

Defining Burnout

What is Burnout?

There are many clinical and academic studies on burnout. Summarized below are of a few key points.

- Burnout is defined as the wearing down and depletion of one's emotional, physical and mental capacity and durability. Burnout is a psychological term describing the cumulative negative results of chronic stress, overwhelm, lack of rest, and perceived pressures beyond one's ability to manage.
- Consequences of burnout include emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced performance, cynicism, loss of interest and energy for activities once enjoyed, isolation and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, including loss of meaning at work.
- Burnout can be:
 - Short-term = situational
 - Long-term = life pattern
- *Burnout* is the outcome of chronic, unmanaged stress from our response to perceived adversities. **Resilience** is the capacity to be strengthened by those same adversities.

Summary of Four Phases of Burnout

Phase 1: Everything's a top priority: overextended, over-doing, feeling trapped

Phase 2: Energy is diminishing, physical fatigue is increasing, shame and doubt enter

Phase 3: You feel you are "going through the motions" to get through the day. You may feel detached and critical. Others notice.

Phase 4: You feel joyless, spent, hopeless, and powerless to change it. Empty inside. Too exhausted to think about anything but escape.

Key Facts about Burnout

- Some symptoms and phases may be perfectly normal responses to real life circumstances.
- Not everyone will experience all the phases or all the symptoms; these phases are a composite.
- A specific event may trigger burnout for a short period of time and then it diminishes.
- Phases of burnout are not necessarily linear, more spiral.
- Denial is one of the key symptoms of burnout and may prevent people from taking action.

Quiz: Do You Need to Take Action?

Give yourself a baseline assessment. Be completely truthful to support your own development.

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Sometimes
- 3 = Often
- 4 = Mostly
- 5 = Always

*"The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining."
-John F. Kennedy*

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| 1. I rush in late to meetings and appointments. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I feel weighed down by demands. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I feel harried, frazzled, or hassled. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I have a short temper, or a lack of patience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I resent others who set boundaries or limit their availability. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I am pulled in too many directions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I worry that I can't keep working this way much longer. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I feel exhausted and depleted. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Piles of papers accumulate at work and home. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Friends describe me as "stressed out" or "overcommitted". | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Lately, my emotions are surprisingly strong and erratic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Life feels like one emergency after another. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I fantasize about escaping. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I am envious of individuals who appear calm. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Some items on my "to-do" list have been there for years. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I tend to ignore any warning signs my body is sending. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I have persistent health issues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I turn down social events I would enjoy because I'm "too busy" or "I don't have the energy". | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I dread going to work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I'm not getting the sleep that I need. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

If you rated ten or more of these at a 4 or 5, consider yourself in need of burnout prevention action.

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Your Real Deal

Based on materials from PEAK Learning, Inc., developed by Dr. Paul G. Stoltz

First, select a context for this activity (career, relationship, life, etc.).

List the five things that matter to you most in this context.

Five Things That Matter Most:

1-10 score

1. _____	
2. _____	
3. _____	
4. _____	
5. _____	

On a scale of 1-10, how fulfilled are you currently on each of these items?

(10=completely fulfilled, 1= completely unfulfilled)

What is your Deal Breaker™ – the one thing that if violated or denied would make you disengage or depart?

If you could improve only one item, which one would you choose?
Put a check mark next to that item.

What is one simple, specific action you would commit to take to become more fulfilled on that item?

Strengthen Your CORE Response

Based on *The Adversity Advantage* by Dr. Paul Stoltz and Erik Weihenmayer

What is at the heart of this situation?

Control – Focus on the aspects of the situation you can control or at least potentially influence. Include your own response and way of thinking as within your control.

What aspects of this situation can I control or potentially influence?

Ownership – Do something to help improve the situation, or make it a little bit better, even if it is not officially your responsibility.

How can I step up to make even the smallest, immediate difference?

Reach – Contain adversity the moment it strikes. Prevent it from spreading to neighboring areas of your life. Don't get obsessed with the downside.

What can I do to contain or limit the potential downside of this adversity?

What can I do to discover and maximize a potential upside? What ideally could result?

Endurance – Look past the issue, no matter how ugly or severe it is right now, to what you want life to look like on the other side. Imagine it.

When I am on the other side of this, what will it look like? How can I get there as quickly as possible?

15 Quick Ways to Renew Your Spirit at Work

1. **The Feel Good File.** Maintain a regular hanging file where you keep notes of appreciation from clients, cartoons you like, birthday cards with meaningful wishes, and other items that make you smile or feel good. When you need a lift, open the file and review its contents.
2. **Random Learning.** Like many other professionals, your office probably contains a plentiful array of great reference materials—periodicals, audiotapes, books, and manuals. At the very least, you probably have an Internet connection. Get curious about a topic or a challenge and see what more you can learn about it in a half-an-hour. Read an article, scan a book chapter, search the Internet and see what comes your way. Apply what you have learned right away.
3. **Audit Your Rituals.** We all have habitual ways of going through our days—things we already do on a regular basis. Do these daily rituals have a positive, supportive impact on your work and life? If not, try some new ones. Examine your rituals for preparing for work, entering the workplace, conducting your business, eating lunch, ending the day, and interacting with others. Design more supportive habits that fit your style such as saying “good morning” or “good night” to coworkers, starting each day with a chapter from your favorite book, a long look at the mountains, or savoring a cup of tea before diving into email and voice mail.
4. **Your Personal Menu.** The benefits of self-care are well known, yet it can become just one more “to do” that didn’t get done. Consider instead, making yourself a personalized menu of items that nurture you, that you would look forward to doing, and that you can order any time you want. Examples might include bringing your favorite CD to play in the background at work, making a bowl of fresh fruit for lunch, taking the scenic route to work, or drawing a little cartoon to slip in your daughter’s lunch box. Consider larger items as well, such as a weekend in the mountains, leaving early to go a matinee movie, buying a new outfit for your big presentation, or relaxing into a spa day.
5. **Bite-sized Inspiration.** There are many places to obtain small doses of inspiration that can kick-start our creative processes. Consider books of quotations, daily email distributions, calendars with daily sayings, a joke-of-the-day, spiritual readings, audio clips, or just opening to a random page in any book. Allow yourself to really take in the message.
6. **Sit in Silence.** Risk doing nothing for a minute. Just stop. Breathe deeply, relax your shoulders, close your eyes and just sit for a while. If you are worried about others seeing you, face the wall, go to a conference room, or an out-of-the-way isolated spot. Connect with your spiritual underpinnings. Listen for guidance. We are paid to think, to be creative, and apply ourselves. Sometimes that means we need to stop the activities and allow ourselves the time and space to rest. Twenty minutes will do wonders.
7. **Touch Nature.** Take a brief walk outside and touch the leaves of the trees as you pass, watch the sun set, or enjoy watering your plants. Listen to the birds, admire the squirrel’s feistiness, notice the majestic arch of the oak tree. In just a few moments, we can reconnect with the planet we live on and the life forms that inhabit it.



15 Quick Ways to Renew Your Spirit at Work

8. **Connect with a Friend.** Seek the warmth of friendly connection. Call, email, fax, or leave a voicemail just for fun. If schedules are tight, even just setting a time to meet up in the future can help you feel the connection. Tell your friend how important they are to you, or what you value about their friendship. Find a long lost friend on the Internet and get in touch.
9. **Smile.** Smile at everyone, including yourself. Answer the phone with a smile, start your conversation with a smile. Smiles create warm connections between people and help lift spirits. Laugh at the absurdity of whatever you are experiencing. Try smiling while looking yourself in eye in the mirror, then smile back.
10. **Give.** Selflessly giving to others generates meaning in our lives. You can authentically respond to an inspiration to give to others. It might take less than a minute. How can you be of service to the person right in front of you? Give your time, resources, ideas, food, a hug, or a small gift. Broaden your giving circle to include new people who enter your life. Try anonymously giving flowers or surprising an associate across the country by sending them a book, card or photograph. Give the gift of your undivided attention, your curiosity and your experience especially when there is no potential personal gain.
11. **Attend to Aesthetics.** Look around your office. Is it pleasing to the eye? Consider adding something beautiful that has meaning to you. Improve your enjoyment of your personal space with plants or flowers, a new “in-basket”, desktop fish tank, room fresheners, a small fountain, music, toys, candy, or a wall hanging – whatever expresses your taste, and aesthetic enjoyment.
12. **Reflection.** With a pen and paper, reflect on the past six months. What have you accomplished? What are you proud of? How does what you are working on relate to your personal mission in life? What challenging situation can you look at more objectively now? Look for patterns, insights, and underlying structures for how events unfolded.
13. **Tell the Truth to Yourself.** What is really in your heart right now? Write it down for yourself. Listen to your truth and acknowledge it. Even if it is unwanted, just allow it to be. Consider carefully your truths, what do they suggest?
14. **Appreciate.** What can you appreciate about yourself? Most people have a hard time recognizing their positive characteristics. Start with your body: generate a feeling of gratitude for your health, and the physical form that enabled you to come to work. Appreciate the hands typing in front of you, moving with such graceful dexterity. Appreciate the agile mind, working on many issues at once. Keep appreciating the small triumphs in your work. Extend your appreciation to others and their successes.
15. **Acknowledge Purpose and Context.** If you were writing the story of your professional life, at what point in the story is today? What is important about this time? Are there specific factors that contributed to you arriving at this moment? Look to the future. Where might your career go from here? Knowing the past and future context that brackets our present work adds meaning and depth to what we do today.