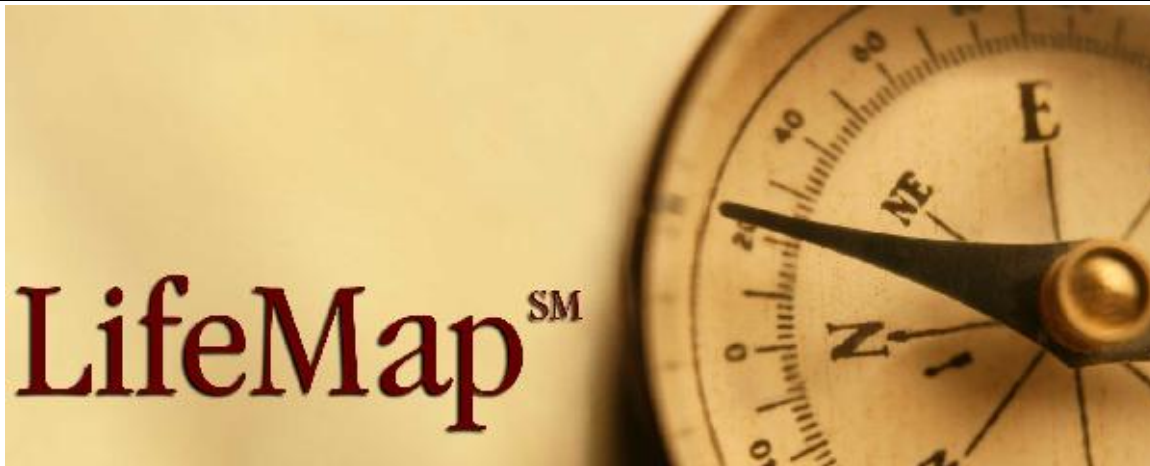


**From:** Dr. Paul Powers drpaul@drpaulpowers.com  
**Subject:** Good News on the Sleep Front  
**Date:** April 14, 2016 at 9:59 AM



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*Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more satisfying life.*

**April 2016**

**This Month's Message:**

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**HOT OFF THE PRESS!**

**Tired of boring meetings??**

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**Good News on the Sleep Front**

During a mid-day board meeting I facilitated a couple of month's ago, first one person yawned, then another, and then another. As we broke for coffee I asked how many folks got a full night's sleep the night before. Of the 9 board members, 5 of them said they felt sleep deprived most of the time. The 3 others said they were "used to getting only 4-5 hours of sleep a night". And with a good-natured jab they offered to share their to-do list with the one bright-eyed, bushy-tailed person who said she "gets a great, full 8 hours every night."

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When I see high levels of stress, grumpiness, or frustration in an organization I will often ask (among other questions) "Are you getting enough sleep? How often are you sleepy during the day?" Quite often I hear complaints about lack of sleep. My anecdotal findings are borne out by solid research

in the area of sleep, sleep deprivation and sleep disorders. For example:

- \* Almost all adults don't get enough sleep and most struggle to get up in the morning. (Mayo Clinic)
- \* Lack of sleep leads to health problems; fatigue, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, shortened lifespan, suppressed immune systems and depression. (Mayo Clinic)
- \* 43% of respondents reported that daytime sleepiness interfered with their normal daytime activities, including work. (National Science Foundation)
- \* Parents of young children lose an extra hour of sleep each night. (NSF) (This reminds me of the saying that those who sleep like a baby have never lived with one! - P)
- \* 30-40% of heavy truck accidents are due to driver fatigue. (US Dept of Transportation)
- \* Sleep deprivation costs \$150 billion each year in higher stress and reduced worker productivity. (National Commission on Sleep Disorders)

There are many more studies like those I mention above but I think, taken into consideration together, they indicate that today's epidemic of sleep problems represent a serious risk to public health, safety, and productivity. Some smart business leaders have received the message.

Perhaps you heard that recently Aetna Insurance, mindful of the proven correlation between sufficient sleep and productivity, now monetarily rewards employees who get a good night's sleep. If an Aetna employee can prove (via a FitBit fitness tracker) they get seven hours or more of sleep for 20 consecutive nights they can earn \$33. per night up to over \$660. per year. Obviously Aetna cares about their employees but it wouldn't be offering cash money if it wasn't good for productivity and profitability. Let's hope this is a new trend in corporate America.

Until this heads up attitude reaches your workplace what can you do to ensure you get sufficient sleep and have enough energy to enjoy both your working and non-work life?

### Paths Forward:

\* **Keep A Sleep Log.** Most adults need about 8 hours of sleep a night. Children and adolescents need at least 9 hours and a few recent studies have indicated that this may be a low estimate. If you don't hit these numbers try this. In the morning write down when you went to bed, how long it took you to fall asleep, how many times you awoke during the night, what woke you and what time you got up. See if you can determine what conditions are present on those occasions when you get the best and worst night's sleep. Try to remove the negative variables and increase the positive variables. If you are mulling over the day's events as you're trying to fall asleep, log those thoughts down and add one or two things you can do tomorrow to address those issues. Then, try again to fall asleep.

\* **Avoid Stimulants.** Don't use caffeine, nicotine, alcohol or exercise four to six hours before bedtime. Alcohol can make you drowsy but it tends to disrupt sleep after several hours.

Research suggests that exercising early in the day may improve your sleep.

**\*Your Sleep Environment.** Isolate your bedroom for sleeping. No laptop, no phone, no work, no TV. If you must read make it something relaxing, spiritual or religious not all-consuming page-turners that will keep you up all night. Keep it as dark as you can because even a little light can disrupt the production of your naturally produced sleep aids (serotonin and melatonin). The same goes for the light in your bathroom if you visit it during the night. Turn the clock away from your line of sight so you won't obsess on the passage of time. Keep the temperature a bit cool. (You can always wear socks to bed if you need to. Our feet don't have the best circulation and will feel cold when other parts of the body don't.)

**\* Snacking?** Some say a ritual, like a glass of milk and a cookie, can prepare you mentally to relax and fall asleep. Other studies say to avoid snacks especially sugars and grains as they raise blood sugar and inhibit sleep. Later, when the blood sugar drops back down you may wake up. One study suggested that eating a small piece of fruit will help those naturally occurring sleep aids to work better. There seems to be conflicting research here so you'll have to experiment to see what works best for you. Avoid anything that causes you gastrointestinal upset of any kind and don't drink excess fluids to minimize the necessity for nighttime bathroom visits.

**\* When To Sleep.** Again we run in to some conflicting research. Some suggest that you should go to bed as early as possible because our biological systems do the majority of their recharging and recovering during the 11 P.M. to 1 A.M. hours. This is not a universal view but it is held by many. What seems to be more popular with sleep researchers is the idea that you should only go to bed when you are sleepy. If you don't fall asleep within 15 -20 minutes, get up, go elsewhere and do something relaxing like read or listen to music and try again a little later. (One researcher indicated his subjects used jigsaw puzzles to great effect.)

**\* Counting Sheep.** One comic suggested that it's not fair to keep sheep jumping over a fence all night just because you can't fall asleep. He was referring to the time tested technique of focusing your mind on a monotonous mental task to induce sleep - and it works. A technique that focuses on physical relaxation is to slowly tense, hold and relax your muscle groups starting with your toes, eventually working all the way up to your scalp and back down again until you drift off. A technique that combines both mental and bodily relaxation is to silently and slowly count backward from 100 with each breath you exhale.

**\* Sleep is Serious Stuff.** If the self-administered sleep solutions I suggest do not work for you then you should seek the great professional help that is available. If family, work or other emotional concerns are keeping you awake please find a psychologist, social worker or counselor who will help you find some relief. (Or contact me- it may take a bit but I'll

find you a good referral.) If it seems to be a medically related issue ask your physician for his or her input or a referral to a sleep clinic. Look into the topic of sleep apnea. Read this article (<http://www.alaskasleep.com/blog/signs-you-might-have-sleep-apnea>) Help is readily available in this day and age and is paid for by most health insurance plans. For some, medicine has shown to be quite helpful but be sure to read all the warnings and be aware of any possible side effects and interactions with other medications because these are powerful drugs.

Whatever you do, don't let your sleep problem go unaddressed because as The Bard wrote in Macbeth, "Sleep... knits up the ravelled sleeve of care, the balm of hurt minds, (is) great nature's second course and chief nourisher in life's feast."

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**Sincerely,**

Dr. Paul

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