better

THAN YESTERDAY

Here's a quick reminder of how this challenge is going to work.

The first thing I want to stress is, this is not an 'all or nothing' kind of thing! The aim of this challenge is really simple - bring 'Sleep' up to the top (or near the top!) of your list of priorities.

Now, I know what you're thinking! OF COURSE sleep is high on my list of priorities. But the reality is, as much as we'd all love more sleep than we're getting, it's such an easy thing to sacrifice in favour of getting more work done, spending more time with our loved ones, or staying on top of the house.

And while all of those things are important, that tiny (or big) bit of sleep debt we're accruing night after night adds up to us not being the people we really aspire to be.

But - it's important to not get super-desperate about sleep either. Because that's a fast way to ensure we make it into a bigger problem than it is currently.

SO, THE 'RULES' OF THIS CHALLENGE ARE:

Don't try to make huge changes over the course of the next 21 days. If your ideal sleep 'number' is 8 hours a night, but you're currently getting 6 per night, aim for 6.5 hours a night this week.

If you have a shocker of a night in there somewhere, no worries! Try again the next night!

If you're currently getting very little sleep during the week, and then doing a big 'catch up' on the weekend - try and even that out (ie more sleep during the week and a little less on the weekend). There is a thing called sleep jetlag that makes the 'big catch up' thing a little counterproductive.

WHAT TO DO FOR THE NEXT 20 DAYS

Read the sleep tip and set your intentions for sleep that night. That's it.

At the end of 21 days my hope is that, without a huge amount of effort on your part, you will have made the subtle changes you need to your daily/nightly routine to facilitate getting just that little bit more sleep than you are getting right now.

SET YOUR INTENTION

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TODAY'S TIP - HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO EXPECTATIONS?

Did you know different personality types approach habit change in different ways?

The ever-wonderful Gretchen Rubin has created a quick and easy quiz to determine how you will engage with habit change. Take the test at **bit.ly/habitsquiz** to find out which of the following you are.

Upholders form new habits easily. With regard to this sleep challenge, if you're an Upholder, it's generally enough that you've made the commitment to getting more sleep. You'll simply make it happen from here.

Questioners will only form a new habit if they've fully bought into the 'why' of it. Usually by doing a lot of research. For the purposes of this sleep challenge, I've tried to give Questioners all the 'whys' here.

Obligers need accountability. So, while it's good for Obligers to fill in the 'set your intention' form linked from this email each day, it's also important for Obligers to head to the Better than Yesterday group each day and publicly state their intentions there too.

Rebels - you guys hate being told what to do! You even hate telling yourself what to do! That's why there are no hardcore 'rules' with this challenge. But, if you choose (because Rebels like feeling like they have a choice!) to set your intentions each day via the form link below ... you'll find you very naturally, and with little effort, start to change your behaviour to get more sleep.

SET YOUR INTENTION

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THAN YESTERDAY

TODAY'S TIP - WHAT'S THE BEST TIME TO GO TO BED?

Figuring out the optimal time to go to sleep is all about reverse engineering.

I like to get up at 4.15am (each to their own, right?!) and 7 hours of sleep is my magic number. This means I need to be asleep by 9.15pm. I know it usually takes ~ 45mins of reading to wind down my brain and get me to sleep. Which means getting in bed at 8.30pm. My husband and I like to watch one episode of Suits each night and an episode goes for ~40 minutes. In order for me to actually get into bed at 8.30pm:

• The kids have to be in bed by 7.30pm.

• I need to have brushed my teeth and done all my 'pre-sleep pottering' before we start watching Suits (no later than 7.45pm)

• Our living area, which I need to be in order before I go to bed, must be in a state for me to do a very quick 5-minute tidy once Suits is finished.

• I need to jump straight into bed once I've done that tidy. No checking of emails or 'Just quickly checking Facebook'

• As you can imagine, this all takes a bit of organisation. And I don't manage it every single night - but I manage it most nights because I've built solid routines around our afternoons and evenings.

More on that tomorrow :)

—— SET YOUR INTENTION ——

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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TODAY'S TIP - BEDTIME ROUTINE

When my kids were babies, each night before bedtime we did the same things in the same order. Dinner, little bit of playtime, shower/bath, one episode of their favourite show, brush teeth, story, bed. (Actually, when I think about it, this is still their routine!)

This routine was useful for two reasons:

1. It gradually wound down their brains and their energy levels.

2. They fell asleep faster, not just because they'd been wound down, but also because their bodies knew what was coming.

Routines work exactly the same way for adults, but we tend not to utilise them. For many of us, evenings are a very ad hoc affair:

• Dinner at different times.

• We might watch one episode of our favourite show some nights, and some nights we might watch three.

• Some nights we take our phones to bed with us .

• Some nights we'll try and squeeze an extra hour of work in after the kids go to sleep.

While it's not possible to schedule every evening to pan out exactly the same way, we can all instigate a 'wind down' routine that goes for 30-60 minutes each night. Mine involves reading before bed. For you it might be 30 minutes pottering around the living doing a tidy up.

It doesn't really matter what it is so long as it's something you can do most nights, and it's something that quietens your brain.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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TODAY'S TIP - WINDING DOWN THE ANXIOUS MIND

Is there anything worse than being dog-tired and sinking gratefully into bed at night, only to find out your brain's decided to have a party and invite everything you're worried about over for a big chinwag?

No, there really isn't.

Quieting an anxious mind is hard and if this is an ongoing problem for you, I have these tips to offer:

- **Exercise** - it's not just for your body, it's for your mind. Getting outside in the fresh air and moving your body for 20-60 minutes is ridiculously effective for dissipating worries and calming the brain (thank you endorphins). Just be wary of exercising intensely within 2 hours of bedtime. It will have the opposite effect.

- **Free-write** - each day, sit down for 10 minutes and write non-stop. The non-stop bit is the key. Literally write whatever is in your head and if there is nothing in your head, write 'I don't know what to write now I don't know what to write now.' Eventually something will come out. Free-writing helps clarify what's really worrying you, gives you a sense of control over those things and allows your brain to take a break at bedtime.

- **Listen** - there is a podcast called 'Sleep With Me'. It's a lulling, droning, distracting boring bedtime story, designed to put you to sleep. The 'distracting' bit is key here. When you've got a worried mind, lying in bed asking it to shut up just doesn't work. Your mind needs to be distracted and the stories in Sleep With Me are just enough to do that.

- **Read** - this is my preferred method of distraction (although I do also exercise every day). I choose a fiction book (non-fiction turns my brain up, not down) and read for ~45 minutes each night. The fiction takes me away to another world and is highly effective in winding my brain down.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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THAN YESTERDAY

TODAY'S TIP - SHOULD YOU SLEEP LONGER ON THE WEEKENDS?

In a perfect world, we'd all go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning. Yes, even on the weekends. Because that's what our bodies would most love us to do.

But, that's a perfect world. And I don't know anyone who lives there.

The reality is, we want to stay up later on weekend nights ... and we have the ability to sleep in later too. And we should. The only thing we need to watch for is something called 'sleep jetlag' where we're doing a massive sleep catch up on the weekend, or our go to sleep/get up times are shifting by more than two hours. This shift/catch up leaves us feeling unrested at best, and jetlaggy at worst.

Just something to look out for and be mindful of :)

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight?   _____

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3. What do you need to do today/tonight to get the sleep you need?

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TODAY I WANT TO TALK ABOUT CHALLENGE-INDUCED SLEEP OBSESSION

In the Facebook group, Katie asked:

Is anyone else finding they are feeling a bit self-obsessed with their new sleep-focused routine? I have never thought through my day so thoroughly before! And my poor husband is not really seeing me as he goes to bed later & gets up later & I am the opposite. I feel this is going to have an effect on our "intimate" time together. Has anyone found this?

Here's what I answered:

It's something that's very easy to happen when you shift your focus to any specific. And I definitely don't want people obsessing over this challenge! That's why I haven't built accountability into it in the form of 'You tell me how much sleep you're going to get - and then I am going to hold you to it!'

The good thing about this challenge is it will show you the things your prioritise ahead of getting good sleep ... and it will force you to take a look at those priorities.

So if you're choosing to sacrifice sleep in order to have better time with your partner, all to the good. As long as it's a very intentional decision :)

So many of our habits are mindlessly built. The idea of all the Better than Yesterday challenges will be to help us all be more mindful of the decisions we make. Quite often I have to mindfully decide to sacrifice sleep, or exercise, or time to myself for something else. I just ensure that 'something else' is really worth it.

Like staying up late to watch Roger Federer - *so* worth it.

—— SET YOUR INTENTION ——

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR BEDROOM

As always, the following is 'perfect world' stuff. If you're able to set up your bedroom this way - brilliant. If certain constraints prevent you from doing so ... that's real life!

1. TEMPERATURE

Your body temperature needs to be able drop at night to both induce sleepiness, and also stay asleep. I know many people abhor air conditioning as environmentally unsound, or too expensive but I believe that even if you don't have air conditioning in the rest of your house, a unit in just your bedroom is one of the best long-term investments you can make for your general wellbeing and health. Poor sleep affects everything in our lives.

Fans are also a good (and cheaper) alternative to air conditioning units. Wrapping an ice pack in a tea towel and placing it behind your neck is another little trick that can help get you to sleep in hot conditions (when you are sans air conditioning).

2. YOUR BED

I remember the day my husband and I upgraded from the ollllllllddddd mattress we'd been sleeping on for the better part of 10 years to a proper one. I was stunned at the difference it made to how well I slept. Again, it's an investment. The price difference between a run-of-the-mill mattress and a good one is significant. But as far as 'price per wear' goes ... we sleep on our mattresses every single night, right?! Same goes for pillows. I've always struggled to pay $100 for a pillow when you can pay $20 for one. But given I'm currently finding my not-quite-right pillows are messing with my sleep a bit - I'm about to bite the bullet and pay good money for proper ones.

3. CLUTTER

I know there are good few people for whom their bedroom doubles as their office. This makes switching from work mode to sleep mode really difficult. First of all, the clutter is distracting and angstifying. If it's the last thing you're seeing every night before you go to bed, it's going to be hard to switch off. Second of all, it prevents your brain from connecting 'bedroom' with sleep. We're talking subtleties now - but every little bit counts when it comes to getting good sleep. If your bedroom is also your office, consider alternative spaces in your home to set that office up (if possible).

4. SCREENS

TVs, phones, computer monitors - all these devices emit EMFs which can interfere both with you falling asleep, and how deeply you sleep. Additionally, all screens (TVs, laptops, phones and tablets) emit blue light - something that should be avoided in the last hour before sleep. If you have these things in your bedroom, and you're only turning them off or putting them down just before bedtime, you might want to reconsider :)

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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LET'S TALK ABOUT SCREENS

I briefly mentioned screens in yesterday's update but they do need a whole email to themselves. Research has now proven quite conclusively that the blue light from TV, computer and mobile device screens disrupt sleep because it suppresses the production of melatonin. (Melatonin is the sleep-inducing hormone.)

Screens, however, are a reality of life in 2017. So, what can we do to stop them messing with our sleep?

Get off all screens an hour before bedtime. You can do this by reading before bed or pottering around the house doing a tidy and brushing your teeth etc. In short, ensure your pre-sleep routine doesn't involved screens. Definitely do not take your phone into your bedroom and 'quickly check Instagram' before you go to sleep!

If you simple can't get off screens in the hour before bed, try using some blue light glasses.

iPhones now also have a 'night shift mode' that can be enabled to reduce/remove the blue light they're emitting.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight?   _____

2. How many hours did you get last night?   _____

3. What do you need to do today/tonight to get the sleep you need?

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LET'S TALK ABOUT WAKING IN THE NIGHT

I can count on one hand the number of times I've ever slept all the way through the night. As the owner of the world's tiniest bladder, if I wake in the night (which we all do - but most of us go straight back to sleep), I have to get up and go to the toilet.

After years of practice, I've perfected the art of falling back to sleep immediately after doing so and the key is not turning on any lights. So tip one here is - if you too are waking in the night (whether it's for your bladder or your kids), trying to avoid turning on any lights. If you HAVE to - make it a lamp rather than the fluro bulbs in your ceiling. If you have the ability to dim the lights right down - do so.

What if it's worrying that has woken you? You have to be proactive. It's better to pull out your book and read for 15 minutes, put the Sleep with Me Podcast in your ears or quickly journal out those worries, than it is to lie there for two hours at 3am cursing your brain.

If it's the heat that's waking you - try putting a cold pack behind your neck.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight?   _____

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LET'S TALK ABOUT THE TIMING OF DINNER

Dinner is typically the largest meal of the day and, if consumed too close to bedtime, it impacts our ability to fall asleep as our bodies work hard to digest the meal. Which is why, in the perfect world, we'd have that last meal a solid 2-3 hours before bedtime.

Also keep in mind that if you've eaten early (we eat dinner at 5.30pm!) then your tummy might be grumbling by the time you want to go to sleep. A light snack (some crackers, or toast with butter) shortly before bed is totally fine. In fact it's recommended. If you're hungry, it's highly unlikely you're going to be able to fall asleep!

SET YOUR INTENTION

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LET'S TALK ABOUT WHY EXERCISE HELPS

So long as you are not a chronic insomniac, studies have shown quite conclusively that as little as 10 minutes of daily aerobic exercise (walking, running, swimming, cycling, rowing etc), helps you sleep more deeply, and for longer.

Why?

The most basic reasons are that exercise tires your body, reduces stress levels and quietens anxious minds. Exercise also releases endorphins which are natural relaxants.

SO, WHEN SHOULD YOU EXERCISE?

Whenever you can fit it in really.

If you're exercising close to bedtime, however, keep a lid on the intensity. A high-intensity spin class will leave you a bit wired and it'll take a while to come down enough to sleep. Lower intensity exercise close to bedtime can actively promote sleep because it will raise your body temperature, followed by a drop in body temperature once you stop. (That drop in body temperature promotes sleepiness.)

SET YOUR INTENTION

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LET'S TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL AND SLEEP

For many of us, a glass of wine or two in the evenings is standard. It helps us relax. And it also helps to get us off to sleep. Right?

Well, researchers agree that, yes, alcohol does help (healthy) people fall asleep, and sleep more deeply initially. But, it also reduces our REM sleep - the stage of sleep that is deepest and most restorative. When our REM sleep is compromised, it makes it hard for us to stay focused and on task the next day.

If you suffer from anxiety (like I do), alcohol can worsen your anxiety which, of course, makes it VERY difficult to fall asleep.

So, what to do?

Consider limiting alcohol to two nights a week (Friday and Saturday for example). And, where possible and practical, have your last drink 2-3 hours before bedtime.

SET YOUR INTENTION

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TWO WEEKS DOWN, ONE TO GO!

So, we're two weeks down. Today, in addition to setting your sleep intention for tonight, I'd love you to answer the following questions:

What have been the biggest challenges you've faced in getting the sleep you need?

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Is there anything you can do to overcome those challenges?

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Is there something you've learnt during this challenge that's surprised you?

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— SET YOUR INTENTION —

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight?   _____

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED SO FAR

So, we're into the final week of our Sleep Challenge and I thought it would be interesting to share what I've learned about my own sleep to date!

I'm just not getting as much sleep as I thought! I knew I wasn't getting my 'optimal' 7 hours, but I thought I was close. The reality is, there are so many more things than I thought that interrupt my sleep, delay me falling asleep or wake me up early (kids, husband, the fact I have to read myself to sleep so I have to choose my bedtime reading carefully). So I'm getting closer to 6 hours than 7 more often than not.

The fact I wake up at 4.15am every morning (even weekends) to exercise, write and have time to myself (and the fact my brain wakes me up at that time whether my alarm does or not) means if I have a bad night, there is never any chance to catch up.

Despite not getting my 7 hours every night, I am really functional during the day. The main difference between 6 hours of sleep and 7, for me, is that around 5.30pm, I completely run out of patience with my kids. Without fail, by the time they go to bed, I've spent the last couple of hours being super-grumpy with them. This is not ideal for me because the only time I see my kids during the week is in the mornings and after school.

What can I do with the above knowledge? Not sure at the moment. I am pondering!

SET YOUR INTENTION

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WOMEN, HORMONES AND SLEEP PROBLEMS

The female hormone progesterone is a sleep-promoting hormone. During pregnancy, certain points in the menstrual cycle and also during peri-menopause (*Kelly waves*), progesterone levels can drop ... and sleep can be impacted.

The thing is, poor sleep also impacts progesterone levels negatively, so a vicious cycle can ensue.

What can you do if you think out of whack hormones are impacting your sleep?

- Control the things you can control (such as all the other factors that impact on our abilities to get good sleep).

- See your doctor for further advice.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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better *THAN YESTERDAY*

LET'S TALK PILLOWS AND MATTRESSES

Years ago, back when we were fresh to the workforce (and thus had very little disposable income), a friend told me she'd spent $100 on a pillow. As I stood there gaping at her, she justified it:

"Kel, as the sales lady pointed out, I sleep on a pillow every night. In a little over three months, the 'price per wear' on this baby will be less than $1. Would you pay $1 a night for good sleep?"

Mmm. I have to admit, I wasn't convinced. But, keep in mind, at the time my then 6 foot 6 boyfriend (now husband) and I were sleeping on a double bed (double!) with a mattress that was at least 10 years old. I wasn't really an aficionado!

Fast forward to six years ago.

It was finally time to upgrade to a new bed. King Size! But more important than the size of the bed was the mattress. Or so the sales person at the store told me. Again, I wasn't convinced, but I did love sleep and if a kick arse mattress could help with that, I was willing to give it a try.

I nearly died the first night we slept in the new bed. It was like sleeping on a cloud. I resolved never to quibble about paying good money for a good mattress ever again.

Except ... I continued to sleep on cheap pillows. Yes, I know!

Until two nights ago.

Doing this sleep challenge with you guys had made me resolve to do something about the pillows I was sleeping on. I even went so far as to go to Myer and have a look at some. But, I got overwhelmed by all the options and had conniptions at the thought of lashing out big time on a pillow only for it to be not very good.

That's when Matt from Ergoflex told me he'd send me one of their new pillows. It arrived on Friday and I tried it out for the first time on Saturday night.

My. God. It was divine. And I don't say that lightly.

Guys - I'm not telling you to buy Matt's pillows or mattresses specifically. (Although I can now wholeheartedly vouch for the pillows! And I hear the mattresses are amazing.) I'm just saying - if your mattress and/or pillows are dodgy, and you have the means ... spending good money on good ones might be one of the best investments you'll ever make in your sleep.

SET YOUR INTENTION

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HOW TO THRIVE ON VERY LITTLE SLEEP

7 hours.

6 hours.

Oh man, I'm down to 5.5 hours now.

4.

Oh wow. Tomorrow's going to be a shocker.

We've all done that countdown at night when we're having trouble getting to sleep. So, when I read Hal Elrod's Miracle Morning book, I found an experiment he did quite interesting.

No matter what time he went to bed at night, and no matter how little sleep he was looking at getting, he told himself (before going to bed) 'Tonight I'm getting all the sleep I need to function well tomorrow.'

In short, instead of freaking out and telling himself 'Oh no, I'm not going to get enough sleep tonight, tomorrow's going to be a struggle,' he did the opposite.

And you know what? It works. It's the technique I use every time I find myself staring down the barrel of a short night's sleep. I've used it when I've taken the red eye flight to the East coast and had to stay awake through meetings the next day. I've used it when my kids have been sick. I used it last week when my husband woke me up at 1.30am to tell me about the big storm that was raging and I never managed to fall back to sleep.

It's definitely not a long-term solution for those of us getting a tiny amount of sleep every single night. But for those one-off situations, it really does work a treat :)

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

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3. What do you need to do today/tonight to get the sleep you need?

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IS THERE AN OPTIMAL TIME WE SHOULD BE GOING TO SLEEP?

According to sleep research - yes.

Ideally, we'd all be going to sleep somewhere in the four-hour window between 8pm and midnight. Exactly where in this window you fall depends on whether you're naturally a night owl, or an early bird. Night owls can go to sleep later in that window; early birds ... earlier.

But wait - isn't sleep from 2am to 9am the same as sleeping from 10pm to 5am? Apparently it's not. Closer to dawn, we start to experience more REM sleep. This sleep is not as deep and restorative as non-REM sleep, the kind we get in the darkest hours of the night. When you miss out on that really restorative non-REM sleep - you can sleep a solid 7 hours, but still feel horribly sluggish the next day.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

2. How many hours did you get last night? _____

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THAN YESTERDAY

SCHEDULING TIME TO WORRY

Of all the things that can affect our sleep, anxiety is the most debilitating. The easiest way to deal with anxiety is distraction, and this is the reason our worries keep us awake. We're able to distract ourselves from them during the day by keeping busy. When we lay our heads down to sleep at night, it's often the first chance our brain's had all day to yell at us about all the things we're worried about.

How do we deal with this? My favourite method is scheduling time to worry (way ahead of sleep time). This can take the form of:

- Going for a walk and ruminating on everything that's bothering me

- Free-write for 15 minutes using the prompt 'What's bothering me right now.'

- Meditating for 15 minutes and instead of trying to empty your mind, let it fill with everything that wants to yell at you. Don't engage with those thoughts, just let them sit there. You'll find that once you've ackowledged them, but not engaged with them - they will evaporate. Poof!

Bottom line - if we avoid our worries all day, they will come back to bite us at night. Setting aside time during the day to worry has certainly helped me. I hope it will be helpful to you too :)

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

2. How many hours did you get last night? _____

3. What do you need to do today/tonight to get the sleep you need?

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WHERE TO FROM HERE?

You all know I love a bit of synchronicity and a piece of that happened this week.

My one hope for this challenge was that it would bring sleep up to the top of our priority lists. Instead of it being the first thing we sacrifice when life gets a bit crazy, I wanted it to be the first thing we doubled down on.

Life for me in the past month has definitely been a little crazy. Three unexpected things have combined to make my days very tight and pressured and, in the past, I would have found it so easy to jump back on the computer each night to catch up. Which would impact my sleep. And then see me walking around like a cranky zombie the next day.

Because of the sleep challenge, I've instead used the evening hours (limited as they are for someone who goes to sleep at 9.15pm!) to wind down and prep myself for a good night's sleep. In doing so, I've found it easier to be more focused and productive during the day, which ended up negating the need to catch up at night.

But that's not the synchronicity I'm talking about. I'm talking about this article that was published in Time Magazine just this week. It's long but worth your time to read as it really highlights a strong body of scientific evidence behind the need to prioritise sleep more highly. One notable excerpt:

"Scientists are learning that shortchanging sleep can compromise nearly every major body system, from the brain to the heart to the immune system, making our inability--or unwillingness--to sleep enough one of the unhealthiest things we can do."

So, where to from here? My hope is that doing this challenge has shown you the value of prioritising sleep, and helped you make more intentional decisions about getting good sleep every night.

We may not actually get that good sleep every night, but, by at least setting the intent to do so, we'll always be ahead of the game.

SET YOUR INTENTION

1. How many hours of sleep are you aiming for tonight? _____

2. How many hours did you get last night? _____

3. What do you need to do today/tonight to get the sleep you need?

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