



Preventing Professional Burnout

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DOI: 10.31080/ASPE.2022.05.0523

Received: September 28, 2021

Published: April 28, 2022

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Abstract

The present-day pandemic has closed many professionals off from one another during times of quarantine, while offering a platform to work from home. This has had benefits and negatives, with professional burnout occurring more than ever before. A Gallop Poll in the United States of America reports that 30% of workers are stressed to the point that their work is directly affected, while another 40% are actively dealing with burnout, with 62% worried about their professional futures. Burnout occurs, it begins typically with feelings of waning passion, then work begins to suffer; followed by making poor choices of coping with the issues at hand, and then ending with the worker being completely disengaged. Identification is key. This paper offers how to identify professional burnout, and how to quell it and reverse its effects. The concept of professional burnout is likened to the simile of a fire burning as an example of the experience process.

Keywords: Professional Burnout; Academia; Team Dynamics; Change of Mindset

professional burnout can be explained as the way a fire ignites, burns, rages, and smolders. Helpful preventative measures include how to identify the signs and symptoms of professional burnout, to be given the tools and resources to reverse professional burnout, but to also discover methods to prevent future instances of academic professional burnout. How does burnout begin?

In the beginning

One blatant fact of working from home during the pandemic caused many professionals in the academic world to take their work home with them as their “workday” continued [1]. There was no boundary of the workday for many University professors. The unhealthy choices that this situation fostered were not eating properly, not exercising, and not taking mental breaks from technology [1]. This everyday scenario led to increased fatigue, and this cycle fed into itself. This was the foundation of professional burnout beginning.

Pre-Ignition1

Fire is a chemical chain reaction much like the inner working of the mind. Behaviors experienced can include being annoyed or dismayed, then desiring to complain and gossip, followed by tearing down the business or persons involved, and finally an explosion with smoldering of harmful emotions.

One can identify there is no resolution in this progression and that prevention is the ideal solution, however workers live in a real world with hurts and disappointments. There is hope in how to stop negative thoughts from turning into actions via changing toxic mental recordings into positive beliefs for the future.

Pre-ignition once identified is the easiest stage to change thoughts to more positive and reflective ones. If this phase progresses negatively, this can be transferred into issues of hearing that changes are coming in the departments, roles are requiring additional responsibilities, favorite colleagues are leaving, and this

stage is where annoyance and even discouragement can develop. These feelings if not dealt with can possibly transfer to a more disconcerted mindset.

This unsettled feeling can be examined and restructured by first determining what the current mindset in this moment is. The growth versus fixed mindset will determine the ability to alter one's thoughts. The fixed mindset is not the ideal method to handle professional burnout as people usually try to hide their errors, internalize that their abilities are limited to certain domains, practice negative self-talk setting themselves up for immediate failure as they avoid new challenges [2]. A wise confidant should be sought at this point to offer helpful insight. The growth mindset offers a restructuring of thoughts as challenges are accepted, being able to learn from professionals present, understanding that hard work will lead to professional goals, seeing failure as an opportunity to learn while acknowledging individual weaknesses and focusing on improving these weaknesses [2].

Flaming

If the fixed mindset is not altered, it can advance to the flaming stage of professional burnout. This phase is where inner thoughts can turn to a deeper disappointment that is felt, and perhaps via the observation of an unfair work balance or feeling isolated with a sink or swim attitude. It should be noted that as a self-doubt mentality creeps in, the worker may look for distractions or a means to extinguish the troubled feelings that occupy their mind.

If one is still unaware of these feelings and has not vented to a sage confidant, there still is hope to reverse this path. This is where some effort on the part of the worker will need to begin. This needs to be a trusted person that is known to tell the truth as an overreacting of feelings or if it is a genuine problem. Beware of sharing these hurts with toxic people, often they will only add fuel to the fire. It is one thing to have an empathetic ear and quite another to be refueled with more self-doubt [3].

The way one talks to themselves impacts what is achieved and kindness is crucial to restructure thoughts of permanence. Changing the mindset to a more affirmative action idea such as Challenge accepted. Next time someone throws an unfamiliar or tricky task requesting completion, embrace it and show that colleague how it is done.

Transitions

Annoyances turn into gossiping, feelings of anger, disappointment now turns to disgust, and a job search may invade immediate thoughts. This fire now spreads to others on the team with some talk of colleagues securing other work elsewhere. This phase can begin the downward spiral if control of your thoughts is not taken because at this point the fire is being fueled and is now spreading simultaneously gaining more power [3]. It is not yet out of control though.

Smoldering

The last phase of the fire before it has taken its captive is smoldering. Smoldering involves feelings of unappreciation, not wanting to come to work, disliking the job, detachment from the team, change of talk to now actively searching for a new job somewhere, because anywhere must be better than what position one is in. Finally, an unshared departure from job ends this scenario but the cycle will continue. The fire has died down a great deal, but the embers are very hot and can damage still! When professional burnout takes hold, passion for work wanes, work suffers, leading to a vicious cycle of negativity. The worker will end up either resenting the work and/or making unhealthy decisions to try to cope with burnout. Eventually, complete disengage occurs [3].

Extinguishing of the Fuel

The removal of fuel will correct this situation. When fighting a wildfire, the best method is to remove the fuel, however this does not extinguish the fire. It will continue to burn until the inner fuel is used up, but the removal of the fuel will prevent further spreading of poison to other workers. Ideally the removal of fuel, heat, and oxygen are the best methods of stopping a fire, and prevention of a fire is the best thing one can do, and if one thing must be removed of the three components it should be fuel. Negative thoughts and toxic feeders around the worker hurt us or disappoint seen as a harm to the professional team. The fueling of the fire within stems from negative thoughts and restructuring of the mind is necessary for emotional wellbeing.

Conclusion

The means to reduce stress are endless from reading a favorite book, listening to music, taking a nap, going for a brisk walk, en-

joying family time, or connecting with one's spiritual centering [4]. The possibilities are limitless to find enjoyment to reduce elevated blood pressures and rising pulses. Fire should be seen as what it is - a wonderful tool. Fire is used to refine metals to their purest form, it is believed to be a living thing as it requires oxygen, it has a power that should be respected. Fire can warm and cook over it. It symbolizes love, passion, romance, giving light, used for communication, and simply mystifying gazers as the flames dance about.

The fire that has been spoke of can now be seen as the tool of change, as one is a precious metal that can be refined into something of purity and of greater use now. This is where one must return to rebuild the inner self, but now this experience can help others learn from the burns sustained.

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