

HOME FURNISHINGS

5 reasons why leaders should sleep more

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Cat nap. Image credit: Nuvanna

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In January 1986, just seconds after launch, the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded, killing everyone on board instantly. According to research in 1988, select managers directly involved in the launch arrived at 1 a.m. that morning, having only slept a maximum of two hours.

Additionally, in 1989, third mate Gregory Cousins was allegedly sleeping at the wheel of the *Exxon Valdez* supertanker. When the boat drifted off course, this made it impossible for him to turn it around and avoid disaster. The crew reportedly had just finished a 22-hour shift loading the oil into the tank. The third mate allegedly only had a "catnap" in the 16 hours prior to the crash.

Lastly, according to the National Transportation Safety Board, "impaired performance resulting from fatigue" was a factor in the 1999 American Airlines Flight 1420 crash that killed 11, including the captain, and injured more than 105 people. Only 24 people walked away from that crash without injury.

Sleep on it

Circadian, a global leader that provides workforce performance and safety solutions for businesses, stated, "Sleep deprivation is an issue that is often ignored, yet frequently the root cause of decreased productivity, accidents, incidents and mistakes which cost companies billions of dollars each year."

Ten of the top sleep deprivation dangers in the workplace include decreased communication, deterioration of performance, increased distractibility, driving impairment, an increase in the number of errors made by sleep-deprived individuals, poor cognitive memory and assimilation, poor mood appropriate behavior, greater risk-taking behavior and the inability to make necessary adjustments when needed.

The more that each of these issues is increased, the more sleep deprivation is compounded in an individual.

So the question that must be asked is whether or not the above scenarios would have resulted in more positive outcomes if the people who were responsible for others' lives on those fateful days had truly been rested before starting their shifts.

This is why I have set out to solve common problems many commonly experience during the night, allowing them

to achieve balance in their overall life through a consistently goodnight's sleep.

When the body achieves a natural flow with the mind, it makes a difference in how a person experiences the world. This means making a commitment to being truly asleep when sleeping and truly present while awake.

We each have an opportunity to put happiness within reach by building the right foundation for our lives, which starts with a truly restorative night's sleep.

If recuperative sleep is good for people, in general, think about the edge that leaders in each of their fields who maintain quality, restorative sleep can have over the competition.

Below are easy-to-follow strategies that prove why quality sleep is so important to getting ahead.

Mental clarity

It is no surprise that professional athletes are always on the lookout for every single advantage they can use to outperform their opponents. With a career that spans a maximum of 15 years, they want to stay on top of their game for the duration.

"Brady is the healthiest great champion the NFL has ever had, both physically and mentally" (Sally Jenkins, *The Washington Post*). The longtime New England Patriots quarterback, with multiple Super Bowl victories and MVP awards, is widely regarded as an athlete whose training and determination pushed him from a mediocre draft position to the most-revered and respected professional football player of his generation.

Tom Brady is very open about his approach to a more natural, healthier way of exercising, training and living, which challenges some commonly held assumptions around health and wellness. He makes lifestyle choices that amplify and extend his performance as well as his quality of life.

The same principles that Mr. Brady used to outperform his opponents on the football field can be used by leaders in a company setting to outperform their competition. One of the key factors to this edge is mental clarity and that simply cannot happen in a body that is running on fumes.

"When people have slept less, it's a little like looking at the world through dark glasses," said Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, longtime relationship scientist and director of the Ohio State Institute for Behavioral Medicine Research.

"The well-rested brain versus the sleepy brain will accomplish much more, but will also be happier and less stressed while doing so," she said.

When groggy and sleep-deprived during the day, in addition to one's overall quantity of work suffering, the quality of work will also be worse than someone who consistently receives eight or more hours of deep sleep.

Leaders who make a commitment to deep, uninterrupted sleep for eight or more hours report more focus, more energy and more motivation than their counterparts.

Better sleep = Better temperament = Better relationships = Greater success

As stated above, those leaders who are well rested report feeling happier and less stressed than their counterparts.

Relationships are major components to winning in the business world.

According to Steve Tobak, "The key to business success is winning and keeping customers. And the key to winning and keeping customers is, and has always been, relationships."

Per Paul O'Brien in Business 2 Community, "It is known that if a strong relationship is in place, employees will be more productive, more efficient, create less conflict and will be more loyal."

Leaders who are well rested can model positive, healthy relationships with their employees that trickle down to their customers.

By giving one's body the sleep it needs to perform optimally, CEOs are able to give 100 percent of themselves in their personal and professional relationships, which helps relieve stress, maintains positive mental health and leads to a more balanced work/leisure lifestyle.

Productivity illusion

As with Tom Brady's key shift to a healthier lifestyle to enhance mental clarity, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos explains how making "a small number of key decisions well is more important than making a large number of decisions. If you shortchange your sleep, you might be a couple of extra productive' hours, but that productivity might be an illusion."

When discussing the difference between interactions and decisions, quality is more important than quantity.

Living the balanced work/leisure lifestyle mentioned above helps leaders maintain their edge over their competitors.

Leaders who do not disengage at the end of the day, but instead constantly check their emails in the evenings and on weekends are the ones with a greater chance of burning out or being less engaged over time.

Cheri Mah, a researcher in the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic and Research Laboratory, "showed that basketball players at the elite college level were able to improve their on-the-court performance by increasing their amount of total sleep time." This was demonstrated by an increase of 9 percent in their free throw shooting and an increase by 9.2 percent in their three-point shooting.

What activities a leader engages in outside of work are just as significant for their work productivity as what activities they engage in while working.

Stuart Brown explains that "for wellbeing to really become a value, one would need to practice wellbeing in and outside the work environment."

Truly engaging in deep, restful sleep, while working less hours, will result in more productivity because both mentally and physically all systems will be working at optimal level.

Improved sleep helps leaders start their day the right way

While the following habits may seem trivial, when added together, they help create a leader mentality, a leader lifestyle that translates to success in and out of the boardroom.

According to psychological research, "people who make their bed in the morning are happier and more successful than those who don't."

Think about it this way instead by taking 30 seconds when one first gets out of bed, your first accomplishment has already occurred, putting one in a "winning" mindset from the outset.

Many successful leaders start their day early. This is only successful, though, with a reasonable, consistent bedtime routine if one wants optimal results.

Upon rising, for the first 60 minutes do not engage in any work-related activities such as checking email, social media or even watching the news.

Instead wake your brain up gradually with meditation, a healthy breakfast and exercise, and engaging in activities that feed your soul. Do this before jumping into the business of the day.

Once you have successfully taken the time to nourish your body and soul, it is time to start knocking out the mindful assignments before the phone starts ringing and people vie for your attention. This will help leaders maintain that sense of accomplishment and productivity.

Avoiding caffeine is another great strategy that gives successful leaders an edge over others.

While people assume they perform better with caffeine, it is actually detrimental to most systems in one's body. Because of its spikes, valleys and addictive quality, one actually underperforms when relying on the United States' drug of choice.

By nurturing one's body in the positive ways mentioned above, healthy eating, deep, reparative sleep and regular exercise actually produce higher quantities and quality of energy than caffeine. After a few days without this stimulant, leaders find they develop more confidence and function better without it.

Impulse control

Related to the caffeine addiction, which creates jitteriness, agitation and irritability when consumed in high quantities and inconsistently throughout the day, those with sleep deprivation are usually more impatient and make poorer decisions than their counterparts.

A study from the University of California at Berkeley "found that after a poor night's sleep, the parts of the brain associated with automatic behavior were extra active, while the frontal lobes which affect self-control were more inhibited."

Therefore, leaders who are sleep deprived are more likely to respond instinctively rather than making conscious,

healthy decisions.

Another study from Clemson University found that people who did not get enough sleep had a "higher risk of being impulsive and distracted, as well as [made] poor decisions."

Successful leaders need to be able to make great decisions, especially in stressful situations and be the atmosphere of the company that they would like to project to their customers. A sleep-deprived leader will have a more difficult time accomplishing that goal.

When one sleeps, the glymphatic system, known as the brain's cleaning system, goes into overdrive. This reportedly purges your brain of "organic waste materials that build up during waking hours, removing unwanted proteins and metabolic waste."

By removing this waste, it protects your body from Alzheimer's and other neurological disorders.

LEADERSHIP, LIKE FOOTBALL, and some would say life in general, is a game of inches.

Tom Brady changed his whole lifestyle, going against the common practices of his teammates, to gain those inches to his advantage, resulting in even winning Super Bowls by mere inches.

Actor Al Pacino sums it up best from the movie, "Every Given Sunday": "You find out that life is just a game of inches. In either game, life or football, the margin for error is so small. I mean one half step too late or too early, you don't quite make it.

"The inches we need are everywhere around us," he said. "They are in every break of the game, every minute, every second. On this team, we fight for that inch 'cause we know when we add up all those inches, that's going to make the difference between winning and losing."

Leaders should care about sleep because they can get some of those "inches" from the benefits of it.

If you are better rested than your competitor, it may give you the ability to present better, treat your team better and retain talent, or come up with more creative ideas on a regular basis.



Alvaro Vaselli is founder/CEO of Nuvanna. Image credit: Nuvanna

*Alvaro Vaselli is founder/CEO of **Nuvanna**, a Chadds Ford, PA-based manufacturer and retailer of crafted mattresses delivered in a box.*

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