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Wake Up Call: Are You or Your Staff Tired at Work?

Have you ever gone out to take a nap in your car because you were too tired at work? Do you ever catch yourself — or your employees — sleeping at work?

If that caused you to yawn, you're not alone. In an Accountemps survey of more than 1,000 U.S. workers, 74 percent of them say they're often tired at work. This is particularly true for working parents, as they often have to pull a second shift of childcare and housework when they get home from their day job.

Working while tired hurts work performance. Survey respondents admit that when they're tired at work, they lack focus or are easily distracted (52 percent), procrastinate more (47 percent), are grumpy (38 percent) and make more mistakes (29 percent). Being sleepy at work could be holding you back professionally. For employers, the consequences are potentially worse, as accounting mistakes could lead to missed deadlines, fines, audits and unhappy clients.

It's time to wake up. Here are some tips to help you and your staff become more alert on the job.

How to be less tired at work
Though some work stress is positive according to a Robert Half survey, some accounting and finance professionals put in long, hard hours. It's important to take care of yourself so you don't burn out and crash.

- **Limit device time.** Face it: If you're sleeping at work, you're not getting enough zzz's at home. One of the top time bandits today are mobile devices. These gadgets are filled with games, news, social interactions and endless opportunities to go down the rabbit hole. For those who are regularly tired at work, be disciplined enough to put away your tablet or smartphone after 10 p.m. and go to bed.

- **Feed your body well.** Oftentimes, you're tired at work because good nutrition and hydration aren't priorities. To be in top form at the office, you should eat a good breakfast, drink sufficient fluids, take time out for lunch and have an energy-dense snack in the mid-afternoon.

- **Get up and move.** Your desk job may be harmful to your health, so make it a point to not be so sedentary during the day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Every hour or so, stand up and shake off the lethargy. Rather than sleeping at work, go outside and take a brisk walk around the block. Some smart watches even tell you when it's "time to stand" by monitoring your heart rate.

- **Use caffeine wisely.** While some caffeine may help you stay alert, be sure to limit your caffeine intake in the late afternoon, or you may have trouble falling asleep at night.

How to help your staff be less tired at work
Managers can't force their employees get enough shut-eye, but they can help in other ways:

- **Lead by example.** Staff tend to follow their manager's lead in many areas, including work tendencies. So use up your vacation days instead of banking them. Take a real lunch break. Don't come in too early or stay too late.

- **Allow flexibility in the workplace.** If you have good employees who are always tired, it may be to your advantage to accommodate their needs. For example, you could let them work remotely to eliminate their long commute, giving them more time to rest.

- **Maximize the work environment.** An overly warm or dark office can lead to sleeping at work – so adjust the thermostat and lighting as necessary. Brainstorm other ways to help workers be healthier and less tired at work. Rather than donuts and fun-size candies, you could provide energy-dense snacks like granola bars, dried fruit, beef jerky or mixed nuts.

- **Limit evening emails.** Is it common for employees to check and respond to messages after work? If so, this habit could be cutting into their rest time. You may want to consider a policy that discourages or limits after-hours communication.

- **Hire more staff.** One of the reasons your accountants may be tired at work is that they're overworked. To take some of the load off their shoulders, add more full-time or temporary staff. Temporary professionals aren't just for peak periods anymore.

When you make it a point to take care of yourself and/or your finance staff, the rewards will be greater job satisfaction and productivity.

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