

Coping with Burnout

Leadership Toolbox

Podcast Transcript

Centennial Student Union & Student Activities

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Welcome to the Student Activities' online Leadership Toolbox. My name is Greg Wilkins. I am going to be your podcast guide. This podcast is about coping with burnout.

Stress happens to all of us. Though it never feels good to be stressed, it can help us to complete tasks and prioritize. Even in the last hour, stressed people can imagine that once they get their tasks under control, they'll feel better. However, if the stress is constant and leaves you feeling disillusioned, helpless, detached, and completely worn out, you may be suffering from burnout.

Burnout can seriously affect your schoolwork, relationships, and activities. If left untreated, burnout can negatively affect your health—mentally, emotionally, and physically. There is hope, though. If you recognize the symptoms of burnout early, you can usually manage it with simple stress relief exercises. Even in the later stages of burnout, there are ways to regain balance by reassessing your priorities, seeking support, and making time for yourself.

What exactly is burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout happens when we become overwhelmed by constant demands, and what work we do goes unrecognized or unnoticed. Over time, the continued stress will cause

you to lose interest or motivation in the things you are working so hard for.

There are some days when we feel overworked, unmotivated, or unappreciated. If you feel like this most of the time, you may be dealing with burnout. Burnout reduces your productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, you may feel like you have nothing more to give.

Isn't that just like being really stressed?

In short, no. Stress is natural, and it often motivates you to complete your tasks. Even in the face of negative repercussions, people suffering from burnout have no motivation to complete their tasks. **You may be headed toward burnout if:**

- *Every day is a bad day*
- Your school or work life seem like a total waste of energy
- You're exhausted all the time
- You feel like your work is unappreciated or unnoticed

If you catch it quickly enough, there are ways you can prevent and treat burnout. These are great tips, but remember, you know yourself best—so listen to your body.

Get Sleep! Sleep is an important part of overall health, but it is especially important when coping with stress. The average college student needs 8 hours of sleep. Even if it is tempting to pull an all-nighter to get that presentation done, you'll do it better and quicker if you sleep. If you struggle with getting enough sleep, try sticking to a schedule—go to bed and get up at the same time every day. It might be difficult right away, but you'll feel better once your body adjusts. On

the flip side, don't oversleep. You can't compensate for a week's worth of missed sleep by sleeping in on Saturday until 3 pm. The right amount of sleep can help you maintain energy even in stressful times.

Eat Right & Exercise. When you take care of your body, you have more energy to deal with the demands on you. Take note of which foods make you feel energized and which don't. It might seem like a great idea to binge on Redbulls and Twinkies while writing that paper, but when your body crashes, you'll end up feeling lethargic and sick.

Exercising will also keep you feeling good in times of stress. Exercising releases chemicals in the brain that create feelings of happiness. Plus, pumping iron is a great way to work out frustration!

Set Boundaries. Don't overextend yourself. It's easy to add one more thing to your plate when you're already an involved student. It's important to learn how to say "no" when you are already busy. If you're leading a Recognized Student Organization, remember to delegate tasks—people respect those who can find a balance, and it makes your group members feel more involved to be given responsibilities. Setting boundaries also means not being available all the time. Don't be on-call for your committees, groups, or school activities when you're doing personal things. It's easy to tell people they can call you any time, but you'll regret it after they really *DO* call you at any time.

"Me" Time. Do you like painting? Do it. Do you relax by playing video games? Take an hour to play. Reading? Sports? Dance? All of these things are important. Don't forget about your hobbies, even during the busy times. Even if you have to pencil yourself into your schedule, take time for yourself. 30 minutes won't mean finishing or not finishing your task, and you'll be more focused when you come back to it.

If you're already feeling unmotivated, defeated, and increasingly detached, then you may be experiencing burnout. However difficult it may seem, burnout can be dealt with—just follow the three R approach:

- **Recognize:** Watch for the warning signs of burnout.
- **Reverse:** Undo the damage by seeking help, delegating tasks, and performing tasks that recharge you.
- **Resilience:** Build your resilience to stress by taking care of your emotional and physical health. Take note of what activities help you distress.

Recovering from Burnout. After getting through burnout, the first reaction can be to jump back into your activities with your newfound energy. Now is the perfect time, however, to readjust your habits and prevent future burnout.

You need to force yourself to slow down or take a break. Cut back whatever commitments and activities you can. Give yourself time to rest, reflect, and heal.

When you're burned out, the natural tendency is to protect what little energy you have left by isolating yourself. But remember, your friends and family are more important than ever during difficult times. Turn to your loved ones for support. Simply sharing your feelings with another person can relieve some of the burden.

Burnout is an undeniable sign that something important in your life is not working. Take time to think about your hopes, goals, and dreams. Are you neglecting something that is truly important to you? Burnout can be an opportunity to rediscover what really makes you happy and to change course accordingly.

And that's it! Let's review quickly what was presented: we discussed what burnout is, how to prevent and treat it, and how to deal with the aftermath of burnout. Remember to take it easy every once in a while and enjoy your time here on campus—it'll go by quicker than you think, and even faster if you're burnt out!

This podcast was presented by Student Activities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Thank you for participating. You can find other podcasts at mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox.