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Alumni Unscripted: Tips for First Time Business Travelers

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Business travel. It sounds wonderful—going to glamorous events and dining at 5 star restaurants. You get to travel places you may have never been and may get to network with CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Cool, right?

Travel can be taxing if you don’t prepare for each trip you take. This hit me like a bus (no pun intended) on my first business trip with my colleagues to a tradeshow in Las Vegas. In my mind, I would get to explore a city I had visited briefly in the past, dine at all the famous restaurants and stay out late when we had a night off. Little did I know what to really expect. I wasn’t prepared for the 10 miles of walking during a tradeshow each day and giving our company’s elevator speech at all hours of the day with prospective and current clients. The reality is you have to be on your game from the moment you wake up to the time you shut your eyes.

I’m here to help you learn from my mistakes. In this post, you’ll find suggestions on how to better prepare for business travel.

- **Keep all of your receipts in one place.**
  Create a folder titled “Travel Expenses.” Save all of your receipts and consider jotting a brief note on who was present or why you are expensing a particular item. Better yet, if you can afford to open a credit card for business travel expenses—do it (unless your company provides you with one). You’ll be able to discern personal expenses from business expenses and provide more thorough financial statements for your accounting department.

- **Make a list before you leave.**
  Like any personal travel, making a checklist before your departure will only make your life easier. Don’t wait until the last minute to pack your travel bag; otherwise, you’ll probably forget extra business cards, or worse, your plane ticket! Invest in a travel bag for your toiletries so you can grab them on the fly. And, be sure to get a good night’s rest before your excursion.
• **Purchase comfortable walking shoes.**
  I can’t stress this tip enough—especially if you’ll be on your feet a lot. I tracked how much I walked for a 3-day show on my iPhone. Would you believe in 3 days at a 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. show I walked 26 miles? And, would you believe me if I said I walked it barefoot? That’s how it felt because I wore the absolute worst pair of shoes I own. Since then, those have been tossed in the trash and I’ve invested in shoes with support. To give your feet additional support, name brand or any off-brand inserts are your friends—and you’ll thank me later. You can find cheap affordable inserts or shoes at any supermarket or department store.

• **Download mobile apps and sign up for rewards.**
  This should be one of the first things you do before you book a room or a flight. There seems to be a rewards program for just about anything. Most hotels and airfare businesses will have rewards programs that allow you to accumulate points and a “status.” In my first year of travel, I earned almost 15,000 “miles” between my airfare and hotel purchases. Check with your company to see if they allow you to keep those miles for personal use or if they are applied to business travel. You never know if your travel could earn you a trip to the tropics!

• **Be productive with your down time.**
  I’m not talking about responding to emails or completing the project you started last week, because you’ll probably be expected to complete these even while on the road. When you get back to your hotel room, consider jotting down items that you’ll need to complete once you get back into the office. Or, spend some time on self-improvement. Download an audiobook about productivity or how you can be the best version of you! Make the most of the time you have to yourself while on transportation or in hotel rooms.

• **And it goes without saying, know your limits.**
  Many events you’ll attend may have alcohol provided. While it may be appropriate when you’re out with your friends, limit yourself in professional situations. And, be cognizant of when you can lend others the same advice. You don’t want to be known as the employee who blabbed confidential company information or missed your early morning flight. Whether you’re with the president of the company or one of the summer interns, you never know who is watching your actions.

With these tips, you’ll find yourself becoming a business traveling pro in no time! What are your favorite tips for staying productive and organized during business travel?

**McKenzie Decker** graduated from Western Michigan University in 2016 with a bachelor’s degree in marketing. While attending WMU, she interned with VP Demand Creation Services, a printing/publishing and marketing execution company in Traverse City. Upon completion of her internship and graduation from WMU, VP Demand Creation Services offered Decker a full-time position where she is now the company’s internal marketing manager. She is heavily involved in helping foodservice manufacturers find the marketing support they need, as well as being deeply committed to helping associations find new members. Decker currently lives in Fife Lake, Michigan, where she enjoys camping and exploring with her boyfriend and dog, Luna.