



Part 2 - Employers Must Deal With Sleep Deprived Workers

Insights

5.26.15

Most people acknowledge that they are not getting enough sleep and that this lack of sleep affects everything from their work to their marital life. Groups such as the National Sleep Foundation regularly announce that at least one-fifth of Americans sleep fewer than 6 hours a night and are sleep deprived. The National Sleep Foundation's 2008 "Sleep in America Poll," found that 29% of Americans fall asleep or become very sleepy at work. Phillips Consumer Lifestyle 2010 "Workplace Power Outage Sleep Study" found that nearly one-fourth of 1,000 U.S. office workers admitted to stealing a nap at work. We know better, but we skip sleep anyway. Likewise, management's response ranges from disinterest to actively encouraging employees to skip sleep and get in more hours.

I'll share below documented conclusions about how sleep deprived employees harm the workplace.

- In a 2009, Journal of Psychology article on the Mining Industry, University of Washington Foster School of Business Professor Christopher Barnes found that people, on average, slept 40 minutes less than normal on the Sunday night after first switching to Daylight Savings Time. On the next work day, there was a 50% increase in severe accidents resulting in injuries, medical attention and absence from the job, and an overall 6% increase in workplace accidents.
- Barnes found in another study that fatigued employees are more likely to "cyber loaf" and check out websites when they should be working. Similarly, late night use of smart phones for work was documented to result in a less engaged and effective employee in the office the following day.
- Manufacturing and construction employers are effectively using LEAN philosophies to more effectively complete production. However, as Susan L. Kone, Ph.D., found, the LEAN staffing model may be at cross purposes with the business strategy and actually cause more production errors.
- Properly carried out, LEAN manufacturing holds out great promise. However, some employers simply reduce the number of employees without determining how to improve productivity through training, engineering, and work practice changes.
- One's judgment and self-control declines when one is fatigued. Dr. Barnes' 2013 Harvard Business Review Blog concluded that "sleep deprived people are more likely to cheat."
- University of Kentucky professor and DeWall lab director, Dr. C. Nathan DeWall, has established that metabolic depletion "lack of energy" and sleep deprivation limits one's self-control.

- Nancy Shoot pointed out in a March 2013 MPR piece that:

“People eat more when they’re short of sleep. And that impulse to snarf when sleepy can cause quick weight gain ... people who are allowed to sleep just 5 hours a night ate more than when they received 9 hours of sleep. In only 5 days of shortened sleep, they gained almost 2 pounds!

- In an August 2013 MPR article, Professor Penelope Lewis, author of “The Secret World of Sleep: The Surprising Science of the Mind at Rest,” explained that we replay and consolidate memories while asleep. Put simply, sleep less, and remember less.
- In an April 2015 Ted talk Russell Foster explained that:

Our ability to come up with novel solutions to complex problems is hugely enhanced by a night of sleep. In fact, it’s been estimated to give us a 3-fold advantage. Sleeping at night enhances our creativity.

By now, like many executives, you may agree that sleep deprivation causes problems in the workplace, but what are you going to do about it?

Put simply, employers have to incorporate admonitions to sleep into training and mentorship. Employees, in particularly managers and professionals, will not sleep more until they learn that their failure to get enough sleep will affect their professional success.

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