

The Board Meeting of the Future

BY JOHN J. MEDINA If you wanted to create a work environment in direct conflict with what the brain is equipped to do, you'd design the standard cubicle. Instead, imagine a brain-friendly workplace where board meetings are conducted on treadmills, desks are equipped with stationary bicycles, and people wear gym clothes, not suits.



AT BOARD MEETINGS, people wear gym clothes and walk on treadmills at about 1.5 miles per hour – to cool down right after a period of intense physical activity.

TREADMILLS are installed in the office. Morning and afternoon exercise breaks are encouraged.

WORKSTATIONS include stationary bicycles that fit under the desks. Employees keep their legs moving while answering e-mail.

IN A COMPETITIVE climate, exercise is as close to a magic productivity bullet as you'll get.

The Brain's Active History

If our ancestors sat still in the savanna for eight hours straight – heck, for eight minutes – they became somebody's lunch. Our brains developed while we walked about 12 miles a day, seven days a week, for several million years.

How Exercise Jogs the Brain

EXERCISE IMPROVES the blood's access to specific brain regions and stimulates learning cells to make brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF, which acts like cerebral Miracle-Gro for neurons. If you want more of this natural fertilizer, you can't be a desk potato.

THE BRAIN'S executive functions – higher-order capacities valued by businesses everywhere – respond to exercise. They help an engineer both design a satellite and resist hitting his boss during a performance review.

JUST AS ROADS improve access to goods and services, exercise makes it easier for oxygen to get to overworked tissues, via the blood, and absorb toxins. Thanks to exercise, the body's natural hazmat teams reach more tissues and do a better cleanup job.

CLINICAL PROOF Food for Thought

YOU LEARN 20% faster immediately after exercise than after sitting still.

AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE reduces the risks for Alzheimer's disease, dementia, anxiety, and depression – and for hospital visits. It doesn't take a brain scientist to see the inverse relationship between exercise and health care costs.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS who jog for 30 minutes two or three times a week for 12 weeks improve their cognitive performance. When they stop the exercise regimen, the cognitive benefits evaporate.

THE COGNITIVE BENEFITS of exercise have been demonstrated in older people, the middle-aged, and even overweight Japanese fourth graders.