

Workplace passion and employee burnout

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Many of us have come across this advice in our bid to build careers for ourselves “if you do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.” A saying or advice that has turned to be more of a myth than reality. A number of successful people can attest that their passion in the things they love has driven them to work harder in some cases leading to burnout. Many people due to the love of what they do have fallen victim to burnout.

According to the *World Health Organisation*, *burnout* is defined as “... a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job;
- reduced professional efficacy.”

In a Gallup survey of 7,500 full-time employees, 23% reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, while 63% said they experience it sometimes. Purpose driven work (work people love and feel passionate about) has been found to be among many jobs that are at risk of causing burnout. According to [a study](#) published in the *Journal of Personality*, purpose driven work can breed obsessive — versus harmonious — passion, which predicts an increase of conflict, and thus burnout. On The Mayo Clinic’s list of burnout risks, two out of six are related to this mindset: “You identify so strongly with work that you lack balance between your work life and your personal life” and/or “You work in a helping profession”. Furthermore a Canadian study analyzed responses from 3,715 employees across 12 organizations and found that employees driven by purpose are significantly more stressed and score lower for well-being, resilience, and self-efficacy than those who are not.

Apart from purpose driven work, burnout has also been seen to be caused by leaders who associate long hours of work with getting ahead, leaders with an implicit expectation that staff should come to work despite mental and physical illness, and the nature of certain jobs-some jobs can be more stressful than others. To address issues of burnout, the first thing an organization has to think about is what in its culture is causing burnout? If burnout is the result of chronically unmanaged workplace stress, what is causing the workplace stress? Dr. Caroline Elton, a vocational psychologist and the author of *Also Human*, agrees that it’s the responsibility of leaders “to keep an eye on the well-being of their staff.”

Burnout may originate within the workplace, affecting productivity and creating a hostile work environment- its effects go beyond the walls of the workplace. Research has shown that burnout goes as far as affecting an employee’s home life. In light of all this, we ought to be careful, when it feels like your passion for work or that of your employees has become all-consuming, it might be time to take or

to offer a break.

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