



Burnout: An Ever-Present Risk That Could Affect Your Life

Here are 10 ways how to keep it from happening.

BY WILLIAM J. LYNOTT

Burnout is a risk that hangs menacingly over the head of every professional in practice. It can sneak up on you with little or no warning, burrowing silently into your professional and your personal life. Psychologists define burnout as physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress. It can leave you feeling empty and incapable.

“Burnout is insidious,” says Jackie Nagel, President, Synnovatia (www.synnovatia.com). “It causes decision fatigue, erodes confidence, drains your energy, infects attitudes, amplifies cynicism, promotes inflexibility, and encourages procrastination. Before long, you’re unable to focus on the task at hand. You’re easily disrupted by e-mail and distracted by the simplest of things.”

Consider the experience of Florida business owner Piedad Trujillo. “I have to oversee employees and technicians operations, take care of clients, and run the business as

well. I’ve been doing this for 11 years now, and at this point in my career, I feel thoroughly burned out. I feel that my passion is dying, and I find it difficult to have patience or tolerance with the staff.”

easily and effortlessly to help put a stop to business burnout.

1. Avoid burnout by recognizing its symptoms.

“One of the best ways to avoid

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Arguably, the stressful environment surrounding a medical practice makes practitioners more susceptible to business burnout than members of most other professions. Here are 10 easy steps you can take to minimize your chances of developing burnout and or help to banish it if you’re already feeling the symptoms. Fortunately, most professionals in practice have control over their work hours and can implement these strategies

burnout is by recognizing its symptoms,” says health coach Dr. Sylvie Heyman, www.drsvlieheyman.ichoosehealth.com.

“Some of the most common symptoms of burnout are irritability, poor sleep or sleeping too long, forgetfulness, lack of motivation, lethargy, lack of energy, erratic eating behavior, bursts of anger, impatience, and feelings of despair and depression.”

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Of course, recognizing its symptoms is only a first step in banning business burnout. Once you become aware of the symptoms, it's crucial to take steps to rid yourself of them.

2. Schedule a weekly personal check-in.

"Take 5-10 minutes at the same time every week for a gut check," says Joellyn Sargent, CEO of the Claravon Group, www.claravon.com. "How do you feel about life? Are you accomplishing what you planned? Are you behind, and never able to catch up? Do things you used to love fail to excite you? If things look dark and gloomy, you could be on the edge of burnout and you need to step back for some perspective. Think about how you can refocus on your priorities, what you might stop doing or could delegate to someone else in order to free up energy and keep yourself on track towards your goals."

3. Give yourself and technology a rest.

"Unplug from technology. When the clock strikes 5 p.m.—or whatever arbitrary time you have for closing down shop, turn off all your technology," says Nagel. "Your body and mind need time to renew after a day of demanding work. Give yourself time to rejuvenate your decision-making muscle."

Before the era of smartphones, leaving your work at the office was only natural; taking your work home with you required a conscious effort to do so. Not so today. With almost everyone owning a smartphone, we're all carrying around an office in our pocket. That's why you should determine to limit or eliminate your use of this technology after working hours. Turn off that smartphone completely after 8 p.m.

According to Nagel, burnout is completely avoidable, with proper use of the latest advancements in technology. "Used correctly," she says, "technology makes your workday more productive and efficient. You're going to be in practice for a long time. It's up to you to make business burnout a thing of the past."

4. Stop trying to do everything at once.

It's only natural that as a skilled professional you think you know it all, and you think you can do it all at the same time. But you can't, so you need to stop trying.

Nagel agrees. "Once the sought-after skill of the 80s and 90s, researchers are now finding that multitasking is not all that it's cracked up to be. Although walking and chewing gum is still an acceptable form of multitasking (it's automatic), responding to email while talking on the phone adds to inefficiency. Plus, it's just plain embarrassing when you're asked a question and you're unable to respond appropriately because your attention is divided."

5. Change your routine.

"Nothing's more exhausting than

but haven't done in years. The enjoyment you find in these small steps can spark motivation to do more and take better care of yourself."

"Always remember that you are the primary breadwinner for your family," says Nagel. "That's why your ability to keep yourself healthy is crucial. And remember that recess isn't just for kids. Taking frequent breaks throughout the day will refresh your creativity and reboot your brain."

7. Stop trying to do it all yourself.

"If you want something done right, do it yourself." You've heard that old chestnut many times, maybe even said it yourself. But that's a philosophy that can help hasten your journey down the road to burnout.

"Failing to understand the importance of delegating is one of the most common and harmful mistakes made by

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monotony," says Adelaide Lancaster, writing in *Entrepreneur Magazine*. "If your work looks the same each day, you're sure to tire quickly. Change your routine with some rejuvenating work-related tasks such as reading, taking a field trip, or meeting with a colleague. The to-do list and the laptop can wait until later."

6. Get (and stay) active and healthy.

An important part of avoiding burnout is a constant awareness of its often "invisible" symptoms. Sargent agrees. "Burnout can easily manifest itself in an extra hour of TV, a skipped workout, cancelled social plans and another glass of wine. If you notice these habits creeping in, force yourself to take a walk, play with a dog, or simply stretch. Just do something that requires you to physically move and is not work-related. Even a short, active break like a 10-minute walk can do wonders for your mindset. Go shopping, stop at the park, and watch a rec ball game, or do something you used to enjoy

busy professionals," says entrepreneur and consultant Phil Wilkins. "You must stick to what you do best and leave the rest to others." Even if you are a solo practitioner with only one or two employees, it's important to learn how to trust others with those tasks that do not demand your personal involvement.

Nagel agrees: "Professionals are notorious for 'doing it all.' Hand over suitable tasks to skilled employees or vendors that support your objectives. That will free your own vision and creativity."

8. Stop being a perfectionist.

At the very core of your professional training is the concept of doing things right. It's only natural, then, to lean toward perfectionism in your work. If the words "good enough" make you cringe, you may be showing early signs of what some psychologists call an epidemic of perfectionist tendencies.

"When people care deeply about their work, they sometimes just don't know when to stop," says Claudia Kai-

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ser, owner of NextStageHome.com.

It's important to understand that "perfect" doesn't exist. Train yourself

says Sargent. "Reflect on what you're hearing. If there is a common theme, it may be because your attention or focus is lacking. If so, determine why that's the case and try to become more pres-

of the symptoms but still feel that your work is being accomplished properly, then it's probably just a matter of burnout for you to deal with. But if you're suffering from feelings of despair and hopelessness, you should consider the possibility that you need professional help.

Short of a more serious problem, burnout is a burden that can be dealt with and relieved. While following these suggestions cannot guarantee complete success, it almost certainly will help. **PM**

Train yourself to understand that "good enough" often is good enough.

to understand that "good enough" often is good enough. And don't allow your employees to feel that you are never satisfied no matter how hard they try.

9. Listen for feedback.

"What are people around you saying? If you hear increasing complaints or experience growing friction with loved ones, staff or patients, there's a good chance it's you, not them,"

ent. You may need to stop multi-tasking, unwind early to get a good night's sleep, or take a day off if you haven't had one in a while. That may seem hard to do, but the world really won't stop if you take a long weekend."

10. Make sure it's really burnout.

If none of these suggestions seems to help, you may be dealing with something more serious than burnout. If you're experiencing some



Bill Lynott is a management consultant, author and lecturer who writes on business and financial topics for a number of publications. His latest book, *Money: How to Make the Most of What You've Got* is available in bookstores.

You can reach Bill at lynott@verizon.net or through his website: www.blynott.com