

Five Signs of Job Burnout... and What to Do About It

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

Do you think you never have or never will experience work burnout? Consider these statistics:

- The American worker has the least vacation time of any modern, developed society.
- In 2005, 33 percent of workers said they would be checking in with the office while on vacation.
- One-half of workers reported they feel a great deal of stress on the job.
- Forty-four percent of working moms admit to being preoccupied about work while at home and one-fourth say they bring home projects at least one day a week.
- Nineteen percent of working moms reported they often or always work weekends.
- Thirty-seven percent of all working dads said they would consider the option of taking a new job with less pay if it offered a better work/life balance.
- Thirty-six percent of working dads reported they bring work home at least one day a week and 30 percent say they often or always work weekends.

These statistics, taken from CareerBuilder.com surveys of American workers, demonstrate the pressures employees in the U.S. are under to be available to the office, despite responsibilities -- or plans -- away from work. All this, coupled with longer work hours and many individuals handling the workloads of two, can easily lead to worker burnout.

If you think burnout on the job is just an excuse used by the weak to get out of responsibilities, think again. Stress and burnout can affect your immune system and has been linked to migraines, digestive disorders, skin diseases, high blood pressure and heart disease. It causes emotional distress as well.

"Job burnout is a response to work stress that leaves you feeling powerless, hopeless, fatigued, drained and frustrated," writes Dr. Audrey L. Canaff, a UC Foundation Assistant Professor in the Counseling Program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in her article on WorkplaceBlues.com. "But since job burnout is not an overnight occurrence, it's important to recognize its early signs and to act before the problem becomes truly serious.

"Consider these five warning signs of burnout:

Sign No. 1: Your co-workers are walking on eggshells around you. If you find yourself becoming cranky and irritable with co-workers you used to get along with, it may be more than just typical interpersonal dynamics.

Sign No. 2: You come in late and want to leave earlier. You used to wake up in the morning excited for another day, but now every day you dread heading into the office. Once lunch passes you start watching the clock, counting the minutes to the end of the day.

Sign No. 3: Apathy has replaced enthusiasm. You feel no motivation, no sense of accomplishment and have no desire to be challenged. Those who have burnout lose their motivation to perform, as well as their feelings of pride for a job well done.

Sign No. 4: You've lost camaraderie with co-workers. You're no longer interested in the company network. You used to go to lunch, go out for drinks and participate in other company functions but now have no desire in socializing in or out of the office.

Sign No. 5: You're feeling physically sick. You always feel exhausted, have headaches, feel tension in all of your muscles and are having trouble sleeping. These physical signs are common indicators of job stress, and demonstrate that this can turn into a physical problem.

If you are experiencing these symptoms, it's time to make some changes. You can start by talking to your boss or someone in your human resources department about how you can confront the problem together by redefining deadlines, delegating or outsourcing a project or two. In her book "Stress Management for Busy People," Carol A. Turkington recommends taking these proactive steps:

- Learn to say no.
- Reevaluate your goals.
- Reduce your commitments at work and at home.
- Learn stress management skills.
- Get plenty of rest and eat a healthy diet.

Finally, give yourself a break. This means taking your vacation days, no matter how important your job is, and taking little breaks every day to re-group, re-energize and unwind. Remember, if you don't take care of yourself in the office, your work will suffer and your health may pay the price, too. Kate Lorenz is the article and advice editor for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.