

GREG YAITANES BELIEVES SELF-CARE IS UNDERRATED

THE EMMY-WINNING PRODUCER-DIRECTOR, A HIGH-TECH EARLY ADOPTER, BELIEVES IN WORKING SMART VIA EXHAUSTIVE PREP, A STREAMLINED WORK PROCESS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

WRITTEN BY STEVE CHAGOLLAN

To say that Greg Yaitanes is organized is like saying Stephen Hawking had a knack for numbers. As a co-executive producer and director on HBO's *Game of Thrones* prequel, *House of the Dragon*—which just ended its first-season run on HBO and employed as many as 4,000 pros at a time—he'd have to be.

A self-described data nut who admits that he loves “process almost more than shooting,” Yaitanes’ obsession with prep and efficiency dates back to his days as exec producer-director of *House* (2004–12), where he quizzed every crew member about what they would change to make the set a better place to work. The result was a position paper that he convinced NBCUniversal to pay him a million dollars to implement.

“We were looking at ‘Why are we spending 20 minutes to take this wall out three times a day?’ So we just kept changing things,” he says.

Using the mantra that “Every fucking second counts,” Yaitanes and his team ended up saving the company two weeks of man-hours by shaving 18 to 22 minutes off each day of production. It seems minuscule on the surface. But added up, these efficiencies translated into 18 days—or \$10 million—in production cost savings on the following season, all by modifying their sets.

Yaitanes was also ahead of the curve in using technology to streamline production. He invested in Twitter early on and gave talks in Silicon Valley, equating the methodology of producing with building a tech start-up.

“One of the reasons I got involved was I knew



(Twitter cofounder)

Biz Stone and followed him through some of his other companies,” says Yaitanes, “and he knew that there would be a connection between tech and Hollywood.”

Yaitanes’ first exec producing gig was on the short-lived series *Drive* (2007), which earned the first Emmy nomination for content aired exclusively online. It was also the first show in TV history to feature a live Twitter session during an episode. (The handle “@foxdrive” still exists.)

It was the dawn of the iPhone, with apps challenging more analog forms of editing, storyboarding and the like, and diminishing your carbon footprint was a relatively new concept that hadn’t taken hold. “I thought, ‘What can we use to not have paper,’” recalls Yaitanes. “I thought, ‘If I

don't need paper, I don't have a copier. If I don't have a copier, I don't need to fix it.' I was looking at where I could find nickels under the couch to put back into the production."

But for all his technical know-how and meticulous prep, when it comes to maximizing resources, Yaitanes admits that it's "all about the food."

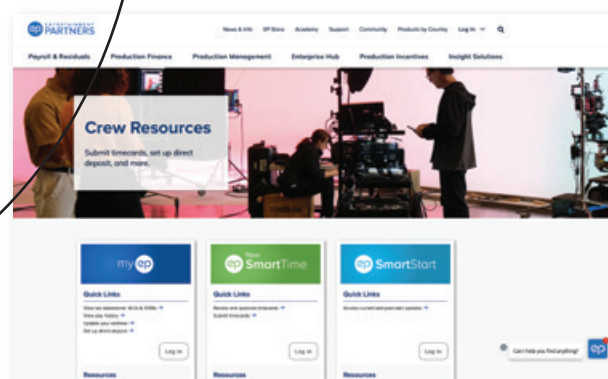
"We have a secret Instagram of how bad the lunches were on *House of the Dragon*," he says. "We're thinking, 'Why is the food so bad?' And someone said, 'It's not made with love.' I think when you're feeding the masses, you can't do that. But as a form of self-care, (proper nutrition) puts me in the right mental space."

Just as he does mental prep to visualize his day, Yaitanes does meal prep to keep his energy level high. "I eat light," he says, "because I find that if you eat wrong, it affects your ability to think and your ability to solve problems. It also wears you down."

Yaitanes also firmly believes in a healthy work-life balance, despite an industry that tends to glorify insane hours. "I don't believe there is a nobility in working 24/7," he says. "The first line producer I ever worked with said, 'This business eats families.' I have put ambition and hours, the job, the show, in front of everything, and I think that feeding your mind outside of work is important. A nightly wind-down is important."

FIRST THINGS FIRST

"I've got my Tumi Sling bag and I've got my Yeti lunchbox, the perfect one that will stay cold for a whole day of shooting. Those are my weapons for going to battle every day."



FUEL FOOD

"I bring oatmeal, a favorite bowl and a favorite mug everywhere I go since I can always find hot water (*House of the Dragon* shot in the U.K., Spain and Portugal.) I also bring my Ninja blender since I (drink a smoothie) almost daily at lunch to stay light on my feet. I just keep as much of a routine as I can, so that my full mental energy from the time I wake up is put into the show."

FAVORED APPS

"We used Box and Pix for our approval system this year and to keep all the information organized and in one place. One of the things that needed to happen was streamlining the approval process for *House of the Dragon*, because there are so many departments. So I got a dedicated person whose job it was to collect materials that were going into folders and funnel them to (showrunners) Ryan Condal and Miguel Sapochnik or to the directors. With script changes, especially with something as high-security as that, we made sure we used Scenechronize so that people are alerted."



ON MY PERSON ALWAYS

"I have an iPhone 13 Pro 6.1 because I don't like having a big smart phone. I use my iPhone so much as a camera that I hate having a big bulky thing in my hand. I often use it as a tool to communicate between setups if I'm directing, and when I'm producing, it's my lifeline. It's also where I keep my audiobooks and photos, and it's how I access apps like Box, so I can instantly call up an episode and the concept art for what we're doing. And I always make sure I've got some sort of portable charger battery.

"My AirPods are also my lifeline. Between takes or during lighting setups or just observing, I'm always playing an audiobook. I also carry lens wipes since dirty glasses drive me insane; Kosas lip balm; Super Goop sunscreen; and Hu Vanilla Crunch bars, a less guilty version of Nestle Crunch."



ACTIVITIES TO INSPIRE AND ENERGIZE

"I'm usually driven when I work overseas, and that gives me time to absorb and learn. I'm not super chatty. I need a lot of quiet around both sides of the day, either to get in front of things or to decompress. So I listen to a lot of audiobooks and podcasts. *The Mythical Man-Month* is a book I especially found helpful in terms of team leading and management. Specifically, the power and giving up power as a producer.

"I also listened to George R. R. Martin's *Fire and Blood* on audiobook; took the Eurostar to Paris twice to see the Damien Hirst exhibit; made frequent visits to the Tate, specifically the Cy Twombly room. Because of the time change I was able to keep my LA Pilates practice over Zoom. And an end-of-day tequila is a good way to call it quits and stop answering emails."



SLEEP SANCTUARY

"I actually went to the U.K. with a year's supply of Moldex earplugs in my suitcase, plus my favorite eye mask. I believe 'If you have one, you have none,' so I bring my creature comforts on location." ■

