

# HOW TO DEAL WITH **BURNOUT**



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**A**NIL was beyond exhausted. He had taken on a new job because it promised greater prestige and more income. But now he was working late nights as well as weekends, sometimes up to 80 hours a week. “The work environment was chaotic,” he states, “and all the responsibility fell on me. I said to myself: ‘What have I done? If I don’t make a change, I’m dead.’” Anil was rapidly burning out.

Workplace burnout is more than mere tiredness, and it goes beyond the ordinary stress of everyday work. Burnout is characterized by chronic exhaustion and strong feelings of frustration and powerlessness. Those suffering from burnout tend to withdraw emotionally from their work, lose motivation, and become less productive. Studies also link burnout to numerous emotional and physical health problems.

What causes burnout? Work overload is often a factor. Because of economic pressures, some employers demand that employees work longer hours, at times for less money. Technology now keeps some in constant contact with their job, blurring the lines between work and private life. For some, job insecurity, lack of control over their work, or feelings of being treated unfairly contribute to burnout. So does dealing with unclear priorities or conflicts with coworkers.

Burnout can also be self-inflicted. In the pursuit of career goals and greater income, some try to fit ever more work into their life. Such ones may become over-committed and find themselves on the road to burnout.

If you are experiencing workplace burnout, how can you recover? Granted, change may seem impossible if you feel trapped in circumstances beyond your control. Nevertheless, consider the following four steps for dealing with burnout. You may have more options than you realize.



## 1. EVALUATE YOUR PRIORITIES.

What is most important to you? Many people would likely put family relationships and good health near the top of their list. These are things that are likely to suffer if you are burned out.

By clarifying your priorities, you prepare yourself to make difficult decisions and accept trade-offs. For example, you may see that your work is leading to burnout. Yet you may reason, 'I cannot change jobs or work less; I need the income!' True, everyone needs income, but how much and at what cost to the things you value most?

Beware of pressure to adopt the priorities of others around you as your own. Your employer's priorities and yours are likely different. Others may choose to put work first in their life, but this does not mean that you must do the same.

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**BIBLE PRINCIPLE: "EVEN WHEN A PERSON HAS AN ABUNDANCE, HIS LIFE DOES NOT RESULT FROM THE THINGS HE POSSESSES."**

**—LUKE 12:15**

## 2. SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE.

To reduce stress and gain time for what you truly value, you may consider working fewer hours, you may be able to persuade your employer to reduce your current job demands, or you may determine that you need to change jobs. Whatever you decide to do, you will likely need to adjust your financial situation and make changes in your lifestyle. But this is not impossible and may not be as hard as you might think.

In many lands, a consumer-oriented society sends the message that happiness is linked to income level and possessions. But in reality it is not. A simpler lifestyle can bring greater freedom and satisfaction. To prepare for such a change, reduce expenses and save money. Try to lower or eliminate debt. Discuss the need for change with your family members, and seek their support.

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**BIBLE PRINCIPLE: "HAVING FOOD AND CLOTHING, WE WILL BE CONTENT WITH THESE THINGS."—1 TIMOTHY 6:8**



### 3. LEARN WHEN TO SAY NO TO WORK.

If you face an unrealistic workload or some other persistent problem in your workplace, discuss your situation with your employer. Whenever possible, offer solutions that meet both your needs and those of your employer. Reassure your employer of your commitment to your work, and explain what you are willing to do; but be clear and firm about what you are not able to do.



Use foresight and be realistic. If you want to work less, your employer may expect you to accept less compensation. Anticipate risks such as the threat of job loss, and be prepared to respond. Remember that your prospects for finding a different job are better while you are still employed.

Even when you have reached a mutually agreeable work arrangement with your employer, you can expect to be pressured again to take on more work. What can help you to remain firm? Keeping to the commitments that you have made. Doing so might give you leverage to ask your employer to do the same in return, including keeping your workload within the agreed limits.

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**BIBLE PRINCIPLE:** “LET YOUR WORD ‘YES’ MEAN YES, YOUR ‘NO,’ NO.”—MATTHEW 5:37

## A JOURNEY BACK FROM BURNOUT

Wayne and Marie are a married couple in their early 30's who live in the United States.

### What led to your dealing with burnout?

**Wayne:** We were running multiple businesses and had gone into debt over our heads. I wanted to build our

business to a point where life was more comfortable and I could make money while working less. My goal was to reduce stress, but I got just the opposite.

### How were you affected?

**Wayne:** We realized that the things we were working so hard to get—nicer clothes, a bigger house, and more expensive vacations—were not making us happy. I felt emotionally drained, and I lost all motivation.



## 4. RENEW YOURSELF.

Even when your work is free of major problems, you may still have your share of stresses, difficult people, and unpleasant situations. So make time for sufficient rest and balanced recreation. Remember that recreation does not have to be expensive to be refreshing to you and your family.

Cultivate interests and friendships apart from your work, and avoid defining yourself by the type and amount of work

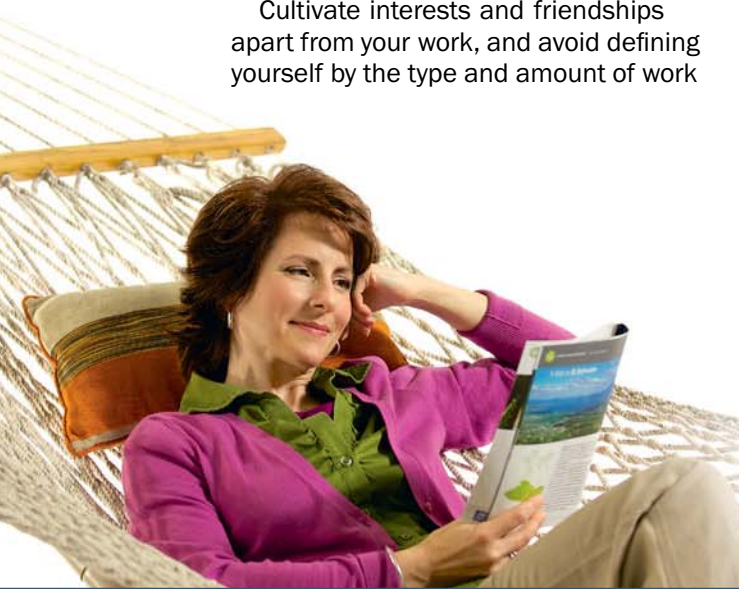
that you do. Why? The book *Your Money or Your Life* observes: “Who you are is far greater than what you do for money.” If your identity and self-worth come primarily from your work, then you will find it difficult to minimize the role that work plays in your life.

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**BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “BETTER IS A HANDFUL OF REST THAN TWO HANDFULS OF HARD WORK AND CHASING AFTER THE WIND.”**

**—ECCLESIASTES 4:6**

Can you really make the changes needed to deal successfully with burnout? Yes, you can. Anil, mentioned at the beginning of this article, did so. He says: “I contacted my former employer and asked if he would take me back, and he did. I was embarrassed to face my former coworkers after I had talked about moving on to ‘greener pastures.’ And I took a significant cut in pay. But I gained peace of mind, and I had more time for my family and other things that I truly value.” ■



**Marie:** My health suffered. Our relationship suffered. We didn't get along well.

**How did you simplify your life?**

**Wayne:** We examined our goals and our life situation. We decreased the overhead of our business. I had a trendy office, and I let it go. I changed the kind of car that I was willing to drive. I built a

one-man business and intentionally kept it small. We worked our bills down and kept our expenses low.

**Marie:** Simplifying was not as hard as I thought it would be. We reduced our frequency of eating out and ate at home. We went for walks, and we got healthier. Eventually, we began working part-time and doing volunteer work.

**What has been the result?**

**Marie:** Our life has stopped being about making money. We adjusted our focus to more important things, and our relationship improved.

**Wayne:** Life has smoothed out. We are much happier.