

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2018 Edition

Perspective

Slow Down Before It's Too Late

Dealing with burnout

The signs of burnout are not subtle. They may be mistaken for general fatigue or the feeling of being overloaded. Some distinct signs and symptoms of burnout include anxiety, depression and irritability as well as the feeling of being tired even after resting all weekend. That's assuming you had a weekend away from work. The difference between the general tiredness or being in a bad mood and burnout is really that these symptoms never go away. In fact, they almost always get worse. We feed the burnout by isolating and even cutting back on leisure and social activities. That in turn leads to an increased feeling of resentment and new or worsening health problems.

For most of us, we can feel ourselves being sucked into the vortex of burnout. We know we're in trouble. We just have no idea how to get out. So we adopt coping mechanisms, most of them as unhealthy as our working life. We drink a little, then a little more. We eat a little, then a bit more, particularly sugary treats and fast food because we're too busy to cook. But mostly we delay, defer or postpone any action to lessen the burden of burnout until it's too late. It is never too late to adopt a healthier lifestyle, which is the only real solution to burnout. Perhaps we should also stop working 80 hours a week.

When you are ready, here are three approaches that help you slow down and finally deal with not only the symptoms of burnout but the problems that caused it in the first place.

Let's Get Physical

The road to recovery from burnout starts with taking better care of your physical well-being. No one will look after your body but you. Once you begin to look after yourself properly, you will almost be guaranteed to feel some relief from the pressure. Practice good sleep hygiene — go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. If you can't manage eight hours a night, take seven. It's better than the five or six you're probably used to now. Get some regular exercise, even if that means a fifteen-minute walk at lunch and another fifteen minutes after work. Every single bit of exercise counts!

Take a look at your diet and start weaning yourself off the junk foods. We really are what we eat. Once we feel a bit better, we can also go back to our social networks and our hobbies, both of which we didn't have time for in our burnout phase. If you've lost interest in them, find new ones that allow you, your body and your brain to just let go and relax. You can still work hard, but you also need to relax.

Take a Break

One of the biggest mistakes that overworked and overburdened professionals make is to skip their vacations or save them up for later. Unfortunately, later never comes or they just too busy to take time away from their jobs. It is absolutely essential if you want to avoid burnout or if you are already feeling it to take time away. This should include regular yearly vacations where you limit your access to work and mini-vacations or breaks along the way. It could be a twice monthly golf date, a visit to the spa or just an extra long weekend to chill by the pool. Once you relearn to take a day off here and there, you will be surprised to discover that your teams actually managed to get along without you.



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You should also take short breaks throughout the workday. It could be that brief walk or simply shutting off your computer and putting your devices on standby. This time will not only help you relax, but studies have shown that it is also an effective technique to increase your productivity.

Learn to Work Differently

Most unwanted stress at work comes from miscommunication and misunderstandings. That's why it's important to clarify your roles and responsibilities and to have an open line of communication with your manager. You may have been asked to do more than you can perform or you may have acquired extra duties along the way. Some managers may see that you are in distress and others are oblivious. It is always okay to say that you are swamped or struggling and ask for assistance. If that doesn't work, you may have to relearn an important two-letter word. Saying "no" is always an option. This is especially true if your health or well-being are being compromised.

You can also request a transfer or reassignment to a less stressful job, at least until you regain your balance. If none of the above works, you may want to start thinking about a new job. It's truly not worth it to get sick or experience total burnout. The cost is way too great!

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