

## What Every Leader Needs to Know About....Sleep

**March 2014** – “It’s gonna be a long day.”

As Pattie and I yawned and stretched, those were the words that seemed most fitting as we reluctantly recounted that both of our pre-school aged grandkids had been awake for a good portion of the night. And now these little hockey pucks were climbing into our bed! All this as my Sony digital AM/FM alarm clock annoyingly flashed 4:55 AM.

So much for overnighters!

Our sleepover scenario notwithstanding, I imagine a case could be made that sleep in the life of a preschooler is overrated, but I also imagine that a case could be made that sleep in the life of a leader is underrated.

So let’s chase this down a bit. Let’s talk about the importance of sleep. And let’s keep it simple. Two points. Two realities. Two things that every leader needs to know about sleep.

- **Point #1 – Looking ahead.** Sleep provides the physical and mental preparation needed for the coming day. Not much breaking-news here. Growing up, every one of us can hear the echo of exhortation from our mom or dad, “Got to get to bed on time tonight. Got a big day ahead of you.” And they were right. Sufficient rest is fundamental to engaging the opportunities that a new day affords. It’s like punching a big red RESET button. Sleep clears the challenges and stresses of today and recharges us with the energy and resource required for tomorrow.

But that’s only half the deal. It gets better. Way better.

- **Point #2 – Looking back.** Check this out: **While the value of sleep for what lies ahead is a well-established reality, recent research now provides us with compelling evidence about how sleep effects our understanding and processing of what took place the day before.** Did you catch that?

You may want to read that again. It’s just that good.

- Tom Rath and Jim Harter in their classic book *Well-Being: The Five Essential Elements*, puts this compelling learning on the table: *Sleep helps us synthesize the learning and experiences of a day. While we sleep, our brain is playing connect-the-dots until we wake up. And it likely does so more effectively than we could if we tried when we were awake. So while we have known all along that a good night’s sleep helps the next day, it is just as important for encoding information we learned the day before.*

Think about it. Our brain is working the swing shift. Downloading. Collating. Connecting. Making sense of yesterday's efforts and endeavors. And arguably doing a better job of it than when we're awake. All this while tucked away in our Sealy

Posturepedic, lost in a field of dreams.

Personally, this too-good-to-be-true phenomenon about sleep is changing me and my leadership. You see, I stress too much about matters beyond my control. I create too many possible scenarios for the decisions on my plate. I work too long to make things just right. All that to say, this reality check about sleep is a necessary (not to mention, convicting) reminder that God has placed in my toolkit capacities and resources that go far beyond my let's-make-it-happen efforts to achieve and accomplish. Benefits that happen while I sleep. Perhaps you can relate.

So sleep well tonight, knowing that your mind is working while you're not.

And as you doze off, be sure to give thanks to your Creator for this remarkable gift.

**What changes need to occur in your sleep strategy for optimum life and leadership influence?**

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