

Banish Burnout for Your Teams and Yourself

by Janice Litvin, workplace wellness speaker and author



There can be a lot to be stressed out about these days. In the energy industry, stress can come from storms, fires, freezes, cyber threats, COVID-induced revenue reductions, green energy legislation, and more.

"Firewalls are like Swiss cheese," Dr. Massoud Amin said at a recent MEA Executive Forum. "It's going to take a much higher level of scrutiny to fortify your systems." The same is true of fortifying your workplaces from stress and burnout. Did you know

that the World Health Organization declared burnout an illness back in 2019? They defined burnout as, "an occupational syndrome caused by chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

This definition creates the doorway to discovering that burnout is a two-way street. It is not simply the workers who are responsible for self-care or actual behavior change. It is also incumbent upon the organizations to ensure that their company does not facilitate a burnout culture.

DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE BURNOUT



- #1 Unfair treatment
- #2 Unmanageable workloads
- #3 Lack of role clarity
- #4 Lack of communication or support
- #5 Unreasonable time pressures

Source: <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>

A 2019 Harvard Business Review article entitled, "Burnout is About Your Workplace, Not Your People" backs up this idea. "The responsibility for managing burnout has shifted away from the individual and towards the organization."

Often, neither company leaders or team members realize when they are approaching burnout. They soldier on and continue to work hard and then suddenly they are snapping at co-workers or family members and feeling emotionally exhausted, with poor sleep. Hopefully, by the time these symptoms appear, they are starting to get it. They are extremely stressed and heading to full-blown burnout.

Burnout, by the way, is a more technical term than one usually considers. The Mayo Clinic defines burnout as a "state of physical or emotional exhaustion that involves a sense of reduced accomplishment, and loss of personal identity." If someone is truly burned out, simply eating healthy, engaging in physical activity or getting sleep is not going to fix the problem. At that point, those band-aids won't even begin to scratch the surface.

Exactly what part does the organization play in facilitating a burned-out organization? What blind spots (as described by Kevin McCarthy at a recent MEA event) might you have when it comes to burnout policies?

Here are some questions to ponder.

- Do you expect your staff to be on call every weekend when they do not support a mission-critical system?
- Do you support the idea of time off with pay when someone has a sick family member at home?
- Do you ask your people how they feel about the idea of a mask mandate or a vaccine mandate?
- Do you overload your workers?
- Are you clear with what you want them to do?
- Do you give them control over their work?
- Do you support them adequately?
- Do you acknowledge their hard work?

In the same Harvard Business Review article, a 7500-person Gallup study was analyzed. Gallup identified five key drivers of burnout in most workplaces:

1. Unfair treatment at work

2. Unmanageable workload
3. Lack of role clarity
4. Lack of communication and support from their manager
5. Unreasonable time pressure

The article goes on to point out that: Companies without systems to support the well-being of their employees have higher turnover, lower productivity, and higher healthcare costs, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). In high-pressure firms, healthcare costs are 50 percent greater than at other organizations. Workplace stress is estimated to cost the U.S. economy more than 500 billion dollars, and, each year, 550 million workdays are lost due to stress on the job. Another study by the APA claims that burned-out employees are 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job, 63 percent more likely to take a sick day, and 23 percent more likely to visit the emergency room. In general, burnout are costing U.S. companies up to 190 billion dollars in annual healthcare spending.

As energy leaders it is important for you to not only take care of your teams but also, yourself.



Whether you need to set boundaries for yourself or your staff, it's helpful to employ these strategies:

1. Know your own limits - physically, mentally, and emotionally. We often say yes to requests and then resent it later.
2. Make sure everyone is clear on job descriptions and who is accountable for what.
3. Define and discuss priorities and deadlines to avoid being stretched too thin by non-essential tasks.
4. Set expectations for team members early and often. Stay in touch with team members to make sure everyone is on task and not overwhelmed themselves.
5. Hit the pause button before automatically agreeing to a request. Sometimes it's a matter of controlling your schedule. Saying something like, "I'll check my calendar and let you know when or if I can fit this request (or meeting) into my calendar" will provide you more freedom.

“ Treat your employees like you would treat your family, with care and respect.

My three best tips for banishing burnout are to incorporate self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-management.

#1 S-T-O-P

One of the easiest ways to make immediate changes to your behavior is to remember to S-T-O-P, which stands for:

- Stop
- Take a breath
- Observe
- Proceed

Penning by Jon Kabat-Zin, the father of modern-day mindfulness, S-T-O-P is a very powerful method for immediate

behavior change. This is the best way I have found to interrupt negative thoughts and turn your mood around from negative to positive. Here's how S-T-O-P works. *Stop* gets you to pay attention to your thoughts or behavior. The deep *breath* has a calming effect by engaging the parasympathetic nervous system. *Observe* allows you to rationally acknowledge that you may be overreacting. *Proceed* gives you the choice to continue or change your state of mind and behavior. It's just that simple, S-T-O-P guides you to stop and pay attention to your thoughts and actions in the moment.

#2 Perform a Stress Audit

The Stress Audit can be exercised every time you catch yourself getting upset over something that happened, such as a disagreement with a colleague, family member or friend. For example, a colleague criticizes you in front of others, and naturally, you feel upset. That's when it's time for a stress audit, which helps you examine what happened and every facet of your reaction: physical, emotional, and verbal.

Writing with pen and paper keeps you focused and boosts creative output. According to Daniel Pink, author of "Drive: The Surprising Truth About

What Motivates Us," sometimes you don't realize what will come out until after you start writing. While you're writing, your amygdala (or fight-flight-freeze center) is activated. While you re-read your writing, the prefrontal cortex (the rational, executive part of the brain) is now engaged. That is the trick - moving reactions to the analytical brain.

#3 Set Healthy Boundaries

The need to set boundaries has grown more important. As the workday has increasingly expanded into a 24/7 schedule, text messages and emails can arrive at any time of

day or night, demanding attention and responses. Also, attempting to meet the needs of everyone in your organization, while at the same time maintaining a reasonable workload - and work schedule - can challenge your limits.

Remember, your workers are your most important asset. Without them, you would have no customers. So treat your employees like you would treat your family, with care and respect and they will, in kind, be dedicated and loyal. ♡



Janice Litvin is a workplace wellness speaker and author of "Banish Burnout Toolkit". She is on a mission to help leaders and teams banish burnout in their organizations. She was a presenter at our recent MEA Executive Roundtable. More information about Janice's programs and book can be found at: <https://www.JaniceLitvin.com>.