

# Burnout: Small Changes Lead to Big Results

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

## What is burnout?

The concept of burnout is not new. It has been a public health epidemic for a while, and it impacts much of the workforce. A Gallup Survey in 2020, released just prior to the pandemic, showed 76% of people experience burnout on the job at least sometimes.



costly physical health conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 Diabetes, and a general vulnerability to illnesses.

## The Latest Employee Burnout Statistics:

1. 75% of workers have experienced burnout, with 40% saying they've experienced burnout specifically during the pandemic. (FlexJobs)
2. 67% of all workers believe burnout has worsened over the course of the pandemic. (Indeed)
3. 36% of employees said their organization isn't doing anything to help with employee burnout. (Eagle Hill Consulting)
4. 37% of employed respondents say they are currently working longer hours than usual since the pandemic started. (FlexJobs)
5. Burned-out employees are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job. (Gallup)
6. Depression costs the U.S. \$51 billion in absenteeism and lost productivity alone. (Mental Health America)
7. More than three-quarters (76%) of respondents agree that workplace stress affects their mental health. (FlexJobs)
8. Workplace stress is estimated to cost the U.S. economy more than \$500 billion dollars, and each year, 550 million workdays are lost due to stress on the job. (APA)

Burnout results from chronic workplace stress. According to the World Health Organization, burnout includes these three elements:

1. **Exhaustion:** Experiencing a stress response causing people to feel physically, emotionally, and cognitively exhausted.
2. **Negative and Cynical:** Feeling negative and cynical toward work, people at work, and others.
3. **Negative about Oneself:** Thinking what is wrong with me and why can't I handle this?

Simply put, people are stressed out at work.

## Why is burnout a high priority for employers?

The modern workplace is fast paced and demanding. Meeting work expectations, while facing stressors brought on by the pandemic and continuing social and political unrest, has exacerbated the effects of workplace burnout. Employers see the impact across industries and the urgency in addressing these issues:

- ▲ **Retention:** Retaining high performers.
- ▲ **Climate and Culture:** Building and sustaining an organizational culture where employees feel cared for and want to come to work.
- ▲ **Performance and Productivity:** Eliminating unnecessary stressors to allow people to perform well and thrive.
- ▲ **Overall Health:** Beyond mental health conditions, burnout and stress are also linked to serious and

## "Six Factors" for Tackling Burnout

Rome wasn't built in a day and eliminating burnout can't be fixed overnight. But there are six (6) well-researched steps that employers can take to tackle burnout according to leading expert, Christine Maslach, PhD:

- ▲ **Workload:** Ensuring that people have the time and tools they need to get their work done and opportunities to communicate about their work.
- ▲ **Autonomy and Control:** Offering people the chance to have some control over their work and how it gets done.

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- ▲ **Reward and Recognition:** Ensuring that people are recognized and celebrated for a job well done.
- ▲ **Community and Sense of Belonging:** Creating opportunities for people to feel like there is trust and mutual support with colleagues.
- ▲ **Fairness in Opportunities:** Offering opportunities for people to be promoted and to feel like they are treated fairly.
- ▲ **Values and Purpose in Work:** Supporting people in feeling good about their work and proud of what they are doing.

### **Small Changes, Big Impact**

While there isn't a standard "roadmap" for addressing burnout in an organization, here are some simple steps employers can take in the "Six Factors" to make a positive difference:

#### **1. WORKLOAD**

Remind leaders of the importance of informal check-ins, especially for communication about expectations, workload, and deadlines.

#### **2. AUTONOMY AND CONTROL**

Find opportunities to give team members more autonomy and control, while still meeting deadlines and work objectives. Where possible, empower team members to assume responsibility and ownership in prioritizing tasks.

#### **3. REWARD AND RECOGNITION**

Remind everyone of the importance of recognizing and rewarding employees for wins and achievement, whether big or small.

#### **4. COMMUNITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING**

Find ways for people to make connections with others, including peers, supervisors, leaders, and across teams. Promote existing and new opportunities for people to engage with others, including through mentorship programs, and "virtual lunchrooms." This is especially important in remote work environments.

#### **5. FAIRNESS IN OPPORTUNITIES**

Evaluate compensation structure and opportunities for promotion to ensure alignment exists between performance and advancement.

#### **6. VALUES AND PURPOSE IN WORK**

Consider part of the job that people will likely find valuable and remind them about it. Find ways to relate the meaning in the work to the bigger organizational purpose and mission and employee contributions to both.

### **Build a Culture of Well-Being**

When an employer fosters a culture of well-being, it moves away from relying on traditional wellness programs like biometric screenings and embraces a holistic approach that includes emotional and mental health. It focuses on elements that provide essential culture; such as leadership, values, communication and environment.

Research examining stress and resiliency programs, among large employers, found that the areas that had the biggest influence on reducing stress and increasing resiliency had less to do on specific stress reduction programs or resiliency training. Reducing stress has more to do with the ways in which the company demonstrated a commitment to their core values, the ways in which employees treated one another, and whether leaders modeled healthy behaviors and habits.

Trust and communication were essential ingredients for work environments judged to be emotionally healthy.

Companies that support the well-being of their employees will find higher employee engagement and loyalty which correlates with improved productivity, effectiveness and business results. Employee well-being has been shown to be associated with higher sales, more innovation, lower turnover, less sick leave and reduced burnout. A culture of well-being can also help to prevent the onset or seriousness of mental illness that might otherwise arise.

Remind employees of their importance.  
 Find opportunities to provide autonomy and control.  
 Recognize and reward employees.  
 Provide ways for people to make connections.  
 Evaluate compensation structure for equality.  
 Remind employees about the valuable aspect of their work.

