

Some Days Are
Better Than Others

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When I went to the University of Maryland, I began as a business major. I studied mostly general business, accounting, and economics. After I graduated, I went to work for the New York Life Insurance Company and felt my lessons in business and life were complete. I had no idea how naive I was. No, in fact, the greatest lessons I would ever learn in business were yet to come in the years ahead on the road. Put in two million miles in the air and you'll learn a lot more than how to get your luggage stowed on board an airplane.

“Some days are better than others” quite simply implies that we start with a careful look at the reality of living—day, by day, by day. In business, I believe you're as good as your last interaction with your customer. (As my kids get older, I'm beginning to believe that a father is only as good as his last interaction as well.) That's not intended to be a cynical comment but rather a realistic warning. I suppose one of the keys to being a success, in business or in life, is to simply prove on a consistent basis that you are who you say you are. When you're not feeling in great physical or emotional shape, however, you still have to play your best—your customers expect no less. This first chapter is about facing this perennial Road Warrior challenge.

In your way stand a number of telling obstacles. What happens when you are not at the top of your game? How will you cope with sickness or physical pain when you have no choice but to do your

job? When you are faced with cultural differences, how will you respond? What happens when grief and depression disrupt your life, and how will you gain perspective to battle these obstacles? At the risk of starting this book on a downbeat, I'd like to share some of the tougher days—if you can weather the storm through days like these, the victories that follow will be even sweeter.

Giving It Your Best

A fact of life in business is, quite simply, you can't always be at your best. Road Warriors know this because so many factors can affect their performances. A missed flight, a bad cabbie, a difficult client—the list can go on and on. The fact of the matter is, how will you perform when you don't want to perform?

Thursday, June 6th—4:55 P.M.

I certainly saw it coming. My travels have taken me to Madison, Wisconsin. This was not one of my best two-day classes. As a matter of fact, I would rate it as one of my worst. I came into town tired. I woke up tired. I spent eight hours trying to manufacture energy and grew more tired. I went out with the customer and was tired. I went to bed and woke up tired and spent the rest of the day tired. I feel old. Like a jockey on a racehorse, I went for the crop, beat on the horse, and the horse just didn't respond.

Oh, I've got my excuses, but unfortunately, they are just that; excuses. Back-to-back two-day classes. A small audience in a large room. Oh, and one last thing. Although I spent a lot of time leaning on the walls, I did not sit. I may not have been as good as I wanted to be, but I did not quit. I gave it my all. I tried as hard as

I could. In this case, that may not have been good enough, but I sure did try. This is what I take with me from this week. As tired, burned out, and beat as I was, I didn't mail it in.

Nobody I know purposely takes on a job with the intent of not doing the best they can. Unfortunately, outside distractions can seriously impact what it is you are trying to accomplish. If your job requires energy and thought the next day, you learn early, even if you have to wear sunglasses to make sure you get to your room without being distracted, you get to that room and rest up. Of course, just because you are in your room, there is no guarantee that you'll get a good night's sleep . . .

Early to bed and early to rise can sometimes take a back seat to reality in the world of the Road Warrior. You see, there is an exception to the rule, and the rule is called, "All rules are off when it comes to redeye flights." I would like to kick things off with a whopper of a story. This story has no great redeeming value, nor does it contribute mightily to the lessons I wish to share with you. If nothing else, however, I hope it will prove that I've earned my stripes, and it might even get me the sympathy vote with the tougher book reviewers.

As our story unfolds, we find our hero, Road Warrior Rob, getting set for a three-day traveling blitz that starts in Cleveland. I call this story, "The Mother of All Redeyes."

Tuesday, April 28th—2:25 P.M.

This week could be called, "The Week to Catch Up on Air Miles" week. I'm not earning a whole lot, but I'm going to be flying a whole lot.

Today, I head to Cleveland. I'll be checking into the Renaissance Hotel and resting up for tomorrow. I have an all-day session that begins at 8:00 A.M. for Nat City. This is the last of five that I will be doing—although they just merged, so there should be more down the road.

My biggest challenge for tomorrow is to get this class finished by 3:00 P.M. My flight is at 3:50 to San Francisco. Miss it, and it will make this trip a lot more complicated than I would like. Cleveland, here I come.

Wednesday, April 29th—4:30 P.M.

Good-bye, Cleveland. After a mad dash from my training session, I am airborne and on my way west—way west. First, of course, I needed to make it interesting. Class finished at 3:15, leaving me 15–20 minutes to drive to the airport and catch a 3:50 flight. I'm really trying to cut down on these mad rushes to the airport, but it was either catch this flight or spend the night in Cleveland.

Now, this day is going to last a good, long time. I'm on my way to San Francisco, landing around 6:10 P.M. their time. I have to change airlines—which means a long walk—and catch a 7:00 P.M. to Honolulu. It is what the airlines call an illegal connection, because it doesn't provide the 55 minutes required for connections. I'll take my chances or sleep in San Francisco tonight. Either way, I'm OK, because I don't speak until tomorrow night. Right now, the travel gods are looking kindly on me. We are due in early to San Francisco.

Wednesdayish, April 29th—5:10 P.M.

Well, that's what time I'm pretending it is. Actually, it's 12:10 A.M., but I've switched to Hawaii time. All systems are go and touchdown

in Honolulu is set for 9:30 P.M. (3:30 A.M. East Coast time). I'm fighting off sleep right now. I want to make sure I can sleep when I finally arrive. I also want to be fresh when I speak tomorrow night . . . at 5:30 P.M. Hawaii time–11:30 P.M. East Coast time.

Wednesday, April 29th–10:00 P.M.

My cab driver has stopped to fill up his gas tank. I've been up now for about 22 hours. We're still about 25 minutes from the hotel. I know I'll get to sleep pretty quickly when I hit the pillow. I'm just wondering how long I'll stay down. I'm figuring that by the time I get to sleep, it will be about 5:00 A.M., my time.

Thursday, April 30th–6:15 A.M.

Good news. I slept pretty damn well. I'm rested and ready to roll. Now I've got stay busy until it's my time . . . like 11 more hours. I'm sitting out on my balcony watching the sun come up over the Pacific Ocean. I guess there are worse places to have to kill time.

Thursday, April 30th–9:45 P.M.

I'm airborne and beginning my journey home. The presentation was a struggle, but it's behind me now. I blew a fuse in my power strip, sweat all over the equipment, but gutted out a pretty good talk. I'm on a redeye heading back to Los Angeles. We were due in at 5:15 A.M. Now we've been told we'll be in around 4:45 A.M. I'm not sure if that's good news or not. My flight for Washington doesn't leave until 8:00 A.M.

Friday, May 1st–4:50 A.M.

I guess that's what time it is. I've decided that I'm somewhere in time limbo. If I go with Hawaiian time, which I just left, it's 1:50 A.M.

If I go with California time, which I'm on right now, it's 4:50 A.M. However, in about three and a half hours I should be taking off and heading home. That would make it 7:50 A.M. That's the one I like best! Yes, I'm making it 7:50 A.M. Oh my God, I think I'm delirious!

I think I slept on the plane for about an hour. That's what I'm telling myself, at least. Now, I have found a pretty nice-looking bench to sleep on while I wait for my next flight. It doesn't take off until 8:05 A.M. (uh, this time). I've got what appears to be a couple of strange-looking people sleeping pretty close by. I must have found a good place for street people to want to sleep here. I've made a pillow out of my suitcases with my LCD projector carrying case strap under my head. I've even set my travel alarm. Hopefully, I can find one or two more hours. Good night, limbo.

Friday, May 1st—8:35 A.M.

Finally, I'm actually heading home on my last flight. I got one more hour of sleep with my unsavory friends. I'm pretty sure that right about now, you couldn't tell us apart. I'm look awfully beaten up. My butt hurts already, and I've got four more hours to go. I feel pretty rested, though, and my competitive side has actually enjoyed this little battle with sleep. Somewhere along these last two flights, it became Friday. At least the week is over. I can honestly say these have been the longest three days I think I have ever spent in my life.

Of course it's a little unusual to go from the Midwest to Hawaii and back to the East Coast, all for one hour's worth of work, but it happens in the world of the Road Warrior. If nothing else, it certainly has made me less fearful of a little old California-to-D.C.

redeye. Pshaw, that's nothing! It's just another fact of life when giving it your best.

Coping with Sickness

You can't always wait for perfect health—physical or mental—before hitting the road. With planes to catch, appointments to make, or in my case, seminars to conduct, sometimes you just have to suck it up.

Monday, December 13th—6:15 A.M.

Here's a switch. I'm an hour early for my return flight, I've got a confirmed aisle seat, the plane is in, we seem to be proceeding without delays, and I'm terrified. I've been fighting off a cold for a couple of days, and sometime last night, it finally struck. I've already taken a Claritin, and it's no use. My sinuses are a mess, my nose is leaking like a sieve, and I'm in trouble.

Once we get airborne, I'm expecting excruciating pain, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it but take it like a man. Each flight I've taken on this trip over the last three days has been more painful than the last, but this has the makings of being the Mother of All Earache plane trips.

I feel like an inmate on death row. My decongestant will not commute my sentence. Soon the warden will load me into my torture chamber, and I will be in agony for the next hour and change . . . if I'm lucky.

When I went to school, I used to pride myself on my perfect attendance. There were textbooks I skimmed, lectures I slept through, and study sessions—well let's just say I could have taken

them a little more seriously. Classes, however, I never missed. Sickness was out of the question.

If I woke up in the morning not feeling well, my mother would smile and assure me I wasn't sick. She would tell me I merely had morning sickness, and it would pass. I'm embarrassed to say, it wasn't until I was in my late twenties and married that I had the term *morning sickness* properly defined for me.

Adhering to the Laws of the Land

While we're on the topic of giving it your best, keep an eye out for roadblocks that might stand in your way. In business, certain rules and laws need to be followed. One is to listen and respect the information that is presented to you—if someone has warned you about the food, the water, the weather, whatever, heed the warning. Eating on the road can be an adventure of the worst kind. That's why, after the novelty and thrill of road travel wears off, most Road Warriors prefer to kick back, order room service, and watch some tube. Besides, it's safer eating in the hotel . . . isn't it? (Warning: if you feel you may have a weak constitution, you might want to skip ahead a few pages.)

Friday, March 5th–5:25 P.M.

Ah, lovely Cancun, Mexico. Despite being over the border, everything seems American. A few months ago, I was invited to give a presentation here, and since I had never been to Cancun, I was excited.

When I got to my room last night, I was tired and hungry. I have had three seminars in three days in three cities, and none of the trips were easy. I looked through the room service menu and

prepared to order. I was told everything, including the water, was safe here, but I was skeptical. With a seminar first thing in the morning, I just couldn't drink the water, but I did decide to go with some rather exotic dishes.

I feel asleep around midnight and had a dream that I was being pursued by a skunk. I tried to run but I couldn't get away from the horrendous smell. I was running, and running, and running.

At four in the morning I woke up. Let's just say that what I had been running from was not entirely a dream. It was either me that was creating the hideous smell I was dreaming of, or a skunk truly did jump into my room, make itself comfortable, and leave. I was in the bathroom until five.

At six in the morning I woke up again. I didn't have the same dream, but the results were the same. Every fifteen minutes, I ran to the bathroom. I still think I resembled Charles Shultz's loveable character Pigpen. Instead of a cloud of dirt following me everywhere, there was simply a cloud of odor.

I venture to guess that you, too, have been in this condition once or twice in your life. But I'll bet you didn't have to get up and speak in front of 250 financial consultants for a one-hour, high-energy talk!

At 7:00 A.M., my cloud and I left the hotel room and floated downstairs. I wasn't nauseous, but my stomach was a mess. Now I began to appeal to two of our human senses as I worked to set up the room. I was not only appealing to the sense of smell. For the first time in my life, I honestly could not control the, uh, sounds I was making. These weren't little toots, either. I simply had no control of what was trying work its way through my system.

Finally, 8:00 A.M. rolled around and so did I. Miraculously, although I was uncomfortable, I held up well. I did toot a couple of times, but I think I got away with it. The first time it happened, I cleared my throat imitating the sound and moved on. The second time it happened, I wasn't as lucky. It was loud, and all I could do was pound on one of my books that was nearby. I don't think anyone thought I was tooting, but I could see confusion in the audience's eyes. I could sense they were collectively asking, "Why did that guy just lose control of himself and smack his own book for no apparent reason?" It was a quick decision, but I figured a small spastic attack was better than the alternative.

I think that simply looking like a buffoon was the right choice, but it's not the main point of that Road Warrior confession. Watch what you put in your mouth. Just because it is hotel food, that doesn't mean it's safe. If you are out of the country, my advice is, *don't* take their word for it. Don't drink the water, and watch those exotic dishes.

Coping With Pain

Although some of the younger readers might think physical breakdowns aren't in store for them, the fact is that business travel is physically demanding and takes a toll—but that doesn't mean our clients feel sorry for us.

Tuesday, July 7th—7:00 A.M.

From the medical desk, I had some minor surgery earlier this week and I have about 40 stitches in my back. It hurts like hell, but I've got a job to do. The client who hired me three months ago doesn't want to hear about my troubles. I was careful bringing in the

equipment, and as long as I don't flail too much, everything should hold together. I do want to be careful, though.

Road Warriors are a tough lot, and in business, that's not such a bad trait to develop. Athletes play in pain. In business, sometimes, Road Warriors have to do the same.

Everyone has an Achilles heel of sorts. For me, it's my neck. After years of marathon running and triathlons, the miles caught up with me. I bid farewell to my love of running and replaced it with swimming, but my neck provides me with an occasional unwelcome souvenir.

7:30 P.M.

Ouch. My neck is killing me. I certainly could have done without a five-hour flight while trying to nurse this thing back to health. I'm praying it lets up a little bit more tomorrow, because I'm awfully tight.

All appears well, except for my neck. I'm in agony. As one who always looks to the brighter side, in a way, I'm fortunate. Although the pain is excruciating, my neck is not locked, as it commonly is when I have an episode like this. This simply means my condition is not obvious to others. No one will know but me.

I remember a saying about runners that I felt at the time. Only a runner would understand:

“Runners are the sickest group of healthy people you will ever meet.”

Stop and think about that quote for a minute. I will add another class of individuals who should understand just as well.

With the lifting, running, sweating, and hustling, I believe the Road Warriors qualify for that quote, as well. We are some of the sickest healthy people you will ever meet.

Depression

Not all pain is physical. No matter who you are, life as a Road Warrior brings you face-to-face with depression. You can't leave the family, accept the pressure, catch the cab and airplane, check into the hotel, and do the job you are traveling to complete without some down days.

Friday, September 26th—1:00 P.M.

I'm airborne and heading home. I think I'd just as soon forget this week. The irony is that it follows such a good week. If I walked on the moon last week, I walked in mud this week. This trip started with a tearful good-bye from my youngest. That was like a shot to the stomach. The cab was late, the plane was delayed, and a nasty stewardess continued my spiral. Then there was the seminar.

Today's seminar just didn't seem to have the spark I normally like. Usually, I think it out, troubleshoot the problem and generate solutions to fix it. I don't really have a clue why this seminar didn't go better.

Time? Maybe. Perhaps they were hungry, but I was the first speaker they saw. Maybe it was the seating. Maybe it was just a somewhat burned-out Rob. The last couple of weeks have been intense. I was up at 4:30 A.M. this morning. I just haven't had a normal sleep pattern with a normal morning in weeks. The other day I looked back over the calendar. I haven't slept in (sleeping past 8:15 A.M.), in almost four months.

Maybe I'm going to go through some sort of a letdown, I don't know, but I know I'm going through something this week.

When we are sick, one of the most disconcerting problems often lies in not knowing what is making us sick. It's almost a relief when a doctor comes in with a definitive answer of some sort.

Road Warriors must cope with depression that often supplies no definitive answers. Yes, the canceled flight or the nasty flight companion can exacerbate it, but sometimes it's a little harder to identify the source.

As a person whose professional study has been mainly related to selling, I know the biggest objection people typically have is, quite simply, a fear of the unknown. Now, I'm no psychologist, but if you are going to try and get through a Road Warrior's depression, it might be a good idea to try and figure out what exactly has you down.

Friday, September 22nd—2:00 A.M.

It's 2:00 A.M. and I'm getting banged around in the back of a cab somewhere near San Diego. Our flight was late, and we now have a long drive up the coast. I've been on the road the entire week, and I feel as if I have gone twelve rounds in a boxing match. Five seminars in four cities will do that to you.

The real battle here, however, is not physical, it's mental. I can get through the lack of sleep and the hours on my feet. The question is, can I get through the emotional battle that seems to be scarring my soul?

I have been playing my picture frame and looking at some scanned pictures on my laptop. It's helping.

The “playing my picture frame” reference comes from a little gift I bought myself from the Sharper Image catalog a couple of years ago. My picture frame, which is small and portable, not only holds a small picture, it plays a twenty-second message. The picture is of my kids, and the message has them hooting and hollering. Isn’t amazing how, for many, the hooting and hollering is annoying? For a Road Warrior at 2:00 A.M., two thousand miles from home, it’s beautiful music.

The laptop pictures require nothing more than a scanner, or a friend with a scanner. I love looking over pictures during the low times. Everybody is smiling, and soon I’m smiling, too. Even pictures of my dogs help.

I’m not claiming these two items will cure your depression. I will say this, though. Until you know what is bothering you, it’s awfully hard to repair it. My down moments are almost always related to missing my family. I leave you with these thoughts to battle your depression in Road Warrior style:

1. What’s getting you down? You’re listening to a writer here, but may I strongly suggest you write it down? Get a pad and write it down. Often, it isn’t nearly as intimidating or daunting if you simply get it on paper and attempt to confront those ugly words.
2. If it’s related to travel—and that’s the single biggest source of Road Warrior depression—can you take a physical souvenir with you to lessen the depression’s impact? Pictures are the obvious choice, but sometimes just a friendly pillow will do.
3. Finally—and you have to behave responsibly with this one—can you set up a reward system? Maybe it’s the thought of watching a movie you taped, maybe it’s a massive Cinnabun

with your name on it, waiting for your return. Whatever it is, it needs to occupy your mind and draw your focus.

Of all the lessons I present, this might be the most simplistic. Depression is a serious health problem that frequently cannot be cured by a Cinnabun. Unfortunately, most Road Warriors—like me—simply can't afford to be depressed. Our survival depends on our ability to overcome these feelings and stay sharp. It's my belief, though, that when the invading thought or thoughts are identified and exposed, it's a heck of a lot easier to design a strategy to do something about it and get it behind you.

Grief

Taking to the road can be challenging enough when things are going right at home, but what happens when they aren't? Unlike a meeting or a presentation in a conference room down the hall, a Road Warrior's meeting or presentation takes place far from home.

During my twenty years of travel, I have had plenty of bad days. I have also had some days that were painful due to a loss of someone I cared deeply for.

Wednesday, February 16th—12:15 P.M.

Tomorrow I go to work for Wells Fargo Bank to deliver a two-day seminar. I'm kind of hungry for work right now so I am raring to go. First class there and back and two nights in downtown San Francisco makes this trip somewhat appealing . . . at least for now.

The one thing that's got me a little off my game right now is the news I heard last night. I got a call around 11:00 P.M. saying that my Uncle Sam died suddenly. He had been battling a couple of problems, but was coming out of it. Then, while watching television, he died. Just like that.

Last night I had a nightmare that was loaded with symbolism regarding his passing. It was a dream that involved a sudden, senseless death. It was a small rabbit that was killed, it was brutal, it was disturbing, and it shook me up a bit. It shook me up because it was the death of my Uncle Sam.

Now I'm on my way to San Francisco and won't even be able to attend his funeral. I hate that about my job and I hate that about travel.

It's easy to say, "The show must go on." But that makes it just too easy. As I look through this entry and look at that dream, I was haunted by more than just the senseless loss of my uncle and the helplessness I felt about his passing. I was haunted by my inability to pay my respects, and although I loved him dearly, not being there for him and his family is something I will have to live with for the rest of my life.

Perspective

Perspective—there's a word I never even understood until I got married. Now I find myself overusing it a bit. "Uh, come on, honey, uh, let's keep things in perspective." As a Road Warrior, sometimes my perspective can be a bit skewed. To close this chapter on some of the emotional letdowns on the road, I think a story of a perspiring clown might be in order.

Friday, February 5th–6:25 P.M.

The day after tomorrow I have my toughest gig of the year. I pull out the "Rollo the Clown" costume and do my thing for eight six-year-olds. I'm feeling something I rarely feel . . . I'm nervous as hell.

That, my friends, is a study in perspective. Here I am, a Road Warrior who specializes in talking in front of hundreds, sometimes thousands of people for hours at a time. Eight six-year-olds had me shaking in my boots.

Monday, February 8th—2:00 P.M.

Thank goodness, my “Rollo the Clown” gig is over. I thought it went well, but I did have one small problem. I came down the stairs and was intense, perhaps too intense. Not that I scared the children, it was just I didn’t slow down. I applied seminar-like energy to this gig. I ran this way and that. I not only danced around the musical chairs, falling and being silly, I danced around the kids who were eliminated from the game. We danced on the side. I took some pratfalls and really hammed it up.

After about fifteen minutes, I noticed it was catching up with me. The movement, coupled with the wig, long-sleeved shirt, and short-sleeved shirt on top, began to heat me up. I started sweating rather profusely. It caused a lot of my makeup to run, but the kids didn’t seem to care much. There wasn’t a whole lot I could do. Even wiping my face would have been a problem, so I economized my movement, dripped for a while, and moved on.

The kids seemed to like it, although I really am extremely insecure about it. Anyway, God willing, the next time Rollo (also now known as “Spitballs the Clown”) makes an appearance will be for grandchildren.

Aren’t moments in life like the “Spitballs the Clown” incident valuable because of their ability to remind us to keep things in perspective? To me, that was one of my most important gigs of the

year for two reasons. First, it was for my youngest child. Second, it served as a good reminder of what's really important in life.

You don't have to be married to gain perspective. You just need to open your eyes, identify, and then appreciate the important things in life.

I just wish I could remember this lesson more often. Here I am, trudging about the country, fighting it out in travel and in business. A delay? A stiff neck? Oh no, my life is ruined! Late for a meeting? That's it, I want off this ride! Spend some time in the air around people you don't know and will probably never see again, and you will gain an amazing insight into the word *perspective*.

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