

New Week

Tip Sheet Primetime

June 30, 2008



ASLEEP ON THE JOB: At Yelo, in New York City, office workers can rent private cabins for a daytime snooze

WORKPLACE

Take a Three-Martini Nap

By TINA PENG

IF KRISTINE JOHNSON GETS FEWER THAN seven hours of sleep at night, she barely makes it through the workday. So when that happens, Johnson, a 33-year-old San Francisco office manager, takes a nap. She's slept in a lawn chair on the roof of her office, in a locked private bathroom (with just a pillow for support) and in her car. Johnson naps at work only twice a month, but it makes a noticeable difference, she says. "It makes me more alert and better able to do my job," she says.

She's in good company. In March, the National Sleep Foundation reported that 37 percent of Americans nap during the day. About a third of the people surveyed by the NSF said their workplace permitted naps, and more than a quarter said they would sleep at work if their employer let them. Worktime napping has seen enough of a popularity boost to fill its own business niche: Yelo, a New York City store that opened last year, has private rooms with sleep pods for quick naps (**\$15 for 20 minutes; yelonyc.com**). Its founder, Nicolas Ronco, plans to expand to three New York City locations next year and then to other cities.

Naps do more than make up for lost sleep. They increase creativity, memory and alertness, says Sara Mednick, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, and author of "Take a Nap! Change Your Life." A recent six-year study of 23,500 healthy Greek adults by the Harvard School of Public

Health and the University of Athens Medical School showed that taking naps at least three days per week reduced coronary mortality by 37 percent.

Many workplaces, including shoe retailer Zappos.com and New York City-based Workman Publishing, have designated sleep areas. Metal distributor Yarde Metals goes a step further. Its Southington, Conn., headquarters features the "Z Lounge," a darkened room equipped with a reclining chair that vibrates to music as a TV screen plays video of a babbling brook, crackling fireplace, beach scene or fish tank. "If some people just need a nap for 15 minutes and they can finish out their day with a clear mind, there's benefit to the company to do that," says Yarde marketing director Susan Kozikowski.

The ideal nap length fits well within a lunch break. Mednick recommends 20 minutes to boost alertness and motor performance. Getting between 30 minutes and an hour of sleep will put a napper into slow-wave sleep, leaving them groggy, she says.

Mednick recommends that workers who don't want to sleep at their desks get in the car, drive somewhere quiet and recline the driver's seat, or go to a gym and sleep in one of its quieter areas. Johnson sometimes puts in earplugs and seeks out closets or storage areas that aren't likely to be disturbed. Her bosses know about her habit, but they don't mind, she says. "I've never had anything negative said to me about it," she says—at least not while she was awake.

A recent medical study showed that taking a nap at least three days a week is good for the heart.