

Curb burnout by better matching staff needs

Think of burned-out members of your team as canaries in the coal mine. When the canary keels over, we recognise the environment is dangerous – we don't tell the canary to take a long weekend!

Contemporary thinking suggests we need to flip how we think about burnout. Burned-out individuals show there are pressing problems in their organisation, rather than problems with the person. The true solution is to redesign workplaces so that the causes of burnout are minimised, if not eliminated altogether. To put this another way, the chronic job stressors need to be managed at their source; it's too late when people are burning out.

How to do this involves improving the match, or fit, between people and the workplace. Not that we shouldn't help individuals cope with burnout, but it's long-lasting and deeper to create better job matches for them.

Sources of mismatches

The chronic job stressors that cause burnout stem from several types of mismatch. These reflect a poor fit between the job and basic human needs in six principal areas. They apply to everyone irrespective of their job, from the cleaner to the chief executive:

- > 1. *Workload*: Insufficient time to do a proper job, others interfering, too little support, poor equipment.
- > 2. *Control*: Inadequate autonomy to derive satisfaction from the job.
- > 3. *Reward*: Work done well is not recognised or rewarded.
- > 4. *Community*: In socially toxic workplaces where there is bullying or sexual harassment.
- > 5. *Fairness*: Discrimination and inequitable work practices.
- > 6. *Values*: Moral, ethical and legal conflicts in the workplace.

Redesigning jobs to create better matches

Improving matches assists people to find fulfillment in their work life by helping them move from burnout to rewarding engagement.

A leader's job is not to find an answer or solve the problem; rather it is to collaborate with your people along these lines.

Seek input on mismatches: Listen deeply, play back what you have heard, share them publicly,

Creatively explore positive matches: Use what you have shared to invite suggestions, encourage voice,

Start with low-hanging fruit: Take small, achievable steps to secure visible gains quickly,

Keep the changes simple: When adding a new task, delete another one; balance intensity and rest, and

Build in checkpoints: Adopt an iterative plan–do–check–act approach.

Conclusion

Rather than looking for a silver bullet to eliminate burnout, executives need a new way of thinking about leadership at work. This requires greater responsiveness to the mismatches that people experience at work, attention to their psychological motivations and greater flexibility in job design and work conditions. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

More on this topic

- ✓ [To Curb Burnout, Design Jobs to Better Match Employees' Needs](#)
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