

Leaders who encourage sleep build a more resilient workforce

RESEARCH BRIEF

A recent study reveals that leaders who display “**sleep leadership**”—showing genuine support and encouragement for healthy sleep—improve employee sleep quality and, as a result, enhance workers' ability to pursue goals and control impulses at work.

Why it matters

Poor sleep isn't just a personal health issue; it costs organizations billions in lost productivity and risk.

- ▶ U.S. economic loss due to insufficient sleep: Over **\$411 billion** a year
- ▶ Individual productivity loss: at least **\$1,967 per employee** per year

While most well-being programs focus on individual self-care, this research shows leaders can spark positive changes in employee sleep—and work performance—through targeted, supportive behaviors. In sum, leadership support for sleep may break the cycle of unhealthy work-home spillover.

How we know

- ▶ 663 active-duty U.S. Army soldiers monitored over ~5 months
- ▶ Sleep quality, quantity, and self-regulatory work outcomes measured via mixed-effects modeling and mediation analysis
- ▶ Supervisor support for sleep led to improvements in sleep health, leading to improved goal pursuit and impulse control
- ▶ Effects were independent of standard leadership qualities

What researchers found

- ▶ Soldiers with higher sleep-specific support from supervisors reported measurable improvement in sleep quality
- ▶ Reported reduced workplace impairment, less anger-related behavior, and lower risk-taking
- ▶ Positive effects beyond general leadership support highlighted the unique impact of “sleep leadership”
- ▶ Sleep leadership = social encouragement (voicing the importance of sleep) + enabling actions (adjusting schedules, discouraging late-night email)

What this means

- ▶ **For managers:** Small daily actions (*proactively discussing sleep, rest schedules, discouraging overnight work*) can yield improvements in employee health, focus, and behavior.
- ▶ **For HR leaders:** Incorporate “sleep leadership” training into existing wellbeing, resilience, and supervisor development programs
- ▶ **For organizations:** Addressing sleep should be positioned as a leadership responsibility, not left solely to individual wellness efforts

Now what?

To improve employee wellbeing and productivity, we suggest doing these:

- ▶ Train leaders to encourage healthy sleep habits during regular check-ins
- ▶ Adjust operational schedules to ensure adequate rest for employees
- ▶ Reinforce a culture of rest through clear after-hours communications and napping policies
- ▶ Pilot “sleep leadership” initiatives in high-risk or shift-based teams, and track changes in absenteeism, safety incidents, and performance

LINK TO THE STUDY

