

White Paper

Why it Pays to Ensure Adequate Sleep for Your Employees

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Introduction:

What do renowned leaders Jeffrey Immelt, Martha Stewart, Indra Nooyi, and Richard Branson all have in common? They have all publicly stated that they regularly get only 4-6 hours of sleep per night. While each of these individuals are clearly leaders in their own organizations, the discourse that they have created about sleep within their own organizations holds that sleep is a luxury that must be sacrificed for success.

This, in fact, is far from the truth. Sleep is a resource to be strategically leveraged by companies to allow their employees to perform at their best—creating a culture of leadership, creativity, confidence, and good decision making. According to the National Sleep Foundation, in order to leverage sleep as a resource, the average person needs 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Americans and individuals within industrialized nations throughout the world are getting less than this. When surveyed, about 29.9% of Americans stated that they had gotten less than 6 hours of sleep the previous night.

Sleep is important not only because there are individual and company benefits but because it reduces the chance of negative events from happening in the workplace. Individuals who are well rested have better quality work because they have a better mood, are more focused, have better mental performance, and feel less fatigued and stressed at work. Sleep also reduces memory decline, workplace injury, cyberloafing, and unethical behavior, while *lack* of sleep increases the likelihood of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and depression. Organizational leaders are beginning to mention the importance of sleep in their own ability to thrive. Arianna Huffington, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Eli Broad all cite the importance of a regular sleep schedule in their lives, as it allows them to lead and work at their highest capacity.

Unfortunately, many organizational leaders do not fully understand the health and organizational benefits of modeling healthy sleep schedules for their company's performance. The habits and values that leaders model and live out in their lives become embedded within the company's value model. Habits like sending messages through the night or staying at work late or arriving far before the workday starts sends a message about the workplace expectations for employees. By modeling better sleep habits, leaders can empower their employees to live out better sleep habits. Better sleep habits will enhance not only individual performance and reduce the rate of negative workplace incidents but they will increase organizational cooperation and trust.

So, how can my company promote better sleep habits for employees?

Here are seven ways that business leaders can help enhance their company's ability to encourage healthy sleep patterns. By enhancing and increasing sleep, organizations reap all the benefits of healthy and rested employees. Each tip includes a power strategy as an example of how to implement it into your organization.

1. **Create a work culture that values sleep:** Create policies and actions that back up what you say and model as a leader about the importance of sleep.

Power Strategy: Even if you craft your emails late at night or before work in the morning, use an email feature that allows you to send them during work hours, like Boomerang for Gmail.

2. **Leverage your wellness programs to improve sleep habits:** Wellness programs are well situated to encourage and improve sleep habits. Utilize your health programs to reduce health issues that can cause difficulty sleeping, like smoking or obesity, and encourage activities that improve one's sleep, like meditation and yoga.

Power Strategy: Enhance your wellness program by including options like a smoking cessation program; a stress and anxiety reduction program; a weight reduction program; and wellness strategies, including meditation, yoga, and exercise. These enhancements will promote lifestyles that encourage higher quality sleep.

3. **Allow employees separation from work when the workday is finished:** Research by Leslie Perlow, the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership in the Organizational Behavior program at the Harvard Business School, found that 26% of people sleep with their phones, 70% check their phones within an hour of waking, and 56% within an hour of going to bed. However, time away from technology and separation from work can allow employees to de-stress and prepare for sleep.

Power Strategy: Encourage employees to “unplug,” scheduling time away from their phones—even if it is only one night a week. Research on consultants, who turned off their phones for only one day a week after work, found that this simple act improved employee job satisfaction, communication, learning and development, and service to customers.

4. **Create nap rooms and encourage their use:** Even a few minutes of napping can significantly reduce the likelihood of an employee making a mistake at work. A number of the best leaders and innovators throughout history, including Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Eleanor Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy relied on frequent naps.

Power Strategy: Allow employees to take short, 30-minute naps during dips in circadian rhythm, which occur around 3-4 PM. Naps longer than this can actually make employees groggy, rather than refreshed and energized. Companies like Google support this practice by providing nap rooms to their employees, where they can nap when they want.

5. **Limit the number of hours employees are scheduled to work:** Employees should not work more than 12 hours per day or more than 60 hours per week and they should not be permitted to work more than 80 hours per week.

Power Strategy: Put limits in place so that employees cannot work more than a certain number of hours per week and allow for time off after long red eye flights or international travel with large time zone differences.

6. **Try to reduce shift work:** Avoid work schedules that fight natural sleep patterns, especially shift work that necessitates constant changes in sleep schedule. Disruptions in sleep schedules and patterns result in a much higher rate of accidents.

Power Strategy: Switch service and call center work that can be done virtually so that the person working is doing so during the day.

7. **Keep sleep in mind when you create a disaster plan:** Plan to include sleep into a disaster plan. Employees will be able to sustain their best performance over time through a crisis recovery when they are well rested.

Power Strategy: Coordinate schedules so that employees are rotated off and have time to sleep. Utilities executives during Hurricane Sandy provided cots and dark rooms for employees during disaster recovery. This allowed for recovery efforts to be sustained throughout time for several weeks after the hurricane.

*This white paper was written by Kaitlin Keane based on “Why Sleep is a Strategic Resource.”

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