

A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO

# BURN OUT



How to identify and reduce burnout in yourself and your employees so your team stays healthy and productive.

 **core**strengths®



**Antonio Horta-Osorio** was hired in 2011 to turn around the performance of the UK's largest retail bank. He was a fit man in his early 40s who regularly attended the gym. But eight months into his new role, he collapsed with exhaustion at his desk.

Horta-Osorio was burned out. At the time, he probably would have been the last person who thought he was susceptible to burnout. Like Horta-Osorio, many ambitious professionals wear their ability to work long hours, juggle multiple priorities, and skimp on sleep as a badge of honor.

But these habits, and others that we accept as part of normal 21st century working life, can lead to burnout in anyone, even a healthy CEO at the top of his career.

The pandemic brought even more people to the brink of burnout as they added home schooling, elder care, and stressful work environments to their already-full plates, while removing social safety nets and built-in times to unwind, such as the gym or the bar.

Gallup found that in June of 2021, 74% of employees said they experience burnout on the job at least sometimes. Their research also revealed that between 2020 and 2021, manager burnout has increased from just under 28%, to 35%.

That's why it's more important than ever for managers to be in tune with themselves and their teams, and proactively address burnout before serious physical and mental symptoms start to manifest.



At Core Strengths, we've spent 50 years designing ways to energize employees, rather than draining them.

## What is burnout?

According to the **WHO**, “burnout is recognized as a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed; a state of vital exhaustion.”

It's the feeling of emotional, physical, and/or mental exhaustion that happens due to overwork. Psychologist Herbert Fredenberger coined the phrase in 1974 and defined it as feeling a lot more than a little stressed out. Burnout produces excessive fatigue, feelings of demoralization, and “the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one's devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results.”

Burnout can happen to anyone, even if you love your job, no matter your work environment. However, some workers in higher-stress or higher-risk environments may be at greater risk.

## What triggers burnout?

Some burnout triggers are very common, and some are specific to the individual. Here are some examples.



**Related to work itself:**

- Unclear job expectations
- Unreasonable job expectations
- Uncontrollable workload
- Unreasonable time pressure
- Difficulty making easy decisions
- Working at an unsustainable pace
- Lack of challenging work

**Related to leadership:**

- Lack of recognition of a job well done
- Lack of support, guidance, and development from leadership
- Unclear growth opportunities

**Related to work environment:**

- High-pressure work environment
- Unfair treatment in the workplace
- Lack of psychological safety in the workplace
- Fear that speaking up about stress is a weakness
- Feeling neglected or invisible at work
- Lack of connection and trust with work colleagues



**Related to attempts to disconnect from work:**

- Sleepless nights and waking up tired
- Guilt taking time away from work
- Blurred parameters between work and home life
- Dread and withdrawal at the end of weekends or vacations

Many of these triggers can be reduced or eliminated through the steps we outline in this guide.

The positive outcome of Antonio Horta-Osorio's story is that he took eight weeks off work and received professional help to fully recover from his burnout. He then returned to work, refreshed and wiser, and used his personal experience to reevaluate the importance of mental health for all employees and help prevent burnout in others. For example, he changed the perception of opening up about stress at work, erasing the taboo and making it a sign of strength.





## Results of burnout

The first negative impact managers should be concerned about is on the individual and their family. But burnout can also have severe downsides for the organization, too. In fact, Harvard Business School and Stanford Graduate School of Business reported that workplace stress accounts for \$190 billion in annual healthcare costs.

### Individual costs:

- Diminished mental and physical health
- Lower confidence
- Behavioral changes
- Increased internal conflict

### Family and relational costs:

- Not giving time and attention to relationships
- Being distant or abrupt with friends and family
- More interpersonal conflict

### Organizational costs:

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of engagement
- More frequent mistakes
- Lack of focus
- Indecisiveness



**Organizational costs:**

- More conflict and less productive debate
- Higher healthcare expenses
- More likely to quit

## What can you do about burnout?

81% of leaders admitted in 2021 that they didn't know how to reduce employee burnout and only 24% of leaders say their company conducts training that effectively reduces employee burnout<sup>[1]</sup>. With these statistics and the burden of COVID-19, it's no wonder that companies in all industries are experiencing a great resignation.

The good news is that there are solutions available to help reduce and prevent employee burnout, but leadership must do more than occasional teambuilding events and insisting that employees take a vacation.

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1 (2022, March 10). Employee burnout study. Leadership IQ. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://www.leadershipiq.com/blogs/leadershipiq/employee-burnout-study>





## Reduce burnout by building trust

Everyone needs a trusted confidante at work: someone who understands you as an individual, who you can safely share your feelings with, and who knows the environment you're working in. As a manager, are you that trusted confidante for your employees? Would they come to you if they had a problem?

It's also important that you find a trusted confidante who can support you. The lesson from Antonio Horta-Osorio's story is that workers at all levels can suffer from burnout, not just one group of employees.

**In your role as a manager, you can build trust by:**

- Knowing your people and letting them know you
- Asking questions to be curious and listening with the intent to understand
- Working together to create realistic, mutually-agreed-upon goals

## Know your people and let them know you

It's important that you get to know your employees on a personal level so you can sense when something is off, even if they aren't telling you.

**Spend time getting to know:**

- What energizes and deenergizes them
- How they're feeling today and this week
- What they most and least enjoy about their role





**Spend time getting to know:**

- One thing you could change that would help them
- What they want from their own growth and development
- What triggers conflict for them
- The signs that something is troubling them

And conversely, you must model vulnerability if you want employees to share themselves with you. It can be hard for someone to approach another person who appears to never have challenges.

**Let employees get to know:**

- What energizes you and gets you up for work each day
- How you're feeling today and this week
- What you most and least enjoy about your role
- What your conflict triggers are

**Ask questions to be curious and listen with the intent to understand**

Approach conversations with your employees with an open mind and genuine interest in knowing how you can help them. As a manager, you'll have to be willing to challenge your assumptions, take in new information, and exchange perspectives.



When you truly listen to an employee, they'll likely share their issues at work, and propose some solutions. But they also may not fully reveal the amount of stress they're under. Learn to look at the world through the employee's lens and recognize that their signs of burnout may be very different from your own.

## **Work together to create realistic, mutually-agreed-upon goals**

Burnout can be caused by having too heavy of a workload, but also by not being challenged enough. And one person might be challenged by a task that another person breezes through.

**That's why it's so important to set goals together with your employees, by:**

- Defining goals that challenge them enough, but not too much
- Outlining what's required of them and what support or direction they require from you
- Discussing what you currently do that might get in the way of their goals
- Agreeing on how you'll measure and discuss performance
- Celebrating when goals are achieved
- Regularly revisiting and redefining goals as they grow



## **Reduce burnout through recognition**

When an individual doesn't feel recognized, that can have a huge negative impact on motivation and engagement, leading to burnout. Recognition helps your employees feel appreciated and valued. The better they feel about being seen and appreciated where they work, the better they'll perform as an employee.

People want to be recognized in different ways, including public praise, private praise, monetary rewards, or just feeling seen. A handwritten note always goes a long way. But the most important thing is to make an employee feel noticed and valued in a way that resonates with them—something you can only do if you truly know them (see the section above).



## Considerations for developing structured and unstructured recognition programs

- Show people that they matter and that you care about them
- Recognize people in a way that resonates with them
- Continuously revisit people's objectives and how they feel they're doing on them
- Find opportunities to give feedback on what people have done well
- Give feedback on growth and development opportunities
- Notice and recognize people's seemingly small contributions
- Don't wait for people to ask to be recognized
- Involve people in discussions around recognition
- Spend time just talking to people about themselves and their lives

By frequently recognizing people's presence and accomplishments, you'll create a culture where high performers are far less likely to burn out or quit.

## **Reduce burnout by building a team that cares**

A cause and effect of burnout is the lack of community or social connectedness. We all need to have quality contact with people who heighten our sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Since we spend so much of our time at work, it's crucially important that we feel connected to the team that we work with. Beyond the



employee-manager relationship, all members of the team must have trusting relationships amongst themselves. But building a team where the members support and care for each other takes time and intention.

**Come together as  
a group to define:**

- Why the team exists and its purpose
- How the purpose connects to each team member's values
- The team's collective values and rules of engagement
- What the team stands for and how each member will behave
- How the team's values connect to the organizational values
- How all members will support and look after each other
- What success will look like in a relational sense

## **Reduce burnout by co-creating a coaching relationship**

As we've established, so much of reducing burnout is about employees having a sense of purpose and the right amount of challenge. An effective coaching relationship can help reduce burnout and improve so much about an employee's experience at work.



High-performing employees want to contribute meaningfully, learn, and move their careers forward. Coaching allows you, as the manager, to serve as a mentor and development partner to your direct reports as they pursue their long-term goals.

Since the pandemic started, many managers have fallen out of the habit of coaching their employees. Now is the time to activate a new coaching relationship or amplify an existing one.

## **How to co-create a coaching relationship and form new coaching habits**

- Have a conversation with the employee about what's important to them, exploring their values, how they behave when things are going well and when they are in conflict, and the strengths they tend to use most at work
- Arrange a follow up conversation to explore what support, direction, and development they want from you as a coach
- Create frequent opportunities to check in and see how things are going from both perspectives

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to coaching. Coaching plans must account for the employee's values and strengths and the history and health of the manager-employee relationship.

Core Strengths will give you the tools, resources, and framework to help you co-create a coaching relationship.

Are you curious about reducing  
burnout at your organization?

**Get in touch.**

