

What to do if your staff is sleep-deprived

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By Nick Patch | February 24, 2017 | Management & HR



If you're reading this through drowsy eyes, you already know the potential cost of sleep deprivation on workplace productivity. But as it turns out, sleep deprivation is a bigger problem than you might have imagined. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States has declared insufficient sleep a 'public health problem', with costly repercussions.

According to a recent CDC [study](#), sleeplessness in the

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White North to poor sleeping habits. But beyond increased absenteeism and reduced productivity, groggy workers can also cause a rise in workplace accidents and errors, as well as long-term sick leaves.

The thing is, if your employees are exhausted, their workday is likely part of the problem. Here's how to fight the effects of sleep deprivation on your company.

1. **Lighten up**

Helping your team sleep better might be as easy as flicking a switch — or throwing open the blinds. According to a study in the journal *Sleep*, workers in offices with windows slept an average of 46 minutes more per night than workers without natural light exposure. Perfecting your lighting could have a transformational effect on your staff.

2. **Let your staff unplug**

Countless studies have shown how our fixation on gadgets and screens keeps us awake; their lights suppress melatonin and their content keeps our brains alert. If one of your staff looks weary and bleary in the morning, consider whether your late-night email kept them up an extra half hour? "We're constantly connected now. You might get an email that's traditionally after hours and naturally you respond,"

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It can be a challenge to persuade some stubbornly devoted employees to take time off, and an even tougher challenge is to get them to do so without staying electronically tethered to the office.

The 2015 Alamo Family Vacation Survey found that 40 per cent of Americans didn't use all the vacation they were entitled to, and the same survey found that 34 per cent of millennials worked every single day of their break and returned feeling less productive. So how do you encourage staff to unplug? Start by setting a good example.

"When you're on vacation and you bring your phone and computer, that sets an expectation that you're supposed to be available and working all the time," Pau says. "Make sure that employees have significant time off and when they're off, they're off."

4. **Invest in a swell wellness program**

Bad sleep habits can be rooted in every part of a person's life, and even the most modest lifestyle improvement could lead to a more restful night between the sheets. Consider hosting a workshop on healthy eating, a lunchtime exercise class or a session on mindfulness and meditation.

"We have clients who have held yoga sessions in the



Ultimately, you have to acknowledge the possibility that your employees are under-rested because they're overworked. If you notice that someone's performance or demeanour seems flattened by fatigue, take a critical look at whether you can lighten their work load. Keep in mind, it might not always be the amount of work causing the problem; it might be *the type of work* that's taking a toll.

"If, for example, an employee has to do a lot of rote, monotonous work, try to break that up," Pau counselled.

6. **Shift their shifts**

Working the graveyard shift can leave a healthy person feeling like the walking dead. It's not always possible to prevent employees from working the kind of funky schedules that can lead to sleep deprivation, but wherever possible aim for consistency and monitor people working difficult schedules for signs that their hours are taking a toll.

"Try to find ways to adjust the shift so it's more conducive to sleep and more in line with our natural circadian rhythms," Pau advised.

7. **Encourage a sleep-deprived employee to get help**



“One night of poor sleep is one thing but six months of sleepless nights does something to your head,” Pau said. “The longer this goes on the more likely employees may be suffering from stress or mental-health issues or anxiety or depression. So make sure to encourage employees to talk to their doctors.”

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