

How sleeping more can help me to become a better Manager



Why read this?

Managers who are truly strong have the capacity to lift and support their team so they can reach their full potential. If you are a manager, getting adequate sleep is an essential way you can stay strong for your team. In this information sheet you will read about the negative effects of sleep loss on your performance, and why your sleep loss is bad for your team. The information sheet provides advice on how you can get more sleep, and how you can use a positive attitude towards sleep to help your team to sleep more too.

How does sleep loss affect my effectiveness as a manager?

Knowledge, experience, and motivation are essential to be an effective manager. However, research indicates that 'obtains adequate sleep' should be added to the list of desirable traits of a manager. Your work performance is highly related to how much sleep you obtain. When you don't get adequate sleep, you will find it difficult to recall information, such as procedures, and pay attention to multiple tasks. Tired managers are more likely to make wrong decisions because risk-taking behaviour¹ and biases and prejudices are triggered². A lack of sleep also has a negative impact on your mood with the literature indicating that sleep deprivation is linked to anxiety³. If you do not sleep enough, you are also less likely to accurately identify your teams' emotions and alleviate conflicts at workplace, and more probable to blame your team and express anger⁴.

Good managers maintain a positive atmosphere, solve conflicts with respect, listen to their team's concerns, are approachable, and motivate others. When things go wrong, they do not blame others but, instead, stay patient and figure out how to resolve the situation. They are fair, acknowledge good work, and provide feedback. It is difficult to consistently behave in this way when you aren't getting adequate sleep. You are more likely to misperceive how others feel, be pessimistic and try to solve conflicts through maladaptive strategies, such as negative comments.

Your sleep loss is contagious

Managers are on stage every day. People in your team are watching you and learn from your behaviour, if you often go to work having had inadequate sleep, your team members may think that you expect them to do the same. Working when tired can quickly become the norm in a team. Since sleep loss has a negative impact on health, safety, mood, performance, and decision making, it is easy to see how this can result in poor team effectiveness.

Why sleep loss is bad for you and your team

Sleep loss causes an increase in incidents and accidents. You might also identify delays in completing projects because sleep-deprived people are more likely to invest less effort in performing well. Research has also shown that sleep-deprived people are more likely to start pretending they work while surfing on the internet for personal use, a behaviour called 'cyberloafing'. Moreover, sleep-deprived people tend to call in sick more often⁵.

Adults should regularly sleep between 7 and 9 hours per night. Research consistently shows that people who do not sleep enough are more prone to physical health issues. In a systematic review of the literature⁶, it was found that sleeping less than 6 hours related to an elevated risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and obesity. If someone is struggling with sleep loss, they may take sick days, not because they are ill but because they need to take time to recover.

How to promote a positive attitude towards sleep in your team

1. Set a good example

Promote the importance of getting enough sleep by arriving well-rested at work. Your team members are more likely to improve their sleep habits if they see you doing this.

2. Communicate the importance of sleep

Ensure your team understands that you take sleep loss seriously and that it is fundamental to health, performance, and safety.

3. Be approachable

Your team members should feel that they can talk to you when they have a problem, and this is no exception for sleep loss.

4. Pay attention

If you pay attention to your teams' behaviour, you may notice they are sometimes showing signs of sleepiness, for example struggling to keep their eyes open on a night shift. You need to explore this with an open mind in order to fully understand why this is occurring and to identify an effective solution. It could be, for example, due to long workhours, time of day, high ambient temperature, late night socialising, or a combination of all of these factors.

5. Make further information and support available

Make sure that your team have access to the resources they need to understand the importance of, and obtain, adequate sleep. For example, the other information sheets in this set, and the employee assistance program (EAP).

6. Consider introducing a napping policy

Whether napping is endorsed and possible at a workplace depends on many different operational, personal, cultural and environmental factors. Where napping is supported, this should be formalised via a napping policy to encourage napping culture, and to ensure that naps are taken safely. Below are some suggestions for what to include in a napping policy.

- Encourage a napping culture. Napping improves performance, productivity, wellbeing and reduces sleep debt, so should be encouraged across the organisation wherever safe and practical.
- Introduce a napping policy, particularly for night-work, or shifts that are likely to reduce sleep (e.g. early shifts, extended hours, long shifts, long driving). The policy should:
 - State who can nap, when and where – and who needs to be informed that an employee is napping, and
 - State maximum duration of naps, and time for recovery from sleep inertia.
- Ensure that the facilities for napping are suitable.
- Encourage napping outside of work, particularly before night shifts.
- Encourage pre-emptive napping; workers should not wait until they are experiencing performance decrements before considering a nap.

If a worker is experiencing severe fatigue -for example, due to very limited sleep the night before (less than 5 or 6 hours)- or is experiencing microsleeps and is making mistakes due to their fatigue, a nap might not be enough to ensure that their performance levels are safe for work. The napping policy should allow for rotation of workers to non-safety critical tasks. If the workers are so fatigued that they cannot complete their work safely, the policy should allow the supervisor to stop the workers' work / cut the workday short so that the employees can have a longer recovery break.

To Summarise

Prioritising regularly obtaining adequate sleep is key if you want to lead with your head and heart, and not be reactionary. By setting a good example, you will be helping your team to also improve team effectiveness.

What Should I Read Next?

Using a wrist-worn sleep tracking device can be useful to help you to understand the duration and timing of your sleep over many weeks or months. If you already have a smartwatch that tracks sleep, or you are considering purchasing one, you will find the information sheet titled 'How to use personal sleep tracking devices' useful. For advice on how to improve your sleep have a look at the information sheets in this series titled:

- 'How to adjust my beliefs and thoughts about sleep'
- 'How to adjust my daily patterns of light exposure, meals and exercise to improve my sleep'
- 'How to change my sleep habits in order to get more sleep'

References:

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- 6 Itani, O., Jike, M., Watanabe, E., & Kaneita, Y. (2017). Short sleep duration and health outcomes :a systematic review, meta-analysis, and meta-regression. *Sleep Medicine*, 32, 246-256.

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About Baines Simmons

We are specialists in aviation regulations, compliance and safety management and partner with the world's leading civil and defence aviation organisations to improve safety performance. As trusted advisors to business, armed forces, governments and regulators across all sectors of aviation, we help to advance best practice, shape safety thinking and drive continuous improvement to safety performance through our consulting, training and outsourced services.

Our Fatigue Risk Management Team help organisations manage the risks associated with fatigue and workload and specialise in delivering fatigue risk management solutions for companies whose employees are involved in safety critical work, such as aviation, the petrochemical industry, road transport and the emergency services. Their work provides organisations with the evidence needed to ensure that the business is operating within an acceptable risk threshold.

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