

# LEADERSHIP CAPACITY - ENERGY

## A T R U S T W O R T H Y S A Y I N G

NO. 3

My definition of energy is less technical than the ones you might find in a physics textbook. For me, energy is the ability to get things done. My concept of energy is about two parts enthusiasm, two parts will power, one part know-how and one part stubbornness. I was reprimanded once for talking about “creating” energy; from a physics perspective that may be a valid argument. But in leadership, creating energy is essential. OK, call it unleashing energy – I won’t quibble over the verbiage. The key concept is that leaders get things done – on their own and through others – and that’s what I want to explore.

Energy – the capacity to get things done – has three important components: 1. the size of our gas tank, 2. the type of fuel we burn, and 3. how we refuel when our tank is empty. Every leader must reflect on these personally and consider how they are cultivated in the next generation of leaders they hope to influence.

Like each arena of leadership capacity, everyone has a different sized gas tank. Some are big and others small. The larger the tank, the longer we can run and the more we are able to accomplish. Knowing the size of our tank is important for our personal planning and mental, emotional and spiritual health. Knowing the size of the tanks of people around us is also important if we want to manage well and develop our followers. Several instruments are available to evaluate our energy capacity and provide helpful insights into the size of our tanks. However, as we reflect on our lives we find patterns that help us gauge how far we can go before we need to stop and refill the tank.

Like all capacity issues, stretching ourselves is important. We need to expand our limits as much as possible. But we must also accept the realities of our design and the boundaries of our finite humanity. Life is not a contest to see who can stay at work (or play) the longest. Faithfully applying what we have, stretching our capacity (within reason), and taking breaks as needed is a better indicator of success.

But what is in our tanks? Some of us burn rocket fuel and others run on diesel. My tank is filled with rocket fuel. I blast off, work hard in bursts, and when the fuel is gone I shut down for a while. I have friends who run on diesel. Like the Energizer Bunny they just keep going and going. They don’t go fast but they do go far and make steady progress step by step. Teams need both styles of workers. However, those who run on rocket fuel and those who run on diesel can frustrate each other due to their differing pace. Good leaders know their own style of fuel and build a team that balances and respects the contributions each member provides.

Different-sized tanks and different types of fuel impact how long we can go before we need to be refueled. People refuel in different ways. I facilitated a late-night discussion several years ago between Ken Blanchard and a dozen bright, young, emerging leaders of Christian non-profits. The ninety-minutes came to an end, and I wanted to honor my commitment to conclude on time. As I tried to wrap up the meeting, Ken pushed back wanting to continue, saying that he was having fun and that he was energized by the discussion. Some of us draw energy from interaction with people while others need time alone to be restored.

On a daily basis we all need sleep, exercise, and food. We generally sleep too little, exercise too little and eat too much. But we all need to find the right balance that works for us. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27). Our humanity demands that we take a break every seven days. There are times when a crisis requires our attention or an emergency calls for our involvement. Without being legalistic, we need to find a way to step back and refuel once a week. And we need longer breaks as well. The Old Testament required that the children of Israel come to Jerusalem three times a year for week-long festivals, times to be restored mentally, physically and spiritually and times to reconnect with family and friends. Three major breaks a year seems about right to me.

Leaders need to have a good understanding of the size of their gas tank. They also need to know what kind of fuel they burn – rocket fuel, diesel, or some other hybrid that is their own unique blend. Leaders also need to know how to refuel – a round of golf, dinner with friends, a weekend away, time in prayer, travel abroad. Each leader is unique, but each leader is human and has a need for restoration.

I have a bigger than average (but not too huge) gas tank. I burn almost pure rocket fuel, and I refuel by spending time with family and friends, traveling and fishing!

Let me know what you think.

*This lesson, written by Dan Bolin, is a part of a larger series on leadership called "A Trustworthy Saying." Find more teaching/lessons available for download for free at: [www.refuelinginflight.com/trustworthysaying](http://www.refuelinginflight.com/trustworthysaying)*