

## **Keep the Fire Alive! Avoid Burnout**

We've just come through a very difficult time for everyone. With the significant cuts and downsizing that have taken place, we've put an extra burden on those left behind. They not only have suffered by losing colleagues, but they have been asked to pick up extra work - significant in some cases - and may be working totally out of their comfort zone. Since we are down to our leanest teams ever, we need to keep everyone healthy, productive and engaged. While stretching people's capabilities is good for learning and development, keeping them in that zone of discomfort for an extended period of time can lead to burnout. Burnout results when employees experience negative stress over a prolonged period of time.

Burnout in employees (managers are employees too!) continues to be a major and costly issue with potential long term affects impacting businesses today. Major inroads have been made in maintaining employee health through the use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and improved employee counselling, but days of work lost to burnout, depression and a host of other psychological problems continues to cost employers millions in lost productivity, extensive use of health plans, sick days, LTD and other associated costs.

Employees who are most likely to develop burnout are your *best and most productive employees* because they put more of themselves into their job, spend more time at work, and take work more seriously and personally. In other words, employees who develop burnout are employees who care about their jobs and give you the most. Signs of burnout include:

- Losing motivation and interest in work
- Sense of being overwhelmed by expectations, frustration
- Depressed state with fatigue and physical complaints
- Increased lateness, absenteeism and lower productivity
- Noticeably less interaction with others

If left unchecked, these problems can lead to serious psychological issues that affect both the employee's personal and professional lives. A once stellar employee could now be looking very unfavourably in the eyes of the employer. Since we are leaders of business and not trained experts in health management, it is important that we do our part to support our teams and let the other professionals support anything beyond our trained capabilities. If burnout symptoms persist, encourage employees to seek appropriate medical attention.

While psychological problems can create serious workplace issues, *they can be avoided and/or mitigated!* Get started today! The mental health of your staff reflects on the bottom line through morale, productivity, attendance, retention and overall performance! A supportive action plan will assist you in keeping your team productive, healthy and engaged in their work with the end result of your business goals being met.

Read on for great tips to avoid burnout!

## Action Plan for Avoiding Burnout

**1. Work / Life Effectiveness** - Create a work atmosphere that promotes both professional and personal interests. A balanced combination between work and family, stressful and non-stressful tasks, tasks that demand strict deadlines and those that have flexibility with deadlines.

**2. Keep Work Interesting** - Create job diversity for employees that must perform repetitive tasks. Cross training employees is not only good for employees, but also for the company. Hence, if an employee is away for an extended period of time, others are there that know how to perform his or her duties.

**3. Self-Directed Work** - Allow employees to develop control over some aspects of their work. One way to decrease burnout is to increase the amount of control that employees have over their jobs. Employees who feel they have a choice in what they are doing, even if it is a small choice, are more likely to feel better about what they are doing. So, think of where small choices can be added to an employee's job.

**4. Make Work Fun** - Allow humor and fun to take place in the workplace. A good way to burn off stress and to re-energize employees is with fun and laughter. Consider hosting company sponsored events, or pot-luck meals.

**5. Understand the Ebb and Flow of Work** - Allow employees periods of reduced productivity along with periods of high productivity. It is okay to ask your employees to give 110% occasionally but not everyday.

**6. Provide Recognition** - Remember to recognize and reward employees for their accomplishments and contributions. Recognition can go a long way towards making your employees feel that their contributions are noticed, and that they are working towards something positive.

**7. Effectively Forecast Work to Avoid or Minimize Overtime** - Good forecasting of work loads can allow employers to schedule tasks in such a way as to avoid many overtime hours. This practice can save employee burden and dollars spent in overtime pay. Planning for seasonal work demands and using part-time or temporary services can further moderate the schedules of full-time employees. Even when overtime is required, give employees as much notice as possible. This allows them to budget time away from home and family and may ease the disruption of unplanned overtime.

**8. Put an EAP in Place** – EAP is a very cost effective solution to support employees with many personal and professional concerns. If you have one in place ensure your leadership teams knows all aspects and it is communicated properly. If you don't have one, look into getting one. The dollars spent on an EAP can easily be offset by increased productivity and decreased absenteeism and turnover.

**9. Communicate** – Communicate business news regularly with your team and demonstrate an open door policy that allows them to air their concerns and provide constructive feedback. Since front line employees typically know more of what's going on in the company, it's a great business resource for making positive improvements in business and increases employee's commitment to the business when their ideas are adopted.