

Defusing Burnout

What is your intention for today's session?

How would you *like* to feel:

In the morning? _____

During work? _____

At the end of the day? _____



Burnout Symptoms

Burnout can affect you in a variety of ways, and will look different for everyone. So consider taking action if:

- These issues don't resolve, lasting 2 weeks+
- Work doesn't bring the same satisfaction it used to.
- You're stuck in a negative or apathetic attitude.
- Your work isn't up to its usual standard.
- You feel exhausted and/or emotionally drained.
- You're noticing physical ailments.

Burnout Red Flags

Some key feelings or habits that come along with burnout.

Ask yourself:

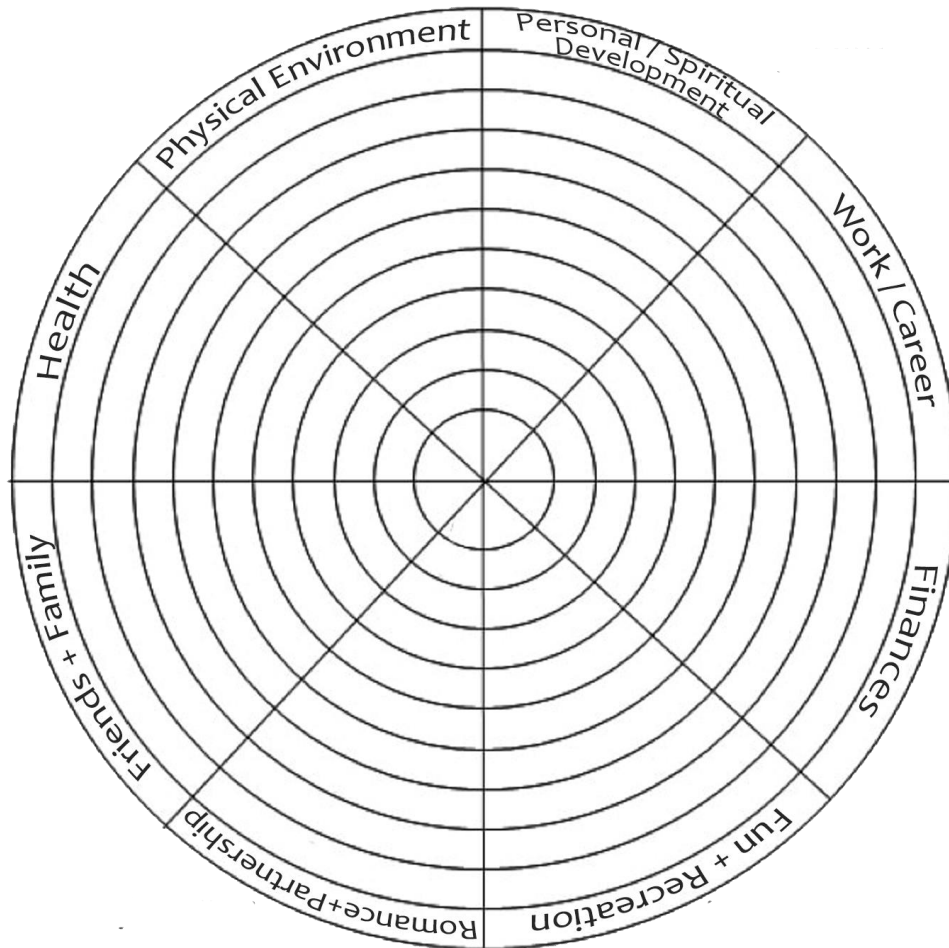
- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, customers or clients?
- Do you lack the energy to be consistently productive?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate?
- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
- Have your sleep habits changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach or digestive problems, or other physical complaints?

Did you know? *In the U.S., during the pandemic homebound employees are logging three hours more per day on the job than before city and state-wide lockdowns.*

8 Aspects of Life Balance

The Wheel of Life is helpful in assessing the balance of 8 aspects of life. This provides a snapshot of our current level of balance and can help chart a path to greater resilience and happiness.

Rate yourself in each aspect on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being least fulfilled or balanced, and 10 being optimal, just as good as it can be! Color in the corresponding levels to see if your wheel is round or lopsided. You can revisit this tool in the future to see how you've progressed in reaching overall balance.



- Physical Environment (Home)** - Your home should be a place where you rest and feel restored.
- Personal / Spiritual Development** - What feeds your soul? It may be faith, finding guidance in ancient wisdom, or pursuing personal development.
- Work / Career** - Ideally, not only is your work fulfilling, but your career feels like it is in balance, and you are moving in the direction you desire.
- Money** - Responsibly managing your resources is essential in both the short term and long term.
- Fun & Recreation** - It's important to have avenues of creativity, curiosity, exploration and playtime.
- Romance / Significant Other** - Balance in the area of romance may feel elusive. Try to simply assess if this is an area where you'd like to improve, without being overly critical or harsh with yourself.
- Friends and Family** - Feeling connected to community is vital, and evidence shows that giving support to other people is one of the most reliable triggers of happiness.
- Health** - Without physical health it's hard to enjoy the other aspects of life. Healthy living doesn't have to be complicated, simply make reasonable goals based on small habit upgrades and you'll start to feel the reward.

Resolving Burnout

Like Rome, burnout wasn't built in a day.

Breaking free of burnout is going to take a multi-faceted approach, and ultimately you are the only one who can initiate the recovery process, and begin to take control over what isn't working for you at work.

This is a long list of suggestions that can help you make the shift back to balance, *but the point is not to create yet another to-do list!* Start with what resonates with you, and come back to the list after you implement one or two practices and keep on adding layers of support.

Nourish your Self

The foundation of self care is simple: *sleep + food + movement*. No amount of mindfulness or other self care habits can replace these fundamentals.

If you haven't got all three of these dialed, you probably want to start here.



Eat well

- Supplements don't replace a nutrient rich, whole food diet. Vegetables and fruit contain phytonutrients including antioxidants, which help our bodies recover from the inflammation sparked by our lifestyle habits. Vitamins and minerals are essential for the processes of every cell, and whole foods are the most bioavailable sources of what our bodies need.
- Processed foods are one major contributor to inflammation. As a general rule, shopping the perimeter of your grocery store (produce, refrigerated and deli areas) will help you find the freshest ingredients with the fewest additives and preservatives.
- Drink plenty of clean water every day. Aim for ½ ounce for every pound of body weight (ie. 72 ounces or 9 cups of water for a 145 pound person).

Move

Regular physical activity is proven to help you resolve stress, and it can help take your mind off work.

- Aim for exercising for at least 30 minutes several times per week, but at minimum move your body for 10 minutes a day to counteract the time you're spending at the computer.
- Relaxing activities like yoga and tai chi are well known for relieving stress *and* chronic pain. A short lunchtime yoga practice can help relieve stiffness and restore focus for the afternoon.

Get some sleep

- Try to support a consistent schedule of sleeping and waking times. If you can, try to let your body find its own ideal rhythm and wake without an alarm clock.
- Try to commit to a 'media diet' and stop viewing any screens 3 hours before bedtime. Both blue-light exposure and the mental activity of watching videos keep the brain stimulated and disrupt circadian rhythms.
- Give your busy mind the opportunity to clear itself before trying to sleep. Keep a notepad nearby to jot down a list for the next day, or record gratitudes to help lift your mood.
- Getting out into the sun for at least 10 minutes soon after waking stimulates the pineal gland to cue the natural cycle of energy and alertness.

Call in more PEACE

Play more

- Take 15 minutes to relax daily. Find a way to disconnect from the demands of life for a little while, and if possible make this time just for you, not your kids or your spouse. Commit this time to rejuvenating yourself, and then be flexible. Read for enjoyment, write in a journal, or meditate. Take a dance break. Experiment with different times to see when this self-care break supports you the most.
- Use your vacation. Even if this isn't a great time to take the vacation of your dreams, consider taking several long weekends and be sure to relax, not just get projects done around the house.

Examine - Search for the source of your discontent.

- Journal. Reflect and ask yourself questions: Where does this discontent come from? Is the problem boredom? Fear or insecurity? It may be helpful to just let yourself write for 5 minutes or more without guiding the flow of words. After you break through the surface complaints, you may be surprised to discover what is fueling them.

Awareness

- Practice the pause, identify negative habits or thought patterns, and work to stop them when they happen. Consider what is driving your own stressful reaction to an exchange or an experience. Get curious, and explore whether you are triggered because of a previous experience or unfounded perception, or even if the source of the other person's stress is due to a misunderstanding or because they are triggered.
- Mindfulness is the act of turning your attention inward. Focus on your breath and simply become aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the present moment, without editing or interpretation. Meditation can support you even when you only have a minute or 2 to devote to it, although some sages suggest: if you don't have 5 minutes to meditate, you need 10.
- Contextualize your work. Take a look at what is on your plate, and try to look through fresh eyes. What part of your role used to be fun for you? Try to put yourself back in that frame of mind. Remind yourself of the greater context - how you're contributing to your team, your company as a whole, and the progress toward its greater mission.
- Review. Clarify your job expectations and responsibilities. It's hard to feel like you're excelling at work if you aren't clear on the priorities. Review what you've been focusing on and take a look at the results if you can. This can be a powerful exercise to remind yourself of the great work you've done.
- Seek solutions. If this list leaves you overwhelmed and frustrated, consider scheduling a meeting to talk about how to match your capabilities to their expectations. Alternately, if you're feeling like there is more you could be bringing to the table, then it could be time to discuss being open to a new challenge and explore duties you could take on.
- Accept what you can't change & change what you can. Once you become aware of what is beyond your control you can choose whether you want to tolerate it, or you need to make a change.
- Ease up on yourself. If you are in the habit of going above and beyond, recognize that you don't need to hold yourself to unreasonable expectations. There is likely no one being harder on you than yourself. Perfectionism is closely linked with burnout. Notice when you are critical of yourself or feel that making a mistake means you're a failure, and learn to give yourself grace.

Celebrate! Reward Yourself.

- Plan rewards for reaching milestones, not only the ultimate goal. Celebrating the small wins helps transform our state of mind, and especially helpful as you are instituting new habits. So if you follow through on a 10 minute walk during your lunch break for 5 days in a row, how would you like to reward yourself?

Environment. What can you do to optimize or add variety to your work environment?

- Is there a way to delineate your work space from your relaxation areas at home? It is helpful to separate work life from home life, even by finding a new venue if any are available, such as a study room in a library or outdoor table at a cafe.
- Avoid taking your lunch break at the computer. Take a walk, stretch or fit in a short yoga series for 10 minutes, and you will likely feel more productive when you go back on the clock.

Happiness Reset

“Every time your brain has a success, you just change the goal post of what success looks like.

You got a good job, now you have to get a better job. You hit your sales target, we’re going to change your sales target. And if happiness is on the opposite side of success, your brain never gets there. What we’ve done is we’ve pushed happiness over the cognitive horizon as a society.” - Shawn Achor, author of The Happiness Advantage



Achor’s research finds that *“your brain at positive performs significantly better than it does at negative, neutral or stressed.”*

He has developed the “21-Day Challenge” in order to train our brains to be more positive by changing the pattern through which our brains view work. He studied these five habits and found benefit after consistent application over 3 weeks, thanks to the neuroplasticity of our brains.

Ready to challenge yourself? Choose *just one* of these five habits. Commit to doing it for the next 21 days. Set a reminder to help you follow through.

- Three Gratuities:** Take note of three new things each day that you are grateful for. This retrains your brain to scan the world for not only negative inputs but also more positive ones.
- Journaling:** Write down one positive experience each day. This helps establish meaning in the activities of the day, rather than only the effort of the task itself.
- Exercise:** Exercising for 10 minutes a day reinforces to your brain that your behavior matters, which then influences other activities you engage in.
- Meditation:** Take just two minutes per day to simply breathe and focus on your breath. This trains your mind to focus, reduce stress, and be more present in this moment.
- Random Acts of Kindness:** One simple act every day, like writing a positive email to praise or thank someone. In addition to boosting the happiness of the recipient, it deepens your feeling of social support.

Set a reminder to help you follow through, have what you need ready where you’ll be for that activity, if it’s a journal next to your bed or sneakers by the door. Don’t let missing a day derail you! Resume your reset the next day, and at the end of your 21 days review your 8 Aspects of Life Balance, or find another way to measure your current frame of mind from your starting place.

Resources & Further Reading:

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