

use their skills and abilities. Employees need to feel needed and important.

- Giving positive feedback and recognizing achievement. Praise and encouragement are vital to job satisfaction.
- Developing a supportive management style. The most stressful management styles are: intimidating, overly ambitious, cold and arrogant or demanding and unfair. If you see yourself in any of these styles, you need to make a change.
- Being fair and realistic in your promotion practices. Unfair promotion practices speak very poorly of a company's attitudes toward its employees.
- Encouraging your employees to share their feelings and concerns. Talking with co-workers can help put an issue into perspective.
- Striving for success. Work groups that are constantly trying new ideas and taking risks seldom burn out.

# Burnout at Work

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Burnout is a cluster of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion reactions. It is the result of constant and repeated emotional upheaval associated with people at home and in the work place. It is created by an environment with too many pressures and not enough support. People who burn out develop negative self-concepts and job attitudes, while becoming detached, apathetic, angry or hostile.

Burnout is a major problem in the helping occupations where people give a lot to others, but fail to take care of themselves in the process. Professionals in medicine, social work, law enforcement and education are especially prone to burnout symptoms.

Of course, burnout can also affect people in other types of careers as well. Jobs that promote burnout include ones in which workers do repetitive or routine tasks, never get much feedback or have a lot of responsibility, but very little control.

Employees who are suffering from burnout feel they are answerable for everything that happens. They feel they receive very little cooperation from co-workers and they personally feel powerless to change things. These feelings tend to make them assume a martyr-like position, become resigned and apathetic and focus on the worst aspects of the job. Persons suffering from burnout often blame others or the situation rather than taking action for change.

## How does Burnout Happen?

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It can begin when a person who has difficulty setting priorities and putting life into balance is confronted with a stressful

home or work environment. Some common sources of job-related stress include:

- Poor time management
- Conflicts with co-workers, supervisors and managers
- Feeling unable or unqualified to do the job
- Difficulties adapting to changes in the work routine
- Feeling overwhelmed by work
- Inability to meet deadlines
- Lack of support from supervisors and managers
- Feeling that work is meaningless or boring

## Stress Build-up

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Many people learn to deal with job-related stress. Those who burn out don't. Often, the types of people who burn out are those who show the most promise at the beginning of their careers. They are perfectionists, idealists and workaholics. They start out enthusiastic about their work, dedicated and committed to doing their jobs. They typically have high energy levels, positive attitudes and are high achievers.

Over time, stress and the inability to cope with it lead to pessimism and early job dissatisfaction. Workers in the early stages of burnout feel fatigued, frustrated, disillusioned and bored. They may suffer from symptoms of stress such as:

- Increased consumption of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine
- Abrupt speech
- Decreased eye contact during conversations

- Changes in sleeping and eating habits
- Withdrawal from other people
- Moodiness and irritability

As burnout progresses, work habits begin to deteriorate. Affected workers arrive late and leave early. Productivity drops. They become isolated and withdrawn and avoid contact with co-workers and supervisors. They become increasingly angry, hostile and depressed. Most suffer from physical symptoms of stress such as:

- Chronic fatigue
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Dry mouth and throat or difficulty swallowing
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Rashes, hives or other skin problems
- Chest pains or heart palpitations
- Nervous tics

In the final stages of burnout, workers experience an irreversible feeling of detachment and a total loss of interest in their jobs. Self-esteem is very low. Feelings about work are totally negative and chronic absenteeism becomes a problem. At this point, the only course of action is to change careers.

## Managerial Steps

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Burnout doesn't happen overnight and it can be reversed with the right steps. Managers can help by:

- Using employees to their full potential. Involve them in decision making, increase their responsibilities and allow them to