

# HR 101: How Did Napping at Work Become a Thing?

HR Brew | Amanda Schiavo | February 9, 2024



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Don't feel guilty about catching some Zs at work.

Welcome to HR 101. Class is now in session. Today's discussion will focus on the history of napping at work—but remember, there's no napping in class.

The history. Remember that episode of *Seinfeld* when George refurbished the underside of his desk so he could sneak in a midday nap? When that episode dropped in 1997, the writers probably didn't know that napping at work would one day be considered by some to be normal.

While some of the world's greatest thinkers (Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, and Salvador Dali, to name a few) were proud on-the-job power nappers, according to the *Guardian*, it wasn't until the late 1990s and early 2000s that workplace napping started to catch on. It was around this time that publications such as the *New York Times* and NPR noted how some

forward-thinking employers were encouraging a midday snooze, citing improved productivity among the benefits.

"The nap-at-work movement remains nascent, to be sure," the New York Times reported in 1999. "But it gives hope to anyone who has ever nodded off in front of the computer screen."

But unlike George, employees at some companies didn't have to retreat beneath their desks to catch some Zs. Google, for example, arguably one of the most famous employers to offer its workforce a designated nap space, installed MetroNap EnergyPods, or, as Business Insider described them in a 2010 article, a "bizarre contraption" in which employees could nap privately, with only their legs exposed.

Fast-forward. Since then, employers including Zappos, Nike, Uber, and Thrive Global have incorporated amenities like sleep and wellness rooms into their offices, according to Workspace Resource.

And when 37% of US adults said they slept "somewhat or much worse" in 2023 than they had in years prior, according to research by the Sleep Foundation, it's no wonder: The benefits of naps during the workday include improved brain health and better cognitive function, HR Brew previously reported. And experts say they don't need to be hours long.

"We find that our employees who use [nap pods] are more productive, especially at the end of the day, and are generally in a better mood than their nap-less colleagues," Jonathan Edelheit wrote for Corporate Wellness Magazine. "As employers continue to see the benefits of sleeping on the job, they will continue to take advantage of nap pods."