THE IMPACT OF SLEEP ON WORK PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Summary

A 2015 study of more than 4,000 working adults by Horizons Workforce Consulting®, a division of Bright Horizons®, shows that lack of sleep is associated with significantly lower satisfaction with life, health, work, and financial well-being. Yet only 40% of respondents indicate that most nights they get enough sleep to awaken refreshed. At work, poor sleepers have lower levels of work quality and productivity, are three times more likely to report feeling burned out by work, and are six times more likely to report feeling unable to meet work requirements. Almost one third of respondents (31%) report that work worries and disruptions interfere with their sleep, and 41% report that they “often” or “very often” get sleepy at work. Poor sleepers are significantly less resilient and optimistic and more stressed than good sleepers. Lack of sleep has a major impact on employees’ overall performance at work and quality of life. Although previously thought of as an issue outside of the realm of concern for employers, sleep is an issue employers need to address in order to improve employee well-being and their bottom line.
The Impact of Sleep on Work Performance and Quality of Life

Insufficient sleep is considered a public health epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has linked a lack of sleep to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors. Research from the National Sleep Foundation found nearly a third of employees sleep fewer than six hours a night, with 80 percent waking up at least once a night. Sleep deprivation is more pervasive than many of the other wellness issues being addressed by organizations. Assisting employees with reducing their sleep disruptions will have a positive impact on employers, for whom sleep deprivation is at worst a critical safety issue and at best a quality and productivity issue.

In our 2015 study of more than 4,000 full-time working adults, we asked respondents about their sleep and learned that work has a negative impact on sleep, and lack of sleep has a negative impact on work for a surprising number of people.

The following chart includes four statements about sleep and the percentage of respondents who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each:

- We created a scale using responses to the four items above to compare the best sleepers to the worst sleepers. We will refer to the top third of the scale as “good sleepers” and the bottom third of the scale as “poor sleepers.” The differences were stunning.
Research has proven that insufficient sleep contributes to the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity. While the impact of sleep on overall health was supported in our study, we also show strong relationships with stress, job factors and respondents’ personal lives. Good sleepers had consistently higher levels of satisfaction across several areas of their lives. The following chart shows the percentage reporting high levels of satisfaction (8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale) by sleep group. All differences are statistically significant.

Poor sleepers have markedly higher stress, with 65% reporting high stress (8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale) as compared to only 27% of the good sleepers.
What Does this Mean for Employers?

Poor sleepers have less energy, are more likely to feel burned out by work, and are more likely to be unable to meet the work requirements. Poor sleepers can be a serious drain on the effectiveness of an organization.

A recent study found that the amount of sleep a person receives is associated with the number of sick days taken away from work. The research found employees who said they slept less than six hours per night missed significantly more days of work due to illness¹.

What are the Impacts on Employees in their Lives Outside of Work?

Poor sleepers are also less able to manage their life outside of work when compared with good sleepers.

- Only 30% of poor sleepers said they consistently have the energy to manage personal and family obligations, as compared with 61% of good sleepers.
- Only 43% of poor sleepers indicate that they are satisfied with their health overall, as compared with 70% of good sleepers.

Sleep Impacts Resilience

According to our study results, sleep has a direct impact on an employees’ resilience—a characteristic many employers are increasingly seeking in employees. Poor sleepers are less able to bounce back, find solutions to problems, and see their mistakes as an opportunity to learn. They are also less optimistic about life.

What Can Employers Do?

Alleviating stress caused by work would be a good place to start for employers in order to help their employees get a good night’s rest. Additionally, there are sleep programs available to assist employees. While most employers have wellness programs focusing on exercise and nutrition, few organizations offer sleep programs. A sleep program can help educate employees about the benefit of sleep and how to make lifestyle changes in order to improve their sleeping patterns. Not only does it make business sense to address this pervasive issue, but by assisting employees with sleep, an employer demonstrates it cares about their employees’ well-being, which has been proven to increase loyalty, engagement, and productivity.
Atlantic Health determined, through an employee well-being assessment, that its workforce would benefit from supports to help them sleep. Atlantic Health System in New Jersey has been working to create a sleep-healthy culture for employees. They communicated to employees that their back-up child care and elder care program could be used to get dependents taken care of while an employee takes some time to him or herself to catch up on sleep. They also posted “sleep healthy tips” on their intranet, including things like how to make your bedroom more sleep friendly, bedtime rituals, and when to see a sleep doctor.

Laura K. Barger, Ph.D., associate physiologist in the Division of Sleep and Circadian Disorders at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Instructor in Medicine in the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School, commented: I applaud Horizons Workforce Consulting for broadening their research to include sleep health attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in their survey work. This is a very important step in helping translate a growing abundance of sleep science into the everyday lives of individuals in this country. This research will serve as a resource for people to take up the cause of sleep health in their own lives and spark the discussion of sleep health in their workplaces.

About Horizons Workforce Consulting

With global capabilities and services ranging from work/life needs assessments to customized response strategies, Horizons Workforce Consulting, a division of Bright Horizons, assists clients in identifying and addressing the work, life, and dependent-care obstacles their employees face. The industry experts at Horizons Workforce Consulting help create workplace environments that allow employees to reach peak performance and productivity while enabling employers to achieve organizational success.

Horizons Workforce Consulting regularly publishes reports on the business outcomes associated with employer investments in the workforce. These briefs contribute to the thought leadership of today’s talent management practices.
### METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT PROFILE

- Study conducted during January and February of 2015 using web-based survey instrument
- 4,166 full-time U.S. workers from across industries and geographies are represented

#### Gender
- Male 29%
- Female 71%

#### Marital Status
- Single (Never married) 7%
- Married/Domestic Partnership 86%
- Separated or divorced 7%

#### Caregiving Responsibilities
(respondents were able to select multiple options)
- Expecting or adopting a child currently or within 3 years 17%
- Child or children under the age of 6 57%
- Child or children ages 6-12 28%
- Child or children ages 13-18 20%
- Child with special needs 3%
- Elder, ill, or disabled adult 20%
- Expect to have adult/elder care responsibilities in the next 1-3 years 8%
- Care for a pet or pets 39%
- No caregiving responsibilities 4%

#### Age
- T8 to 30 12%
- 31 to 40 50%
- 41 to 50 24%
- 51 to 60 12%
- 61 and over 2%

#### Household Income
- Under $40,000 3%
- $40,000 to $79,999 10%
- $80,000 to $119,999 36%
- $120,000 to $159,999 22%
- $160,000 to $199,999 13%
- $200,000 and over 16%

#### Employer Size
- Fewer than 25 7%
- 25 to 49 5%
- 50 to 99 6%
- 100 to 499 15%
- 500 to 999 9%
- 1,000 to 1,499 7%
- 1,500 to 1,999 5%
- 2,000 to 4,999 13%
- 5,000 to 9,999 11%
- 10,000 or more 23%

#### Tenure
- Less than 6 months 3%
- 6 months to 1 year 5%
- 1 to 2 years 13%
- 3 to 5 years 24%
- 6 to 10 years 27%
- More than 10 years 29%

#### Education
- High School Graduate 3%
- Completed Some College 10%
- Associate’s Degree 6%
- Bachelor’s Degree 36%
- Completed Some Postgraduate 6%
- Master’s Degree 28%
- Ph.D., Law or Medical Degree 10%

#### Geography
- New England 9%
- Middle Atlantic 19%
- East North Central 15%
- West North Central 6%
- South Atlantic 20%
- East South Central 3%
- West South Central 8%
- Mountain 5%
- Pacific 14%

#### Job Type
- Salary 76%
- Hourly 23%

#### Industry
- Advertising & Marketing 1%
- Agriculture 1%
- Airlines & Aerospace (including Defense) 1%
- Automotive 1%
- Biotechnology/Pharmaceuticals 6%
- Business Services 3%
- College or University 4%
- Computer and Electronics 3%
- Construction, Machinery and Homes 1%
- Consumer Products 2%
- Entertainment & Leisure 1%
- Finance & Financial Services 14%
- Hotel and Food & Beverages 1%
- Government 5%
- Health Care 15%
- Legal Services 3%
- Other Education 2%
- Primary or Secondary Education (K-12) 3%
- Publishing 1%
- Insurance 2%
- Manufacturing 4%
- Nonprofit 2%
- Retail 3%
- Real Estate 1%
- Telecommunications 2%
- Technology 7%
- Transportation and Warehousing 1%
- Utilities, Energy, and Extraction 2%
- Other 7%