

I'm Used to Working 16-hour Days – Here's How I Ensure Every Minute is Spent Productively

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If you want to build a lasting business, long hours are the norm. It's not just in the early days of the business, either. I've been at it for over ten years, and the ambition to grow my CPG startup is as strong as ever, meaning that, after all this time, 16-hour work days are nothing extraordinary.

The cause? Back-to-back investor meetings, intense work sprints, putting out fires and more, all of which are in addition to the day-to-day duties and responsibilities.

Popular wisdom says most people max out at around six productive hours a day. But, as a CEO, I cannot afford to spend the remaining 10 hours in zombie mode. I pride myself on putting 100% into everything I do – and the growth of my business depends on it. While 16-hour days certainly test this ambition, I make the most of every minute thanks to three practices I've developed over the years.

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1. Planning the work

The main difference between 16-hour work days early on in your entrepreneurial journey and 16-hour work days when your

business is well-established is that, in the latter case, you generally know when and why the long days are coming. This allows you to prepare accordingly.

Every Friday, I prepare my tasks for the upcoming week. This includes both the regular to-dos as well as anything out of the ordinary. Essentially, this means treating 16-hour workdays like any other workday.

While obvious to me, it's a mistake I see many others make – they make no plans or schedules for their “second shift,” believing that any and all work beyond the usual eight hours is productive. Not only is it not true, it also surprises me that people are willing to do more work, less effectively. If you have to sacrifice rest and family time for work, surely you should strive to tackle the workload as efficiently as possible. That means treating it like any other work.

2. Getting enough sleep

Seven hours a night is non-negotiable. While 16-hour days happen every now and again, 18-hour days are out of the question. I cannot stay productive or sharp if I haven't had sufficient sleep. I used to think I could, but, in retrospect, I see that I was confounding participation for productivity.

The extra hours of work you gain at the cost of sleep is like going to a loan shark – after immediate gains, you'll be repaying your debt with crazy interest.

Please don't focus on the number, though. While seven hours is a sweet spot for me, it might not necessarily work for you. In case you haven't yet, it falls on your shoulders to determine your optimal sleep schedule. Once you find it, follow it diligently, and while it may be difficult at first, your body will adapt to the routine.

3. Keeping the energy up through physical activity

Surviving 16-hour workdays isn't just about the mental side – it's a physical challenge, too, and one that you must respond to with the same amount of preparation as anything else. My routine might sound unconventional, but it keeps me operating at maximum efficiency. I try to keep things simple: one meal per day, intensive HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts – often in the middle of the day – and always taking cold showers.

These practices aren't just random habits. They've been carefully curated over the span of several years after proving their worth in ensuring my productivity remains at its peak. The mid-day intensive workouts, in particular, are a game-changer. They inject a burst of energy that carries me through the most demanding parts of my work day. And the cold showers? They're my secret weapon for staying sharp and focused.

It's not about creating a complicated system. It's about finding what works and sticking to it religiously. Some entrepreneurs get caught up in elaborate fitness plans or extreme diets. I'm not interested in that. My approach is simple: keep moving, stay disciplined and listen to your body.

The result? A consistent energy level that allows me to tackle those long days without burning out. When you're running a startup, that's worth its weight in gold.

Perhaps the highest added value of such routines is that they eliminate the need for additional decision-making. Even the most mundane decisions – what should I eat? What should I wear? Should I go to the gym? It takes a lot out of you. Eliminating them from your daily itinerary frees you up to focus on value-added activities.

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Unstoppable Productivity

Putting it all together

This systematic approach has allowed me to avoid burnout and always bring my A-game, whether it's an early-morning team standup or a late-night investor call.

All of the above is combined with other productivity practices, such as journaling and mindfulness. However, these are more general and geared toward general productivity rather than surviving those long days.

Of course, life and business will inevitably throw a spanner in the works. Business trips and unpredictable events can disrupt even the most carefully crafted routines and practices. That said, it's essential to recognize these as the exceptions they are and do your utmost to maintain – or return to – the routine as soon as possible.

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