

# Baltimore smart CEO

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2100 Aliceanna Street, 2nd Floor

Baltimore, MD 21231  
Phone: 410-342-9510  
Fax: 410-342-9514  
www.smartceo.com

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## Required Reading for Growing Companies



### caskey's corner

By Wayne Caskey  
for Smart CEO

on the *go*

You've just left home in the taxi on the way to the airport. You're settling down as the cab pulls onto the interstate. Then you see it—a massive traffic jam. Your stomach knots. You may miss the plane and this most important business meeting you've been planning for months. You urge the cabbie to hurry, but you know there isn't much he can do.

As a traveling CEO, you confront such scenarios every day. Time crunches multiply, especially now with added security measures at airports - making travel increasingly hazardous to your physical, emotional and spiritual health.

And, the stress of travel does not end at the airport. Once you get to your hotel, everything may be handled efficiently, but it's quite impersonal. The familiar faces and comforts of home are absent, and the most available default activities are additional preparation for tomorrow's meeting, business reading, or watching TV.

So, what's the bottom line to these experiences? The scrambled, frazzled feelings are evidence of

your vulnerability to situations beyond your control. Even without the spectre of terrorism, events out of your control deepen the feeling of vulnerability. This is especially true for CEOs who have a good measure of control of their environment. Vulnerability creates hyper-vigilance, leading to hyper-sensitivity, exhaustion and even paranoia. The fact of terrorism and the unceasing media hype surrounding it merely serve to heighten the atmosphere of victimhood that already shrouds travel. And, at the end of the road, the traveler is met, not by comfort, but by emptiness and loneliness.

As I've flown around this past month on trips to Florida, Ontario, Minnesota and California, I've sampled a number of these indignities. While flying over Kansas at 37,000 feet, I asked myself what viable coping mechanisms exist for a traveling CEO.

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A former client of mine, David Hennage, is Executive Director of the IEEE Computer Society. With more than 100,000

members, it is one of the largest not-for-profits in the country. While its headquarters office is in Washington, D.C., many of its operations are located in Los Alamitos, California and it has an Asian office in Tokyo. Its quarterly board meetings are held at various locations throughout the U.S. and, because of its status as a subsidiary organization of IEEE, David attends IEEE board meetings throughout the world.

David's duties while he is on the road are what you might expect, e-mails and cell phone calls to and from staff in all Society locations in his role as a "key player" in decision-making within his organization. He makes numerous formal presentations to his Board and others, which involve considerable preparation. He finds himself in many informal situations as well where he's continually thinking on his feet, interacting with others and building relationships inside and outside his organization.

He's also involved with IEEE, where he has no formal role, a "fly on the wall" who must occasionally speak forcefully when required

by circumstances.

What David seeks in these multiple roles is to be close to the people he's with, yet self-contained. He needs to be alert, but not emotionally embroiled in the sometimes chaotic circumstances he confronts. So, he wants to be "warm" but he also wants to be "cool." Neither victimhood, nor emptiness or loneliness serves his objectives.

So how does he seek to maintain this balance in his life on the road? He divides his strategy into physical, and emotional and spiritual aspects.

#### Physically coping with continual travel

In his airline travel, David tries to place himself "as high in the airline status hierarchy as possible" to avoid as much pre-flight and flight stress as possible and maintain his vegetarian diet. He drinks a lot of water to prevent dehydration and avoids alcohol altogether in flight. While this doesn't insulate him from delays, cancellations and traffic jams, he's able to deal with them coming from a somewhat calmer atmos-

phere.

When he arrives at a destination, he seeks to drink less alcohol and eat less than when he's at home. He limits intake, even though a typical day almost always includes meetings for breakfast, lunch and dinner, followed by meetings after dinner, meetings after the after-dinner meeting, and then getting together for a social drink after that!

Sleep is important for David. He requests a quiet non-smoking room with the space and configuration that promote the sense of peace he seeks.

Particularly when he's jet-lagged, David gets sleepy in the late afternoon. While he generally avoids caffeine, he takes a cup of green tea to stay awake.

David finds exercise helpful for maintaining a sense of well-being. He practices a physically demanding form of yoga, but any vigorous form of exercise will do—swimming in the hotel pool or working out in the hotel gym, renting a bike or taking a brisk walk. Exercise promotes

deep breathing, which is a bodily reminder that inside we are not what is going on outside. Exercise reaffirms our capacity to function in a sometimes chaotic world and releases endorphins in our bodies which give us a feeling of well-being.

### **Emotionally and spiritually coping with continual travel**

Lonely and without comfort, it's easy to feel vulnerable and volatile when things go wrong, as they often do. I remember staying at a very expensive hotel in Manhattan where the all-night rattling of garbage cans felt like a personal assault.

When chaos occurs, it's helpful to remind ourselves that we are not the chaos, that it exists outside of us. Using several of many techniques available to affirm that fact, David meditates, and practices deep breathing and his physically demanding form of yoga called Ashtanga. To recreate the setting he has for his practice at home, he brings along his yoga mat, bowl and candle. He's

recently begun going to yoga classes on the road (to find a spot go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and reference yoga and the place where you are). David enjoys the classes because they promote his inner peace while the shared activity bonds him with others. He says, "My humanity gets nurtured this way."

If you're not into meditation, deep breathing or yoga, try a simple affirmation, such as "This too shall pass," or "This is stuff, not me." Borrow from Victor Frankl and remind yourself "I can choose my attitude in any given set of circumstances..." Affirmations enable you to separate yourself from outer circumstances and affirm your inner power to deal with them. Even an inspiring novel or movie can have this effect.

David's bond with his wife also helps across the miles. He sends her greeting cards and they talk often when he's on the road. Sometimes he'll find a note she's placed in his luggage. On his laptop screen, he can

pull up a picture of the retreat center they're building in Tobago.

Keeping bonds fresh with loved ones is its own reward, and it keeps one closer to that part of oneself which deeply appreciates the warmth of others, in all settings. This can function as an antidote to emptiness and loneliness on the road, and make friends of strangers.

As a CEO, your attitude is extremely contagious. A smile or a kind word at the right time can spread through your organization like wildfire. And many in your organization depend on you for a positive vision all the time. Paying attention to those physical, emotional and spiritual activities which promote your positive attitude is important all the time, and particularly when you're on the go.

*Wayne Caskey is a three time CEO who is now an executive coach. [www.waynecaskey.com](http://www.waynecaskey.com)*