



Burnout in the Workplace

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

What is burnout?

Burnout in the workplace is a state of physical or emotional exhaustion, resulting from various work-related stressors. Like a battery that is drained and eventually loses its spark and stops working, burnout can leave a person feeling empty about their work, unmotivated and sometimes depressed.

How do I know if I am “burning out”?

Early signs of workplace burnout include a noticeable decrease in motivation, energy, and enthusiasm in regards to work, coupled with feeling physically and emotionally exhausted, fatigued, and depleted. The person suffering from burnout may struggle with completing tasks; they may become more distracted, cynical, impatient, and less interested in what they are doing. They may dread the beginning of their workday, call off, and fail to do projects on time (or at all). They may find they are unable to regenerate and renew themselves after spending time in stressful work activities, and begin to disengage from co-workers. Many report stressful work conditions, with a sense they are helpless and hopeless that work-related change is possible. All of this results in feeling ineffective and meaningless in what was once a fulfilling job.

Why does burnout happen?

Many jobs are stressful where employees find they are overloaded and overextended with tasks. We are people with a limited capacity. Our culture is not good at teaching the value of slowing down and resting; consequently, there are poor boundaries between work and personal life. Having little control in your actual work (such as lack of choice in regards to what, when, where, and how you do what you do) also adds to the process of burning out.

Other reasons for burnout include not enough reward (such as being underpaid, lack of respect, and difficulty seeing accomplishment), isolating work or conditions that do not offer social support or a sense of community in the workplace, compassion fatigue (tension and stress related to hearing about or helping a traumatized person), a lost sense of meaning and purpose in your work, value conflicts with work expectations, and a simple “wrong fit” between person and job.

What can I do about it?

Generally, when there are high demand, low control, and low support in the workplace, people tend to experience higher levels of stress. The more stress put on a person, the more they are likely to break. However, there is hope that you can recognize the signs of burnout and find the help that will fill your emptying tank.

Help starts with assessing your level of stress at work, and determine what you can and cannot change. Start with areas where you can exercise control in your work and begin to make small adjustments. Some methods to consider include building a community of support in your work by making friends with co-workers. Create fun and play in your workspace. Find a mentor at work with whom you can confide. Be honest about your experience of burnout. You are not alone.

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Determine your values and re-evaluate the meaning and purpose of your work. If you need help exploring this, talk to a counselor or a trusted mentor. Do this, in part, to see if your work is right for you. If not, then it may be time to look for a change.

Assess your balance between other-care and self-care. It is good to care for others, but even Jesus required time away from ministry to rest and be with his Father. Put a boundary around your work. Designate set times when you will **not** check your email or work on projects; instead, practice rest. Good self-care includes attending to your body, soul, and spirit. In her book, *Sacred Rest (2017)*, Dr. Dalton-Smith encourages rest in the following areas:

Emotional: Learn to express your feelings and create emotional boundaries. You can only take so much drama. Think about where you may need to practice saying “no” (when you say “no” to one thing, you say “yes” to something else).

Physical: Use your body in restorative ways to relax muscle tension, reduce pain, and encourage quality sleep.

Spiritual: Experience God and rest in Him.

Social: Discern relationships that revive from ones that exhaust; limit exposure to shaming people.

Mental: Learn to quiet the mind. Focus on things that matter. Notice how you are talking to yourself. Practice affirming yourself. Appreciate the small moments of “I made a difference.”

Sensory: Take a break from sensory input received from electronics, light, and noise. During times of rejuvenating rest, take a break from the TV and social media. Get out in nature. Turn off the music and sit quietly in silence.

Creative: Exercise your creative gene. Paint, cook, garden, write, play music, etc. If you do not have a creative gene, allow beauty to inspire by watching a beautiful film, listening to music, watching someone dance, or admiring God’s handiwork in nature.

If you find yourself doing work you love, and you still feel you are burning out, let me encourage you to find your rest in the areas listed above, and remind you that scripture tells us that God has given his children a gift to use in service to one another (1 Peter 4:10). Whatever your work is, see the gift that you bring to the table and remember you are ultimately working for the glory of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:31). Do not compare your work to others. The apostle Paul was a magnificent writer and preacher, but the Bible also says that he made tents for a living. Do not judge the value of the work you do. Work as unto God alone and let him determine the value of your work (Colossians 3:23-24).

I pray you will find fulfillment in Christ alone, the only source that will never burn out. ■

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