

SLEEP DEPRIVATION AND KILLER DEADLINES

This is a follow-up to the DRAFTSMEN E09 Podcast July 30, 2019

▼ Introduction

- Lack of sleep is hard on the body. When we must lose sleep, we can try to cut down other stressors.

During the decades that my peers and I made our living as free-lancers, we often did twenty and thirty-hour workloads, sometimes losing sleep for the better part of a week. It was harsh, but we found that some activities helped to vary the long stretches. Below is a list of those activities that you can arrange to alternate so that one refreshes the other. None of them are based on hard research, they are simply what we adapted to help us survive.

Some are abstract categories (like input/output or dry/wet). They may not help you because they are general.

Others are specific activities (like take a bath or go for a walk). I find that it especially helps to vary up physical position: standing and sitting, holding still and moving.

You can consider the abstract categories as pressure gauges. Keep an eye on them. It's easy to ignore them for the task at hand, but having this list at hand and taking a moment to assess "are my eyes tired from focusing on the monitor?" or "should I move from thinking mode to rote-activity mode?" may help keep your momentum in balance.

▼ Dry/Wet

- A bath or floating in the pool allows the body a time of weightlessness. We hear more often from experts that showers aren't good for the skin, and that jacuzzis have risks, but sometimes the body asks to get into the water for comfort. Consider immersing or floating. I find that something as simple as washing my face, hands or feet can refresh me.

It can even help to be in the presence of the sound of water, like a fountain.

▼ Exposure

- Clothing can make you feel comforted and supported, or confined. Nakedness can energize you, lessen inhibition, or make you feel vulnerable.

Check on this dynamic, asking if you feel like putting on more, taking off more, or alternating.

▼ **Light = Artificial/Natural**

- Sixteen hours in front of a monitor or under fluorescent lights can't be good for the eyes or the mind. Time a break to allow you ten minutes of sunlight on flowers, sunbathing, or simply light from the sky.

A fireplace or candle could be considered natural light, but they are hot and dry. I have found that even looking at images of ocean waves, or surf videos provide enough of the *illusion* of natural light to create some positive effect.

▼ **Indoor/Outdoor**

- This category relates to light, but also the need to relieve too much time in a stuffy room by taking a fresh air break, or focusing your eyes on something distant when you've been looking into something up close for too long.

▼ **Position = Sitting/Standing. Moving/Still.**

- Sitting is the new smoking. Standing for too long doesn't seem much better. See if you can balance sitting and standing, and since they are both static, consider physical motion: walking, running, biking, swimming... as brief balances to holding still.

▼ **Input/Output**

- When I read, I find an impulse to write or tell someone about it. When I talk a lot in public, I get anxious to go silent for hours at a time, or listen to someone else. That balance can contribute to endurance. Consider which tasks require concentration to "take in" information or resources, and which ones require performing, or "putting out". Alternating between introversion and extroversion can provide relief.

▼ **Thinking/Rote-Doing**

- If your brain starts shutting down, scan your tasks to see if any of them require only monkey-work - the kind that take repetitive movement but little thought, and use these to give your brain a rest.

BIG POINT: Make a list of all the necessary tasks *before* you begin them. That way you can look at the list and choose them according to your brain capacity.

▼ Bits of Sleep

- Sleep for short bits whenever you can. Naps of ten-to-thirty minutes can be invigorating. Longer naps create malaise like pulling out of hibernation. If your schedule allows, try a quick “power nap” instead of caffeinating.

If possible, set up an agreement with a friend/colleague to step in and allow you half-hour catnaps when possible.

▼ Use Caffeine Strategically

- When facing a long sweep of staying awake, *do not start with a cup of coffee*. Save it for the downswing. You may miss a chance to sleep once you put caffeine in you. Caffeine kicks in fast, so have it ready as a reserve.

▼ Get Psyched

- Psychological preparation means taking this coming crunch time seriously in advance. Arrange around it. Prepare like it’s a long uphill hike on a timer.
- Sleep until the last minute if you can. If not, use that time just previous to set aside anything that could sap energy. The best pre-emergency state is to sleep.
- Reserve energy at first - pace yourself - you will need your reserves for the home-stretches.

▼ Watch for a Second-Wind

- The “second wind” is a metabolic phenomenon that occurs during long-distance running, but it seems to have a counterpart in other long-term exertions. Watch for, and learn to recognize the pattern of the “second wind”. When it hits, ride it, don’t try to throttle it harder. It’s a gift. Let it carry you.

▼ Music Suggestions for intense stress

- JD and I experimented with music that helped us in the twentieth hour when energetic music felt threatening. These became favorites:

▼ Non-Percussive Choral Music. Usually in Latin, so the meaning of the words do not call attention to themselves, only the sounds. There are many, but these are the ones we knew and used and liked:

- John Sheppard, *Media Vita*, performed by Peter Philips and the Tallis Scholars

- William Byrd, Lullaby and masses
- Thomas Tallis. Gregorian Chants. Palestrina....
- If you feel percussion-deprived, juxtapose those ethereal bits like Sheppard and Byrd with Renaissance/mandolin/Vivaldi acoustic guitar. Everything Vivaldi wrote is pleasant, and very different in rhythm from chants.
- Yoga music juxtaposed with French Impressionists (especially piano - Satie, Ravel, etc)
- Trance music juxtaposed with blues
- This area needs research...

▼ **The Role of Intuition**

- Most of this is about balance. Standing still may seem harder than walking because standing offers so little “back and forth” between tension and relaxation compared to walking.

BIG POINT: It doesn't take an essay for any of us to figure out how to balance ourselves: we simply get an impulse to do something different.

If we listen to our body - it may tell us what we need. A craving for orange juice may mean a craving for vitamin C. This list may be useful for identifying some categories that may have escaped you. Your best resource may be self-counsel, asking yourself what (besides sleep or caffeine) your body wants. If there is no other answer besides sleep - short naps may be the reason I'm still alive and in reasonable health. They seem to be the best way to cope with the long stretches. But this is for you to discern and decide. I hope this helps....

– Marshall