

PRODUCTIVITY ON THE GO

BY
GREGORY TAGGART

Neen James is a motivational speaker at conferences and business events from Anaheim to Antwerp to Adelaide.

“My job is to open a conference with a high level of energy,” she said. “[I’m paid] to have an incredibly high level of energy, to motivate a room full of people, so I’m personally responsible for that energy. My energy—or lack of energy—is contagious.”

For James, that’s reason enough to fly in a little earlier, to pay a little more for a hotel, to take a little time to work out. In short, it’s reason to make sure she’s rested, ready and packed with contagious energy. Only then will she be confident that on stage and in person, she’ll be

at her best.

“Productivity for road warriors is really about consciousness,” she said. “It’s all about what you do before, during and after you travel.”

If you or your employees travel much you know that it’s easier to talk productivity than to be productive on the road. The distractions can wear you down if you’re not careful. Attending to last-minute details before you leave, negotiating the ever-changing security landscape at the airport and sleeping on a lumpy bed in an unfamiliar hotel often combine to sap your energy before you conduct the first meeting or visit an important client, short

changing everyone involved. That shouldn’t be, according to James.

“When we travel, we can’t expect our clients to have the leftovers.”

SYSTEMATIZE

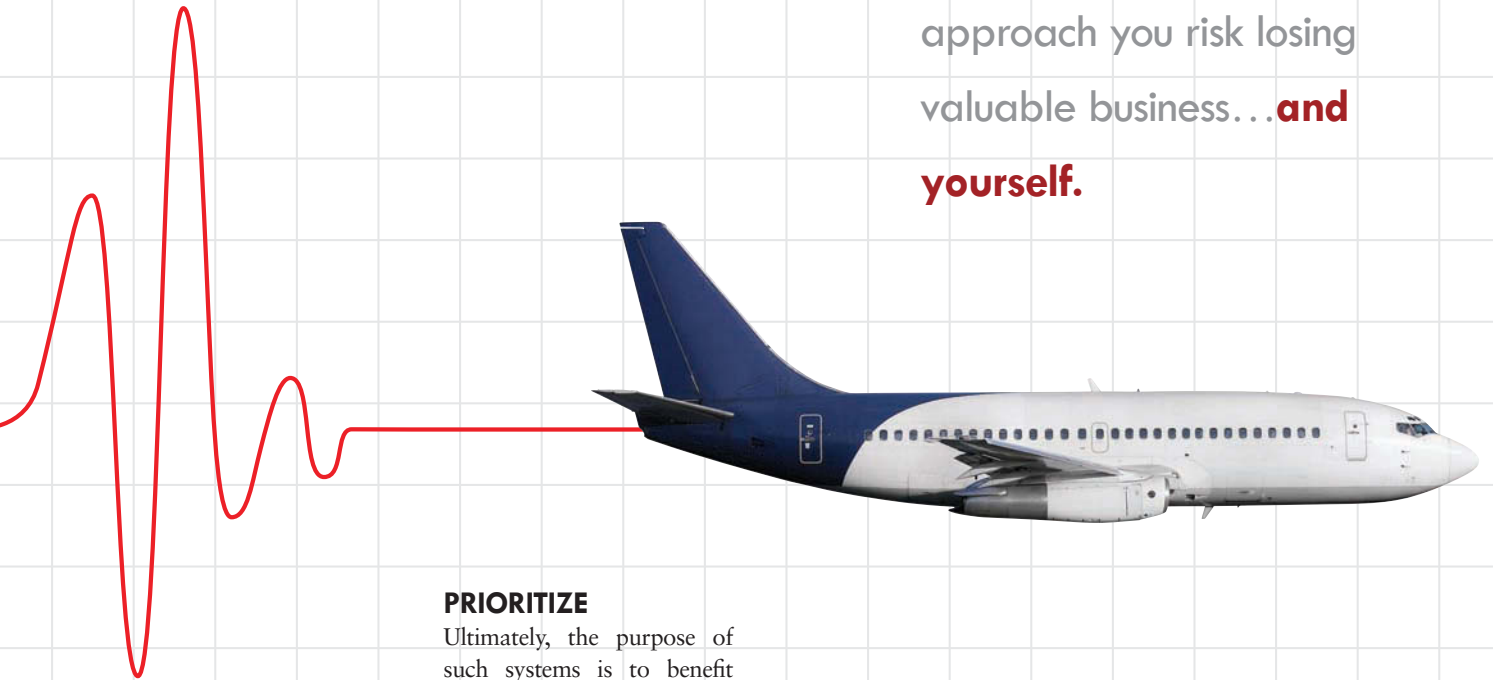
To make sure you serve the dish fresh, productivity experts offer up a smorgasbord of ideas that promise to make you or your employees more effective on the road. For James, president and CEO of Neen James Communications and an international productivity expert, that means being very systematized.

“From showering in the morning to taking the same route to work to paying the bills, everybody creates systems in their lives,” she said. “But when we travel, the unfamiliar becomes a distraction because there’s not a system for it. So to become productive when you travel, you

must create a travel system.”

She’s serious. Her systems include even the smallest details. For example, she always parks on the third level of the garage at her departure airport—“the first level is always full, and the roof is unsafe for a woman at night”—and always places her travel gear on the security scanner conveyor belt in the same order—“shoes on first, so I can put them on when I get through; laptop last, so I can see it go through security.” She even packs her bag the same way every

Staying productive while out of the office has never been easier. But without a clear strategic approach you risk losing valuable business... **and yourself.**



PRIORITIZE

Ultimately, the purpose of such systems is to benefit the bottom line. To ensure delivery, Lawrence Polsky, managing partner of PeopleNRG and author of *Say Yes to Change: 27 Strategies for Motivating Yourself and Your Team During Challenging Times*, uses a system he refers to as “double star,” a way to manage the expectations of you and your boss.

Suppose your department head has given you a list of 20 items to do when you visit the branch office in London. You both realize the list is at least 10 items longer than you can possibly accomplish. What do you do? Polsky suggests sitting down with the department head and listing everything she expects you to do.

“Don’t list dues dates or other details,” he explained.

Then ask her to place asterisks by the items that you absolutely must get done and that will have the biggest impact. Finally, ask her to review the items that have asterisks beside them and double star those that will help other people move forward on their own projects.

“When you get to London, you do the double stars first,” he said. “If you knock off the double stars, you not only have a successful trip, but the people you met with will look forward to your next trip because they know it will be productive.”

SET BOUNDARIES

Business travelers, especially those who travel to distant time zones, can feel like

they’re always on call. Their boss or team sitting in the Denver office at 3 p.m. may forget that the weary traveler could be curled up in bed at 11 p.m. in Amsterdam. And so what; they are on company business after all.

That won’t do, says Kathy Ameche, author of *The Woman Road Warrior* and CEO/traveler-in-chief at womanroadwarrior.com.

“You need to manage expectations with your home office,” she said. “Tell them ‘I’m going to work until noon or 2 p.m. Denver time, and then I’m cut off. If you need to talk to me, that’s my window. And please send me an e-mail or a text to tell me

time. More importantly and because she travels a lot, she has a bag that is permanently packed with travel essentials.

“I have a full set of makeup and toiletries. I have a pre-packed first-aid kit. And I also have an extra set of any kind of charger that I might need. So what I’ve done is created a bag that I literally just have to put clothes in.”

The productivity gains of this simple system will become more obvious every time you don’t have to find a pharmacy in a strange city or forget to charge your phone overnight.

“Productivity,” she emphasized, “is about having systems when you travel.”



what you need to talk about, so we can make the phone call productive.”

According to Ameche, business travelers need to set boundaries for themselves as well—again, especially if they’re changing time zones. Watch what you eat. Calories on the road really do count as much as the ones you consume at home. Try—we know it’s hard—to maintain the same sleep routine you have at home. If you exercise at home, exercise on the road.

Kingdom, an amusement park complete with roller coasters.

“I had never been there before, and I like roller coasters,” he said. “So I squeezed a visit in one night while I was there.”

According to Polsky, it’s important for business travelers to carve out time for themselves. They must make that trip to Allentown or Rome energizing; otherwise, it becomes just time away from their family.

“Find something to do for yourself, enough so the trip is still about work, but so there’s also a rejuvenating factor.”

Need some help? Try *The New York Times* travel column “36 Hours.” Can’t find it there? Talk to a flight attendant, a hotel concierge or research the destination on

finance of west Europe for Wrigley. She loves having a good chat with someone in another part of the world just before she goes to bed. And as much as she might like riding a roller coaster or walking the streets of a strange new city, after 20 years on the road, she prefers people, especially the locals.

“I value spending time with the local folks because that helps me understand what their country is all about,” she said. “A dinner invite from them is more valuable than taking a city tour.”

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Ultimately, you are the expert for what works best for you when you travel, so start paying attention. De Gaetano always has a candle in her hotel room. Why?

“It gives me light,” she said. “I realized that if I enjoy the light of a candle when I’m home, why not enjoy it when I’m travelling?” Precisely.

For De Gaetano, the hotel room is more familiar and therefore more like home because she always sets the book she’s reading on the table next to her bed. And instead of leaving them in her suitcase, she places her favorite perfume, creams and other familiar items around the room. That feeling of home helps her to be more productive.

Ripping a page from Ameche’s and Polsky’s books, De Gaetano is adamant about one routine she seldom gives up.

“I need time to do my yoga and my meditation, even if it means getting up earlier,” she said. “It gives me the kick, the mental energy and strength to keep going during the day.”

What gives you that kick? **one+**

When traveling, the unfamiliar becomes a distraction. To remain productive on the road, create a travel system.

“If you don’t get the sleep, don’t eat right and if you don’t get the exercise you’re used to, you’re going to be incredibly unproductive on the road,” she said.

ME, ME, ME, ME

To the seasoned road warrior, even travel to distant, exotic locations can become humdrum, no different than commuting into Manhattan every day from Weehawken. Consequently, the work product suffers. So if flying into Rome’s Aeroporto Fiumicino has ceased being exciting for you, Polsky suggests breaking that routine by establishing a new routine, one he calls “me time.”

To illustrate, Polsky tells about the time he found himself scheduled to speak in Allentown, Pennsylvania. One of the first things he did was find out what he could do for “me time” in Allentown. To his delight, he discovered Dorney Park & Wildwater

Wikitravel. Still can’t find something? Go looking for it. Polsky and a colleague did just that late one night in Istanbul.

“We had just finished working and had a full day starting the next morning at 8 a.m.,” he said. Exhausted, they both wanted to just go back to the hotel to sleep.

Instead, his colleague suggested they take a half an hour and walk around Istanbul to see what it was like. That half an hour—30 minutes that didn’t cost his employer a thing—formed one of his best memories of the trip.

“Whether it’s a walk through a part of town you’ve never been to, a visit to a new restaurant or the purchase of a certain souvenir, there are a lot of things you can do quickly that will make the trip special for you,” Polsky said.

People make the road special for Munich-based Nunzia De Gaetano, director of SC

GREGORY TAGGART is a writer and lecturer specializing in finance, art and design and travel. He’s also contributed to *Bloomberg Markets* and *Wealth Manager*.