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# 3 Misconceptions About Burnout – and How to Fix Them

USING RECOGNITION TO ALLEVIATE WORKPLACE STRESS





If you're reading this paper, you know what burnout is.

You've either experienced it yourself, heard from friends, family, or colleagues who are struggling with it, or seen the countless headlines recommending the silver bullet for how to beat it.

At Workhuman® Live 2024, Accenture Chief Health Officer Dr. Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee (also known as Dr. Tam), and Workhuman® Sr. Director, People Analytics & Research, Dr. Meisha-ann Martin, sat down to discuss burnout during the session, Navigating Workplace Resilience and Recognition: Insights From Accenture's Chief Health Officer.

In this paper, we'll highlight some of the misconceptions around burnout they covered, as well as proven strategies to alleviate workplace stress.

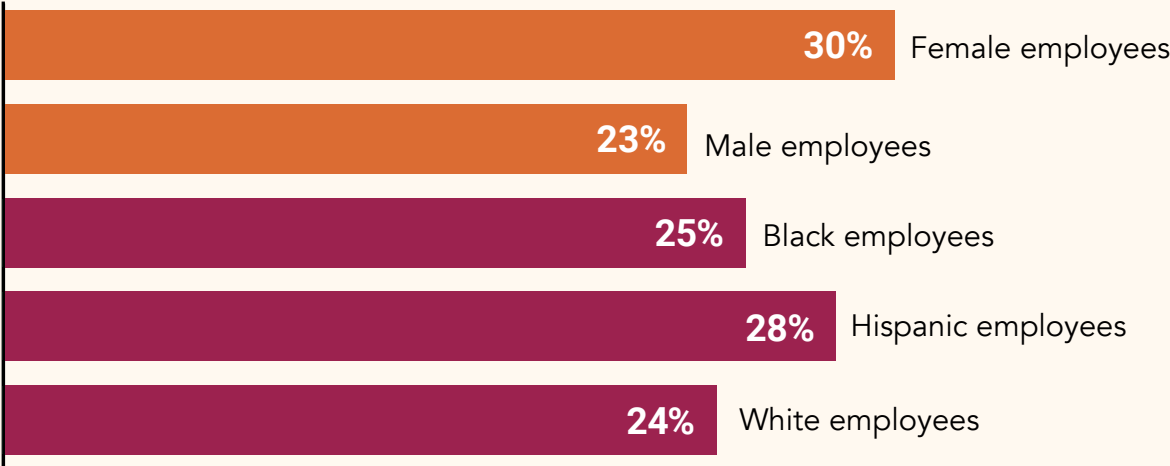
Misconception #1:

# Burnout affects everyone equally.

The reality is burnout affects every person differently. In fact, Dr. Martin shared one insight that demonstrated just how drastically burnout can affect different demographic groups: **“In our typical samples, we see about one-third of people saying that they’re burned out at least sometimes – specific to women, closer to 80%.”**

When we partnered with Gallup to look at burnout across demographics, not only did we find that burnout affects different groups at different rates, but that women are experiencing burnout at the highest rate, especially women in management. Across the U.S., three in 10 employed women report they **always** or **very often** feel burned out at work. (The most across measured demographics.)

Percentage of employees burned out always or very often



Source: [“Reduce Burnout and Turnover by Addressing Diverse Employees’ Unique Needs,”](#) Gallup and Workhuman, 2023

This research proves that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot solve for burnout. To understand how burnout is affecting your workforce, we recommend starting with a [pulse survey](#) to understand the unique needs and experiences of your workers. If the results show that worker wellbeing needs to be reprioritized, you'll be able to use your survey findings to develop a customized (and measurable) strategy for improving worker wellbeing.

### **Misconception #2:**

# **If I don't give 120%, 100% of the time, I'm not giving my best.**

Dr. Tam squashed this misconception right out the gate when she challenged that we only have 100% to give – and, more importantly, asked: **How do we give it?**



**“You only have 100%. The fallacy that you can do a 120% is wrong. And I love what Thasunda Brown Duckett, the CEO of TIAA, talks about – that she lives her life like a diversified portfolio. It’s only 100%. So, if you’re going to prioritize, 30% is your family and kids, this percentage is what you’re going to give for work, this is the percentage that you’re going to give for care for yourself – that is it. So, you’re going to manage work, for example, within the 25% that you have.”**

**Dr. Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee**  
Chief Health Officer  
Accenture

According to Gallup, two top reasons for burnout include an unmanageable workload and unreasonable deadlines and pressure. If the workload at your organization requires employees to give 120%, 100% of the time, consider how leaders can begin to advocate for the value in a more supportive work culture. Having candid conversations about work-life balance, role expectations, and appropriate boundaries can pay dividends if they help employees get ahead of burnout before it’s too late.

### **Misconception #3:**

# **Stress is just a part of the job.**

Yes, occasional stress is a part of most jobs – and sometimes, it can even be a healthy motivator to get to the finish line of an important task. But according to [Harvard Business Review](#), “Research has consistently shown that chronic overwork leads to a decrease in productivity, higher absenteeism and turnover, poorer health, and burnout.”

So how can you identify when healthy stress is starting to slip into chronic overwork? Dr. Tam and Dr. Martin discussed the concept of “a job +1.” Think those extra “duties as assigned” that get taken on, and then over time, become more like a second or third job.

**“Maybe it’s not what you were hired to do, your skill set, but it’s expected that if you want to be on the track of being seen and recognized for your good work, maybe get promoted, that you have to take on a plus-one. Problem is, that goes unchecked... I’ve seen people with four plus-ones because it gets drilled into them – you’ve got to take this on to be seen.”**

**Dr. Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee**  
Chief Health Officer  
Accenture

When workload goes unchecked or unrecognized, burnout can creep in. In fact, [Gallup reports](#) that two more of the top five reasons for burnout are lack of manager support and unclear communication from managers. To change this misconception about stress and workload, managers must be empowered to have [effective check-ins](#) with their team members. As [Gallup](#) found, “Manager support is central to preventing burnout. Manager support provides a psychological buffer, so employees know that their manager has their back – even when challenges arise or something goes wrong.”

## Using recognition to interrupt burnout

[In our research with Gallup](#), we found that workers who feel they get the “right” amount of recognition are 30% less likely to experience burnout than those who do not believe they are getting the right amount of recognition.



**“What we also see in our research is that recognition seems to be something of an interrupter of that [burnout]. Because we’re hearing a lot of people say, ‘I do these extra things like participating in ERGs, or I take on this extra work for my organization, but nobody sees it.’ And there’s something about recognition and acknowledging the work that somebody is putting in and making that invisible visible, that seems to interrupt that relationship between a lot of work and the feeling, the perception of burnout.”**

**Dr. Meisha-ann Martin**

Sr. Director, People Analytics & Research  
Workhuman

So, how can you use recognition to effectively interrupt burnout?

We recommend keeping in mind these three key things:

- 1. Recognize in the moment.** For more than 20 years, we’ve seen how timely recognition can reinforce and drive repetition of the positive behaviors being celebrated. If you wait, you’re weakening the impact of your colleague’s achievement. Through the Workhuman platform, your employees can nominate colleagues for recognition, create check-ins, and send feedback without ever leaving the apps in which they work.

- 2. Recognize your colleagues for what they do and who they are.** Gallup and Workhuman research found that employees recognized for work and life events are 3x as likely to feel connected to company culture, 3x as likely to say their company cares about their wellbeing, and more than 30% more likely to say they plan to remain at the organization.
  
- 3. Recognize holistically by highlighting “invisible” work.** The skills and collaboration required to complete a project are just as important to recognize as getting to the finish line. In our research, we’ve seen that a strong culture of recognition means workers receive a mix of rewards for both achievements and community built. With Workhuman® iQ, you can uncover the types of recognition given, as well as the skills, biases, trends, and themes in your unique recognition data.

**Now that you know the truth about burnout – and the impact of recognition – we’ll help you make the case for change. Contact us today.**

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