



This Is Your Life Podcast

Episode 11: “The Secret Power of Naps”

Published: May 9, 2012

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Hello and welcome to this episode of *This Is Your Life*. My name is Michael Hyatt, and this is the podcast dedicated to intentional leadership. My goal is to help you live with more passion, work with greater focus, and lead with extraordinary influence.

In this episode I’ll be sharing with you about the secret power of naps. In my experience this is a major reason why some people are so stinkin’ productive. Many don’t want to talk about it, but we’ll look at why. I’ll even share some tips on how to take advantage of the latest research and take your productivity to the next level.

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As I said at the beginning, this episode is about the secret power of naps. When I blogged on this recently, I got 1,700 plus comments, about 1,600 re-tweets on Twitter, and almost 14,000 Facebook shares. Obviously this topic hit a nerve.

Where did it all start? Well honestly I’m a habitual nap taker. If there is one thing I do consistently in my life, it’s take naps. I take one almost every day, and I have for years. I used to feel a little guilty about it, like I was slacking off or something.

Then Sam Moore, who was my predecessor as the CEO at Thomas Nelson, admitted to me that he, too, was a napper. That was all it took. He told me, “Every day after lunch, I lie down on the sofa in my office. I hold my car keys in my right hand, and I let my left hand hang toward the floor. When the car keys fall out of my hand, my nap is over.” The famous artist Salvador Dali evidently had a similar practice, and he called it “slumber with a key.”

Well as I was doing the research for this particular podcast and for the original blog post I wrote, I found that a lot of really successful people were also nappers. For example, Leonardo da Vinci took multiple naps a day, and he slept less at night. I’ve met people through my career who have had a similar pattern. Not many, and not many can do that given the nature of their work, but Leonardo da Vinci was able to do that.

The French emperor Napoleon was also not shy about taking naps. He indulged in them daily. Thomas Edison took a nap every day even though he was embarrassed about his napping habit and denied it when he was asked directly. Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, used to boost her energy by napping right before her speaking engagements. I think this is a practice that would help me if I could do it, but honestly I'm usually too wound up before I speak to do it. Good for her if she could get away with it and make it work for her.

Gene Autry, also known as the Singing Cowboy, routinely took naps in his dressing room between performances. Now that I get because after I speak I feel like I've put in an eight-hour day even though I may have only spoken for 45 minutes. So taking a nap between performances may be a possibility.

President John F. Kennedy ate his lunch in bed, and then he settled in for a nap every single day. In fact, as I was doing the research for this, he used to have his valet pull the blinds in his bedroom in the White House. He would call for Jackie, and they would both take a nap. I mean, get under the covers, draw the blinds, make it dark, and take a serious nap every day. Interestingly, he also took two showers a day.

Oil industrialist and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller napped every afternoon in his office. Winston Churchill, one of the most famous nappers of all time, believed an afternoon nap was a non-negotiable. He believed it helped him get twice as much done each day. I would certainly concur with that. I don't know that I could get as much done as I do without a routine nap.

President Lyndon B. Johnson took a nap every afternoon at exactly 3:30 pm in order to break his day up into what he called *two shifts*. He had the first shift and the second shift, and he used a nap and also a bath at 3:30 to break his day up into these two shifts. Though he was heavily criticized for it, I still remember President Ronald Reagan famously took naps as well.

So my premise for this particular episode is you should consider taking a nap every day for the following five reasons:

1. **A nap restores alertness.** You know how that is maybe after lunch when you're a little sleepy, a little groggy. You feel your energy level flagging, and you begin to lose focus. Well a nap can restore that alertness you have first thing in the morning. The National Sleep Foundation recommends a short nap of 20 to 30 minutes long "for improved alertness and performance without leaving you feeling groggy or interfering with nighttime sleep."

So number one is a nap restores alertness.

2. **A nap prevents burnout.** In our always on, go-go culture, it just seems like we never get a chance to rest, but we're not meant to race without rest. Doing so leads to stress, frustration, and burnout (something we've been talking about for the last couple of episodes). Taking a nap, I have found, is like a system reboot. In other words it relieves stress, it clears out the pipes, and it gives you a fresh start.

You might want to read Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz's excellent book, which I think I recommended in a previous podcast, called *The Power of Full Engagement*. I did read it with my mentoring group. All the men in the group found it tremendously helpful. It kind of gives the science behind this whole notion of rest and surge. You have to have that kind of rhythm in your life if you're going to maintain a high level of productivity and a high level of performance.

So number two is a nap prevents burnout.

3. A nap heightens sensory perception. According to Dr. Sara C. Mednick, who is the author of *Take a Nap! Change Your Life*, which I haven't read but have ordered, napping can restore the sensitivity of sight, hearing, and taste. Most of the times we do everything better when we're rested.

One of the best pieces of advice I ever got as a beginning runner is before a race make sure you get a good night's sleep. I've tried to practice that before I have a major speech or a major presentation. I want to be well rested for anything that demands my best effort. As Dr. Mednick suggests, a nap heightens sensory perception and makes sure all systems are firing at their optimal state.

Napping also improves your creativity by relaxing your mind and allowing new associations to form in it. If you think about this, most of my creative ideas, most of your creative ideas, probably come when you're the most relaxed, right? Like when you're running, walking, maybe golfing, in the shower, and yes, even when you're taking a nap or dozing off. Sometimes that can be frustrating because you don't have a place to write them down or you're not prepared to write them down, but my only point here is when you're relaxed, it heightens your sensory perception and heightens your creativity. That's something I think all of us want to take advantage of.

4. A nap reduces the risk of heart disease. Who knew? Did you know those who take a midday siesta at least three times a week are 37 percent less likely to die of heart disease? Working men are 64 percent less likely to die of heart disease if they take a midday nap at least three times a week. What other proof do you need? That is great justification for a nap.

It's true. According to a 2007 study that was published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, Dimitrios Trichopoulos of the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston who led the study said, "Taking a nap could turn out to be an important weapon in the fight against coronary mortality." So if you get any static from your coworkers or from your family members, just quote this study from the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.

I don't know about you, but taking care of my heart is high on my priority list. I had my gall bladder explode on me several years ago. It was nasty. It was something I almost died from, but I've had almost zero impact from the lack of a gall bladder. My doctor told me it was a vestigial organ. I'm not sure I believe that. I think God put it there for something and it probably does serve a function, but I haven't noticed any symptoms from not having a gall bladder.

I'll tell you what, that can't happen with your heart. It's not only *not* a vestigial organ, it is essential. Without it you die. So I want to take care of my heart and do everything, every little hack I can think of, to keep it in tip-top working order. So evidently a nap does that by reducing the risk of heart disease.

5. **A nap makes you more productive.** To me, that's really the most important reason as it relates to the topic we've been talking about with productivity. As I said before, the secret to becoming more productive is not managing your *time*; it's managing your *energy*. If you have enough energy, you'll figure out how to get it done, right? Numerous medical studies have shown workers become increasingly unproductive as the day wears on.

Think of your own experience. I start out really productive, highly energized, and able to accomplish almost anything. In fact, I sometimes have too big a to-do list if I do it in the morning instead of the night before as I've recommended in previous episodes. I have more energy early in the morning.

A 2002 Harvard University study demonstrated that a 30-minute nap boosted the performance of workers, returning their productivity to beginning of the day levels. Now this may not work for everybody. It may not work for you, but it certainly works for me and literally hundreds of people I know. A 30-minute nap boosted the performance of workers, returning their productivity to beginning-of-the-day levels.

Both Winston Churchill and Lyndon Johnson saw naps as a way to get the productivity of two days out of one. That's really why I take a nap, because I want to get rebooted so I can restore my productivity and get back to that level I had at the beginning of the morning.

So again, five reasons why you should consider taking a nap every day:

1. **A nap restores alertness.**
2. **A nap prevents burnout.**
3. **A nap heightens sensory perception.**
4. **A nap reduces the risk of heart disease.**
5. **A nap makes you more productive.**

I typically take a 20-minute nap right after lunch. If I can't do it then, I try to squeeze it in before 4:00 pm. If I don't get it before 4:00, it really messes with my sleep at night so I just forget it for that day. When I was working at a motor shop in college, I'd eat lunch in my car, and then I'd lie down in the backseat for 20 minutes and take a nap. When I was the CEO at Thomas Nelson, I napped in a zero gravity chair that reclined to a horizontal position. Now that I work from home, I just go into my bedroom and lie down on my bed for 20 minutes.

So here are a few practices I've found helpful when it comes to napping:

1. **Be consistent.** Try to nap at the same time each day. This helps stabilize what's called your *circadian rhythms*, and it maximizes the benefits of napping. It's kind of like going to bed at the same time every night or getting up at the same time every day. This also helps stabilize your circadian rhythms and is a very helpful thing in terms of being able to go to sleep kind of on command and being able to wake up after a reasonable period of time, again preferably 20 or 30 minutes.
2. **Turn off the lights.** Light acts as a cue for our bodies, and darkness communicates it's time to shut down or go into standby mode. Light indicates it's time to wake up or resume your activity. So if you can't turn off the lights, use a simple eye mask. I bought one at Walgreens, and it's terrific. It's just simple. I carry one in my briefcase when I travel. I used to have one at the office, as well. Then turn the lights back up to full brightness when you wake up because again it's a visual cue to your body that it's time to get up and get back to work.
3. **If you can, use a blanket.** When you sleep, your metabolism falls, your breathing rate slows, and your body temperature drops slightly. It can be a little uncomfortable, and I'd rather just avoid that by using a blanket. It's not imperative. You'll usually be more comfortable if you use a light blanket when you nap, but again it's not essential.
4. **Keep it short.** This is really important. You want to avoid what the researchers call *sleep inertia*. It's that feeling of grogginess and disorientation that comes from awakening from a deep sleep. So we're not trying to put you into a deep sleep but into a light sleep. Long naps can also negatively impact your nighttime sleep, so I recommend just 20 to 30 minutes. This is what the National Institute of Sleep also recommends.

Set an alarm on your phone to avoid oversleeping. I don't usually have to do this, but if I have an important call or an important meeting to attend, then I want to make sure I wake up in time and I don't sleep too long. Occasionally it happens, so in those situations I do use an alarm on my iPhone. I just set it for 21 minutes, and then that gives me a minute to get to sleep. Yes, I can get to sleep in a minute. Then I have 20 minutes of sleep. I wake up. I'm totally refreshed. Again, that's just me.

5. **Be discreet.** Getting caught napping at your desk is probably not a good way to earn respect. In some old school environments it might even get you fired. Most people get an hour for lunch, so eat in half that time and then go snooze in your car. My assistant at Thomas Nelson used to do that. Or nap in an unused conference room or even a closet. Another one of the assistants I know up at Thomas Nelson did that. (I'll let those of you from Thomas Nelson figure out who that was.) It's possible. You have to be creative.

Even if you just can sit at your desk and close your eyes for a few minutes and even if you can only meditate, that's helpful because you're shifting your pattern. You're shifting your rhythm from hard, charging go-go-go-go to relaxing and just kind of letting the stress out of your body.

6. **Shift your own thinking about naps.** People who take naps are not lazy. They might just be the smartest, most productive people you know.

So with that, I want to leave you with a question before we go into the listener questions: ***Are you a napper? Why or why not?*** If you want to comment on this episode, you can go to my blog at MichaelHyatt.com. Find the show notes for this episode, scroll down to the comments, and leave me a question or a comment.

With that, let's go to some of the listener questions. The first one comes from Art Carden, who is a college professor.

Art Carden: My name is Art Carden. I am a college professor, I write for Forbes.com, and I do a lot of different things. I am a big fan of taking naps, but I find that when I lay down for a nap it's very, very, very hard to get up unless I've been done for say two hours or so. So how do you fall asleep quickly, and then how do you get up after 15 or 20 minutes?

Michael Hyatt: Art, this is a great question, and I actually had that question from several callers. I would say a couple of things. One is it takes practice. When you lie down, your mind may be racing, and it takes some discipline to begin to focus.

What I try to do is I think about my body and about different parts of my body and just relaxing it, usually with my face or my forehead because that's where the tension tends to accumulate. But just to physically will myself to relax. I'm really not even focused on sleeping but just relaxing. Relaxing the top of my head, my eyes, my cheeks, my neck, my shoulders, my arms, and my stomach. I just work myself down through my body, and I've found that as I did that numerous times, I would just fall asleep somewhere in the process.

Again I think the key is keeping it short. If you don't want to wake up groggy, keep it short because when you enter into that deep, REM-based sleep, you're going to get groggy if you don't get enough of that. So again, just 20 minutes is the best advice I can give you.

Jackie is the next caller, and she is calling from Northern California.

Jackie: Hi Michael, this is Jackie from Northern California calling just to ask regarding the nap upcoming podcast. I'm wondering if America's need to nap or all of our need to nap doesn't have something to do with our addiction to coffee, especially morning coffee. Maybe you have some physical comments regarding that. Enjoy your podcast. Thanks for speaking to all of us.

Michael Hyatt: Thanks, Jackie. Coffee is a controversial subject, and I've seen research about caffeine on both sides of the equation where some say moderate amounts of caffeine in coffee can be helpful, and other studies say no, you should avoid it at all costs.

It is true that it stimulates your adrenal glands. When you get adrenal fatigue, when you have adrenaline coursing through your body all day, and when it's amped up by caffeine, it can wear you out faster. So the trough you experience after the caffeine has worn off is actually deeper than you would experience otherwise.

All I would say is experiment with your own body. I have a tendency... Somebody actually critiqued me for this on iTunes. They said, "This guy has a tendency to sort of globalize his own experience as though it would work for everyone." I think that's actually true. I am guilty of that. I would just caution you, you have to figure out what works for you.

So just try it. If coffee is depleting your energy and making you less energetic, then by all means avoid it. It doesn't take that long to eliminate coffee and get over the effects of withdrawal. I have found when I've done it in the past, a couple of days and I'm good to go. On the other hand, if you find a cup in the morning (again moderate use of caffeine) works for you and then maybe a cup right after you wake up from your nap, then do it. You just have to experiment.

The next call comes from Mary DeMuth, who is a friend of mine and called in with this question:

Mary DeMuth: Hi, this is Mary DeMuth from Rockwall, Texas. I blog at marydemuth.com. My question is I am a total insomniac, so one of the pieces of advice doctors give is not to nap so by the time you get to the evening you can actually sleep. So what do you say to those of us who can't sleep at night? Thanks. Bye.

Michael Hyatt: I would say a couple of things, Mary. First of all, maybe it's because you're sleeping too long in your nap so that is spoiling your nighttime sleep. On the other hand, I would go back to the advice I gave just a moment ago to Jackie, and that is what I advise may not work for everyone. You may be one of those people who a nap actually makes you less productive, and it disrupts your sleep so badly at night that it's just not worth it. If that's the case, then again by all means avoid it.

I would try to experiment a little bit and see if you couldn't get the right length. Maybe it's 15 minutes. Maybe it's 30 minutes. Maybe it's 20 as I suggest. Again, you have to find what works for you because the goal here is not a nap per se, but the goal is to be more energetic, more productive, more focused, and more present to what you're doing now. Whatever within reason lends itself to that is what I would practice.

The final question comes from Stu from stupendousmarriage.com:

Stu Gray: Hi Michael, it's Stu Gray from stupendousmarriage.com. Thank you so much for your new podcast. I'm loving it. It's a great resource. In regard to naps, I've tried to be a nap guy, but I haven't been consistent with it number one, and two, I tend to wake up groggy. Have you found there is an ideal time length or a time of day that helps with grogginess? I would love to hear your feedback. Talk to you soon. Thank you again.

Michael Hyatt: Thanks, Stu. Again, I think you can see a lot of the questions were around this idea of what is the best time and best length. For me, it's right after lunch. So I usually go down at about 12:30. I plan on 12:30 to 1:00, but again I rarely can sleep longer than 20 minutes. If it gets later in the day than that, I can go to about 4:00. Longer than that and it's going to disrupt my nighttime sleep so I avoid it.

But again, "hack your own body." Figure it out for yourself. Experiment. What is the worst that can happen? If you try it and you don't get a good night sleep that night, oh well. You figured out something else that didn't work.

I will say you will get better with practice. Napping is like anything else. It takes a little practice to get better at it, and I literally can fall asleep on command. I can go to sleep within about a minute now. That wasn't always the case. My wife, Gail, by the way, can't do that. She doesn't typically take naps because she just doesn't like fighting it, and if you're in that situation, fine. If you can't get to sleep fast or you wake up groggy, then avoid it. This is for the rest of you who might profit from it, and it might make you more productive.

So I hope this was helpful. If you have additional questions, like I said go to my website and my blog at MichaelHyatt.com. Scroll down through the show notes to the comments and leave a question or a comment.

A couple of announcements before we wrap up. The *Platform* book began shipping on April 25. This is my newest book titled *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*. In fact, I'm going to be doing my first media interview today, late this afternoon, about the book with *USA Today*. So I'm pretty excited about that.

I want to advise you, don't order the book yet. It's for sale in many retail outlets and online, but don't order it yet. I know that's kind of a strange request. Those of you who have been listening to my podcast have heard me say this for a couple of weeks, but there is a method in my madness. The official publication date is May 22. I want to focus all the sales I can into that first week of publication in an attempt to hit the bestseller list.

As a result, I'm prepared to reward you big time for waiting to order the book until then. I put together a special offer that includes seven free bonuses worth \$375.98. These are amazing bonuses, and I can't wait to share the details with you. I will the week of May 22. All you have to do to get in on that bonus offer is buy the book between May 21 and May 25. May 21 is a Monday. The book officially gets published on Tuesday, but if you buy it from May 21 through May 25, then you're going to just email me your receipt. Then I'll give you the link to these seven amazing resources.

So I'll give you more details as we move toward this, but you can sign up and be notified at MichaelHyatt.com/platform. I don't want you to miss this because once it goes away on May 25, it is going away forever.

The second announcement is BlogWorld & New Media Expo in New York City on June 5-7. I'm going to be speaking at one of the Super Sessions on Thursday morning, June 7, at 9:00 am. I'm going to be speaking on the topic of *Platform* and particularly how I'm applying that to my new podcast and what I'm learning. Oh man, I have been learning, failing, learning. Three steps back, two steps forward. Hopefully I'm figuring this out.

If you register before May 15, you get \$100 discount on the three-day blogger and podcaster pass. You only have about a week to that, so I would encourage you to take advantage of it if you've ever thought about going to BlogWorld as I have. I can't wait for this conference.

The third announcement is I want to talk about the SCORRE Conference, which I mentioned at the front end of the program in the sponsorship message. My wife Gail and I spent the last week at the SCORRE Conference in Rome, Georgia at the beautiful WinShape Retreat Center, which is owned by Chick-fil-A. It was an incredible setting.

SCORRE is an acronym we use for teaching a system of speech preparation, which is designed to help you deliver your message with clarity and power. If you've ever thought about being a public speaker, whether professionally or not, or you just want to be better at your communication and make it more professional, this is a conference for you.

The event last week was incredible. My colleagues Ken Davis, Michelle Cushatt, and Curtis Fletcher did an amazing job teaching the full group, but the heart of the program is the small groups. These groups consist of eight students who are led by a certified SCORRE coach. Each student has to give three brief speeches over the course of four days. They're coached, they're videotaped, and then they're critiqued.

I know it sounds a little scary, but by the end of the conference the students there were describing their experience as transformational, nothing short of life changing. It's incredible to watch these students who come in and see what happens to them, sort of the before and the after, as a result of going through this conference.

Again we're going to be holding the next SCORRE Conference in Vail, Colorado, which is an incredible setting, October 17-20, 2012. We really haven't started promoting it yet, but once we started promoting the last conference (this one we just had in Rome, Georgia), it sold out in less than a week. So I'm giving you a little bit of a head start.

If you ever wanted to come to SCORRE, if you ever wanted to improve your communication skills, or if you ever have thought about coming a professional speaker, this is your chance to grab a ticket before we open the floodgates and start selling to the general public. You can get more information by going to scoreconference.com. That's *SCORRE* with two r's. Again, SCORRE is an acronym so it's scoreconference.com. There will be a link in the show notes for you.

Well, that's about it for this episode of *This Is Your Life*. Next week I'm going to be talking about the five marks of authentic leadership. So if you have a question about leadership, you can leave a voicemail for me at MichaelHyatt.com/podcastquestion.

If you have enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe to it at MichaelHyatt.com/ThisIsYourLife. That way you won't miss a single episode. I'd also be grateful if you would rate my podcast on iTunes. That

helps tremendously with keeping my podcast visible so people who have never heard of it can discover it.

If you'd like to comment on this episode, please go to MichaelHyatt.com as I said before and go to the show notes for this episode. Scroll down to the comments section, and I'd love to hear your comments, your questions, or whatever you'd like to share.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Now go make it count!