

HIGH PERFORMANCE  
**ROUTINES**

The Daily

# High Performance Routine

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exercise



Dr Rob Archer

# High Performance Routines - the theory

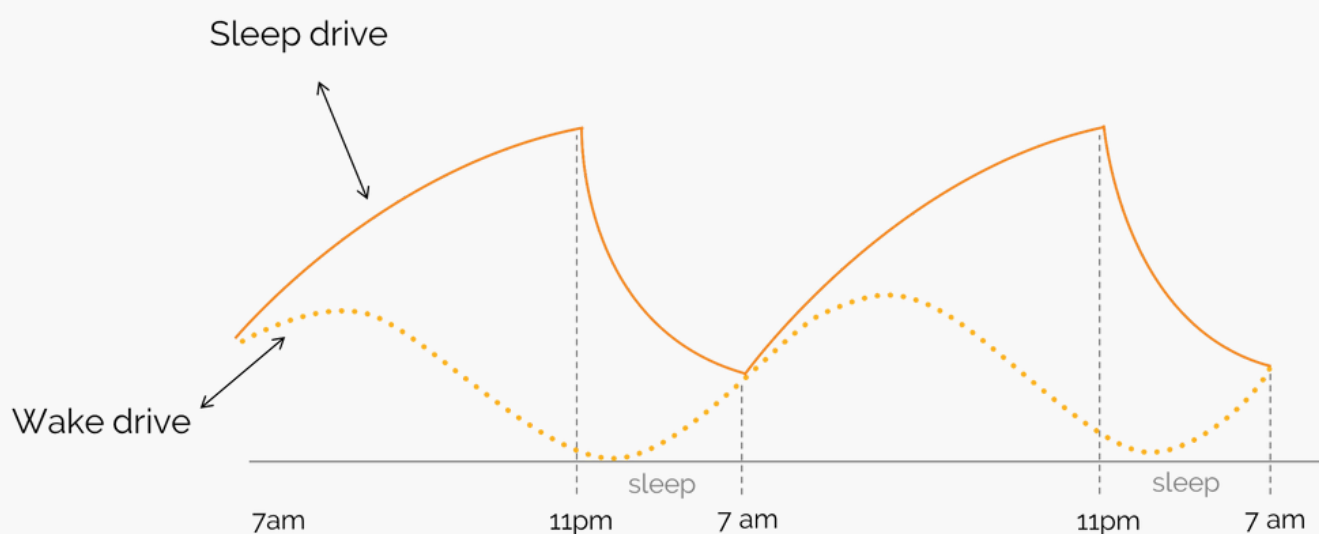
We evolved to live and work in a rhythm.

For most of our existence survival was a complex struggle where 'performance' was a sequence of actions that helped us to survive.

Partly because this sequence can't be performed all at once, and partly because it makes sense to tether certain behaviours to certain times of day, this sequence is orchestrated by an internal body clock which is based on the 24 hour daily cycle (hence 'Circadian rhythm' meaning 'approximately a day').

Thousands of years later the circadian rhythm remains one of the most powerful influences on our biology and behaviour.

## The body works in a 24-hour rhythm



If you've ever:

- Felt more **focused** at some times of day than others
- Feel some parts of the day are **more productive than others**
- Felt that you are better off doing **certain behaviours at certain times** of the day

Then that is your circadian rhythm.

Fast forward to today, and 'performance' is still a sequence of things, but many of us have a completely disrupted circadian rhythm. We have fallen into routines where we are out of sync with our own biology.

If you've ever:

- Felt **tired** in the morning
- Felt **'tired but wired'** at night
- Struggled to see daylight during the day whilst being **exposed to light or screens at night**

Then it is likely you are fighting your biology, rather than working in tune with it.

The good news is that change is possible and even small, intentional changes to work more in tune with your biology can be powerful.

The Daily HPR exercise is designed to liberate your thinking:

If you were to *design* your ideal routine, what would that look like?

# Design your daily High Performance Routine

We define 'high performance' as a state where you consistently get the best out of yourself.

It is about living life intentionally, in a way that maximises your talents and where your actions are aligned with what really matters to you.

Yet often our routines pull us in the opposite direction, leaving us reactive, distracted and exhausted.

So if you had complete control over your day, what would an ideal routine look like for you\*?

In a High Performance Routine, there are 4 separate stages. Let's start by thinking about what each stage looks like for you.

## Step 1: Defining the 4 stages

<h3>Preparation</h3> <p>What are some of the actions you take that help you prepare mentally for the day? (Think about activities that help you feel calm, in control and clear on priorities).</p>	<h3>Focus</h3> <p>On a typical day, <b>when</b> do you focus best, or feel that you add most value?</p> <p>What kind of activities do you feel add most value or define 'high performance' for you, during this time?</p>
<h3>Warm down</h3> <p>What are some actions that help you to close down your work day, switch off from work, and transition into recovery?</p> <p><b>Pre-sleep routine:</b> What activities do you do prior to sleep that help you to unwind, or which assist sleep?</p>	<h3>Recovery</h3> <p>What are the things that give you the best or quickest mental recharge? (Think about activities that energise you, give you joy, or give you some mental perspective).</p>

\*Note that this exercise is about your ideal – the reality may not always be possible. But it is important to understand what the ideal is so that we can work towards it.

# Design your daily High Performance Routine

## Step 2: Unproductive time

Many of us feel like we have slumps in energy at some point during the day, and many of us also feel that we waste time on pointless activities.

How we handle this unproductive time is also part of a High Performance Routine.

Consider the following questions:



1. When do you generally feel least productive?

2. What would you ideally do to make this time more effective? (e.g. common responses include 'meetings' (!), 'taking a break', 'exercise' or 'do less demanding tasks').

3. What kind of activities do you feel are timewasters? ('Timewasters' are defined as avoidance activities, unconnected to your long-term goals and values).  
When do you typically do these activities?

4. What kind of actions could help you mitigate or eliminate these timewasters? What would you prefer to do instead?

# My High Performance Routine

Now let's put all this together and plan your ideal High Performance Routine.

Remember, you are trying to design your ideal day which would get the best out of *you*.

Although this is just a thought experiment, it will force you to think about your priorities, workload and how you go about planning your days.

You can either design it freestyle using the template below, or follow the prompts in the 5 steps on the right.

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## Step 1: Sleep

When is the ideal and duration time for you to **sleep**? Write 'sleep' in the relevant blocks.

*My example: My ideal sleep block is between 22:30 - 7am*

## Step 2: Pre-sleep routine

A crucial part of good sleep is protecting time to switch off and decompress – sometimes called a '**pre-sleep routine**'. When would this ideally occur for you?

*My example: My own pre-sleep routine is quite extensive and occurs between 9pm and 22:30pm*

## Step 3: Big rocks

'**Big Rocks**' are things that really matter to you and without which you wouldn't be as focused, productive or happy.

Next, put in some time for your 'Big Rocks' along with a description of what they are – e.g. 'Exercise', 'Family time' or 'Reading'.

*My example: I would ideally exercise late morning – 11am. I also would protect family dinner time (7pm), and I want to read my kids a bedtime story (8pm).*

## Step 4: Focus time

'When are you at your best in terms of mental performance? When would your ideal '**focus**' time to get your most important work done?

*My example: I would ideally have a 'Focus' block between 10 and 12 and again between 4 and 6pm.*

## Step 5: Remaining time

Once you have entered steps 1 - 4, the remaining time is all the time you have for meetings, non-focused work activities, unexpected commitments, commuting, discretionary stuff...and energy slumps and timewasting!

Anything you say 'yes' to has to fit into this space, by definition.

# Optional extra: Design your routine for 'crunch mode'

Occasionally we need to move into a higher gear – for example when there is a client deadline or during an emergency situation.

In this 'crunch mode' we may need to move to a routine which is more about surviving than thriving.

Note that this mode of working is not sustainable – it will require recovery afterwards. However the basic structure of high performance remains the same; you will be more productive by working in a rhythm and in tune with your basic biology.

01:00 - 05:00		<b>Step 1: Minimum sleep routine</b>  What's the <i>minimum</i> amount of sleep you can get away with during crunch mode, which does not affect your mental performance? When are your best times for minimum sleep routine?  <i>My example: I do not perform at my best with less 7 hours sleep, so my minimum sleep routine in crunch mode is probably 23:00 - 6am</i>
05:30		
06:00		
06:30		
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07:30		<b>Step 2: Expedited pre-sleep routine</b>  When would you need to stop working prior to sleep in order to successfully get to sleep quickly?  <i>My example: I don't find it easy to get to sleep – so I still need a pre-sleep routine, even in crunch mode! I could probably get away with 30 minutes between 22:30 and 23:00.</i>
08:00		
08:30		
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10:00		<b>Step 3: Essential Big Rocks</b>  During crunch mode, some of our Big Rocks may fall by the wayside. But others tend to remain essential. What are the Big Rocks you will not compromise on, even in crunch mode?  <i>My example: I would still prioritise exercise (whenever I could) and I would also be reluctant not to say goodnight to my kids (830pm).</i>
10:30		
11:00		
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12:00		
12:30		<b>Step 4: Focus time</b>  Even in emergency mode, it pays to protect focus time for your most complex priorities. When would your ideal 'focus' time be during crunch mode?  <i>My example: I would ideally have a focus block between 10 and 11 and again between 5 and 6pm.</i>
13:00		
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15:00		<b>Step 5: Remaining time</b>  Of course, it is always hard to protect time in crunch mode.  Nevertheless, understanding what routine gets the best out of us still applies during this time as otherwise we risk becoming reactive and exhausted.
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