

Symptoms & Signs of Burnout at Work



In the modern workplace, stress is inevitable, but if work-related stress goes ignored the risk of burnout increases. On an organizational level burnout at work can result in a decrease in employee's job performance and job satisfaction, reduced commitment to the company, and an increase in absenteeism and employee turnover. On a personal level, occupational burnout can result in severe health issues that can be difficult to overcome. Employers need to recognize the symptoms and signs of burnout so they can monitor their team members and intervene if necessary.

What is burnout syndrome?

Burnout at work is a syndrome that results from chronic work-related stress, with symptoms characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion, a negative attitude relating to work, and reduced feelings of work-related personal accomplishment.

Burnout syndrome can have serious consequences on employees'

physical and mental health. Burnt out team members suffer from perpetual fatigue and lose all joy they once felt at their job. Not only does this have a negative impact on your business, but there can be serious consequences for the individual if burnout is not addressed.

The 5 stages of burnout

The signs and symptoms of burnout vary from person to person; however, they can be categorized into the following five stages; The honeymoon stage, onset of stress, chronic stress, burnout, and habitual burnout. Each stage has specific characteristics, which progressively worsen as employee burnout advances.

1. *The Honeymoon Stage*

As the name suggests, the honeymoon stage is when an employee is experiencing high job satisfaction as they have taken on a new role, or undertaken a new project. Commitment levels are high, they feel positive, productive, and creativity is free-flowing.

Ideally, employees should be able to maintain the honeymoon stage indefinitely, but this is not a simple task.

In the first phase of burnout, employees may begin to experience the predicted stresses of the initiative they are undertaking, so it's important that they start to implement positive coping strategies.

2. *Onset of Stress*

The second stage of burnout in the workplace begins with the onset of work-related stress. Employees might start to become aware that not every day is plain sailing. Their initial optimism starts to wane and you may start to notice common stress symptoms affecting them physically, mentally, or emotionally. These can include; anxiety, avoidance of decision

making, fatigue, lack of social interaction, or an inability to focus.

3. *Chronic Stress*

The third stage of employee burnout is chronic stress. This is when a person experiences a marked change in their work-related stress levels. Some days they might feel motivated and driven, but they begin to experience job stress on an increasingly frequent basis. The mental and physical symptoms of burnout are more intense than in stage two and can include; anger or aggressive behavior, apathy, chronic emotional exhaustion, feeling a loss of control, an increase in alcohol, drug, or caffeine consumption, missed work deadlines, procrastination in the workplace, and physical illness.

4. *Burnout*

Stage four is burnout itself, this is when symptoms become critical and it becomes increasingly difficult for employees to cope. At this point the stressors intensify to the point where it is not possible to continue as normal and at this point, intervention is key for employee wellness. It is important to remember every employee is an individual and each person has their own unique limits, where one might handle a certain amount of pressure, others may struggle. The warning signs of job burnout include; extreme behavioral changes, chronic illness, a complete lack of self-care, self-doubt, social isolation, developing a pessimistic outlook on work and home life, and the development of an escapist mentality.

5. *Habitual Burnout*

The fifth and final stage of occupational burnout is habitual burnout. This is when the symptoms of burnout are so embedded in an employee's life that they are likely to experience serious ongoing mental, physical, or emotional problems. Chronic mental fatigue, chronic physical fatigue, chronic sadness, and depression are all possible at this stage.

Habitual burnout doesn't go away on its own; rather, it will only get worse until it is addressed. It's important to recognize the symptoms so that your employees can begin recovery as soon as possible.

Possible occupational burnout causes

Job burnout can result from numerous factors. It is important to be aware of these factors so that you can recognize the signs of job burnout more easily and effectively:

Unclear job expectations

If employees are uncertain about their degree of authority or what is expected of them in the workplace they may begin to lack confidence and feel uncomfortable at work.

Dysfunctional dynamics

Within your work environment there may be certain dynamics that contribute to work-related stress. This could involve bullying, micromanagement, or team members undermining one another.

Lack of control

When employees have little or no influence over decisions that affect their job – such as scheduling, workload, or task management – this can lead to job burnout.

Lack of social support

If a team member feels isolated at their place of work and in their personal life, they might feel more stressed out and isolated.

Extremes of activity

If a job is monotonous or chaotic, it requires constant energy to remain focused – this type of activity can lead to fatigue

and job burnout.

Work-life imbalance

If work is taking up so much time and effort that your employees don't have the energy to spend time with their family members and loved ones, this can have a negative impact on their mental health and they might burn out more quickly.

Work burnout symptoms, risks & consequences

According to the World Health Organization, burnout has three elements: feelings of exhaustion, mental detachment from one's job, and poorer performance at work. Every person experiences job burnout in a different way, but there are common warning signs that you can watch out for. Severe burnout syndrome symptoms should be addressed as soon as possible to maintain employee well-being.

Symptoms & signs of burnout at work

Signs of burnout in the workplace for employees include:

- Becoming cynical or overly critical at work
- Lacking enthusiasm and finding it hard to start the work day
- Showing signs of irritation or impatience with other team members or clients
- Low energy or an inability to be consistently productive
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Showing no signs of satisfaction from their achievements
- Feeling disillusioned about their job
- Using food, drugs, or alcohol to feel better or to feel nothing at all
- Unhealthy sleeping habits, or feeling tired even when they have had enough sleep
- Unhealthy work-life balance, or working excessively long

hours

- Obvious lack of self-care
- Physical health issues such as unexplained headaches, stomach problems, or other physical symptoms

Risks & consequences of being burned out at work

Burnout affects our health, leading to physical and mental health issues. Work-related ramifications include job dissatisfaction, poorer quality of work, professional mistakes, absenteeism, intention to give up a career, and abandonment.

Ignored or unaddressed job burnout can have significant consequences for the individual employee, including:

- Fatigue
- Chronic stress
- Insomnia or feeling constantly tired
- Sadness, anger, or irritability
- Alcohol or substance misuse
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Vulnerability to illnesses

Key takeaways

The consequences of experiencing burnout at work can be extreme and affect not only the individual employee, but the whole organization. Employers must monitor where workplace stress might exist within their organization and understand that people react differently, even under similar circumstances.

Learning to recognize the common symptoms of burnout across the five stages will allow for earlier intervention and

prevention of burnout before it occurs.