

The Burnout Epidemic

Tags: [#stress-management](#) [#engagement](#)

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Dialogue

Title: How to Reduce Burnout

What is burnout?

Why self-care doesn't cure burnout.

Research from Francesca Gino: curiosity increases empathy. What does empathy have to do with burnout?

Citing the work of Martin Seligman:

Lack of community is one of the biggest threats to burnout because healthy relationships are foundational to well-being.

Harvard Business Review article on: The Surprising Power of Simply Asking Coworkers How They're Doing

- Be considerate

Figure out how people want to communicate

- Be authentic

Don't ask how someone is doing generally -- zero in on a specific topic or project.)

What not to do --> "How are you?"

- Remove bias

Confirmation bias -- we tend to place greater emphasis on evidence that appears to confirm what we already believe.

What's a way to interrupt that?

- Assume the best

Example of grieving when somebody is awkwardly trying to help.

If you don't know what to say, you should stick with, "Thank you for sharing this with me. I don't have any advice. I just want to listen and learn."

- Stay humble

If you want people to be curious, you have to give them protected time to explore and react.

What have you changed your mind on?

Reserve

Hiring curious people:

1. During the interview, give candidates a problem to solve.
2. Check their interest in learning new things (ask about something learned in past six months.)
3. Ask candidates about their outside interests, but be specific. (Hobby, for example)
4. Curious people ask better questions.

There are two kinds of curiosity:

Epistemic

Perceptual

Section in the chapter --> Becoming a professional eavesdropper.

There's something to learn here from the field of anthropology.

Quotes

Highlight [page 13]: Although the concept of occupational burnout originated in the 1970s, the medical community has long argued about how to define it. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) finally included burnout in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), describing it as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.” It is characterized by three dimensions: • Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion • Increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job • Reduced professional efficacy The WHO definition is important because it acknowledges that burnout is more than just an employee problem; it’s an organizational problem that requires an organizational solution.

Highlight [page 14]: According to Christina Maslach and her coauthors, Susan Jackson and Michael Leiter, the leading experts on burnout, there are six main causes to burnout. Although similar, here is the list on which most academic research has been based: 1. Workload 2. Perceived lack of control 3. Lack of reward or recognition 4. Poor relationships 5. Lack of fairness 6. Values mismatch

Highlight [page 177]: Curiosity is defined as having a strong desire to learn or know about something. The desire comes from a deeply imbedded genetic need to survive. Curiosity teaches us about threats, but it also helps us develop emotionally, mentally,

intellectually, and even physically, through knowledge attainment. When we quash that process, we stop growing. Our imagination atrophies. Our learning dies.

Highlight [page 178]: Francesca Gino, behavioral scientist and the Tandon Family Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, wrote the wildly popular Harvard Business Review article, “The Business Case for Curiosity.” She challenges business leaders to consider the value of curiosity for all the reasons you’d expect—innovation, creative thinking, competition. “Most of the breakthrough discoveries and remarkable inventions throughout history, from flints for starting a fire to self-driving cars, have something in common: They are the result of curiosity,” writes Gino.¹ But the article also reflects on the other benefits to a culture of curiosity, like nurturing trust, fostering psychological safety, making questions easier to ask, and fostering friendships. Most critically, curiosity, according to Gino’s research, increases empathy—a leadership skill recognized for reducing burnout.

Highlight [page 179]: Epistemic curiosity—the kind that explores arts and sciences, that connects humanity through discovery and innovation— conjures a “pleasurable state, one in which we anticipate reward.”⁵ Perceptual curiosity is primarily associated with an unpleasant feeling or as Livio suggests, it’s like “scratching an intellectual itch.” Think CNN on background music all day in those first few months of the epidemic and even before Covid-19. Our news consumption has exponentially increased since the 2016 election, with unfortunate results. It’s caused so many “unpleasant” feelings that therapists came up with a specific term explaining the resulting symptoms, “headline stress disorder,” also known as “breaking news disorder.”

Highlight [page 180]: We just need to focus our attention on epistemic curiosity, the kind of curiosity that follows the pathways that transmit dopamine to trigger our brain’s reward systems. When we are curious in this learning-forfun kind of way, we get to enjoy “intrinsic motivation, an activity undertaken for its own sake, that is also pleasurable.”⁷ And since epistemic curiosity makes us feel so damn good, you can imagine there would be some mental health benefits, right? That would be accurate. Actually, our survival depends on it. 1. Curiosity helped humans to evolve. We might still be living in caves without fire if we weren’t committed to being curious. The urge to explore and the impulse to seek novelty play an important role in our evolution, and we’ve been hardwired for it. We are rewarded for curiosity by dopamine and opioids (feel-good chemicals in the brain), which are stimulated in the face of something new. The flipside of novelty is boredom—a predictor of burnout. We need to keep moving forward, and we do this by leveraging curious behaviors. 2. Curiosity increases workplace success. In the study “Field Investigation of the Relationship Among Adult Curiosity, Workplace Learning, and Job Performance,” the authors found that adult state and trait epistemic (knowledge-seeking) curiosity would influence workplace learning and job performance.⁸ 3. Curiosity can expand our empathy. Highly empathic people have an insatiable curiosity about strangers. They find other people more interesting than themselves but are not out to interrogate them. Roman Krznaric founding faculty member of The School

Highlight [page 188]: 178 Leadership more effort on challenging, meaningful tasks. On the flipside individuals who believe that they are better than others are more likely to reduce their contribution to group tasks.”²⁰ Wharton management professor Katherine J. Klein, in, “Team Mental Models and Team Performance” coauthored with Beng-Chong Lim, a professor at Nanyang Technological University, suggests that the widely accepted ideal size for a working team is five people: “If you go beyond five people the team starts to lose individual performance, while teams smaller than five people can experience awkward team dynamics and skills gaps.”

Highlight [page 188]: But experts suggest that cutting people from an existing team despite the size—isn’t the answer. When a group of individuals is closely knit in the workplace, severing those relationships without a valid reason can negatively impact their experiences of work en masse. And since healthy relationships play a big role in preventing burnout, it’s best to look for the right openings to move people out of the group, such as attrition, promotion, or a team member’s interest in seeking new internal opportunities.

Highlight [page 189]: In “The Surprising Power of Simply Asking Coworkers How They’re Doing,” author Karyn Twaronite, EY global diversity and inclusiveness officer, suggests that “when people feel like they belong at work, they are more productive, motivated, engaged and 3.5 times more likely to contribute to their fullest potential.”²⁴ In her research, she found that 39 percent of respondents feel the greatest sense of belonging when their colleagues check in with them, both personally and professionally. On the flipside, she found out which tactics didn’t yield the same results; for example, face-to-face with senior leadership that wasn’t personal, being invited to big or external events or presentations by senior leaders, and/or being copied on their emails didn’t make anyone feel any more connected.

Highlight [page 189]: Be considerate To be authentic, you need to know how someone likes to communicate.

Highlight [page 190]: Be authentic Try to establish authentic connections with your friends and peers. Don’t just ask how they are doing and accept it when they say they’re fine— be specific. Dig deeper. Instead of just checking in generally, ask them about a project they’re working on. Learn about what they’re interested in and reflect that with your curiosity. Maybe you heard they were presenting on a specific topic; ask them to expand on it.

Highlight [page 190]: Catherine A. Sanderson, author of Social Psychology, claims that confirmation bias reaffirms the existing stereotypes we have about people. In her book, she writes, “We are more likely to remember (and repeat)

Highlight [page 191]: Leading with Curiosity 181 stereotype-consistent information and to forget or ignore stereotypeinconsistent information, which is one-way stereotypes are maintained even in the face of disconfirming evidence.”²⁶ She shares the following example: “If you learn that your new Canadian friend hates hockey and loves sailing,

and that your new Mexican friend hates spicy foods and loves rap music, you are less likely to remember this new stereotype-inconsistent information." According to Francesca Gino, "When our curiosity is triggered, we are less likely to fall prey to confirmation bias and to stereotyping people (making broad judgments, such as that women or minorities don't make good leaders). Curiosity has these positive effects because it leads us to generate alternatives."

Highlight [page 191]: Assume the best Start your conversations with people assuming the best. Believe that they mean well, especially when it comes to difficult issues. When we are in conversations that may be hard to have— say, if we're grievingsomeone trying to comfort us might fumble and feel awkward. But assuming positive intent will help to take the good with the discomfort

Highlight [page 192]: If you want to authentically create a culture of curiosity, hire for it. Ruma Batheja, the head of organizational development and HR strategy at Knowledgetics, a research consulting firm, recommends several strategies for hiring curious people:29 1. During the interview, give candidates a problem to solve. Assign a real, challenging task that needs immediate attention. Curious people will be confident in their knowledge and will likely try to modify a process or method for creating something better. It isn't about the solution; it's more about how they got there. 2. Check their interest in learning new things. Batheja offers a couple of examples: "Tell me something new you have learned in the last six months" or "What recent skill have you acquired, and how have you implemented it in your current role?" 3. Ask candidates about their outside interests, but be specific. Suggest they teach you about their hobby. What has their outside interest taught them about life? How can they apply it to their career or the role they are applying for? Or, ask them what books they've read or movies they've watched. Then have them share why they're interested in specific genres of films or literature.

Highlight [page 193]: Leading with Curiosity 183 4. Curious people ask better questions. The interviewer can try using scenario-based questions to give candidates the opportunity to show if they are naturally driven to ask questions or care to understand how a particular process works.

Highlight [page 194]: Select a perceived business issue or problem and organize a meeting to briefly present it to your team or cross-functional group. Then instruct the group that they have four minutes to collaboratively generate fifteen different questions reframing the problem. The aim of this step is not to solve the problem but to uncover, through different ways of wording it, whether an alternative problem exists whose resolution would be even more organizationally valuable. After the initial four minutes, take another twenty minutes to identify any additional questions missing from the fifteen-question set created. Then, using the entire question set, select which questions specifically identified new pathways in viewing the problem, and highlight why each pathway seems important or meaningful. Setting aside what might be the

most comfortable route to pursue, commit to investigating at least one of the pathways and create an action plan for doing so.

Highlight [page 194]: By developing curious behaviors, we increase our cognitive empathy, which enhances not just our leadership skills but makes us better global citizens. When we practice curiosity, overcoming obstacles is reframed as stimulating. Change is thrilling instead of terrifying. Curiosity is a “superskill” to lean on during times of massive, uncertain shift.

References