

# THE SHRMBlog

## How Emerging Professionals Can Avoid Burnout



According to [new SHRM studies](#), 27% of Generation Z workers report that their job has made them feel depressed at least once a week in the last six months. Additionally, the [Mary Christie Institute 2023 Survey](#) reveals the emerging workforce's overwhelming concern: nearly 40% of young workers believe that their workplace adversely impacts employee wellbeing and 45% claim their work has taken a negative toll on their own mental health in the previous year.

### Burnt-out Gen Z

In investigating the prevalent burnout in recent graduates, [recent research](#) reveals that 42% of young professionals who feel burnout at least weekly said they plan to leave their job within the year, compared to 32% of young professionals overall.

### Common causes

Learning & People Operations Manager at Nonprofit HR in Washington D.C., Tameka Spann, attributes “a high workload or unrealistic job expectations” as the primary cause for burnout in Gen Z. Similarly, VP of Learning & Organizational Development at Members 1st FCU in Pennsylvania, Amy Wallace, explains how “many young professionals are very set on making a name for themselves and getting promoted.” However, in doing so, “they set unrealistic expectations for career growth at a pace that isn't possible,” thus causing individuals to lose sight of work-integration balance and burnout.

Given the dire sentiment towards their work, Spann attributes the factors inducing workplace burnout to “a lack of job satisfaction, a lack of support from managers and an overall feeling of disconnect or isolation.” Similarly, Wallace recounts how she met several emerging professionals “who don't yet respect the fact that a healthy career requires a focus on well-being across a variety of spaces,” which results in burnout.

## Common Signs

While symptoms of burnout vary per individual, Professional Speaker on Burnout & Author of “Banish Burnout Toolkit,” Janice Litvin, identifies physical and mental symptoms of “trouble sleeping, trouble eating, and feelings of detachment or disconnect” typically seen in burnt out emerging professions.

In addition to physiological symptoms of “headaches, muscle tension or anxiety,” Spann also points out that “decreased motivation, productivity and job performance” also maintain tell-tale signs of a burnt out emerging professional.

## Tricks to Avoid Burnout

Litvin pinpoints how young workers, while demanding the most meaning and purpose in their jobs, often feel the most intensely about their jobs. In other words, “they want to excel and do whatever it takes to succeed and progress. Sometimes that means saying yes to any request by any boss.”

### 1) Pursue Learning & Development Opportunities

Partaking in the L&D resources offered by your company maintains an effective measure for avoiding burnout. “At the core of learning is an element of self-reflection,” Wallace insists, and explains how self-reflection “begets self-awareness, which becomes a powerful tool when interacting with others, applying new learning, and moving your career forward.”

Similarly, Spann stresses how pursuing L&D opportunities significantly contributes to preventing burnout. These resources can appear in the form of workshops, courses or coaching sessions, but should also “be focused on mindfulness, stress reduction and self-care.” Not only can your organization’s L&D department help you work on finding flexibility and work-life balance, but they can also help avoid burnout by providing “resilience training, soft skills development, leadership development and mental health resources through the company Employee Assistance Program (EAP).”

#### Propose L&D resources

In the case that L&D resources remain unprovided by the company; however, Litvin describes how emerging professionals can propose them in two ways. “First, write a business case for ways this training would enhance their work and productivity in their current position. Leadership, mental health and other soft skills can always be applied to any job.”

Another way involves first completing a course and presenting the certificate and invoice to your boss to demonstrate your seriousness in improving in these areas. Then ask for reimbursement for the class and present how these skills would enhance your work and benefit the company.

### 2) Practice Setting Boundaries

“It is okay to say *no*,” Litvin reassures emerging professionals, “especially when you are starting to feel stressed from overwork. She reminds them of the need “to put your foot down, because the more you say yes, the more you will be asked to do.” Nonetheless, setting boundaries with upper management remains “challenging for many professionals, but even more at the emerging professional level,” since these young workers “feel lost or unsure how to approach the topic,” remarks Spann.

In simple terms, Litvin explains that “the way to set boundaries is to learn to push back and to say ‘no.’” Practice setting boundaries with your direct manager, since that person assigns your projects and workload. If you like the company, try an honest conversation with your boss to help reduce burnout.

## **Communicate effectively**

In efforts to establish healthy boundaries with upper management, effective communication remains essential. Communicating effectively prompts work discussions that “build meaningful relationships where you are allowed to express when you are feeling overwhelmed,” according to Wallace. Litvin points out how, counterintuitively, “many managers do not excel at attention to detail.” Thus, “they may not realize how busy you are, and they won’t know if you don’t tell them.”

“As you communicate with upper management,” Spann explains, “you must be clear, direct, and professional.” She details that through “providing specific examples of how your workload is impacting your ability to perform your job duties effectively,” you can communicate your job expectations up front with upper-management.

Spann also encourages emerging professionals “to be open to feedback and suggestions from upper management and collaborate to find solutions that work for all parties involved.” She also reminds students to “always be professional in your tone and actions and remain tactful!”

## **Put proactive measures in place**

Practicing boundary setting underscores the importance of putting proactive measures in place in order to get to know your co-workers early-on. Litvin offers guidance in familiarizing yourself with the other faces in your department, emphasizing the need to get to know other members of your team in efforts to “ask these more senior teammates how they have navigated through setting their own healthy boundaries and how they’ve established relationships with upper management.”

More importantly, Litvin encourages emerging professionals to spend time with your own manager or one of the leaders. Litvin encourages emerging professionals to invite their boss for a walk, a cup of coffee or lunch, so that you can “tell them you’d like to check in with them about a few things and you need to see them privately.” Then, discuss your projects and be sure to “ask your boss a lot of questions about expectations and how to thrive and succeed without burning out.”

As company leaders often get involved with company-wide efforts and philanthropy activities, such as a health walk, Litvin advises emerging professionals to attend these events as well in efforts to introduce themselves and “let them know how much you like working for the company and that you just wanted an opportunity to get to know them better.”

## **3) Prioritize Self-Care**

In assessing work-life priorities, “if you can determine that the stress is from a lack of clarity about your role or your deliverables, you can address that with your management,” Wallace states. However, “if you feel the stress is due to a myriad of circumstances, be sure to focus on your well-being.” Self-care “can include physical exercise, mindfulness activities, and other stress reduction activities.” But, this ultimately means prioritizing your wellness and advocating for your needs.

Likewise, Litvin and Spann urge emerging professionals who already feel burned out to immediately focus on their self-care. “If you are feeling burnt out, it is important to take time away from work, in which you can rejuvenate, recharge and reflect on your goals.” This time can look like vacation time off, a longer lunch break or simply heading out earlier than normal.

When overwhelmed at work, Wallace takes a life inventory, encouraging emerging professionals to follow suit in order to prepare a plan before burnout occurs. “This means examining why you are feeling stressed: Do you have personal circumstances that are contributing to your stress level? Or is it your workload that’s stressful or is there a lack of a clear path forward to produce the deliverables?” Constantly self-assess by asking yourself these types of questions to avoid overworking or overextending yourself.

Likewise, Litvin and Spann urge emerging professionals who already feel burned out to immediately focus on their self-care. “If you are feeling burnt out, it is important to take time away from work, in which you can rejuvenate, recharge and reflect on your goals.” This time can look like vacation time off, a longer lunch break or simply heading out earlier than normal.

When overwhelmed at work, Wallace takes a life inventory, encouraging emerging professionals to follow suit in order to prepare a plan before burnout occurs. “This means examining why you are feeling stressed: Do you have personal circumstances that are contributing to your stress level? Or is it your workload that’s stressful or is there a lack of a clear path forward to produce the deliverables?” Constantly self-assess by asking yourself these types of questions to avoid overworking or overextending yourself.

Taking care of yourself can help you feel more motivated and energized at work. Nonetheless, these steps altogether can help emerging professionals who may already feel burnt out from the start reinstate their motivation to continuously learn and develop.

## More Resources To Avoid Burnout

Available on the [SHRM store](#), *Banish Burnout Toolkit* by [Janice Litvin](#) teaches emerging professionals how to successfully pursue continuous learning and development without reaching burnout. As a SHRM Recertification provider, this book remains eligible for recertification credits.

Student members have access to more information about the [recertification program](#), [other eligible books for credits](#) and providers offered by [SHRM](#).