

Promoting Healthy Sleep Hygiene In The Workplace



A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the topic of sleep as it relates to work performance. In comparing and contrasting a few different studies, it appears that results across various platforms are quite consistent. It is estimated that up to a third of the general population suffers from sleep insufficiency, and when it comes to work performance, nearly all reviews indicate that lack of sleep lends itself to performing poorly.

One such review published in Harvard Business Review states, “Lack of sleep leads to detriments in job performance, productivity, career progression and satisfaction, and an increase in job-related accidents, absenteeism, and counterproductive work behaviors. Conversely, better sleep has been linked to improved memory, knowledge acquisition, and learning.”

While the benefit of a good night’s sleep and its direct impact on employee performance may not be a new topic, how can business leaders and executives use this information to their advantage? Implementing practices and policies on overall well-being within the work environment is one thing; influencing healthy sleep hygiene, which occurs off-hours and off-site, is another.

If your industry involves shift work, your challenge may be even greater. According to an article published by UCLA Health, shift work makes consistent, regenerating sleep even more difficult, which can lead to a higher probability of physical harm either on the job or when driving home. Employees and executives who are required to travel can face this same challenge. Time zone changes; sleeping in unfamiliar places, sometimes with less than desirable accommodations; and a general disruption of sleep consistency are all factors that can lead to insufficient sleep. Whatever unique obstacles your industry may face, promoting healthy sleep hygiene within the workplace by providing information, education and resources can go a long way in improving the mental health and productivity of your staff.

Here are three pragmatic implementation practices.

1. Make proper sleep hygiene a topic of discussion.

It can be easy to assume that needing proper sleep is something that everyone knows. That is not the case. Employees who are motivated to add value to their employer may make a



habit of staying up late in order to accomplish tasks ahead of schedule or to prove their worth. An employer may view this sacrifice as desirable, even referring to this person among their colleagues as the model employee to which all others should aspire. Although this approach and perspective are understandable, I would argue that it is short-sighted and fails to consider the long-term detriment that lack of sleep can create.

Talk to your employees about the benefits of sleep. Be an advocate for their well-being, mentally and physically. Let them know that although there may be times when certain deadlines and tasks can interfere with proper rest, mental health and the increased performance that can be achieved by balancing sleep with work is more sustainable and ultimately produces greater results. Overachievers who neglect their bodies' needs can burn out quickly. Promote sleep and work balance among your staff.

2. Make physical activity easy.

An article published by UCI Health cites that the amount of time we spend sitting, at home and at work, is one of the common causes of sleep disruption. In this publication, Dr. Rami Khayat says, “As we have become more sedentary, we are less physically tired by the end of the day, which does not help with initiating sleep.”

One way to correct this is to make physical activity easy within the workplace. Provide stand-up desks for employees to use. Turn an office space into a small gym, offering a treadmill or a small trampoline and some weights. Delegate an employee to organize group walks during breaks. Encourage your staff members to find accountability partners to keep them in check with their physical activity goals.

3. Educate on relaxation techniques.

Baylor College of Medicine expert Dr. Annise Wilson says, “High levels of stress impair sleep by prolonging how long it takes to fall asleep and fragmenting sleep.” Most of us have had experiences of stress disrupting our sleep. Either we find it difficult to fall asleep due to an overactive mind, or we fall asleep only to wake up shortly after, consumed with stressful thoughts.

Learning to relax and quiet our minds can equip us to handle these sleep-disrupting situations. An article published by the Mayo Clinic highlights several relaxation techniques, including autogenic relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation and visualization. It also references deep breathing, massage, meditation, tai chi, yoga, biofeedback, music and art therapy, aromatherapy and hydrotherapy. A relaxation technique that I have found particularly useful in my own work with clients is Access Bars. My research on this hands-on process has shown it can calm the mind.

Educate your staff on a variety of relaxation techniques. Experiment with things such as playing peaceful music or using aromatherapy in the office. Invite practitioners of various



techniques to offer sessions. Whatever works for your particular business, make stress management resources and education on relaxation techniques a priority.

While every industry can face unique challenges with regard to having well-rested employees who are performing at the top of their game, implementing a few simple practices can make a difference. Talk to your staff about the value of proper sleep. Find ways to make physical activity easy during working hours. Educate on relaxation therapies and make them available, in-house if possible. Not only will this present you as an advocate for the mental health of your employees, but it can also contribute to cultivating a culture that balances self-care and hard work thereby optimizing results.

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