

Why companies should insist that employees nap

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Good luck, right?

But here's the reality: naps are a powerful source of competitive advantage. The recent evidence is overwhelming: naps are not just physically restorative, but also improve perceptual skills, motor skills, reaction time and alertness.

I experienced the power of naps myself when I was writing my new book, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*.

I wrote at home, in the mornings, in three separate, highly focused 90 minute sessions. By the time I finished the last one, I was usually exhausted—physically, mentally and emotionally. I ate lunch and then took a 20 to 30 minute nap on a Barcalounger chair, which I bought just for that purpose.

When I awoke, I felt incredibly rejuvenated. Where I might otherwise have dragged myself through the afternoon, I was able to focus effectively on work other than writing until 7 pm or so, without feeling fatigued.

When Sara Mednick, a former Harvard researcher, gave her subjects a memory challenge, she allowed half of them to take a 60 to 90 minute nap, the nappers dramatically outperformed the non-nappers. In another study, Mednick had subjects practice a visual task at four intervals over the course of a day. Those who took a 30 minute nap after the second session sustained their performance all day long. Those who didn't nap performed increasingly poorly as the day wore on.

When pilots are given a nap of just 30 minutes on long haul flights, they experience a 16 per cent increase in their reaction time. Nonnapping pilots experience a 34 per cent decrease over the course of the flight.

The conclusion is inescapable: the more hours we work continuously, the greater the toll on our performance. To get a sense of how valuable it may be for you to nap, take our brief energy audit.

The best time for a nap is between 1 and 3 pm, when the body most craves a period of sleep. The ideal length for a workplace nap is 30 minutes or less, which assures that you won't fall into the deeper stages of sleep, and awake with that loopy feeling scientists call "sleep inertia."

"A nap," argues Mathew Walker, a sleep researcher at Berkeley, "not only rights the wrong of prolonged wakefulness, but at a neurocognitive level, it moves you beyond where you were before you took a nap."

For all this evidence, I've yet to come across a single company that actively and enthusiastically encourages employees to nap. A growing number, including Google, provide napping pods and renewal rooms. That's a great first step, but it's scarcely the norm to use them.

Napping won't begin to take hold in companies until leaders recognize that it's not the number of hours people work that determines the value they create, but rather the energy they're capable of bringing to whatever hours they work.

If encouraging employees to take a half hour nap means they can be two or three times as productive over the subsequent three hours late in the day—and far more emotionally resilient—the value is crystal clear. It's a win-win and a great investment.

The problem is that most corporate cultures remain addicted to the draining ethic of more, bigger, faster. Rest, by this paradigm, is for slackers. Until your employer sees through that myth, consider these tips to take matters into your own hands:

- Schedule a regular time for your nap—between 1 and 3 p.m. is ideal—to increase the likelihood that you'll take it.
- If you have your own office, create a cheeky sign for your door to set expectations others. As in: "Short nap in process to insure high afternoon productivity."
- If you work in a cubicle, see if you can find a quiet space for your nap, even if it means leaving the building and taking your nap on a park bench, at a Starbucks or in a local library.
- Turn off your technology and set an alarm for 20 or 30 minutes.
- Close your eyes (obviously) but don't try too hard to fall asleep. Instead, breathe in through your nose to a count of three, and out through your mouth to a count of six. Even if you don't fall asleep, this way of breathing will insure you'll get a rejuvenating rest.

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