

EBOOK

The Ultimate HR Guide to Employee Burnout

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Employee burnout is on the rise. Again. Employers that do nothing to address employee stress leave themselves vulnerable to the consequences of it.

Want to build a burnout-resistant workplace?

The short answer is: employee wellness initiatives. The long answer is this e-book, intended to help company executives, human resources professionals, managers and other decision-makers recognize and prevent burnout in the workplace.

What is Burnout vs. What is “Just” Stress?

Burnout can be described as total mental, physical and emotional exhaustion. It's the end result when chronic stress reaches a critical point, overwhelming one's ability to cope.

Stress, on the other hand, is defined as mental tension in response to a challenging situation. With stress, as it is with many other things, the dose makes the poison. Healthy amounts of stress can motivate one to reach their goals, stave off boredom and make successes more meaningful.

As stress compounds over time, so do the negative consequences. This is especially true when stress is unrelenting, attacking from every part of a person's life. Some worries stem from work (like deadlines, bad managers, unhealthy work environments) while other concerns come from outside the office walls (illness, family matters, financial security, etc.). Let's face it, the stressful worldwide events of the past decade haven't helped either.

Is it any wonder that 82% of employees are at risk for burnout this year?

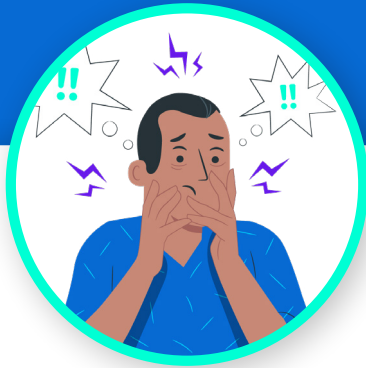
Unfortunately for employers, the negative impact from employee burnout tends to hit hardest at work regardless of where the stress originates. This means that even though employers may not be responsible for their employees' burnout, they often feel the brunt of the pain.



Stress vs. Burnout

Stress is when a person's battery runs on low. It can put employees on high alert and can lead to outbursts and overreactions. With burnout, their battery is completely dead. Rather than overreact, a burned-out employee often doesn't even care enough to react at all. This is what makes burnout so dangerous. The metaphor of the battery is especially apt when you consider that stressed out employees can look and act completely fine, until suddenly they're not.

Recognize the Signs



Employees Under Stress

- Fluctuate in the stress they feel daily or even hourly
- Often are reactive, emotional or irritable
- Appear visibly tired
- Are still connected and actively trying
- Complain of headaches and/or stomach problems
- Return energized after a break, but may lose steam quickly
- Show decreased creativity and initiative



Employees Experiencing Burnout

- Are disengaged and emotionally detached
- Latch onto false beliefs (burnout hijacks the mind)
- Are all-negative, all-the-time
- No longer feel value in or connected to work
- Isolate from others
- Lose more days to absenteeism and [presenteeism](#)

Why is Burnout So Bad?

Burnout itself is not technically classified as a medical condition, but instead as an “occupational phenomenon.” Don't let that fool you into thinking burnout can't cause real and lasting harm. In fact, burnout:



Directly impacts an individual's **physical AND mental health**



Costs businesses upwards of **\$500 billion** each year



Requires an extensive active **recovery period**



Continues to grow in prevalence despite beliefs that levels would drop after the first spike during the pandemic



Accounts for a significant percentage of **workforce turnover** (up to half according to 25% of HR professionals)

Burnout is the opposite of employee wellness.

Employees who are holistically well are more likely to be engaged, productive, creative and loyal. Let's look at why burned-out employees are so much less likely to give the same to their employers.

Burnout Compromises Physical Health

One recent study looked directly at the relationship between burnout and the human brain. The results were pretty fascinating. Researchers concluded that chronic stress (aka burnout) changes brain structure. It physically enlarges parts of the brain that assess and respond to threats, while simultaneously shrinking the connections to the parts linked to emotional distress.

This means that a person experiencing burnout is caught in a vicious cycle where they will continue to over-respond to stressors in unhealthy manners, ultimately making all their symptoms worse. If the cycle isn't broken, they'll stay stuck incessantly, leading to greater detachment and disengagement.

On top of changes to the brain, unrelenting [stress can accumulate](#). As a result, inflammation rises and immune response lowers – leading to all kinds of [physical ailments](#) like headaches, digestive issues, increased blood pressure, heart issues and stroke.

Too often, employees treat these physical symptoms without understanding the connection they have with their stress levels.

Stress related physical ailments can be serious enough to require medical attention and often lead to missed work days.

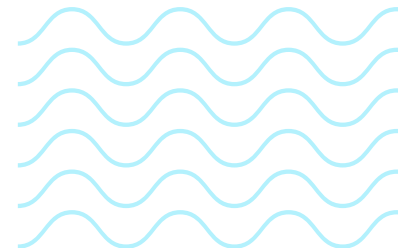


Burnout Compromises Mental Health

**With mental health, the connection
is a little more obvious.**

The [World Health Organization](#) links burnout with feelings of energy depletion, exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, cynicism toward work, and reduced professional efficacy.

Burnout's effects can have profound physical and mental consequences on those experiencing it. Worse still, the effects can radiate out to impact one's family, social group, and employer. It's just not possible for a person to continually produce superior work and manage healthy relationships when their tank is perpetually dry.



70% of employees said they would leave their current employer

Employees who are burned out because of workplace stress might not find recovery possible without switching employers.

Among employees already showing symptoms of burnout **70%** said they would [leave their current employer](#) for one with better resources to prevent burnout.

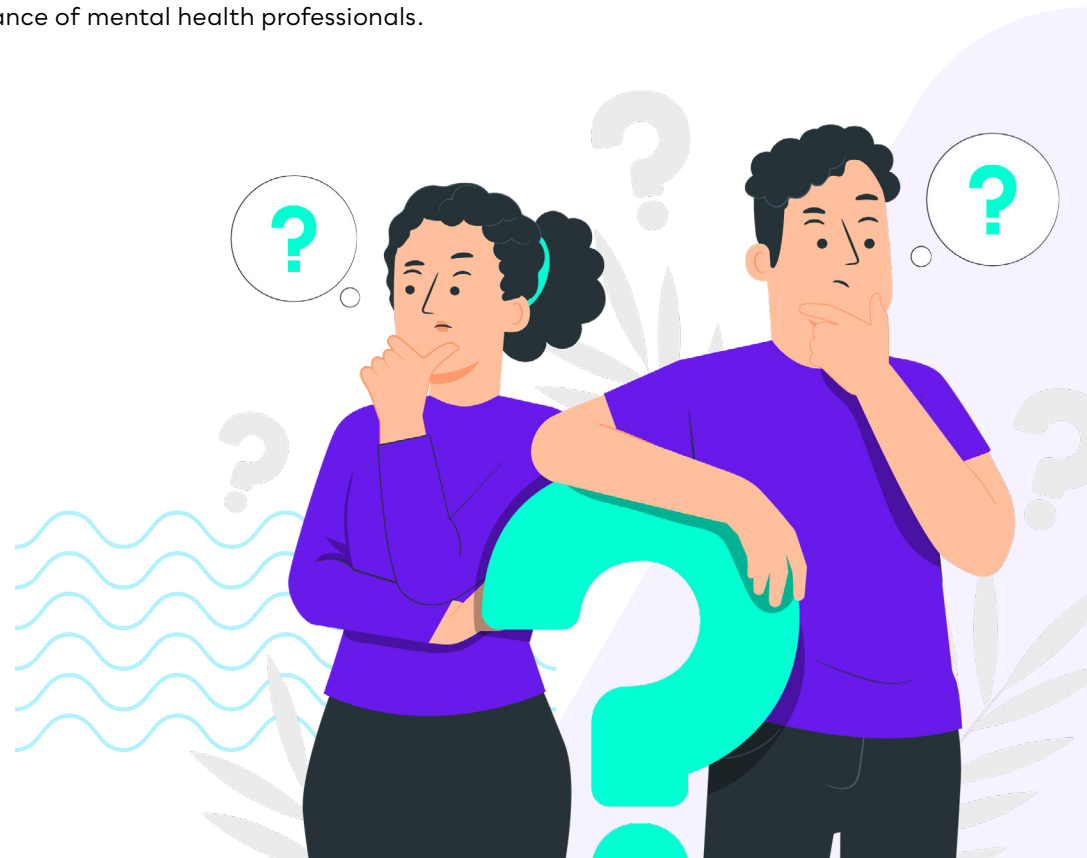
Even those who don't up and resign will often "[quiet quit](#)," which means to give to bare minimum of effort instead of going above and beyond.

Burnout Recovery is Difficult

The world is full of life-hacky tips claiming to relieve your stress in [10 minutes a day](#). Healthy practices like yoga, gratitude journals, or even [holding a pencil in your mouth](#) to force yourself to smile can indeed combat the effects of everyday stress. They can even help prevent a person from reaching burnout, which makes them well worth trying.

But what if a person is already burned out?

Then, recovery becomes exponentially more complicated. In fact, the path to recovery requires months or years of actively practicing [coping skills](#) and ridding one's life of stressors. It may require the guidance of mental health professionals.



Who is at Risk for Employee Burnout?

While employees across all positions and demographics experience burnout, some groups tend to experience it more than others.

Gender



Research consistently shows that [women burn out](#) more frequently than men. In 2023, **75% of women had experienced burnout compared to 58% of men**. This discrepancy could be attributed to various factors. These include societal expectations, caregiving responsibilities and workplace dynamics. Women often juggle multiple roles which can lead to heightened stress levels and increased susceptibility to burnout. In addition, while it may not be the case across the board, it's certainly more common for women to face workplace challenges like gender discrimination, unequal pay and limited opportunities for advancement. These contribute to feelings of frustration and exhaustion which in turn causes burnout.

Generation



Twice as many millennials and members of gen Z report facing burnout compared with baby boomers. These numbers go right along with the data from a recent [Gallup poll](#) measuring employee stress by age group. While 65% of individuals aged 30-49 and 64% of 15-29-year-olds said they're stressed, just 44% of people older than 50 reported feeling stressed out.

Other



Other groups [at higher risk](#) for stress, depression and burnout include low-income earners, racial minorities, those identifying as [LGBTQI+](#) and [management level](#) employees.

How Common is Employee Burnout?

A recent [Aflac](#) report showed that a startling **57% of U.S. workers feel at least moderate levels of burnout.**

Some industries experience higher levels of burnout than others. For example, pre-pandemic, workers in the hospitality and food service industries were the most plagued by burnout, with as much as [80% of employees](#) overwhelmed by their workload. Then, during the pandemic, burnout among [healthcare workers](#) reached crisis levels. More recently, the financial and insurance, IT and construction industries have been [losing talent](#) to burnout at alarming rates.

Changing economic (and other) factors seem to impact which industries are the hardest hit at any given moment. Even so, this year's reports show that burnout is increasing [across the board](#), which is a more concerning trend.

Considering the direct correlation between burnout and disengagement, such numbers should be a giant red flag for employers. And it appears to be getting worse. Citing data collected from nearly 58,000 employees from over 1,600 companies across the country, BambooHR revealed that employee satisfaction is at a [4-year low](#). The survey asked employees to rate their employer based on how likely they were to recommend it as a place to work. Neglecting to prioritize these efforts may well cost companies more than they have to lose.



“These dire statistics indicate employers would be wise to step up efforts in employee communication, compensation, benefits and support, and overall company culture.”

ANIGHT GRANTHAM
HEAD OF HR, BAMBOOHR



What Does Employee Burnout Cost?

Burnout costs employers in a myriad of ways both financially and operationally.

When employees reach the point of burnout, they lose the ability to focus and perform at typical levels. Instead, these exhausted workers become less productive and lose efficiency as they struggle to concentrate on the tasks in front of them. This can be even more damaging when their position requires them to build and maintain relationships internally and externally. The decline in performance can ultimately result in missed deadlines and costly errors.

Burned-out employees are more prone to health issues, both physical and mental, which leads to elevated healthcare expenses and increased insurance premiums for employers.

On top of that, the negative atmosphere caused by burnout can permeate the workplace, affecting morale, teamwork, and ultimately, organizational culture. Employees experiencing significant burnout are much [less likely](#) to be satisfied with their pay, benefits, staffing levels and their organization's culture of support regarding wellbeing.

As for dollars and cents, burnout contributes to higher rates of absenteeism and in extreme circumstances, turnover. Some estimates suggest that U.S. businesses forfeit over \$1 trillion every year to [voluntary turnover](#). Experts say the cost to replace a good employee can range anywhere from 33% to 400% of their annual salary. While keeping employees happy and engaged can sound expensive, dealing with the aftermath of [employee turnover](#) costs even more.

Millennial workers in particular have shown they're not afraid to walk away from their job for another one that will pay them more or give them better benefits.

It's pretty clear just how detrimental employee burnout can be to organizations and their bottom lines. However, understanding these costs won't do much good until leaders truly understand why so many employees wind up there.



What Does Burnout Cost?

In dollars & cents, U.S. businesses lose over \$1 trillion a year replacing employees who quit, many due to burnout. They often lose much more in employee morale, productivity and other non-monetary factors.

70%

Waste on-the-clock
hours worrying
about stressors



41%

Feel less
productive

33%

Feel less
engaged

15%

Are more
likely to look
for a new job

14%

Are absent
more often

For more information,
view the [Colonial Life survey](#)

What Causes Employee Burnout?

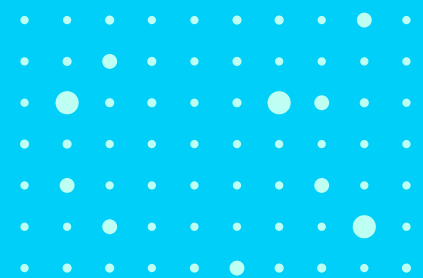
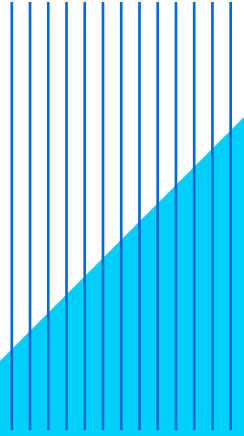
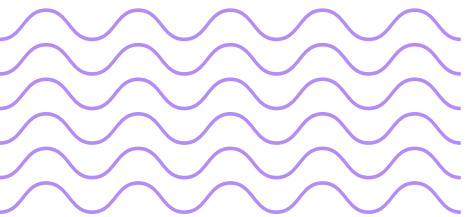
All employee burnout comes from the same place: stress.

As for the stress that leads to the burnout? Those origins can be a little harder and more complicated to pinpoint. Generally speaking, employee stress can be categorized into two main buckets: workplace stress (stuff that's directly related to their job and the people they work with) and outside stress (everything else).

Stress doesn't necessarily stay where it originates. If you've heard the adage "don't bring your work home with you," you probably recognize how often workplace stress causes strain in personal relationships.

And yet, it goes both ways. Employees often can't help but drag their homelife stress into the office.

Given the huge impact employee burnout can have on employee performance, co-worker relationships, managers and the company's bottom line, it's a good idea to understand where it comes from—all of it.



Where is all the pressure coming from?

Here are a few of the most common sources:

Sources of Workplace Stress



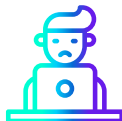
Overwork



Toxic Workplace



Micromanagement



Boredom/Lack of Purpose



Perceived Inequalities

Sources of Outside Stress



Personal Finances



Parenting



Caregiving



Physical Health



**Economic and
Social Uncertainty**

Sources of Workplace Stress

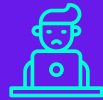
The American Institute of Stress says that 83% of U.S. employees suffer from work-related anxiety.

This worrying can be incredibly costly as it heavily contributes to diminished productivity, absenteeism, employee turnover, legal expenses, accidents and even medical and workers' compensation awards. If ignored, workplace stress can be devastating to a business. Its impact is simply too far-reaching to avoid the detrimental consequences.

Where is all the pressure coming from? Here are a few of the most common sources:



Overwork



Boredom/Lack of Purpose



Toxic Workplace



Perceived Inequalities



Micromanagement



EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

What Workload Factors Contributed Most to Your Burnout?



Data from [Kronos Inc](#) and [Visier Inc](#).

SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Overwork

When people think of burnout, most often, they'll point a finger at overwork - workloads that are too full, hours that are too long, expectations that are too high. While there are usually other factors at play too, overwork's reputation is well earned.

Remote and hybrid work schedules, which became much more prevalent during the pandemic, helped many people feel like they had more free time. However, for others, it actually increased stress by blurring the boundaries between work life and homelife. This ["always on" work mentality](#) has proven to be unsustainable for most employees in the long term.

Is it any wonder, then, that quiet quitting (a general refusal to perform above and beyond the job one was hired to do) is a growing trend?

What Can HR Do?

Address toxic behaviors, re-evaluate workload, set & respect work-life boundaries, encourage breaks & support vacations.

[JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS](#)

SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Toxic Workplace

A recent study proved that a toxic workplace is the biggest driver of negative employee outcomes like burnout, anxiety and intent to quit.

It turns out, employees can remain productive through heavy workloads and stay energized through long work hours... when they're happy. On the other hand, the thought of facing a day full of toxic behaviors from coworkers and management is enough to drain anyone of their will to excel.

Unfortunately, a lot of problems either directly or indirectly come from [bad management styles](#). Because management holds such power over the workers under them, tactics like bullying, favoritism, manipulating and more do extra harm.



EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

How Do Toxic Behaviors Affect You?

33%

Of workers report that office gossip, sexism, excessive office politics, bullies, etc., was a major factor in their burnout

7.5x

Workers in a toxic workplace are 7.5x more likely to experience burnout

10x

A toxic workplace is 10x more likely to drive workers to quit

Data from [Visier](#), [McKinsey Health Institute](#) and [MIT Sloan Management Review](#).

What Can HR Do?

Address toxic behaviors, especially from management, fulfill DEI promises, communicate well, especially bad news, enthusiastically share company purpose & values.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS

EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

What Micromanagement Factors Contributed Most to Your Burnout?

24% Being micromanaged/excessively observed on the job

23% Lack of control (inability to influence schedule, assignments, workload, etc.)

74% Excessive meetings. In fact, when meetings are reduced by 80%, employee perception of being micromanaged drops by 74%.

Data from [Visier](#) and [Harvard Business Review](#).



SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Micromanagement

Among the worst management styles, the most demeaning has to be micromanagement.

Bosses who hoard all the decision-making power, hover throughout the workday, and obsess over results strip employees of their autonomy. The result is a workplace that [stomps out creativity](#) and wears employees down one task at a time.

Micromanagement also has long-term consequences. It keeps employees at arm's length, preventing them from becoming fully invested in their organization's mission. Instead of engaging top performers, it more frequently adds unnecessary pressure and stress that will ultimately drive them to disengage. It's nothing new that [employee engagement](#) is a necessary precursor to retention, productivity and everything else employers hope to gain from their workforce.

What Can HR Do?

Address toxic behaviors, especially from management, fulfill DEI promises, communicate well, especially bad news, re-evaluate workload, processes & resources.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS

SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Boredom/Lack of Purpose

Employees can be bored for a variety of reasons. Some employees may be overqualified. Others may have repetitive task lists with no opportunity to learn new skills.

Others still may simply feel lonely because they don't have any workplace friends or [feel isolated](#) working from home. Ironically, too much leisure time can cause boredom and subsequently lead to burnout.

Perhaps boredom becomes the most dangerous when employees aren't able to find purpose or meaning in their work. It's hard to feel like your work is meaningful when you also feel like your time and talents are being wasted.

EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

How Much Does Lacking Purpose Contribute to Your Burnout?

75%

Of people who don't find their work meaningful experience burnout

80%

Of people who don't feel pride in their job have experienced burnout

76%

Of burnt-out employees are not confident in the direction of their employer

What Can HR Do?

Enthusiastically share company purpose & values, recognize and reward good work, give opportunities to grow community & friendships.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS





SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Perceived Inequities

Whether or not the employer thinks an employee is being treated unfairly, if the employee believes so, the damage is already done.

Perceived unfairness can happen when a person's reality doesn't meet their expectations and/or when they compare their workplace relationships to others. Either way, when employees feel like they're getting the short end of the stick, they're much more likely to burn out. It may start with them feeling extra stress from the need to "prove themselves" in their job. Ultimately, the feeling of "never being enough" will likely hit hard and manifest as they back off and disconnect.

There are quite a few metrics employees may use to compare the way they're treated with other employees. Some of these could be wages, advancement opportunities, awards, and recognition in team or company meetings. However, one of the most common is general politeness, friendliness and the way supervisors express interest in employee's personal lives.

Employees might feel extra stressed when they feel that their co-workers have an "in" with the boss. It causes them to feel like they'll never catch up which can turn into burnout if employers don't recognize it in time. Experts believe that [burnout is higher among women and minorities](#) mainly because they are subject to more inequities in general.

What Can HR Do?

Address toxic behaviors, especially from management, fulfill DEI promises, communicate well, especially bad news, re-evaluate workload, processes & resources, offer mental health support & coverage.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS

EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

How Does Unfairness Contribute to Your Burnout?

55%

Of people who don't feel pride in their job have experienced burnout

2.2x

Perceived unfairness leads to 2.2x more burnout

Data from [SurveyMonkey](#).

Sources of Outside Stress

Much of what employees fret about during the workday stems from outside relationships and situations. Employees are concerned about a whole slew of challenges in their personal lives: finances, aging parents, marital conflicts, personal or family illnesses, children, and the list goes on.

It's impossible to nail down everything that puts pressure on employees outside of work, but a few of the most prevalent today are:



Personal Finances



Parenting



Caregiving



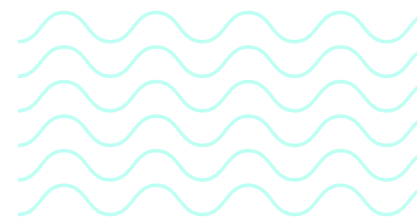
Physical Health



Economic and Social Uncertainty



Personal Finances



A whopping three-quarters of the U.S. population admits to worrying about their finances at work. In fact, Mercer's 2024 Inside Employees' Minds report found that financial security is the number one concern for U.S. employees.

Thanks to inflation, Many [employees are saving less](#) than they have in the past, dipping into their retirement accounts and living paycheck to paycheck. [Bank of America](#) published research in 2023 indicating that fewer employees are prioritizing long-term retirement savings and a growing number are focusing on short-term financial needs.

The truth is, many employees aren't even thinking about paying for retirement. They're too busy trying to figure out how to pay for right now.

Costs of living have increased so sharply in the past few years that even mid- to upper-division salaries often aren't enough to keep up with people's monthly expenses anymore.

Take groceries, for example. Prior to 2020, grocery prices consistently ticked up around 2% each year. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many stores dealt with disruptions to the food supply chain that led to an [11% increase](#) in grocery prices in 2022 alone. They rose even further in 2023 by [another 6%](#).

Then there is housing. Securing a quality place to live is a huge financial challenge in and of itself. With the cost to own a home higher than ever, many workers start the month by handing over a third of their paycheck (or more) to their mortgage company. And that's just the beginning.

On top of mortgage payments, [homeowners in one survey](#) reported spending \$17,500 a year on other expenses like maintenance, repairs, insurance, taxes, and utilities. That's for the people who own a home. Many aspiring homeowners are completely priced out of the market due to sky-high house prices and mortgage rates. Every extra year that people have to rent is another year they miss out on amassing equity in a home, putting them further and further behind as inflation climbs.

And yet, renters don't see much relief when it comes to their month-to-month payments. The typical American tenant is officially ["rent-burdened"](#) for the first time ever. On average, people are paying more than 30% of their monthly income in rent. The pressure is even greater when you consider [low-to moderate-income families](#). Many of these households pay upwards of 40% of their income in rent or even higher in some of the larger metro areas.

Then, there are car payments, gas, utilities, subscription fees, medical and dental costs, student loan payments and travel, most of which are rising right along with groceries. It's no wonder so many struggle to keep up—with stress levels rising right alongside costs of living.

What Can HR Do?

Bolster paychecks with everyday discounts & lifestyle benefits, encourage breaks and support vacations.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS

SOURCES OF OUTSIDE STRESS

Parenting

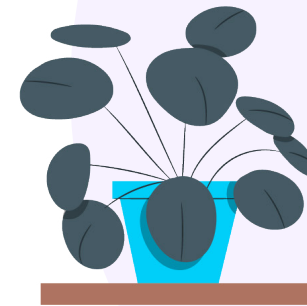
It's no surprise that 60% of working parents suffer from burnout as they attempt to juggle the responsibilities of work and home.

Parents deal with loads of tasks on a daily basis that can pull their focus away from their job. They manage not just their own schedule but one for each of their children. Plus, they have the added financial responsibility of paying for childcare, piano lessons, dance, soccer, new shoes, braces, diapers and any every other extraneous that comes with having kids.

With so many people and tasks competing for their time and money, working parents fall into a delicate game of Tetris every day as they try to fit it all in. As a result, 29% of working dads and 37% of working moms reported “always feeling rushed” in a [recent survey](#) leading to even higher levels of stress.

According to [Neil Brown](#), a licensed clinical social worker and author of the Parental Burnout Recovery Guide, “Parental Burnout (PBO) is a condition of chronic emotional, mental and physical fatigue caused by a parent’s unending attempts to meet their children or teens’ needs or manage their behavior. When parents try their best, yet always feel they’re coming up short, it inevitably leads to PBO.”

In these cases, work, family and individuals all suffer. Nearly half of respondents in [one survey](#) said that burnout undermined their well-being, leaving them anxious, worried, unable to enjoy family time and without the focus they need to fully concentrate at work.



What Can HR Do?

Provide flexibility to support parents & caregivers, set & respect work-life boundaries.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS

SOURCES OF OUTSIDE STRESS

Caregiving

Currently, 48 million Americans provide unpaid care to their loved ones.

And [six out of every 10](#) of those caregivers work at a paying job during at least part of their caregiving experience – many with children at home. As if they aren't busy enough raising their families and building careers, more than [1 in 6 \(17%\) U.S. employees](#) have added caring for an elderly family member or friend to their already very full plate.

The growing number of family caregivers is largely due to a massive shortage of healthcare workers. When it comes to understaffed professions, nursing and professional caregiving have taken some of the biggest hits. Alan Ormsby, a state director with AARP explains, “We’ve got this gigantic baby boomer generation and then there’s a much smaller ‘Gen X’ brigade to care for them. There just aren’t enough humans to provide paid care.”

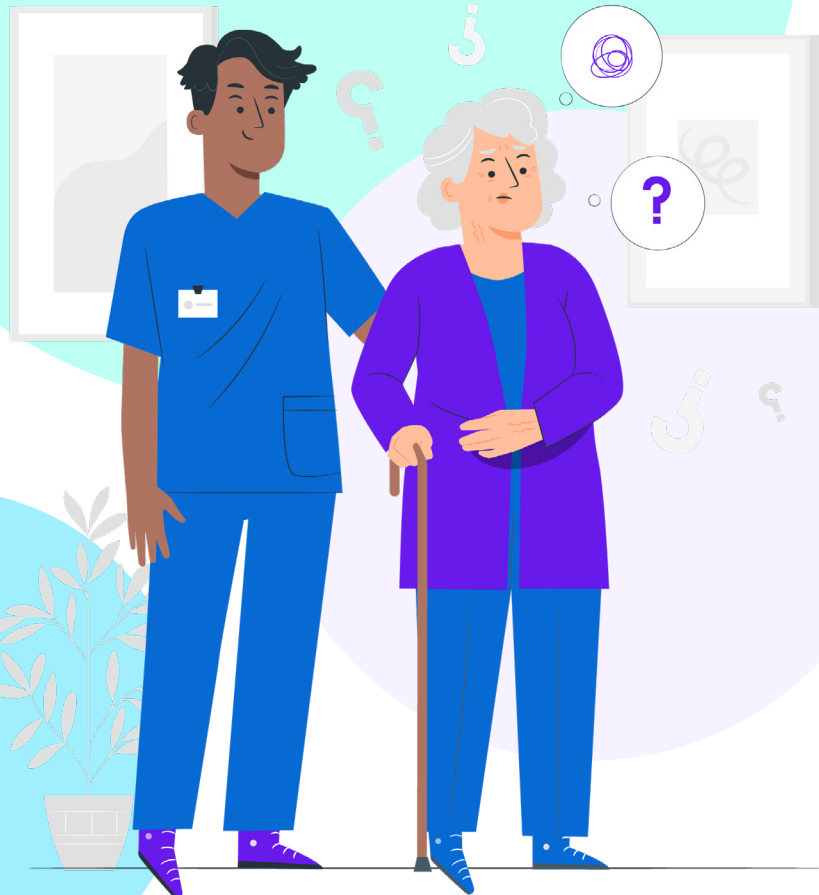
As a result, the responsibility to care for the influx of aging adults falls at the feet of their children or other family members. In other words, your employees. On average, unpaid caregivers spend [34.7 hours per week](#) on the various duties associated with caring for their relative. It’s practically a full-time job in and of itself. For some, it’s even more than that.

With so many obligations demanding their attention day in and day out, it’s no wonder so many of these workers wind up disengaged and [stressed at work](#). Or even worse, they quit. One study found that [almost 40% of unpaid caregivers leave their job](#) so they’ll have more time to care for a loved one.

What Can HR Do?

**Provide flexibility to support parents & caregivers,
set & respect work-life boundaries.**

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS



SOURCES OF OUTSIDE STRESS

Physical Health

We've already talked about how stress can worsen physical health, but it goes the other way too. Health and wellness concerns are a significant cause of stress for the one experiencing them.

There are a whole slew of medical issues that employees could face, especially as they age. Plus, the nation has seen a surge in the number of [chronic illnesses](#) diagnosed since 2019 (pre-pandemic).

Trying to work through physical health challenges often causes extra stress and can prolong recovery. Even remote work options come as a double-edged sword when it comes to physical health. On one hand, remote work is beneficial for workers with physical limitations. However, sometimes it can stand in the way of employees truly unplugging to take the time they need to deal with their physical health problems.

In addition, many people get caught in a cycle trying to reconcile their physical and mental health. The two impact each other so heavily that it's hard to focus on one without impacting the other. It's critical that employees make both a priority in order to thrive, but doing so can definitely add layers of stress for everyone.

What Can HR Do?

Offer mental health support & coverage, set & respect work-life boundaries.

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS



SOURCES OF OUTSIDE STRESS

Economic and Social Uncertainty

Simply consuming the news can cause stress hormones to flood one's body. Consider the headlines we've been reading for the last decade.

From the tragedies inspiring the BLM movement, to the COVID-19 pandemic, to soaring inflation, the last decade has been a barrage of crisis after worldwide crisis.

The American Psychological Association analyzed the extent to which the pandemic, combined with global conflicts, racial injustice, inflation and climate-related disasters weighs on Americans. Most experts agree we are experiencing this not as mere stress, but more like [collective trauma](#), which requires a longer and more deliberate healing process.

Today, Americans consistently perceive the [economy as worse](#) than experts say it is. The last two presidents have the [lowest approval ratings](#) in modern history. Whether their pessimism is founded in reality or not, it's hard to focus on a work project when it feels like the world is falling apart.

Of course, employers don't have the power to solve these social and economic problems for their employees. However, they can have a profound impact on how their employees tolerate the whole of their stress, especially while on the clock.

What Can HR Do?

Offer mental health support & coverage, bolster paychecks with everyday discounts & lifestyle benefits

JUMP AHEAD TO SOLUTIONS



How To Deal With Employee Burnout?

If employee burnout has an antidote, it's employee wellness initiatives. After all, wellness is at the opposite end of the spectrum from burnout.

In the majority of cases, burnout is exponentially easier to prevent than it is to correct, treat and reverse. In fact, once an employee reaches burnout, the road back to wellness is long and hard, full of tasks that are only effective when the employee does them for himself. Luckily, prevention is not only the easier path, it also puts a lot of power in the employer's hands. Every effort you make relieving employee stress has the potential for big payouts in engagement and productivity. So much so, that the ROI on employee wellness initiatives can hardly be calculated as they're surely invaluable.

A positive work culture is shown to energize, rather than drain employees. You have the power to help employees feel connected at work and more balanced in their lives.



Here are some strategies that stop unnecessary power drains and provide opportunities for employees to recharge their batteries

Control What You Can

- ✓ Address Toxic Behaviors, Especially from Management
- ✓ Set & Respect Work-Life Boundaries
- ✓ Encourage Breaks and Support Vacation
- ✓ Recognize and Reward Good Work
- ✓ Fulfill DEI Promises
- ✓ Give Opportunities to Grow Community and Friendships
- ✓ Re-evaluate Workload, Processes and Resources
- ✓ Communicate Well, Especially Bad News
- ✓ Enthusiastically Share the Company Purpose, Values and Culture

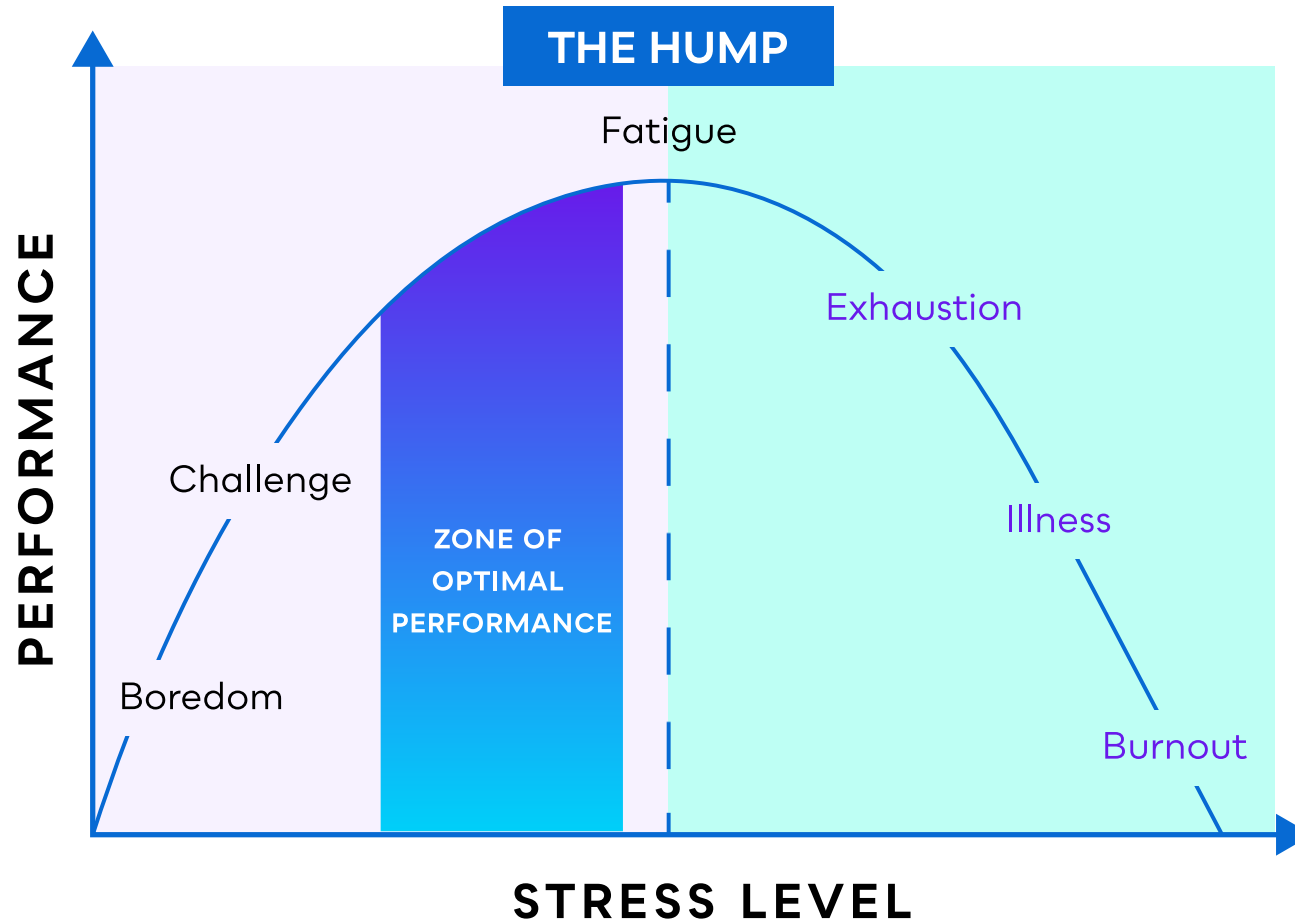
Address What You Can't Control

- ✓ Offer Mental Health Support and Coverage
- ✓ Provide Flexibility to Support Parents and Caregivers
- ✓ Bolster Paychecks with Everyday Discounts

Control What You Can

Stress-Performance Sweet Spot

(Based on work by Drs. David Poser & Peter Nixon)



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Control What You Can

Much of the stress employees feel originates in the office.

The good news is, employers hold significant influence over the amount of pressure their employees experience. Every small improvement can help bring stress back down to healthy levels.

Employment is always going to come with a certain amount of stress. Employment comes with deadlines to meet, differing personalities to work alongside, new skills to learn and challenges to rise to. Some of these are examples of positive stress that can help a person grow and find fulfillment.

Unfortunately, some workplaces are overrun with unnecessary stressors. The key to both prevention and recovery is to remove these from the workplace. When employees are overworked, surrounded by toxic behaviors, micromanaged or treated unfairly in the workplace, their stress levels can quickly spiral out of control.

The causes of workplace burnout are myriad, which means the fixes are too. One obvious place to start is by strengthening areas of obvious weakness. For example, if your exit interviewees all indicate the same issue caused them to leave, you've got a no-brainer starting point.

More likely, people's chronic stress comes from a variety of small situations that might seem fine in isolation but together over time build up to unmanageable levels of stress, and ultimately, burnout.

A recent study in Japan showed 20% average burnout rate among employees. In contrast, employees who were engaged at work, had strong personal wellbeing AND worked where their strengths were utilized had only a 1% chance of becoming burned out.



“What can we control in the workplace? We can choose how we treat our employees, the policies we emphasize, the culture we cultivate. All of these cumulative choices determine whether the workplace feels supportive and empathetic, or toxic and draining.”

LISA OYLER
HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS

SOLUTION

Address Toxic Behaviors, Especially from Management

Toxic workplace behaviors quickly eat away at employee morale.

The effect is compounded when managers are the ones bullying, micromanaging, discriminating or participating in any other behavior that creates a hostile work environment. Employees know [managers have the power to affect](#) their future at the company, making it even more difficult to stand ground against such treatment.

Before employers can address toxic behaviors, they need to be aware of them. Having an open-door policy can help employees feel comfortable reporting without fear of retaliation. Then, taking prompt action will further prove dedication to making the workplace safe for all. This could include investigating claims, followed by training or disciplinary action for the offending employee. It should also typically include support for those who felt harmed.

As leaders train managers, it's important to watch for signs of the pendulum swinging too far in the other direction. Managers who take it upon themselves to “therapize” those underneath them are bound to create even more problems. After all, [managers are even more at risk for burnout](#) than regular employees and they shouldn't [feel pressure to perform](#) tasks they're not equipped to handle.

7.6x

Employees in toxic workplaces are 7.6x as likely to burnout, making it the largest precursor to burnout globally.





SOLUTION

Set & Respect Work-Life Boundaries

The fast paced, “always-on” workplace culture of today that values hustle is short-sighted.

People can only maintain a sprint pace for so long. While work-from-home arrangements are a huge boon for many, the right boundaries are key to prevent “work from home” from feeling like “always at work.”

Overwork and the blurring of work/life boundaries were the top 2 reported factors in employee burnout in 2023. However, when employees have a good work-life balance, they are 16% less likely to be at risk for burnout.

HR reps and organizational leaders may need to ask themselves whether employees feel pressured to respond to work emails and requests outside of work hours. If they do, management could be crossing a boundary by treating employees as if they’re always on-call (and probably without paying for that service).



“Everyone should cultivate the ability to self-reflect. For decision makers, that’s a step toward challenging the things we think we know and allow change to happen. For employees, it’s the first step toward setting healthy boundaries and defending their autonomy.”

LISA OYLER | HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS

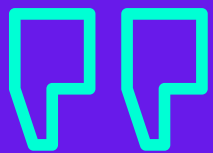
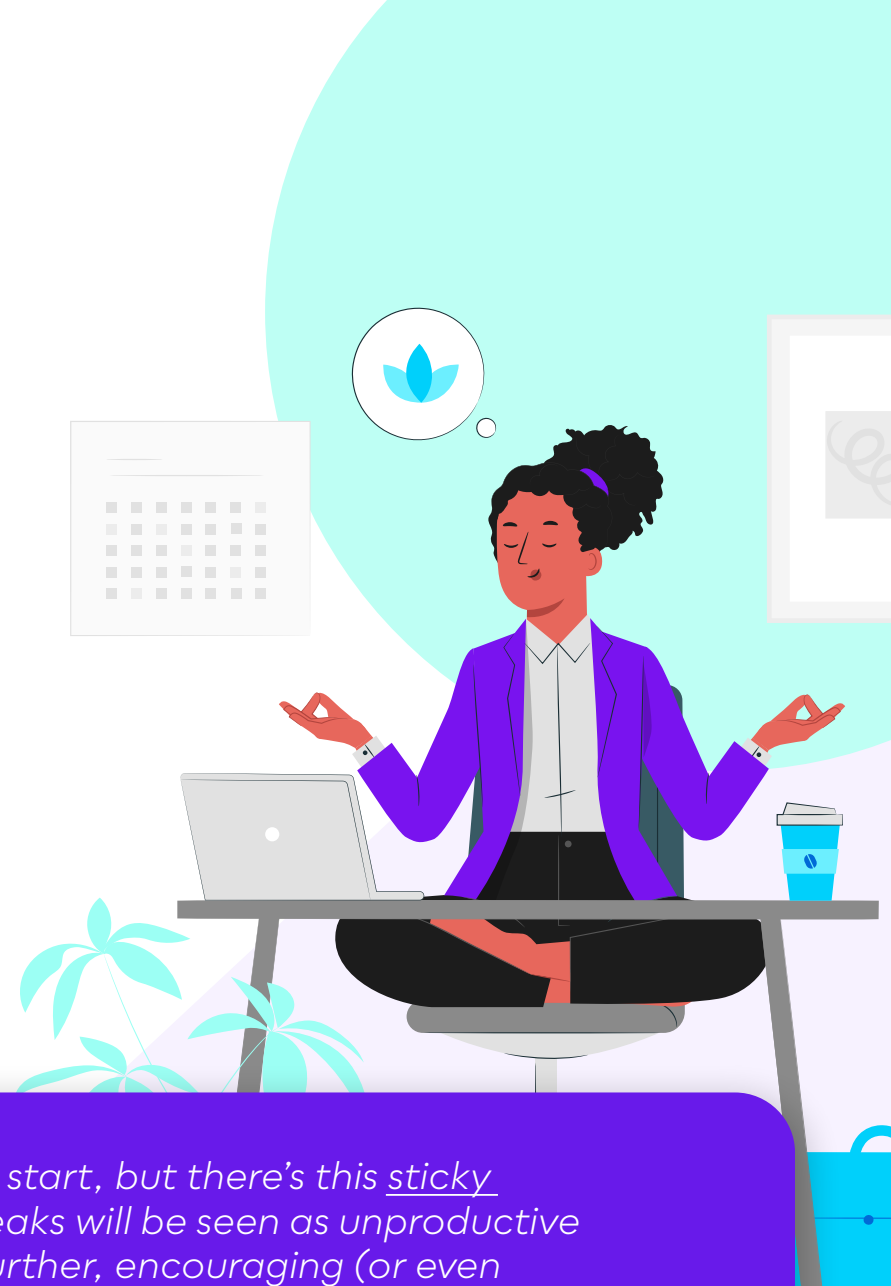
Encourage Breaks and Support Vacations

Employees who feel pressured to “push through” frequently don’t get the relief from chronic stress that regular breaks provide.

Psychologists agree that those who don’t take regular breaks are more likely to [drain their mental fuel](#), making them less resilient when stressors arise. Employers in one study found significant day-to-day improvements in engagement by providing many “[micro-breaks](#)” throughout the workday.

In addition to breaks at work, for 42% of the population, [vacations reduce stress](#) for a significant period of time.

[Vacations are so good for employee morale](#) that many companies are supporting them with benefits that extend beyond paid time off. For example, they can make vacations more affordable by offering [employee discounts on travel](#) expenses like flights & hotel stays, and also dining and entertainment at their destination.



“Providing breaks and paid time off is a good start, but there’s this sticky belief out there that employees who take breaks will be seen as unproductive or lazy. You may have to take it a few steps further, encouraging (or even insisting) that employees take their breaks, even if it’s just to walk around the building. You can also model how to take time off by disconnecting fully from work during your own vacations.”

LISA OYLER | HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS

Recognize and Reward Good Work

Working without recognition is disheartening and demotivating. Recognition doesn't have to be in the form of bonuses, trophies or parking spots.

However, when organizations don't have a formal recognition structure in place, it's easy for great accomplishments to pass without so much as a "thank you."

When asked what would make them feel more connected with work, the highest percentage of employees (45%) said ["feeling meaningfully recognized."](#) Also, 62% of employees feel highly engaged at work when [recognized weekly](#). The number drops to 34% when recognized monthly, 25% when recognized quarterly and 13% when never recognized.

When it comes to recognition, one size does not fit all. Perhaps a sales team would thrive with a [gamified points system](#). Some employees might like being publicly recognized at the next company-wide meeting. Others still would prefer quiet recognition, like a tangible certificate to hang in their cubicle.

Companies have found success by throwing parties to celebrate company milestones, by facilitating peer-to-peer recognition programs, or by doling out their own form of merit-money to spend on company branded swag. There are a huge variety of ways to recognize employees and their efforts. The right way to do it can be as unique as each organization.

"This year, the CEO of Access asked me to help him meet one-on-one with every employee in the company," said Oyler. "I've heard great feedback from employees who appreciate getting to know the big boss on a personal level. They walk away confident that he knows their name and their contributions to the company."

Leaders may have to try different things year to year or team to team, but as long as they're making consistent effort, showing appreciation and empathy, good results are sure to follow.



SOLUTION

Fulfill DEI Promises

DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) efforts at work came into sharp focus a few years ago at the height of civil rights unrest.

Unfortunately, [DEI has fallen](#) lower down organization priority lists before real change could occur. This leaves many of the most vulnerable employees at even greater risk of burnout.

Studies show [mental health concerns](#), including burnout, are more prevalent among minorities, women, low wage earners and those with disabilities. For example, the risk for burnout is higher among employees identifying as having [mental disabilities](#) (50%), physical disabilities (50%) or both (52%).

Because so many biases are unconscious, meaning people don't even realize they have them, it may take some concentrated detective work to find where an organization's DEI weaknesses lie. Here are some [DEI ideas](#) to get started:



Compare hiring and employee review processes to current best practices aimed at eliminating bias.



Look to decision makers to see if diverse voices are fairly represented.

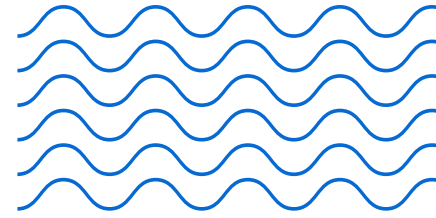


Review DEI statement and make a list of the promised changes that you have yet to implement.



Re-examine employee benefits to ensure health care adequately covers diverse needs and that [lifestyle benefits](#) offer something for everyone.

Give Opportunities to Grow Community and Friendships



If the isolation of lockdown during the pandemic taught us one thing, it's how much having friends at work can impact an employee's happiness. Specifically, feelings of loneliness are a danger sign of burnout.

While only 20% of employees have a best friend at work, those who do are [twice as likely to be engaged at work](#), be better at engaging with customers, have a greater sense of wellbeing and are even less likely to be injured on the job.

Friendships at work can't be forced, of course, but there's plenty an organization can do to encourage healthy associations and respect among employees. Many relationships build naturally when leaders step back and allow water-cooler conversations and other spontaneous socializing to happen. Beyond that, many regular tasks are already collaborative in nature; and therefore, could easily double as team-building opportunities.

When the goal is reducing burnout, many companies warn against things like team ["working lunches"](#) or otherwise insisting that all socializing centers around company business.

Access has introduced several successful team-building events this year. Cross-departmental lunches were introduced as a proactive way to help team leaders build relationships with others they don't often cross paths with. Also, enterprising Access employees started Business Employee Resource Groups (BERGs) to bring like-minded people together. Currently, the Women's Inclusion Group is growing and bringing in experts to help them learn new skills.



"At Access, we love to combine events that build community with those that promote relaxation and mental health. Every year on Earth Day we get outside in the sunshine to serve our community by cleaning the beautiful river parkway right next to our office. Also, people loved last year's stress-relief paint pouring event so much that we're repeating it again during this year's mental health awareness month."

LISA OYLER
HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS



SOLUTION

Re-Evaluate Workload, Processes and Resources

When people hear about burnout, most automatically attribute it to overwork - and only overwork. Indeed, working too many hours and being under too much pressure to perform are huge factors leading to exhaustion.

However, it's been shown that overwork is most draining when it also feels unfair, which can happen when people aren't provided adequate resources and training, when inefficiencies in the workflow never get resolved and when they're asked to take more responsibility without being given a raise.

Together, the World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization estimate that overwork is directly responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths. Plus, 38% of employees believe they are at significant risk of burnout because of inefficient work processes.

The last few years have been a series of rapid, drastic changes for most workers. Things that were reasonable before the pandemic might not be realistic today. If C-Suite executives and other decision makers don't re-evaluate periodically, it could be the employees that pay the price.

For example, leaders could ask:

Has market demand shifted, making our measures of success obsolete?

If so, what new metrics will be reasonable and what stretch goals could add a fun challenge?

Is workload equitably distributed?

Is hiring/training keeping up with churn or are we constantly asking people to pick up the slack?

Where are the bottlenecks in the work process?

Where are the redundancies and inefficiencies that could be eliminated without jeopardizing quality or safety?

Do we have the right technology to make basic tasks more efficient, and are the employees fully trained on it?

Do we have too much/too confusing technology resulting in frustrating situations like a toggling tax?

Are we taking into consideration each employee's strengths?

Have we empowered employees to give feedback, given them the autonomy to decide how they complete their work and to best use their strengths to the betterment of themselves and the company?

SOLUTION

Communicate Well, Especially Bad News

Poor communication leads to frustration or worse.

For example, some managers give instructions that are unclear in parameters and/or purpose. Others may refuse any input from those who are supposed to execute the task. Any type of [poor communication](#) becomes a big problem with employees are blamed for missed deadlines or poor results.

Employers may be surprised to learn that, generally speaking, there's actually a pretty big gap between how well employers think they're communicating and how well employees feel communicated to. 77% of leaders vs. 46% of employees believe their communications have enough context for employees to do their jobs well. 76% of leaders vs. 43% of employees believe there's an easy way to share feedback on the communications they receive.

The best communication is both clear and concise. An [excess of meetings](#) can be just as stressful as too little instruction. The effect of bad communication is even more evident when rumors are circulating that trouble is coming. When the company offers nothing but crickets, or worse: lies, in response, employee stress can skyrocket.

Active listening is just as important as proactive communication. When information flows back and forth between leaders and employees and is received with respect, everyone benefits.

77% **vs.** **46%**
OF LEADERS OF EMPLOYEES

Believe their communications have enough context for employees to do their jobs well.



"We've all seen the news stories of [successful corporations laying off](#) employees, worse, they're delivering the bad news by email or mass Zoom calls. The methods are so impersonal that some employees never got the message, only finding out when [their keycards wouldn't let them in the building](#). No wonder people are looking over their shoulders, wondering if they're next."

LISA OYLER
HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS

SOLUTION

Enthusiastically Share the Company Purpose, Values and Culture

While overwork takes much of the blame, many experts are coming to realize that the main culprit is something much harder to quantify.

A recent study asked employees if they were able to “live their purpose” at work. Those who answered “yes” were 4 times as engaged and reported a 5 times better sense of wellbeing than those who answered “no.”

In fact, the quality of the [work experience has 2.5-3 times the impact](#) on burnout as the number of days or hours worked.

Because workplace culture is organic by nature, it grows and changes along with the workforce. Still, like a gardener with a flowerbed, management can do a lot to shape culture into something beneficial for all.

When leaders clearly [define company values](#) and get people excited about a shared purpose, they’re far more likely to [attract and retain](#) the employees that want to contribute and stick around for the long haul.



Address What You Can't Control

Many of the stressors that lead to burnout happen outside your direct jurisdiction. Much of work necessary to cope with stress can only be done by the individual.

Hard changes might be happening in the world or in your employee's personal lives. Even so, employers hold a lot of power (and perhaps some amount of responsibility) in the fight against burnout.

Simply choosing not to pile on — by ridding your workplace of unnecessary stress using the tips in the previous section — can help employees better cope with outside stressors. However, why stop there?

Preventing burnout is a big task. Recovering from burnout takes even more time and active effort. It's not, as some may be picturing, relaxing on a beach sipping chamomile tea (though that can be a small part of the healing process). In fact, the [top strategies for recovery](#) include self-reflection, practicing stress management techniques, getting adequate sleep, journaling, getting enough exercise, seeking therapy, etc... for months and months and months.

[Active recovery](#) takes consistent effort and is so much easier to achieve with active support. Businesses willing to share the responsibility can play a pivotal role in mitigating burnout's harmful effects on employees and the organization as a whole.



SOLUTION

Offer Mental Health Support and Coverage

The care of one's mental health is best left to the individual, sometimes with the help of professional licensed therapists. There is still much an employer can do to support employee mental health, whether they seek help or not.

Employers may have to take a second look at their health coverage and ask:



Do employees have co-pay options for seeing a counselor? Do they have coverage for counselors close to where they live or through [telehealth services](#)?



Do those who are more vulnerable to burnout have adequate coverage for their diverse needs? Do you support reproductive health, trans-affirming services, etc. in addition to mental health?



Do you offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to give them access to professional help in resolving a wide array of personal issues?

80%

Of employees believe it's critical for employers to offer mental health coverage, but only [61% have mental health coverage as part of their benefits package.](#)

In addition to ensuring proper coverage for professional services, employers can promote mental health practices at work and home. These could include self-reflection, practicing stress management techniques, getting adequate sleep, journaling and getting enough exercise.

SOLUTION

Provide Flexibility to Support Parents and Caregivers

Most employees want flexibility. Some NEED flexibility.

There are a lot of situations that could force talented employees to choose between working and caregiving unless employees are willing to be flexible. [Parents often miss work](#) for illnesses or school closures when their employer can't accommodate these needs. Others can't justify the cost of daycare. In addition to caring for a growing family, many workers provide some measure of care for parents or other family members. [Caring for aging parents](#) can be a full-time responsibility on its own.

Flexibility can come in many forms. In some cases, remote or hybrid schedules are an excellent solution. Other employees would greatly benefit from the opportunity to work late occasionally so they can attend a recital or doctor's appointment in the middle of the day. Regardless of what the flexibility looks like, most employees will appreciate the peace of mind knowing their job is not in jeopardy if they get called away on an emergency.

24%

Of employees ranked [flexible scheduling as the top benefit](#) that would help them deal with burnout.



"It's important to cultivate an organizational culture of empathy. When leaders have empathy, they're more than happy to help employees live their best lives. Benefits like the flexibility schedule around personal responsibilities naturally follow."

LISA OYLER | HR DIRECTOR, ACCESS PERKS



3+ hours

Experts estimate financially stressed employees could be spending 3+ working hours per week worrying about or dealing with personal finance issues.

SOLUTION

Bolster Paychecks with Everyday Discounts & Lifestyle Benefits

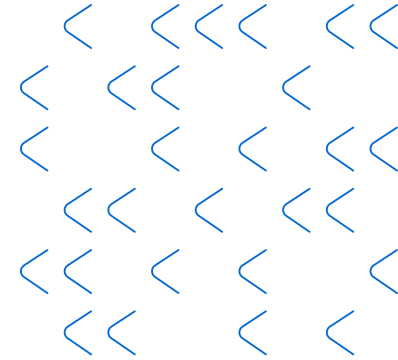
Of the 72% of employees who are stressed about finances, 77% say it's affecting their mental health and 52% that it's impacting their physical health.

Right now, rising inflation is the top concern, followed by not having enough retirement and/or emergency savings, and then the stress of paying off debt.

Contrary to what many people think, financial stress is sky high among all income brackets, even those making more than \$100K a year. Experts estimate these financially stressed employees could be spending [3+ working hours per week](#) worrying about or dealing with personal finance issues.

Now more than ever, people are turning to their employers to solve their financial woes. Fortunately for employers, help doesn't have to come in the form of a pay raise to be effective. That's because personal finance involves money coming in and money going out. [Employee discount programs](#) – particularly those with high-value discounts on everyday necessities – are a popular solution that is also cost-effective to the employer and can make a huge difference in an employee's wallet.

Where to Start in Managing Stress and Burnout?



Commit to improving employee wellness this year. Employees who are physically, mentally and financially well are able to give their best while on the clock. They are among the most productive, creative and valuable employees in the world. Therefore, investing into employee wellness initiatives is a proven path to a healthy, happy and stable workforce.

The specific strategy that will give you the biggest bang for your buck will vary by company. To find your best ROI:



Start where you are weakest
& correct the areas that are
causing the most stress



Survey your workforce to
learn their biggest sources of
workplace and outside stress



Choose employee perks
that offer the most reward
for the least investment

Help Employees Achieve Wallet Wellness by Stretching Their Paychecks

Over 1 million everyday discounts
for the price of a candy bar



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