

Your Personal Coach

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Like most of us, I have to work hard to keep my life in balance. Between work and other responsibilities, I find that I struggle to make time for exercise, relaxation, family and friends, and meaningful activities – like meditation and reflection on the bigger questions in life. Sure. I'd love to find a way to extend my energy and am a great fan of good nutrition, exercise, and healthy sleep. But it takes a lot of effort to keep things in equilibrium and approach life with awareness and a vibrant wakefulness. The wise mythologist Joseph Campbell once wrote, "I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive." I believe him and also accept that to be fully alive requires being awake to all of our experiences. But, hey! I've been on the wrong track with my old-fashioned thinking that I might have some responsibility about how I spend my time and, most importantly, my energy.

I've discovered a way to dispense with the darn hard work of striving for balance, with attempting to live my values and priorities by designating time for the things that really matter to me. I've found a way to stay awake all day (and all night, too, if I want).

An email I received this week has offered me a dispensation from taking any personal control for the quality of my energy. Ladies and Gentlemen (and especially fellow North Carolinians), you will be pleased to know that Shock Coffee is now available in the Tarheel state! Never heard of it? Shock Coffee is a hyper-caffeinated coffee with over 50% more caffeine than other gourmet coffees. Promoting the theme "Sleep is overrated," this company offers heart-jolting java in hot, cold, and covered with chocolate products. Need some energy? Don't worry about whether or not you're following good health habits. Don't give a single thought to the idea that, perhaps, your body is trying to tell you something if you are feeling lethargic and dragged out. Instead, just pop a can of Shock Triple Mocha. One reporter for the IndyStar newspaper wrote, "One big slurp, and you'll feel like you just injected coffee grounds into your bloodstream." That sounds good.

So if you need a quick heart-start in the morning, you can either keep a portable defibrillator on your nightstand or just chug a big cup of Shock Coffee. And, if you choose the latter, you're not alone. Nonexistent six years ago, there are now more than one hundred energy drink products on the market and the industry has percolated to \$3 billion dollars a year. Dunkin' Donuts has its Turbo-Hot – a super-strong coffee made even more virile with a shot of espresso that is guaranteed to "supercharge" your day. In February, Coca-Cola launched Blak – a fusion between Coca-Cola and coffee that is purported to be "stimulating and invigorating." Not to be left behind, McDonald's and Burger King are selling their own versions of high energy java.

People used to say, "Let's get together for coffee." It was a way of making and nurturing friendships. A cup of coffee was the excuse, but the relationship was what it was really about. I'm more of a tea drinker, but my parents always enjoyed coffee. As a child, I remember the distinctive aroma of coffee cooking on the stove in a tin percolator (no Mr. Coffee in those days). My mother would carefully place the coffee in the basket, fill the pot with water, and turn up the heat. While making cereal or toast and eggs, that old pot would begin to sing and the coffee would turn brown and rich in that little glass top. As coffee was perking, my parents talked about their plans for that day. They'd sip

their coffee as my father pointed out stories in the local paper that he found interesting. There was conversation and a deep sense of belongingness and family on those ordinary mornings. We didn't linger there for hours. We all had busy days ahead. My brother and I would head to the bus stop and my mother would drive my dad to the train station for his daily trip to New York City. What happened to those times for today's families? Instead, now we are racing to make things work. A cup of Joe at the break of day in the context of precious connection has been replaced by shotgunning a hyper-charged shock drink just to get going as we race to work or school.

Energy drinks to wake up. Alcohol or pot or downers to relax. Anti-depressants because we're not happy. Aspirin and pain killers for our chronic headaches. Our kids can't sit still in school? Just give them Ritalin or Strattera.

Some people really need anti-depressants and some kids really do have a neurologically-based ADHD and can be helped with medication. But maybe we need to question what underlies our depression or consider whether most young children really learn best in a lecture format where they're stuck in their seats all day. Maybe we need to take a look at what our bodies are telling us when we have no energy because we're working too hard. Maybe it's time to stop and smell the coffee.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.