Strategies for Dealing with Burnout

With excerpts from Gallup, Fast Company, and Forbes

Burnout is becoming more prevalent in organizations and has a significant impact on employee productivity and health.

"A recent Gallup study of nearly 7,500 full-time employees found that 23% of employees reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, while an additional 44% reported feeling burned out sometimes. That means that about two-thirds of full-time workers experience burnout on the job." - Employee Burnout from Gallup, July 12, 2018

Employees who report burnout are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times more likely to leave their current employer. This increase in reported burnout can be attributed to multiple causes. From workplace engagement, well-being, and life satisfaction studies remaining flat over the past several years according to Ben Wigert with Gallup, to the extensive disruption of technology and speed needed for change management.

Wigert also reminds leaders that the main factors that cause employee burnout have less to do with expectations for hard work and high performance and more to do with how someone is managed.

Whether you're experiencing burnout as a leader or seeing signs of it in your employees and teams, there are multiple steps companies can take to reduce burnout at work:

Unsure if you're experiencing burnout? Evaluate if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Exhaustion – tired all the time, emotional, mental or physical. Sick of not having energy.
- Lack of motivation – not feeling enthusiastic about anything you do anymore.
- Frustration, cynicism, and other negative emotions – when what you're doing doesn't feel like it matters much anymore.
- Not taking care of yourself – engaging in unhealthy coping strategies like drinking too much, smoking, being sedentary, eating junk food, not eating enough and not getting sleep

Here are some steps you can take to eliminate burnout in your own life:

1. **Know when it's you and when it's them:** Burnout is sometimes motivated by internal factors and sometimes it really is a symptom of external ones. The first question you should ask yourself is, "Where is this coming from?" This can help figure out what's stressing you out and how to maintain your internal resources to keep yourself motivated, doing your best work, and functioning well.
2. **Take relaxation seriously:** Whether its meditation, listening to music, reading a book, taking a walk, or visiting with friends and family, truly think about what you do to relax and designate time on your schedule for it. Integrate renewal into each and every day.
3. **Unplug:** While communication technology can promote productivity, it can also let work stressors seep into your personal life. This may be the most difficult one to accomplish, so make sure you over communicate your unplugged time with your team.
4. **Get enough sleep:** No enough sleep can lead to fatigue, decrease your motivation, make you more sensitive to stressful events, impair your mental function, leave you more susceptible to errors and make it harder to juggle competing demands. The reverse is true, too: Gallup has seen that sleep can actually improve your memory.

To help your employees with burnout, here are some steps you can take:

1. **Improve communication:** According to Gallup, employees who have a manager who's always willing to listen to their work-related problems are 62% less likely to be burned out. Improving dialogue with employees through a regular cadence of 1-1s that discuss balance and work productivity can lead to opportunities of work improvement and problem solving.
2. **Encouraging collaboration & teamwork:** Coworker relationships are important because they provide another line of emotional support for employees who are struggling. Coworkers often understand the stress of a job better than managers do, says Wigert. To encourage teamwork, Wigert suggests that managers collaboratively set team goals.
3. **Focus on strengths:** Employees who have the opportunity to do what they do best are 57% less likely to frequently experience burnout, according to Gallup. Engagement is a huge buffer to preventing burnout, says Wigert. "The manager is responsible for about 70% of the things that impact employee engagement."
4. **Connect to purpose:** Employees are significantly less likely to be burned out when they can connect their work to their company's mission or purpose in a way that makes their job feel important, according to Gallup. "People do not just go to work for a paycheck; they want to find meaning in what they do," according to the Gallup research.
5. **Provide role and responsibility clarity:** According to Gallup's recent State of the American Workplace report, only 60% of workers can strongly agree that they know what is expected of them at work. Keep accountability and expectations as steady targets. The best managers discuss responsibilities and performance goals with their employees and collaborate with them to ensure that expectations are clear and aligned with those goals.

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