3 Non-BS Sleep Tips for Entrepreneurs



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I knew I was in trouble when I reached for my eighth cup of coffee. My head was buzzing and my hands were jittery, but it felt like there was no end in sight. It had been more than 24 hours since I last slept, relentlessly working on a project for my new startup.

The year was 2006, and I was a new entrepreneur at the time. I felt I needed to prove myself somehow, to earn my place. To show that I, too, was just as ambitious as those renowned founders who swore that the key ingredient to success was to produce more and sleep less.

My passion for building my company, Jotform, was still in its initial stages at that point. I had yet to learn what

work/life balance meant, or how working through evenings, weekends and vacations was a surefire path to collapsing from exhaustion.

I think most entrepreneurs can relate – especially when you're at the beginning stages of building your business. You figure that the end justifies the means and that if you just keep pushing yourself and your team to work through the brain fog and fatigue, you'll eventually make it safely to the other side.

Well, I call BS.

I can say this because I've been there – I sacrificed precious shuteye in the name of productivity, and although some of those projects turned out fruitful, my overall wellbeing deteriorated. When it came time to go to bed, I'd struggle to turn my mind off – experiencing restlessness and bouts of insomnia. It was like some vicious cycle I couldn't get out of.

Why you should choose moderation over peak productivity

The tech world is notorious for glorifying a "busyness" culture. Even one of Silicon Valley's most influential entrepreneurs, Elon Musk, has acknowledged the toll his lack of sleep has taken on his personal life. In an interview with the *New York Times,* he noted "There were times when I didn't leave the factory for three or four days – days when I didn't go outside," he expressed. "This has really come at the expense of seeing my kids. And seeing friends."

A significant price to pay, in my opinion.

That's why I'm here to tell you that you don't have to pull all-nighters or sleep four or five hours each night to grow your business. Jotform now has millions of users worldwide,

and I attribute this to ditching my initial poor sleep habits and focusing instead on moderation. Below I'd like to share some sleep tips that I believe to be the real secret to success.

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1. Don't rely on weekends to make up for lost sleep

Here's a typical habit many entrepreneurs practice: Sleep a few hours five days a week and then try to make up for all of that lost rest on the weekend. But sleep debt is a real problem, and it can increase exponentially over time. One 2016 study published in *Scientific Reports* found that sleep deficit leads to symptoms of excessive sleepiness and a decline in performance.

The gist? You're not *actually* recovering your sleep by pushing it all onto the weekend. Multiple nights of lost sleep can significantly impede your body's daily functions – making it that much harder for you to reach your goals.

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2. Focus on good sleep hygiene

In his story for *Harvard Business Review*, researcher Christopher M. Barnes lays out the reasons we need to take our rest seriously. He writes:

"Sleep allows us to consolidate and store memories, process emotional experiences, replenish glucose (the molecule that fuels the brain), and clear out beta-amyloid (the waste product that builds up in Alzheimer's patients and disrupts cognitive activity)."

On the flip side, Barnes notes that not getting enough sleep and increased fatigue leads to poor judgment, lack of self-control and impaired creativity – the very things that will hinder your business from succeeding.

Many leaders erroneously believe that crashing after a long day at the office is the equivalent of quality sleep, but this is a mistake. More often than not, they wake up in the middle of the night tossing and turning to no end.

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3. Quality sleep comes down to a healthy lifestyle

I have a programmer friend, Andy, who rarely sees the light of day. Our circle of friends likes to joke that he's secretly a vampire. So, you won't be surprised to discover that he struggles with chronic insomnia.

Here's what I've learned: Getting peaceful rest involves sticking to a consistent bedtime routine, avoiding caffeine and alcohol too close to when you're going to sleep and ditching screens at least two hours before nodding off.

All of this is part of cultivating a healthy lifestyle.

And part of this also involves getting enough sunlight. Research shows that the light/dark cycle of the sun has a powerful effect on our circadian clock, sleep and alertness. So, this has a direct link to our quality of sleep.

Similarly, a good workout doesn't just ward off a day's stress, it can also help you more easily nod off at night. Aerobic exercise, for example, causes your body to release endorphins, which can help your brain wind down later in the day. But experts agree that it's important to not do this too close to your bedtime, or else you'll have the opposite

effect.

Starting your day with a quick run or taking a stroll through your neighborhood in the afternoon can make a huge difference in getting quality sleep.

But aside from all of the above, I've found that having mindfulness and meditation practice is what's most helped me maintain a lifestyle of moderation. Skillfully and consciously managing our sleep is one of the best ways to ensure that we're not only professionally successful but that we're also prioritizing one of our greatest assets: our overall wellbeing.

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