

Avoiding Job Burnout

By Deanne DeMarco

What happened to Joel? For the past eight years Joel was one of the best employee's on the team. He always came to work on time, seldom took sick time, produced top quality work and got the project completed even if he had to work late. Joel often assisted team members if they ran into problems on their projects. Lately, Joel has been calling in sick, coming in late, and complaining of stomach cramps. At work Joel is irritable with people, both customers and co-workers complain about Joel's' behavior. Additionally, when at work Joel complains of headaches, the quality of his work has decreased, and it takes him longer to get a project completed. What's happened to Joel? Joel is most likely suffering from the **\$300 billion profit killer**, job burnout and distress.

We all experience a certain level of stress in our daily lives. A certain amount of good stress called *eustress* provides stimulation, excitement, and provides a competitive edge. However, continual job deadlines, personal demands, personal finances, difficult relationships, and demanding bosses can all make you feel off balance and give you the sense that you are spinning out of control. Even the most confident super-achiever can be nudged or shoved off balance. Stress hurts your productivity and takes a serious toll on your mind and body.

Dr Hans Selye, the stress research pioneer, describes stress as the physiological reaction to external and internal events. Burnout is the physical, emotional and mental response to constant high levels of stress. When stress remains unmanaged burnout can occur. The inability for the mind and body to relax after continued stressful events can cause the person to become obsessed over personal problems and burnout can occur. Burnout usually occurs when stress builds and a person feels they are no longer able to control their world, and lack motivation to proceed. Sometimes the physical and psychological problems can become severe enough to cause illness and the inability to function on the job. The worker feels overwhelmed and his or her career is actually threatened.

Who gets Burnout?

Burnout can happen to anyone, it can affect everyone in any profession and at every level in the organization. When a team member is continually pushed to the limit and doesn't have the time to relax, or unwind stress can build.

The Impact of Stress Overload and Burnout

The impact of unmanaged stress can result in low morale, increased absenteeism, lost productivity, declined performance, increased mistakes, and increased workplace accidents. Stress overload costs the company money in higher turnover, absenteeism, and lost productivity.

The First Step in Preventing Burnout

Learn to relax and let go of the stress in your life. The type of stress in your life is not nearly as important as your ability to control it. It is critical to admit when the stress in

your life is beginning to reach critical levels. When stress starts to build-don't wait- start burnout and stress reduction strategies immediately.

Stress Reduction Strategies

1. Use Humor

Change your perspective on your situation. Learn to smile, look for the humor in the workplace. Sometimes looking at a situation or a problem in a different light can help you to feel differently about the event. A recent UCLA Medical Center study suggests that laughter and humor can help to reduce stress. Laugh: it is good for you!

2. Pace Yourself

Maintain a practical schedule with your expectations. Identify job activities that could be simplified, and plan thoroughly to prevent last minute problems. Use good time management strategies to help pace the workload.

3. Reinforcement

Value yourself and your contribution to the company. Do the best work you can, even if you feel no one is noticing. Keep reinforcing positive thoughts in your mind.

4. Release Stressful Emotion

Being frequently angry, filled with rage or anxiety, is not healthy. Taking a brisk walk or some other physical activity using the large muscles, will help release pent up emotions and aid the body to eliminate harmful chemical responses.

5. Practice Good Nutrition

Stress robs your body of needed vitamins and minerals such as vitamin B and vitamin C, potassium, calcium, and zinc. A number of research studies have concluded that stress increases susceptibility to illness. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables, maintaining a balanced diet and limiting the amount of caffeine, nicotine, and sugar promotes health and improves your ability to handle difficult situations.

6 Talk to Someone

Share your burden; discuss stressful events with another person. Often an associate, friend or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor can help you see the lighter side or offer a fresh approach to the problem.

7. Take Time for Yourself

Take stress breaks during the day. Stretch, Take short vacations at least twice per year. It is important to take time off for yourself during stressful periods.

Symptoms of Stress

Physical symptoms include

- *Feeling fatigued, exhausted, or drained
- * Irritability, or lower tolerance levels

- * Muscle tension, joint aches, headaches
- * Upset stomach or loss of appetite
- * Susceptibility to illness

Emotional symptoms include:

- Depression
- Frustration
- Loss of self-esteem
- Feeling “powerless” or “trapped”
- Anxiety
- Nervousness

Behavioral symptoms include:

- Inability to laugh at daily situations
- Social withdrawal: pulling away from co-workers, peers, and family members
- Job performance change: increased tardiness, absenteeism, or increased use of sick leave, and decreased efficiency or productivity
- Self-medication: increased use of alcohol, tranquilizers, or other mood altering drugs
- Skipping rest and food breaks

Manager Strategies

Burnout consumes enthusiasm and cannot be ignored. Here are some tips for managers to help employee stress and burnout. **First**, make sure your employees schedule their vacation time and actually take the time off. Don't call them when they are on scheduled vacation time! **Second**, help employees plan periodic breaks- maybe walk around to all your employees with a bottle of water or an ice cream bar or a piece candy. It's a great way to give everyone a quick mental break and put a smile on your employees' faces too. **Third**, plan a brown bag lunch. Have everyone bring their lunch to a workroom or sectioned off part of the cafeteria. Lead the conversation around vacations, hobbies or light hearted topics. This is a great way to help your employees release a little stress, and keep employees motivated too. **Fourth**, help employees with good time management skills. Help them to set realistic project goals and milestone markers. **Fifth**, keep employees in the loop. Employees like to be informed with company changes and progress. **Lastly**, rewards. Rewards include praise, and anything else that is positive. Employees need to feel that they are recognized and valued for their good work.

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