

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

BURNOUT: WAKE UP AND SEE THE FLAME

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the last fifty years, technological advances have robbed millions of people of their ability to determine the way work is structured, how fast they must complete tasks, the amount of work they will do, the way work hours are scheduled, the chance to use their minds, and the opportunity to learn new things.¹ These advances have also lead to more stress. Most people do not realize how widespread the physical symptoms caused by work stress are. There is no way to know for certain how many of the seven million Americans with lower back pain or the twenty-five million with headaches are actually suffering from job burnout.

It is known that work stress is a major cause of such physical complaints. Doctors estimate at least 50 percent of all their patients come with problems caused by one kind of stress or another and that each year, 15 percent of the nation's adult population take tranquilizers.² For 40 years, professionals have known about emotional and psychological stress, but research that identifies burnout as a specific stress syndrome is recent.³ Burnout has both physical and psychological effects, but is neither a physical ailment are a neurosis.

Researchers have just begun to seriously examine stress, career burnout and mid-life professional crises as they affect

modern professionals. Many people show signs of burnout, but other people are burning out and never reveal it since job burnout may have a far greater incidence than imagined.⁴

Burnout is an inability to mobilize enough interest to act. Motivation to perform is diminished or extinguished.⁵ This unrelieved stress affects not only caring professionals, but also the caring person. Burnout results in emotional exhaustion and cynicism and frequently occurs among individuals who do "people-work"--those who spend considerable time in close contact with others under conditions of chronic tension and stress.⁶ People who enter into a profession with a cynical attitude are unlikely to burnout, whereas a person who enters a profession with a strong desire to give of themselves will be more susceptible to burnout.

"We all engage in activities to meet our needs, fulfill our wants and deal with the normal demands of life. Our life seldom makes only normal demands. Unanticipated situations arise almost every day. We shall define stress as anything that places an extra demand on you."⁷

Burnout does not flare up all at once, but builds up gradually; sufferers are genuinely unaware of what is happening to them.⁸ Each person's coping skills, determines development time, but usually burnout begins about the third year of a new job.⁹ "Hard work, long hours, and even insufficient rest, in themselves, seldom lead to job burnout."¹⁰ Workers in helping professions find that the length of the workday does not contribute to burnout, but the continuous contact with the public throughout the day does.¹¹

Sudden changes such as traumatic life events may cause tedium. Tedium results from having too many negatives and too few positive features in one's environment, too many pressures, conflicts and demands, combined with too few rewards, acknowledgements and successes. More often tedium occurs as a result of a more gradual process -- the daily struggles and chronic stresses that are typical of life and work.¹² How we perceive stress and tedium has a direct effect on the burnout process.¹³

Helping professionals tend to burnout due as an exhaustion reaction caused by helping. Although it appears the helping professional is more inclined to burnout, the fact is that any person, in any profession, at any level can become a candidate for burnout. No one is immune.¹⁴

As a firecracker whose fuse is lit and burns until the explosion occurs, burnout begins with the fuse of stress burning unrelieved until the ultimate explosion of burnout occurs. This research paper will provide information on what burnout is, how burnout begins, some effects, symptoms and recommendations for dealing with this phenomenon. It is time for people and organizations to start treating burnout.

II. CAUSES

No single risk factor can lead to burnout. Individuals in low stress jobs succumb to burnout. Yet, individuals in highly stressful jobs do not burnout.

The primary risk factors include 1) individual perception of stress, 2) family pressure, 3) environmental demands, 4) work problems, 5) faulty stress safety valves.¹⁵ It appears the primary cause for burnout is unrelieved stress. As the unrelieved stress increases, the feeling of powerlessness can increase the burnout.¹⁶ Every kind of work creates some type of stress.¹⁷ Many causes of burnout are located in specific social and situational factors and not in permanent traits of the people involved.¹⁸ The timing and consequences of burnout depend both on the environment in which the individual works and lives and the individual's own reactions.¹⁹

III. EFFECTS

Burnout debilitates its victim. The burnout victim begins to feel that everyone is "out to get him."²⁰ While burning out, people curse their situation and take drastic, but futile, action such as quitting their jobs, leaving their towns, ending their marriages or switching careers without ever having learned to take control of the problem.²¹ Overtime or an ill-fitting job can erode motivation and contribute to job burnout.²² Some people respond to burnout by becoming passive, giving up their goals and believing they are unworthy individuals. Other individuals behave aggressively.²³

The more acute the burnout, the more the individual will feel that "no one understands". This belief may lead the burnout victim to feel isolated from others.²⁴ Burnout people report a feeling of being trapped in a no win situation. They become pessimistic and cynical and overreact to events; they experience despair and embarrassment and believe they are worthless. Worthlessness leads to feelings of rejection.²⁵ It is not uncommon for burnedout individuals to feel utterly helpless, as if invisible forces have begun to dismantle their lives piece by piece²⁶ or as if they were sinking in quicksand. They feel the more they struggle, the faster they sink.²⁷

When the fires of burnout burst into flame and ravage the lives of burned out individuals, they find it easy to fall

back on the assumption that hard work can solve the problem.²⁸ However, if ignored burnout progresses until a person dreads going to work and burnout spread to all aspects of a person's life.

It is rare for a person burned out at work to be energized and enthusiastic at home.²⁹ Rather than a source of nourishment, family and friends become just one more demand.³⁰ Research has found that spouses, friends and bosses, in their attempts to help someone caught in the throes of work stress, often contribute unknowingly to the problem.³¹

Individuals who are burning out often fail to see their situation as stemming from inside themselves.³² Burnout victims feel guilty and blame themselves for not being able to handle the situation. This guilt can paralyze any constructive activity toward burnout recovery. The guilt handcuffs them and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to change their perception of long term stress.³³

Individual suffering from burnout will not only blame themselves for not being able to handle the situation, but will also begin to find a scapegoat. The scapegoating leads to imputing negative motivations to others³⁴ and may result in direct verbal attacks, or even physical assaults,³⁵ and unpremeditated violence.³⁶

Burned out individuals feel they have worked harder than anyone else, contributed more, taken on super-human

tasks, and even ruined their health in the process.³⁷ Scientific studies show that under stress the body begins to mobilize to deal with stress. This mobilization build up is associated with changes that cause chronic disease. If the unrelieved stress is not dealt with, it will cause physical illness, emotional exhaustion, ulcers, high blood pressure, excessive drinking, headaches and depression.³⁸ Ulcers have become one of the most widespread occupational diseases in America today. Some people have difficulty swallowing, some develop heartburn, acid stomach, diarrhea, colitis or constipation.³⁹

If the stress safety valves don't work very well, burnouts find themselves trying to escape by eating more, reaching for another martini, going through an extra pack of cigarettes, or going on shopping sprees.⁴⁰ Sleep is disturbed at night with nightmares or insomnia. When the symptoms for burnout reach an acute phase most individuals will become obsessed with their problem. When the burnout becomes very severe, suicidal wishes emerge.⁴¹

IV. SYMPTOMS

Stress is an alarm sounding to inform a person that something is overloading the system. The alarm is the first symptom that something is wrong. Treating the symptom is not the same as treating the cause, and elimination of the symptom should not delude people into thinking that the cause of the problem has also disappeared.⁴²

Burnout signals the psyche, the body and society through manifesting frustrations or emotions including withdrawal and alienation, various health problem, and substance and performance abuse.⁴³ Working overly long hours is another sign of burnout.⁴⁴ Sleep habits can also signal burnout, whether a need for more sleep or a need for less sleep can sound the alarm.⁴⁵

Burnout has three basic components: physical, emotional and mental exhaustion:

Physical exhaustion of low energy, chronic fatigue, weakness and weariness begin to show. Weight loss and gastrointestinal disturbance become more noticeable.

Emotional exhaustion creates feelings of depression, helplessness, hopelessness. The mood changes can cause feelings of entrapment, which may lead in extreme cases to mental illness or thoughts of suicide.

Mental exhaustion creates negative attitudes toward one's self, toward work, and toward life.⁴⁶

The symptoms of burnout are still being researched by professionals in many fields, but the symptoms that seem to

reoccur in most research begin with negative emotions followed by interpersonal problems, leading to health problems. A declining performance is observed with an increase in substance abuse and personal feeling of meaninglessness. Frustration, anger, depression, dissatisfaction and anxiety cause negative emotions which are a normal part of living and working. Yet, when the experience builds to chronic levels the person becomes emotionally fatigued.⁴⁷

The body has a normal rhythm of tiredness-rest-recovery, but when the recovery is replaced with an endless flat plane of exhaustion then tiredness turns to chronic exhaustion. This exhaustion leads to a decrease in attention span that affects thinking.⁴⁸ However, others instead of feeling exhausted, find that burnout takes the form of feeling tense, being keyed up, and speeding along in high gear.⁴⁹

When things become intolerable, people reach the point where they can neither quit, fight it, or make it go away.⁵⁰ These feelings intensify the unrelieved stress to the point of depression.⁵¹ Perpetual feelings of anger may develop even in a calm, accepting, easy-going person.⁵²

Interpersonal problems develop when the emotionally drained individual can no longer interact with people on the job and at home. The burned out individual is likely to overreact with an emotional outburst of intense hostility. Communication with co-workers, friends and family becomes

increasingly difficult which causes the burned out individual to withdraw from social interest.⁵³

A person who works in a constantly stressful situation may begin to distrust and even dislike his or her clients, and to wish they would go away.⁵⁴ Distrust will take the place of friendly interest as the burnout sufferer starts a harmful distancing of the self from others.⁵⁵

Health problems resulting from feeling tired and rundown are probably the most destructive symptoms of burnout. This rundown feeling will increase as the person's emotional reserves are depleted. As physical resilience declines, relationships deteriorate. Family relationships dwindle and divorce and suicide rates become higher.⁵⁶ Ailments, such as colds, headaches are more noticeable with insomnia and backaches becoming more frequent.⁵⁷ Burned out individuals will develop allergies or nervousness. The burned out person will experience dizzy spells, shortness of breath, pounding heart or irregular heartbeats.⁵⁸ Burned out individuals may develop ulcers or have anxiety attacks with tremors. Eyestrain, and dermatitis as itching may also occur.⁵⁹

When a worker's efficiency noticeably drops, this could be the first sign of impending burnout. Declining performance occurs when a person becomes bored, unable to get excited about projects or loses concentration. Efficiency suffers with a decline in quality.⁶⁰ The five expressions of lost productivity related to burnout include jadedness, cynicism,

lowered creativity, avoiding decisions, and increased accidents.⁶¹

Substance abuse can also be a sign of burnout. To cope with the unrelieved stress associated with conflicts and declining performance, the person will often consume more alcohol, eat more or eat less, use more drugs, smoke more cigarettes and drink more coffee.⁶² Feelings of meaninglessness take hold and the burnout individual has feelings of "so what" and "why bother". The enthusiasm the person once had when he was dedicated is now replaced with cynicism, and working becomes pointless.⁶³

V. COMBATING BURNOUT

Anyone who has ever had a bad day at work will have an inkling of how immobilizing burnout can be. If having a bad day at work becomes the standard rather than the exception, then it is likely the person is burning out. Work doesn't have to be a unpleasant. There are specific actions that can be taken, starting today, to beat job burnout and transform work pressure into productivity.⁶⁴

The first step in combating burnout is to identify what burnout is. Many people have heard the term burnout, but have never developed the ability to recognize easily those work stresses that lead to job burnout.⁶⁵ When experiencing a job burnout crisis, it becomes more tempting to deny the power of unrelieved stress because there is no "quick fix". By not admitting they are burning out, they don't have to make the difficult changes in their lifestyle that the crisis stage requires in order for them to take control of job burnout.⁶⁶

A burned out individual needs to feel in control over their life, to understand why things happen, and to predict personal goals.⁶⁷ This crisis can trigger personal growth and force awareness of problems, and examination of demands imposed by work and home. This opportunity promotes reorganizing priorities and learning about personal strengths and weaknesses.⁶⁸

In some cases, one of the symptoms of burnout, the unrelieved stress, becomes the focus of attention. When ignored, the destructive power of unrelieved stress often leads to placing blame on the individual. Recognizing diverse problems leads to understanding the specific underlying cause, prevention, and cure becomes possible.⁶⁹

Coping with burnout can occur at several different levels: individual, social and institutional.⁷⁰

A. INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

The first and most difficult step requires taking command and directing life for personal power. When a person tries to regain control of themselves after a period of rebelling against their own self control this can start a pattern of self-punishment, which reaffirms fears of being controlled.⁷¹ Some will feel that only the weak will admit to needing help so, they will take an ostrich approach to the burnout symptoms.⁷² Nevertheless, the management of burnout comes from friends and loved ones and, most importantly, from the burnout victim as well.⁷³

Understanding how burnout works is the most important first step in taking control of burnout. Knowledge of the nature of stress, the power of work stress, the way the body has been constructed to respond to stress and how unrelieved stress can bring on burnout symptoms leads to control of the

job and the life.⁷⁴ Robert L Veniga, and James P Spradley, have developed the following rules a person can use to pull out of burnout. These rules will not bring instant relief but, they will help to regain control of job burnout and life.

"Rule one: Accept the fact you are in the midst of a dangerous crisis. Don't allow yourself to deny, avoid and remain trapped. A crisis is upsetting. So get upset.

Rule two: Find someone to give you assistance. When in a state of crisis, you simply cannot view your situation accurately.

Rule three: Don't feel guilty about retreating from danger. You will probably need to find the best way to escape from the powerful enemy of unrelieved stress."⁷⁵

Every strategy lowers the risk of living with unrelieved stress.⁷⁶

Burned out professional helpers can restore their mental and physical wellbeing by using a number of practical strategies. First the professional helper must recognize the high risk of burnout. Second, setting work priorities: strong service orientation implies the workers setting aside time for welcomed tasks. Most will respond to the request of others before they will work on their own priorities. Workers who set priorities feel in control and work on rewarding tasks. Third, the worker must pick "wars" carefully. Professional helpers encounter human needs at every juncture in the working day. It is easy to get drawn into every struggle for improvement of services. Fourth, any professional should cultivate at least one good friend who can help overcome burnout hurdles. When the work pressures mount

everyone needs a psychological life preserver: a good friend. Finally, the person should consider professional help. Many professional workers find it difficult to ask for help and feel professional help signifies weakness, instead of acknowledging a problem.⁷⁷

B. BUILDING PERSONAL POWER

Beverly A. Potter, in her work on burnout has developed eight paths she believes increase a persons personal power to deal with burnout:

1. Self management
2. Stress management
3. Build a support group
4. Skill building
5. Modify the job
6. Change jobs
7. Mood management with thought control
8. Detached concern⁷⁸

Self Management

Self management increases personal power through creation of win and lose situations needed for motivation. By creating the situations in which people give themselves only the wins, they are able to increase the motivation.⁷⁹ By becoming more in tune to personal feelings people are better able to recognize the need for counterbalancing coping strategies. This ability to introspect and understand personal feelings is critical for coping with burnout.⁸⁰

Any self-analysis should be constructive, not destructive. Complaining about flaws and failures is not the

same as recognizing limitations and learning from mistakes.⁸¹ Personal understanding begins with self-observation of "What am I feeling? When, where and with whom?" Self-analysis comes from talking to friends, writing things down in a diary, talking into a tape recorder or just talking aloud.⁸²

Self management means setting goals that provide a reasonable chance for accomplishment. If the goal is virtually impossible to achieve, then failure results. Setting realistic goals involves recognizing limitations as well as recognizing abilities.⁸³ Look for alternative and creative ways to reach goals, stop thinking about the way things ought to be and concentrate on the changes that can be achieved.⁸⁴ Unattainable goals will result in failure. There is nothing wrong with learning to lower goals. Not rising to vice-president of the firm, principal of the school, or foreman of the shift, does not mean failure. Lowering goals can offer a richer life in the current position. People have discovered that when they quit worrying about where they would be in five years, they became more relaxed and enjoyed life again.

Lowered goals and lowered expectations may result in time for other things: sailing, tennis, stock market, jogging or some other hobby. Having more time to do enjoyable things and worrying less about the way things ought to be, might result in landing a better job and living a better life.⁸⁵

Stress Management

It is important to know how the body and the psyche function in certain situations and how situations trigger stress responses. This understanding can be used to raise and lower tension level as needed⁸⁶ which increase, stress awareness. Many people are hardly conscious of the stress events that are most responsible for damaging of their health.⁸⁷ Activities that raise the conscious level of work stress include writing down all complaints in a typical week⁸⁸ and monitoring stress response by recording pulse changes. A stress-response diary logs fluctuations that occur with changes in stress level. Over a period of weeks, stress that causes faster pulse is logged.

Another way to systematically listen to stress is to write down in the stress-response diary the level of stress in the job or away from the job for that day. Then describe any physical changes that have occurred. After a month, a pattern can be seen that causes stress levels to rise.⁸⁹ Listening to the body and becoming more aware of what is happening to changes in the body under stress will take practice.

Build a Support System

To buffer against the negative effects of stress a strong support system made up of family, friends and co-workers should be developed.⁹⁰ Sometimes personal strength comes from strong social support. Research has indicated that people who are a part of a solid social support network can cope with

physical ills and psychological problems⁹¹ because that social support acts as a buffer against stress and burnout.

A person who is in continual contact with people for whom life is going badly and are exposed to the negative bias arising from their negativism needs to try and limit the negative contact and be around people for whom life is going well.⁹² A good marriage or an intimate relationship provides an emotional support that will help to counterbalance the emotional drain of the job.⁹³

A support system provides burnout victims with someone to talk to. A proven way of treating burnout is talking with sympathetic people.⁹⁴ One needs to ventilate--to "get it out of his system"--after confronting a stressful event. It helps to talk to someone who can understand, but who will not pass judgment.

As burnout suffers talk about experiences and feelings and attend to the reactions and expressions of others, they may learn new ways of dealing with situations.⁹⁵ A professional helper should talk to colleagues if the stressful situations are work related, because they understand the professional situations and sometimes can offer constructive alternatives. If a colleague is not available, a friend, a spouse, or other loved one can help, mostly by listening sympathetically.⁹⁶

Social coping techniques require the joint efforts of several people.⁹⁷ A person must make a point of spending time

with their families and friends or engaging in sports, hobbies, or simply resting to combat the unrelieved stress that leads to burnout.⁹⁸

Skill Building

Knowing how to acquire the skills needed will give the burnout sufferer confidence to tackle new challenges and handle the unexpected.⁹⁹ A person can learn to do things in a different way and get out of that rut they have gotten into.¹⁰⁰ The benefit of doing things differently is purely psychological. By learning new skills and doing things differently a source of stress may be alleviated. The standard way of doing a task may be ineffective or cause additional emotional strain, and thus a change may actually improve the situation as well as provide an opportunity for personal control.¹⁰¹

Modify the Job

Every job should have some leeway for tailoring it to better fit the workstyle. The ability to conform a job to personal style increases feelings of potency and enjoyment at work.¹⁰² Effective stress managers know how powerful unrelieved work stress is. They know it can become a deadly hazard to their health, so they make it their highest priority to control their job rather than let the job control them.¹⁰³

While modifying the job, care must be taken to avoid the workaholic trap. When the source of unrelieved stress comes from the job, working harder can become a blind alley that

looks like a thoroughfare to recovery. Working harder can become a self-defeating strategy that develops after burnout has closed in.¹⁰⁴ Working harder often contributes to the stress of burnout, rather than relieving it, but working smarter instead of working harder can help. People who are overwhelmed by the job try to work harder in an attempt to catch up and get back in control of things. Working smarter means making changes in ways to handle the job so that less stress and more efficient work results.¹⁰⁵ People forget jobs are malleable. They will try to carry out the job in the same manner as the last person. This can be like trying to squeeze a round peg into a square hole. When a job doesn't fit, it erodes motivation. Tailoring the working style to the job, offers a greater sense of control over the work and reduces the possibility of burning out.¹⁰⁶ Workers should focus on the skills, talents, and aptitudes for which they were hired, should identify tasks, and activities at work and should rate the impact each will have upon problem solving. Creating priorities that include enjoyable tasks provides a reward so that less enjoyable activities get finished first. Task management provides increased productivity and more satisfaction from the job.¹⁰⁷

Change Jobs

It is important to realize that changes are sometimes for the better and sometimes not; changes do not automatically guarantee success and happiness. Well-planned changes can be

a positive step toward personal growth and should be considered crucial to the process of taking stock of personal abilities in order to make better decisions. If the job situation does not improve after careful analysis then the worker should change jobs. Giving up is a serious step to take and a decision to do so should be based on careful consideration of the underlying reasons and available alternatives.¹⁰⁸ Burnout individuals will quit an unsatisfactory job without analyzing the source of dissatisfaction or exploring what is needed and grab the next job that comes along. Sometimes the new job is as bad as, or even worse, than the old one.¹⁰⁹

A change of jobs may be needed to combat burnout and sometimes a change in jobs may mean a change in professions or careers. A word of caution is needed, because if the change is more superficial than real, the risk of burnout is not really reduced.¹¹⁰

Mood Management with Thought Control

Thinking affects feelings. Emotions may cause out of control feelings which stem from "runaway thinking". Every red flag thought creates a response. Power grows from emptying the mind of negative chatter and focusing on productivity and the task at hand.¹¹¹ Thinking negative thoughts and thinking like a loser creates feelings of powerlessness, depression, anxiety, frustration and anger. These feeling will only increase the burnout. Positive

thoughts create feelings of power, hope, enthusiasm, confidence and energy: feelings that combat burnout.¹¹²

The guilt trip is one of the most insidious blind alleys that burnout individuals consistently take. They feel they are to blame for their own problems. People who take the guilt trip will turn their anger inward against themselves.¹¹³ Changing perception phases out stress. Motivation is sustained by determining the cause-and-effect relationship between what is done and what happens. Personal action influences results for good or ill.

How an individual reacts to his situation depends upon his/her psychological and emotional makeup. A situation can be an opportunity or a danger, depending on the individual's coping ability.¹¹⁴ Frequently, humor can disarm the severity of a disaster. However, the best antidote for burnout is a personal feeling of "I-can-do", of feeling in control.¹¹⁵ The burnout sufferer should see things in a new way: problems become opportunities; hassles become teachers.¹¹⁶

Personal strength also can come from a religious faith or spiritual philosophy. Beliefs can give meaning to work, provide hope and inspiration in adversity and can be a source of comfort and joy in an otherwise bleak institution.¹¹⁷

Detached Concern

Detached concern is gained by letting go. This is of particular importance for those who work with people having serious or even impossible problems. It is the attachment to

notions of how things ought to be that can imprison the professional through helplessness.¹¹⁸ Over involvement with people (taking on their problems as personal ones, reacting to negative comments as if they were personal insults,) sets up the professional for the emotional exhaustion of burnout. The professional helper should notice increasing intensity and should court abstraction and intellectualizing.¹¹⁹ Distancing in this way is a method of coping with a bad situation.¹²⁰ If the job is distressing and the burnout victim cannot change it or leave it, then they should strive for detached concern. They should make their best effort and don't dwell upon whether they are winning or losing. Instead, they need to roll with the punches, focus on the present think of problems as opportunities and make sure to laugh a lot.¹²¹

People invest their lives in their work, so they want it to mean something. People believe in what they are doing and wouldn't have it any other way. Basically people are satisfied, but if they use their minds to gain a healthy distance from their work they can help control job burnout and improve the quality of work.¹²² Distance from the job can be achieved by taking the lunch hour and leaving the office and going for a walk or reading a book. Distance can also be obtained by getting together with friends, playing cards, listening to music or other fun activities.¹²³

C. Safety Valves

Safety valves release the unrelieved stress that leads to burnout. Safety valves are discussed below:

1. Changing gears
2. Revised hours
3. Increased exercise
4. Self-pampering
5. Increased involvement
6. Slow warm up
7. Released pressure
8. Relaxation techniques

Changing Gears

Changing gears means shifting from work to something else and developing interest in things outside the job.¹²⁴ Changing gears gives burnout sufferers something to fall back on.

By setting up clear boundaries between job and home, the worker can leave the job, really leave it, psychologically as well as physically. By setting boundaries, the worker strengthens their private life and protects it from encroachments by work.¹²⁵ When the worker stops taking home other people's problems, emotional overinvolvement that develops when working with others is reduced.¹²⁶ The emotional strain of the job is not easily left behind and can cause problems for relationships with family and friends. Bringing home job burnout is hazardous to homelife, while setting boundaries between home and work creates two different environments and recognizes that a special transitions is

needed to get from one to the other.¹²⁷ Bringing home the emotional turmoil asks the job to run the private life.

It is hard to stop recurring thoughts and unresolved feelings and to avoid venting them on the nearest target, but decompression helps. Decompression is a cooling-off period for an hour or so at home. Two things happen as a result of cooling off: first, a pleasant time results from family and friends; second, problems become less immediate and less intense.¹²⁸ Decompression activities are any type of routines between work and home that break the continuity.¹²⁹ These activities include reading books, writing letters to friends, developing a hobby, taking a long walk or window shopping. Some people can decompress by sitting and daydreaming.¹³⁰

Reduced Hours

For a large number of people, burnout and overtime go hand in hand.¹³¹ Keeping job out of home life is easier said than done. There may be times that work is essential or may be required, but limited extra work should be the goal.¹³² The solution may be to say no: "No" to too much overtime, "no" to daily work to take home, and "no" to continuously being "on call".

Taking intermittent breaks or rest periods will help reduce stress on the job. Lunch hours and work breaks are standard procedures in most organizations and are ideal opportunities for emotional recharging, but their misuse aggravates burnout. People will continue to work during their

breaks, catching up on paperwork, making telephone calls or doing other chores.¹³³

Increased Exercise

Burnout almost always comes from excessive mental and emotional stress. Physical exercise is one of the best safety valves to beat burnout. The best antidote for the fatigue of burnout is regular exercise.¹³⁴

Helping others is highly demanding work. "Meeting these demands without falling victim to burnout can best be done by people who are strong, both in body and spirit, and who make sure they stay that way."¹³⁵ Tense muscles are the body's message. Depression and lethargic result from the body feeling "trapped".¹³⁶ Exercise improves physical condition and reduces mental and emotional fatigue.¹³⁷

Self-Pampering

When others experience a life crisis, professional helpers know how to pamper the other person. The professional should learn to self pamper.¹³⁸ Self-congratulation or acknowledging achievements develops motivation as does accentuating the positive. Helping relationships have a negative bias. Problems can make people focus only on what is wrong and forget what is right. Learning to take the good along with the bad makes the bad less overwhelming.

Finding the positive can take many forms and includes paying more attention to personal accomplishments--the minor ones as well as the major ones, having an interesting

conversation, sharing a joke, or helping someone not in crisis.¹³⁹

Increased Involvement

A challenging job can provide too much pressure, but so can a job that is boring. If skills fail to match the job, the burned out worker might consider increased job involvement.¹⁴⁰

Slow Warm-Up

Changing the way a tense, pressured workday offers a job control mechanism. The most important part of the day is the two-hour period just prior to starting work. During that period, the tone for the day is set.¹⁴¹

Released Pressure

The workers who are most often the people who burnout are the people who work faster and harder than others, they take their jobs seriously and never shirk responsibility.¹⁴²

Relaxation Techniques

The best relaxation techniques are vigorous exercises or some of the other safety valves that have been discussed. These safety valves allow the body to discharge tension and return to a state of equilibrium.¹⁴³

These health risks can be reduced by learning to relax, both physically and mentally.¹⁴⁴ Any kind of leisure activity is a great help in handling burnout. The activities replenish and rejuvenate and thus, offset the exhaustion and emptiness of burnout.¹⁴⁵

Relaxation through meditation can help with the tension and stress as do vacations and getting away to some physically different place.¹⁴⁶

Other ways to alleviate physical tension include soaking in a hot bath, sitting in a sauna, taking a nap or getting a massage. This will also promote mental relaxation as well.¹⁴⁷ Burnout will cause physical symptoms that effect the individual. Learning to relax can be an effective way to cope with this type of chronic emotional stress.

Good nutrition is also vital in combating burnout. Stress robs the body's need for protein and vitamins B and C are depleted dramatically. Coffee draws vitamin B from the system and cigarettes use up vitamin C.¹⁴⁸

Strategies to Help Others

In some cases the burned out individual will need professional help, but expert help is not always necessary.¹⁴⁹ A person can do a great deal to stay away from burnout, but even more can be done with a little help from a friend.¹⁵⁰ An indisputable fact has emerged in research on burnout: " People often recovered from burnout only because someone helped them."¹⁵¹ It will not be easy because research shows that burned out individuals confided that they had not shared their feelings with anybody - no one!¹⁵² Most people want to help their friends, they simply do not know how to go about it and feel ill-equipped to intervene, and do nothing.¹⁵³ Veniga, and Spradley, in The Work Stress Connection: How to Cope with

Job Burnout, give advice on how to help a burned out individual:

Helping involves more than just telling someone they are under pressure. Care should be given to developing a helping relationship instead of just trying to help. A helping relationship will show the burned out person, that a friend is there for them. It will provide the burnout sufferer with someone to talk to. A helping relationship will give the helper a chance to ask questions on what is happening to the burnout victim, without causing the victim to feel more helpless. A helper needs to level with the burnout sufferer, while searching for an achilles heel of the cause of the persons burnout. A helper should use the resources that can be found to help the burning victim. The best thing for the helper to do is to provide TLC (Tender Loving Care).

No single best strategy exists for helping someone recover from job burnout, but an effective beginning help the person regain control of leisure time.¹⁵⁴

VI. Conclusion

Scientific study of burnout has only recently begun. The search continues to identify the symptoms, to plot the stages, to discover better ways to cope with burnout and to redesign the structure of work.¹⁵⁵

Very little comparative research has been done on the levels of stress from one occupation to another.¹⁵⁶ Specific stress requires specific combat measures.¹⁵⁷ The worker needs motivation to encourage burnout prevention¹⁵⁸ Most of the techniques that promote physical and psychological well-being can do much to offset the negative costs of burnout.¹⁵⁹ Everyone on occasion, kicks the dog, slams the door or gets angry with someone not responsible for problems. If the fighting becomes a regular occurrence, it may mean the burnout process has driven the worker into a blind alley.¹⁶⁰

Reading about how pressures can alter physiological process may help, but it is quite another matter to actually observe change.¹⁶¹

Taking control of this debilitating condition is the best way to treat burnout. This lowers your stress, raises hopes and begins the road to recovery. Taking control will not be easy, especially not after years of chronic burnout. It can be done by systematically applying the personal strategies of understanding the nature of burnout, raising the consciousness

of stress, listening to the body, taking control of perceptions of stress and lowering expectations.¹⁶²

Burnout is not a specific hazard, it can devastate the lives of college professors and chimney sweeps. It can drain the energy of housewives and police officers. It can leave waitresses and corporation presidents feeling listless and unable to make the smallest decisions.¹⁶³

When workers prepare for stressful events, they minimize them.¹⁶⁴ One method discards old ways of perceiving stress and learn new ones that work.¹⁶⁵

There is no quick and easy solution to the problem of burnout.¹⁶⁶ Good intentions alone will not help reduce burnout and sometimes can, in fact, add to the stress.¹⁶⁷ Recovery will elude some, yet others may regain their equilibrium to battle stress. It will take time and understanding, but recovery is possible.¹⁶⁸

Not all coping techniques will work for everyone.¹⁶⁹ If professionals learn to pay attention to the aches and pains of everyday life, they will find more effective ways to deal with stress, but if they ignore those physical symptoms or manage them with medication only, the fires of stress will continue to burn away, doing irreversible damage.¹⁷⁰

Burnout is real and will not go away overnight. It is time for individuals and organizations to start working together to find solutions to stop the burnout cycle.

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