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ITINERARIES

Constant Travelers Wear Their All-Nighters as a Badge of Pride



Jamie Rector for The New York Times

Mark Stevens, a marketing executive, says his clients care more about the quality of his ideas than whether he seems well rested.

By **FRANCINE PARNES**
Published: December 6, 2005

Mark Stevens, the chief executive of MSCO, a marketing firm in White Plains, is away on business 150 to 200 days a year and typically gets one to four hours of sleep a night. But he's not complaining.

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"A business trip is not about sleep," said Mr. Stevens, who spends the wee hours in his hotel's lobby or bar, mapping his strategy for the next day. "Nobody comes out of any business meeting and says, 'You did best today because you look freshest.' Clients couldn't care less if I am fresh as a daisy. They just want to know that when I or my team comes to the table, we've got a big idea."

Mr. Stevens belongs to a hardy breed who set themselves apart by their embrace of sleepless nights. Most travelers view insomnia as an affliction: 41 percent of those questioned in January by the Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell/Yankelovich Partners National Business Travel Monitor said they did not get enough sleep on business trips, and 29 percent said they did not sleep well.

The mavericks, by contrast, not only welcome the condition, they nurture it and say they thrive on it.

While others doze, Mr. Stevens says, he often sits around in public spaces, waiting for unexpected opportunities. One time, when he was engrossed in his [BlackBerry](#) in a Chicago



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hotel lobby, a woman tapped him on the arm and said: "I don't mean to be presumptuous, but you look deeply engaged in something. What are you working on at 2:15 in the morning so intently?"

The woman went on to say that she was an insomniac who haunted hotel lobbies in the usually vain hope of finding a kindred spirit. Not only that, she was the head of a financial services company, and before their conversation ended, she offered him a night job.

"It was an odd and wonderful experience," Mr. Stevens said. "We worked together for five months and built a company within her company from the ground up."

Mr. Stevens says that plotting his strategy at his hotel, where he can check out the conference room where he will be in the morning, is more effective than planning back at his office.

"It's where the action is, right on the client's turf," he said. "When I am in the lobby at 1:30 in the morning, I can identify much more, smell the battle. While the client is sleeping, I'm in the lobby thinking, 'Are we ready to walk in there in the morning and say something to knock their socks off?'"

Other business travelers also speak of the hours before dawn as a time of inspiration. Eric Yaverbaum, the president of a Manhattan public relations firm, says he often thrives for months on three hours of sleep a night and, wherever he is, goes running in the middle of the night.

"It is definitely brain-power time," Mr. Yaverbaum said. "Nearly every answer comes to me when I run." On one business trip, he said, he sat through three six-hour meetings with 10 people without coming up with a marketing plan for a new clothing line. He knew what the solution, was, though.

"Four a.m., I went on my run," he said. "By 4:20, I came up with my idea. For everybody who wants to buy my time during the day, they should buy my 4 a.m. time. Call me in the afternoon, I'm not nearly as entertaining, but at 4 a.m. I'm a fun guy to be with."

Not that his sleep debt doesn't sometimes catch up with him. He once went running in Stockholm shortly after arriving, assuming the exercise would be more effective than a nap in making him alert for a meeting.

Unfortunately, he forgot the name and address of his hotel and soon became hopelessly lost. After three hours, by "absolute luck," he said, he ran into one of the five people he was traveling with.

The near disaster had a happy ending, though. "My mind was actually plenty sharp for the meeting as a result of a much longer run," he said.

Like any other endeavor, Mr. Yaverbaum said, you have to work at sleep deprivation to get the most out of it. "Every other month, I fly to Denmark and take a train to Sweden for intense and very important one- to two-day meetings," he said. He rarely sleeps before walking into them, he said, but while in years past the practice took a lot out of him, "it no longer bothers me."

To be sure, lack of sleep can backfire on even the most fervent believers. Douglas Stinemetz, a lawyer with the Texas firm of Haynes & Boone who often travels between Houston and Moscow, frequently recharges his energy reserves at Moscow's bowling lanes from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. "Bowling does seem to combat jet lag," said Mr. Stinemetz. "I am staying up and active. It forces me to adjust quicker."

On the other hand, he recalls the time he drifted off while walking down a street - and collided with a parking meter. On another occasion, the lead negotiator on his team fell

asleep in midsentence.

"We waited, thinking that he was just considering what to say for a few minutes," Mr. Stinemetz said. "Finally, someone nudged him, at which point he woke up and just continued like nothing had happened."

It was even worse for Donald C. Dowling Jr., a lawyer with the New York firm of Proskauer Rose. When traveling to Europe, he said, he has had to work anywhere from 24 to 36 hours straight. But the intense schedule miscarried when he tried it in Mexico.

He arrived in Tijuana at around 10 a.m. after staying up most of the night. Though he had been sent to a meeting because of his ability to speak Spanish, his fatigue did him in.

"By about 8 p.m., my fluency hit a wall and my mind shut down," Mr. Dowling said. "I couldn't figure out what they were talking about. Lesson: Don't push the 'staying up all the time when you travel' thing."

Also, do not take amphetamines. David Wolfe, creative director for the Doneger Group, a fashion-trend tracking firm in Manhattan, confesses that he used to pop them "like they were M&M's" in the 1970's, when he was working 18-hour travel days.

He quit cold turkey when he left that company, he said, and today he makes sure he is rested before meetings on the road.

When traveling overseas, "I always fly the day before I need to function, so that I can sleep as I need to," he said. "I learned this the hard way because once I flew into Milan and went right to a fashion show where I fell asleep and fell off my chair."

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