

# Sleep

## Why getting enough sleep makes us better leaders

During a strategy conversation at Seven Stones we asked ourselves: *When are we at our best?* One of our top answers was: *When we get enough sleep.*

Could it be that simple?

Perhaps. Consider that several disasters—Chernobyl, the Challenger Shuttle, and the Exxon Valdez spill—are known to be caused in some part by sleep deprivation. We become sleep deprived when we are awake for more than 16 hours (17 by some research) and this leads to a decrease in performance equivalent to having a blood alcohol level of 0.05%.

As leaders interested in our performance it behooves us to ask: **Are we getting enough sleep? Are members of our teams?**

At Seven Stones, getting enough sleep has become an accountability, and we encourage enough sleep for our clients as well. No matter how much development and training we do for ourselves, if we are not getting enough rest, we will likely fall short of our performance goals, like adding water into a sieve.

Which is difficult in a culture that prays to 'more is better'. For example, many of us are willing to give up sleep to get more done—to extend our day, so to speak. Whether it is to finish a report or a proposal, or have some downtime away from the kids, we may push sleep off for just a little more...

### What is enough sleep?

The purpose of sleep has continued to elude researchers, though we know we need it. We need it so much, that we devote about one third of our lives to it. As adults it is recommended we get somewhere between seven and eight hours each night. Some people know they need more and some perform at their best with less. Six seems to be the minimum, though, and only for short stretches of time. 30% of Americans report getting less than six. Are you one of them?

If you are, we recommend you take this sleep inventory and then take some steps to get enough.

- What is my relationship to sleep?
- Do I like where I sleep? Are there distractions in my bedroom? Do I have a routines to draw me into sleeping?
- Does it take me less than five minutes to fall asleep? If yes, then I am probably sleep deprived because the ideal amount of time is about 10 minutes.
- What amount of sleep is right for me? If you don't know, run an experiment by sleeping different amounts consistently for a week and monitor your thoughts, feelings and behaviors, moods and reactivity. Ask the people around you, too, for feedback.
- What keeps me from going to sleep at a time that would allow me to get enough sleep? E.g., is it difficult to stop working, watching TV, "not enough time to get it all done", etc.
- What are the main stressors in my life that could be contributing to getting less sleep than I need?
- What daytime habits do I have that could contribute to not getting enough? E.g., do I drink caffeine, have screen time or exercise rigorously too close to the evening?



## Benefits of getting enough sleep

We can:

- Look and feel five or ten years younger
- Be more effective at work
- Share our unique gifts with the world around us freely and generously every day
- Be kinder to family and friends
- Experience an explosion in creativity
- Improve our ability to keep unwanted pounds away
- Feel more satisfied and have an increase in overall well-being and health.

## Tips for sleeping smart

- Establish a regular bed and wake time
- Avoid nicotine altogether and avoid caffeine close to bedtime
- Avoid alcohol
- Exercise regularly (but complete the workout at least three hours before bedtime)
- Establish a consistent, relaxing “wind-down” bedtime routine
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet and comfortable
- Discuss the appropriate way to take any sleep aid with a healthcare professional.

## ABOUT SEVEN STONES

Seven Stones is a leadership journeys company founded by Gina LaRoche and Jennifer Cohen in 2009. Our learning programs, coaching practice, organizational consulting engagements and groundbreaking thought leadership work are all designed to help bring about a world that is loving, courageous and just. We pursue this vision primarily by shifting the paradigm from one of scarcity to one of Sustainable Abundance® in the individuals, organizations and communities with whom we work.

