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Meet the Unconventional Game-Changers in Business

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By Deborah Tarrant

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For high-level leaders looking for a competitive advantage in a dramatically altered business landscape, specialist consultants can bring a different and, at times, downright unorthodox point of view.

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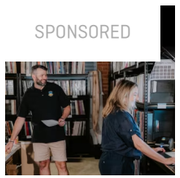
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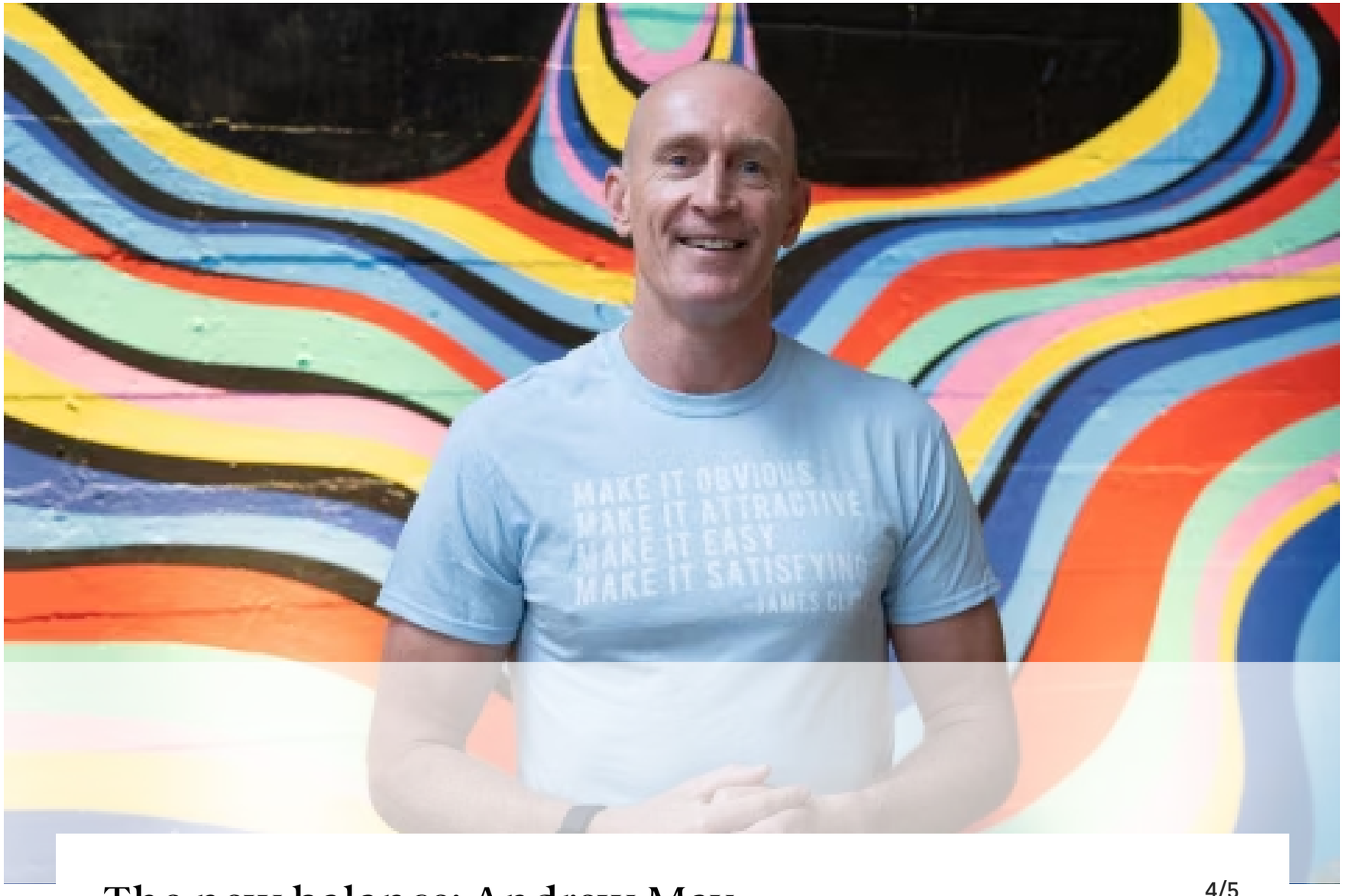

The new balance: Andrew May

What: Transformation specialist

Philosophy: Increasing leadership capacity requires mastering the brain and body.

The most intriguing aspect of Andrew May's coaching philosophy is that he debunks the concept of work-life balance. "It's a crock of garbage – it sets people up for failure," insists the

entrepreneur and you want balance – wrong job! You need to be prepared for the trade-off."

May teaches people "how to work really hard for periods and how to down-regulate, control the inner dialogue and set up frameworks so they don't end up burnt out, divorced and their kids hating them in 10 years time".

Leadership capacity is May's specialty. That involves helping clients to establish sustainable operating rhythms that factor in peak work demands, such as intense quarterly reporting periods, and relaxing school holidays. Essential to the process is protecting time, boosting energy and powering up the ability to focus attention. There's a strong physical backbone to his work. He calls it "hard fun".

His unconventional "inside out" approach makes executives "match fit" to run the business. It leans into the 1970s biopsychosocial model created by psychiatrist Dr George L. Engel, which explores the links between physiological and psychological pathways and socioenvironmental factors (think culture and relationships). May mixes in personal experience from his 25 years in sport, a stint in a professional services firm, a marriage break-up when his children were young, bouts with cancer and near-bankruptcy.

Clients, who pay him $15,000 for a two-to-three-month period, tend to be well-informed super-performers or those with a "Bunsen burner on their backside" because they have just been promoted or are about to take on a new role. Either way, they need to be ready for May's rigour, which starts with a thorough analysis.

Working with stress and resilience researcher Dr Tom Buckley at Sydney University, May gives his clients swathes of metrics and KPIs on their body, drawn from wearable tech – each person is required to wear a heart monitor for 48 hours – and blood tests. "From the tech we can see how much of their day is spent in stress or the sympathetic nervous system, how well they sleep and their biological age. Our goal is for clients to be five years younger biologically, to give them the capacity to run at a high level."

What follows is a prescribed exercise and dietary program – cutting out sugar, alcohol in moderation and eating the right macronutrients – with monitoring via a dashboard, then a mix of mental skills and energy management training.

If the going gets too tough, there's an exit strategy. May and his clients agree at the outset that they can sack each other. But many of them have stuck with him long-term. "Life changes – you might land a global role and need to learn about your body clock and the suprachiasmatic nucleus [the region of the brain that regulates most circadian rhythms in the body]," he says. "It's not like you get all this info and suddenly you're 'performed'."

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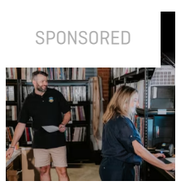

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