4 Powerful Ways to Prevent Burnout

Burnout is not a badge of honor — it's a problem.

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Burnout is not a badge of honor. It's a problem, and a common one, too. According to a 2013 Harvard Medical School finding, you've got a 96 percent chance of feeling burned out if you're a senior leader. So what's causing us to feel this way? Generally, burnout is caused by a combination of external factors and personal choices. It's defined as a physical or mental collapse due to overwork or stress, and the American Institute of Stress states that 80 percent of workers feel stress at work.

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If we're burned out, then we're not feeling energetic. And when we feel energetic, that's when our brain has what it needs to thrive and excel. Jeff Bezos, CEO and founder of Amazon, believes in energy management — the practice of finding ways to improve your energy levels. Managing your level of energy can be an impactful way to end or prevent a physical or mental collapse. Here are some impactful ways to take charge, manage your energy levels and avoid burnout.

1. Innovate your company's sleep

culture.

Co-workers not pulling their weight, team dynamics or being part of a team that's short of achieving their goals can all add stress to employees and cause burnout. The less your co-workers sleep, the less motivated and accurate they are in their tasks and the harder time they have making appropriate decisions. And contrary to popular belief, the brain can't recover from lost sleep on the weekends — that's why it's crucial to prioritize sleep and make sure you're getting the recommended seven to nine hours every night.

Changing the way your company views sleep will also give you a network of colleagues who are less likely to experience burnout. Leading companies like Procter & Gamble Co. and Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. offer free courses on sleep hygiene, the habits and practices that support optimal sleep. Google and Nike have also improved their companies' sleep culture by incorporating a flexible approach to work schedules and providing nap pods in their offices.

Maybe your organization has a smaller budget than the likes of Procter & Gamble or Google. You can still make an impact by getting creative with fun challenges or a series of lighthearted internal emails to help foster a positive sleep culture.

2. Power pose to increase your energy.

In the book *Presence,* by Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist and professor at Harvard Business School, the author asks, "We know our minds change our bodies, but do our bodies also change our minds?"

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A study by Cuddy showed those who held high-power poses for two minutes saw a 25 percent decrease in cortisol levels and a 20 percent increase in testosterone levels. Those who held low-power poses saw a 15 percent increase in cortisol levels and a 10 percent decrease in testosterone levels.

Sitting reclined in a seat with your feet up on a table, your hands behind your head and elbows outstretched is an example of a power pose. Standing with your feet shoulder-width apart with your hands on your hips and elbows out is another way to potentially decrease your stress levels. Whenever we use more height and space in our posture and stance we are increasing our energy and decreasing our stress levels.

3. Help someone out and experience a neurochemical reward.

When we're busy, the last thing we tend to think of is someone else's needs. But science shows us there is something energizing about helping others. fMRI technology shows that giving activates the same parts of the brain that are stimulated by sex and food. Winston Churchill said it so profoundly: "We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give".

But when we already have a lot going on, how can we help without adding more to our to-do list? Don't focus on doing more. Instead reflect on the little things you do, like sharing a social media post, offering your best advice to a colleague or client, or reaching out to your network on behalf of someone else. Bask in the moment of how the act of giving and helping makes you feel, and when you're ready, build on the momentum. The purpose is to let the endorphins drive your actions.

4. Maintain a positive and supportive work environment.

A supportive work atmosphere where you feel valued and appreciated causes less work stress. If you're not a naturally optimistic person, recognize those around you who are, and associate with them when you can. Spreading negative energy can be draining to both yourself and others. You want to be known as a problem solver.

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At the same time, not being authentic with yourself can drain your energy, and you can burn yourself out by not being true to who you really are. Embrace your "failures," your beliefs, your dreams, aspirations and whatever makes you unique.

Work with what you have. If you have two minutes to relax, make every second count. If you struggle with sleeping seven to nine hours each night and are not asleep during the prime hours of 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., celebrate gradual improvements. Knowledge alone transforms no one. Practicing these energy saving habits will help you beat burnout and experience better well-being.

(By Rachel Montañez)

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