



Florida campus of LGE Performance Systems look like a pro athlete training camp. But LGE's prime focus is a 2½-day "Corporate Athlete" training program aimed at boosting executives' physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

Corporate athlete may seem like the latest fad from the ever-burgeoning cottage industry of management experts and empowerment programs. Critics might scoff at the premise, which has elements of both boot camp and touchy-feely retreat. But in an era of increasing executive burnout and turnover, companies see the program as a way to keep their executives in the starting lineup. And many desk jocks who go through the corporate athlete program say they leave with a fresh outlook, including a clearer view on how to align their own values with work and a blueprint for better health and more balanced lives.

LGE's sports-training gurus have long helped boost the competitive skills of world-class athletes, from gold medal speed skater Dan Jansen to U.S. Open tennis finalist Jim Courier. Some occasionally still hang out here. But LGE co-founder Jim Loehr, a pioneer in the field of sports psychology, program co-creator Tony Schwartz and exercise physiologist Jack Groppe are shifting almost exclusively to the lucrative corporate world, using sports-training methodology to retool the lives of harried executives.

Winning converts

"The world is demanding more from executives than ever before," Loehr says. "What we've learned from 25 years in sports is that the only real answer to increased demand is to expand capacity, to learn how to embrace pressure rather than run from it, in order to perform at the highest levels."

LGE is on to something. More than 10,000 executives have gone through its programs, and its growing corporate client list includes General Motors, IBM, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter and Pfizer. Full training centers such as the Orlando site are planned for the ripe New York market this summer and for Chicago and San Diego in 2002. LGE also holds on-site programs throughout the USA.

LGE's corporate athlete program is hard-core, intensive interdisciplinary training based on the premise that increasing physical, mental and emotional capacity for stress, combined with stress-reducing recovery techniques, leads to enhanced on-the-job performance. The prime selling point to employers is that the program helps create performance-friendly cultures that encourage higher productivity, greater loyalty and lower health care costs, says Schwartz, who has written about behavioral change and high performance. Please see COVER STORY next page ▶



Test of Strength: Dean Preising of LGE Performance Systems helps Ellen Boshart of Salomon Smith Barney measure her abilities on the chest-press machine at the 9-acre facility.

Cover story

'Corporate athletes' hit the mat

LGE Performance applies sports-style training principles to business

By Gary Strauss
USA Today

ORLANDO — In short order, Steve Pikowski gets poked for a blood test, strips down to a skimpy bathing suit to measure his body fat, paces a treadmill to test endurance and hoists weights to gauge his strength.

"Oh, man," says Pikowski, a Salomon Smith Barney managing director, flushed and breathing heavily following scrutiny from an assortment of fitness training experts. "I



All systems go: Bob Lowe of LGE measures the body mass of Salomon Smith Barney's Anne Marie Campbell while she sits in the "bod pod."

think they're having more fun with us than we are with them."

Elaborate weight-lifting equipment, cardio-workout

machines, tennis courts, an odd, egg-shaped "bod pod" fat-gauge machine and incredibly fit-looking employees make the sun-drenched, 9-acre

Workers try to get in shape to meet rising demands

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ance for more than 20 years.

Even those who scoff at assorted New Age change-agent theories say LGE's personally tailored programs are broader, more regimented and easier to follow, and make more sense than most of what they've encountered. "I'm pretty much of a convert," says Dan Bresle, head of cosmetics giant Estée Lauder's U.S. operations. "It's the first program that's given me the incentive to integrate a plan of eating right, working out, giving myself time to recuperate and allowing myself downtime."

Applying sports-style training principles to business isn't as far-fetched as it seems. Loehr, author of several best-selling stress management books such as *Stress for Success*, says there are plenty of parallels. "Whether you're in sports or business, you have to have remarkable mental, emotional and physical fitness to maintain a high level of performance," he says. "But in sports, you might train 90% of the time to perform 10% of the time. In business, it's 90% performance, maybe 10% training. You have to concentrate all the time, virtually year round."

Moreover, competitive sports seasons last a few months; an athlete's career, if he or she is lucky, lasts maybe a decade. Corporate athletes are "on" 24/7, seldom get much relaxation time and have careers spanning several decades, Loehr says.

Core to corporate athlete training is the principle that increasing amounts of stress are good. "Stress gets a bad name. But it's the foundation of physical, emotional and spiritual growth," Loehr says.

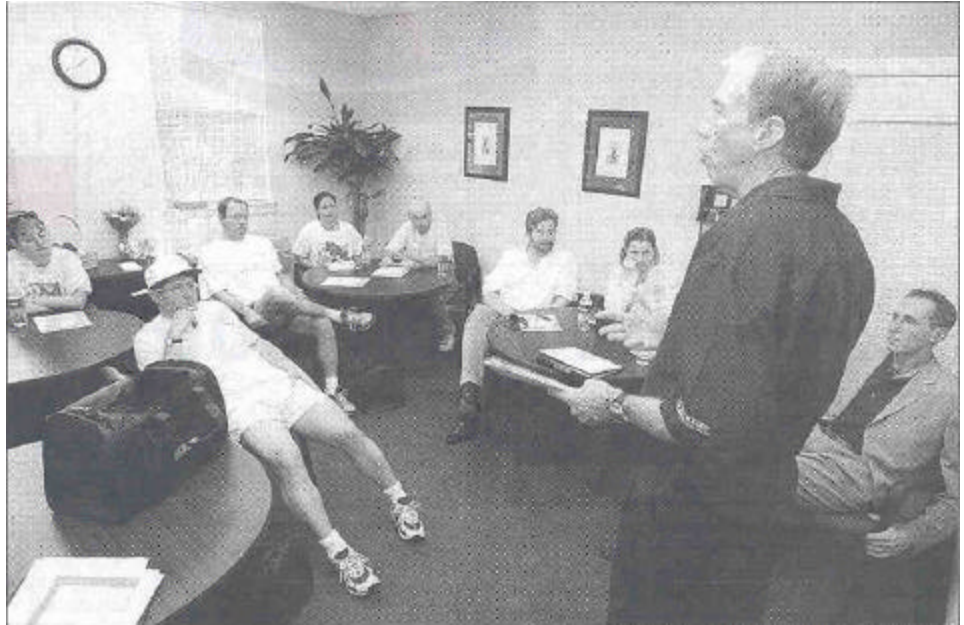
Stress recovery is also essential. LGE even recommends executives take frequent recuperative breaks from the hamster-cage treadmill at work for exercise, personal reflection, even a short power nap or a walk.

Scoring points

Perhaps what makes LGE's sports regime-influenced training a bit more digestible — especially among scores of aging weekend jocks in key corporate posts — are the inherent comparisons to the corporate world, where sports metaphors such as "team players" and "winning is everything" flourish.

Given MBA President Bush's near-fanatical penchant for daily exercise and relaxed work style, LGE's premise of balancing work with exercise and intermittent recovery may assuage nose-to-the-grindstone traditionalists.

"This isn't just some mumbo jumbo. They're on to something here," says Randall Larrimore, CEO of office products distributor United Stationers. He was skeptical when he



Getting Oriented: LGE's Jim Loehr welcomes Salomon Smith Barney executives to the facility.

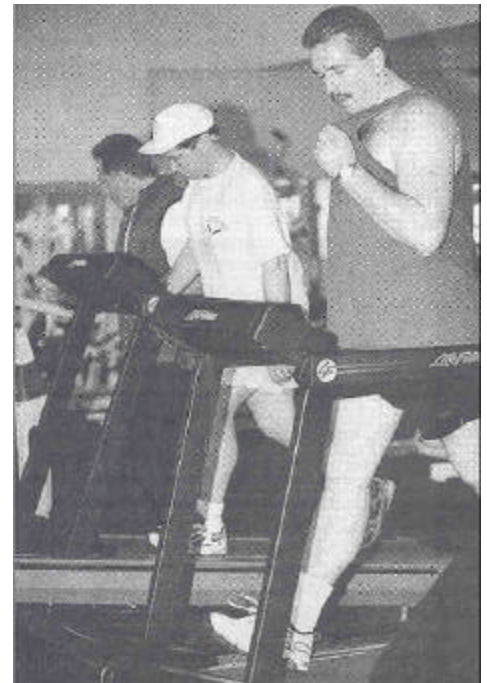
first arrived, but energized after completing a one-on-one corporate athlete program.

"At first, the notion that you might be more productive if you exercise or take a mental break during working hours felt like a waste of time," Larrimore says. "Now I realize that it can help me deal with the pressures of the job. And instead of feeling burned out and thinking about retiring, this could give me another 5 years of productivity." Larrimore, thick waisted and 53, vows to follow a healthier diet. "I'm going to cut down on red meat and Krispy Kremes," he says.

Salomon Smith Barney, a major LGE client, is sending 700 executive-level employees to Orlando in small groups over the next 18 months. Like Pikowski and 10 other Salomon executives who arrived at LGE in mid-February, they'll undergo exhaustive physical and mental profiling. For a closer look at their frenetic Wall Street lives, LGE staffers spent time in New York shadowing Salomon employees on the trading floor.

Before arriving, participants must answer lengthy questionnaires about themselves and their lifestyles that provide insight into their physical, emotional and mental mettle. The responses are used to determine each participant's "High Performance Quotient" — a measure of nine factors that identify stress adaptability and performance capacity.

There's little room for self-denial or glossing over personal foibles. Additional feedback is provided, anonymously, from five peers who can offer candid criticism and insight. LGE calls this process "Face the Truth," and the



Walking the walk: Steve Pikowski, right, and Dan Patterson work out on treadmills at LGE.

comments can be bracing. Among this group, some are viewed by peers as quick-tempered and moody; others as humorless, hyperactive drones.

Overall, the tests show executives who are out of shape, overstressed and overwhelmed

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by work/life demands — about par for most of those who go through the program, Schwartz says.

As the group is indoctrinated in classroom sessions later in the day, the members slowly transform from skeptics thinking, "Yeah, I should change, and I want to change but really don't have the desire or time," to, "Hey, maybe I not only need to change, but here's a way I can make my life better."

Loehr plays a short video of a comedy skit, noting how it quickly lightens the mood. "See what just a couple minutes will do for you?" he asks. Other mental recovery tactics include deep-breathing exercises and writing notes to loved ones.

Every couple of hours, the group is ordered to take a break — go outside for some fresh air, a snack and a drink. Invariably, they come back to class sessions refreshed and more alert. These are part of the many basic "rituals" that LGE helps participants incorporate as positive habits that become automatic to their lives, including eating five or six small meals a day or simply committing to some chill-out time.

Later, the Salomon crew sits Lotus style on soft mats, mimicking the stretching and deep-breathing exercises of yoga instructor Devi Dyal, who sports a turban and ZZ Top-length beard. As stock trader Anne Marie Campbell notes, "These exercises are great. I can do them at my desk or in the car."

Individual sessions with LGE fitness trainers help executives establish daily rituals, such as regular workouts and taking time for mental breaks. "Corporate training has historically focused on only one dimension of performance — cognitive," Schwartz says. "We address people as a whole, recognizing that performance requires expanding physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual capacity, which we define as the unique fuel that comes from connecting to a deeper sense of purpose."

Campbell says rituals such as regular workouts quickly boosted her energy. "These things are becoming habits and already have a calming effect," Campbell said last week. "The process is wonderful."

Of course, corporate athlete training doesn't come cheap. Group sessions cost \$3,000 per person; one-on-one individual sessions such as Larrimore's are \$6,000. Travel and lodging are extra.

Salomon Smith Barney, which will spend more than \$2 million for its 700 corporate athletes alone, believes the money is well spent.

"It's a cost, but you can't measure it that way. We look at it as a terrific investment in

Corporate athlete rules to live by

1. Launch each day by revisiting your personal and professional mission in life, reconnecting to your deepest values and beliefs.

2. Establish concrete physical, emotional, mental and spiritual objectives.

3. Develop mental preparation and visualization rituals to sustain high-level performance under stress. Example: Like an athlete before a competition, carefully rehearse desired actions before an important meeting.

4. Institute precise personal recovery rituals to decompress and renew energy every 90 to 120 minutes. Example: Have something to eat or do deep breathing exercises.

5. Perform a highly specific exercise routine at least three to four times a week that expands physical capacity and stimulates mental and emotional recovery.

6. Stabilize blood sugar and energy levels by consuming five to six nutritious small meals and 48 to 64 ounces of water daily.

7. Be consistent on sleep patterns, focusing especially on going to bed and waking up early.

8. Implement clearly defined rituals for positively connecting with co-workers to facilitate more effective communication and leadership. Example: Take opportunities to compliment a worker each day.

9. Build effective rituals for truly separating work life from personal life. Example: Take a walk or work out to decompress before leaving work for home.

10. Conclude each day by holding yourself accountable for the progress made in achieving your desired mission and behaving consistently with your deepest values.

Source: LGE Performance Systems

our people," says Bob DeFazio, the company's co-head of global equities who went through the program last summer.

"Wall Street is a very high-stress environment. It's a difficult place to perform over a meaningful period of time and prompts burn-out," DeFazio says. "This is a very efficient way to help balance work/life arrangements and take performance to a higher level."

Two weeks after completing the corporate athlete course, Pikowski — who was overweight, out of shape and listless — is undergoing the metamorphosis most LGE grads experience. He's lost 11 pounds with daily workouts and by eating a healthier diet. Co-workers say he appears less stressed. He's

also carving out more family time.

"I was a train wreck before," says Pikowski, 34. "It was a great time to reflect on life and what's important. A lot of what they teach you is plain, simple, common-sense motivation, and I'm sticking with it."

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