



Dear Friend,

Heavy Sighs

I'm going to let you in on a secret.

The first 10 seconds of a conversation reveal volumes.

Seriously, they do!

Perhaps one of the most telling 10-second scenarios comes when I ask folks a simple question: *"So, how's it going?"*

Now, this seems as if it would be a totally benign question, doesn't it? But, even before the actual response is offered, there's much to be gleaned.

Some people immediately smile. Their faces and their whole bodies radiate as they prepare to launch into what's been happening. Their biggest challenge is figuring out where to begin.

For others, the initial response is an incredibly heavy sigh. No words, but eyes that close or begin to tear up, a head that may shake subconsciously, and sometimes a chuckle that's thick with the complexity of the situation.

Who would think that 10 seconds could be so extremely powerful?

"So, how's it going?"

I hope you smiled. But, if you didn't (or you know someone who wouldn't, if asked), keep reading. This month, **EA Insights** travels to *The Burnout Zone*. We explore ways to help you claw your way out if you're already there or ways to keep from making an unwanted visit. I hope it's helpful!

All the best,

June

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The Burnout Zone

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Crowded calendars... overcommitted lives... too much to do... little time to think or regroup

What's the impact?

Underwhelming performance... weariness... snippy behavior... strained relationships... joylessness

Did I just hear you sigh heavily on the other end of this message?

Welcome to *The Burnout Zone*.

If you're like many people, you're either there right now, or you recall (with less-than-fond memories) a time when you were.

The good thing is that *The Burnout Zone* isn't a place in which you're doomed to live forever. There is a way out; though it may take some time and effort. How do you do it? Here's one approach.

Recognize the signs. My friend, it's time to call it what it is. You're fooling nobody but yourself! Take note:

- when you find yourself more physically and/or emotionally tired than usual and for longer than usual;
- when you notice your cynicism rising about the things going on around you and your motivation falling about pitching in to turn those things around;
- when you see your physical, emotional, professional, or relational self-care slipping; or



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"Quotes"

"A lot of what goes into making positive behavioral changes has to do with mental preparation. If you want to achieve...any other goal, you have to start out by setting some small, but realistic goals."
~Rene Britt

"[They] are routinely working 18-hour shifts and working on days off. Burnout is a serious concern[.]"
~Bob Brooks

"I'm going from doing all of the work to having to delegate the work - which is almost harder for me than doing the work myself. I'm a lousy delegator, but I'm learning."
~Alton Brown

"Strive for continuous improvement, instead of perfection."
~Kim Collins

"High-pressure work environments are taking their toll on workers' morale. Twenty-three percent of workers say they frequently or constantly feel burnout at work. This can be detrimental to both workers, whose health and career progress may suffer, and employers, who pick up the tab in higher insurance costs and lost productivity."
~Rosemary Haefner

"Burnout is nature's way of telling you, you've been going through the motions; your soul has departed; you're a zombie, a member of the walking dead, a sleepwalker."

- when you discover your outside interests disappearing, your preoccupation with work taking over, and your level of frustration rising.

~Sam Keen

Take care of you. An important step in leaving *The Burnout Zone* is figuring out whether what's going on is internal or external. Consider starting with a visit to the doctor just to be sure that all is well physically. Also, be intentional about getting sufficient sleep and eating properly so that your body is receiving the fuel it needs to function optimally.

"Burnout leads to accidents, arguments, breaks relationships, and costs the bottom line."

~Ellen Kossek

Also, take care of the other aspects of you. Determine what makes you whole, healthy, and happy. Then, carve out some time to reintroduce those hobbies, interests, and/or people into your life. They too are important sources of fuel to help you function optimally.

"It is a priority, but we have to take the circumstances into consideration and set goals that are realistic. It's like saying I'm going to run the 100-yard dash in five seconds - it's not going to happen."

~Dennis Lyberger

Plan realistically. One contributor to burnout may be the stress that accompanies too lofty, ill-timed, or misaligned plans. With that in mind, one way to counter burnout is to step back and regroup. There always will be work to do and needs to meet. The question is how much can be accomplished reasonably in any given period of time. Effective planning is about creating goals that are realistic -- that is, goals that actually can be completed, and even those that help you stretch and grow, but that leave you (and anyone else involved) energized and encouraged to do more...not resentful.

"Perfection has to do with the end product, but excellence has to do with the process."

~Jerry Moran

Delegate. If you're trying to do it all on your own, you're on an express train to *The Burnout Zone*. My friend, you're headed there, and you're headed fast! Delegating successfully, though, is one way to slow the trip, if not halt it entirely. The key is not simply giving someone a task from your plate, although that's a start. Rather, it's delegating effectively -- that is, thinking strategically about what others can do versus what only you can or should do, evaluating existing skillsets of those around you and the skills that could be developed through new opportunities, and assessing the person's readiness and willingness to receive new tasks.

"Leadership is an active role; 'lead' is a verb. But the leader who tries to do it all is headed for burnout, and in a powerful hurry."

~Bill Owens

I won't lie. It probably would be faster just to do some tasks yourself. Yet, if you never prepare those around you to take on more responsibility or different roles, please recognize that you'll always be doing these task(s) yourself. By hanging on to assignments that you could pass on to others, you make your load heavier. You also stifle creativity, innovation, and investment. And, actually, by not letting go, you end up being too stressed or stretched to tackle the matters that are best left for you to do...or get some much-needed rest.

"Don't be a bottleneck. If a matter is not a decision for...you, delegate it. Force responsibility down and out. Find problem areas, add structure and delegate. The pressure is to do the reverse. Resist it."

~Donald Rumsfeld

Dump perfection. It really sounds good: *"I'm a perfectionist."* Can't you just feel the pride wrapped up in that statement? Yup, I can. Well, dump the perfectionism and the pride; they're sure-fire ways to tie you up in a burnout cycle.

Why? Think about it; I mean, really think about it. Perfection is impossible. Honestly, what human do you know who's *perfect*? (My list is empty. What about yours?) So, in holding on to a dedication to perfection, you drive yourself, not to mention those around you, absolutely bonkers. It means you work and work to reach an unreachable level. And, what's the result? Burnout.

Instead of perfection, *excellence* is a more attainable standard. It doesn't absolve you of striving to produce high-quality work or from encouraging those around you to do likewise. However, it does relieve some of the frustration that's inherent in seeking the impossible dream that's couched in the alternative.

"Everyone realizes that perfection is not possible; we're all fallible."

~Jim Sinegal

Decide When It's Time to Change. You're off-kilter. Now, what do you do?

Look in the mirror. How much of what you're experiencing really rests with you? Are you taking the steps you can to reduce the drain for yourself? Often, with self-correction (such as the examples outlined above), you can get yourself back on track. So, is it time to change YOU?

"Disorganization in an office environment creates a lot of stress. Getting organized is a real emotional process, and it always gets worse before it gets better."

~Patty Wolf

But, sometimes even with all of the *self*-correction in the world, the drain won't end. Have you considered that your burnout may stem from the fact that you're in the wrong role? You're trying to do or be something for which you're not equipped in terms of knowledge, skill, and/or temperament. Could it be that you're in an environment that functions in a vastly different way than you're wired? Picture Silicon Valley on Wall Street. We're talking serious square peg in a round hole! So, understanding whether you're coping with a "me" issue, a "they" issue, or an "us" issue is critical to making informed decisions about how to proceed. And, if it's more a "they" or an "us", is it time for a change of environment in order to improve your circumstances?

Feeling burnt? Need help determining why and how to turn it around? Contact us at **Executive Advantage, LLC**. We're here to help you to identify what's behind the current situation, and we're here as you craft steps that move you from being burnt out and just surviving and on to place where you're thriving.

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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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