



Wtca Update

Stress in the Workplace

Identifying the causes of employees' stress can minimize burnout in your business.

No matter the time of year or pace of work flowing through your operation, it seems as though stress is often hanging in the air. A little healthy stress in a workplace can be a positive, motivating factor. However, too many people allow stress to go beyond an acceptable level and reach a point where it causes burnout.

Stress can result from many things, and each of us has a different tolerance threshold. Some of us—you know who you are—bring stress from our personal lives into the workplace. Another cause of stress is simply feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work on our plates. Working on a team with people of varying personalities and opinions is another potential source of stress in the workplace. When these stresses are internalized or left to fester without resolution, burnout can often result.

Burnout is a response to high levels of negative stress that results in exhaustion and unhappiness. The symptoms of burnout vary and, sometimes even affect people's physical health. Often, people that are burned out feel no satisfaction from the work they do, are visibly unhappy and seem to worry more than usual. It is important to identify these symptoms and alleviate them before they affect you.

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Check for these signs if you suspect that you or an employee may be experiencing burnout: (Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*)

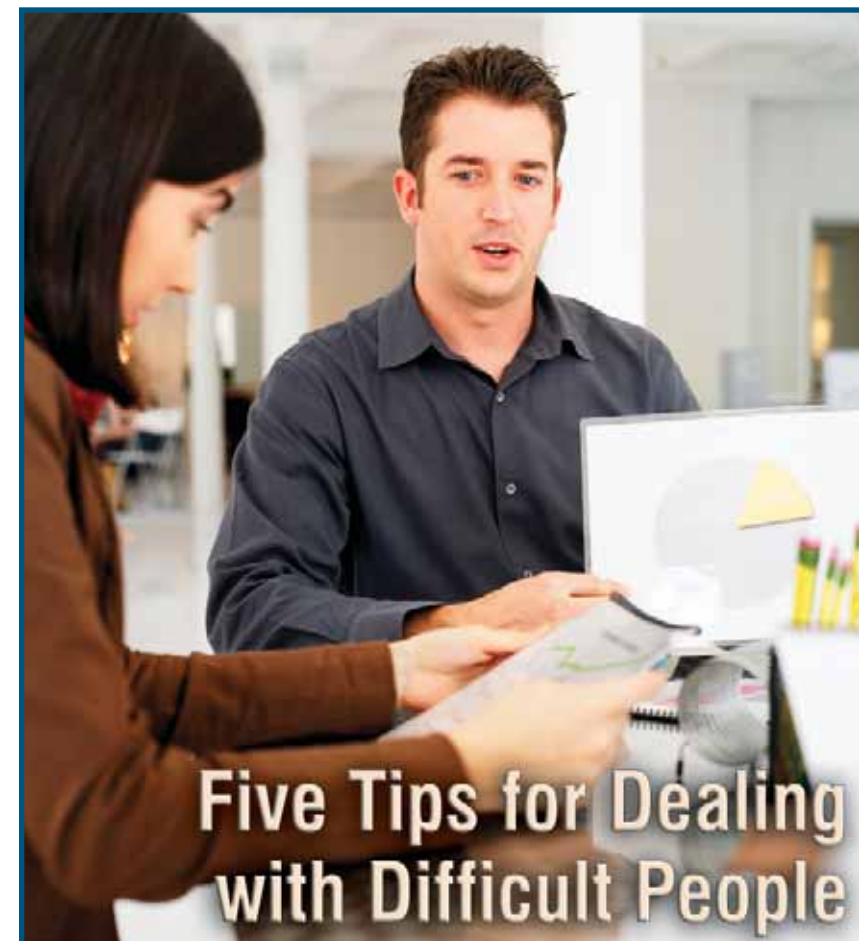
- lack of positive feedback
- tension with other employees
- the pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines
- monotonous workload
- not having the opportunity to progress or advance in the workplace
- personal problems beyond the job sphere

The Simple Things

Burnout can be contagious and spread like wildfire through a work environment. To rid yourself of burnout and prevent its spread, try changing the little aspects of your life. The website www.inc.com offers the following tips to get started:

- **Monitor what you put into your body.** Don't skip meals or live on fast food. You may be amazed at how much eating a balanced diet and drinking plenty of water will energize you and improve your mood.
- **Look for natural ways to energize.** Something as simple as taking a walk can keep you in shape and clear your mind. And try to clear your mind at the end of the day, by winding down with a relaxing, quiet activity.
- **Don't forget to breathe.** Take a few deep breaths and loosen up by stretching. This is also a helpful exercise when you feel sluggish at work.

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Five Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

You can eliminate a common and often frustrating source of stress in the workplace by learning how to effectively handle difficult people. Some talk constantly and never listen. Others must always have the last word. Some co-workers fail to keep commitments. Others criticize anything that they did not create. Below are five productive ways to deal with difficult co-workers.

1. **Examine yourself.** Always start with self-examination to determine that the object of your attention really is a difficult person's actions. Are you overreacting? Have you always experienced difficulty with the same type of person or actions?
2. **Explore what you are experiencing with a trusted friend or colleague.** Brainstorm ways to address the situation. When you are the object of an attack, you tend to feel emotions like anger, humiliation, fear or concern that makes objectively assessing your options a challenge.
3. **Approach the person with whom you are having the problem for a private discussion.** Talk to them about what you are experiencing in "I" messages. This approach focuses on your experience of the situation rather than attacking or accusing the other person. It may also be effective to explain to your co-worker the impact their actions had on you. During the discussion, attempt to reach agreement about positive and supportive actions going forward.
4. **Follow up.** Determine whether a follow-up discussion is needed or if it will have any impact. Decide if you want to continue to confront the difficult person by yourself.
5. **Tactfully confront your difficult co-worker's behavior.** Deal with the person with gentle humor or slight sarcasm. Employ more positive confrontational tactics. Not all of us are spur-of-the-moment funny, but if you are, humor can work well with difficult coworkers.

[Source: Susan Heathfield, www.humanresources.com]

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- **Manage your time well.** Don't take on too much too quickly and learn to delegate your responsibilities. You don't have to do it all.
- **Don't be afraid to have a little fun.** Laugh often and keep light-hearted momentos in your office. Also, make some time to separate yourself from work. For instance, reenergize yourself by using your lunch hour to go for a walk.

Prevention

If you are responsible for managing a department, keep these tips in mind to prevent burnout within your team.

- **Add diversity.** Most people enjoy variety in their jobs, so keep this in mind when delegating tasks to your team.
- **Change your approach.** Instead of stressing about the bigger picture of finishing a project, take it bit by bit and designate time to complete each task. Adopt the "one thing at a time" mantra. Discourage your team from using negative words when approaching a stressful event or project.
- **Take advantage of your creativity.** Examine your work and continue to look for creative ways to improve it.
- **Have fun.** This doesn't mean all play and no work, but something as simple as chatting with an employee can decrease stress. Play music in your office, or just make sure you are doing some tasks you truly enjoy.

It is important to catch burnout or prevent it from happening at all. Burnout affects individuals, but it can also affect everyone on the team by slowing down the completion of tasks, causing bottlenecks and exacerbating mistakes. Watch for the signs, and strive to make your workplace experience a happy, healthy one. **SBC**

Adapted from "Avoiding Burnout" by Krista Reisdorf, Professional Roofing Magazine, March 2004.

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