

Busting Burnout Myths

Employees have to be on fire to burn out.

Burnout is real, and your most engaged employees are the most susceptible. Burnout is a response to prolonged exposure to emotional, physical and interpersonal stressors that leaves people with a chronic feeling of exhaustion, inefficacy and cynicism.¹

Why does it matter to you? Burnout is associated with employee absenteeism, intention to leave the job and actual turnover. And for people who stay on the job, burnout leads to lower productivity and can have a negative impact on team members. Often, burnout is “contagious” — it can spread toxicity across a team or spillover into people’s home life.

We’ve debunked five common burnout myths to expose the truth about burnout and to help you keep your most valuable assets — your employees — engaged, focused and energized.

Myth #1: People who feel burned out are weak and just can’t handle stress.

Employees have to be on fire to burnout. That means your most engaged employees — those who are energized, enthusiastic and focused — are the most likely to burn out. It doesn’t necessarily mean burned out employees are weaker or unable to handle work stress. Even under high stress, energy levels of engaged employees are, on average, 15% greater than those of disengaged employees.¹ Employees don’t burn out overnight — it happens over time. Knowing the phases of burnout is the first step in helping employees, at any phase, recover from burnout.

Myth #2: Burnout is a personal issue — not an organizational issue.

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 an organizational issue** and should be addressed accordingly. With strong managers and an understanding of what causes burnout, employers can more readily prevent their top talent from losing steam.

Myth #3: Millennials use burnout as an excuse.

Research shows that burnout greatly affects millennial retention, with 84% of millennials experiencing burnout at their current job.⁶ And nearly half of millennials have also left a job due to burnout, but they are not burning out for the reasons you might think. For example, the rise of technology has left millennials with the feeling they should always be working. Millennials also have high expectations for themselves and constantly compare their performance to others. This self-applied pressure, coupled with the need to always “be on,” leaves millennials especially susceptible to burnout. Managers need to find ways to harness this drive while providing the support needed to avoid burnout.

Myth #4: More sleep and time off will solve burnout.

Burnout is a response to prolonged exposure to emotional, physical and interpersonal stressors and it can't be cured with time off, exercise or more sleep. While recovery time or breaks help deal with the symptoms of burnout, they don't provide a lasting solution.

Managers need to focus on the root causes which could include:

- 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

Myth #5: Once you “get over it” burnout won't come back.

Your most engaged employees will always be at risk for burnout if they don't have high levels of well-being. 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.³ These employees enjoy their teams more, are more loyal and recommend their company as a great place to work.³ 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.⁴ When employees have high well-being AND feel supported by their organization, it's a win for everyone.

¹ Limeade Institute, 2019

² <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/burnout-survey.html>

³ Gallup, 2013

⁴ Limeade & Quantum Workplace, 2016