



Mastering the Morning

Your practices and attitudes early in the day are crucial to top performance.

YOUR MORNING routine is the metaphorical launching pad for your day. It can determine the kind of mental set you arrive at work with, the amount of energy reserves you have on hand, and even the degree of productivity and success you experience throughout the day. Yet many financial advisors don't believe their day starts until after they arrive at the office. They routinely allow many stressful, low-energy events to create performance problems during the early period of their day, when morning is the time they should be locking into a high-performance pace.

This article will take several concepts and strategies and put them together so you can get a clear picture of how to begin a maximum day. These ideas have been used by numerous top producers to build and preserve their energy reserves. Jason Blake describes how he starts his day: "I keep myself on a morning exercise program that is important to me. I get up at 4:25 a.m. and am at the gym by 4:55 five days a week. I do an hour's worth of aerobic exercise and weight training. While I exercise, I focus my thoughts on maximizing my exercise. At home, I also give myself some vital "mental preparation" time. I want to use the time to relax and generate a broad picture outline of the day and the objectives I have set. I do not listen to

the news nor do I read the paper. My breakfast consists of oatmeal, juice and lots of vitamins. I want to be in the office no later than 7:30 a.m. I want to have 30 minutes to review and get everything ready to follow my daily plan."

MORNING EXERCISE

Aerobic exercise at any time of the day is great for defeating stress and increasing your physical and emotional energy and overall stamina. Here are a few reasons why exercise gets you going in high gear in the morning.

First, exercise increases the flow of blood through your body and to your brain. This means that it creates a significant increase to the blood that flows through your brain. Conversely, a lack of oxygen is one cause of fatigue, the thing that triggers yawning, or a light-headed feeling. But by giving your brain an oxygen boost through exercise, you will increase your awareness, and enhance your creative and decision-making abilities.

Fifteen minutes of mild exercise will stimulate this enhanced blood flow. This could include weight training, stretching, jumping rope, bouncing on a rebounder, jogging or climbing a Stair-Master.

If you want to give your system an even bigger blast of energy, schedule 40 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise, such as jogging, swimming, skating, dancing, tennis, and cycling. It also requires a level of physical intensity that produces heavier breathing, a faster heart rate, and sweating. But most important, this type of exercise will increase a person's metabolism up to 25 percent for four to six hours, a significant physical energy boost. Aerobic exercise changes the chemistry of the body, get-

ting rid of toxins and producing endorphins and other hormones which increase creativity, silence negative self-talk, and increase the likelihood of brain integration. You will have more patience as you improve your listening skills after 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise. Aerobics creates energy and makes you feel alert, open, tuned in, and ready to prospect and call clients.

Morning aerobics may be the solution for everyone who does not wake up with a natural high, or for financial advisors who have a difficult time getting into high gear. An "aerobic high" is a great substitute for caffeine.

WHAT'S FOR BREAKFAST?

Many financial advisors have learned the value of an energy-sustaining breakfast. Of course food is a primary source of energy, particularly calories converted to blood sugar, or glucose, in your bloodstream. If your last meal was last night, your blood sugar will be low when you arrive at the office. Some financial advisors do not feel hunger upon waking because their metabolism has slowed down during sleep or because they grab some coffee and a bagel on the way to the office. But neither of these will provide enough calories to sustain the body's energy needs until lunchtime.

A number of debilitating symptoms come when the body is deprived of ready calories. Fatigue, foggy thinking, queasiness, and hunger are common foes. A cup of caffeine in the morning actually exacerbates these symptoms. While skipping breakfast is the worst way to start your day, you should also avoid breakfasts that are high in fats or simple sugars. Fats actually reduce the amount of oxygen that is able to reach your brain. So grabbing a donut or bagels, or hitting a vending machine, should be a thing of the past.

The best foods to put into your bloodstream in the morning are complex carbohydrates and high-fiber items. Unlike simple sugars, more complex carbohydrates will not raise

the blood sugar too high; and fiber slows down some aspects of digestion, helping you feel fuller longer. Our number one breakfast suggestion is oatmeal with skim milk, cinnamon and raisins. Fresh fruit with a slice of whole-grain bread is another high-energy breakfast option. Low-fat yogurt is another light item that will give you protein as well.

A final word on caffeine: In addition to the fact that caffeine exacerbates many health hazards, such as high blood pressure, caffeine is simply not necessary if you jump-start your morning with exercise and a good breakfast instead. If your goal is to increase your energy, eliminate caffeine.

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Do you usually wake up without a thought about what you are going to wear until you begin to dress?
Are you sharing "get ready" time and space with your family?**

GET UP AND GO
Perhaps you can conserve your morning energy reserves by avoiding stress-causing situations — before you get ready for work. If you wake up just half an hour earlier, you can increase the margin of error in your time schedule. Otherwise, virtually anything that goes wrong can create worry and stress about getting to your office on time. For instance,

if you nick your face while shaving or receive an unexpected phone call, you may feel that the lost time will force you to be late. It may be difficult for you to have a peaceful morning when you are running late. The same applies if you are always running late. One extra traffic light or being cut off in traffic can create debilitating stress.

Do you neglect filling the gas tank until you are at empty? Do you usually wake up without a thought about what you are going to wear until you begin to dress? Are you sharing "get ready" time and space with your family?

You may wish to get up an hour earlier. Give some thought to tomorrow, before you go to bed at night. Figure out what can you do ahead of time. For example, check out your wardrobe, and pack your attaché case.

If you normally arrive at work feeling stressed out, you are doing something wrong. Travel time can be and is valuable time. If neither is the case for you, consider several ways of

making your commute a more rewarding experience. It might be helpful to think in terms of compounding time. Basically, this is a strategy of getting two or more benefits from one time period. If you drive to work, of course reading is out of the question, but listening to something stimulating is not. Rather than hearing the world's problems, consider listening to training tapes, language lessons, the scriptures, or books on tape.

You may choose to use the time to brainstorm, and record your comments. Or record the names of people to whom you should send thank-you notes. And always be prepared to rethink your commute. Can you leave earlier? Can you take another route?

EARLY ARRIVAL

Arrive at work 30 minutes earlier. To begin with, this strategy provides you a buffer if you run into delays on your commute to work or if you need to catch up on a few unfinished details from yesterday's projects. Second, this early arrival time is a quiet period to settle in and get organized for the day. You might use this time to:

1. Look over your daily work plan.
2. Plan for ways to improve your day.
3. Write thank-you notes.
4. Do some troubleshooting.
5. Organize your office.
6. Return phone calls to earlier time zones.
7. Prepare for meetings.
8. Check the market.

SUMMARY

Think of your morning routine as the launching pad to your day. It will establish your mental set, your energy levels, and your productivity.

Your high-energy morning menu might include: a wake-up imaging session; exercise; a high-carbohydrate breakfast; a stress-free positive mental set; a rewarding commute to work; and early arrival at the office. □

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