

Contemplating Burnout

By
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Burnout occurs when the sustained giving out of energy is grossly out of proportion to the repletion of energy, so that a state of depletion exists. It is the severest form of fatigue. If fatigue is an acute condition and exhaustion chronic, burnout is even more severe. Consequently it can sometimes take years to recover from it.

There are distinct physical, emotional and lifestyle symptoms associated with burnout. During burnout a person may gradually detach themselves from work and other meaningful relationships due to prolonged physical, emotional and mental stress. If you have a partner or friend who is going through burnout you may find a usually pleasant guy, to now be cynical and prone to fits of anger, even rage, for the most seemingly insignificant of reasons. Feeling confused is also common along with the inability to make decisions. A person in burnout goes through bouts of feeling drained, with nothing left to give, yet being unable to say “No” or let go of emotional stressors. They tend to make mountains out of molehills, and therefore can be difficult to live with, especially if the person is in denial of their burnout.

It may seem that the people being described here are the weak and tantrum types. This is not so. This condition is most often seen in those possessing a strong sense of responsibility to reach goals and accomplishments. Many reach the deeper stages of burnout because of tenacity and dedication to their goals. This is not weakness, indeed we are describing the noble of heart, the men and women in service, the succeeders in life we tend to hold in esteem.

In our ARC classes we praise our new students for their courage in taking the leap to be there. Despite referrals from friends, despite having met the teachers and finding us to be safe and integrous, they still enter ARC to some extent not knowing where this is going to lead them. This courage needs to be named and acknowledged. But then, we also point out that the students who are attracted to ARC and other such self-care programs find giving to others to be far easier than giving to themselves. Chances are many of you reading this article grew up in a home environment without your needs being fully met and therefore entered into a contract of hope. Hoping that if you give of yourself, even sacrifice yourself in service of the family authority, they – the authority - may one day reciprocate and meet your needs. And so we become these service experts; highly developed in sensing and meeting the needs of others, but without the template in place to fuel our own systems.

How do you know if you have the potential to burn out? Here are some soul-searching questions to ask yourself: Are you the pillar of strength? Have a need to be available to others? Desire to be a hero? Need a lot of attention and recognition? Are you an emotional sponge? If you answer yes to anyone of these questions, burnout could creep

up on you, sometimes without you even realizing it. One day you may wake up (or have trouble waking up) and realize your in it - burnout is upon you.

There are four distinct stages to burnout. The **first stage** is physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. This is the feeling of having to hold it all together at work, and when you come home there is little energy to do anything else but collapse in front of the TV. We all experience this from time to time, but if it persists it could be burnout.

The **second stage** involves shame and guilt. Your exhaustion is taken personally. You don't feel good and confident about your performance in your work. You feel inefficient and find yourself wanting to take shortcuts. You feel like an imposter in your job and worry that people will see your front and when they find you out you'll end up unemployed.

Stage three is about being defensive. You are starting to feel sufficiently run down that life and people bother you. You are constantly stressed out and respond more and more with irritation to the point that compassion and tolerance is thrown out of the window. You have so little energy that in order to conserve what little you have you isolate and avoid people. It's easier to do this than putting on a social show and pretend you are somebody you no longer are.

Stage four is the final stage. This is where you hit rock bottom. Bottoming out is different for everyone. It may be the loss of a relationship, contracting a health problem, the loss of a job or the inability to function anymore. If you regard this as a teaching tool it can catalyze change into your life, hitting bottom becomes the means to begin moving out of burnout. Burnout invariably involves significant life changes.

Acknowledging that we are in burnout and recognizing the stage that we are in is the first step from giving too much of ourselves to giving enough to ourselves. The next step is to look at some home truths. Do you create enough time for yourself? Do you have a healthy separation between work and play? Do you have the ability to say "no" when the time you put aside for you is threatened to be compromised? The key to all of this is walking our talk; eating in a way that is healthy, having sufficient sleep, creating recreational time that is separate from work time, spending time with people that nurture us and allow us to be ourselves. Consider having a massage, an energy bodywork session or a visit to a spa from time to time. Allow time in your day for contemplation, meditation, yoga or reading. Daily exercise is important in that it is as much about burning off our daily stresses as it is about maintaining a healthy, strong, tolerant physical body.

All of this may initiate a reflection of the elements of our past and upbringing that contributed to our perspectives on self-care. Did we have healthy models of self-care growing up or were our childhood authorities more prone to self-sacrifice? Where did we learn to parent ourselves in the way that we do? These truths alone can pave the way to putting into place alternative and more conscious, healthy, self-serving choices for ourselves.

To introduce a new way of being into our life is not a single moment of time; it is an on-going process. Self-care improves as long as we remain conscious of the need to keep addressing and updating our self-care skills. Chances are we will not only have to re-organize our days but re-educate those closest to us. Things are going to change for everyone around us. Initially, family and friends may be resistant to these changes and the effects for them, as it may entail a re-writing of the initial contracts of the relationship. One way of finding out who your friends are is to make changes and see who stays on board – who is supportive and who is resistant.

The ARC Institute looks to create that template of self-care so that our specialties in life and our personal propensity for service can be maintained, developed and used to enhance the lives for ourselves and for others. Self-care then is preventative medicine which, when designated its rightful place of importance in our lives, allows us to live life to the fullest. It is this truth that moved ARC from being a modality of care for others to incorporate on equal footing our own self-care and self-awareness. This knowledge and specialization opens the doors to anyone who wants to deepen their relationships with themselves, others and realize the potential of passionate living.

The best way to care for others is to care for yourself.

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