

# FESTIVAL OF US

## Reset

I am not an expert on motorsport, however occasionally I will watch a Formula 1 race. The cars whizz round the track at ridiculous speeds and then every 20 laps or so they decide to stop. Apparently, an incredible amount of thought goes in to when the car pulls into the pit lane and the activity of changing tyres and refuelling is executed with finely tuned skills.

Why does the car do this? The answer is simple, in that the team and the driver simply want to win the race. The mechanics and drivers recognise that taking a proactive approach to performance, as opposed to continually driving around, will reap rewards. If we look after cars in this way, why is it that when it comes to our world of work, we rarely think about how we could win our daily race? Whether it be physical, nutritional, emotional or intellectual, reset is a really important part of the resilience process.

**Physical reset** – sitting for long periods is not good news. The lack of movement increases the risk of cardiovascular events and Type II diabetes. However, an area I want to consider is the health of the spine. Back pain is one of the biggest causes of absence from work and whilst continuous lifting can be a trigger for many people, the real enemy is prolonged sitting. Sitting for as little as an hour will result in a reduction in the range of movement in the thoracic area. This is the middle part of the spinal column that sits between the neck and lumbar region. Simply making a habit of getting up from your desk every hour, walking around, shrugging your shoulders, twisting from side to side, taking a couple of deep breaths can both restore thoracic mobility and reduce the risk of overloading the other parts of the spinal column.

**Nutritional reset** – put simply we need energy and fluids to function effectively. If a job is physical, then you will need calories (ideally healthy ones) to ensure that your 'personal petrol tank' does not reach empty! Fluids are often a forgotten part of nutrition but maintaining a good level of hydration is important. Dehydration levels of as little as 2% can have a negative impact on mental productivity.

**Emotional reset** – Our emotions are one thing that can change quickly, especially when we are stressed or fatigued and recent advances in neuroscience are starting to unravel the reasons why. In very simple terms, this is due to an increase in the activity of structures found in the limbic system and a reduction in the functionality of the cerebral cortex. The limbic system is often called the emotional centre of the brain and controls reactions such as crying or laughing. The cerebral cortex dictates how appropriate it is to display an emotion and will have a regulatory function. This regulation is one of the executive functions that, due to the human brain having a highly developed and sophisticated cerebral cortex, differentiates us from other species.

If the limbic system is overactive, it is possible for our emotions to get the better of us. We may say things we regret or write emails that come back to haunt us; we may become louder and more extrovert or we may become quieter and withdrawn. Whatever the output is, thinking about how you reset emotionally and reactivating the cerebral cortex is beneficial.

One of the best ways to go about this is through breathing exercises. These come in many shapes and forms, but I typically use a 5:5:7 pattern where you breathe in for 5 seconds, hold for 5 seconds and out for 7 seconds. Breathing is a skill, so practise and make sure that the breath is controlled by your diaphragm. This muscle sits at the base of your lungs – think about breathing that inflates / deflates the region around the tummy rather than breathing at the top of your chest and tightening up around your shoulders.

**Intellectual reset** – At the start of the day many people are good at thinking what needs to be done. In fact, they are so good they may even collate these thoughts and take control by writing out a 'To Do List'. The trouble is that on a number of days things can change. It could be that a colleague is off sick, a meeting is cancelled, a contract is lost, the school has rung to say that your child is unwell and needs to be taken home. Suddenly, the day has taken control of you.

Time management experts suggest that the productivity level of a human being drops after less than an hour, so maybe there could be some benefit in taking control on more occasions than just the start of the day. There are a number of methods that are promoted, ranging from The Pomodoro technique that suggests 25 minutes work / 5 minute rest; the 52 /17 technique argues the case for 52 minutes work / 17 minutes rest. The choice is yours, but the message is clear – if you decide that working flat out for 10 hours is going to be great for your productivity you are likely to be wrong. The human brain needs to reset and if your day is changing around you, then you need to reset your targets.

Whether it be for your health, your wellbeing or your ability to be resilient, working out the reset mechanisms that work for you is important and will help you 'win the race'.