

WHOLE HEALTH MATTERS

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Michael Corey at the Scioto Audubon Metro Park downtown.

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HUMAN SERVICE CHAMBER LEADER PREFERS WORKING OUT AFTER MOST CALL IT A NIGHT

Q&A

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When it comes to exercise, Michael Corey is definitely a night owl.

We're talking long after the executive director of the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County and his wife have fed their 3-year-old son and gotten him tucked into bed.

And long after he and Lori, who is clinical director of community housing at the YMCA of Central Ohio, have eaten dinner together and hung out for a couple of hours before she heads off to bed.

And even after Corey has written his morning newsletter for the CEOs of the member organizations he works with. That started during the early weeks of the pandemic.

"That alone was the best thing I could do for my mental health with

my day job and stressing over what our agencies were going through, what their employees were going through, what the people they were serving were going through," he said.

"I'm a processor through writing. I struggle to express myself in any way other than with words. I have no artistic skills. I have to write."

And once he closes his laptop, his workout can begin.

"I exercise around 11:30 at night," Corey said. "I hop on the bike and I do some free weights. I absolutely love that."

"And that's actually how I've always preferred to work out. I've always rather worked out at night whether it was high school or college or inconsistently in all the years since then."

And although he would never describe himself as a morning person, Corey is up at 7 a.m. for breakfast and to take his son to preschool before heading into the office.

We talked this month about physical and mental health coming out the pandemic.

Our conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

Tell me about your son. We kept waiting for the terrible twos and then the terrible threes, but we've lucked out. And he's a good sleeper, which helps, too. He's curious and independent and affectionate and nice and interesting and funny. We're very lucky.

And and one of the things that I'm grateful for is that the pandemic forced us into a situation where we would have abundant time with him. We were with him every waking moment for the first 18 months of his life.

Are you at home or in your office? In the office. We're in a peculiar circumstance because we're a

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MICHAEL COREY

peculiar kind of organization. When I was working by myself with a part-time executive assistant when the pandemic started, I could work from wherever as long as I had Wi-Fi. I worked from home, my Mom's house.

Then when all of the adults got vaccinated and Elijah got into childcare, which was downtown at the time, it made sense to just come into my office and be by myself.

I started coming to work five days a week in May of 2021 and that cadence has stuck.

How big is your team? Three, but we are about to have four. We're going to figure out what we wanna do with that and I think they want to come into the office four days a week.

How was your mental health during the pandemic? We could talk about that for several days. We had that blissful four-month window with our newborn before Covid changed our lives.

So from a mental health perspective, we were very scared. From what I had read, I knew that this was gonna be bad and prolonged, but I thought prolonged would be a year at most.

Back to writing our CEOs – being able to help organizations was tremendously cathartic for me. And still is.

Tell me about how the the mental strain manifested. Was it anxiety? Depression? For me, it was anxiety. I'm an anxious person by default. It's one of my best and worst traits. And I can usually channel it into something productive. That's like my fuel, much to my doctor's chagrin.

Did that get better? It did until the end of January 2021, right after the insurrection attempt. I started having what felt like a heart palpitation. I ignored it for a few days and I was enormously stressed about whether we were actually going to have this presidential transition and what all of this could mean for our work and for our people and everybody.

So I ended up going to my doctor at the end of that month and he looked at me and he said, 'Whatever you're doing, you need to stop doing it. You've gained weight, your blood pressure is high.' And he asked, 'How much coffee are you having every

day?' And 'How much sleep are you getting?'

It was a lot of coffee and very little sleep.

And he said change that up. So I got back into some exercise and back into getting more sleep.

And now I don't have any more than two cups of coffee a day.

What's your exercise of choice? Has that evolved over time?

So the first year of the pandemic in particular, we were walking every day. We would finish the workday, shut our computers at about 5:00 or 5:15, throw our then baby in the stroller and just go outside and walk for an hour. That was wonderful.

Just being in nature and paying more attention to everything around us – that was a benefit of the pandemic for us. There was catharsis in that alone.

Then when winter started approaching, we chose to invest in a Peloton. I was skeptical that I would enjoy that. I'm not a cyclist.

But I really enjoyed having someone yell at me for 30 minutes, telling me to pedal faster. And that has continued to be something that I use on the regular.

Someday I'll get a treadmill and watch West Coast basketball games. That's perfect for me.

When you work out, are you listening to music? I usually have a game on or a movie on low so if our kiddo wakes up in the middle of the night I can be responsive to that.

I made the mistake early on in the pandemic of putting headphones on with music and I couldn't hear anything. And then I missed a full 1 a.m. situation.

But if I'm walking or running outside, I've got music on and it is as loud as possible, thumping away in my ears.

What's your routine during the day?

I usually take Elijah to school in the morning, so Lori picks him up. Then we have a handful of hours where all we're doing is hanging out with him.

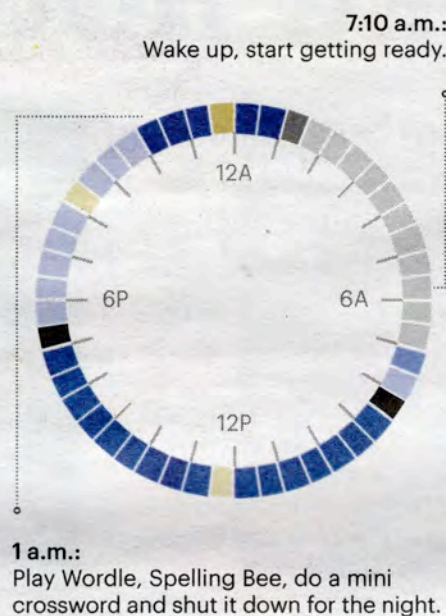
He won't let Lori put him to bed, so I put him to bed, which I secretly love. I probably get out of his room about 8:15.

Then Lori and I eat, we unwind, we hang out, we watch a little TV. Then

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Michael Corey's typical routine:

- Sleep
- Work
- Commute
- Meals
- Family/social
- Get ready
- Exercise/recreation
- Self-time



she goes to sleep and I start working around 10.

I work out around 11:30 and I work for another hour or so until about 1:00.

Then I do a crossword, do the Wordle, do last read of the news and I fall asleep probably around 1:30.

Tell me about writing at night.

There's just a lot to do. We want to be helpful and that's the way I can be helpful to a lot of folks.

I like being able to take a step back at night and process and think and not have emails pouring in and calls and all the things that are happening and getting in the way of being able to have concentrated, unfettered thought.

And that's your me-time. It is. It's the only child in me that needs those couple hours of alone time every night.

What else do you do for yourself? I'm

becoming a green thumb.

Excuse me, I am someone that aspires to have a green thumb.

I try to be a good steward of the sliver of land that we've got in Columbus. That has been enormously good for my mental health as well.

I love being outside and digging in the dirt, which is something I inherited from my mom, who is not an amateur. She's a pro.

What else do you love? I love to read. That is absolutely one of my passions. I do not read the number of books that I would like, but I find myself reading a lot of magazine articles and long-form essays and things like that.

I need to go back to the library and ... read more books. ... One of my mental health projects for this year is to get back into fiction as opposed to non-fiction.

How many hours do you think you work in an average week? I would say about 55 to 75 hours, depending upon the week.

The one thing I've tried really hard to do is not work on the weekends. I work on Sunday nights, but that doesn't count, right?

Would you consider yourself an optimist? Yes. But I was much more of an optimist 10 years ago. My optimism is couched in more realism now.

But at the end of the day, I always try to make myself think about the optimistic element of whatever it is that I'm processing.

What is your go-to favorite thing to eat? So I can hear Lori laughing at me in my head as I confess to you what this is.

It's a very simple recipe for a salad that I inherited from my maternal grandmother. You throw in a bunch of your preferred kind of lettuce – I prefer green leaf and romaine and some red leaf or whatever.

Then add lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, garlic salt, pepper and then an assortment of veggies – peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions.

My mom throws in parsley. And I always like to add tuna.

I ate that in my bachelor days about five days a week. And now I probably get it about once a month.