

THE FUTURE OF WORK
TECHNOLOGY ON THE MARCH

FATIGUE FIGHTERS

BUSINESS IS WAKING UP TO THE TOLL WEARINESS TAKES ON JOB PERFORMANCE, AND HELPING EMPLOYEES GET MORE SHUT-EYE

by ARLENE WEINTRAUB

WHEN ARSHAD Chowdhury was working as an investment analyst, he noticed a lot of his colleagues were sneaking into bathrooms to take naps. So four years ago he started MetroNaps, a New York company that sells resting chairs called EnergyPods for \$12,485. These plush recliners lull users to sleep, then gently shake them awake after a specified time. Procter & Gamble has ordered a couple of EnergyPods, as has Cisco Systems, which positions them as part of a companywide effort to "support employee well-being," according to a spokesperson.

Some U.S. companies are waking up

to the benefits of keeping workers alert. It started in industries such as aviation, trucking, and hospitals, where avoiding careless mistakes is a matter of life and death. Now, as news spreads about the toll fatigue takes on job performance, other industries are climbing aboard, teaching workers how to sleep better at night, shortening work shifts, and setting up napping rooms in corporate offices.

While the trend may fly in the face of America's hyperactive work ethic, there's a growing body of evidence that naps help. At Bombardier Aerospace, a leading maker of small aircraft such as the Lear-

jet, internal research shows pilots who employed strategies to fight off drowsiness performed better than fatigued pilots on cockpit tasks such as responding to radio calls. Tired pilots sometimes fell into "microsleeps"—zoning out for a few seconds, unaware, and thus reacting to events more slowly. "Your brain shuts off, and you can't control it," says Robert W. Agostino, director of flight operations for Bombardier's business aircraft unit.

How does this translate to desk jobs? Just as a drowsy pilot is more likely to miss a radio call, a stock trader whose eyelids are drooping may have trouble pouncing on as many transactions as usual. "People think they're fine. They're not," says Dr. Mark Rosekind, president of Alertness Solutions, a Cupertino (Calif.) consulting company that trains executives in simple techniques for improving alertness at work.

Among Rosekind's tips: get more strategic about how you consume coffee. You'll get the maximum mental boost if you drink a cup one half hour before an important meeting or other business event. Sitting in a brightly lit room for just 15 minutes helps, too, as does exercise. And nap, of course. You won't necessarily lose if you snooze. ■

HOW TO SLEEP ON THE JOB

New York-based MetroNaps is trying to sell companies on the merits of midday naps in an EnergyPod.

THE CHAIR reclines to the ideal napping pose, positioning the legs at the same level as the heart.



NAPPERS ARE soothed by meditation music in noise-canceling headphones.

A SOUND-PROOFED, domed top provides privacy. Colleagues will never see you drool or hear you snore.

GENTLE LIGHTING can be dimmed, and a programmable timer will wake the napper up with vibrations and light.

NATHAN SAYERS FOR METRONAPS