



Avoiding Burnout in the Workplace

There is a proverb that states, “a man can do nothing better than to find... satisfaction in his work”. Most of us spend 30% of our adult life at the place of our employment. If what the writer of this proverb says is accurate, then it would be tragic to not enjoy what we do for a living! Far from being enthusiastic about going to work, many Americans dread Mondays and can’t wait for Fridays. One of the key reasons that work becomes laborious and mundane is because of what I call “Burnout in the Workplace.”

Some common symptoms: a growing lack of enthusiasm, fatigue, irritability, loss of memory, and a sense of being overwhelmed and under appreciated. Frequently, it seems that this form of stress is not limited to a huge amount of workload, but rather internal turmoil that prevents balance and enjoyment in the workplace.

Can’t say no

For example, if you have time refusing a request of a co-worker or feel guilty when you say no to your supervisor regarding an overtime opportunity because of previous plans, you are eventually going to feel taken advantage of.

Perfectionism

If no one can “do the job as good as you do” and as a result you won’t delegate or even begin on a project unless you can do it “perfectly” you are in line to be overwhelmed.

Wrong position

If somehow you are placed in a position that doesn't match your particular personality type, you will grow in frustration and others won't benefit from your lack of passion either.

Insecurity

If you find yourself driven to success to the point of having to prove something or impress somebody frequently, you will become disappointed. What if the person you are working for is never impressed or the people you are trying to prove something to don't care? That's a lot of spinning of wheels with very little movement forward.

Misplaced Priorities

If you simply exist for your job and have no outside interest, or if your total sense of identity is wrapped up only in what you do rather than who you are, you'll eventually begin to burnout. This is one reason many cease to live after retirement. In the bigger scheme of things your work should only be one slice in the pie of life. Is your job truly what matters most?

Below is a brief inventory to help determine if you are avoiding burnout or headed towards it. Check the statements you agree with.

Burnout Inventory

- 1) I find, increasingly, that I can hardly wait for quitting time so I can leave work.
- 2) I'm thinking more about changing jobs.
- 3) My energy level is not what it used to be.
- 4) I'm feeling an abnormal amount of responsibility and pressure at work these days.
- 5) I don't seem to pay attention or concentrate at work like I did in the past.
- 6) I feel unfulfilled and disillusioned.
- 7) I'm not as enthusiastic about work as I was 2 years ago.
- 8) I feel like a failure at work. All the work I've done hasn't been worth it.
- 9) I find I'm doing fewer things at work that I like or that I do well.

10) I don't feel adequately rewarded or noticed for all the work I've done.

If you agree with the majority of these statements, then you may be feeling burnout and be in need of professional counseling or at least, a change in lifestyle or jobs.

If you need to recover from burnout or truly want to avoid it altogether, I suggest some timeless well worn principles that can help:

Is it a job or call?

Determine if what you do for a living is simply a job or a "call". Is what you're doing simply a means to an end, or are you cut out for this position because of the impact you can leave on others?

Are you misplaced?

Is the position in the organization a fit for your personality? For example, if you are an introverted person, strong sales and public relations will eventually drain you. On the other hand if you are the extroverted type, a corner office in the back alone or quiet cubicle will most likely bore you to tears!

Lower your bar?

Learn to lower the bar. If everything has to be "perfect" you will either have a hard time delegating because "no one can do it better than you" or you'll get backed up on your projects because you won't start one unless it can be done "perfect". By the way, when I say lower the bar I'm not suggesting sub-standard work, but I am suggesting that you learn that sometimes "good" can be good enough!

Verbally draw boundaries?

I remember before I accepted a position with an organization ,in my final interview, I was asked how I would divide my responsibilities within my 60 hour work week? My reply was, I'm not working 60 hours. Once the shock on their faces wore off, we were able to negotiate a 50 hour work week.

If you feel you are asked to go beyond your duties, contract or hours, and you're starting to burnout, speak to your supervisor or administration and negotiate what will work for both you and the company. As one successful businessman once told me, "if you don't raise your hand you'll never get called on". In others words speak up!

Take a Break and Breathe

Nobody was physiologically designed to work "petal to the metal" without running out of gas eventually. Take that needed vacation, a sabbatical if possible, a lunch break, or a walk around the office complex. Just breathe and above all else change the scenery. I'm convinced that burned out employees, as loyal as they may be, cease to be effective within the organization.

Take Control of you Job and Life

If you feel you can't take control of yourself at your place of employment then you are in the wrong place emotionally and/or professionally.

I'll never forget the burnout I was suffering as a former Senior Pastor of a Church in the Redwoods of California. A Church consultant once told me that my congregation really didn't care what happened to me or my family. They just wanted to keep the "machine" running and that if I didn't take control of myself and family they weren't going to do it for me. I was speechless, and proceeded to make one of the biggest and best changes of my career.

So please, in the 30% of the work life you have left, determine that they will be faced with passion, good work ethic, and above all else enjoyment!