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The Power of 20-Minute Naps to Zen Time

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The Power of 20-Minute Naps or Zen Time

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Abstract

Naps are not just for National Nap Day on March 13th (SHRM, 2019) and naps aren't only for toddlers. Approximately 1 in 3 American adults nap, according to previous Pew Research Center data (Everyday Health, 2022). Research has shown that the workplace needs to offer separate time for their employees to take a 20-minute power nap or Zen time. Zen time can be defined as relaxed or feeling peaceful (Zen Definitions, 2022). Some people would consider napping to be lazy. However, it is the opposite. A survey by Mattress Nerd of 2,000 adults showed nappers considered themselves more productive at 93% vs the non-nappers at only 65% (Anderer, 2021).

Naps aren't only for toddlers. Approximately 1 in 3 American adults nap, according to previous Pew Research Center data (Everyday Health, 2022). Research has shown that the workplace needs to offer separate time for their employees to take a 20-minute power nap or Zen time. Zen time can be defined as relaxed or feeling peaceful (Zen Definitions, 2022). The benefits of Zen time can be, but not limited to improved focus and concentration. The separate time for employees can be utilized for various reasons. It could be for religious reasons, or a mother that needs to empty her milk filled breast, or "a worker [who] needs a quiet space to focus on mental health or have a power nap" (SHRM, 2019). Naps are not just for National Nap Day on March 13th (SHRM, 2019)! Some people would consider napping to be lazy. However, it is the opposite. A survey by Mattress Nerd of 2,000 adults showed nappers considered themselves more productive at 93% vs the non-nappers at only 65% (Anderer, 2021).

The US government has said no to taking naps at the office, but the experts believe that it is time for them to reconsider. The experts say there are about 70 million people that suffer from sleep disorders. The argument is that napping at the office is about increasing productivity not diminishing it (BBC News, 2019).

Over the years I have come to find out that I need to take a 20-minute power nap or Zen time each day separate from my lunch break. I would hit a wall late afternoon and I would lose all focus and motivation. I also found myself becoming very irritable. I struggled with productivity and creativity for the rest of the day. I found myself becoming more stressed and my spirits low. I was a new mom, and I started a new role at a level one trauma center in the Radiology department. I noticed several of my co-workers taking part of their lunch hour and using it for a quick nap or personal Zen time. We worked in a very busy level one hospital, and all were in the Radiology department. Lunch breaks were staggered, but I saw that everyone

would hurry to the cafeteria when it was their time to go, eat their food quickly, then use the last 20 minutes to either nap or take Zen time. This was a new concept for me. I knew I was struggling with late afternoon, and I was feeling drained. I decided I was going to try give the 20-minute power nap a try. In the breakroom there were couches and recliners for us in Radiology. Raman Malhortra, MD states, “Remarkably, even napping for as little as 10 minutes can recharge the mind and provide an energy boost.” Typically, the best time to nap is in the early afternoon. Usually, 8-9 hours after waking (Well+Good, 2020).

In the Radiology breakroom there were couches and recliners for us. I remember it so vividly. It was a Wednesday when I learned about this life changing activity, and I decided on Thursday I was going to give it a try. That Thursday, I went to lunch, scurried to the cafeteria, and ate quickly. I grabbed a warm blanket out of the warmer and curled up on one of the couches. I set my alarm for 20 minutes and I fell right to sleep. I woke right up 19 minutes later. I had about 7 minutes left of my lunch break, I cleaned up my blankets and went to the restroom, then headed back to work. I felt really good when I returned back to the department. I noticed a difference right away. I was not sluggish or moody. I realized that this was the moment my life changed. This may sound dramatic but applying this time each day benefited me and my family. It also helped with my relationships at work. As I worked the rest of the day, I felt completely recharged and not in a slump. “Taking a nap can replenish your brainpower and leave you feeling just as sharp as you were first thing in the morning” (Lifehack, 2017).

Over the next few weeks, I noticed several changes. I noticed that my productivity increased. I say this because instead of dreading each requisition that came off the printer and secretly hoping that someone else grabbed it, I happily grabbed it and performed the task. Before incorporating naps into my daily routine, I was much slower and fatigued by late afternoon. I

also noticed that my mood had increased, and my stress level decreased. I noticed I was not moody or on edge later in the day. Even after work, I was able to go home and continue with my duties. I did not feel the need to relax on the couch for an hour before preparing dinner or other household chores. My family also started noticing. My family members noticed that I was happy when I got home and more productive. By adding this 20-minute nap to my daily routine, I noticed the tremendous difference between if I am able to have my 20-minute time or if I do not get this time.

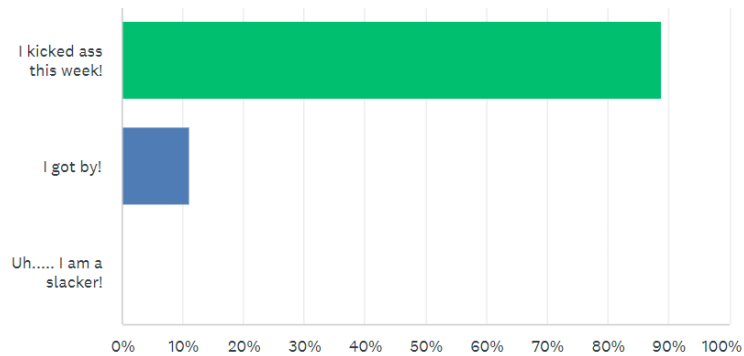
I have obviously become a firm believer in the power of 20- minute naps or some sort of Zen time. Since this time, I have done some research and have found that there is proven research that power naps or Zen time are linked to higher productivity in the workplace. It has also been stated that a person's creativity and focus is also heightened. To go a step further, it is noted that one's spirits are increased, and stress levels are lowered along with helping with one's immunity. "Not only does it help your immunity, but there is very clear evidence that it increases your cognitive processing, your cognitive thinking and your creative thinking," says Dallas-based sleep expert James Maas (2022). Maas is credited with the term "power nap." The workplace should offer nap rooms or if the employee lives nearby, they could go home briefly for their "power nap" (Brent, 2022). Taking short naps at work is proven to improve employee productivity. Employers need to know the facts to be able to offer the accommodations that will allow their employees to nap while at work. Google provides on-site sleep pods. They even provide a cashmere eye mask. David Radcliffe (2019), VP of real estate and workplace services at Google stated in an interview with CBS, "No workplace is complete without a nap pod." Google uses a sci-fiesque bubble that has a zero-gravity napping bed. It has sleep music with lights and relaxing vibrations. This is engineered for the perfect 20-minute power nap. It seems

that there are a few companies that agree, but the goal is for all employers to agree (Yahoo, 2019). I realize not all employers can be like Google, but they are setting the bar for other employers to incorporate this new way of life and reap in the benefits of happy employees. Taking a nap at work can increase productivity and increase better moods (United Concordia Dental, 2022).

I conducted a survey with nine participants, all with varying professions. They were required to take a daily 20-minute nap or Zen time each day for a week. For the week, this time was a designated time, separate from their lunch hour where they had to find a quiet place to either partake in a 20-minute nap or take the 20 minutes to relax and let their mind recharge. I had to speak to the majority of these participant's employers. They were very helpful by allowing these participants to be a part of my survey. By conducting this survey, I was able to prove that by incorporating this much needed 20-minute time for employees that their productivity, creativity, focus, and mood all increased. A few employees did not even realize how much they needed this time and are very thankful, just as I was when I worked in Radiology all those years ago. I have place screenshots below from the results of the SurveyMonkey. You can see that 88.89% ranked their productivity high, and there were zero participants that were low. This was also true on how focused the employees were. Again with 88.89% were more focused. Also, I asked them to rank their stress level and all the participants ranked either a 1 or 2 which was little to no stress.

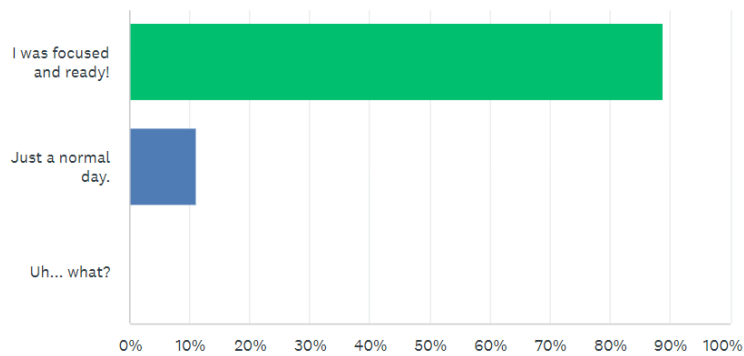
At the end of this week, please rank your overall productivity. ...

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0



My ability to stay focused during the day was? ...

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Off the charts awesome!	66.67% 6
Average Joe!	33.33% 3
Non-existent!	0.00%
TOTAL	9

I spoke with each person about the question about their creativity. The three that chose “average joe” all said that was better than their typical week. One stated, “I have zero creativity every day, but I felt like I had a clearer mindset.”

After the week of requiring the nine participants to take the 20-minute time for themselves, I had them not take that time for a week and I followed up with them individually. I asked them the same questions. All the participants said that their productivity lacked mid afternoon and they felt less focused. All of them made a comment about their mood. One gentleman said, “I noticed that I was very irritable, and I took that home with me.” He noticed he was not like that the previous week when he took the 20-minute time for himself.

One stakeholder that I spoke with is the owner of a training facility for heavy machinery. I asked him his thoughts on incorporating a 20-minute nap time or Zen time each day for his employees. I reiterated that this time is separate from their lunch hour. After discussing the potential and benefits for the company and his employees, he was willing to pilot this concept in one of his offices. He has 15 employees at this specific site, and he made a chart for sign-ups during the afternoon for each employee to select their time. All 15 employees selected a time, and they were asked to use this time for a 20-minute nap, Zen time, or mental health focus. He piloted this for two weeks. The third week we convened, and he was beyond surprised. He stated, “My workers are happy all day and have a little pep in their step.” By doing this pilot within his one office, he has now incorporated this structure in all his offices. He also mentioned the morale in his one office has increased. He said, “We feel like a team.” I look forward to hearing more from him once this is enrolled out to all his employees. I feel there will be a lot of happy and productive employees!

Speaking with the owner of the training facility for heavy machinery and looking back at my time in Radiology, I have come to realize that incorporating the much needed 20-minute nap or personal Zen time should be a requirement for all employers, especially ones where heavy machinery is involved and/or anywhere important decisions are being made. For instance, my

time in Radiology, I was responsible for administering radiation to patients and maneuvering a large C-Arm in the operating room. It is very important that these employees are present and awake. Employers that put into place the 20-minute nap or Zen time for each employee, this would help ensure their employees are not reaching that afternoon grog. One study, NASA found pilots who took naps showed a 54% improvement in their alertness compared to pilots who did not nap. Also, the study showed a 34% increase in the pilot's job performance (Breus, 2020).

Sleep is critical to one's health. If a person does not get enough sleep, they have the potential of negatively impacting their life. Some of these impacts, but not limited to are the lack of alertness, and excessive daytime sleepiness. The lack of sleep can also affect your memory. It can affect your ability to process information. Another negative impact could be your mood. One could become very moody if they do not have the correct amount of sleep. Overall, this could affect one's life. Those are just the short-term affects. Long-term affects could be serious health issues. Some issues could be high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, or heart attack. Other issues include reduced immunity, depression, and obesity. Lack of sleep can also lead to a lower sex drive (Cleveland Clinic, 2015).

This research project resonated with me personally and professionally. Taking the time out of my workday to reset and recharge has made an impact in my life. As I mentioned above, the 20-minute nap or Zen time that I have made a part of my daily schedule has proven to increase my productivity, increase my creativity, and boost my alertness. It is my goal to have employers recognize the benefits and acknowledge how important it is for their employees. In doing this research project, I was able to show the proven research and open up this new idea to the employers. I learned that most employers are in tune with what their employees needs. This held true due to the fact that the employers of the nine participants were on board with allowing

them to be a part of the survey and they were also very interested with the results. Much so, that they are now looking into how to make this a standardization within their workplace. One employer even partook in the study without telling me and then relayed to me her results which matched with the other nine. She stated, “Wow, I did not realize how much I need this downtime.” She was very thankful and is looking forward to having her employees benefit from this 20-minute much needed time. I was unsure how this project would turn out, but in the end, every employer I spoke with was in fact on board with giving their employees the extra time. You can recall the story about the owner of the training facility whose employees operate heavy machinery. I had a call with him to check in to see how his employees were doing with the new structure. He was completely blown away in just a week of implementing the 20-minute time. He stated, “My workers are focused more later in the day and their morale is up.”

This made me realize that in just a short time, I was able to help nine employers have happier and healthier employees. I plan on continuing the conversations and helping more employers implement this structure for their employees. This not only benefits the employees but also their employer and the families. I spoke to a worker from this training facility and had them ask their family how she was at the end of the week after the 20-minute extra time was implemented. Her boyfriend said, “It was nice having Alisha awake for dinner this week” and her daughter said, “My mom was much more relaxed throughout the week” and she noted that they started walking at night like they had wanted to do for so long, but Alisha was wiped out when she got home. This alone made the project worth it. I love seeing and hearing how lives are being improved by just 20 minutes of relax time.

The skills I acquired during this project was the ability to step out of my comfort zone and have confidence in the conversations I was having with leadership of workplaces. I typically

would have a hard time having conversations that I was unsure on how the other person's stance was on the topic. For example, if I thought someone was not in agreement with me on a subject then I would not even bring up the matter, but for this project I had to speak my case and then prove the results. For this project, I was passionate about the subject, and I was able to have the tough conversations. I was able to speak to it on a personal level along with the research that has already been done. I think having both helped plead my case and I was able to get the employers to agree to let me conduct the study with their employees. I also learned that when something seems too big, take it in small increments. Have an end goal, but small ones to get you there. In the end, I was able to have the outcome I was hoping for, and I am thankful for this opportunity. Now go take a nap!

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