



Burnout:

Prevention and recovery

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In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared burnout a legitimate syndrome linked to chronic workplace stress.¹ According to WHO, this chronic stress can have severe consequences for employees including exhaustion, lack of engagement and workplace inefficacy. Why does this reclassification matter? It further legitimizes that burnout is a global problem, and that companies should take proactive measures towards burnout prevention and recovery.

This guide will provide useful information on preventing burnout, spotting existing burnout and helping your employees recover from burnout.

¹World Health Organization, 2019

What is burnout?

Burnout is a response to prolonged exposure to emotional, physical and interpersonal stressors that is characterized by a chronic feeling of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy.²



Limeade Institute research indicates that employees who experienced greater levels of stress felt higher levels of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy.³ Research also suggests that your most engaged employees feel the impacts of stress more than unengaged employees.³

Your most engaged employees are the most likely to burnout.

Here are the most common causes of burnout: ³

- Overload – workload and time
- Pressure
- Role conflict and ambiguity
- Lack of support from managers
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of participation in decision making
- Lack of fairness and equity
- Values disconnect
- A “broken” psychological contract between an employer and employee

²Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001
³Limeade Institute, 2019

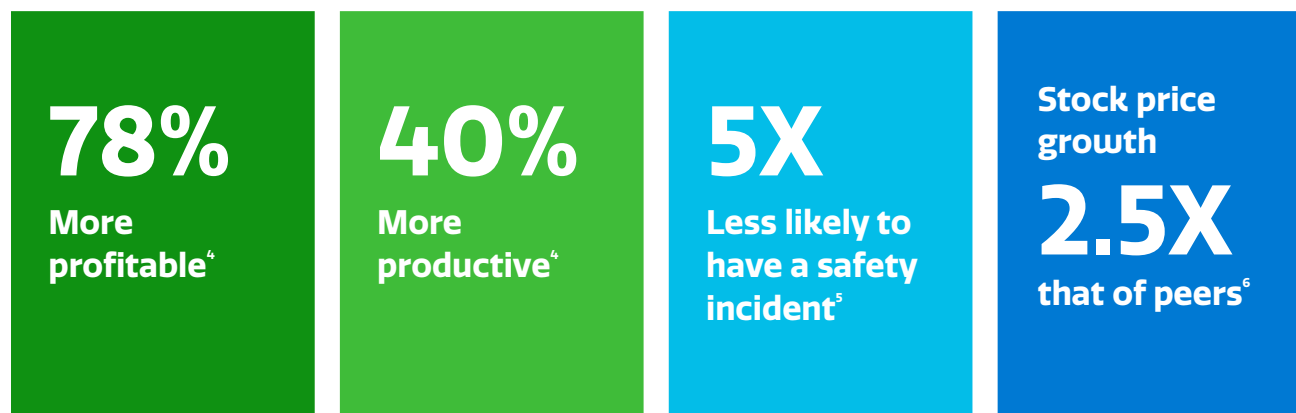


Why does burnout matter?

Engaged employees drive real business results — they're energized, enthusiastic and focused. Engaged employees enjoy their work, help boost productivity, performance, morale and growth.

Ultimately, employee engagement is good for people and for business.

Companies with engaged employees are:



However, burnout can happen when highly engaged employees begin to have low well-being due to unmanaged personal and/or workplace stressors. In order to be burned out at work, an employee has to be highly engaged. The employee has to be all in and care deeply about their work in order to get to the point of feeling burned out. This means top-performing, highly engaged employees are at the highest risk for burnout. Without support from their manager or organization, and/or the ability to resolve stressors for themselves, engaged employees can eventually burn out. And the consequences can be huge. Burnout results in low productivity and high turnover — especially turnover of the most talented and productive employees that employers can't afford to lose.

⁴Aon Hewitt, 2009
⁵SHRM, 2006
⁶Hay Group, 2010



Burnout has big consequences

Most companies think of burnout as a personal issue because it shows up so differently for each person who is experiencing the cycle of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. The reality is that burnout is really an organizational issue and should be addressed accordingly. Burnout is associated with absenteeism, intention to leave the job and actual turnover. But for people who stay on the job, burnout leads to lower productivity and a negative impact on team members. Often times, burnout is “contagious.” It can spread toxicity across a team or spill over into people’s home life.⁷

Personal impacts:

- Lower productivity
- Stress-related health issues
- Increased substance abuse
- Can precipitate anxiety, depression and decreases in self-esteem

Organizational impacts:

- Reduced organizational commitment
- Absenteeism
- Intention to leave
- Actual turnover

⁷Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Burke & Greenglass, 2001

Authentically supporting employees and managers

Most employees say their immediate managers matter more than C-suite leadership when it comes to well-being support. But often, managers don't understand how to talk with their employees about well-being.⁶

And it's not just about well-being. Managers play a big role in employee engagement. In fact, they account for up to 70% of variance in employee engagement.⁷ And employees who rate their manager as excellent are five times more engaged than employees who rate their manager as poor.⁸

Managers play a critical role in ensuring employees have a great experience. They're not only responsible for the career path of the employee, they're responsible for bringing the company values and culture to life. It's imperative that companies help managers understand how to do this.

A great place to start is with an understanding of the strongest drivers of employee engagement, including:⁹

- Challenging but achievable goals
- Maintaining a reasonable number of work hours
- Realizing personal potential and learning new things
- Using their greatest strengths
- Fitting professional abilities with role and responsibilities
- Feeling valued and respected
- Feeling supported by manager and organization support

Managers who strive to create these conditions for their employees will be more likely to have employees with high well-being and who are truly engaged while proactively mitigating the risk of employee burnout.

The best way to foster employee engagement and well-being is to support employees. And one of the best ways to support employees is to focus on managers.

⁶Hay Group, 2010

⁷Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Burke & Greenglass, 2001

⁸Gallup, 2013

⁹Limeade & Quantum Workplace, 2016



The missing link: Well-being

It's obvious why employers want to foster engagement, but few know how to foster high engagement and high well-being at the same time.

Employee well-being drives engagement, and vice versa. When employees are engaged in their work, they feel good and live with a sense of purpose.

Employees with higher well-being are twice as likely to be engaged in their jobs.¹⁰ These employees enjoy their teams more, are more loyal and recommend their company as a great place to work.¹¹ Further, highly engaged employees with high levels of well-being are able to cope with higher levels of stress without succumbing to the symptoms of burnout.¹²

When employees have high well-being AND feel supported by their organization, it's a win for everyone.

Limeade burnout definition

Burnout is when people have been highly engaged for a long time, without the personal skills and organizational support to maintain their well-being. Burnout is a harmful individual and organizational virus that targets the most committed employees.

¹⁰ Gallup, 2013

¹¹ Limeade & Quantum Workplace, 2016

¹² Limeade Institute, 2019 (New burnout results deck)

Burnout prevention & recovery

The good news is that burnout is preventable. With strong manager support and an understanding of what causes burnout, employers can more readily prevent their top talent from burning out. Here are four ways to help prevent burnout today:

1. Provide recovery time

Everyone needs a break to recover.

Employees pushing themselves to the limit at work is not only unproductive, it leads to burnout. Managers should adjust workloads and be aware when someone has been going full throttle in overdrive for too long. While recovery time or breaks help deal with the symptoms of burnout, they don't, provide a real solution. Make sure managers focus on the root causes too. How managers can help:

- Managers should meet with each of their direct reports each week for a one-on-one meeting. In this weekly meeting, managers should be sure to check on the employee's overall well-being and address any issues that arise as quickly as possible.

2. Foster a well-being mindset

How people think about stressors has an impact on their ability to handle and recover from them. What's stressful to one person can be energizing to another — it's subjective. For some, stress is enhancing and exhilarating, while for others, it's debilitating. When managers know how employees think about stress, they can help them cope with it better and prevent burnout.

How managers can help:

- Give employees permission to set emotional boundaries with their work by identifying limits and recognizing feelings. Without boundaries, employees are vulnerable to crippling disappointment when they receive critical feedback.
- Help employees find their "sweet spot" of stress. Acute (good) stress keeps you on your toes, ready to rise to a challenge. Chronic (bad) stress, and our response to bad stress, can lead to many health problems both physical and mental.

3. Build social connections

People are wired to be social.

And the more we can rely on each other for support, the better off we are. In fact, social support positively relates to important factors that impact stress, health, well-being and engagement. Employers have the unique ability to foster community among employees by boosting team support and social networks. These social connections will help employees get the support they need and help guard against burnout. How managers can help:

- Challenge employees to create a plan to connect with a friend, family member or colleague at a scheduled time each week. Encourage them to schedule a phone call, meet for coffee or go for a walk. This will lift their mood and help them feel connected.

4. Purpose

Helping employees connect to their purpose is key for burnout prevention. When people have a real emotional connection to their work, they're more connected to the company and their own purpose. This helps put things into perspective when work gets hectic.

How managers can help:

- Connect each employee's role to your organization's mission and values. Connecting roles to how jobs directly contribute to the goals of the company helps reinforce why each employee's role matters.
- Help employees take ownership in crafting their job. Job crafting involves intentional reflection on how the employee frames their job and the purpose and meaning derived from it. This exercise will help employees think through small changes they can make to take more ownership over their role, and uncover their unique set of skills and strengths that make them great at their job.



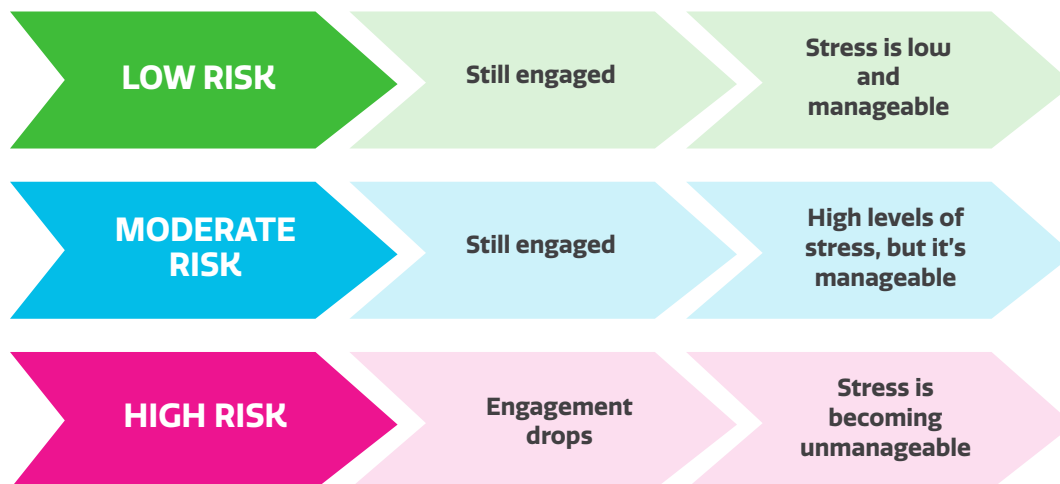


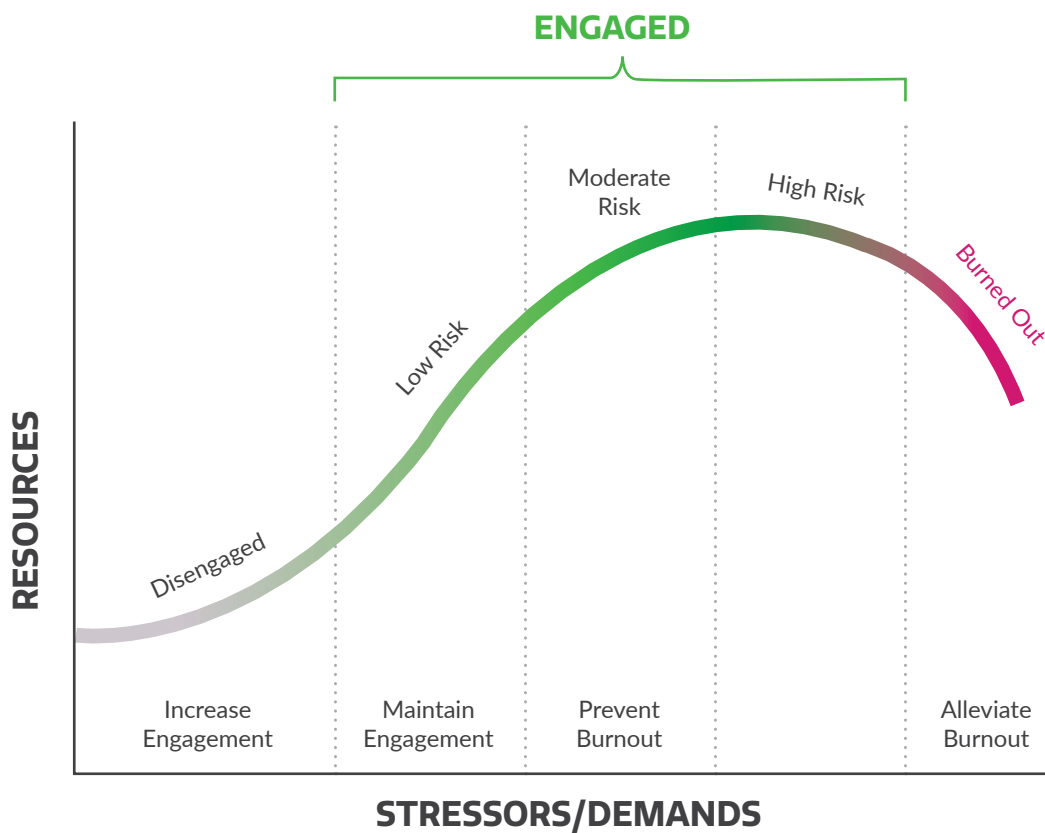
How can companies help employees recover from burnout?

Employees have to be on fire to burn out. But how do you know when they're feeling the heat?

Employees don't burn out overnight. Burnout happens over time. Knowing the phases of burnout is the first step in helping employees, at any phase, recover from burnout.

Phases of burnout





Organizations and managers need to simultaneously help employees address and manage their stress and workload while enabling them to allocate time to replenish and build their resources. Resources are the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that help achieve work goals, reduce job demands or stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Think of resources as the well-being drivers that people draw from to help combat the negative effects of stress.

Resources can include:

- Time to relax and disconnect
- Time and space to focus on building good relationships
- Prioritizing care of emotional and physical health
- Helping people reconnect meaning to their jobs

Employees who are completely burned out have lost sight of meaning in their work. Managers and organizations must recognize burnout and help re-establish meaningfulness in employees' lives and work.

Conclusion

Burnout is real and it's affecting millions of workers globally. It's imperative that companies understand the impact burnout has on employee engagement and business results. It's up to organizations (and managers) to spot signs of burnout and intervene as quickly as possible. Companies should strive to prevent burnout in the first place by focusing on employee well-being and manager support. When employees are burned out, companies and managers need to take an active role in helping the employee recover. Burnout is not a personal issue, it's an organizational issue. Burnout needs to be addressed at all levels of the company in order to effectively prevent and combat it.



Limeade is an immersive employee well-being company that creates healthy employee experiences.

Limeade Institute science guides its industry-leading software and its own award-winning culture. Today, millions of users in over 100 countries use Limeade solutions to navigate the future of work. By putting well-being at the heart of the employee experience, Limeade reduces burnout and turnover while increasing well-being and engagement — ultimately elevating business performance.

To learn more, visit www.limeade.com.

