

## Employee Burnout



On May 28th , 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) updated its definition of burnout in the new version of its handbook of diseases, the International Classification of Diseases- ICD-11. The new definition describes burnout as a “syndrome” and ties it to “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.” The WHO calls burnout an “occupational phenomenon.”

Additionally, a recent study by Gallup of 7,500 full-time employees found that 23% of employees reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, while 44% reported feeling burned out sometimes. A Harvard Business Review article also reported that employee burnout costs an estimated \$125 billion to \$190 billion a year in healthcare spending in the U.S.

This is alarming because the cost of burnout is substantial to a business. It lowers employee productivity and overall job satisfaction but puts employers in a tough situation as they still need to inspire higher performance.

The WHO’s reclassification doesn’t necessarily provide any major changes, but it does highlight a common issue that arises in the workplace—How do we prevent and handle employee burnout?

## **Burnout definition**

Burnout is common in the workplace, but usually, companies treat it as a personal issue of the employee rather than a larger organizational issue. This is a common mistake and often ignores the true cause of employee stress.

The WHO characterizes burnout as “feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; and reduced professional efficacy.” While an employee who is suffering from burnout may seem like a disengaged employee, a burned-out employee still finds value in their work and is only suffering because of pressure from the workspace.

## **How to spot a burned-out employee**

Besides the WHO’s characterizations of burnout, there are other signs of burnout that you can use to identify an exhausted employee. Here are a few of the signs:

- Cynicism towards their work
- Increased absences from work
- Lack of trust in the company and its leaders
- Disengagement in the workplace
- Higher sensitivity to their work
- Increased loneliness in the workplace

## **What causes burnout**

Another important step is assessing the environment in which an employee is working. Often employee burnout is a byproduct of how an employee is managed. The following are five factors that can cause employee dissatisfaction at work:

1. **Excessive workload**- Taking a moment to assess an employee’s workload can be helpful to see if the amount of work they’re being given is manageable. By taking employee feedback into consideration when making important decisions relevant to their work, you can then create a fair distribution of responsibilities that will prevent burnout.

2. **Not giving them clearly defined roles-** When there are tasks that are given to an entire team to complete and no clearly defined roles in the group, it can begin to cause frustration. This can be seen especially in small businesses where manpower is limited, but when you clearly define the roles of your team members you can point to where a problem is occurring if a job isn't getting completed. This can mitigate group frustration and clearly outline the strengths and weaknesses of a team.
3. **Lack of communication from management-** We've talked about the importance of communication in the workplace before in previous blog posts, and this lesson still remains important here. Giving employees feedback on their performance during important projects increases their sense of belonging in the company as well as allowing them to grow in their roles.
4. **Unreasonable time constraints-** Giving an unreasonable time frame for a project to be completed can lead to immense frustration among employees and can also cause them to do sloppy work to meet the time window. By having an active discussion with employees about how long a project should take to complete and setting milestones can keep employees happy and productive.
5. **Not establishing reasonable goals-** Similar to establishing unreasonable times for a project to be completed, failing to be transparent on the expectations of your employees can be another source of frustration for them and cause them to burn out.

Burnout can be prevented and managed. It just takes effort on management's part to adjust how employees are being led in the workplace. If the true causes of stress in the workplace aren't being addressed then it will hurt employee morale, or worse, affect the employee retention rate.