

# *Getting Ahead Of Professional Burnout*

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Presented by

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**PROGRAM AGENDA**

The purpose of this presentation is to explore the roots, causes, indicators, and prevention of Professional Burnout.

**8:00 - 8:50 Introduction:**

The time before THE BURN begins.  
The neurobiology of pushing beyond a limit.  
The brain and stress.

**8:50 - 9:00 Break in place**

**9:00 - 9:50** What it takes to start THE BURN

Recognizing the indications

**9:50 - 10:00 Break in place**

**10:00 - 10:45** Prevention & Resilience

Managing Professional Burnout

**Learning Objectives:**

- 1) Understand the nature of behavior from the human brain's perspective.
- 2) Know the origins of Professional Burnout.
- 3) Recognize the signs of Burnout.
- 4) Managing the factors that result in Professional Burnout.

“My candle burns at both ends;/It will not last the night;/But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—It gives a lovely light.”

A Few Figs from Thistles by Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1922

(American lyrical poet and playwright, February 22, 1892 – October 19, 1950)

To *Burn Your Candle at Both Ends*:

Extreme effort without time to rest.

Working hard during the day and staying up late every night.

Getting little sleep or rest.

Getting up early every morning.

Exhaust your energies/resources by living a hectic life.

Being identified at work as the “go to gal” or the “go to guy”.

None of these actions are problematic in themselves for short episodes.

The problems arise when any of them become the routine or habit.

What exactly is the CANDLE? The phrase originated in France long before electric light bulb. Candles were expensive then. To burn one at both ends was wasting a valuable resource to achieve an obsession – keeping the candle lit day and night.

**What valuable resources are you burning?**

physical/mental energy

dedication

enthusiasm

determination

initiative

ethics/morals

RESILIENCE

attention to details

**Beyond SLEEP DEPRIVATION EFFECTS**

Using up valuable resources can be professionally threatening. It can be life threatening as well.

Elevated suicide risk does not necessarily begin with suicidal ideation. Meaning an individual can be on his/her way to self-destruction without awareness.

Burnout is a NOT a state of *boredom*.

**What is Professional Burnout?** Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, the end result of excessive and prolonged work and personal stress.

Enduring job stress can elevate suicide risk.

Factors that make a job stressful: salary/wages below individual's cost of living,

long hours,

low work place morale

high client demand,

meeting required and changing protocols

emotional trauma of the work.

Professions with the highest suicide rates in the United States according to media reports.

Care Providers – Doctors, Dentists, Pharmacists, Mental Health Workers

Lawyers

Financial Workers

Police Officers

Combat Veterans

Scientists/Artists

Electricians

Real Estate Agents

Farm Workers

“Occupation is not a major predictor of suicide and it does not explain much about why the person commits suicide.” Ronald Maris, PhD, Center for the Study of Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, University of South Carolina

Regardless of profession, today, the top predictors for suicide are a combination of: a diagnosable mental disorder, co-morbid substance use, intent to end life as it is experienced, loss of social support, and availability and access to a firearm.

Is *Professional Burnout* a diagnosable mental disorder? Can present as a Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent Depressive Disorder Not Otherwise Specified  
Mood Disorder with Depressive Features  
Grouchy, crabby, cranky, bad-tempered disorder

Loss of meaning in life, sense of becoming a burden on others, and belief that there will be no relief arriving, signifies that the candle is almost burned up.

There must be meaning in life beyond work  
And, beyond the progress of veterans/patients

RESILIENCE in three parts. That which can be depleted & that which is boundless & abundant

Mind  
Body  
Spirit

The NEUROBIOLOGY of pushing beyond a limit  
What is important?

The Brain attends to every **moment – each a new event:**

SIGHT-SOUND-FEEL-SMELL-TASTE-PHYSICAL POSITION/BALANCE-THOUGHT

**The Brain's part. Alert to the environment, taking in sensory information, assessing threat.**

Brain is wired for its own survival.

to survive this day and as many days in the future as possible.

The purpose, the motivation, the Brain's “I wants”

The Brain generates - energy output in the form of electro-chemical interactions

The actions important to the brain to achieve its purpose:

Breathe - bring me oxygen

Drink water - keep me hydrated

Eat nutrients - bring me protein, carbohydrates, fatty acids, vitamins B and D, minerals

Stay safe

Nap - give me some restoration

Wake up, be alert - keep me safe

The brain cannot take an action to meet its own needs. It depends on the person to react immediately and purposely (functional behavior) to the brain's need/wants.

**Event: manage – survive – recover/restore – be glad (gratitude/prosper)**

All of these depend on energy from the brain and thinking/decisions by the person

Do you not have enough time to do all the things you think you should be doing?

If you are still breathing, you have figured out how to manage and survive every event that has occurred in your life history. Do you believe this will apply to every event ahead of you?

When the brain registers any event as injurious, painful, abusive, distressing, unpleasant -

The brain signals/agitates/fuels the nervous system to impel the person to take an action:

*END THIS* or

*ESCAPE THIS* When the going gets tough...

**Skilled behavior requires more Brain Output.**

**Repetition, practice, then, permanence**

**Permanence means, the brain has etched a neural pathway for the thought & behavior.**

Muscle memory occurs.

The action will require less conscious thought.

The thought-action interaction becomes habit.

The brain again establishes minimal output.

**Easier to react from stored information, rather than acting in the moment.**

What it took to get where you are at:

Education

RESILIENCE

Determination & diligence

Passing exams & evaluations

Supervision

Letters after your name/certification/licensure

Great sense of responsibility & commitment

The return? The greater resources of:

Esteem

Salary

Sense of Contribution

Purpose and Meaning 8-12 (and sometimes 16-18) hours a day

Any loss of resources like these typically results in greater efforts and longer hours to attain them.

VSO Job Responsibilities

**The BURN has already begun** when under constant stress.

feeling exhausted and completely worn out,

overwhelmed by responsibilities,

unable to meet constant demands,

multi-tasking – an esteem builder – begins to fail,

sense of being overloaded, or unappreciated

reduction in productivity,

problems seem insurmountable,

mustering up the energy to care is taxed,

loss of interest or motivation in using the skills/tasks once enjoyed,

feeling disillusioned, helpless, unhappy, cynical, and resentful like never before,

everything looking bleak,  
hopeless that things will ever improve - positive changes are impossible

**The BURN has already begun** when under constant stress, cont.

sense of detachment/alienation in work place and wondering about a job/career change

having nothing left to give

elevated tension/conflict with coworkers and in personal relationships

## Understanding *Professional Burnout*

Burnout is a condition that:

- is rooted in doing something initially enjoyable and personally meaningful, over an extended period of time;
- has subtle onset, usually managed by greater exertion to regain balance;
- results from unrelenting stress associated to responsibilities, pressures involving high physical and psychological demands, thoughts of being overworked and undervalued;
- reaches the point that professional actions gradually are depleted of any sense of reward.

The gradual acceleration of BURNOUT results in the loss of:

The idealism or dream imagined at the beginning of the career

The role or identity that came with the profession

The physical and emotional energy and mental enthusiasm

The performance-based self-esteem

## The sense of control in life

The experiencing of work and life as meaningful, purposeful, and worthwhile

**Never doubt the serious and impairing nature of reaching a state of *Professional Burnout*.** The exhaustion dissatisfaction, and unhappiness threatens a career, relationships, health, and the willingness to continue life.

Recognize – be alert to the early signs/symptoms of burnout

Reverse – heal the impact by managing stress and seeking support

Resilience – restore resilience by attending to physical, psychological, and emotional health

## Observing the simple signs

Every day is a bad day.

Exhaustion is a constant

## Sleep aids have become a necessity

Majority of the day is spent on mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming tasks

Actions seem to make no difference in reducing stress or are not appreciated

Everything seems like a total waste of energy

Don't care about the responsibilities at work or at home

## Where time is spent matters

When the majority of a person's time is taken up by work responsibilities, burnout will typically be attributed to the job.

Stressful work or too many responsibilities are generally not the sole cause of burnout.

**Causal factors** contributing to the genesis of burnout:

- chronically stressful work
- certain personality traits
- lifestyle

how “downtime” is spent



Work-related factors: Thinking you have little or no control over your work  
Unclear, changing, or overly demanding job expectations  
Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment  
Responsibilities that predominantly involve care of others  
Sympathetic traumatization vs empathy associated to the trauma of others:

Lifestyle-related factors: Working too much  
Not enough time for recovery, restoration, relaxing and socializing  
Viewing recreation (play/hobbies) as secondary in importance & discretionary  
Taking on too many responsibilities, and avoiding help from others  
Expectations to be too many things to too many people  
Not getting adequate sleep to meet the natural needs of the nervous system  
Lack of, or alienation from, close, supportive relationships

Personality traits related to burnout: Perfectionistic tendencies  
No result or outcome is ever good enough  
Pessimistic view of self, life, and the world  
An obsessive need to be in control  
Reluctance to delegate responsibility to others  
Using, encountering, reacting to micromanagement styles  
High-achieving, Type A personality  
People-pleasing attitudes and reaction patterns

One example – The Grand and Esteemed *Work Ethic* vs *Recreation*

### **Early Warning Signs**

Behavioral indicators of BURNOUT: Withdrawing from responsibilities  
Procrastinating—taking longer to get things done  
Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early  
Having more frequent irritable outbursts  
Taking out frustrations on others  
Isolating from others  
Using food, drugs, or alcohol as stress management devices

Psychological/Emotional indicators: Loss of motivation  
Decreased professional satisfaction  
Depleted sense of accomplishment  
Sense of failure and self-doubt  
Development of a cynical and negative outlook in most things  
Sense of detachment from life & others—feeling alone in the world  
Thoughts of being helpless, trapped, broken, or defeated

Physical indicators of BURNOUT: Feeling tired and drained of all energy most of the time  
Frequently feeling sick due to lowered immunity  
Frequent headaches, back, muscle & joint aches and pains  
Obvious changes in appetite or sleep habits

**BURNOUT Specific to Caregivers** indicators responsibilities and stress are typically chronic and present long-term challenges. It is particularly disheartening when there seems to be no improvements or hope that the client/patient/veteran will get better.

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Caregivers without adequate self-care, help, and support are vulnerable to a wide range of physical and emotional problems, ranging from heart disease to depression, and to *Professional Burnout*.

Managing the stress levels in the caregiver's life is as important as caring for others.

Additional indicators of Caregiver BURNOUT:	Life revolves around caregiving with little satisfaction Trouble concentrating Feeling increasingly resentful Neglecting responsibilities Overreacting to minor annoyances Increasingly impatient and irritable with the veteran Having trouble cutting back and/or relaxing Recurring anxiety, depression, irritability
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### **Taking Preventative Measures**

\* **Restore Resilience.** Resilience is the ability to encounter stress, develop in spite of it, to adapt positively to it, and to grow from it. Resilience is part trait or attribute of person (resiliency), part attitude (or cognitive set), and part ability; a blending of strength, endurance, and adaptability

Resiliency is the ability to cope successfully with adversity, to develop competencies that offset the stress, and to continue to reach or exceed expectations.

Resilience develops over time, likely associated to the encounters with realistic and reasonable stresses, and is what might be called *diligent striving*.

Resilience involves managing stressful experience and recovering or bouncing back from it.

It is important to acknowledge and accepting that some stresses result in being unable to return to the original condition prior to the stress. Stressful experience changes a person.

Resilience is reflected in, maintained, and restored by:

- possessing a good share of optimism, energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity about the world,
- being active outside of work activity,
- developing talents in some areas beyond a profession,
- having a strong tendency toward humor and laughter,
- being genuinely good-natured and easy-tempered,
- thinking realistically and keeping things in perspective,
- having a positive self-concept and view of self,
- maintaining a hopeful and optimistic outlook,
- setting and working towards attainable goals,
- developing habits of effective problem-solving,
- being sociable and easy to get along with,
- being independent, yet inter-dependent in healthy ways,
- demonstrating a positive social orientation to others,
- communicating effectively and engaging in interpersonal relationships,
- maintaining close and positive relationships with important others,
- establishing close relationships with supportive and caring others,
- having supports in the wider community,
- developing and sustaining strong relationships with other competent adults,
- accepting help and support,
- participating in groups,

taking care of basic physical, emotional, and psychological needs, having a spiritual connection.

**\* Start the day with a relaxing ritual.**

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**\* Adopt healthy eating, exercising, and sleeping habits.**

**\* Set new, more reasonable limits & boundaries on responsibilities.**

**\* Develop more adaptive stress management methods.**

**\* Choose activities that have nothing to do with work.**

**\* Take a daily moratorium on use of technology.**

**\* Cultivate curiosity and creativity.**

### **Ignore the Signs at Your Own Peril.**

The demands of caregiving can be chronically overwhelming.

When burn out occurs, doing anything is tough, especially looking after someone else.

Once burn out occurs, caregiving is no longer a healthy option for the caregiver or the veteran.

The most effective way to combat job burnout is to quit doing what you're doing and do something else.

Very few people come back to their profession once BURNOUT has consumed all the resources once available to do the work.