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*The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence* and keeping it there.

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## Middle-of-the-Night Awakenings

**Often I wake up in the middle of the night disgustingly alert and wonder how I will fall back to sleep. In sharing this questionable predilection with my friends, I discovered that they too are affected in such a way – happening far more often that they would like. What’s going on? If mid-night awakenings are so common, perhaps we should attempt to understand the phenomenon a bit better.**

### Back to our Roots

While our documented human history goes back about 10,000 years, our human evolutionary history spans at least 700,000 years. Such a time span certainly gave us enough experience to develop specific habits that served us well in those times past – actually during most of our human history. Even so, let’s jump to modern times, say 30,000 to 10,000 years ago when humans began to plant crops and give up their nomadic ways in preference to geographic stability and the evolution of peopled communities. Neon lights 10,000 years ago were only a dream, thus, after dusk things got pretty dark except for the light of occasional fires. It was hard to do productive things in the dark, so people went to sleep. They rose again with the sun when light allowed greater capabilities for everyone. With that in mind let us focus on a Homo Sapiens’ October day from 5 am till 7 pm accompanied by a night from about 7 pm till 5 am.

When we sleep for 5 hours (7 pm till midnight) we have lots of good sleeping hours under our belt during which we go through the REM sleep to deep sleep and natural arousal. Therefore, at midnight it was common for our ancestors to be wide awake and alert. In fact, they did get up, visit friends and socialize for an hour or so. And then they returned to bed until the sun signaled the new day.

We don’t have to go back 10,000 years even. In the Middle Ages, only several hundred years ago (a drop in the evolutionary bucket), neon lamps and electricity were still an undreamed fantasy. Thus, people then dozed off after sunset, getting up for a new day around sunrise. But having put in 5 hours of slumber, they did wake up at midnight too. Our written history is full of stories of mid-night awakenings. Shakespeare plays abound with mid-night human activities, not just the nefarious type. In fact the word itself ‘midnight’ suggests the middle of the night break – little different from today’s jargon of a school’s ‘mid-term break’, mid-seminar break’, etc. Christmas hymns and carols are replete with midnight awakenings and events. What could be more specific than “It came upon a Midnight Clear.....”

### Conclusion

It was normal through most of our history to wake up and be alert at midnight. It is not something we can just shake off because we have neon lamps now. Nor is it attributable to only you and me; it occurs far more commonly than most of us would have believed.

### The Cure

“OK, so accepting this mid-night factor, what do I do about it?” There are a few things about our sleep patterns that seem not common knowledge, currently. Staring with this awakening factor, begin to accept the inevitability of it; there is nothing wrong with you.

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Then, do as your ancestors did, put the time to use. Go down to your computer and check your emails for an hour. Compose a letter to a friend. Make an agenda for your activities for tomorrow. Answer that crazy puzzle that's dancing in your head. The caveat is that you must set a time limit for remaining awake of about an hour. Otherwise you will disrupt the human sleep pattern formed since times of antiquity.

Then return to your warm cozy bed. "But I can't sleep" you cry out in alarm. This is the second interesting piece of common misinformation about sleeping. You are wrong to believe you cannot sleep. You will sleep because your body demands it and if nothing else, 700,000 years of ancestors' history will force it on you. So quit worrying about your sleepless status (and thus keeping yourself needlessly awake because of imagined, unnecessary, worry).

Here is how you check that you slept and 'were not awake all night'. When you lie down at 1 or 2 am after your very wide awake mid-night letters, take a look at a clock. When 5 minutes later you re-awake, look at the clock again. Surprise, surprise: it was not 5 minutes but an hour or two later. This may happen one or two other times in the night. But you get the drift. You will start to realize that you slept most of the night – not lain awake most of the night. With time, your mind, which has been misleading you all these years, will grasp that you do sleep most of the time and will begin to relax after a mid-night awakening. The body is pretty clever about demanding as much sleep as you need; you really cannot fool it.

With sleep worries removed, important tasks completed during mid-night (if awake), and sufficient sleep under your belt you will become a more productive, more business-capable and more positive human being.

Good luck to you and your new sleep pattern!

Bill

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