

## BURNOUT PREVENTION

"You miss the lovely fragrant flowers  
And work until the midnight hours.  
The good years pass but you're so harried,  
Before you know you're dead and buried.  
Death can't wait to pull the cord,  
You're all worn out ... and no reward."

translated from Manager-Magazin 05/2001

### How to recognize and treat burnout and reduce the future risk

#### 1. What is it?

Managers and HR professionals are increasingly confronted with employees who suffer from burnout or at least show symptoms. The challenge

- is to see the impending crisis coming, recognize burnout for what it is
- and react correctly to keep employee performance from suffering.

Lost productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover and the economic consequences can be avoided if the situation is handled properly.

**Burnout is a problem throughout industry, so steps should be taken to prevent it across the board.** On average, there is a 15% to 20% risk that employees will suffer from burnout. Highly committed individuals are particularly susceptible. Managers have an above-average risk (around 25%). The burnout rate among teachers and human service professionals (e.g. nursing care, social work) is greater than 30%.

According to the Swiss business magazine CASH, one out of every five managers has reached the end of their rope. 3/4 of all managers suffer from stomach disorders, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythm, loss of motivation or depression as a result of "normal" work stress. Many resort to taking tablets. Alcohol consumption by managers is above the average for the general population.

Deutsche Wirtschafts Chronik 2005 identified burnout as the "Achilles heel of top performers" in German management.

Stress at work alone costs companies in Germany more than €5 billion a year. The list of problems includes stress-related production mistakes, poor decision-making, absenteeism as well as severance pay for workers who suffer from burnout and the cost of recruiting new staff.

## A. Recognizing burnout

What people are expected to do in connection with their work goes well beyond the actual job responsibilities

### Besides the familiar problems

- such as time pressure and excessive workload,
- employees have to deal with repeated reorganization cycles,
- increasing rivalry and conflict,
- job insecurity and
- "poor morale".

These factors increase stress levels, and it becomes increasingly difficult to draw the line between work and private life.

### People who suffer from burnout go through three phases.

**The 1st phase is exhaustion** which is generally associated with the burnout syndrome.

**Phase 2** is characterized by **irritability and apathy at work** and in the private sphere. Insensitivity and resignation add to the problems. Eventually, the victims begin to avoid contact as far as possible.

**The consequence:** They show a lack of involvement and commitment at meetings. Phone calls and face-to-face discussions tend to be brief if they take place at all. This is disastrous when the job involves interpersonal skills, particularly for managers. When this happens, it is high time to visit the doctor to exclude the possibility of burnout syndrome.

Mental and often physical breakdown as well may be just around the corner. During the **3rd and final burnout phase, loss of self-confidence** results in a lack of positive experiences and ultimately failure at work. People question their own ability. Job performance and productivity suffer. At this stage, people invariably become incapable of working for weeks or months at a time.

## B. Treating burnout

When the symptoms are recognized in time, the prospects for recovery are good. This is positive news not only for the person affected, but also for the employer. However before treatment gets underway, a psychiatrist or neurologist should be consulted to obtain a professional diagnosis. The problem is not only to recognize burnout in time but also to diagnose it correctly. Not every case of exhaustion is a burnout syndrome.

Medical expertise is needed to exclude the possibility of physical or mental illness such as a thyroid condition or depression which can often be treated with medication.

**Forms of therapy:**

- Behavior therapy and
- depth-psychology psychotherapy

are recommended and tested methodologies. The therapists are highly trained and qualified, and the methods of providing therapy have proven to be effective over a period of many years. In contrast to many alternative forms of treatment where the jury is still out on the actual effectiveness, health insurers are willing to pay for the types of therapy mentioned above.

**What to watch out for:**

An understanding of corporate organizations and occupational psychology are needed to treat burnout. Therapists should be asked about their level of experience in this field. We specialize in burnout prevention for senior management. Our services are directed at senior managers working for national and international corporations as well as managers at mid-tier companies and start-ups.

Some of our senior management coaching clients in recent years are listed at

[www.genius-coaching-training.com/en/about-us/references](http://www.genius-coaching-training.com/en/about-us/references)

## C. Avoiding future burnout risks

**Back to the "old" job?**

Many senior managers who are affected by burnout are reluctant to admit that they have the problem, because they fear (correctly from their subjective standpoint) that they will be unable to return to their job. Although that possibility cannot be entirely excluded, it happens far less frequently than people often assume. Burnout therapists tell us that more than 90% of people who suffer from the affliction return to work. That however invariably depends on how far the burnout crisis has progressed and at what stage the therapy has been started.

The general rule is that starting treatment early increases the chances of recovery. If over a period of weeks and months employees become completely unable to carry out their responsibilities, the negative experiences become deeply ingrained and a change of jobs is probably the best option. Simply changing companies is often sufficient. Statistics indicate that retraining or moving to a different industry following successful treatment only becomes necessary in rare instances.

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### **How to prevent burnout**

Relaxation techniques such as autogenic training and progressive muscle relaxation have proven to be effective in preventing burnout. They are particularly suitable for on-the-job stress prevention, because in their abbreviated form they only involve a few minutes of exercise each day. The following have also proven to be effective:

- Good time management
- Realistic expectations at work
- Expanded freedom of action
- Career development potential
- Clarification of goals
- Continuous professional development

In the private sphere, close contact with friends and family, passionate interests and hobbies and a **willingness to embrace assistance offered by others can help prevent burnout.**

## **2. What is our approach ?**

To be truly efficient, the therapist needs to thoroughly understand the burnout victim's situation as well as the work situation and the personal background. This is the case both for individual consultancy provided to senior managers and consultancy directed at the management team. Managers and HR development professionals are involved.

Specifically, this means generation of company-specific situation analyses, goal setting, action plans, implementation recommendations and supervision. Any follow-on activity is individually defined and implemented in agreement with the client. This includes defining both the individuals who will be involved and the timeline. This ensures that any absence (e.g. to attend seminars, workshops, etc.) causes minimal disruption to company workflows. All activities for managers can be scheduled outside of "normal" working hours.

### **Our individual or group coaching sessions are initially directed at**

- burnout prevention
- What is burnout and why is it so dangerous?
- How do you recognize burnout at an early stage?
- What can you do to prevent it?

We put together a checklist to help you assess burnout for yourself and your employees. Early detection shortens the duration of burnout and reduces the harm caused. Many practical examples, tips and exercises which are based on our coaching experience help you detect burnout at an early stage, protect yourself and your employees from being affected and know what to do if problems surface.

Concrete action plans for day-to-day work situations are generated during the individual or group coaching sessions. We discuss what you can do to prevent burnout, and we provide training based on case studies.



**During the coaching sessions, we provide answers to the following questions and address the following issues:**

- Why do employees suffer from burnout? Institutional and individual causes
- We identify personal causes of burnout as well as corporate structures that tend to provoke employee burnout, and we suggest solutions.
- What you can do to counteract the problem: Work organization and time management, social support within the company, opportunities for personal development, modification of job requirements
- "First aid" when the "batteries" run down: Relaxation techniques, be willing to accept help, create a calmer environment at work
- What is stress and how do I deal with it?
- What factors are weighing most heavily on me at work?
- What strategies could help me deal more effectively with stress?

**Methods:**

Presentations, case studies, discussions, exercises.

You learn what a healthy working environment looks like, one that provides protection against burnout.

You will be able to perform well and achieve success at work over the long term.

**Additional options:**

Analysis tool for managers incl. evaluation and analysis, action/consultancy recommendations  
Analysis tool for employees incl. evaluation and analysis, action/consultancy recommendations

Schedule upon request/ Fees upon request

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