

PREVENTING JOB BURNOUT

Nine Ways to Reduce Workplace Burnout

By Lorna Riley, CSP

Certified Speaking Professional

760-639-4020

Could this be you? Do you have a decrease in energy, sleep difficulties, chronic fatigue, nagging colds, tense muscles, increased cynicism, decrease in work satisfaction, frequent headaches, nausea, back pain, dizziness, frequent depression? Are you more accident-prone, easily irritated, tearful, more negative, pessimistic, or indecisive? Do you feel emotionally drained, incompetent, or helpless?

If you've been experiencing even just a few of these symptoms, you may be showing early signs of job burnout.

Job burnout is a term used to describe a decline in one's emotional, mental, and physical well being as a result of long-term stress without sufficient compensation. Stress alone is not the culprit. In fact, stress allows people a sense of exhilaration when it's used constructively and helps people function at their best. When stress continues for months or years without adequate reward and support however, we easily become candidates for the more serious effects of stress called job burnout.

The term "burnout" was first coined in the 1970's when describing the damaged vein of a heroin user. It's now used to describe the best and the brightest of people who experience a gradual erosion of their capabilities and spirit. It comes from literally "frying" the nervous system into a chaotic state of frayed, over-stimulation and imbalance.

Who gets it? Susceptibility largely depends on:

1. Who you are:

- a. Often people who love their work become burnout victims. They continue to work at what they love to the exclusion of all else. Family members are largely ignored, friends drop off, or there never seems to be enough time for exercise. Hobby? No time for that!

- b. Perfectionists and "A" type personalities with high expectations are high on the list too. A relentless drive for the illusive "perfect" result is an artificial bar. We create unnecessary stress by often demanding unrealistic standards and expectations not only of ourselves, but others. Strive to do your best, but keep effort proportionate to what's at stake. If your body runs down, you won't be able to do what you love at all!
- c. The way you are chemically wired—the amygdala portion of the brain is responsible for regulating emotions of the nervous system (capacity for fear, love, anxiety etc.). Some people have nervous systems that are more "stress hardy." Others under the same stimulation are more susceptible to nervous fatigue and burnout.

2. Where you work:

- a. People who have heavy contact with the public such as teachers, sales professionals, flight attendants, restaurateurs, human resource personnel etc. are more susceptible.
- b. Those with deadline work (newspaper/ magazine journalists, advertising executives, designers etc.) or with high responsibility for others (lawyers, doctors, caretakers).

3. What you do:

- a. Stressful working conditions on the job contribute as well--constant change, inadequate feedback, little or no compensation, constant rejection, extreme competitiveness, or unchallenging work all add to the mix.
- b. Repetitive tasks or sameness on the job or at home also contribute as well (assembly workers, file clerks, data entry etc.) Doing the same thing over and over again "burns" neural pathways that will eventually weaken the entire system. It also prunes back dendrites necessary for enhanced brain function. Literally, doing the same thing over and over can make you feel "stupid."

When these conditions merge, reexamine your work priorities, balancing efforts, and coping strategies. Here are a few tips for getting out of the embers:

1. Eat a high-energy diet--fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains, and megavitamins. Cut out “white” foods such as refined sugar and white flour, high fat foods, sodas, caffeine, chocolate, dairy products, red meat, and alcohol. These foods are harder to digest, deplete energy, and suppress the immune system. If you have chronic fatigue, see your doctor. There are several excellent books with specific diet requirements for its reversal.

2. Exercise every day. I know it's hard, but exercise is not an option. Get up 30 minutes early every day to do *something*--stretching, a brisk walk, toning. Stressed, tense muscles need oxygen. You can get that through stretching and deep breathing. An excellent video series by "The Firm" specializes in aerobic weight training. You'll get heart *and* muscle work done concurrently--saving time, oxygenating the body, and building strength. When you feel stronger physically, your mood and sense of well-being improves. Blood rich in oxygen helps feed the brain (the brain consumes 20% of the body's oxygen) and increases alkalinity, making it harder for unwanted bacteria and viruses to get a foothold. It takes 21 days to form a new habit. Exercise is a habit that could save your life.

3. Pretend that you've retired. Imagine that you just work for fun. Imagine that you don't need to work—that everything you do is joyful. When your efforts are more relaxed, ironically you'll get better results.

4. Breathe deeply. This is critical, especially when you're under the gun. Learn to take 4-8 breaths per minute. Shallow, fast breathing contributes to nervous exhaustion. Slow, long breaths kick in the body's natural relaxation response and force the nervous system to calm down.

5. Force yourself to relax. Rest periodically during the day. Even five minutes can make a difference. I have a friend who didn't--lived on donuts, coffee, fast food, fast talk, and fast times. Now he wears an insulin pump.

6. Simplify your life. Get rid of excess baggage--stuff in closets, junk in your wallet or purse, the cluttered garage--even a bad relationship.

7. Handle paper only once. Make a decision to toss it, refer it, act on it immediately, or file it (TRAF). Reducing cluttered papers reduces the “visual noise” of stress and will help focus your effort.

8. Stop rushing. If you’re habitually late, set your watch five minutes fast and live your life five minutes ahead of the world. You can cash in on those precious minutes whenever you need them.

9. Reduce your expectations. We create our own stressors. Don't be so hard on yourself. Save some goals for tomorrow. They'll still be there when you wake up. If you constantly try to exceed your limits every day, eventually you'll pay with your health. Be a partner with your body and learn to listen when it's asking you to stop. Honor yourself.

Life is a series of moments. Learn to live in the “now” and enjoy each one of them!

Contact Lorna Riley for a complete list of training programs and speeches:

Lorna@lornariley.com

Or call 760-639-4020.

For more resources and complete listing of services, please visit our sites at:

www.straightreferrals.com

www.otclearning.com

www.lornariley.com