Should You Ask Your Employees to Sleep On The Job?

How often do movies and television portray workers as being caught taking too many breaks? Far more than portray workers as taking too few breaks. Yet, the reality is that in many cases employees are working through breaks and over lunch hours. And, instead of increasing productivity by putting more time into work they are often hampering their productivity.

Time and again research demonstrates that taking more breaks, in terms of frequency and not duration, contributes to increased performance in the workplace. This research has found that jobs which require repetitive and physical work (including typing), that taking frequent 20-30 second breaks reduced errors and increased speed.

According to research by US based 'The Pulse Institute", presented in a 2014 report called 'Asleep on the Job' The cause and consequences of employees' disrupted sleep and how employers can help' 75% or 1,139 employees surveyed reported being tired many days a week while at work and 15% indicated they actually fell asleep while at work. The cause most often cited was trouble sleeping at home.

A 2014 survey by Staples reported that 41% or employees felt burned out from working long hours yet 55% felt they could not leave their desks for a break. When asked about the benefits of breaks 59% or respondents felt breaks would improve their work happiness and 43% indicated it would help their personal happiness and 37%. Interestingly, 90% of the employers said they encourage breaks, and 86% of workers said that taking a break would make them more productive.

Create a Break Friendly Workplace

Encouraging employees to take breaks more often can be a smart way to improve your workplace. Not only can you reduce mistakes and potentially improve performance and productivity but you can also concurrently work on creating a workplace culture that retains your best employees.

1. **Create Break Spaces:** A break room can be one way to encourage employees to take breaks but it if you build it you need to make it inviting if you want your employees to use it. Better than having a designated break room is having a number of break 'nooks' throughout your workplace. Find places you can set up two nice comfy chairs, or better yet a small sofa, add a small table and even a lamp for ambiance and put out the welcome sign for people to work or rest in the

space. If you add a few inexpensive touches such as decorate pillows and nice picture for employees to look at become signals your employees that they are invited into the space to relax and have a break.

2. **Yoga in the WorkSpace:** Create opportunities for your employees to take a physical break to help them mentally and physically recharge. You don't have to employ Yoga, you just have to enable and encourage your employees to do something physical for a few minutes that is not strenuous or fulfills a work function. Schedule or encourage even 5 minute breathing or stretching breaks and have everyone put it into their calendar. You don't have to bring in a certified wellness instructor, send everyone a link to a video clip.
3. **Beautify The Workspace:** Throughout the workplace rotate interesting and beautiful items such as art, even inexpensive posters or pictures and other items that can catch and hold someone's interest for a few minutes. Looking at something that is interesting or beautiful can give an employee a mental break from the stresses of work.
4. **Give Them Something To Talk About:** Sharing a collective moment with a colleague to talk about something that is not work related can provide another mental break from work. Impact the conversation by sharing positive news stories, creating and sharing conversation starters and other ways to get your employees to share a moment and catch their breath.
5. **Have Your Leaders Take The Lead**: Many employees work without a break because they don't want to be seen as slacking off or 'caught' when the boss comes by. However, if the 'boss' is leading the break (even just now and then) it is an opportunity for everyone to take a collective break. Have a leader spend as little as 10 minutes sitting at the break room table talking about a poster or any other non-work related item can encourage employees' to join in. Organizations with mentally and physically engaged leader can find themselves with more highly motivated workers across as motivating.
6. **Give your Employees A pillow and Some Permission**: Brief breaks away from work, hold benefits for your employees and your organization. But sometimes employees need a safe place to sleep during the day. Research has demonstrated that as little as 18 minutes of shut-eye can improve someone's morale and help them be more productive. Find a way to invite employees to take 10-15 minute to turn off the lights and rest their eyes. This may not be easy to do but with some thought and planning you could turn 15 minutes of an employee's day into the rest he/she needs to get back to work.

To make these or other ideas work you need to communicate what you are doing and why. Let employees know all about the health and productivity benefits from taking regular breaks. Next time they are tempted to work through the lunch hour they may come across a great workspace that reminds them to stop and smell the roses.

Staples Survey Reveals Many Employees Feel Too Guilty to Take breaks, despite spending longer hours at work