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“EMPLOYEE JUDGEMENT AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION.”

Effective leaders want focused “business” conversations. Asking a subordinate to explain her sleep patterns feels like a violating of personal privacy.

Asking a subordinate, “You getting enough sleep?” might simply elicit a simple “yes” or an inane “I never rest. I am focused on my work 24/7!”

The purpose of this article is to suggest that you do ask your employees about their sleep habits.

PEOPLE ARE MORE WILLING TO TALK ABOUT SEX THAN SLEEP:

Being productive in a global business [environment](#) means managing chronic sleep deprivation. According to Dement and Mitler (1993), as many as 80 million Americans have incapacitating sleep problems. D.J. Bartlett and his [team](#) studied 3300 adults from New South Wales in Australia. They concluded that almost 20% were chronically sleep deprived. According to

Shannon Kenney and her team, 40% of U.S. managers sleep less than six hours per night. (2012).

WHY IS SLEEP A BUSINESS ISSUE?

Kenney and her team found poor quality of sleep associated with dysfunctional consumption of alcohol. C.M. Barnes (2011) found poor quality of sleep associated with unethical conduct. Beyond the erosion of business judgment, sleep deprivation is associated with lack of enthusiasm.

Members of your team with sleep problems are a risk to your customers and to your business.

Employee cardiovascular [health](#) risks rise with sleep deprivation. And that can drive up health insurance costs.

A second business consequence of sleep deprivation revolves around the negative consequences of [circadian rhythm](#) being out of balance with customers, prospects, and colleagues.

Circadian rhythm means that there are predictable fluctuations of energy level during the day. For example, 1400 and 1500 hours are called tea time in Calcutta, coffee time in Frankfurt, and Coca-Cola time in Atlanta: energy level tends to diminish as the body digests food consumed during lunch. When the rest of the world is “low energy” you do not want to be the one person in the room with “high energy.” When the rest of the world is at a “high energy” phase you do not want to project low energy.

“Tell Me About Your Sleep Patterns.”

If your circadian rhythm is out of balance with your world, this reinforces feelings of alienation from your environment. Having such feelings makes it more difficult to sleep. You have now entered an ever deeper self-reinforcing negative cycle.

We recommend you ask members of your team “Tell me about your sleep patterns.”

New Sets of Behavioral Habits Take Time:

Your team members may have developed an ingrained set of bad habits around sleep. Whether successful or not, habits create [neural](#) pathways in the brain. Those neural pathways become deep through constant use. One does not destroy deep neural pathways. You create new neural pathways by establishing new behavioral habits. The new pathways work around the old pathways.

Set Sleep Goals You Can Achieve:

You probably set tough but achievable goals for yourself in business. Do the same for this project.

A goal is “eight hours of restful sleep” is too difficult.

I recommend you change the goal to “seven hours in bed.” As long as your “goal” is to get sleep, you may work too hard at it. Sleep comes when you “let go.”

The seven hours in bed can be used to relax, listen to music, or read in bed.

Sleep may come as a positive side benefit of your goal of “seven hours in bed.” It should not be the goal.

Listen to Music:

When you ruminate about the negative things in your life, your heart will increase.

An alternative to rumination is to listen to music in bed with slow tempo and harmonious sound.

Jackie Gleason was a popular American television comedian during the mid twentieth century. He also created several music albums that purchased online or found at a local library. Gleason’s albums contain music with a consistently slow tempo and similar languid melodies. Mozart’s chamber music works. Philip Glass, Charlie Pride, 50 Cent, and the Rolling Stones are off limits.

There are two purposes in listening to music in bed: (1) Focus your attention on calm melody rather than rumination and (2) actively manage your heart beat so it slows to a rhythm you define.

Bed Time Reading:

Reading is fine as long as you (1) you do not disturb your partner and (2) you limit your reading to soothing material.

Avoid reading challenging or exciting material. It stimulates your mind when you should be relaxing.

Read something soothing, calming, and boring. Consider reading this blog over and over!

We enjoy books written by Agatha Christie or Dick Francis.

Find what you like. Librarians can be very helpful with suggestions.

Drinking Before Bedtime:

If you drink anything during the rest period, try warm milk, hot cocoa or water. Avoid liquor.

Walking:

If you continue to have problems relaxing during your time in bed, take a 15-20 minute walk at night.

ENGINEER YOUR ENVIRONMENT.

Three hours prior to bed time, try to manage the stimuli that you take in. For example, limit your exposure to news. Media news report are not likely to contain calming, reassuring information: keeping viewers from switching stations requires an emphasis on “alarming” or “threatening” stories.

Be wary of “reality” television shows.” Many of these programs portray humanity as stupid and hopeless. In the real world, people are stupid, hopeless, creative.... and wonderful. These shows dangerously simplify life

with a bias to the negative. And absorbing this information prior to sleep does not help you sleep.

If you watch television at night, focus on positive shows.

MANAGE RUMINATION

We all have negative thoughts. Can you manage those negative thoughts without resorting to alcohol? It is like a neighbor in the apartment next door who plays drums at 2:00AM. He is not going to stop just because you politely ask. Your choice is to listen, to focus your attention on something more positive, to self-medicate, or to get a physician to prescribe medication. It doesn't matter what combination of things you do. The obnoxious noise will always be in the background.

The neural pathways of habit are deep. They may never be eliminated. But they can be managed by developing new habits that work around the old ones.

MAKING CHANGES IN WORK DEMANDS

Our recommendations have focused solely on what individuals can do. But company work demands are also to blame.

If a global company expects the General Counsel to be on the phone to China at 11:30PM and then be available for a 6:00AM video conference in Paris, you can always chalk it up to work demands related to a specific project.

But if sleep-deprivation becomes routine, then perhaps the company ought to consider being more open about delegating responsibility to others.

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