Workbook

Manager Essentials: Preventing Employee Burnout

According to a 2021 survey from the global staffing firm Robert Half, more than four in 10 employees feel more burned out in their jobs today than they did a year ago.[1] And, nearly half of employees experiencing increased fatigue blame it on the heavier workload they've experienced in the last year.

Burnout – which the Mayo Clinic defines as a state of physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion combined with doubts about one's competence and work value[2] – has only seemed to grow among the global workforce as the pandemic continues into its third year.[3] While some businesses have attempted to address burnout with company-wide initiatives like mental health days, managers are the ones who have to shoulder much of the responsibility for preventing burnout.

But, fortunately, it's possible to bounce back from burnout, and managers can be instrumental in helping their employees do so. Use this workbook to learn how to spot burnout in your employees and help them overcome it.

[1]Kathryn Mayer, "Burnout is continuing to rise; is HR doing enough?", Human Resource Executive, June 1, 2021.
[2]Mayo Clinic Staff, "Job burnout: How to spot it and take action," Mayo Clinic Adult Health, June 5, 2021.
[3]Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, "How to Measure Burnout Accurately and Ethically," Harvard Business Review, March 19, 2021.

Identifying and preventing employee burnout

Has it just been an off couple of weeks, or are your employee's recent deadline lapses signs of a larger issue? It's not always easy to recognize signs of burnout in others, particularly when it comes to distributed workforces, but it's essential in today's work environment. Here's how you can recognize burnout, identify what causes it, address it with your team, and look out for yourself, too.

1.

Recognizing burnout

When your team seems to be operating in survival mode, is only trying to get by in their day-to-day lives, and are no longer thinking about the future, they might be experiencing burnout. According to the World Health Organization, signs of burnout at work include:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion

- Increased disinterest in one's job

- Negative or cynical feelings about one's job

- Reduced productivity[4]

✏️ What are some of the signs that led you to realize you or a member of your team were experiencing burnout? List examples here based on the signs noted above.
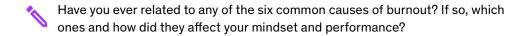
✏️ What's helped you overcome periods when you've experienced burnout?
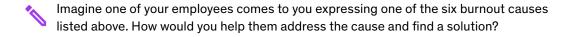
---

[4]"Burn-out an 'occupational phenomenon': International Classification of Diseases," World Health Organization, May 28, 2019.

2.

Identifying causes of burnout

If only the reason behind burnout was as simple as too much work. In her research on burnout in the workplace, Christina Maslach, creator of the Maslach Burnout Inventory,[5] identified six common causes of work burnout:

- Little control or lack of autonomy
- Insufficient rewards
- Lack of community
- Unfair treatment
- Values mismatch
- Work overload[6]

✏️ Have you ever related to any of the six common causes of burnout? If so, which ones and how did they affect your mindset and performance?

✏️ Imagine one of your employees comes to you expressing one of the six burnout causes listed above. How would you help them address the cause and find a solution?

[5]Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, "Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry," World Psychiatry, June 5, 2016.
[6]Elizabeth Grace Saunders, "6 Causes of Burnout, and How to Avoid Them," Harvard Business Review, July 5, 2019.

3.

Addressing burnout

The first step in addressing burnout with your team is for you, as a manager, to start with yourself. How are your communication habits, expectations, and overall leadership style possibly contributing to burnout? Once you've taken a moment to recognize your own role in burnout, speak up and address burnout with employees by:

Understanding the root cause — Check-in regularly with your direct reports on their current feelings toward work. Ask questions, listen, and encourage their feedback.

Advocating for your team — Show your direct reports that you're on their team by protecting their time with cross-functional teams and offering flexibility (whether with deadlines, project ownership, or work hours) when possible.

Eliminating roadblocks — Leverage the strengths of the individuals on your team to eliminate roadblocks for all. This might take shape by delegating a task to an employee who excels at a specific skill or postponing a deadline to lighten a heavy workload.

Encourage use of resources and support — Whether it's in team meetings or one-on-one sessions, regularly remind your employees of the benefits and tools offered through the company. For example, encourage them to schedule a vacation day or use another wellness benefit.

✎ What resources are available within your company that employees can use to combat burnout? Talk to your HR team about wellness programs to share with your team.

✎ Draft a few open-ended questions to use in employee one-on-ones to assess employees' overall well-being. An example might include, "Which projects in your job are you excited to own?" Another might be, "Do you feel like you have real ownership of project ABC?"

4.

Take care of yourself, too

As the saying goes, "Put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others." This phrase expresses a principle managers and business leaders should especially take to heart when it comes to burnout in the workplace. Although it might seem easier to focus on your team than on yourself, keep in mind how symptoms of burnout may trickle down from you to your employees. For instance, when you mention feeling overloaded with work, it can create a culture where employees feel like they can't say "no." Instead, lead by example with actions that combat burnout. Take vacation time, respect work-life boundaries, and be open when you push back on a project or deadline for your well-being.

✎ How might your actions be contributing to feelings of burnout within your team?

✎ How do you demonstrate a healthy commitment to work, while modeling the principles described above?

Make well-being part of your company culture

When an organization and its managers openly prioritize the wellness of the workforce, everyone benefits — from employees to managers to the organization as a whole. Recent WHO research suggests that prioritizing worker mental health results in increased productivity and greater employee engagement.[7]

Talk to our learning experts for more solutions on how to develop managers who keep employees engaged and influence your company's long-term success.

---

[7]"Mental health in the workplace," World Health Organization, accessed February 7, 2022.