

Professional Sleeping For Cabin Crew

APATS2018 speech by James Nixon

(PowerPoint slides are in **BOLD**)

“I was the Purser, walking with the crew to the aircraft and we were stopped in the aerobridge for a random drug test. The Captain and I were tested, and we both passed. No alcohol or cocaine, but I was off my face on Zanax, a legal Benzodiazepine.

Ultra Long Haul flights killed me. I was a walking zombie. I had been OK flying short haul, but when I started flying across the Pacific, I couldn't handle it. I was going to have to resign.

Then I was given one Zanax tablet, and I slept for 13 hours straight. Just what I needed. Just what the Doctor ordered.

Soon I was Doctor-shopping, on a four year downhill spiral. In the end I could only sleep three hours at a time, and was taking Zanax just to “feel normal”.

I detoxed in hospital for 8 days ... and have been clean for 123.”

Those were the words of a Cabin Crew member, who, I must add; does not work for my old airline.

27 million Zanax prescriptions will be filled in the USA this year, making it the 23rd most-prescribed pharmaceutical medicine in that country.*

And it was announced in Australia yesterday, that deaths from Benzodiazepine overdoses over the last 15 years are averaging 472 a year.

[Slide of JN]

I am James Nixon, author of five books and a retired A380 Captain.

I flew for over 31 years, had about the same number of hours as Sully when he went into the Hudson River, and Captain Shah from MH370.

I flew Boeing 727s, Airbus A320s, 321s, 330s, 340s and 380s and have worked in Australia, Malta, England, Vietnam, Bahrain and Dubai. Besides flying, I studied Management, and Acting.

You can't make a career out of flying, be it as a Pilot or Cabin Crew, without getting to grips with sleep.

Quality sleep, when you want, for as long as you want. I call it: Professional Sleeping.

Since Accountants, MBAs and Risk Managers have taken over the running of airlines, there a whole bunch of experts in middle management, sitting around in head office, giving themselves awards for generating the most ‘productive rosters’ each month. Getting Cabin Crew to work harder than ever before.

Because the airline industry is so young, and because they are yet to learn from history—a glance at the Mining Industry would reveal that these problems have been solved by smart people a century ago—the airlines are classic silo businesses.

Recruitment stands alone, trying to put names in the spaces on the spreadsheets being produced by Cabin Crew Training, who are filling the requirements of Cabin Crew Operations; while HR exits those crew who can’t survive the pace.

The Cabin Crew churn-rate in many airlines has increased, as many give flying away as a bad joke; leave and have to be replaced by new people.

Unlike our generation, who fell in love with the smell of jet fuel as kids, and would fly for free if required; Gen Y —the Millennials— youngest 24; and Gen Z —the i-Gen— oldest 23; aren’t in love with flight. For them they have seen no change. A computer is a computer, a phone is a phone, all planes - and cars - look the same.

In my day cabin crew had a gap-year before starting university, took-up flying to get away from their family, or an enthusiastic boyfriend, and made it a career, maybe retiring to start a family.

These days they choose a gap year after university, before entering their chosen career, and come to the airline to see the world. Why stay at a back-packers when you can stay at the Sheraton in New York? In my time at Emirates I had cabin crew who were qualified Doctors, Scientists, Accountants and Lawyers from 130 nationalities.

So that side of the business hasn’t changed in recent times. Neither has the cabin crew from a poor background who sees this industry as an escape from the farm. They will stay forever.

So why the increase in the churn rate? Why are they leaving?

“I am so tired! This job is killing me!”

I got so sick of spending flights telling my FOs and Cabin Crew how to sleep properly, I wrote a book about it.

One retired A380 Captain wrote a review:

“I gave up a career that I loved, in large part because the night shifts, and subsequent fatigue, were killing me! Had this book been available, I might still be flying”

What did it cost our airline, to replace him?

As trainers, it’s your responsibility to teach them how to do all of this job. Not just safety and security. Not just first aid and cabin service. Not just responsible service of alcohol and presentation. But all of the job. And that includes sleep.

There are twenty factors that affect your sleep, to a greater or lesser degree:

Alcohol.

Stop after two glasses or you’ll sleep like a dead person for 90 minutes, then spend the rest of the night bouncing off the walls.

Bed Bugs.

Check your Room, Never put your suitcase on the bed, use the stand, keep suitcase closed at all times, put dirty washing in sealed plastic bags.

Body Clock.

Learn your 90 minute sleep cycle, observe daily body cycles, plan for jet-lag. Make your body work for you - not against you.

Coffee.

Takes 15-30 mins to work then stops you sleeping for 6 hrs.

Use it strategically, before you need it. It’s a diuretic, so you need to drink an equivalent amount of water.

Illegal Drugs.

Despite the fact that taking the wrong pill could cause you to sleep forever —they usually stop you sleeping properly.

To expand your mind, use a book, podcast or audiobook instead. And just say No.

My whistle-blowing Zanax user told me that one cabin crew told him that he couldn’t do an Ultra Long Haul flight *“without Tina.”*

My mate said: *“I thought he meant he liked listening to Tina Turner in crew rest. It turns out that Tina is code for crystal methamphetamine.”*

There’s a new campaign that just started in the U.S.: “One Pill Can Kill”

Legal Drugs.

Sleeping pills and Benzodiazepines are used after major traumas. None are an option for aircrew whose career lasts more than two weeks.

They should never be used with alcohol and are banned in some countries.

Like that fantastic restaurant near the hotel in Osaka, once Cabin Crew find something they like, they go there every trip.

We are addicted to things that make our lives better, so the chances of stopping your sleeping pills after two weeks —as recommended by their manufacturers— are zero.

And everyone drinks alcohol with them, which is a no no.

Just don't start.

Fitness.

Simple exercises and stretches. 30 mins brisk walking a day, every day, forever. Keeps depression at bay and helps you sleep better.

iPods, Audiobooks & Apps.

One of my theories on life is: '*If you can't win - CHEAT*' and cheat you must, if you are to make sleeping your number priority in life. Audiobooks, Podcasts, Sleeping Apps and Sleep Music. All these can be used to ensure you are ready to sleep when you want.

Massages.

Before and after ultra long-haul flights, after any long day really, a relaxing massage can prepare you for sleep like nothing else.

Happy beginning ...

Mosquitoes.

Get educated, Get serious, Get safe. 216 million cases of malaria occurred in 2016, resulting in 445,000 deaths. Not to mention the other mosquito-transmitted diseases: Dengue Fever, Nile Fever, Encephalitis and Chickungunya.

Despite airlines training their crews, and providing Malerone for free, against Malaria, there is an undercurrent lie being spread in cabin crew ranks that Malerone is more dangerous than malaria.

This is not true. I can only find one case of liver damage in the world caused by Malerone, and the jury is still out on the cause. Like the flu vaccine, Malerone is upgraded each year, and the current version is OK to take almost continuously.

One thing is for sure.

If you are trying to sleep in a hotel room in Accra, Ghana; and there is one, fat, female, pregnant, Anopheles mosquito in the dark with you ... sleep will be very hard to find.

Natural Remedies.

Are all fakes: Melatonin and Valerian. They don't work for Cabin Crew in a moving sleep cycle roster, and only cost you money. The best result is that they will fool you into believing they work.

Nicotine.

Affects your sleep. The smoking habit, which is harder to break than heroin in many people, even wakes you up, to be satisfied. Yet, stopping is easier than you think.

Rosters & Diaries.

Are the key to getting control of your life. Give up the electronic diaries and get back to paper. Plan sleep like you plan your work. Spend a couple of hours planning your month when you get your roster. Within three months you won't believe how great you feel.

Snoring is a sign you need to change your life:

- lose weight
- stop smoking
- reduce drinking
- cut out tranquillisers
- take up exercise or,
- go back in time and change your parents!

Tackling snoring leads to better sleep.

Sleep Apnea, on the other hand:

Shortens your life. The good news is that you won't out-spend your retirement savings.

Get medical help, and don't give up on the CPAP machines.

Stress.

Do a simple stress test. Take action, learn the tips & tricks, to reduce stress. Get help. You'll sleep like a *baby*.

Wetting the bed every few hours and then wake up screaming ... but you know what I mean.

Too Much Sun.

Cabin crew from western countries, and especially colder ones, think that lying beside the pool in the tropics, without sunscreen, is clever.

It isn't.

Sunburn prevents restful sleep, then skin cancer kills you.

Too Little Sun results in long-term sleep issues, and people from Arctic countries have to take special measures to be able to sleep in summer, when the sun never sets, and in winter, when it never rises.

They call it the SADs, Seasonal Affective Disorder, a type of depression associated with the seasons. Get help, to be able to sleep better.

Water.

Well-hydrated humans sleep better. It also reduces cellulite and makes your skin look better. While cabin crew complain about working in a dry environment, few drink enough water, often saying that they are worried about having to go to the toilet during crew rest breaks.

The thing is, your wondrous human body will adapt after a couple of weeks.

Weight & Sex.

Getting control of weight issues leads to better sleep, and sex induces sleep, *so they tell me!*

That's the twenty factors that affect your sleeping.

But it's how you trick your subconscious, and the tips required to get to sleep, that we have to also teach our crews.

Prepare for sleep. **[Sleep Preparation]**

I am going to reset your sleep clock. Here comes a yawn. And many of you are going to yawn too.

Y A W N

And in one and a half hours, at 11:45, you are going yawn again.

Then again at 1:15.

And again at 2:45.

And later, at 4:15.

And then, at 5:45. We are surfing the 90 minute sleep cycle wave.

At ten past eleven something great is gonna happen. You are gonna be in bed. Beside you is a pad and pen, and you have written down the things in your mind. Hotel dressing gown blocking-out the crack under the door. Pitch black room, three alarms set, earplugs in, sleep mask on your forehead, phone on airplane mode. TV off. Room slightly cool, you will be snuggled-down reading a book by one solitary light. It doesn't matter what the book is. The light is reflecting off the pages.

Suddenly the sleep wave comes, and you are about to yawn.

Book down, light-off, eye-shade on. Sleep.

By planning your sleep before a flight, using tips and tricks, you know you are going to sleep naturally for, say six and a half hours. You block off eight hours, and wake naturally.

With three alarms set, your subconscious can relax, it knows that you are going to wake up and doesn't have to keep bothering you all night ... *'You awake? Remember, you have to go to work soon.'* It does that all night.

Three alarms, the last one is gonna wake up the whole neighbourhood. It knows that you are going to wake up, no matter what, so can let you sleep deeply.

By using these tricks you'll wake up naturally, all month, and never hear an alarm. Except for those flights where I want you to wake up after three hours for strategic reasons. Maybe two or three times a month.

You need to get your **Room, Bed, and Sleep-Position** right.

To use **Self-Hypnosis & Relaxation Techniques**. Even Pre-Sleep Affirmations, with the goal of **waking-up naturally**.

Learn how to create a great state of mind, at work. To **fake it til you make it**. So when someone asks you how you are ... say fantastic!

You soon will be.

Someone who makes each flight zoom along; energising your fellow crew-members, not dragging them down by complaining about your roster.

You need to master sleeping in the **Crew Rest [Coffin]** Compartment. Not lying there, wide awake, in a coffin.

And use the **NASA Nap**. 24 minutes that will change your life. Forever.

Discover that the **Layover Destination** starts on board the aircraft. Take control of your personal security, learn the truth about elevators, and hotel fires. Answer the questions so your subconscious will let you relax.

Really understand **Jet Lag**. These days it's only really for passengers, since we're back at home before the dreaded Third Day. By becoming an expert you can help your passengers.

Learn how to survive the **Expat Lifestyle**, if you have to go overseas to work.

Surviving A Long Flight.

The actual experience of being in a aeroplane for a long time has little to do with sleeping, or jet lag. You can fly from Moscow to Johannesburg for 14 hours and 30 minutes in the same time zone and still feel like you've been hit by a truck. I discovered '*23 Tips To Survive A Long Flight*' but they have little to do with **Professional Sleeping**.

Professional Sleeping is all in your mind.

They say that an audience like this will only remember 3 things. They lie.

Before our much-needed coffee break, if you are anything like me, you will be lucky to remember my name. James as in James Bond. Nixon as in President. Google me. Email me and let me know if I am right.

To make a successful career in aviation and look this good when you retire after 31 years, remember these three things:

- 1 Sleep has to be your **#1 priority**, plan your sleep.
- 2 Three **alarms, earplugs and eyeshades**.
- 3 **[No Electricity.]** No phones. No TV. No Ipad. No Computer.

Oh, and number 4. There are 4,416 airliners up above us right now. A million passengers. And, lets say, 40,000 cabin crew. How many are taking *Zanax* to *feel normal*?

Most airline crashes happen on the first sector after an overnight.

Are your crews ready?

Have they slept, professionally?

I hope so.

[Contrail Slide]

*Footnote: *Valium (Diazepam) vs. Xanax (Alprazolam) Comparison* click [HERE](#)

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[CAUTION: Language warning!]

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James Nixon is available for speaking engagements: [HERE](#).
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