

WHAT ARE YOU EATING?

BY ROBERT M. GIGNAC



It's alright, don't worry. I am not here to criticize your dietary habits or make personal inquiries into your midnight snacking. But the concept of "what are you eating" was driven home to me recently as I spent 19 days on the road, away from home and my normal routine.

I am the first to admit that at the best of times I struggle to maintain decent dietary habits and this only gets worse when travelling for business. Compound the sleep issues associated with moving back and forth across nine time zones with meetings and speaking events staggered throughout the day (and two evening speaking events), staying in hotels, which ranged from "extremely pleasant" to "no chance I'll be back" and toss in 14 flights and you can see what I am talking about.

What I have found is that regardless of your routine at home, you had better find a way to create a slightly better one on the road—and for me that means forcing myself to eat something for breakfast every day—and that something can't consist of simply coffee and a donut. Fortunately, I started my days in many cases with fruit (courtesy of the hotel front desk), followed by a juice and some sort of fibre (muffin, bagel, toast, etc). When you are on the road and expecting to perform your best for clients (after all, isn't that why they hired you over your competition?) you can't just jump out of bed, shower, shave, and go without adding some fuel to the tank.

Lunch tends to be less of an issue as many clients were bringing lunch into events; the key is to eat less than you might think in order to avoid the "post lunch crash" as your body starts to process what you have taken in. As much as it pains me to say it, avoid the lunchtime desserts as well—not only does it not help in terms of decent fuel, it can tend to spike your sugar levels, which can contribute to your energy fluctuations later in the day.

Dinners on this trip were a tough one—not from availability, but from timing. On several occasions I arrived in a city via a late afternoon flight, only to have a client want to take me to dinner at 7:30 pm (say Vancouver), while physically my body clock was already at 10:30 pm. You cannot always say no, but you can choose to go with the salad over the steak, keeping it light since the next morning you will need to get up and get going. After a sometimes less than restful hotel sleep on a full stomach, that can be a difficult thing to do.

The biggest tip I can give you for extensive travel on the road is one word: water. It didn't matter where I was—on an airplane, in a rental car, in a meeting, waiting in the airport lounge—I tried to have a bottle of water with me all the time. Not because I'm a fan of bottled water (I often refill them from the tap), but it's taken me a long time to learn that hydration is a key to better performance—first for my voice as a speaker and second for my body to help make up for the abuse I sometimes impose on it while travelling.

The last dietary habit I would like to address is that of feeding your mind. When you are on the road, there tends to be a fair bit of downtime—waiting for flights, sitting in your hotel room, transit time between meetings, etc. Business expert Jim Rohn has posed this question many times: "Are you feeding your brain protein every day, or are you just giving it candy?" I'm not talking about Kit-Kat bars. Too many people sustain their brains solely on "candy"—that is, useless reality television shows, the 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm news, and mindless gossip from the latest Hollywood tabloid. Ok, so this isn't you. So what have you done lately to further your education, stimulate yourself with new ideas and insightful learning? When did you last enrol for a seminar, sit in on a webinar (if you need to ask what that is, type it into Google and find out), or buy a new business book or audio program? Pop a CD in the car, download a podcast to your iPod, or crack open a book, but make the effort to learn something new this week.

I have been back home for five days now and I can already see myself starting to undo some of the better habits I tried to instil while on the road. Since they say that we attempt to teach the things we most need to learn, I will be posting this article on my bulletin board as a reminder—we cannot perform at our best if we are not aware of what we are consuming physically and mentally. I will be making a renewed effort to focus on improving my consumption both physically and mentally—I hope you will too. **E**

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