



The Wellbeing Quotient

WQ

*Unleash Your
Full Potential*

Folef Bredd MHD

For my children, Finn, Dodi and Lizzie, and my partner Charlotte.
You give reason to everything I do, you brighten each day and
make me look forward to tomorrow!

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Introduction

A Typical Day at Work

His days are packed with back-to-back meetings. In between, he constantly checks his mobile and responds to the most urgent emails and messages. Even though he prioritizes ruthlessly, he is – as always – on a tight schedule, constantly absorbing the endless flow of information and dealing with demands for his attention. Steering the company, pushing activities forward, trying to remain sharp and a step ahead of what is coming.

Sounds hectic? It's just another day at the office for Ralph Hamers, the CEO of ING, the biggest bank in the Netherlands and one of the 10 largest banks in Europe.

Daily Challenges

In addition to leading his organization through a massive digital transformation, Ralph and his team are driving a number of critical customer-focused innovations. Ever since he took over control of the bank in 2013, the pressure has been high, but it seems as though it has only been increasing over the past few years. The constant disruptions in the banking industry, increasing regulatory demands, the rising expectations of customers and the growing pressure to consolidate and digitalize, have had a significant impact upon him, his leadership team and his entire organization.

Hamers knows that in order to stay ahead in today's high-pressure work environment, it is not enough for him as a leader to be smart (high IQ) and to be emotionally intelligent (high EQ). To sustain his high level of performance over time, he depends heavily on a much more fundamental capacity, his Wellbeing Quotient, his 'WQ'.



Ralph Hamers: 'The past few years have brought a whole new learning curve when it comes to my personal energy management. My commitment to ING and my passion for clients continue to drive me forward, but I've learned to accept that there are only 24 hours in a day, and that choices have to be made about what can realistically be achieved in that time. As I get older, I'm increasingly aware that I can only deliver optimal performance for ING when I myself am in prime condition, both physically and mentally.'

The Power of WQ

People with a high WQ feel better and perform better. They feel strong, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, and achieve a higher quality of life. They are better able to stay energized, focused, creative and flexible. They are more in control, they have better interactions, and they can absorb more, allowing them to sustain higher levels of performance and bounce back more gracefully when confronted with the inevitable setbacks that come with their jobs, or in their private lives. All of this carries forward, creating an upward spiral for the people around them, both at work and at home. Their clients, colleagues, family and friends all benefit.

Your level of WQ is the result of how well you develop and preserve your Wellbeing; how you treat your body and your brain. You can develop your WQ, just as you develop your skills and emotional capacities. The more you practice, the higher and more stable your WQ.

Our Wellbeing is under Siege

We may not all be the CEO of a multinational organization, however we do recognize the challenges that Hamers faces. We all operate in a highly demanding business environment that is full of uncertainties and constant distractions, where past practices seldom offer orientation on how to confront and deal with the challenges we face today, where massive change is the only true constant.

Yet, we are all expected to approach each and every task with full focus, to maintain a positive mindset even under the most challenging circumstances, to make bold decisions, to always be proactive, and stay alert and energetic throughout our days. As a result, our working days have been transformed into non-stop tests of stamina, adaptability and composure.

From the moment we pick up our mobile to check-in early in the morning, until we finally check-out late at night, we are almost always switched-on and on the go. And while we may flourish on the opportunities and excitement that our jobs have to offer, the ever-increasing demands do take their toll and inevitably wear us out; they undermine our Wellbeing.

Unfortunately, instead of upgrading our everyday behaviors that help maintain our energy, mood and mindset to accommodate a tougher schedule, we do exactly the opposite. We sleep too little and eat too much, relax too little and sit too much. When the pressure goes up, it only gets worse. We work harder, skim on our downtime, and are constantly on the lookout for a ‘pick me up’.



Ralph Hamers: ‘Personal rituals and habits, or just the odd moment of relaxation, are likely the first things to go when the pressure builds. Many, like myself, will dedicate themselves entirely to the cause at hand, to achieve that one result, that milestone. Yet no-one can thrive on continuous peak moments – you will eventually pay a price, either physically or mentally.’

The Slippery Slope

It is not that we deliberately want to undermine our Wellbeing; without realizing it ourselves, our brain, running on old software, is consistently working overtime, trying desperately to deal effectively with the modern cocktail of multiple demands coming its way.

Subconsciously, we are on a slippery slope that damages our Wellbeing in subtle ways. We find ourselves having to cope with high levels of stress, and consequently display unhealthy behaviors; squeezing in more appointments, even when it means giving up our breaks, watching one more episode of our favorite show, even if that means cutting ourselves 45 minutes short of the sleep we so desperately need.

The way we have organized our lives no longer requires healthy activity to get through the day.

Unhealthy ‘comfort’ food is practically everywhere, no matter where we go; at train stations and gas stations, on every street corner, in the office and meeting rooms, the cookies are there to greet us!

All in all, it seems impossible to resist those unhealthy temptations that provide instant gratification. Our brain, tired from having to deal with the high demands of our long days, is simply no match for the highly advanced strategies of the so-called ‘neuromarketeers’, who have evolved their seductive methods into a true art-form and are increasingly supported by automated intelligence. In reality, it has become a truly unfair game; the majority cannot beat the vending machine.

As a result, most people are operating well below their full potential, both inside and outside the office. Their interactions with clients, colleagues, friends and family are nowhere near as good as they can be. Over time, their physical and mental capacities suffer significantly as chronic elevated levels of stress accumulate and the unhealthy behaviors take their toll. More often than not this leaves people discouraged, depressed and exhausted, or totally burned-out. Ever since we started Lifeguard in 2002, it has been our mission to change this.

There Is Always Room for Improvement

Even if you are doing a good job and you generally feel pretty confident at work, there is always considerable room for improvement. Data we have collected over the past 18 years, across all major industries in nearly 50 different countries, shows that statistically you have a more than an 80% chance that your performance will benefit from enhancing your WQ. If your lifestyle resembles the average, highly-skilled professional, working long days at your desk, constantly pushing to meet deadlines, it is close to a 100%. And the older you get, the more room for improvement there is.

Beating the Vending Machine

Since both the demands of the digital economy and the temptations to indulge in unhealthy behaviors will only increase, it is imperative that you focus on the other side of the equation; get stronger and safeguard your Wellbeing, enabling you to beat the vending machine, sustain high levels of performance and live a better life.

The good news is that your WQ can be developed through making tiny changes in your daily behavior. The biggest changes come from taking a few small steps that improve the behaviors that you have been performing since the day you were born, and that you will perform every day for the rest of your life.

The Big 4: Eat, Move, Sleep, Relax.

Improving the way that you Eat, Move, Sleep and Relax has a major impact on how you think, feel and interact with others; your mood,

focus, creativity and mindset, they all benefit – instantly. Over time, the tiny and sometimes seemingly insignificant changes in your behavior will lead to functional and structural changes in both your body and your brain, and it is the awesome power of these changes that make you more resilient, enhance your Wellbeing, and enable you to unleash your full potential.



Ralph Hamers: 'For me it means creating time to be with my family, regularly exercising, reflecting, and taking proper vacations (allowing myself to truly disconnect). Spending time with my family at home and on holiday is my 'safe haven' – it recharges and enriches me. Because I'm absolutely convinced that you can only operate optimally in your job if you at the same time make sure to take great care of yourself'.

Strategies that Have Stood the Test of Time

Through my organization Lifeguard, we have for almost 20 years trained and coached people to perform better and achieve sustainable high performance by enhancing their Wellbeing (WQ). We have helped more than 100 organizations implement a culture of Wellbeing, reaching more than half a million people, resulting in millions of lasting behavioral changes.

Over time, learning from our experiences in the field, and working closely with top scientists in the field of human performance, ranging from neuroscience to psychology and behavioral science, and top performers in sports, music and business, we have come to learn which strategies are most effective when it comes to implementing the behavioral changes that enhance Wellbeing. In this

book, I will share some of the most fundamental strategies that have survived the test of time, and offer practical tools that will help you to implement them successfully.

WQ – the Book

Each chapter is divided into 2 parts. The first part deals in detail with how your Wellbeing and performance are affected by your daily behavior, and aims to motivate you to improve your daily routines. The second part provides a list of practical tips and strategies that make it easier to follow through with behavioral change and achieve a healthier work-life harmony.



Ralph Hamers: 'I advise everyone to seek out a safe haven, something that gives you energy: be it yoga, meditation, religion, cooking or climbing mountains – whatever works for you. For me personally, in addition to my safe haven of quality time with my family, I create time and space around me at work by trusting everyone from the beginning – this means that I don't have to waste energy on micro management. I empower everyone around me and this gives me the opportunity to focus on the vision, our strategy.'

Crossing the Gap

As mentioned, the vast majority of people have plenty of room for improvement when it comes to 'The Big 4'. While most understand, at least to a certain extent, how their behavior affects their Wellbeing and performance at work, they find it hard to make lasting changes. Everybody has tried to make improvements at some point

in their life, some have made sustainable progress, but most have fallen back into some, or all, of their old routines.

In my experience, everybody can use some help in implementing change; the final part of this book, 'Crossing the Gap', offers you that help. It provides key insights from both neuro- and behavioral science, that will help you better understand how you can make your behavioral changes stick. It goes into how you can keep your motivation at a high level, how you can make change easier, how you can nudge yourself into performing the behaviors that enhance your Wellbeing and how you can translate your new behaviors into strong habits. It includes 10 proven strategies that help close that gap between knowing and doing. Applying any of them is guaranteed to work, and every time you successfully implement a behavioral change, it will build your confidence, making it easier to implement new behaviors in all spheres of your life. That is the power of mastering change!

Eat

*'Eat food. Not too much.
Mostly plants.'*

Michael Pollan



Why Eat?

Your energy, your focus, and your overall ability to perform, are highly dependent on the food choices you make. A healthy diet can help you prevent – and in many cases reverse – diseases and dysfunction in any part of your body, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, cataracts and infertility. With that, eating healthier offers a major opportunity to live a better life.

Eating for Energy

The relationship between the food you eat and your health and Wellbeing is extremely complex and continuously under debate. Having said that, there is, and has been for a while, a general consensus about how the food you eat influences your energy levels throughout the day. When you eat, your digestive system breaks down your food into microscopic, manageable components. For example, carbohydrates break down into glucose, fats into fatty acids and protein into amino acids. Because of this, your cells can grow, duplicate, repair themselves, and create the energy source which drives all of these processes, making it possible for you to breathe, move, think and feel. There is also a growing consensus about how eating specific nutrients – such as vitamins and minerals – and avoiding others – such as refined sugars and trans fats – can improve your metabolic health, the generation of new cells in your brain, the activity of important bacteria in your gut, and the regulation of anti-inflammatory genes. All in all, science constantly develops valuable insights, which show how eating specific

nutrients and foods can improve energy and performance, and enhance your Wellbeing.

Looking at the statistics, eating healthy is easier said than done. In this chapter I aim to provide some insights and practical tips that I hope will help you eat as healthily as possible, within your personal possibilities and needs.

Find Out What Is Good for You

If you feel pretty skeptical about just any advice you get on nutrition, you are not alone. Many of the people I have coached and trained over the years are overwhelmed by all the nutrition and diet advice out there. Not in the least because the information can be quite confusing. 10 Documentaries on food and nutrition will offer at least 10 different views on what is good for you, and what is not. Each of them backed up by nutritional experts from around the globe. Go online to check out what's healthy or what will help you to perform, and it seems that for every expert who tells you a certain food or nutrient is good, you'll find at least 10 others stating the complete opposite. All in all, it may seem hard (if not impossible) to find out what really is best for you.

However, when you start looking for commonalities between the different approaches of nutritional experts that have survived the test of time, instead of focusing on whatever 'today's hottest food guru' has to say, you will find that there are a number of things that most of them agree on. There actually is a growing consensus in the scientific community about what is best for most people with regard to their energy-management, health and Wellbeing.

Your Personal Needs

The reason why I underline 'best for most people' is that, depending on a whole list of variables, people can react differently to the nutrients they eat. A well-known example is lactose, found in dairy products. While roughly two-thirds of the world's population is sensitive to lactose, and malabsorption rates are close to 100% in some countries, there are also countries where the prevalence of malabsorption is below 4%. For example, the vast majority of people living in South Korea have difficulties dealing with lactose, which in practice means that drinking more than 2 glasses of milk per day will harm their health. At the same time, most people in Ireland can consume larger quantities of dairy products without any complaints.

Because of these distinct differences, nutritional guidelines vary around the world. Of course they are also affected by the availability of certain types of food, which is probably why only people in Iceland are advised to eat fish at least 3 times a week, and are recommended to use vitamin-D supplements in winter – when they are terribly short on daylight-time.

Most people are, to some extent, aware of the fact that depending on their background, they may react differently to certain foods, and they are also practically guaranteed to know someone who is allergic or hypersensitive to a particular substance. Less known is that within seemingly homogenous groups of people, those with the same backgrounds and without known allergies or medical conditions, the response to specific foods or combinations of foods can also vary significantly. To make things even more complicated, people can react differently to the same foods, at different times