

How to Overcome Burnout Without a Netflix Marathon

April 17, 2020 6 min read

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When it became clear that I'd be spending weeks on end at home, I initially thought that throwing myself into work would be a good way to pass the time and entertain myself. Although it's certainly worked (pun intended), I've felt indicators of burnout creeping up as I've seldom left my laptop. I've been inspired by entrepreneurs sharing on social media how they've realized through this time of stillness that they've been going too fast for too long. Taking a step back from the "hustle" can be challenging, but this period of lockdown invites it.

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So, what to do? I've struggled with striking a balance between the work I need to do and ... well ... Netflix marathons. As leisurely and satisfying as it is to plop on the couch and turn on one of the many Netflix seasons beckoning after a long day of work, it's not doing much to eradicate my burnout and energize me for the day ahead. So, I've put some other tactics to the test, and I'm feeling better already.

1. Base your first task of the work session on an "energy test."

No matter how much you love what you do, there are certain parts of your workday that drain you more than others.

Replying to emails and strategizing content are what drain me. When I begin my workday doing these necessary tasks, I find myself feeling burnt out before I even get to the good stuff. I recommend doing an “energy test” with each part of the work you need to do, which is simply done by feeling into your body and how energized you are before and after you do each task.

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Energy can't be created or consumed, but it can be summoned. I believe that when we're doing something we genuinely enjoy, we draw greater energy. I've found that recording a podcast episode or filming an Instagram story is what energizes me most. So, now when I sit down for a work session, I first whip out my podcast microphone or my phone and start recording. It might take some trial, but determine what order of business brings you into the flow, hones your focus and adds a pick-me-up to your already strong cup of coffee. Do that first.

2. Get in sync with your body.

Although there are many symptoms of burnout, it's usually something we feel physically. The exhaustion makes me feel heavy, like I'm being pulled downward, and while I'm not tired enough to take a nap, I feel tired enough to begin to think of my old pal Netflix again. This is where it's always a good idea to get your heart pumping again.

There are a few ways you can do this. I do 20 jumping jacks in place, stand up and stretch or engage what Kristin Jekielek, an expert in reviving energy post-burnout, calls the “rest and digest” system. “The fastest way to do this is to move your body in synchronicity with your breath,” she told me. “Yoga is one great way to do this, but my favorite is to make tiny twisting motions with my hands in rhythm with my breath, letting it be easy and relaxing. It really works!”

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Now when I'm starting to feel an afternoon slump come on, I find some way to move – even the micro-movements synced with my breath. This syncing of my breath and body brings me back to center.

3. Aim to go deep.

Prioritizing focus has also helped me. Rather than letting my mind be pulled in several different directions with my email, phone and dog near me while I'm working, I follow a strict schedule of what I need to get done and put all my focus on the task at hand. Going deep allows me to find more energy within my task, which keeps me working for longer and actually enjoying my work more.

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I wasn't surprised to learn that multitasking literally and scientifically drains your energy. Daniel Levitin, professor of behavioral neuroscience at McGill University, shared in an article that switching (moving from one focus or task to another) "comes with a biological cost that ends up making us feel tired much more quickly than if we sustain attention on one thing." Hiding my phone in a dresser drawer out of reach helps me personally. If I have to put in effort to grab my phone and check my text messages, I have a few extra beats to catch myself and redirect my attention to the task at hand.

4. Create more than you consume.

Finally, it's important to fill our leisure time with more creativity than consumption. Because we're rigged to be productive, the usual day-to-day hustle of normal life (i.e., life outside of quarantine) doesn't afford a lot of time to create for creativity's sake. I've played around on my guitar,

created colorful pages of notes and doodles while listening to podcasts and prioritized more time for leisure writing so far. Make a list of fun creative activities that you used to love as a child, and try swapping a Netflix episode for an hour of pure playtime creation.

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Research from Lund University has found links between playtime and productivity. Even doodling on a sheet of paper can help you remember more details. In creative playtime, there are no right or wrong answers, happy or unhappy clients or grades. Giving ourselves this artistic freedom reflects in all of the work that we do. As I lean into play during this quarantine, I know it's helping me become less vulnerable to burnout, a practice I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. No Netflix marathon needed! <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/348340>