

What Big Business Can Learn from a Chronic Disease

One of the top chemical companies in the world has discovered something game changing. It's not the latest polymer or catalyst that can drive new product sales, nor is it a revolutionary process improvement in their manufacturing plant. The company has embarked on an organization-wide initiative to ensure sustainability of its business. How? Through investing in the sustainability of its people.

Sustainability is an environmental buzzword. It means you can't continue to burn through resources at a furious rate and expect them to last forever. With short-term results and tunnel vision focused on next quarter's performance, employees are in a personal energy crisis never quite seen before due to a confluence of factors from short-term focus, technology eradicating any boundaries that may have existed before, and increased workload due to employee headcount reductions, particularly in the last five years – all driven by the "more, bigger, faster," ethic of the world's largest companies.

Those with chronic disease, especially those who suffer from mitochondrial disease, know this is a recipe for disaster. Mitochondria are inside our cells and they are often called the "powerhouses" of the cell because they supply the energy for every aspect of our being – seeing, breathing, thinking and moving. In mitochondrial disease, the body cannot make enough energy. For children with mitochondrial disease, this can result in a child's inability to develop, grow, learn, eat, move, or even sleep. For adults with mitochondrial disease, it can result in brain or muscle fatigue, and complications with other vital organ function.

While it's clear that the rules of Wall Street are not changing, how the best companies approach the quarter needs to change, particularly if they are concerned about long-term goals, the overall health of their employees, and the desire to create more purposeful companies that stand for something greater than beating the next analyst earnings estimate. These are all arenas where amazing people who have to overcome mitochondrial disease and other chronic diseases every day not only succeed, but thrive.

The Energy Project recently learned about the Foundation for Mitochondrial Medicine (FMM), and they shared with us how mitochondrial function is integrated into every system in the body. We immediately realized a clear purpose in aligning our efforts. Attending to energy – in all its forms – is the foundational platform for enhancing our worldview and moving beyond our own limitations, whether to unlock individual achievement, progress in medicine, and even unleashing organizational capacity.

In addition to creating energy, mitochondria also perform other important tasks within the cells. They regulate calcium, which allows the smooth function of neurons; they code for and assemble various proteins used by cells; and they are in charge of telling the cell when to die – an important housekeeping task called apoptosis that ensures the availability of robust cells to take care of our bodies' business. Organ-specific roles of mitochondria include mitochondrial in liver cells detoxify the liver.

So, what makes a sustainable enterprise is the same approach that has worked for amazing people overcoming mitochondrial disease:

Susan's Story -- Susan is like many of us. A business owner and the mother of two boys, an unexpected twist in her journey occurred only a few years ago when mitochondrial disease limited her mobility and she struggled to walk. She was walking on stage to sing at a holiday concert and a slight twinge in her ankle distracted her. Within a few weeks, she was struggling to walk and suffered from intense pain in her feet. She soon bought shoes with rocking bottoms on them that supported her weak ankles and a cane to get around. Little did she know that her answer would come *years later* through her son Sam. Sam is an athlete and was bothered by shoulder and ankle pain for two years before getting a diagnosis of mitochondrial disease. Meanwhile, Susan fell and required two surgeries and suffered more nerve damage and pain. Convinced that her pain and her son's condition were linked, her doctor ordered a muscle biopsy and spinal tap for Susan, and within two weeks the doctors found that in addition to mitochondrial disease, Susan's body wasn't properly metabolizing folic acid. Within three days of taking a new

medicine, her legs worked better than they had in 5 years. Though she still has issues with her ankles, she now knows how to better manage her mitochondrial disease.

Colby's Story -- From the outside, you would never know that Colby has mitochondrial disease. When he practiced and played football games as a teenager, he would get sick during and after each game. His coaches thought he wasn't hydrating enough, or eating right, or not working hard enough. After several episodes of severe pain and blackouts, Colby's family sought out a neurologist that eventually led to a muscle biopsy and a diagnosis of mitochondrial disease. Colby no longer plays contact sports and he knows mitochondrial disease is something in his life he has to manage on a daily basis. He takes time daily to check his energy level and re-energize himself if needed.

With all the discussion in the business world around product and environment sustainability, we need to remember who will make that happen. It's the employees, the same people who report the highest levels of burnout and disengagement in our history. The patience, consistency, and pursuit of long-range goals, ever critical for managing mitochondrial disease, is also the answer for corporate myopia.

The satisfaction *earned* from those with mitochondrial disease and other chronic diseases provide a valuable lesson for businesses and all of us who want to achieve intrinsic satisfaction in what we do – be incremental in your approach and expect to delay your gratification.

The Energy Project is supporting the Foundation for Mitochondrial Medicine and the United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation's Southeast Regional Mitochondrial Medicine Symposium bringing together researchers, doctors, medical school professors, biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry innovators to address both of our energy crises and two of our most pressing public health epidemics: the human energy crisis, pushing people into burnout; and mitochondrial dysfunction, impacting and contributing to chronic and life threatening diseases.

In this partnership, we aim to help researchers, innovators, and medical professionals to sustainably expend and renew their energy as they continue to unlock information and treatments for mitochondrial disease and dysfunction. And, we hope that other organizations take note and find ways to fuel their employees' energy at not just the cellular level, but by meeting the full range of their energy needs to create healthier and higher performing workplaces.

To learn more:

The Energy Project www.theenergyproject.com

The Foundation for Mitochondrial Medicine www.hopeflies.org

The United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation www.umdf.org