

### CUBICLE CULTURE

By JARED SANDBERG

## Bosses May Disagree, But a Quick Nap Shows How Smart You Are

**WITHOUT FAIL.** Joel Darrow runs into a wall of torpor at 3:30 in the afternoon. The financial engineer describes it as "brick, thick and high."

He doesn't exactly go to sleep, he says, but he might as well. "It's that point in between when you know you're awake but you're basically unable to move," he says. Typically, he's looking at his computer screen, his back to his office door and a pencil in hand. "Next thing I know," he says, "the pencil's on the floor, and I have a thousand-mile stare through the back of the screen."

A colleague once asked Mr. Darrow if he was OK. "It would be easy for someone to think I



popped some pill and was in La-La Land," he says. "Fighting it just prolongs it, and self-medicating with sugar provides brief relief followed by deeper stupor."

No one exactly schedules a slobbering coma each afternoon, but for many people, it's more punctual than the coffee cart. No sooner do you get back from

lunch than every document seems like an opiate, every colleague a sheep to count, and the creepy carpeting an enticing feather bed. It's the only time of day when the incessant chatter of a cube mate can fade like a lullaby. Even insomniacs can't always withstand the contagion of a yawn in the middle of the afternoon.

**TO STAY AWAKE.** Pam Sturchio Quandt resorts to such remedies as candy bars, frozen yogurt and coffee. Bribery also comes in handy. "I'll treat the department if someone goes to get coffee," says the online marketing director.

Neal Katz, who works in an industry that's contracting rapidly from layoffs, says fear of becoming one of them is what keeps him bright-eyed. "If my eyelids feel like they're 100 pounds each," he says, "I still do what I have to do to snap out of it."

Peri Brand, a recent Indiana University graduate, tries to talk herself through it. "You've made it this far," she tells herself shortly after 2 p.m. But only a can of Red Bull, with its heart-pounding 50 milligrams of caffeine, really helps.

The tussle to stay awake is clearly a sign that work is at odds with our nature. We're a society that has ritualized the sleep deprivation that caused such disasters as the Exxon Valdez and Chernobyl, so our daily battle is also evidence of just how dumb the planet's smartest beings have become.

"You're phenomenally stupid when you're sleep deprived, and you're too stupid to realize it," says Bob Stickgold, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "We are certainly the only known organism that sleep deprives itself."

Most mammals are designed to stay awake if there's rapidly changing emotional input, Prof. Stickgold says. But monkeys, for example, don't tend to put their social needs on a collision course with their sleep needs, the way humans do.

**THE MAIN PROBLEM** is that the mechanics of the human body don't mesh very well with a 9-to-5 work day. Researchers have found that when humans are fed at regular intervals and deprived of all sources of time, such as light and clocks, they have the greatest tendency to fall asleep during two periods of the day: between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. and 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. These are natural dips in our biological clocks, or circadian rhythms, and the core body temperature drops along with a person's eyelids.

Potentially plunging us further into oblivion is a metabolic tendency—called the post-prandial dip—to get tucked out after a meal, though researchers disagree on how much of it is attributable to the meal.

"In the afternoon, all these physiological and mental processes begin to go into a dip," says Sara Mednick, a researcher at the Salk Institute. "This dip used to be thought of as a post-lunch dip. But it's been shown to occur when people eat or don't eat." In fact, from the moment you wake up in the morning, she says, "there's pressure driving you back to sleep."

There's also increasing evidence that in the Middle Ages people napped all the time. Ms. Mednick says. But the advent of timepieces, light bulbs and factories made naptime inconvenient for all but the crankiest toddlers. "We're allowing society and pressures of modern age to prescribe our sleep and thought schedules," she says.

Which is why it's such a struggle for Kimberlee Peters, a mortgage-loan processor, to fight off the languor after she eats Chinese food. "I want to crawl under the desk," she says. Besides walking around, her defense methods focus largely on mild forms of self-inflicted torture. She takes her halogen desk light and blasts it in her face. To increase her discomfort, she also kneels sideways in her chair and listens to a thrashing Limp Bizkit CD. Gossip also can breathe a little life into her. "I've actually never seen someone get so pumped from gossip," confides a friend.

Bob Stern, a retail advertising manager, resorts to more spiritual stimulants. They include yoga and transcendental meditation, which bored him to sleep when he first tried it but now re-energizes him. When the yoga and meditation aren't convenient, he turns to Hershey bars, Baby Ruths and Snickers. "They keep me happy," he says.

E-mail me at [jared.sandberg@wsj.com](mailto:jared.sandberg@wsj.com). To see past columns, go to [CareerJournal.com](http://CareerJournal.com).

## Preparing for Vioxx Suits,

By BARBARA MARTINEZ

**WHETHER** Merck & Co. ends up winning or losing in the courts of law over Vioxx is going to depend in large part on the location of the playing field and the leanings of the referee.

For Merck, which withdrew its painkiller Vioxx from the world-wide market six weeks ago because of a link to heart attacks and strokes, the stakes could be huge. Analysts' projections of the company's legal exposure to liability range from \$1 billion to about \$20 billion.

For that reason, both sides are battling for the courtroom advantage—seeking to have many of the cases that have been filed assigned to the courthouse and judge each thinks will be most open to its arguments.

"Where you play your games, everyone agrees, can make a big difference," says David A. Logan, dean and professor of law at Roger Williams University School of Law in Bristol, R.I.

Merck last month asked a judicial panel to move the nearly 50 federal Vioxx cases filed

around the country into one court, the District Court in Maryland. The court is in District, considered to have among the servative judges on the federal bench. filing, the company described the Maryland as ideal since it has tried consolidated publicity cases in the past, it already has cases filed there and it is near major air in an area that has many hotels.

By contrast, a faction of attorneys ing a few hundred plaintiffs want all cases transferred to U.S. District Court in South Texas is considered a very attractive place for plaintiffs," Prof. Logan says. "The juries in southern Texas are among generous in the U.S."

In April, a south Texas jury in state Beaumont ordered drug maker Wyeth billion to the estate of a deceased woman finding that the company's diet drug death. About \$100 million was actual damage, the remainder was punitive damages, on appeal.

Other plaintiffs' attorneys have

## A Christmas I

### Troubled Train Maker Lionel Clings to Box-Office Hopes For 'Polar Express' Replica

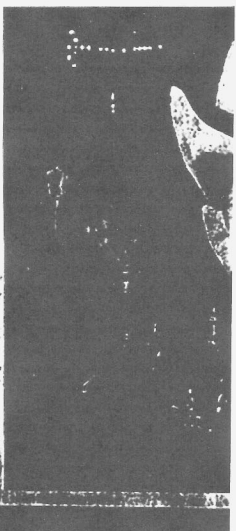
By JOSEPH PEREIRA And ETHAN SMITH

**CHRISTMAS** IS turning into something of a train wreck for Lionel L.L.C., the 101-year-old maker of model trains.

Lionel has the license to produce a replica of the locomotive in "The Polar Express," Warner Bros.' big-budget holiday movie that made its debut last week.

The movie was supposed to rekindle interest in trains among youngsters more fixed these days on videogames. And in spite of the film's showing at the box office, Lionel's \$249 Polar Express train sets have been a hit, selling out in many stores. But hopes for taking advantage of that interest seem dashed by Lionel's filing for protection from creditors late Monday in federal bankruptcy court in New York's Southern District.

Lionel says it filed because it couldn't pay a \$40.8 million judgment against it after a federal court in Michigan found it misused blueprints from a rival's trains. The judgment "has forced us to take this action," says Jerry Calabrese, Lionel's chief executive. The bankruptcy filing will give the company time to appeal the court de-



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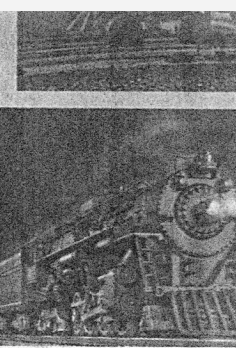
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Lionel, founded in 1900 by Joshua Lionel Cowen, the son of Eastern European immigrants, has experienced wildly fluctuating fortunes over the years. The company based outside Detroit grew to become the world's largest toy maker in the early 1950s. "Every middle class boy wanted to play with Lionel trains back then," says George E. Hoffer, an economics professor at Virginia Commonwealth University who is a model-train collector and a longtime follower of Lionel.

But the suburbanization of America in the post World War II era distanced many children from train stations, Mr. Hoffer says. Interest in train play dwindled further in the 1960s and 1970s, but picked up again when many baby boomers began collecting train sets again as deep-pocketed adults during the 1980s.

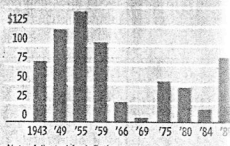
Catering to their expensive tastes, Lionel and other train manufacturers boosted sticker prices for basic kits to levels that became unaffordable.

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### Little Engine That Could

Lionel sales for selected years, in millions



Note: Adjusted for Inflation Source: Rail

## Angry NFL Slams ABC's 'Desperate Housewives'

By JOE FLINT

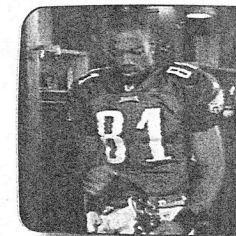
**ABC THOUGHT** it had come up with a brilliant, synergistic promotional play for two of its top shows. Instead it got called for unsportsmanlike conduct.

National Football League officials were furious and said they'd been blindsided by ABC's attempt to use "Monday Night Football" and its hit drama "Desperate Housewives" to hype each other in a sexy promo before Monday's game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Dallas Cowboys.

The spot featured "Housewives" star Nicollette Sheridan, clad in only a towel, trying to seduce Eagles wide receiver Terrell Owens. At first, he resists her charms, saying he has an important game to play. Then she drops the towel. He says, "Ah hell, the team's going to have to win this one without me" and they embrace.

The NFL, which got stung earlier this year when Janet Jackson's breast was exposed during the halftime show of the Super Bowl on CBS, complained to ABC's parent, Walt Disney Co. The league fiercely protects its All-American image and its appeal to young people, and well knows that the Janet Jackson incident prompted the Federal Communications Commission to propose a \$550,000 fine against Viacom Inc's CBS.

"ABC's opening was inappropriate and unsuitable for our Monday Night Football audience," the league said in a statement. "While ABC may have



Mr. Owens and Ms. Sheridan in ABC's promo

gained attention for one of its other NFL and its fans lost."

In this case, the salaciousness was more than shown; the towel-dropping scene is being only the actress's back.

Still, the network was barraged with angry viewers: "Monday Night Football" airing at 9 p.m. Eastern time but during fall time elsewhere in the country. ABC's statement apologizing to viewers saying "it was inappropriate and unsuitable for Monday Night Football audience." As of yesterday, the network had not apologized to the NFL.