

Energy Clinic

Energy, Not Time, Is Our Most Precious Resource

Think about the past several weeks you've spent as a college student preparing for finals or recitals. You probably survive on too little sleep, wolf down fast food on the run, fuel up with coffee and crash at the end of the day only to begin the race again the next day. We take pride in our ability to multi-task and we are sometimes motivated by the pressure to succeed rather than by passion or love of music. We have every tool imaginable at our disposal to help manage our time: Palm Pilots, Instant messaging, e-mail and more. We have incredible technology to assist us in our practice. Yet why do most people and in particular college students experience burn out and melt down? How does any of this have any impact on my ability to perform, create and be a skilled musician?

Today, many top CEO's and business leaders as well as Olympic athletes, and body builders have come to realize this very simple principal. **Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance.**

THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT

Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Manage time	Manage energy
Avoid stress	Seek stress
Life is a marathon	Life is a series of sprints
Downtime is wasted time	Downtime is productive time
Rewards fuel performance	Purpose fuels performance
Self-discipline rules	Rituals rule
The power of positive thinking	The power of full engagement

- Seeking regular and valuable “recovery” throughout our practice as musicians renews our energy and allows us to become more fully engaged in what we are doing.

What are some of the things that contribute to negativity in our lives and leave us feeling “spent”?

We need to learn how to perform consistently at the highest levels under intense competitive pressures as musicians. We need to have the same focus and drive as a world class athlete.

- Professional athletes typically spend about 90 percent of their time training, in order to be able to perform 10 percent of the time. Their entire lives are designed around expanding, sustaining and renewing the energy they need to compete for short, focused periods of time.

- Athletes build precise routines around their lives – eating and sleeping, working out and resting; summoning the appropriate emotions; mentally preparing and staying focused; and connecting regularly to the mission they have set for themselves. Pete Sampras analogy....
- Most professional athletes also enjoy an off-season of four to five months a year! Why? They need that time for rest and healing, renewal and growth. What is the appropriate off season for a professional musician? How much time should we build in to our practice routine during the week for recovery?
- What types of energy do we draw from as musicians?

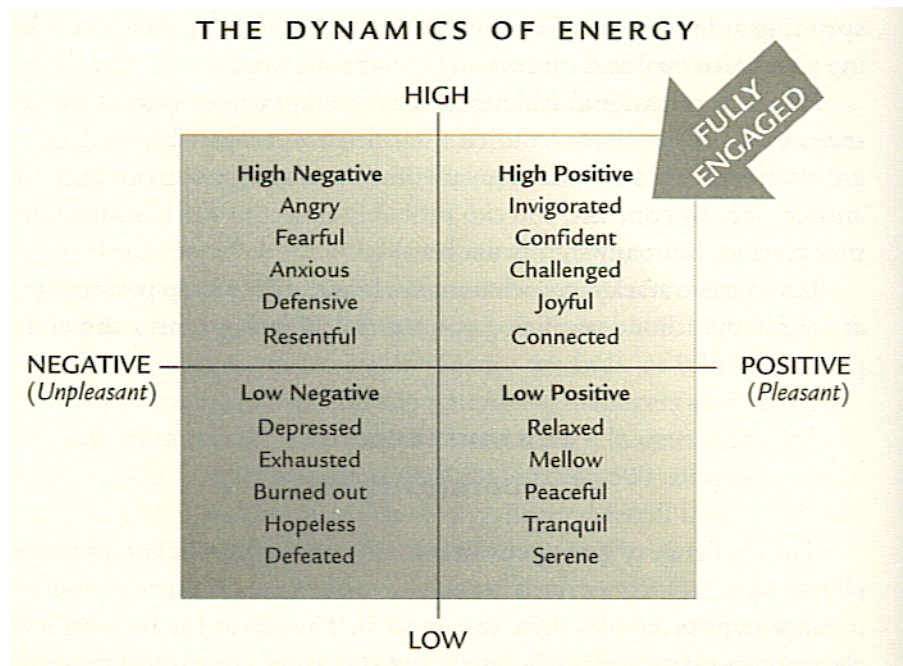
Being fully engaged in what we are doing requires drawing on four separate but related sources of energy: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

Define elements of these four sources of energy and give examples of each.

- To perform at our best, we must skillfully manage each of these interconnected dimensions of energy. Subtract any one from the equation and our capacity to fully ignite our talent and skill is diminished.

Yes - we need the appropriate technique and ability to master our instruments. Yes - we need to spend regular and systematic time in the “wood shed”. Confidence is earned in the “wood shed” but your ability to translate the talent you have as a musician into an engaged performance rests not only on skill but on your ability to perform and manage energy.

- Have you ever felt that during lessons or perhaps at an audition your ability was in fact much less of what you knew you were capable of doing? Think back on a recent solo performance or audition. What was going through your mind at the time?



The Ideal Performance State

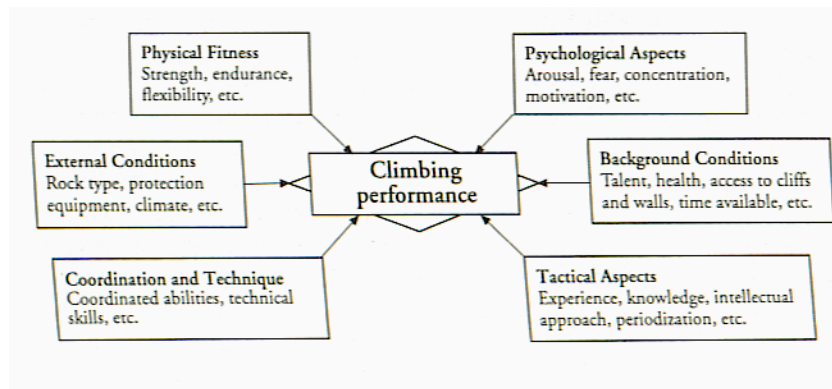
Olympic athletes involved in an intensive study to determine how “mental states” related to their level of play following a performance. They were then asked to describe in writing and in as much detail as possible what their internal psychological experience was like during the performance. The study involved 43 Olympic athletes and over 300 professional athletes. The second phase of the study was to have the athletes describe their “finest hour” as a player and then describe in writing what their internal psychological experience was like during that performance.

Over and over the same words consistently appeared in the study. Below is a sample of the terminology used to describe the perfect performance.

“I felt physically very relaxed, but really energized and pumped up. I experienced virtually no anxiety or fear, and the whole experience was totally enjoyable. I experienced a very real sense of calmness and quiet inside, and everything just seemed to flow automatically. I really didn’t have to think about what I was supposed to do; it just seemed to happen naturally. Even though I was really hustling, it was all very effortless. I always seemed to have enough time and energy and rarely felt rushed – almost at times as if I were performing in slow motion. I felt like I could do anything, as if I were in a complete control. I really felt confident and positive. It also seemed very easy to concentrate. I was totally tuned in to what I was doing. I was also super aware. Aware of everything but distracted by nothing. It almost seemed like I knew what was going to happen before it actually did.”

The Ideal Performance State has twelve distinct categories:

- Physically relaxed
- Mentally calm
- Low anxiety
- Energized
- Optimistic
- Enjoyment
- Effortless
- Automatic
- Alert
- Mentally focused
- Self-confident
- In control



What are some sample thoughts that produce pressure before a big recital or audition?

What are some sample thoughts that reduce pressure before a performance, recital or audition?

You Must Love It!!

- When an athlete or musician can start loving adversity, then he or she is becoming a competitor! Triggering our Ideal Performance State often seems so easy and natural when everything is going our way and we are playing well. This is what we live for. But our internal response to adversity; perceived or real, is what makes us truly grow as competitors and musicians.
- The greater the adversities the more challenged and inspired you become. Rather than dreading the performance, you look forward to the outcome. Rather than playing timidly or carefully trying to avoid mistakes when the door begins to close on you, you instead turn the experience into an opportunity and a challenge and inspiration that begins and ends in your head.

The importance of Rituals

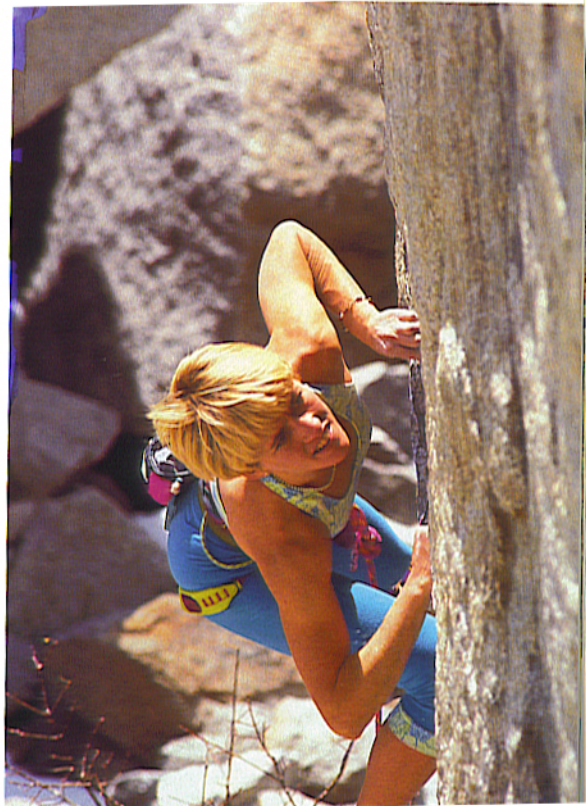
- Do you have rituals that help you feel loose, confident, energized etc?
- Do you rehearse your pre-performance rituals so that they become powerful triggers for your own Ideal Performance State?
- Do you short circuit your rituals when things go against you?
- Do you study the rituals of top musicians in you instrument that you admire?

Rituals help us tap into the right “**engrams**” and internalize a positive outcome.

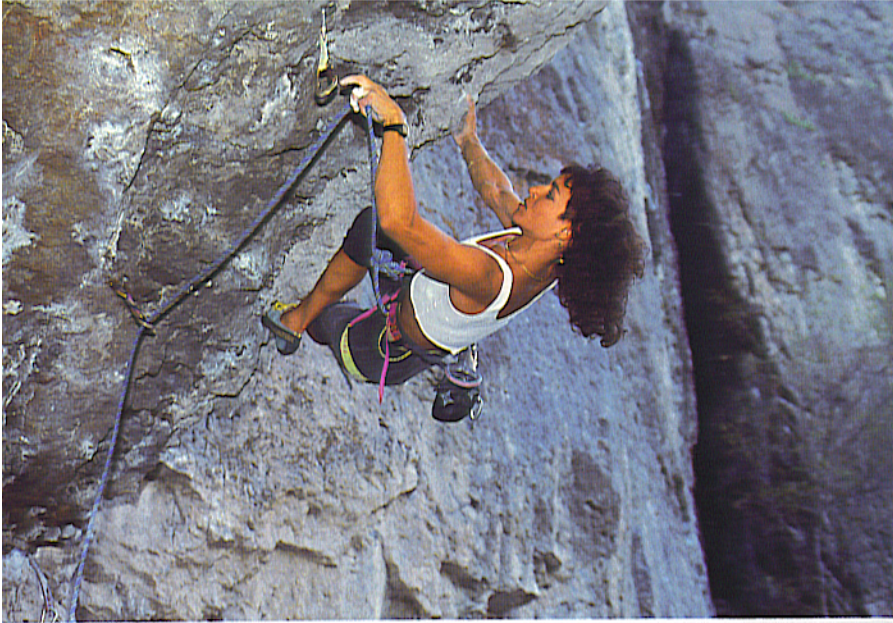
Engrams = take climbing for example, when a climber executes a movement, the motion causes a particular sequence of nerve impulses, unique to that specific movement, to occur in the brain. When he repeats the movement several times (whether in reality or through accurate mental imagery), the repetition of that pattern of nerve impulses ingrains the movement in memory and causes it to be stored as a “motor engram”. Engrams are complete records of movements we’ve made.

Engrams are the instruction manuals for reproducing the same movements or feelings again at will. You could think of it as a packet of preset muscle and mental instructions on how to reproduce a particular move or sound.

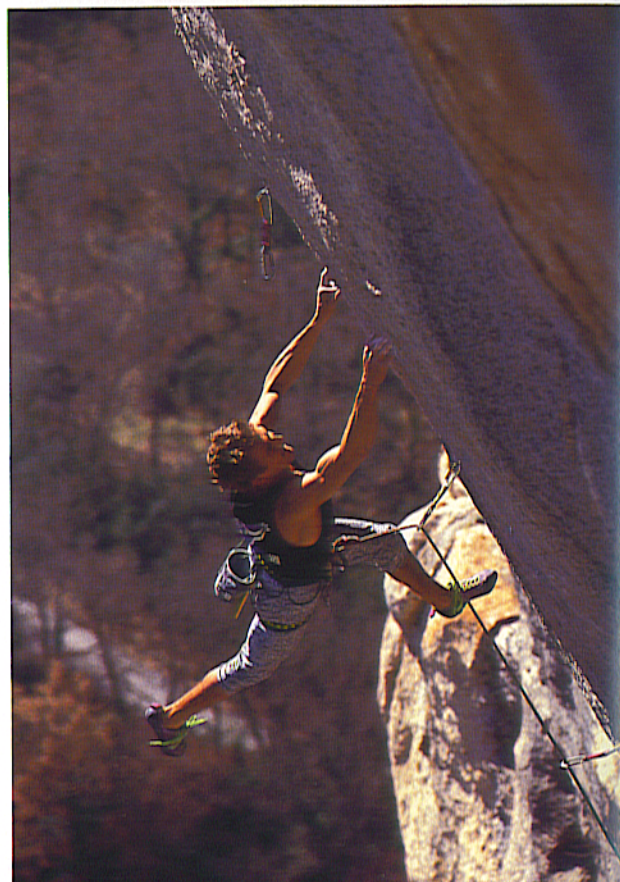
Since the engram replaces thousands of conscious signals, we are then able to free our mind to allow for artistic and musical thoughts.



*Amy Irvine on Little Cottonwood
Canyon's All Chalk No Action, 5.11d,
Salt Lake, Utah.*



Bobbie Bensman on Vulcan Crawl, Logan, Utah.



*Francois Dreyfus
on Agincourt,
Buoux, France.*

A positive ritual is a behavior that becomes automatic over time—fueled by some deeply held value.

In contrast to will and discipline, which require pushing yourself to a particular behavior, a ritual pulls at you. Look at any part of your life in which you are consistently effective and you will find that certain habits help make that possible.

- An effective mother has rituals around spending quality time with and without the kids
- A bodybuilder has built into his schedule a regular work out
- If you manage others successfully, you likely have a style of giving feedback that leaves people feeling challenged rather than threatened
- An expert rock climber has strong ritual of visualizing his next move, breathing deliberately and efficiently using only specific muscle groups.

What are some rituals you can do before a performance or during your musical training?

How should we train for peak performance?

We must consider training and living our lives as a series of sprints – fully engaging for periods of time, and then fully disengaging and seeking renewal before jumping back into the fray to face whatever challenges confront us.

Stress is not the enemy in our lives. Paradoxically, it is the key to growth. In order to build strength in a muscle we must systematically stress it, expending energy beyond normal level. Doing so literally causes microscopic tears in the muscle fibers. At the end of a training session, functional capacity is diminished. But give the muscle twenty-four to forty-eight hours to recover and it grows stronger and better able to handle the next stimulus. This periodized training process is just as relevant to building “muscles” in every dimension of our lives – from empathy and patience to focus and creativity to integrity and commitment. The scriptures tell us that we should consider it joy when various trials come our way because the testing of our faith produces endurance. (James 1:2)

- Long tones – we must maintain a daily routine of practicing long tones, visualizing a locomotive on tracks, not speeding up or slowing down. No pulsing or shaking when we play them. We (brass players) should spend 10 to 15 minutes a day practicing long tones in various registers and in extremes of our dynamic range to the point of muscle fatigue. This is followed by adequate recovery! Don't start playing your excerpts or technical etudes immediately following long tones.
- Balance your week in the orchestra or band with a practice routine that is opposite that of the style and type of playing you are doing in rehearsals. Example – last week I played Brahms 1 in the orchestra so I concentrated on more technical and loud playing in my private practice. Most weeks in the Marine Band I play very tiring and technical, articulated passages. I spend the majority of my time these weeks playing soft, slow Rochut etudes with little or no tonguing.
- I spend a considerable amount of time in my private practice studying the tone and style of various other players and then try to emulate that in my own playing.

- I record myself practicing every week so nothing escapes my awareness. While working on tiring excerpts or difficult recital material I will take frequent breaks to listen to what I have just played and remind myself of how I want to sound. We spoke earlier about engrams. Make sure in your practice patterns you are not learning incorrect engrams and enforcing bad habits.
- Be very aware of diminished returns in you practice. When you experience this, go get on the computer, read an article, listen to some great recordings. Give yourself time to recover before you pick up the horn again.
- Good technique is paramount to everything. When you get tired your technique will fall away. This is normal. Stop trying to work on aspects of technique when you are physically and mentally exhausted.
- Divide your practice up into many different short bursts or groupings. “Body for Life” approach to practice. Many smaller meals throughout the day promote better overall health.
- Make sure the piece of brass you are holding is not your idol! Balance and perspective is the key.

A “Periodized” approach to practice.

Very simply put, following a period of activity, the body must replenish fundamental biochemical sources of energy. This is called “compensation” and when it occurs, energy expended is recovered. Increase the intensity of the training or the performance demand, and it is necessary to commensurately increase the amount of energy renewal. Failure to do so will result in diminishing returns and injury.

Overtraining and under training will impact the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspect of music in much the same way. Examples of this are:

Persistent injuries

Sickness

Anxiety

Negativity

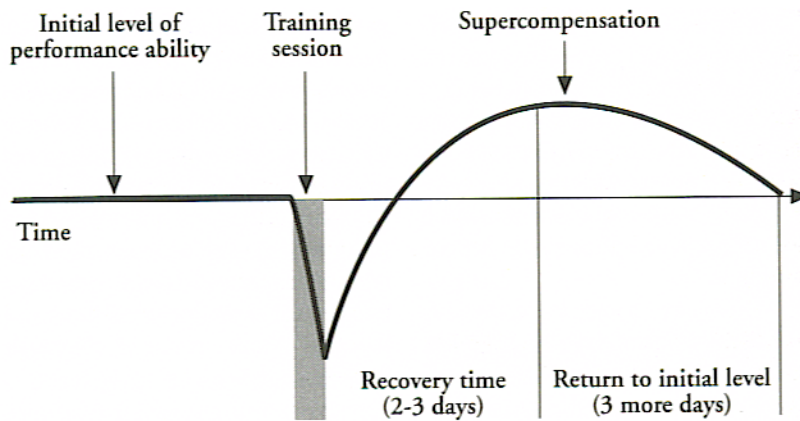
Anger

Difficulty concentrating

Loss of passion

To live like a sprinter, we must break life down into a series of manageable intervals consistent with our own physiological needs. Study what professional tennis players do between points. The best players built almost exactly the same set of routines between points. The way they walk back to the baseline after a point, how they hold their heads and shoulders; where they focused their eyes; the pattern of their breathing; and even the way they talk to themselves. It is this time between points that they routinely maximize their recovery.

- When we practice our instrument, we need to build these same types of recovery processes into our routine. We need to maximize recovery on a sub micro-cycle (daily), micro-cycle (weekly) and on a macro-cycle (monthly)



Supercompensation after a training session.

Imagine this *initial level of performance ability* is a medium intensity practice routine of high register practicing (Rochut's in tenor clef and up the octave) followed by preparing the following days music (chamber music, band, orchestra or solo work). The initial flat line will represent one practice session of 45 minutes to an hour including fundamentals and touch up work. You already spent 15 to 20 minutes getting in a good warm up earlier in the morning followed by two hours not playing. The *training session* represents extensive practice on some "weak link" area or a very challenging aspect of your playing that brings you to relative exhaustion.

- Weakest link principle – a small change in your weakest area will have a great effect on overall performance, while a significant improvement in the strongest areas of your playing will have a much smaller effect.
- The challenge is to find priority areas. This is a matter of asking yourself honest questions and recording yourself to get honest answers. Maybe you should just trust your teacher.
- This is not dwelling on the negative but rather discovering a gold mine, for this is where your potential lies.

The recovery time required to get back to where you started will of course vary for each person but will probably be in the neighborhood of 3 to 4 hours. After long balcony jobs at the White House or an intense Marine Band concert I will not have fully recovered even by the next day.

Super compensation will not occur until the following day or later in the evening of the initial practice session. This whole process for me is alternated by levels of intensity and length or duration of the *training session*.

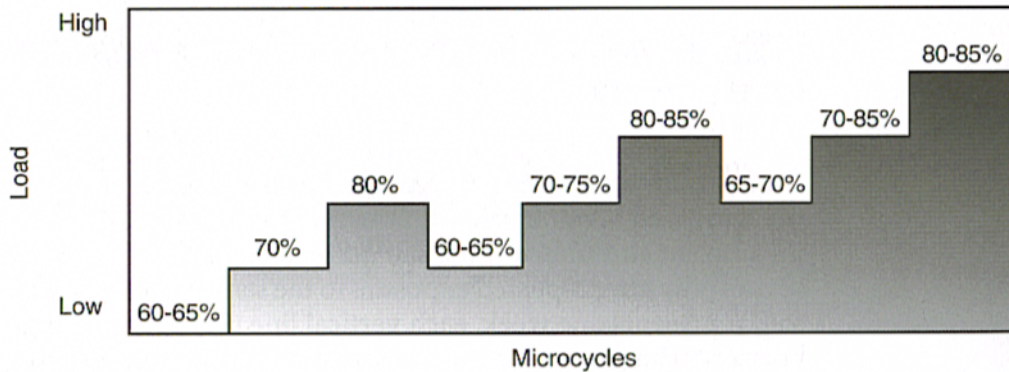
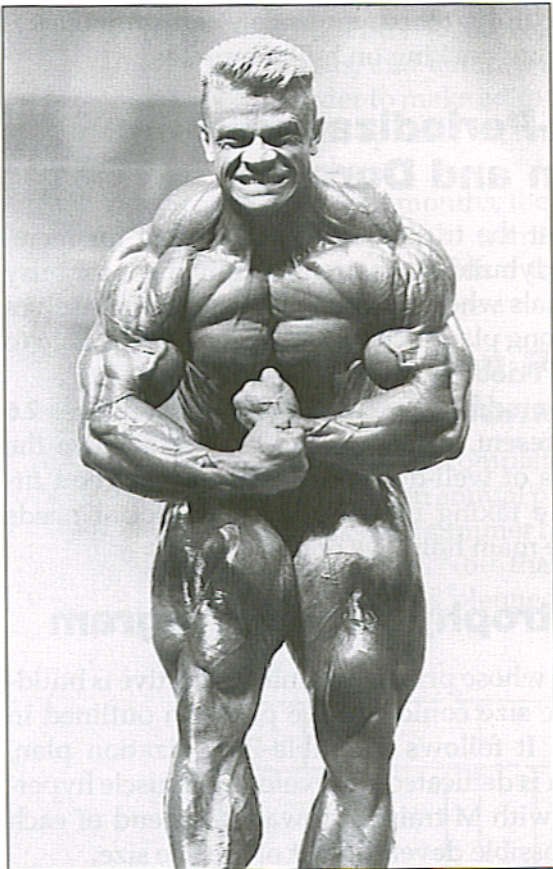


Figure 1.5 An example of how to increase the training load over a longer period.

The intensity of the practice can increase throughout the week as long as every other day there is a brief return to allow for recovery. Figure 1.5



Roland Cziurlok knows how to gain muscle mass.

Too much practice!!

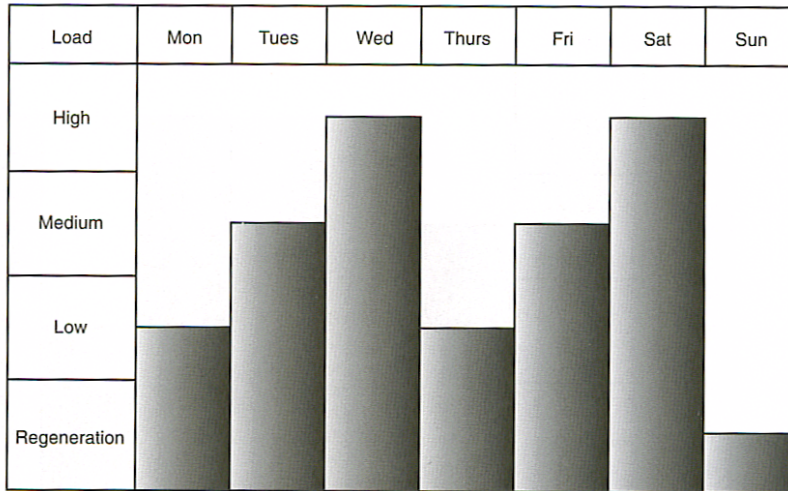


Figure 3.7 A low-intensity microcycle.

Reprinted from Bompa 1996.

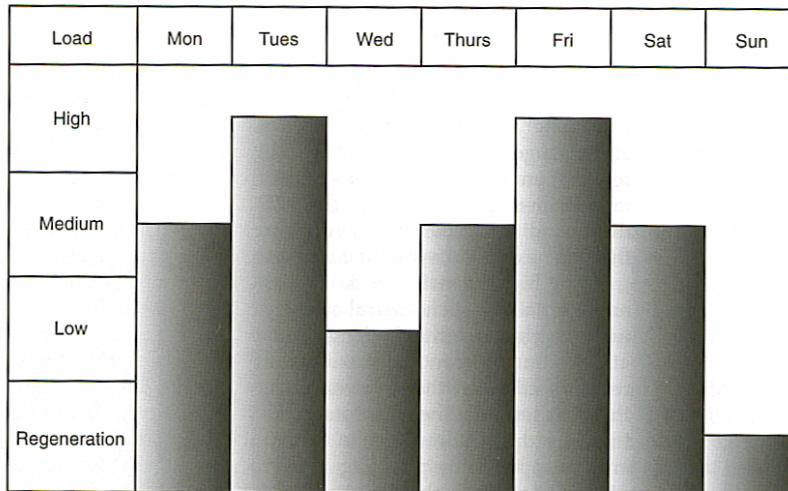


Figure 3.8 A medium-intensity microcycle.

Reprinted from Bompa 1996.

Notice how both the low and medium intensity micro-cycle practice weeks are followed by a period of complete regeneration on Sunday. I usually have a concert on Sunday so Mondays are days that I usually spend on technique and long tones and try to keep from diving into playing that is at all tiring.

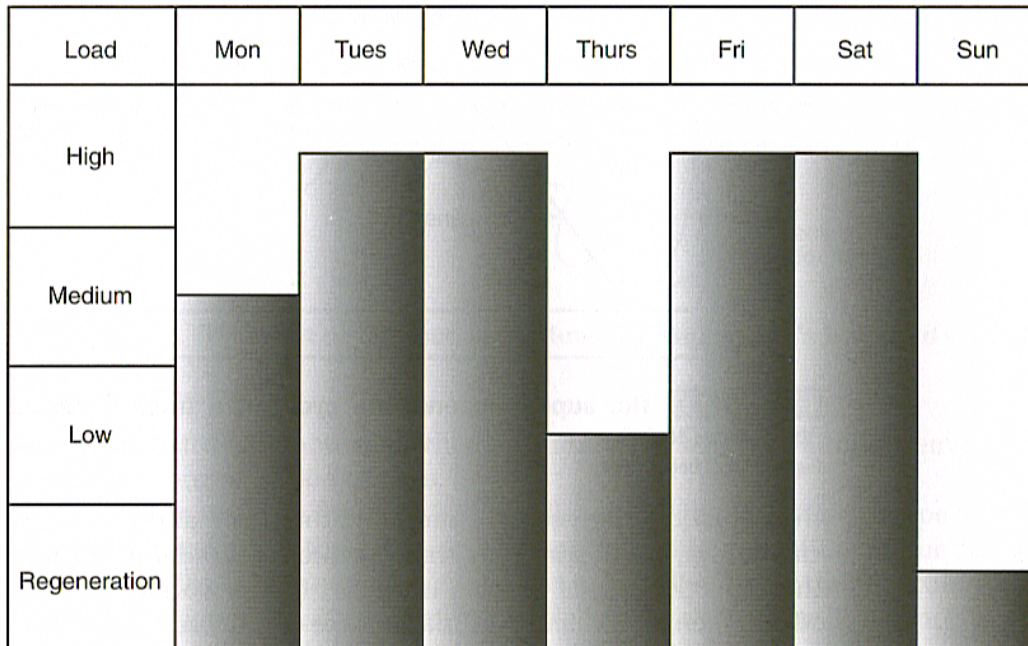


Figure 3.10 A suggested microcycle for the third, high-intensity step of a macrocycle for elite strength trainers and bodybuilders.

Reprinted from Bompa 1996.

Notice that on very high intensity weeks the two days of high intensity are followed by one progressively lower intensity day. This type of practicing will lead up to a week prior to an audition or recital. The week prior to a huge performance is spent in a medium or low intensity micro-cycle.

How then does all this fit into my practice month or year? Depending on how you want to develop your skills, the series of micro-cycles are followed by a period of anatomical adaptation or (AA).

Anatomical Adaptation refers to the off-season. Research in the area of anatomical adaptation suggests that training with constant and extensive high-intensity loads may decrease the material strength of bones, muscle fiber and tendons. This means that if the load does not vary from low to maximum, the result may be a decrease in overall strength and flexibility, which may leave the athlete prone to injury. The time between intense musical study and practice like spring break, Christmas and summer vacation may be considered the AA phase. If you took the whole summer off you would definitely be in bad shape but this is a good time to vary and change your practice routine.

The **Transition** phase is a period of recovery and rest before beginning the next phase. Not playing at all! This for me is usually following a major audition or recital or perhaps a long series of concerts. After playing principal on a Marine Band National concert tour for 52 straight days I gladly took a week off during the Thanksgiving holidays to recover mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. My next cycle of practicing was at an

extremely low level of intensity and lasted two weeks before beginning work on my next goal which was a major recital for a job interview in two months.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12					
3	6	6	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	5					
AA	H	MxS	T	MxS	M	MxS	T	AA	H	MxS	T	MxS	M	T	MxS	T

Figure 2.9 A Periodization plan stressing maximum strength. Numbers in top row refer to months. Numbers in upper right of boxes indicate number of weeks to devote to the phase.

Figure 2.9 shows an example of a years worth of practice with the various micro-cycles indicated by the number of weeks in each cycle.

How does this relate to music? You can keep the weeks of anatomical adaptation (AA) and transition (T), and change the (H) phase to a 6 week intensive excerpt study and the (MxS) phase to solo material and the (M) phase to developing register or working on your “weak link”.

Thinking Aside

In his provocative book, *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*, author Michael Gelb poses a wonderfully revealing question: “Where are you when you get your best ideas?” Gelb has asked this question to thousands of people over the years, and the most common answers he gets include “in the shower”, “resting in bed”, “walking in the woods”, and “listening to music.” Almost no one claims to get good ideas while working. While working on *The Last Supper*, he sometimes spent several hours in the middle of the day appearing to be lost in daydreams, in spite of entreaties from his employer, the prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie, to work more steadily. In his *Treatise on Painting*, da Vinci wrote, “It is a very good plan every now and again to go away and have a little time alone, when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer, since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose the power of judgment.”

After all, Christ himself would on occasion slip away to the wilderness when it seemed He was most needed. Why? To regain strength!

Thank you for your time and best of luck in everything you do.

Brent Phillips - 2002

Trombone “The President’s Own” US Marine Band - soloist, assistant principal
Principal Trombone Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra