

Is It Burnout or Boredom? The Answer Matters.

Use these three tactics to banish that sense of ennui..

November 14, 2019 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Entrepreneurs have a habit of blaming their lack of enthusiasm or increased fatigue on burnout. While burnout certainly isn't uncommon among founders, the condition is often self-misdiagnosed, which can derail attempts to address the real problem. As psychiatrist Richard Friedman points out in the *New York Times*, overgeneralizing burnout diminishes the credibility of the syndrome (which has been defined by the World Health Organization). When everyday stress, disengagement or fatigue are interpreted as burnout, every working professional is likely subject to the diagnosis at some point. Rather, Friedman argues, the capacity to "feel anxious, overwhelmed at times and exhausted" can in fact be "evidence you are alive and engaged in your work" and should not be treated as burnout.

What could possibly feel akin to burnout without actually being burnout? One answer is so commonplace that it seems almost impossible, and that's pure, unadulterated boredom. After all, plenty of boredom indicators mimic burnout symptoms, including a lack of motivation, exhaustion and unhappiness. It's therefore easy to see how someone could claim burnout and not notice boredom's red flags.

Related: 7 Ways to Get From Burnout to Balance

Here's the seldom-voiced truth: Boredom and entrepreneurship

often go hand in hand. In an article discussing the real-life habits of self-made millionaires, author Thomas C. Corley admits that many successful entrepreneurs he studied found the experience “intensely boring” at times. That’s hardly the emotion most people would expect from founders who had made it and were living the entrepreneurial dream.

Of course, burnout can be authentic, requiring conscious intervention or help from a trained mental-health professional. When it’s real, it eats away at productivity, morale and individual confidence, and it should always be taken seriously. Yet entrepreneurs who feel uninterested and unmotivated may want to do a bit of soul-searching before jumping to a burnout diagnosis. Those who realize their cynical postures stem from mere boredom can take it upon themselves to make these few key changes in their lives.

1. Fuel a new work challenge.

Boredom can stem from doing the same thing day after day. Getting bored is going to happen occasionally, particularly if you’ve already conquered your current role and need to find a way to stay interested. “Maybe you’re feeling bored because you have become too much of an expert at your job and need to challenge yourself in a new way,” notes fellow *Entrepreneur* contributor Mike Kalis, CEO of Marketplace Homes.

If this sounds far too familiar, it’s time to make some changes. For instance, take on different tasks, or train someone else to handle the responsibilities that no longer stoke your fire. Go after a project that seems a bit beyond your current reach. You may even want to start a side hustle. Who knows? That gig could turn into a whole new entrepreneurial path, smashing your boredom into a million pieces.

2. Change your dull-as-butter-knife routine.

Feel like you can't move forward because you're stuck in a rut? Plodding through daily rituals can weigh down your spirit. "If it's not a challenge you're after but a different kind of workday, it could be that your business life has settled into a routine that doesn't vary much from day to day," suggests digital media consultant and *Entrepreneur* contributor John Boitnott.

What can you do to mix it up and make every day an unexpectedly fresh adventure? Getting a change of scenery by working somewhere else can be a good start. Depending upon how hands-on your role is, you could potentially rent an exotic Airbnb for a few weeks and remotely check off your to-do list. Other ideas for banishing routine-based boredom include taking time for off-campus lunches, learning something that has nothing to do with your current business and reading just for fun.

Related: The Biggest Hidden Cause of Burnout (and What to Do About It)

3. Marry your mission all over again.

Over time, entrepreneurs occasionally lose sight of the reason they started their companies. If you're having trouble connecting to your mission, you may need to revise it or at least get to know it again. See whether your original mission still matters to you, and rework it if it doesn't. That way, you'll feel more in tune with your company's output, which should help energize your work.

Re-examine your initial business plans, and revisit the places

or memories that inspired you to open shop. Returning to your original passion will help you gain perspective on why it might not be a good fit any longer or how you lost your connection to it. Journaling and speaking with trusted mentors are two activities that can give you a sense of perspective, enabling you to rediscover your spark.

The next time you slump in your easy chair after a long day, ask yourself whether you're feeling burnout or boredom. While they can feel similar, the latter is simpler to address by switching up your focus.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/342161>