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| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Tips from NBF 2026 Speakers:
The Habits and Secrets behind
Peak Performance**



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Tips from NBF 2026 Speakers: The Habits and Secrets behind Peak Performance

On 16-17 September, Nordic Business Forum 2026 will focus on the theme The Human Edge. Over two days, 11 of the world's top business leaders and thinkers will take the stage to share their insights on performance, decision-making, and collaboration.

Ahead of the event, we invited a few of our speakers to share their own personal performance habits. What does peak performance mean to them? Which routines help them perform at a high level? What habits have they intentionally let go of to improve? And how do they recover and reset to sustain high performance? We were happy to receive so many unique and valuable perspectives to our questions.

This guide offers an inside look at the habits and routines of top leaders and high performers. We hope it inspires you to reflect on your own path to peak performance.

A warm thank you to these NBF 2026 speakers for sharing their expertise:



Kjell A. Nordström

Economist and
Author



Patty McCord

Former Chief Talent
Officer at Netflix



Nando Parrado

Survivor & Hero of
Uruguayan Air Force
Flight 571, Businessman
and Producer



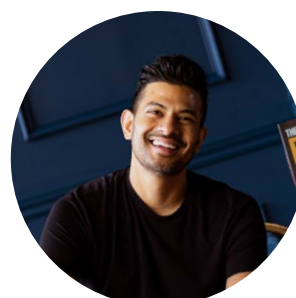
Rahaf Harfoush

Digital Anthropologist
and NYT Best-Selling
Author



Michael Beckley

Political Scientist
and Professor



Shawn Kanungo

Innovation Strategist



The Do's and Don'ts of Performance

✓ Do's

- Focus each day on the action that creates the greatest impact.
- Design your environment so it supports you in performing at your best.
- Protect your sleep and treat it as a non-negotiable foundation.
- Train your body regularly to strengthen your energy and mental clarity.
- Align your work with your natural energy rhythms instead of forcing constant intensity.
- Protect long blocks of uninterrupted time for deep thinking.
- Simplify routine decisions to free up mental capacity for complex work.
- Build a calendar filled with projects and meetings that give you energy.
- Say yes to what excites you and, if possible, outsource what drains you.
- Plan carefully so you can act decisively, even in uncertainty.
- Seek context and understanding before judging decisions.
- Schedule recovery, rest, and time off as part of your performance system.
- Use simple resets like walks in nature, training, or a nap to regain focus and perspective.
- Keep your priorities rooted in values, relationships, and long-term meaning.

✗ Don'ts

- Do not confuse pushing harder with performing better.
- Do not accept burnout as a normal part of success.
- Do not fill your calendar with commitments that drain your energy.
- Do not say yes to everything just because it looks like an opportunity.
- Do not allow constant email, news, and notifications to fragment your thinking.
- Do not try to prove you're right when the discussion no longer creates value.
- Do not follow productivity rules that ignore your biology or personal rhythms.
- Do not try to keep up with every new trend instead of focusing on real impact.
- Do not let work define your entire identity or purpose.



Defining Peak Performance

What does it mean to us?

Peak performance looks different for everyone, but the foundation is surprisingly similar. It is about energy, health, focus, and designing the right systems to support clear thinking and meaningful action. In this section, our speakers share what peak performance actually means to them and what allows them to operate at their best.

Healthy body and mind

Kjell: The first step is to stay fit and healthy. This is the true number one.

It's all about energy

Shawn: Peak performance is about energy. To me, energy isn't just physical, it's mental. The biggest game-changer for me has been designing a business and social calendar that actually excites me. Every meeting, every project, every commitment should give me energy. If it doesn't, I outsource it—either to my team or to my AI agents. I do my best work when I'm completely in flow, and flow only happens when you're spending time on things that light you up.

Creating the right systems and environments

Rahaf: Peak performance means creating the conditions that allow me to show up as my most strategic, efficient, grounded, and creative self. It is less about pushing harder and more about working with precision.

I focus closely on what research tells us about cognition, energy, and recovery, and I consciously tune out productivity narratives that normalize burnout. I know my creative rhythms well, and I protect them with intention. Late afternoons and early evenings are when my thinking is sharpest, so that time is treated as non-negotiable.

On a daily level, this includes movement and long walks, dedicated time for exploratory thinking, and periods where I deliberately reduce cognitive stimulation. I also make room for learning and play, which are often overlooked but essential to creative work. Recovery is part of performance. The body and mind are deeply intertwined, and high performance can coexist with mental, emotional, and physical well-being when systems are designed with care.

Focusing on the impact

Patty: Peak performance means prioritizing my actions every day: "What do I do today that moves us furthest, fastest?"

Consistency under complexity

Michael: Peak performance, for me, is consistency under complexity: the ability to think clearly, write precisely, and make good judgments when information is incomplete and the stakes are high. I reach it less through motivation than through systems. Fixed writing blocks, disciplined reading, structured workouts, and fairly hard boundaries around distractions. In my experience, performance comes much more from designing the right environment than from willpower.

Moving forward and creating opportunities

Nando: For me, peak performance means giving 110% in everything and never giving up. This creates more options than staying still. And when you have options, you can choose. When you choose, you respond with conscious awareness, and that gives you an edge in any situation.



Intention and Tools

How can we reach high performance?

High performance is rarely accidental. It comes from intentional choices about how you structure your time, your environment, and your commitments. Here, our speakers share the practical strategies they use to create focus, build systems, and perform consistently under pressure.

Simplify routine decisions

Kjell: The routinization of non value adding activities like breakfast menu, what clothes to wear, whether to train, tends to free up capacity for dealing with complexity and staying on top.



Create your performance support system

Shawn: As a father of three young children, time is the most precious resource I have (and good sleep is a close second). A few things keep me operating at my best:

My AI agent, Carlton. Through an open-source innovation called OpenClaw, Carlton works overnight to build my morning game plan based on my priorities, calendar, upcoming commitments and works on anything it can. This has been an absolute game-changer.

I protect my sleep. Seven hours minimum whenever possible. I've learned that discipline at night pays dividends by morning.

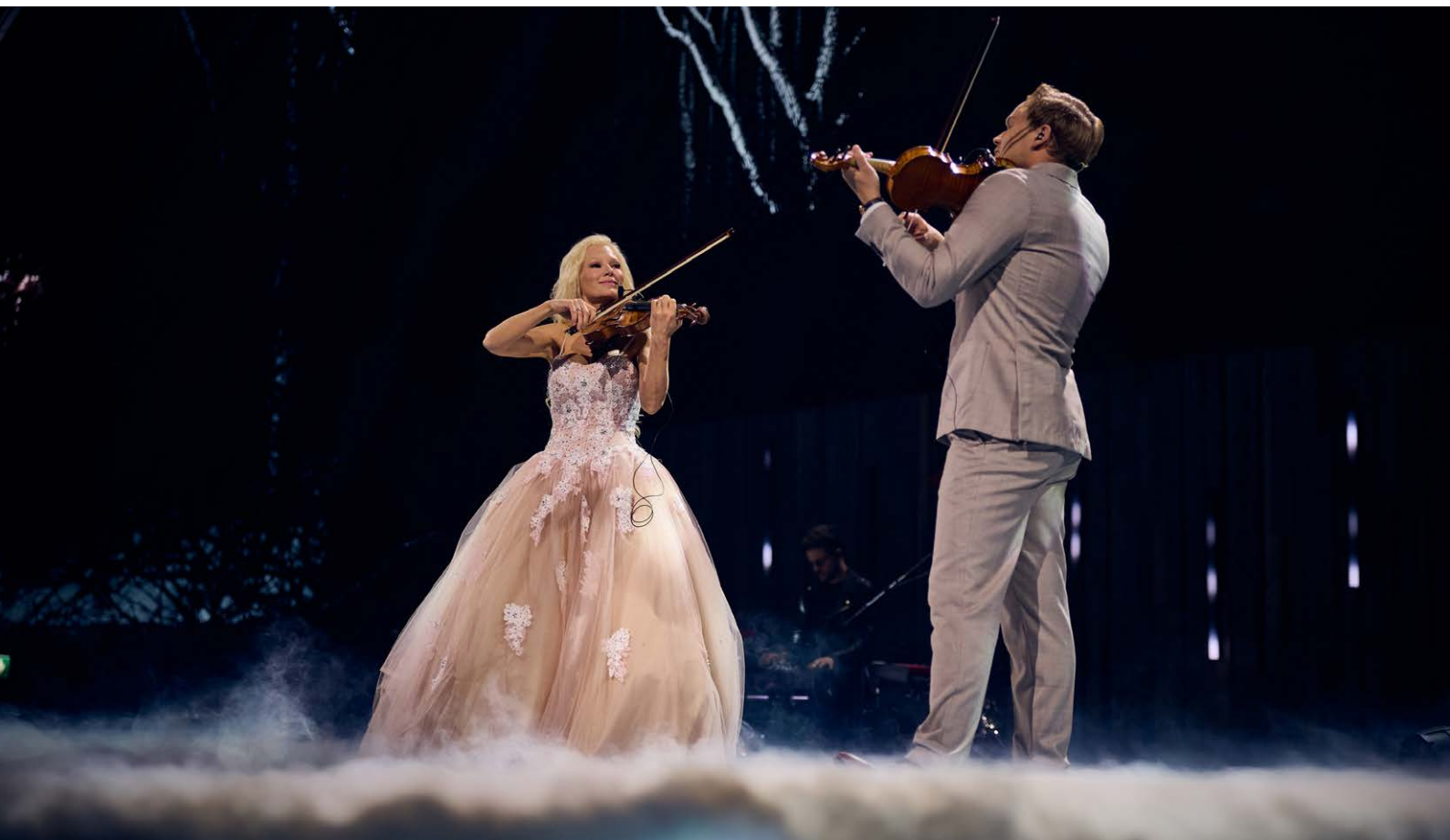
A 5:30 AM morning workout. Hopefully some weight training, but if I don't have enough time—just enough to get the blood moving and the mind sharp before the day takes over.

Take care of yourself

Michael: A big one is physical training. Regular cardio and strength work stabilize my energy and sleep and make my brain much more reliable under stress.

Schedule (and protect) uninterrupted time

Michael: The personal practice that matters most for me is protecting long stretches of uninterrupted thinking time. My job is less about producing constant output and more about getting a few hard things right, so I structure my week so that mornings are reserved for reading, writing, and thinking with no meetings, no email, and no phone.





Rely on humane productivity

Rahaf: My approach to performance is grounded in a concept I call Humane Productivity, which comes out of my recent research. It starts from the belief that performance systems should be designed around human realities. That means respecting energetic patterns, hormonal cycles, seasonal shifts, and the natural limits of attention.

One of the most damaging narratives we have inherited from hustle culture is the expectation that success requires showing up with the same intensity, every single day. That model ignores how humans actually function. Over time, it erodes both performance and well-being. Sustainable excellence comes from alignment, not force.

Plan carefully to be ready to take action

Nando: Planning has always been the key in everything I've ventured into. I've also learned to make fast decisions and take action, even in uncertainty.

Seek context and new perspectives

Patty: Proactively seek business context. For example, go directly to someone on a team who has made a decision that you don't understand or may disagree with, and seek to understand why that decision was made.



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Habits to Drop

What habits are keeping us from reaching peak performance?

Improving performance is not only about adding new routines, but also about removing what no longer serves you. Many leaders discover that certain habits quietly drain energy, fragment focus, or create unnecessary stress. In this chapter, our speakers reflect on what they have stopped doing to perform on a higher level.

Stop saying “yes” to everything

Shawn: Saying yes to everything. I used to take on projects, join committees, invest in companies - all because they seemed like opportunities. But I'd look at my calendar and dread half of what was on it. Status updates that drained me. Obligations that extracted energy instead of creating it. The shift came when I realized my calendar is my MOST valuable asset, and I need to protect it like a hawk. Now, I ask the question: does this thing give me energy, or does it take it away? If it takes, it's a no.

Forget multitasking

Michael: A habit I've mostly dropped is reactive multitasking—constant email checking, news scanning, and jumping between tasks. It feels productive in the moment but quietly destroys the quality of your thinking. I now batch communication and limit news intake. I probably “do” fewer things each day, but the quality of my decisions and work is much higher.

Don't push against your natural rhythm

Rahaf: Waking up early simply because it is framed as a requirement for success. I wake up later than most productivity advice would recommend. It suits my biology and my work, and the quality of my output reflects that choice.

Stop trying to keep up with everything

Kjell: Trying to keep up with the technological frontier is no longer on my agenda. It adds more value to focus on the implications of new tech on us, firms, and our societies than trying to keep up with technology per se.

Stop wasting time on simply proving you're right

Patty: Trying to convince someone who is adamant about their position. Sometimes it's best to just let things play out. Also, when you do this, it is important to never say "I told you so".

Don't try to do it all by yourself

Nando: For many years, I relied mostly on my intuition, discipline, grit, and adaptability under pressure. Now, I listen more to good advice from people who know better than me, especially my daughters and my wife!

Reset and Recover

How to prioritize recovery to support performance?

Sustainable high performance is impossible without recovery. Whether through sleep, exercise, time off, your loved ones, or simple moments of gratitude, intentional resets help protect both clarity and perspective. Here, our speakers share how they recharge and how they prevent burnout before it begins.

Remember the basics: sleep, training, nature, screen-free time

Kjell: The reset button in my case is to engage in heavy training followed by a nap.

Patty: Taking a walk. Preferably outdoors.

Michael: For recovery, two things matter most: sleep and deliberate resets. I protect sleep aggressively. During the day, I build in short resets—workouts, long walks, or just stepping away from screens.





Plan and protect rest and time off

Rahaf: I treat rest as something that belongs on the calendar. Time off is planned, protected, and taken seriously.

During the summer months, I often work summer hours every other week with a four-day workweek and a three-day weekend. I take all of August off, along with most of December. January is blocked from travel and used as a gentle on-ramp into the year.

I focus on maximizing the quality of time rather than the number of hours worked. At a deeper level, this reflects a belief in living a good life, one centered on community, relationships, wellness, and joy. Work is deeply meaningful to me, but it does not define my identity or my purpose.

Spend time with your loved ones

Michael: On a weekly level, family time is my main reset. Nothing restores perspective faster than kids who don't care at all about your deadlines or titles.

Say 'no' to things that don't bring value

Nando: I avoid burnout by saying 'no' to things that don't align with my values. For me, mental exhaustion comes more from emptiness than from effort. Surviving extreme situations gave me a lifelong habit of perspective-checking, and I believe this helps daily stresses not dominate my nervous system. That naturally lowers chronic stress, one of the biggest drivers of burnout.

Try to design an energizing life

Shawn: I know this might be controversial, but I don't have a recovery habit...because I'm trying to design a life that doesn't require one. My goal is to spend the most time possible on things I love—my wife and children, my mother, my friends, my work. When your life is built around what energizes you, you can't really burn out.

That said, if there's a micro-reset I rely on, it's gratitude. Just pausing to sit with the health and happiness of the people around me. It recalibrates everything instantly.





Quote Collection

*“The first step to peak performance is to **stay fit and healthy**. This is the true number one.”*

Kjell A Nordström

*“Peak performance is less about pushing harder and more about **working with precision**.”*

Rahaf Harfoush

*“Mental exhaustion comes more from **emptiness** than from effort.”*

Nando Parrado

*“Peak performance means **prioritizing my actions** every day: ‘What do I do today that moves us furthest fastest?’”*

Patty McCord

*“When your life is built around what **energizes you**, you can’t really burn out.”*

Shawn Kanungo

*“Peak performance is **consistency under complexity**: the ability to think clearly and make good judgments when information is incomplete and the stakes are high. It comes less through motivation, and more through systems.”*

Michael Beckley



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