

The sting of burnout on productivity

From deadlines and performance quotas, to budget cuts and restructuring, the workplace can be a very high-stress environment. At the right level, stress is not necessarily a bad thing and can actually motivate and challenge your team, encourage creativity and improve productivity.

But when the pressure for an employee to perform, meet expectations or face uncertainty becomes overwhelming, the consequences—physically, emotionally and organizationally—can be troubling and get in the way of achieving success. The result of too much stress for too long can be burnout. Burnout is a mental, emotional and physical state of exhaustion that can leave employees feeling:

- Disinterested
- Cynical
- Unmotivated
- Resentful
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Unappreciated
- Unfulfilled
- Unsatisfied

Employees suffering from excessive stress or burnout may feel disconnected from the world around them, drained of energy and may also experience strain on a personal and professional level. Unhealthy stress and resulting burnout can take a heavy toll on virtually all aspects of your team's performance. The direct and indirect costs to your team and the wider organization can include:

Lower productivity: The high level of anxiety associated with excess stress and the exhaustion and apathy that come with burnout can clog up workflows, causing workers to miss deadlines, quotas or complete tasks at an unacceptably slow rate.

Lower quality work: It's not surprising that when people are over-stressed, they may have trouble focusing on the task at hand, make more mistakes, or take less pride in their work.

Disorganization: Employees with unhealthy stress levels may become more disorganized and less effective at managing their time. When other team members are interdependent on the stressed employee, this could negatively impact the efficiency of the entire team.

Wasted time: Employees suffering from burnout often focus their time and attention away from their job. They may spend more and more of their work time on personal activities, such as online shopping or phone conversations with non-work friends.

Attitude: People with burnout are often more negative, cynical, impatient, disagreeable and generally less social. They may complain a lot or make it known to everyone around them that they don't enjoy their job. Obviously, this can seriously impact the overall work environment and team. If someone is stressed-out and in a position where they deal directly with customers, it can cause even more damage and negatively reflect on the organization as a whole.

Poor health: Unhealthy stress is linked to many mental and physical health issues, including:

- Insomnia and other sleep disorders

- Migraine headaches
- Digestive problems
- Depression
- Autoimmune diseases
- Eczema and other skin conditions
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse

Stress can also worsen many pre-existing health conditions, including many types of chronic pain and heart disease.

Absenteeism: People suffering from burnout will often take more sick and personal days.

Presenteeism: Absenteeism's cousin, *presenteeism* describes employees who are at work in body but not necessarily in spirit or mind. They often arrive late, leave early or take lots of breaks throughout the day and generally don't function at a high level.

Turnover: When work stress becomes overwhelming, many people decide that the best way to escape it is to leave the company. This hurts the team through a loss of talent, the high cost of training a replacement and a negative impact on morale.

Excessive stress in the workplace can hurt virtually all aspects of team bonding and performance. Carefully monitor your group for early signs of these conditions and refer to ***Got Stress? Identifying and mitigating on-the-job stress*** for tips and tactics to preventing stress before it happens and minimizing its impact when it seeps into the team's psyche. Though it can be a major challenge to any team, when managed quickly and effectively, you can reduce stress's negative reach and maybe even harness its energy to motivate a stronger, more effective team.

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact LifeWorks·fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.