Level: B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

The Power of a Nap

Employers wake up to the power of a staff nap

A friend once mused that the number of babies you have directly correlates with your ability to nap. I had one.

During maternity leave more than a decade ago, I became demented by my failure to sleep when the baby slept. I tried everything. I changed into my pyjamas mid-morning, Winston Churchill style. I put on eye masks, made the room pitch black, walked in the fresh air, sprayed lavender cologne on my pillow and ate turkey slices. Nothing worked.

I am not anti-nap. I don't see a short snooze as a sign of idleness or moral decay – if anything, framing it as fecklessness makes it more appealing. I am just nap resistant; it's part of my make-up. Or so I believed.

Cara Moore, an executive coach and founder of ProNappers, a business consultancy, thought differently. An evangelist for the power of the nap, she has become so good at it she can fall asleep sitting in a co-working space with earbuds and an eye mask.

It increases productivity, she says. "If you go for a nap with an unsolved problem – an email you haven't been able to phrase quite right or a conversation that's weighing on your mind, you often wake up[and] know what to do or say."

The benefits were reinforced by research in the journal Sleep Health last month. It found regular napping slowed the pace the brain shrinks as we age, lowering the risk of dementia and other diseases.

Naps fall into three categories. The refresher: a post-lunch rest to revive energy; a recovery nap to remedy broken sleep, perhaps mid-morning; and the preparatory nap to ready for a night shift or evening of socialising.

Employers are waking up to the advantages. Dr Guy Meadows, clinical director at The Sleep School, which runs programmes for businesses and individuals, detects a shift in attitudes. He says some employers in law, consulting, banking and the NHS are asking for help for staff working long or antisocial hours, as they are worried about diminished concentration and increased risk-taking.

With organisations that require employees to work late on a deal, for example, Meadows might suggest "a strategic nap". "In the past [employers] were coy, they didn't want to be talking about sleep-depriving their employees. [Today] they're more open about wellbeing."

How to nap is one of the most common questions in his sleep sessions for companies. Employees typically don't nap, he says, because they don't know what to do and they can't fall asleep.

Of course, scornful managers or a lack of facilities (nap pods or quiet rooms) at the office are also big obstacles.

How many organisations have a napping culture, with managers truly enlightened about snoozing on the job? My editor is flexible but I can't imagine promising to deliver an article just as soon as my nap is over.

Working from home may have eased the way for some white-collar professionals. Research by LifeSearch, the life insurance provider, found one in six admitted to a nap during work time.

In overcoming nap resistance, Moore asks me to examine thoughts holding me back. A common one, she says, is pride in being busy. I'm past the stage of hustle-humblebragging – but am guilty of believing that if I press on, I'll grind through the work quicker. This desire to crack on, says Moore, and "tick a few more things off their list" is fool's logic.

As with a good exercise regime, Meadows encourages scheduling naps in a diary, setting an alarm or asking someone else to hold you to account. Meadows suggests experimenting with the napping time, usually between 10 and 20 minutes.

The first day at home after lunch, I start with 10 minutes, setting the alarm in case I enter deep sleep. I lie in a hammock with a cushion over my eyes to reduce the light. Worrying that my neighbours will wonder why I've got a cushion on my eyes prevents me from sleeping. Moore suggests listening to something to slow my whirring internal thoughts. I try a guided meditation, interrupted by a request to fund their podcast. The next day, I listen to a boring book. It works for a bit and then my mind wanders: how did the narrator discover his knack for sending people to sleep? Does it interfere with his dating life? Better was Moore's ProNappers' meditation, which declares "napping is a great use of your time", accompanied by the sound of waves.

On the fourth day, I enter a kind of twilight consciousness. Success, according to Meadows, whose most important advice is, don't fixate on sleep. The ambition, he says, creates its own stress – evident among insomniacs.

Two weeks later, on a sporadic nap schedule, I find that rest has become its own reward. I'm going to persevere. A nap habit takes practice, after all – Moore suggests at least a month, and Meadows, three. No one can accuse me of lacking ambition.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Level: B1 | B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

The Power of a Nap

a. Complete each sentence with the correct preposition(s).

1. When will companies wake ..... the benefits of office naps?

2. There was a shift..... the team after the conference.

3. Do not let fear hold you .....from new experiences.

4. Let's press .....and get the job done.

5. If we each take a few pages, we can grind .....them more quickly.

6. I love the feeling I get when I tick things .....my list.

7. Telling others about your goals is a great way to hold yourself .....account.

8. Let's not fixate..... whose fault it is. Let's ask, how can we fix it?

9. Every winter, we are..... a tight schedule to meet customer demand.



LIVEWORKSHEETS