



The Burnout Battle

Why leaders must lead the charge

BY JESSICA RECTOR

Burnout is impacting every industry, company and role. There are no exceptions.

Leaders often find themselves in the trenches, navigating through the chaos, and driving their teams towards success. However, amidst the pursuit of goals and objectives, there's a lurking enemy that can undermine all efforts — burnout.

In the burnout battle, we often find the great divide.

Leaders believe that their employees aren't being impacted by burnout or that their people have everything they need to beat it. Yet, employees are struggling in the day to day and believe they don't have the strategies, tools or support to help them. We call this the burnout gap (the distance between what leaders think and how employees feel).

Much of the burnout battle begins with educating leaders not only on the importance of burnout but also the urgency of it, because burnout won't go away on its own or work itself out. You must be intentional and strategic as a leader and organization to prevent it.

Our research has uncovered two components of burnout: the company and individuals. More specifically, a company's culture and an individual's habits. If one of these is misaligned it will lead to burnout. Your organization might have a wellness program, but that solely focuses on what employees can do to prevent or beat burnout in themselves, so it leaves out almost half of the contributing factors for burnout.

In other words, if employees work through a wellness program, they will still be headed toward burnout, because it doesn't incorporate the company side of the contributing factors to burnout. For leaders, preventing burnout is no longer a nice to have, it's a must do.

Here's why it's crucial for leaders to take proactive measures to prevent and combat burnout within their teams, along with microstep, a small action leaders can take for massive results.

1. Burnout Kills Productivity

Burnout doesn't just sap employees' energy and enthusiasm; it also wreaks havoc on productivity. Exhausted and disengaged workers are far less likely to perform at their peak, resulting in missed deadlines, more mistakes and decreased efficiency. The detrimental outcomes often can lead to safety issues and enhance cybersecurity attacks. When leaders fail to address burnout, they inadvertently sabotage their team's performance and jeopardize the organization's bottom line.

Microstep: Find one way to acknowledge or appreciate your people at least on a weekly basis. When employees get recognition six times a year (once every other month), performance increases by 32%, according to WorkHuman. Imagine if they received recognition weekly how much their performance would increase.



2. Burnout Breeds Disengagement

A burned-out workforce is a disengaged workforce. When employees feel overwhelmed and undervalued, their commitment to the job dwindles, and they become more prone to absenteeism and turnover, which costs U.S. employers \$300 billion annually due to burnout. Leaders who turn a blind eye to burnout risk losing their top talent to competitors and creating a toxic culture of apathy and discontent.

Microstep: Address the elephant in the room and start talking about burnout. When you talk about burnout, employees lean in and become engaged, knowing that you're creating a safe place where they will be met with compassion, empathy, and understanding. They recognize their work community is operating on the same foundation on which they can all build and thrive.

3. Burnout Undermines Creativity and Innovation

Innovation thrives in environments where individuals are energized, motivated, and encouraged to think outside the box. Unfortunately, burnout stifles creativity and dampens innovation. Exhausted minds lack the clarity and focus needed to generate fresh ideas and problem solve effectively. By neglecting to address burnout, leaders inadvertently stifle their team's creativity and hinder their organization's ability to adapt and thrive in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Microstep: Encourage frequent breaks. You people are most productive when you work for 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break. Instead of pushing through to finish a project or a task, give their brains the time and space to unwind and decompress. When they get back to it, they're more creative and innovative and are able to finish things faster by taking that much needed break.

4. Burnout Damages Health and Well-being

Beyond its impact on productivity and performance, burnout takes a significant toll on employees' health and well-being. Chronic stress and overwork can lead to a host of physical and mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, cardiovascular problems and weakened immune systems. Leaders who prioritize the bottom line over their team's well-being not only jeopardize individual health but also incur long-term costs in terms of healthcare expenses and employee morale.

Microstep: Implement more fun into the work days. Fun and work aren't mutually exclusive. The more fun employees have at work, the more they will stay at the company. Fun shows up in different ways for people. Trivia, contests, ropes courses, or karaoke — ask them what they like to do for fun and then do it.

5. Burnout Leads to Leadership Failure

Ultimately, leaders bear the responsibility for the well-being and success of their teams. Failing to address burnout is a failure of leadership. Leaders who ignore the warning signs of burnout, or worse, contribute to its proliferation through unrealistic expectations and poor management practices, risk damaging their reputation and undermining their credibility as effective leaders. The ability to recognize, prevent and address burnout is a fundamental skill that separates great leaders from mediocre ones.

Microstep: Do a two-word check-in. Ask your team, "How are you really feeling," and don't allow them to say, "Fine." Inspire them to tap into other feelings. When they say anxious, stressed, depressed, sad, hesitant or words like these, it's an opportunity to dive into a deeper conversation and ask, "How can I help," which lets them know you care about them as a real person and not just a worker.

The battle against burnout is more critical than ever. Leaders who prioritize the well-being of their employees and take proactive steps to prevent and combat burnout are not only fostering a healthier and more engaged workforce but also safeguarding the long-term success of their organizations. By leading by example, cultivating a supportive work culture, and promoting life-work alignment, leaders can empower their teams to thrive under any circumstance. Remember, the fight against burnout begins at the top — and it's a battle worth waging. 🧡



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