

Life Balance & Stress Management for Event Planners

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I have long had a fascination with the human brain and what we can learn from cognitive and neuroscience to allow us to live happier and more productive lives.

As a leadership consultant and executive coach dedicated to building high-performing leaders and teams, I have observed those I work with, across a wide variety of industries and discipline spaces, relative to life balance and stress levels. Never has the topic of this white paper been more applicable or timely.

In recent years, more and more of the executives and business professionals I work with report increasing challenges in finding life balance and managing stress in their lives. For those in the event planning space, this challenge is especially acute.

Having spent close to three decades in the global hospitality industries (many of those in the meetings and conventions space), I am all too familiar with the subtle, relentless stress that event planners deal with on a daily basis. The pressures of handling multiple events, all in different phases of their life cycle, managing the constantly shifting needs of

a variety of stakeholders, coping with the unpredictability of weather and often doing it all on road while coping with jet lag—it is no wonder that it has been said that event planners have the same stress level of an active duty police officer.

My aim in this white paper is to share some of what I have learned leveraging brain science in managing our energy, life balance and stress to ensure we mitigate the pressures that, if unchecked, may be toxic to our health and long-term happiness.

Disclaimer

This white paper offers basic information and context around this subject matter. The author is not a medical doctor; nor should anything in this article be construed as medical advice. If you are experiencing any symptoms of anxiety, stress or a sleep disorder please consult your physician or mental health therapist.

Life Balance

Many years ago, while participating in a leadership development program at the Center for Creative Leadership in Colorado Springs, I was made aware of what was called the “shirt button” metaphor. If you imagine a shirt button, it comprises four holes. Metaphorically speaking, each of these holes represents a different aspect of your life: Career, Family, Community (any non-work-related group activity where you connect with like-minded people) and Self (personal growth at a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual level). In an ideal world, your energy is divided equally across all four of those aspects.

In my coaching practice, some of the most successful leaders I know do a very good job in managing that balance. When all four of those areas are given equal energy and attention, they allow one to be grounded and balanced. Each area of your life supports and positively influences the others. In reality, most of us struggle to find that balance and many report a disproportionate energy investment in work, followed by a scramble to devote energy to family. All too often, there is not as much time or energy left over to support community or self-growth and development.

What does your shirt button look like now, and what can you do to proactively manage a more balanced investment of energy and time over the next few months?

A Mind Made for a Simpler World

When we look back at the history of mankind, much of our existence on earth has been as hunter-gatherers. In fact, it has been estimated roughly 99 percent of our time on this planet was in this role. Consequently, our minds and bodies have evolved to optimally support that specific lifestyle.

As hunter gatherers, life was relatively simple, if not also rough and often dangerous. It has been suggested that for millennia, we lived in small family clans of roughly 6 or 7 members in collaborative communities of up to 150 individuals. There were bursts of activity (hunting and/or gathering) followed by significant down time, where people built social connection primarily through grooming each other and physical contact. Robin Dunbar, the famed anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, estimates that perhaps as much of 40 percent of Neolithic man's waking hours was devoted to this activity. How many of us today enjoy the luxury of that much relaxed socially stimulating “down time”?

The acts of being groomed improved health through the removal of ticks and other parasites and supported mental well-being through a sense of social cohesion and support. The modern event planner can relate when we consider the positive feelings enjoyed when someone is doing your hair, or giving you a manicure or a foot or body massage.

About 10,000 years ago, we moved into the agrarian era and became more settled as farmers. 5,000 years ago, we saw the rise of the great civilizations with their increase in population density and the stress of living in larger cities. A couple of hundred years ago, we saw the Industrial Revolution, then the birth of computing, the information age and now the onset of virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

All in all, this exponential explosion of complexity, time demands and information overload has consumed us. Yet, our glacial slow physical and mental evolution is still attuned to the lifestyle of a Neolithic man. No wonder we feel stressed most of the time!

Top 10 Stressors

On top of the persistent environmental stress of our modern world, we all battle the intermittent impact of some of various stressful events. A variety of different studies suggest the following make up the top 10 causes of toxic stress in our lives (the order of impact varies and is less relevant than the list as a whole):

- 1 Death of a family member
- 2 Separation or divorce
- 3 Childhood trauma
- 4 Financial crisis
- 5 Threat to job security
- 6 Health crisis or physical injury
- 7 Dysfunctional relationships
- 8 Chronically ill offspring
- 9 Pregnancy
- 10 Pressures associated with holidays

How many of those major stressors are you grappling with currently? The greater the number of these in play in your life, the more you might benefit from further investing in self-care, therapy and personal development.



Proactive Solutions and Self-Care

In short, while we cannot stop the very nature of modern life, we can control our reaction to it and be proactive in self-care. Specifically, that means getting enough quality sleep, eating well and getting enough exercise. Much has been written on the latter two in manifesting physical health and vitality. I would like to focus on some of what I have learned in managing a healthy mind through sleep, mindfulness and meditation.

Sleep Hacks

Getting enough good-quality sleep is a precursor to having the energy to get enough exercise and eat well. It is also an aspect of our lives that is often most negatively impacted in a busy event planning season. I have had the privilege of travelling extensively, over 3 million miles of flying and work experiences in over 30 countries. Bottom line: I have experienced more than my fair share of jet lag and have been long motivated to understand how we can manage proactively manage our circadian cycles and enjoy enough high-quality, restorative sleep.

One of the most practical lessons I ever learned is that as human beings we sleep in multiples of sleep cycles. The human sleep cycle is roughly 90 minutes in length (for some of us it is a little less, others a little more). Through monitoring my own sleep patterns, I know my sleep cycle is 90 minutes. In the course of a good night, we enjoy a number of sequential, complete sleep cycles. So for me, I want to plan to sleep a multiple of 90 minutes. In other words: 1.5 hours, 3 hours, 4.5 hours, 6 hours, 7.5 hours

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(my ideal) or 9 hours. By knowing roughly how long it takes me to fall asleep, calculating the number of complete cycles I can get in before I need to get up and then setting my wake-up alarm accordingly, I have been able to ensure I wake easily and naturally at the end of a sleep cycle.

Sometimes, I have found it is better to get less total sleep time and wake up at the end of a cycle rather than sleep a little longer and wake up in the middle of deep Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep and have that awful feeling of groggy disorientation.

The other thing I have found invaluable is to ensure if I do need a nap, I take a power nap of no longer than 20 minutes. This allows for refreshing, restorative rest before the brain moves into deep REM sleep that needs a longer period to run its course. So, a 20-minute nap for a quick refresher, or a longer 90-minute sleep cycle for a more complete rest is ideal, in my experience. It is also best not to nap within 6 or less hours of your natural bedtime, for



fear of disrupting your nighttime sleep ritual. The more we can follow a regular sleep routine, the better.

Many meeting planners I know thrive on and enjoy the experience of a good cup of coffee or caffeinated tea. It apparently takes caffeine about 25 to 30 minutes to be absorbed into our system and for the caffeine boost to kick in. Another hack I have personally found of use is to grab a coffee just before a 20-minute nap. Then, on awakening refreshed from the nap, it roughly corresponds with the energy boost from the caffeine hitting my system. We are all unique, so experiment to see what works for you!

Brain Waves, Relaxation, Mindfulness and Meditation

Every day we experience 5 different types of brain waves:

Gamma – that mode where we are experiencing deep insights and integrating information

Beta – our normal active waking state

Alpha – relaxation, daydreaming, object fixation, mindfulness, light meditation

Theta – deep meditation, light sleep, dreaming

Delta – deep sleep

Compared to our hunter-gatherer ancestors, we are likely spending significantly more time in our beta and gamma brain wave

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states, based on the intensity and frequency of external input and stimulation we experience in today's world.

The level of details and the constant change in event planning often puts pressure on us to remember minutiae. The human brain is not by design for remembering things—it is designed to solve problems. So if you are prone to constantly trying to remember things, explore the best practice of capturing all your “to dos” as they occur on a dedicated note page on your smart phone or on a pad of paper. This will both alleviate some stress and free your cerebral bandwidth to problem-solve rather than to waste energy on inefficiently maintaining a mental list of things to remember.

Most of us can greatly benefit from more time in our alpha and theta brain wave states. The good news is that there can be a profound benefit from even just a few minutes of mindfulness, guided relaxation or meditation if practiced on a regular basis.

The number of resources supporting your ability to find relaxation and a meditative state are also plentiful, from smart phone apps, to dedicated websites, podcasts and recorded CDs. I encourage you to explore and experiment. Even just a few minutes a day can be an effective start in building a new habit around spending more time in your therapeutic alpha and theta wave states.

As a professional meeting planner, managing your own energy and finding life balance is critical not only to being able to perform on the job, but also ensure you are leading by example for your team and participant stakeholders.

Nurturing your mind and body with good sleep, the right nutrition, adequate exercise and an investment in meditation and mindfulness will pay dividends both professionally and in your personal life.

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MARGARITAVILLE®

Beach Resort

HOLLYWOOD BEACH, FL

With Wellness named one of the top meeting trends this year and last, hospitality brands are now more than ever making changes to incorporate healthy lifestyle activities into the meeting experience for travelers who want to feel well on the road. At Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort, a AAA Four Diamond-rated destination resort in South Florida, meeting guests can stay healthy while away from home with enhanced on-site activities, including group fitness classes and teambuilding challenges.

As a premiere hospitality lifestyle brand, fun and escapism is part of the Margaritaville culture. Guests can clear their mind in the morning with a yoga class on the beach or a guided run and bike ride along the legendary Hollywood Beach Broadwalk. The year-round warm weather offers individual recreational activities including paddle-boarding and group teambuilding exercises, such as Beach Olympics.

The resort's St. Somewhere Spa allows groups to unwind with a variety of rejuvenating services including the signature St. Somewhere Swedish Massage. Downtime at the Fins Up! Fitness Center offers attendees the opportunity to enjoy a moment of personal escapism and relaxation. A Group Beer Yoga class offers a fun spin on physical fitness while private one-on-one personal training sessions are available for exercise enthusiasts.

Healthy menu options are offered as part of the resort's meeting food and beverage packages, as well as at the eight food and beverage venues on-site. Guests are able to keep their healthy eating routine or stick to their specific diet plans with ease.

Contact Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort today for the latest in sunny, ocean-front wellness offerings.

About Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort

Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is a 17-story, 369-room destination resort and entertainment complex offering an authentic, "no worries" tropical vibe. The resort features 30,000 square-feet of flexible function space, multiple oceanfront dining and live entertainment venues, with a state-of-the-art oceanfront fitness center and full-service spa.



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There's a certain expectation that comes from a destination with "Paradise" in its name—like award-winning beaches, exquisite restaurants, a thriving arts scene and countless ways to make the most of your time in the sun. Florida's Paradise Coast delivers all that and more.

It's not everywhere that lets you see miles of white sand beaches from your seat in the meeting room. But Paradise isn't any ordinary place. It's home to luxurious beachfront resorts, charming boutique hotels and unique venues like NGALA, an extraordinary wildlife preserve. No matter your group size or budget, you're sure to find an unforgettable meeting location here.

Florida's Paradise Coast is fast becoming a favorite among food lovers. When you combine award-winning restaurants with fresh, locally sourced ingredients and creative chefs, you get a destination that's sure to make mouths water. Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades are home to a variety of delicious dining opportunities, from casual beachside eateries to elegant downtown restaurants.

Meeting attendees also enjoy plentiful opportunities for wellness throughout the destination, thanks in part to the Blue Zones Project. This unique project is a community-wide wellbeing initiative that makes it easier to make healthy choices. (No wonder the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index named us America's Happiest, Healthiest City four years in a row!) In Paradise, visitors see the Blue Zones effect all around: from better-for-you menu options at restaurants to immersive nature trails. It all makes Florida's Paradise Coast a healthier, happier place to meet and play!

About Florida's Paradise Coast

Florida's Paradise Coast is where the Gulf of Mexico's sparkling waters meet endless white sand beaches, unspoiled natural settings, and luxurious downtowns filled with artful treasures, culinary delights and other discoveries. Explore Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades, and find your idyllic Florida meeting destination.



Would you like the recipe for a stress free flawless event? How about doing so at the Biltmore Miami-Coral Gables, recipient of the Conde Nast Traveler Reader's Choice Award in 2019. The Biltmore's many attributes can alleviate a meeting planner's stress throughout the planning process.

A location that provides easy accessibility is key. The Biltmore's close proximity to Miami International Airport as well as world-renowned shopping districts and local attractions makes it centrally located.

Next, well-appointed comfortable guest rooms that provide attendees with a good night's sleep maximize engagement and attendance. Our individually styled spacious guest rooms have recently been renovated and offer comfort, quality and the latest technology.

Incorporating first class amenities in to the meeting agenda focusing on lifestyle, recreation and wellness is vital. This will create the perfect balance for the planner's agenda. Attendees can tee off on our newly restored 18 hole Donald Ross Championship Golf course, enjoy a relaxing massage in our luxurious Spa, learn to cook along-side our executive culinary team at the Culinary Academy, relax poolside in one of our private cabanas, or schedule a personalized group team building session.

Hosting a meeting in space with natural daylight, high ceilings, and comfortable setting, provides a relaxed environment that fulfills the planner's meeting objectives. This can be accomplished at the Biltmore with our recently refreshed flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Explore the exclusive Coral Gables area of Miami and alleviate stress by booking your next meeting at the Biltmore Hotel.

About The Biltmore

The Biltmore, located in Coral Gables, the heart of Miami, recently completed a \$35 million restoration and redesign project. The 271 room resort offers endless amenities, award winning dining options, Culinary Academy, luxurious Spa, 18-hole golf course, and 75,000 square feet of meeting space. Discover more of the Biltmore at www.biltmorehotel.com.



As a brand that incorporates wellness as a core part of its experience, Virgin Voyages is redefining the ways in which well-being is delivered onboard. Stress is an element everyone handles differently, and there's truly no better place to reset than at sea. Virgin Voyages instills the concept of "detox/retox" which offers a balance for sailors to enjoy both physical and mental wellness in a variety of ways. Scarlet Lady, Virgin Voyages' new ship debuting April 1, 2020 has everything from an outdoor boxing ring, a heavenly thermal suite, to a spinning studio with incredible ocean views. With a wellness-dedicated pool, to a fresh-pressed juice bar cheekily named "Gym and Tonic" Virgin Voyages gives sailors a great collection of health-forward activities onboard. As a brand that's more inclusive by nature, all group fitness classes onboard are complimentary for all sailors. For other travelers, maybe all that's needed to recharge is a crafted cocktail, a DJ and their colleagues to dance the night away with. Whether it's our Scarlet Night event, or our pool party at Virgin Voyages' private Beach Club at Bimini, there's always an opportunity to enjoy the activations. For private groups, a bookable set of karaoke rooms at The Groupie, is the perfect way to redesign team building by giving sailors the chance to let loose and share laughs together. On a Virgin Voyage, it's all about our sailors, come stray the course!

About Virgin Voyages:

Virgin Voyages is an irresistible new cruise line that strays the course from traditional and inspires the modern romance of sea travel. Virgin Voyages offers a curated, adult-only experience with a robust culinary scene and an exciting entertainment variety, all with Virgin's signature red glove service. Scarlet Lady, the first of four mid-size vessels in the Virgin Voyages' fleet begins sailing from Miami April 2020.

www.virginvoyages.com

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/virgin-voyages-meetings-and-incentives/>

<https://www.facebook.com/virginvoyages/>



In the heart of the Riviera Maya, in an exceptional location between the jungle and the Caribbean Sea. The eco-unifying architecture of the complex and of its 900 suites distributed in its 5 houses, respects and integrates nature like few have been able to do it.

Hotel Xcaret México's unique concept: All-Fun Inclusive™ includes unlimited access to the 7 parks and 2 tours of Grupo Xcaret: Xcaret, Xel-Há, Xplor, Xplor Fuego, Xenses, Xoximilco, Xavage, Xenotes y Xichén. All of which have activities that will make you treasure Mexico's natural wonders. The contact with the flora and fauna and its natural water bodies, will take you to a mindfulness and joy state in which you will want to stay forever.

The most recent opening in Hotel Xcaret México is Bio, a restaurant located in a natural cave in front of the hotel's iconic small coves. It has a delicious menu that covers the needs of vegan and gluten-free diets. Its creative and fresh proposal combines local natural products with superfoods and ancient spices.

Furthermore, Hotel Xcaret México offers meditation and yoga classes at dawn, one 24/7 gym, an outdoors functional training circuit, tennis and paddle tennis court, bikes and water activities such as kayak and paddle board to go all over the kilometers of crystal-clear water that go around the hotel. Its white-sand beach that sits in front of the Caribbean turquoise water, its infinity pools and beach shores offer perfect postcards.

For your safety and ease, the All-Fun Inclusive™ concept of Hotel Xcaret México includes airport-hotel-airport transportation, as well as hotel-parks-hotel.

About Hotel Xcaret

- A paradise set deep in the Mayan Jungle with a new sustainable tourism and of unifying eco wellness concept
- Located in front of the Caribbean Sea
- 45 minutes from Tulum and 45 minutes from Cancun International Airport (CUN)
- hotelxcaret.com
- FB: [hotelxcaretmexico](https://www.facebook.com/hotelxcaretmexico)
- IG: [hotelxcaretmexico](https://www.instagram.com/hotelxcaretmexico)