

Avoiding Job Burnout

By Kathleen Barton, MBA

Nearly 50 percent of all U.S. workers feel overwhelmed by a growing number of job tasks and longer working hours. Work overload leads to stress-related conditions and burnout. In fact, 72 percent of American workers experience frequent, stress-related physical or mental conditions that greatly increase health care costs. In addition, 40 percent of employee turnover is due to stress.

Causes of Workplace Stress

There are several causes of stress in the workplace, the most prevalent being work overload. Fifty percent of workers report that they often spend 12-hour days on work-related duties and an equal number of people frequently skip lunch. With the recent downsizing most employees are now performing the work of two to three people. Other causes of workplace stress include:

- ◆ Lack of control over one's area of responsibility or destiny
- ◆ Lack of communication or feedback
- ◆ Role ambiguity; unclear expectations
- ◆ Contact overload, especially with difficult people
- ◆ Personality – controlling, inflexible, perfectionist

Job Burnout

Such factors can cause undue stress. Over time such stress leads to burnout. Symptoms of burnout include fatigue, depression, forgetfulness, irritability and physical complaints. Burnout results in decreased effectiveness and lower productivity.

So how can you avoid burnout? How can you better manage the stress on your job? Besides the obvious recommendations of getting plenty of rest, eating right and exercising, here are some other specific recommendations: develop a good support network, renew yourself on a regular basis, and maintain a positive attitude.

Develop a Good Support Network

When things are stressful at work it helps to have someone you can talk to; someone who will listen and acknowledge your frustration. These people may be colleagues, friends or family members. Oftentimes by talking through the issues with a trusted friend, you can come up with creative solutions. Knowing that these people support you can help ease the burden.

Renew Yourself on a Regular Basis

Just as batteries need recharging, our bodies and minds need recharging as well. We need to rejuvenate ourselves on a regular basis, daily and weekly. What refreshes you? It's very personal. For one person it may be curling up with a good novel. For another, it may be some sport, such as golfing or bike-riding. We all need to take time out for recreation. When we do, we're more likely to come back to work with greater energy and enthusiasm. Besides recreation, take some personal time to yourself on a daily

basis. Spend some quiet time to unwind, pray, meditate or reflect. Such daily personal time helps you maintain a better frame of mind.

Take Renewal Breaks at Work

When you're feeling overloaded with work, it's tempting to skip breaks and work through lunch. However, research shows that those who take frequent breaks are actually more productive in the long run. When you start to feel fatigued, take a short break to do some deep breathing, muscle relaxation or stretching exercises. Or you might take a short walk, or think about what you're grateful for, or visualize yourself relaxing in your favorite place (on the beach, in the mountains, etc.). These breaks will help you feel energized and more alert when you return your focus on work.

Attitude

Your attitude toward stress (and life in general) can make a big difference in how you respond to stress. Those who handle stress more effectively view stress as a challenge rather than a problem. Use self-talk to help maintain a positive attitude toward stress. For example, tell yourself, "I know I can overcome this challenge." Focus on what you can learn from the experience rather than how difficult it is.

Even though you're overloaded you don't need to feel overwhelmed. Follow these tips to avoid burnout. Develop a good support network, renew yourself on a regular basis, and maintain a positive attitude to combat a stressful work situation. You'll find that you will be more productive and effective in the long run.

*Kathleen Barton is a keynote speaker, workshop presenter, and life coach specializing in life purpose, career success, and work-life balance. She is the author of **The Balancing Act: Managing Work & Life** audio/workbook. Kathleen can be reached at www.YourLifeBalanceCoach.com.*