



## Burnout

This knowledge digest summarises two practical articles about burnout, one on the recovery aspects and the other on how to lead people who are suffering burnout. Conceptually, burnout is your body's response to experiencing too much and ongoing stress leading to the depletion of physical and mental reserves.

### Recovering from Burnout

#### **Gramberg, N. 2023, 'How do I recover from burnout?' |practice**

This article suggests that there are three stages of recovering from burnout. Also, that how long burnout and recovery takes will depend on which phase you are in, which approach you choose to help heal, and your specific situation.

**How long does it take to recover?** On average, recovering from burnout takes between three months and a year. Factors that contribute to length of time for recovery include:

- What stage of burnout you are in
- Your level of emotional exhaustion and physical fatigue
- Your social /professional supports and approach to healing
- If you experience any relapses or periods of stagnant recovery.

#### **What Are the Stages of Burnout Recovery?**

*Stage 1: Acknowledge and accept that you have burnout:* Talk to a doctor, psychologist and/or friend/partner. Take time to rest.

*Stage 2: List things that are making you feel stressed:* Look at how tension built up and what situations, thoughts and events have and are draining your energy and contributing to stress. The root cause of burnout is prolonged Stress which can be linked to work structures and culture but also things like perfectionism, not setting boundaries, a tendency to over-plan, social insecurity, lack of assertiveness, uncertainty about the future, working too much, separation, conflict or illness within the family), Share your findings with people you trust, identify the efficacy of what you have been doing to restore that energy.

*Stage 3: Put solutions in place that will help you take back control over your life:* Recovering from burnout involves learning to confront your problems with greater speed, setting boundaries, and living according to your values. Examples of actions include:

- Make sure you're getting enough rest: Relax after exerting yourself. Make sure you're getting plenty of rest to give your body time to recharge. Create a balance between moments of exertion and relaxation.
- Structure your day: Having structure in your life creates peace of mind. Eat at set times, build rituals into your daily routine, and avoid putting yourself under too much pressure.



- Figure out what gives you energy and what drains your energy: Make sure you're balancing out your activities. Once you've figured out what drains your energy, balance that out with things that restore your energy.
- Learn to set boundaries: Saying "no" is the best way to prevent stress. Turn things down if you don't want to do them or you've got too much on your plate.

## Leading burnout people

**Abrahams, R and Groysberg, B 2022, [Leading an Exhausted Workforce](#) Robin Abrahams and Boris Groysberg March 25 2022.**

This article offers a list of tips for leaders whose people are at risk of, or who are suffering burnout. The following list are ideas for fostering healthy coping mechanisms and discouraging unhealthy ones, including causing additional anxiety.

*Role model self-care*: Walk the talk on good practice for managing inevitable human imperfection with mental flexibility, emotional openness, and healthy habits. This includes doing self-care, which will help you be less tense, irritable, withdrawn, and even volatile. Self-care does not have to cost money, it can take the form of sleep, exercise, nutrition, hydration, and downtime.

*Support healthy behaviours*: People don't need advice, they need practical support in the form of resources (time, money, equipment, access) to do self-care. Keep self-care at the forefront of mind by making it a regular topic of conversation. On occasion begin a meeting by asking everyone to state one good thing they've done for themselves, or a meaningful conversation they've had lately.

*Cultivate mental flexibility* - Keep mental muscles limber by:

- At work make a regular habit of asking for input and admitting what you don't know. Normalize and destigmatise admitting mistakes. Acknowledge conflicting impulses and values, make it OK to change your mind when new information comes in, and apologise without embarrassment when you need to. This will build trust in teams and help combat mental fog and cognitive tunnel vision.
- At home consider a personal practice to get yourself out of mental ruts. Spending time in nature, journaling, starting a new hobby, meditation — anything that uses different muscles in the brain and creates an opportunity for reflection.

*Strike a balance with emotional openness*: A leader cannot share every passing doubt and fear or lean on team members for emotional reassurance. Your more tuned-in team members will know when you're having a bad day so just admit it and everyone can make the appropriate adjustment

*Reduce stressors in employees' lives*: Think of this goal as a psychological energy conservation plan: What can be done to conserve people's valuable cognitive and emotional energy for the most crucial tasks, at work and home? Encourage suggestions, employees may well come up process improvements, or ideas for low-cost perks or practices that would ease their lives.



*Mitigate mistakes:* Acknowledge the mental burden that people are under. Create checklists, cross-check protocols, backup plans, to prevent serious errors.

*Reduce tunnel vision:* Mitigate the tendency to focus on only one side of an issue or getting hung up on details or one's own concerns) with mental exercises (or role play) to ensure all aspects of a situation are being examined. One idea when debating a course of action, is to have team members list all the hard, cold reasons for a decision and then all the warm, fuzzy reasons, or the most pessimistic/most optimistic scenarios, or the like. Another idea is to ask at the end of a meeting "What questions would someone who really doesn't understand this issue have?" People can admit to greater vulnerability and confusion if they don't have to attribute it to themselves.

*Destigmatise failure:* Reward people, rather than metaphorically shooting, the messengers of bad news. Don't make employees afraid to admit mistakes or bring problems or unknowns to your attention. Analyse failures together with your teams and figure out ways to improve.

*Make It Meaningful:* Meaning matters more than happiness, especially when it comes to surviving in difficult circumstances. Research finds that people who have little sense of meaning in their lives, *even if they are happy*, have immune-response patterns similar to "people who are responding to and enduring chronic adversity."

As a leader, encourage team members to engage in meaningful activities inside work by fostering on-the-job friendships and chances to connect. Draw a clear picture of how specific tasks fit into agency or department's mission, and how the agency helps society. Talk about what you find meaningful in life, and how you ensure you have the time and energy for these things. Also acknowledge that meaning is not found exclusively, or even primarily, through work and find out what non-work activities matter to your team. Connect their job to these sources of meaning eg. a salary that sends the kids to a good school; a flexible schedule for auditions; opportunities for continuing education or travel; perks and discounts that make life with kids — or life alone — easier