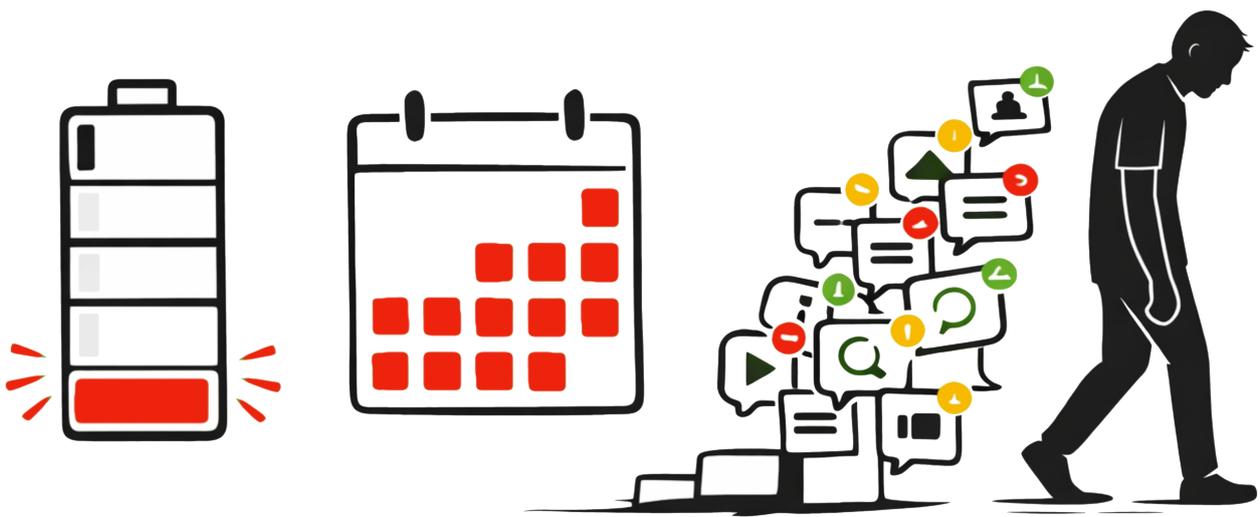


# The Tech Leader's Guide to Burnout

Recognising it early, responding effectively, and building a healthier leadership environment

*Andy Skipper*  
*CEO & Founder, CTO Craft*



## Watch the full episode

This handout complements Andy's *Build Your Edge* episode, "Burnout Happens Gradually... Then Suddenly". Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.

**Build Your Edge** 

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**Episode 26**

# Burnout Happens Gradually... Then Suddenly



**Why tech leaders hit the wall — and how they find their way back**

**Andy Skipper**

# The Tech Leader's Guide to Burnout

## Recognising it early, responding effectively, and building a healthier leadership environment

Burnout is far more common among technology leaders than most people realise, and far less openly discussed.

CTOs and senior engineering leaders operate in environments with intense pressure, high expectations, and constant change. The role often combines technical responsibility, commercial accountability, team leadership, and investor expectations, frequently without clear guardrails.

Over time, this pressure can accumulate.

For many leaders, burnout develops gradually, until one day it suddenly becomes impossible to ignore. If it goes unrecognised, burnout can damage not only the individual but also the team and organisation around them.

The good news is that burnout can be recognised early, managed effectively, and often prevented altogether.

This guide expands on the four-stage framework discussed in the Build Your Edge episode with Andy Skipper, CEO & Founder of [CTO Craft](#).

### Why burnout feels sudden

Burnout often feels like it arrives suddenly. In reality, it usually develops gradually over time:

- Expectations slowly increase
- Responsibilities accumulate
- Recovery time disappears
- Pressure becomes constant

Eventually the system reaches a tipping point, and what built gradually appears suddenly.

# A One-Minute Burnout Self-Check

Ask yourself the following questions honestly.

Over the past few weeks:

- Do I feel consistently exhausted, even after rest?
- Do I find it harder to concentrate or make decisions?
- Do I feel less effective than I used to?
- Do I feel increasingly cynical about work or colleagues?
- Do I feel pressure that never fully switches off?
- Do weekends or holidays no longer restore my energy?

If several of these feel familiar, you may be experiencing the early stages of burnout.

This does not mean something is wrong with you.

It often means the conditions around your role need to change.

The good news is that burnout can be recognised early and addressed, which is exactly what the next sections will help you do.

## Common Leadership Situations That Trigger Burnout

Examples:

- Joining a failing project
- Repeated incidents or production crises
- Layoffs or restructures
- Constant executive pressure
- Unclear expectations from founders or boards

## The Four Stages of Burnout Management

1. Recognise it early
2. Take immediate action
3. Change the conditions
4. Build long-term resilience

Each stage addresses a different part of the problem.

Burnout rarely disappears by itself. It requires awareness, honest communication, and changes in both personal behaviour and organisational conditions.

# Stage 1: Recognise Burnout Early

Burnout often develops slowly. Many leaders miss the early signs because they assume the pressure they feel is simply part of the job.

Psychologists commonly describe burnout using three indicators (based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory):

## 1. Exhaustion

Persistent physical and mental fatigue. Typical signs include:

- Feeling permanently drained
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent illness, headaches, or sleep problems
- Struggling to recover after weekends or holidays

## 2. Reduced Self-Efficacy

A growing belief that you are no longer effective. This can feel like:

- Doubting your ability to deliver
- Feeling overwhelmed by decisions
- Avoiding difficult problems
- A sense that nothing you do will fix things

## 3. Cynicism

This is often the clearest signal. It appears as:

- Loss of enthusiasm
- Irritability or impatience
- Disengagement from colleagues or the company
- A feeling of “I just don't care anymore”

When cynicism appears, burnout may already be well advanced.

## Recognising Burnout in Others

Leaders should also watch for signs in colleagues and team members. Common indicators include:

- Increasing negativity or cynicism
- Withdrawal from meetings or conversations
- Missed deadlines or declining work quality
- Unusual irritability
- Visible exhaustion
- Difficulty making decisions

Burnout can spread through a team quickly if it is ignored. Early recognition is critical.

## Stage 2: Take Immediate Action

Once burnout is recognised, the first step is not solving the entire problem. The first step is acknowledging it.

Many leaders try to push through burnout alone. This usually makes the situation worse. The most important immediate action is simple:

### **Talk to someone.**

This might include:

- A trusted colleague
- Your manager or CEO
- A mentor or coach
- A friend or family member

Speaking openly about burnout can reduce isolation and create space for solutions.

Other immediate steps may include:

- Taking time away from work
- Reducing workload temporarily
- Delegating responsibilities
- Establishing clearer boundaries

Burnout thrives in silence. Communication is the first step to stopping it.

## Stage 3: Change the Conditions

Burnout rarely occurs because of a single bad week. It usually results from structural conditions inside a role or organisation.

- Common causes include:
- Unclear expectations
- Constant crisis management
- Unrealistic delivery targets
- Excessive workload
- Lack of support
- Poor leadership culture
- Isolation at senior levels

If burnout occurs, leaders and organisations should examine the conditions that allowed it to happen.

Questions to ask include:

- Were expectations realistic?
- Was the workload sustainable?
- Did the leader have adequate support?
- Were responsibilities too broad?
- Were decision-making structures clear?

Organisations may need to introduce changes such as:

- Hiring additional leadership support
- Redistributing responsibilities
- Improving prioritisation and planning
- Creating clearer processes
- Strengthening psychological safety

Burnout prevention is not just an individual responsibility. It is also a leadership and organisational responsibility.

# Stage 4: Build Long-Term Resilience

Recovery from burnout takes time. Leaders who return from burnout should aim to rebuild a healthier operating model. This often involves changes in three areas.

## Personal habits

Examples include:

- Protecting time for rest and recovery
- Setting clear boundaries around work
- Maintaining physical health
- Developing support networks

## Professional relationships

Healthy leadership environments require:

- Honest communication
- Psychological safety
- Trust within leadership teams
- Space to discuss challenges openly

Leaders who show vulnerability often make it easier for others to do the same.

## Organisational culture

The healthiest organisations:

- Prioritise meaningful work over constant urgency
- Encourage learning rather than blame
- Promote teamwork rather than heroics
- Recognise human limits

Burnout thrives in cultures that reward overwork and silence. Healthy cultures encourage openness and support.

# Recovery After Burnout

Recovering from burnout is not simply about taking time off. It often requires rebuilding confidence and trust in your own abilities.

Helpful steps may include:

- Talking openly about the experience
- Working with a coach or mentor
- Rebuilding confidence gradually
- Being selective about future roles or environments

Recovery is different for everyone. For some people it takes weeks. For others it may take months. What matters most is recognising that recovery is possible.

## One Simple First Step

If you recognise the signs of burnout in yourself today, start with one action:

**Talk to someone you trust.**

You do not need to solve everything immediately. But you do not have to deal with burnout alone.

## About Andy

Andy Skipper is the CEO & Founder of [CTO Craft](#), a global community supporting senior technology leaders through coaching, mentoring, events, and peer networks.

Having experienced burnout early in his CTO career, Andy now works with thousands of leaders around the world to help them build healthier, more sustainable leadership careers.

Connect with [Andy on LinkedIn](#) to follow his thinking and insights.

## Andy's Build Your Edge episode

Episode 26: Burnout Happens Gradually... Then Suddenly