

Employee Burnout Facts to Care About

Author: Thandeka Madziwanyika . September 2020

Introduction

Employee burnout is the loss of meaning in one's work, coupled with mental, emotional, or physical exhaustion as the result of long-term, unresolved stress (Calmer, 2020). Although work is the largest contributor to burnout, other aspects of life may play a role. Stay-at-home mothers may also experience burnout as at times they tend to overwork themselves with children, housework, among others. Others include the lifestyle you live and at times, the personality traits that you possess. Seemingly minor issues like overthinking things and having a negative outlook on life can push one straight down the path to burnout. In this article, we will look discuss the important facts of burnout to care about.

The difference between stress and burnout

It may be easy to confuse stress and burnout as many people think that burnout is stress but the reality is that burnout is beyond stress. The table below as outlined by the Health Guide (2020), provides the difference between stress and burnout for a better understanding and diagnosis.

Stress	Burnout
Characterised by over-engagement	Characterised by disengagement
Emotions are overreactive	Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional

Causes of burnout

Various root causes lead to burnout. As mentioned previously, work, personality traits among others, may lead to burnout and the signs and symptoms may differ depending on the cause. Below are some of the signs of burnout from the various origins according to Help Guide (2020):

Work-related causes of burnout

1. Feeling like you have little or no control over your work;
2. Lack of recognition for a job well done;
3. Unclear or demanding job expectations;
4. Doing work that's monotonous or unchallenging;
5. Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment.

Lifestyle causes of burnout

1. Working too much, without enough time for socialising or relaxing;
2. Lack of close, supportive relationships;
3. Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others;
4. Not getting enough sleep.

Personality traits leading to burnout

1. Perfectionistic tendencies; nothing is ever good enough;
2. Pessimistic view of yourself and the world;
3. The need to be in control; reluctance to delegate to others;
4. High-achieving, Type A personality. A person with the type A personality likes to be in charge and be in control of their environment and their lives. They're normally not very detail-oriented, choosing to delegate details to others. They're usually very goal-oriented and practical in their solutions. And arriving at their solutions and goals will entail a no-nonsense, bottom-line approach (Hire Success, 2020).

Signs of employee burnout

Physical signs of burn out

1. Feeling tired and drained most of the time;
2. Frequent headaches or muscle pain;
3. Lowered immunity, frequent illnesses;
4. Change in appetite or sleep habits.

Emotional signs of burn out

1. Sense of failure and self-doubt;
2. Loss of motivation;
3. Feeling helpless, trapped, and defeated;
4. Increasingly cynical and negative outlook;
5. Detachment, feeling alone in the world;
6. Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

Behavioural signs of burn out

1. Withdrawing from responsibilities;
2. Using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope;
3. Isolating yourself from others;
4. Taking out your frustrations on others;
5. Procrastinating, taking longer to get things done;
6. Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early.

What to do if you are experiencing *signs of burnout*

Although it is not always easy to pull yourself out of the ditch of burnout, there are some things you can do to help get yourself out. Most times, the help of others will be needed but this does not take your power away from helping the process as well. Carter (2020) from Psychology Today offers some practices that one can do to be on the road to recovery. These are highlighted below:

1. **Reach out to those closest to you** such as your partner, family, and friends. Opening up won't make you a burden to others. Most friends and loved ones will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your friendship. Try not to think about what's burning you out and make the time you spend with loved ones positive and enjoyable.
2. **Be more sociable with your co-workers.** Developing friendships with people you work with can help buffer you from job burnout. When you take a break, for example, instead of directing your attention to your smartphone, try engaging your colleagues. Or schedule social events together after work.
3. **Limit your contact with negative people.** Hanging out with negative-minded people who do nothing but complain will only drag down your mood and outlook. If you have to work with a negative person, try to limit the amount of time you spend together.
4. **Connect with a cause or a community group that is personally meaningful to you.** Joining a religious, social, or support group can give you a place to talk to like-minded people about how to deal with daily stress—and make new friends. If your line of work has a professional association, you can attend meetings and interact with others coping with the same workplace demands.
5. **Find new friends.** If you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, it's never too late to [build new friendships](#) and expand your social network.
6. **Find balance in your life.** If you hate your job, look for meaning and satisfaction elsewhere in your life: in your family, friends, hobbies, or [voluntary work](#). Focus on the parts of your life that bring you joy.
7. **Make friends at work.** Having strong ties in the workplace can help reduce monotony and counter the effects of burnout. Having friends to chat and joke with during the day can help relieve stress from an unfulfilling or demanding job, improve your job performance, or simply get you through a rough day.
8. **Take time off.** If burnout seems inevitable, try to take a complete break from work. Go on vacation, use up your sick days, ask for a temporary leave-of-absence, anything to remove yourself from the situation. Use the time away to recharge your batteries and pursue other methods of recovery.

Monitor or change your diet

The phrase, “you are what you eat” fits in well with this topic. At times, you may need an energy booster and this may be found or lost in the types of food you eat. Carter (2020), outlines what you can do with your food to help in these times:

1. **Minimise sugar and refined carbs.** You may crave sugary snacks or comfort foods such as

pasta or French fries, but these [high-carbohydrate foods](#) quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy.

2. **Reduce your high intake of foods that can adversely affect your mood**, such as caffeine, trans fats, and foods with chemical preservatives or hormones.
3. **Eat more Omega-3 fatty acids to give your mood a boost.** [The best sources](#) are fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines), seaweed, flaxseed, and walnuts.
4. **Avoid nicotine.** Smoking when you're feeling stressed may seem calming, but nicotine is a powerful stimulant, leading to higher, not lower, levels of anxiety.
5. **Drink alcohol in moderation.** Alcohol temporarily reduces worry, but too much can cause anxiety as it wears off.

Conclusion

It can be easy to fall into the pits of burnout if the stress that you are experiencing is not dealt with. Remember, burnout is a result of unresolved stresses in the workplace, personal life or other aspects that can have a direct impact on how you respond to situations. Reach out to people if you need help. If you are not experiencing burnout but you notice some *signs of burnout* in someone who is, offer your support to them if they will let you.

Thandeka Madziwanyika is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/481950 or

Cell number +263 78 318 0936 or

Email: thandeka@ipcconsultants.com or

Visit our website at www.ipcconsultants.com.

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Employee-Burnout-Facts-To-Care-About>