



# Preventing burnout in the workplace

A quick guide for  
you and your team

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- 1. What is burn out**
  - 2. Traffic Light - the 6 levels**
  - 3. What to do**
  - 4. Monitoring**
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According to WHO's definition "Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

It is characterized by three dimensions:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- Reduced professional efficacy.

It is also rooted on two main causes or more often a combination of both

- Personal - how much you demand to yourself to perform at work
- Environment - what a workplace or culture will expect

Ambitious high achievers in very competitive and demanding environments are the ones that can push themselves to the limit without realizing it (or ignoring the symptoms) and are at high risk of burnout.

But everyone is at risk if stress and well-being are not regularly checked in the workplace.

***Preventing and treating burnout symptoms at early stages, when they are still manageable, it's much better than trying to do that when you cannot cope any longer or have already passed the edge and need a long recovery.***

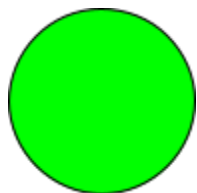
In the following page you will find an easy to reference print-out to keep at hand in order to quickly assess your stress level.

It's a great tool to check yourself as well as your team, checking if they are only a bit busy or a few days before collapsing. You can see what to do to support them in every stage.





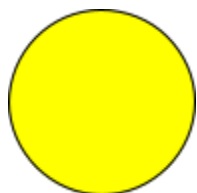
**What is your main feeling today?**



**Satisfaction**



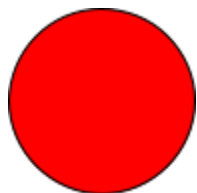
**Dissatisfaction**



**Irritability**



**Overwhelm**



**Exhaustion**



**Burn-out**



## Recognizing levels and what to do

It's very difficult sometimes to express exactly how we are feeling. We are not used to doing this, especially in professional contexts.

Also, as soon as we get too busy, the first thing we do is stop checking how we are. We shut down the feelings and operate like machines as a coping mechanism.

This is why you can use the traffic light system to check yourself or anyone in your team. You have a scale to measure and a clear language of communication so that everyone can align on what each level means.

In each stage you have a sense of what your day looks like, what you are experiencing, and possible physical or behavioral symptoms\*\*, so you can easily assess your well-being.

**SATISFACTION** You are in a relatively good mood, your energy level at the beginning of the day is high, you are clear on what you want to accomplish at the end of the day and you are confident you can make it.

**WHAT TO DO:** Keep going, use your high energy and help others if you can. Remember still, not to overdo it and allow yourself to rest

**DISSATISFACTION** You are doing too many activities that you do not enjoy, you start questioning why you are doing some tasks and often at the end of day you feel you have accomplished very little or added no real value. Physically and emotionally you are getting tired and frustrated

**WHAT TO DO:** Ask what you need to do to love your job more? What is draining your energy during the day?

Focus on what needs to happen to do more things that give you energy, and less of the rest. Make a plan with small daily changes to go in that direction

*\*\*Disclaimer - These are some typical symptoms experienced when stress is increasing. The mentioned information is to help get awareness of some of the effects it can have on your body and it's not in any way to be used as a medical assessment. For anything that is impacting your mental or physical health, you should always be consulting a doctor.*



**IRRITABILITY** Your feeling of dissatisfaction starts to show up with anger and frustration also in small, sometimes unrelated, events. Your stress is having a negative impact outside work life.

At this point you can still have a mix of good days and bad days, but often job related worries do not stop after you have finished your working hours and keep you awake at night.

**WHAT TO DO:** This is the time to create a routine that enables you to switch off at least some hours of the day. Set clear boundaries on what you can do and when you are available, say “no” more, respect your own free and family time.

As a manager it is important to respect time off, and lead by example on this. If you work with high-achiever individuals it can be too easy for them to take more than they can handle and never complain about it.

Reach out to them proactively . Show real appreciation of their work and ask: What can I do to help you work better?

**OVERWHELM** You are at a point that you know you have too much to handle. You are having a hard time quieting your mind to focus.

You have lost control of what you should be doing, you work on everything that comes your way because you have no energy to think and prioritize any longer. Resting becomes hard and the sleep pattern is interrupted, usually other physical pains can show up, muscle and upset stomach can be common.

**WHAT TO DO:** Stop believing you can do everything on your own. At this point it can become hard to figure out what you can drop, so ask for help. You’ll be surprised how many people will step in and take more responsibilities as soon as you give them the chance. Set clear priorities and delegate, keep your focus only on key areas.

As a manager with an overwhelmed person in your team the question at this point is only one: What can I take away from you?



**EXHAUSTION** You are doing more and more hoping that at a certain point you will get everything done. At the end of the day you feel you have never done enough. Hyperactivity and lack of rest is now the norm, almost all your awake time is dedicated to work or thinking about it. You are getting or feeling sick more frequently and you lack motivation in most of the things you do.

**WHAT TO DO:** Remove as much as possible uncertainty from your day. Plan a few key goals to reach and drop, delegate, postpone the rest. Make time for a break, anything longer than a weekend where everyone knows you won't be reachable.

As a manager, see what they need, strongly encourage them to take a break and check-in with them more often than usual and ask: What do you need help with today?

**BURN OUT** - Your anxiety and physical sickness is a sign that it is time to go in rest mode. If you have reached this stage you will probably know it, yet you want to ignore the signal that your body is sending you, as you think you have too much to do to stop.

**WHAT TO DO:** Do not ignore this and seek help. Take a break. Ask a friend or someone very close to check on you.

As a manager, ensure they take time off now. They will probably say no since they have so many things to do, but it's the only way you can support them and avoid a total breakdown.

There is no question here, organize everything so that they can focus only on taking care of themselves.

As they slowly work on their Emotional recovery, you can plan on how to approach their getting back to work to avoid the cycle to start again



## Monitoring

Getting in the habit of regularly checking your feelings and stress level is the key to reacting promptly to the situation and preventing serious burn out.

Tracking this in writing is very important, because it's very easy to over or underestimate how we really felt after a few days.

When you first start monitoring how you are doing - or you start implementing this with your team - check the temperature for about a week or two.

Rate your feelings and write some notes of what good/not so good happened.

You will then know your baseline for the current period and you can start planning on how to improve it.

I like very visual type of forms such as the below ones, because they are easy to use and help to spot trends quickly

Linear form - *Don't get at the end of the rainbow*

Date	1-May	2-May	3-May	4-May	5-May	6-May	7-May	8-May	9-May
Temperature									
Notes									

Graph form - *Don't climb the mountain*

	1-May	2-May	3-May	4-May	5-May	6-May	7-May	8-May	9-May
	★								
						★			★
				★			★	★	
		★	★		★				
Notes									

If everything looks good, and you see no worrying trends, you can use this on a weekly basis instead of daily. Take time to reflect on it at the end of your work week or use it during your weekly 1:1 as a starting point of the conversation.

**You do not have to do everything on your own.  
Get in touch if you need a guiding hand.**