

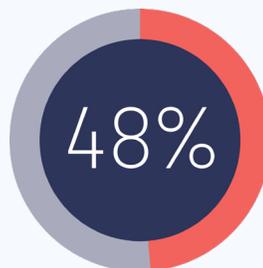


Burnout Is Real. And There Are Ways to Avoid It

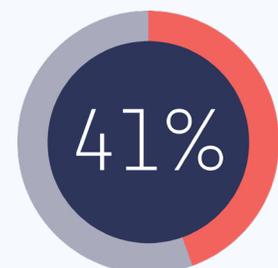
Employee burnout is rising—but there is something we can do about it.

Last year, [nearly half](#) of employed Americans reported feeling mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the day, and 41% identified that feeling as burnout. If your company has experienced record-high resignations lately, perhaps none of this comes as a surprise to you. You might even feel burned out just hearing about all this burnout.

Mental Health Survey of U.S. Workers



Feel mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the workday.



Feel burned out from their work.

Source: Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Managers, leaders, human resources professionals, and employees need to learn to recognize burnout before it's too late. It may feel timely now, but prioritizing and supporting employee work-life balance will help retain and attract talent, increase productivity, and have a long-term impact on your company's goals and culture.

Burnout is complicated. It can be caused by several stressors that snowball into one exhausted package. But companies have the tools and resources to support and retain their employees—they just need to recognize the signs of burnout, learn how to identify the underlying causes, and commit to addressing it head-on. Like most challenges in the workplace, you can't solve burnout with a quick training video. But getting to the root of it can bring meaningful change in workplace culture.



What causes burnout?

To me, burnout is when an employee is at the breaking point. It's the moment an employee can no longer be productive. They don't feel successful at their job, and they don't feel great about themselves. Often, it impedes both their professional and personal lives. And despite what many think, burnout can affect employees of all levels and ages.

It's complex, but burnout usually comes about when we see a layering of issues at work going unaddressed for far too long. Issues such as lack of support, lack of tools and technology for people to do their jobs, lack of clarity about what their job even is. They may feel a lack of control over their entire day.

Right now, there's a war for talent. Companies are staffing up, and with that comes employee training. However, that might be putting more work on existing employees' plates if they need to mentor new colleagues. Being overwhelmed with work and a never-ending to-do list is a common burnout cause—though it's not the only one.

In our own office, we recently enlisted a team of experts to help out in a department they don't normally work in because that team needed support. But then some of those associates showed signs of burnout by the new demands of the job.



We needed to balance the needs of the company with the needs of the employees, which isn't easy when you're still staffing up.

When the job your employees signed up for abruptly (or not so abruptly) changes to something they feel they never signed up for, they begin to lose their original motivation.

This push and pull can be even more complicated when employees work from home, where it can begin to feel like there's no separation between off-hours and work. Today, we find that people are having dinner—then getting back to work.

During the pandemic, there's been [an increased need for childcare](#), adding another layer of challenges for working parents that we didn't have before. And this can make people feel like they have no control. Managing work, approaching deadlines, conference calls, kids' school commitments, and just getting dinner on the table can all begin to mount, potentially leading to burnout. Yet on the flip side, we've had employees say they have a new appreciation for the time they can now spend with their families. Managing a healthy balance between work and home life is the key to avoiding burnout while working remotely.

This requires employers to take a closer look to they can better understand the bigger picture—and better understand their employees' workloads and needs.



Identify and recognize employee burnout

Even in a hybrid workplace, there can still be signs that an employee is drained, exhausted, and struggling to find the ambition that used to get them through the day: the drive to succeed.

Maybe they look tired or seem distracted on video calls. Maybe they're making mistakes in their work that they didn't make before. Maybe they're telling you about stressors from work that are spilling over into their home life. These could be signs of burnout, but as managers, it's imperative to actively look out for them before it's too late—that's the key.

We need to have an open dialogue in the workplace. Companies need to ensure that their employees feel comfortable expressing their concerns about feeling burned out. It's common, it's human, it's not taboo—HR managers and business leaders need to build a culture that encourages open lines of communication and ensures employers and employees embrace that.



As soon as you recognize burnout in your workplace, you should move quickly and strategically to help address it.

We can't be everything to everyone

When I talk to associates who are feeling burned out, I ask them to think about what makes them happy, what motivates them, and to reflect on the things that used to excite them at work. It's important to think, "How do I get back to *that* place?"

It's also important to have an ongoing conversation with your employees about which tasks are necessary versus unnecessary.

As you can imagine, employees can contribute to their own burnout by involving themselves in projects where they don't need to be involved. Saying no to new projects and knowing when to opt out—those decisions can help mediate time and energy, but employees need to feel empowered to do so. If your employees have trouble seeing what's important versus not important, tasks need to be laid out more clearly. Employees need to feel in control of their day, which will help alleviate some of the burnout they may be feeling.



If burnout is about feeling a lack of control over your day, what are the things you do have control over?

Paring down calendars might be a crucial way to help regain a sense of control over the workday.



Speaking of control, let's talk about the importance of taking a break. During the workday, a break for a walk or lunch can completely recalibrate an employee's mind and energy. I'm a strong believer in taking time, off and I make sure to encourage our associates to do the same. Sometimes, a three-day weekend isn't going to cut it.

I spoke to an associate recently who felt she couldn't take time off because of everything on her plate. She felt she'd never reach the end of that to-do list in order to give herself permission to log off. We talked about which tasks on her plate she could delegate (without overloading another colleague), which were truly necessary, and which could be dropped altogether.



Empowering—not subtly suggesting—people to take time off is important.

Does burnout culture start with you?

Leaders and managers should be thoughtful about the ways they may be contributing to employee burnout. Here's an example: if a leader sends emails late at night, an employee might feel they need to immediately respond because it appears urgent! Or, if a manager calls someone while they're making dinner for their family without first asking, "Is now a good time?" that could add to an "always on" expectation. Those small moments can add up, especially when they build towards something stressful that happened earlier in the day.

It's also important that company leaders continue to show that their employees are valued, respected, and supported. Maybe that's an email to congratulate someone on a strong performance, or a call-out during a team meeting.



Employees who feel valued can better address burnout.

It helps when leadership acts as a role model. This means taking time off to go on needed vacations, going for walk breaks, signing off at healthy hours, being proactive with conversations like, "Let's talk about what's on your plate, let's talk about your challenges, let's talk about what you actually loved doing this week." We don't always have the right conversations with associates, so that's something we're actively working on here at ADP. These are everyday decisions leaders can make to take employee burnout into consideration—not to mention the beauty that is "scheduled send" on email now.





Getting proactive about burnout

We shouldn't respond to burnout in moments of sudden crisis. We want to promote a healthy workplace year-round, and one way is by offering wellness resources to employees and leadership.



At ADP, we offer confidential mental health support sessions with our Employee Assistance Program.

Through this program, employees can have one-on-one meetings with facilitators too.

We also make sure our leadership team and managers are educated about how to help employees deal with stress, which in turn helps with their own stress management. Employers, leaders, and HR reps need to do a better job of educating around the wellness resources tools that we have available. Some employees might not know they exist, and they can make all the difference.

Lead by example

Our clients look to us for advice. And so when they talk to us, they're not just asking us about their payroll, or benefits administration, or tax and compliance. They want to know what we're doing internally at ADP.

We have to not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. So we spend a lot of time discussing what's happening in the work environment and what's happening with our associates. We talk to them about how the pandemic has affected their organizations, and some of our strategies for managing burnout. We talk to them about our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. It's important to show, as an organization built on the idea of supporting our clients and employees, that we're also supporting our own teams and communities in what we do every day.

Simply put: our clients trust us because we talk from experience. Anything we recommend we've implemented ourselves. When I say employees should take a break for an afternoon walk or lunch I mean it—because I regularly do the same myself.



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