

Optimise performance and get ready for next year!

Reflect and then actively design your life...

Set up your foundations for health and happiness!

Get ready for the New Year

It's around this time of year that most people start to reflect on the year just past and prepare for the new year to come. It's a great time to consider the following questions and prepare yourself to perform better and increase your fulfilment going forward –

- What went well last year?
- What areas of your life can you improve?
- What is your real purpose?
- How can you achieve your purpose?
- How can you live your best life?

Step 1 Reflect on the year that is ending

I suggest grabbing some blank A3-sized paper, dividing it into 6 sections and then answering each of these questions. Write the answers quickly so that you can tap into your subconscious and not overthink it. The techniques of **brain dumping** or **freewriting** are excellent to ensure that you can let your thoughts flow in an unscripted way onto the page.

Step 2 Create the framework for next year

Then, very quickly, once again without overthinking, grab another blank piece of A3 paper and draw a **mind map** of the NEW Year. Draw a small circle in the middle of the paper and write the word NEW YEAR in the centre, then create tentacles radiating out from the centre for each of the major domains of your life. I like to use –

- Health & Fitness
- Home & Family
- Relationships
- Fun Stuff
- Work & Business

Step 3 Design each area of your life to maximise your fulfilment

The next step is to consider each domain of your life and fan out from the tentacles with specifics about what you would like to achieve and how you would like to live in each area.

It's good to get the details down really quickly and then to take some time to reflect and refine them before taking the next step to determine your goals and specific actions.

Step 4 Prepare goals and plan specific actions

Up until this point, we are 'dreaming' and embedding our intentions into our subconscious, so it's critical to move into 'planning' mode to give yourself the best chance of making genuine improvements and achieving your goals for the next year.

It's easier to make progress when you prepare specific goals in each domain of your life and then expand on these into small actionable tasks. I suggest setting up a **Trello board** with a set of actions for each domain. Be really specific about the first immediate actions and give yourself specific dates to complete them. In this way, you will start the year on a high and it will be easier to move forward and maintain momentum along the way.

How do you feel today?

Now that you have considered your broad plan for next year, it's a great time to consider your foundations so that you can be in peak condition both physically and mentally for the road ahead.

By doing this you'll be able to optimise your performance, supercharge your productivity, increase your positivity, and live a happier life!

Start by considering the following questions...

How do you feel in your body? Are you bursting with energy?

Do you feel vibrant and vital? Are you healthy, fit, and strong?

Can you focus without distraction? Are you tired and aching?

Life has natural rhythms, and we all have ups and downs. The real skill is being able to prioritise your self-care and put yourself first so you can function at your best no matter what is going on.

Lawyers and other professionals need this more than most due to the highly stressful nature of the work and working environments.

The Mind-Body Connection

From ancient philosophers to modern science, there have been different views on the interaction between our physical and mental being.

Increasing [research and evidence-based practices](#) support the notion of a bidirectional relationship between the two.

Sustained negative emotional states such as stress, depression, and anxiety can worsen immunity functions and affect other bodily functions.

Recent studies show that positive emotions are associated with a range of health outcomes, such as reducing ill-health symptoms, reducing pain, and increasing longevity.

Other studies show that the fitter and healthier you are then the better you perform cognitively. So, exercise, good nutrition and hydration increase your brain's performance.

Foundations for optimal performance

If you want to perform at your best at work, then you need to maintain your health and fitness.

This simple statement is supported by overwhelming research and evidence. If you wish to live your best life, then you ABSOLUTELY MUST put your health and fitness first!

When we piece together the numerous research studies on how factors such as mindset, positive emotions, health, and fitness impact our performance, success, and happiness, the following five foundational components become evident –

1. Sleep
2. Healthy body
3. Purpose and meaning
4. Positive mindset
5. Work-life balance

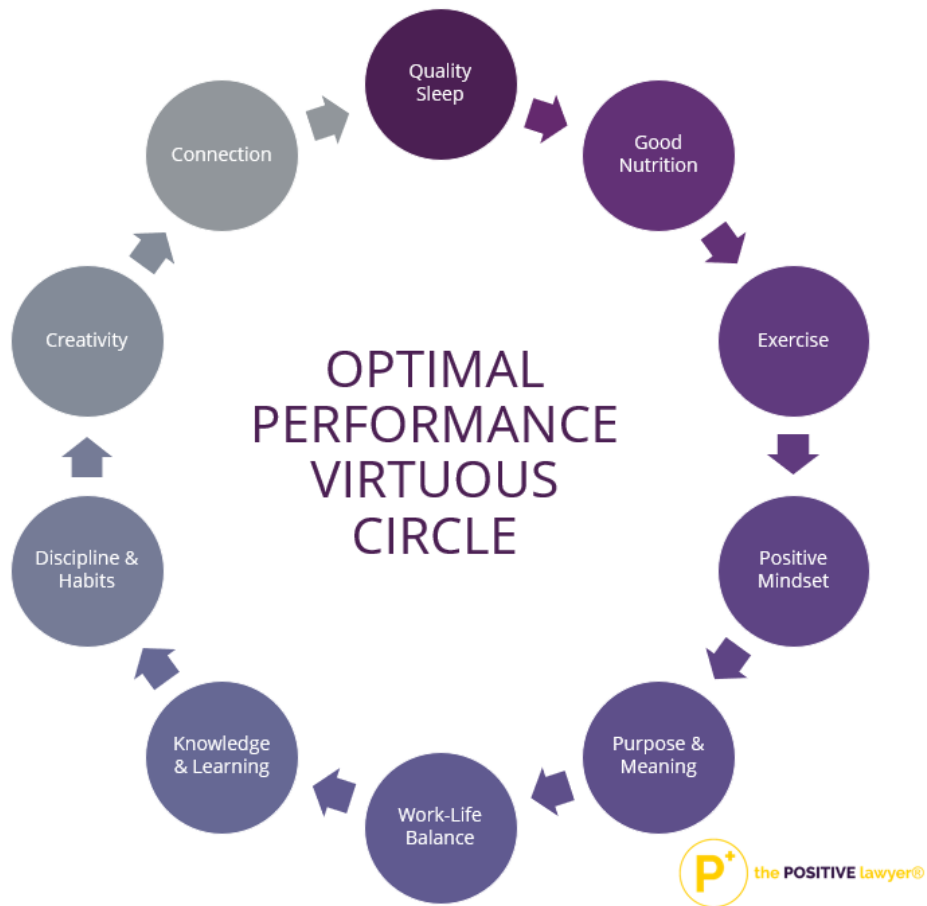
This article considers the first 2 in the list above.

Optimal performance - a virtuous cycle

I am sharing my personal virtuous circle for optimal performance. It has been distilled from a lifetime of interest in happiness, performance, and wellbeing. It's no coincidence that it brings together many aspects that have been highlighted by recent research to be beneficial to optimising our health and performance.

You can embed these components into your daily habits. Sometimes you will wander off track and then you simply need to take action to course correct. Other times you can give yourself permission to step outside of the good living boundaries or adjust the framework to suit your preferences. This is particularly important for holidays and during periods of high stress.

If you are neglecting your health, diet and fitness then you will lower your productivity and happiness.



With this cycle, you will set yourself up for success with the best possible foundations for optimal performance. Then it's important to maintain your commitment to continuous improvement in your work, fitness, health, happiness, and wellbeing.

How to get good quality sleep

It's all about being disciplined and also kind to yourself. For me, setting up habits that ensure you have sufficient, high-quality sleep is the greatest and more fundamental act of self-care. It shows a commitment to putting you and your wellbeing first so that you can show up every day for everyone else in the best condition possible.

Medical science recommends 7 hours of sleep, I extrapolate this out to mean roughly 8 hours in bed sleeping in order to get 7 hours of good quality sleep each night.

"Sleep is the best meditation" Dalai Lama

I've assembled the best sleep tips I can find from all the various sleep research that I have reviewed –

- Adults need 7 hours of sleep and 8 hours in bed every 24 hours – you don't sleep the whole time
- Monitor your sleep – Fitbit, Sleep Cycle – what you measure improves!
- Regular sleep schedule for bedtime and wake-up time
- No screens an hour before bed - perhaps read the old-fashioned way
- Don't go to bed on a full stomach or when you are too hungry
- Exposure to sunlight and nature during the day
- Be physically active – not too close to bedtime
- Be well hydrated – dehydration impacts sleep quality
- Remove distractions from the bedroom
- Naps during the day can make it hard to sleep
- If you don't fall asleep within about 20 minutes - do something relaxing and go back to bed when tired
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine, especially in the afternoon and evening – their stimulating effects impact sleep quality
- Avoid alcohol – you sleep more deeply for the first hour and less deeply after that
- Calming activities before bedtime - take a bath, meditate, listen to music
- Limit worries - plan for tomorrow before today ends
- Reduce stress – organise, prioritise, delegate

How to maintain a healthy body

The importance of exercise

Let's look at what exercise does for our strength, health, and happiness. Exercise makes us stronger in many ways – we have improved cognition or stronger abilities to think and solve problems; improved flexibility, muscle and bones strength to hold off deterioration and function better in our daily lives; it also supports a stronger immune system to reduce infection and inflammation.

The health benefits of regular exercise and physical activity are hard to ignore. Everyone benefits from exercise, regardless of age, sex, or physical ability. You know exercise is good for you. Well, it's even better than you think. It boosts your mood; increases your life expectancy; improves your mental, cognitive, and brain health!

Want to feel better, have more energy, and even add years to your life? Just exercise.

Research indicates that high-intensity exercise in the morning is ideal. If this doesn't work for you then feel great about the fact that any exercise is beneficial. Ideally, around 45 to 60 minutes of high-intensity exercise every day that combines both aerobic and strength components.

Get more active throughout the day and be consistent.

Even small amounts of physical activity are helpful, and accumulated activity throughout the day adds up to provide health benefits. So, take a dance class, hit the hiking trails, or join a soccer team. Find a physical activity you enjoy, and just do it. Bored? Try something new or do something with friends or family.

The importance of nutrition

There is often a shameful divide between traditional medicine and natural wisdom, so I am aiming to walk the middle path and concentrate on evidence-based practices. What all the professionals in this area agree on is that artificial substances are not food and don't provide the nutrition we need to perform at our best.

Eating better will increase your productivity and wellbeing!

We all know that we feel better when we eat better. Good nutrition and healthy eating are about more than weight loss. Good eating habits improve your wellbeing, your mood, your productivity, your focus, and your happiness.

Extensive research studies (too many to list and too many to count)...confirm that the food we eat impacts our health.

The CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), Australia's national science agency has conducted research that has led to the creation of world-leading diet and lifestyle programs to improve healthy lifestyle behaviours. Their findings indicate that by improving diets and getting more physical activity people can expect enhanced wellbeing; reduced risks of obesity; and other chronic diseases including Type 2 Diabetes.

I've included links to both their nutrition research and their diet and lifestyle programs. It's worth taking the time for a deep dive into the information provided and then using it to develop your own improved eating plan.

I prefer not to think of 'diets' as these tend to conjure up ideas of nutritional deprivation. For me, nutrition is about having a healthy eating plan that is a natural part of your lifestyle and supports good health, as well as optimal physical and mental performance. It's all about a common-sense approach.

The importance of hydration

There are many different recommendations from leading health organisations and the general recommendations are that men should drink 4 litres of water a day and for women, it's 2.7 litres of water per day.

There are relationships between climate, how much you sweat, and body mass that influences the ideal amount of water each person should drink for optimum hydration. In general, if you stick to these recommendations, you will be way ahead of most people.

There are four main areas where hydration supports us –

1. Performance – If you are not well hydrated your physical performance will suffer, especially during intense exercise or high temperatures.

Athletes commonly lose 6 to 10% of their body weight when competing and a loss of only 2% of the body's water content has a noticeable negative impact on physical performance.

Optimal hydration prevents the loss of physical performance and also reduces the oxidative stress that occurs from intense exercise.

2. Cognition – our brains are strongly influenced by our hydration status. Studies show that even mild dehydration, such as the loss of 1 to 3% of body weight, can impair many aspects of brain function such as mood, working memory, concentration, anxiety, fatigue, and headaches.

This sort of loss easily occurs through normal daily activities, let alone the extra loss through exercise and high temperatures. It is vital to stay well hydrated all day and every day.

3. Good health – there are many other benefits to staying well hydrated. For instance, dehydration is a major cause of headaches and also contributes to significantly worse hangovers. Water supports the function of our intestines and is critical to avoid constipation (especially mineral water that contains magnesium). Increased water intake appears to decrease the risk of kidney stone formation. Some evidence suggests that increasing water intake can promote weight loss by slightly increasing your metabolism and making you feel full before a meal when drunk half an hour before eating – this results in naturally smaller portion sizes.

4. Wellbeing – adequate hydration reduces feelings of anxiety and uplifts our mood; it reduces feelings of fatigue and anger and increases our ability to concentrate. Enough clean water daily generally contributes to more stable, positive emotions.

Water is vital to the function of our brains and our bodies. After all, our bodies are between 50 and 75% water, and we lose water every day, so it's critical that we replenish our supply.

About the author...



Hi, I'm Therese Linton, a global leader in legal project management legal process improvement, and personal productivity. Over the last decade, I've worked with thousands of lawyers to introduce innovative ways of working that delight clients, reduce stress, improve work-life balance, and lead to better legal outcomes.

I've been encouraged by my best friend, business partner, and many clients to expand the positive impact of these ways of working with the NEW Positive Lawyer coaching program.

I've been growing and learning throughout this journey myself. I have firsthand experience with learning new skills, along with the ups and downs that are inevitable when striving for mastery.

Announcing an amazing new program - THE POSITIVE LAWYER®

The Positive Lawyer provides the new 'non-negotiable' approaches to legal work, and a well-researched collection of tools and techniques to support positive mindsets, improve resilience and uplift legal working environments.

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You will be the first to know when the program is available, and we'll keep you motivated and updated along the way.

My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T