



Burnout - Beating Work Stress

As a coach, I come across many different situations on the job. One of them is dealing with burnout.

While reading the November 2006 issue of Yoga Journal, I came across an excellent article titled, "Banishing Burnout". This article - plus other data I have collected - contributed to this article. Enjoy!

Experts say burnout is one of the biggest occupational hazards of the 21st century!

I hope that got your attention. Did you know that as a culture, Americans work, on average, 9 weeks longer than our European counterparts? Even more shocking is that when we are offered time off, many of us don't take it.

How many of you personally know someone who has accrued weeks and weeks of vacation time? A Harris Interactive poll identified that at least 30 percent of employed adults don't take all their vacation days and hand back a whopping 421 million days to their employers. So how, as managers, do we counteract burnout? How can we see the signs and prevent those around us from burning out?

To answer these questions, we first need to understand what burnout is. The dictionary defines burnout as, "Physical or emotional exhaustion, especially as a result of long-term stress or dissipation or one who is worn out physically or emotionally, as from long-term stress." It is important to note that "long-term" is a relative term. For one person, long-term may span a life's career, and for another it is a few weeks of intense projects. Regardless of how long "long-term" is for you, the symptoms are the same. Feelings of being overwhelmed, tightness in the body, fluctuating weight, chronic headaches, loss of excitement for work and forgetfulness can all be indicators of burnout. Quite often, we only realize that we are burning out because others begin to see the symptoms before we do. It is also important to note that the fix is not simple. If it were easy, many of us would not be in this situation in the first place.

Experts say that only 12 percent of people who attempt to change something in their lives actually succeed. When exploring a plan to reduce your burnout tendencies, make sure you can work with it, otherwise it just might add to your stress.

To counteract burnout, managers need to take a personal inventory of their daily lives. You can take this inventory by just writing down those things that

have become burdens and all-encompassing in your life or you can go online to www.yogajournal.com/extra and take the job stress quiz. Either way, you will be able to take an inventory of those things that cause us stress.

Some of the things may be easy to identify. Things like a nagging boss or client can be easy to identify but upon a closer inspection, the driving force behind many stressors is simple awareness. How aware are you of the way you react to situations and events? Do you find yourself reacting based on someone else's desires or needs or those of your own? Is your reaction fear-based? The more you build a practice of awareness, you will find that you are able to distinguish your urge to act from reaction.

By tracking the stressors in your life you begin to take back control of those things that seem uncontrollable. Make sure you include both the external stressors and the internal physical symptoms. This will be critical in enabling you to make a change. Also know that you are not alone, managers today have to accomplish more with less as well as dealing with the demands of superiors. We are all in this together. If we support each other we can construct a better working environment for all.

For some, the answer may be to change careers, but for others it may be just a matter of adjusting the job structure because the work is still fun but the way it is being done does not work anymore. Either way, the choice is yours; know that you have the choice to stay or leave.

Finally, think about simplifying your life. Can you survive with less money if it meant your quality of life was better? Can you negotiate more vacation time in place of a raise? Are there ways you can simplify your life at home so that you can have more time for the things you enjoy?

To explore these questions further consider reading John De Graaf's *Affluenza* or go to www.timeday.org. John is the national coordinator of Take Back Your Time Day, an initiative that seeks to stem the epidemic of overwork.

All in all know that you are on a path of transformation. This change can be scary, but if you listen to "yourself," you may just enjoy life a whole lot more.

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