



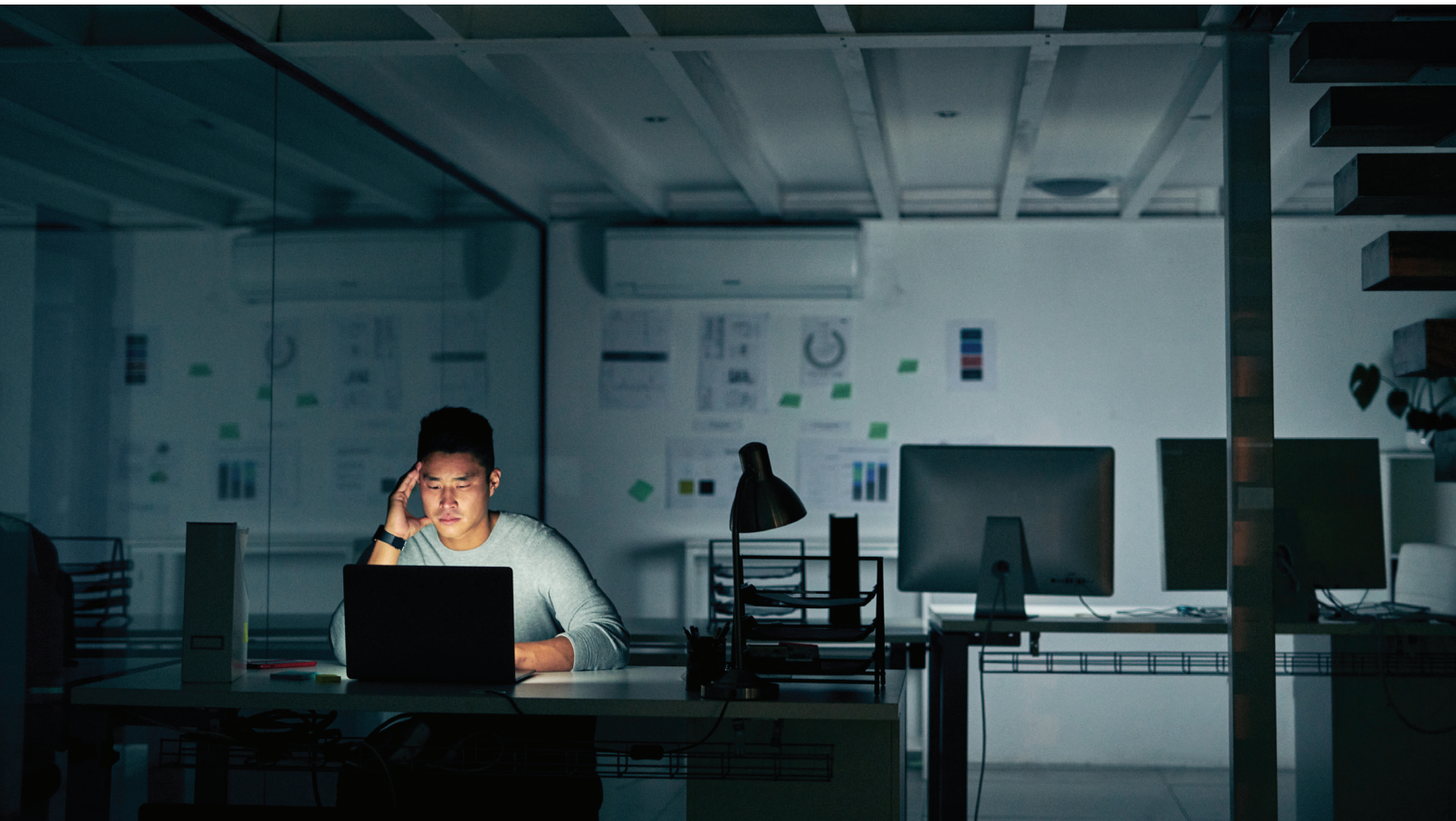
We've all likely experienced working unbelievably long hours and burning the candle at both ends. But such accelerated behavior comes with a price. When constant stress has us feeling disillusioned, helpless and completely worn out, we may be suffering from burnout. When we're burned out, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks big and bleak and it's difficult to muster up the energy to care about our situation—let alone do something about it. Unfortunately, burnout sneaks up on us and we don't realize that we're toast until smoke gets in our eyes. Burnout is a condition caused by imbalance, charging forward in the fast lane, being a workaholic or a perfectionist, and stretching ourselves too far until we lose our sense of center.

When we're burned out, we won't be much good to our team or to ourselves. If you are utterly stressed, have you wondered why? You may actually be burned out, not stressed out. Although burnout may be the result of unrelenting stress, it isn't the same as too much stress. Stress involves feelings of *too much*. This can include too many pressures that demand too much of us, both physically and mentally. Stressed people can still imagine, and they will feel better when they get their lives under some kind of manageable control. On the other hand, burnout is about *not having enough*. There's not enough energy, imagination or strength to put forth the normal effort of

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

Risks of burnout in the workplace

BY CAROL BROOKS, SR/WA





setting one foot in front of the other. If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, burnout is being all dried up. And here's another thing: we usually know when we're stressed, but we don't always know when we're burned out. So what can we do to tame this beast and become an asset to our team? Here are a few tips.

Pace Yourself by Taking Mini Breaks

Consider taking mini breaks throughout the day. For example, try sitting outside and enjoying nature. Take a short walk and let the sun warm up and loosen the tension throughout your body. If you can't get away, close your eyes at your desk and just chill out for at least five minutes if you can. Most importantly, remember to breathe. Inhale to the count of four and exhale to the count of four. As you do this breathing exercise, try to clear your brain of all the chatter. It may take a while to calm your thoughts, but keep up the breathing exercise. The goal is to relax your thoughts and give your mind, soul and body a chance to refresh and regroup. These short breaks are not time eaters. They'll actually add more time to your day by giving you more energy.

Don't Take Lunch at Your Desk

When it's time for lunch, be sure to make it an enjoyable one. Sometimes we eat through lunch to meet a deadline and though this is occasionally permissible, we shouldn't make it a habit. During a lunch break, make a commitment to get away from your desk, even if it's just outside the building. Never make a practice of eating lunch in your office because too often someone will stop by and talk shop. I used to eat at my desk and work through breaks. By the end of the day, I could barely crawl to my car. Remember that you deserve to get refreshed and this small act will help to avoid burnout.



Create a Family/Fun Bulletin Board

If you have wall space by your desk, consider putting up a bulletin board filled with pictures of family, pets, friends and your vacations—all of them happy and full of love. Think about posting your favorite sayings on your bulletin board, especially words of encouragement that will fire up your motivation. If you find yourself in a pickle, just lean back in your chair and survey your bulletin board. In doing so, you'll be surrounded with people you love. The photos will remind you that life is good because of the wonderful people who are part of your life. Be encouraged with your favorite sayings that remind you of peace and harmony.

Listen to Your Body

Our bodies send us clear signals when they're tired and used up, but it's tough to recognize these signs when we're living in the fast lane. Take a moment to think about how your body tries to attract your attention. Through insomnia? Headaches? Stomachaches? Loss of appetite? If you refuse to listen to these warnings, a bout of the flu that you might not be able to shake could begin to plague you or chronic fatigue may haunt you. Do yourself a huge favor: turn up the volume and listen to your body! What can we do to keep our bodies healthy and happy? Eat healthy, hydrate, exercise and sleep well.

In Summary

It only takes one person to burnout before an entire team fragments into burnout. I've witnessed this destruction of teams who crash and burn without knowing it.

When we see someone putting in more hours, doing extensive research and burning the candles at both ends, our own competitive nature has us believing that we need to stay at the competitive edge for our own survival. Don't be blinded by anyone else. Stay in tune with yourself and recognize the warning signs of impending burnout. Take physical and emotional care of yourself. Take breaks. Change your scenery at lunch. Take frequent glimpses at your fun board and see how quickly you are refreshed and grounded.

Finally, the greatest gift you can give yourself and your team is to listen to your body. It won't lie to you about its capacity. Our minds tend to demand so much more than our body can give. Don't abuse it and instead, work on a balanced lifestyle. Remember, only you can prevent burnout and avoid a full-blown breakdown. Your team will not only thank you, they'll recognize your leadership and check their own behavior for potential signs of burnout. ✪



Carol Brooks, SR/WA, is owner of Cornerstone Management Skills and a well-known author and lecturer. With 20 years experience in right of way, she is an IRWA CLIMB Certified Lead Instructor and the recipient of the prestigious Lum Award by the R/W International Education Foundation. ©2020 Carol Brooks. Visit www.CornerstoneManagementSkills.com