

Webinar Transcript: All work and no play: Avoiding burnout

Presenter: Erica Hanlon

Hi, everybody, and thanks for joining this webinar today on burnout. Our webinar is called All Work and No Play: Avoiding Burnout. So, burnout is something that can happen to the best of us, and it doesn't feel good when it does happen.

So, as part of today's webinar, we're gonna talk about what burnout is. What does it look like? What are the warning signs that you're on the road toward burnout? We'll also discuss the difference between stress and burnout because they are very similar, they can absolutely contribute to one another, but they are two different things so we will explore that difference. We'll discuss what are some common causes that can lead to burnout as well as discussing what are the consequences of burnout when you get there. And finally, we'll give you tips to either help you avoid burnout, if you're worried that you may be on that road to being in that burnt out state, or if you feel like you're already in burnout we will give you tips to help you climb out of that emotional state into a place of being... Returning you to a place of emotional wellbeing.

So, what is burnout? So, burnout is really what happens when you feel overwhelmed, right? You're just simply not able to keep up with the constant demands that are being placed on you. And you can really experience burnout in any different area of your life. So, you might experience burnout at work or if you're a caregiver, maybe you take care of a family member, children, and elderly family member or loved one. Or maybe you're even a caregiver as part of your work. You can also experience burnout in that position, as well. Any role you can think of that you might play, you can experience burnout. And burnout is really just that state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, and it really comes about because you, the stress just adds up. There are never any breaks. It feels relentless. And that leads you to that state of being completely exhausted.

Let me give you an example of burnout that I had. About a year or so ago I was asked to write an article on stress. It was kind of like a little bit of a different take on stress but it was about stress. And I talk about stress, I write about stress, I train about stress. I should have been able to write this article really easily, like with my eyes closed. I should have been able to write it. And I spent the day staring at my computer, just staring at my blank Word document, and I wasn't able to get any words on the page. Just nothing happened. I just felt completely empty. I felt like I had nothing to give. And I ended up calling a coworker on the phone and I said I don't know what's going on with me. I should be able to just write this article. It should be no problem. And she said, "You sound burnt out. I think you're burnt out." And it was a real aha moment for me. I was, I was burnt out, and I was exhausted. Mentally exhausted where I just couldn't produce.

So, let's talk about the difference between stress and burnout. So, stress gets kind of a bad rap, right? So, stress is not necessarily a bad thing. Consider what happens if you have zero stress. If

you have zero stress, you probably have zero motivation. When it comes to stress, what we sort of aim for is this optimal level of stress, that sort of sweet spot of stress where we feel really motivated, we're really productive, we're getting a lot done.

But sometimes we overdo it, right? We take on too much stuff. There's just simply too much pressure put on us, too many demands. We feel kind of a lack of focus, our focus is pulled in a bunch of different areas, a bunch of different directions, it's hard to get things done, can make us feel really tired and anxious, and it can show up in our bodies in a number of ways like you get a cold or have trouble sleeping, that kind of thing. So, there is stress. So, stress can be a problem if you don't manage it appropriately.

And stress, if you have chronic stress, chronic excessive stress that can lead to that state of being burnt out which is really, it's defined by feeling that kind of detachment, a numb kind of feeling, empty feeling where you're just sort of disconnected from things. You just feel really fatigued and tired. This is not like in the morning before you've had your cup of coffee, "Oh, I'm tired," or that afternoon slump. This is that kind of excessive, persistent exhaustion throughout the day. Doesn't matter what time of day it is or how much coffee you've had. Somebody might ask you how you're doing and you're just like, "Ugh, I am really tired." The other key indicator of burnout is that a lot of times it feels like it's never going to end. It can make you feel helpless. It can make you feel hopeless. You feel like nothing is going to change. And that, you can see, would further exacerbate that state of burnout. And a lot of that kind of damage and the way that it shows up is primarily emotional. It's that kind of emotional feeling.

So, when it comes to burnout, some warning signs that maybe you're flirting with some burnout in the future include if you're feeling exhausted all the time, right, if you're not taking care of yourself, you're not sleeping well, you're not taking breaks, you're not recharging your batteries. If you're tired all the time, that is a red flag that your self-care probably could use some work. If you feel like it's a waste of energy to even care about work or your home life or whatever kind of area is kinda problematic for you and you're having low investment in it and you're not really energized or interested in it, then that is a warning sign that you may be getting burnt out. If you also find that you spend a lot of your time on tasks that are just simply not interesting to you, if your work is boring, right? If it's overwhelming you and if you feel like you're working really hard and nobody's appreciating you, that can also lead to burnout.

So, burnout shows up in a number of different ways. Now, it is primarily an emotional state but it can show up in our bodies and it can also show up in our actions. So, physical symptoms you wanna look out for, we talked about that kind of exhaustion all the time, if you're tired all the time, you feel drained. If you're finding you're having a lot of physical complaints like headaches, back pain, muscle aches. If you're noticing a change in your appetite or your sleep, and by that it could mean you're eating and sleeping more or you're eating and sleeping less. Or you find that you are just simply getting sick a lot more because that chronic, excessive stress can really do a number on your immune system.

Now, emotionally, this might show up as kind of low motivation, again, that feeling disconnected from things. You might also feel like you're failing somehow, right? You're sort of spinning your wheels, you're not succeeding in any kind of way. And then you might find that you're plagued with a lot of negative thoughts, thoughts that cause self-doubt, poor self-esteem or poor self-image, if you feel trapped, like this is never gonna get better, there's no way out. There's that kind of helpless, hopeless feeling, feeling really defeated. If you feel really alone, like nobody understands where you're coming from, that can also be a symptom of burnout. I mentioned before low motivation. Also if you kind of have this really cynical, negative, pessimistic outlook on life, and you might also notice that you have this sort of decreased satisfaction and joy in life. You just aren't feeling really happy anymore.

Now, behaviorally, you might notice things like you withdraw from other people or you withdraw from your responsibilities. Maybe you're kind of slacking off in areas where you didn't used to. If you find that you're procrastinating a lot more than you used to. Also, if you find that kind of you're treating that your stress and your burnout and these unhappy feelings with food, drugs, alcohol, that can be a warning sign. And also maybe you notice that you're taking your frustration out on others. Maybe that's your coworkers, your partners, your friends, your pets. Another sign of burnout is if you're skipping out on your responsibilities, you're kind of going into an avoidant state. So, for example, if you're burning out at work, maybe you are calling in sick more frequently or you're coming in late or you're taking extended breaks or you're leaving early. That can be a sign of burnout.

So, what happens when you get burnt out? So, you can feel helpless, hopeless, really negative, resentful, angry, and that can cause a lot of problems at work and at home. My husband, a few years back, was not really happy in his job, and he was a bear. He was a bear at home. Not like he was picking fights or anything, but he was very sort of... A bear is probably the wrong metaphor. He was very kind of closed off, right, and sort of shut down and remote and distant. And that put a strain on our relationship until the work stuff improved. So, when you are not taking care of your stress, when there is a problem in one area of your life, it can influence other areas.

And you might notice that you're less motivated. Whether that's at home or at work. And when you're less motivated, you're gonna be less productive, you're gonna get less done, and you might just feel like you have nothing more to give to anyone. That day where I was staring at my computer, I knew logically I should be able to just write this article but I felt like I just had nothing. I had nothing to say, I had nothing to give, I had no energy. You might also notice you're getting sick a lot more. The thing about stress is if you don't manage it, it will manage you. It will land you in bed. it will land you on the couch. It will force you to take a break and it won't be the kind of break that you wanna take 'cause you're not gonna be feeling very good. And I mentioned before, burnout can spill over into all areas of your life, even if you're feeling burnt out in just one area. And that can cause your relationships to suffer. And you may notice some mental health symptoms that closely, that look a lot like depression.

So, what are some contributing factors to burnout? So, this is by no means a comprehensive list, but I think a lot of times these factors fall into these one of three categories, lifestyle, work circumstances, and just your temperament, your personality. So, when it comes to lifestyle, if you're just simply working too much. You never have any balance, you never have any time to recharge your batteries, and you're not spending time with friends and family and people who really matter to you. If you're not taking any time for yourself, to take care of yourself. If you find that you're just always doing stuff for other people and you're doing too much for other people. If you're not sleeping well. Sleep is... I think a lot of time we talk about eat well, exercise, and those are both very important things and we will talk about them in this training, but sleep does not get enough credit. Sleep is critical to your health. It's really important to get enough sleep. And it's really important to have those supportive relationships.

Now, when it comes to work, if you feel like you just have little control over your work life or no control over your work life, if you feel like you're working really hard and nobody's recognizing you for all the effort you're putting in, that can contribute to burnout. Also, if you find that you're in a position or maybe you're working on a project and the expectations aren't very clear, that can lead to burnout. And finally, if your work is just really not interesting to you, if you're not passionate about it, you're not interested in it, if it's boring and monotonous, that can contribute to burnout.

And then, finally, some of us are just simply more prone to burnout because of our temperaments and the kind of personalities we have. So, if you find that you're really driven to achieve perfection, which is basically impossible, nobody is ever perfect, then you may find that you are more susceptible to burnout. If you find that you just tend to be kind of a pessimistic person, you kinda just have the general negative outlook or cynical outlook, you may be more prone to burnout. If you find that you need to be in control all the time or you're really type A or you always have to be at the very top, you're a really high achiever, then those things can contribute to burnout, as well. And kind of along those same lines, if you're a high achiever, perfectionist kind of person and you're really unforgiving to yourself and others when mistakes are made, then that can contribute to burnout, as well.

So, when it comes to burnout, we really want to intervene as early as possible, right? So, we wanna have really healthy habits put in place. But if you notice kind of the stress is building, you recognize some of those warning signs we talked about before, it's really important to try to prevent it if you can. So, you wanna understand the warning signs, you wanna recognize any symptoms in yourself that indicate that burnout may be imminent, and you wanna take steps to help prevent a full-on burnout episode from happening.

So, let's talk about some things that you can do to either kind of address burnout or help prevent it. Because these steps, while they help prevent burnout, they're also really important to implement if you find that you're already in a burnt out state, as well. So, one of the most important things you can do is simply to take care of yourself, and I really like this statement. Self-care isn't selfish, it's self preservation. You can't do for others if you're not first doing for

yourself. If you are depleting yourself, what good are you to other people, right? So, it's like being on the airplane. They tell you, "Put your oxygen mask on first "before you put it on other people."

So, self-care looks different for everybody, and I think a lot of times we throw out these kind of pithy, superficial tips like take a hot bath, get a pedicure, go for a walk. And those are fine, but if you're only doing them every now and again, if self-care is not part of your consistent routine, you are not really gonna make much of a dent, okay?

So, you wanna make sure you're taking time for yourself and that you're doing it on a regular basis. If you find that you're bottling in your feelings a lot, that can be problematic, so make sure you're expressing your feelings some way in a nice, healthy way. Maybe talking to a trusted person, writing in a journal, whatever works for you as far as getting those feelings out.

And then ask for help. So many of us feel like we have to do it all. We have to run around with our superhero capes on. And nobody is a superhero. I hate to break it to you but you just simply can't do it all. You have to ask for help. And be realistic about what you can and cannot do. You simply cannot do it all, right? And so you also need to be realistic, set those boundaries, and take time to recharge your batteries. And I'm not talking about once in a blue moon. I'm talking about on a regular basis. Find just a few minutes every day where you can do something for yourself to recharge your batteries.

And when you take care of your body, this is one of those things that you can do. You can do it on a daily basis. Take care of yourself because when your body is healthy, you're going to be much more resilient and it's going to be easier for you to cope with whatever life is throwing at you. So, eat well, move your body. A lot of times when we feel really tired in the middle of the day it's because we've been sitting at a desk all day long. Our bodies are meant to move, and sometimes fatigue sets in because we've just simply been too sedentary. So get up, go for a walk, move your body. We're meant to move.

And, as I mentioned before, get plenty of sleep. For most adults, that looks like somewhere between seven to nine hours. It looks a little bit different for everybody. My husband, bless him, he can go seven hours and he is good. I am more on the nine hours side of the spectrum. So, you may have to play around with it.

And if you can, take the intensity down a notch. I really like this statement. You can do anything, but you can't do everything. Wouldn't it be great if we could do everything 'cause then it would be done just the way we like it, right?

But let me give you, let me share with you a little cautionary tale. I had a coworker once. We are going to call him Bob. That is not his name. And Bob is a really, really nice guy. I really liked Bob. He was not only a really nice guy, he was a very talented clinician. And as such, he got a lot

of requests for help. A lot of the other clinicians that we worked with would go to Bob and ask for his help, his insight, his expertise. They would ask him to sit in on different committees and different groups. They would ask him to come to different meetings so he could give his input. And Bob said yes to everybody and to every request. So, this all sounds good so far, probably, right? But this is where the cautionary tale part kicks in. So, Bob, bless him, simply couldn't do it all. He said yes to too many things. Bob was chronically late to meetings. He was always late, and that was if he even showed up at all. The work he promised to do, he wouldn't do it. It didn't get done because he was simply overwhelmed. And as a result, Bob ended up with a terrible reputation at work. Everybody thought of Bob and then the next thing they thought of was that he just simply wasn't dependable. He wasn't reliable.

So, it's really important that you are realistic about your limits. Say no to things that you can't get to. For me, I had a really busy month this past month. I had a lot of projects going on. People would come to me and say, "Hey, I really want you to work on this," and I would say I would love to. I cannot get to it until next month. And if you need it done right away, here are some people you might want to try instead of me. So, I was realistic about my limits. I set boundaries. I said no. It's also really important that you're taking time off and that you are recognizing, really, how much time you can do.

It's also really important to spend time with loved ones 'cause social relationships are really important. That connection with other people is linked to better resiliency, it helps us feel less stressed, and there's research that shows that positive relationships can help prevent mental health issues like depression. It can actually lead to a longer life span and fewer health challenges. So, nurture those positive relationships in your life. And all relationships are not created equal.

You wanna make sure that you are recognizing which people in your life are toxic. Who is negative? Now, you may not be able to eliminate those people from your life. You may be forced to interact with them. In those cases, it's even more critical that you set appropriate boundaries with those people, with those relationships, and try to inoculate yourself as much as possible from that toxicity. Because it is absolutely contagious. But similarly, positivity is contagious, so surround yourself with positive people, supportive people, friends and family, people that you love, people who are positive. And when you find that you're feeling really stressed out, you need a helping hand, reach out. Talk to them. Even if you don't need any help, just being able to talk through things can be really beneficial to managing your stress.

And it's also important to take time to pursue creative outlets. They're a great antidote for burnout. So, you might wanna choose some new activities, maybe there's an old activity that you used to do and enjoy. So, take time to get back into them because engagement in activities that you enjoy, engaging in these hobbies can make you happier, it can make you more productive at work, it makes you more resilient and helps reduce stress, and it kind of lets you escape for a little while, right? It kinda takes you to a different place. Another great thing about a hobby is it sort of allows you to expand your view of yourself. Remember, we talked about

one of the emotional impacts of burnout, potential impacts, is this negative self-view. So, when we're allowed, when we're able to expand that view of ourselves, we see all kinds of benefits. And then it really comes down to this, right? You have to manage stress, and I said this before. If you don't manage stress, it will manage you. You will be on the couch. You will be in bed, sick, and all your life demands are just gonna keep on piling up.

So, what can you do to manage stress? One of the best things you can do is to simply breathe. Breathing is great because it's free, it's limitless, and you can do it anywhere. So, even just taking a few deep breaths can make a big difference. Being in the moment, right? Just being in the moment without judging it, striving to change how we think. Just being in the moment, noticing things around us, noticing our own thoughts without the judgment can make a big difference.

And you can practice mindfulness. There are some really great apps out there for mindfulness like Calm. Headspace is one that I tend to be more familiar with, and they will walk you through really short, easy mindfulness tips. Mindfulness doesn't necessarily have to mean meditation where you're sitting in a lotus position on top of a mountain top. You can be, you can do it kind of anywhere, anytime.

Another thing is we used to be told to multitask, that multitasking was kind of the key to productivity, but what we know is that our minds can really only focus on one task at a time. And shifting, even, between one task and another takes a lot of mental energy. So, while you might have to multitask sometimes, try to just do one task at a time.

And really make sure that you're making yourself a priority. Schedule time in your calendar. Make an appointment. Make it an appointment. My guess is you probably don't flake on appointments with other people. Don't flake on appointments you make for yourself that are self-care, whatever that happens to look like for you.

So, make yourself a priority and also take time to unplug. Right, don't check your work emails on the weekend. Try not to check them after a certain time at night. Turn off your phone notifications. All those pings and buzzes and vibrations really pull a lot of energy and attention from us. I was talking to somebody about being on call and how she has to be on call for her current position and I've had to be on call in the past and how taxing it is, mentally. Even if nobody ever calls you during your on call time, having to give that mental energy to knowing where your phone is, is it going off, is it plugged in, is it charged, can you hear it, is it accessible, do you have a connection, all these things, and you're doing it constantly, right, in the back of your brain. It pulls a lot of mental energy. So, take time to unplug.

Now, let's say you're already burnt out. Take it seriously. If you're not taking it seriously, it's not gonna get any better. So, you wanna take it seriously. Don't just try and push through it or gut it out and hope that it goes away on its own because burnout doesn't work that way. It will not

just be like, "Alright, we're done here," and take off. You have to actively address it. You have to focus on your recovery from burnout and make it a priority.

So, what do you do? You really have to slow down. If you're burnt out it's probably because there's something in your life that is not working. Take time to think about that. What is going on that's not working for you? Are you neglecting something important? Are you taking care of what really matters to you? Do you need to make an adjustment in your current course? It's almost natural to kinda pull in and conserve energy and isolate yourself, but, we talked before, connections are important. This is a really important time to reach out to others. When I was burnt out that day and I talked to my coworker, I didn't have, for whatever reason, I lacked self-awareness in that moment, right? But when she said, "You sound burnt out," it was like this light bulb moment. You're right, I'm burnt out.

So, we need to slow down. Acknowledge how you feel. Reexamine your goals and priorities and get support and help. Maybe that's support and help from friends and family. Maybe it's support and help from a professional like a life coach or a therapist. So, what do you do if you're burnt out at work? So, it doesn't hurt to ask. You are gonna be your own best advocate. I had somebody once tell me, when I was in a really stressful job, I mean really and I've had some stressful jobs. I've had jobs where we didn't get a break and my only break was when I would tell people I had to use the restroom. And then I would go in the restroom and I would cry, and that was my stress relief. And so I don't recommend being in a job like that, but those jobs happen.

If you can, you want to advocate for yourself. You wanna talk to a manager, supervisor, somebody who's in a position to help you. Talk about what's going on with you. What is the struggle? And if it's unclear expectations or maybe, at work, or maybe too many expectations or maybe your job is just simply not interesting to you, it's boring. I've been in my current role for a number of years. I started to get bored a few months back. I talked to my supervisor about it, and she found some new and interesting projects for me to work on. So, nobody is going to advocate for you unless you advocate for yourself. And so you have to explain what's going on, ask for what it is that you need, whether those are new duties, time off, whatever that is.

And we're gonna conclude with this quote that I really like. It's from Michael Gungor and it's from his book *The Crowd, the Critic, and the Muse: A Book for Creators*. And the quote is burnout is what happens when you try to avoid being human for too long. So many of us try to be superhuman, right? We try to do it all. We think we can do it all without any breaks, and we just simply can't. We have to acknowledge our humanity. We have to be human and take time to be human. So, thank you, everybody, for attending. If you have any more questions, please check out your member website and the resources available there, or you can always call us. We're here for you. Thanks, have a great day.