

Introduction:

On campus, burnout is often named as a top challenge to maintaining a healthy and engaged workforce. But what exactly is burnout? And what can supervisors do to help with it? In the April edition of the EAO Supervisor newsletter, we offer tips for understanding, recognizing and addressing burnout.

What is burnout?

Burnout goes beyond the everyday stresses that can come from work deadlines. Burnout is persistent stress that can seriously impact a person's physical and mental health. Burned-out employees feel a strong sense of unsustainable overload at work-- that they've been working too hard for too long. Burnout can cause employees to lose confidence in their abilities to do their jobs well. They may feel unmotivated and unsatisfied with their work, or lose their sense of purpose.

Burnout is often considered a work-related issue, but it can impact all parts of someone's life. Employees who are feeling burned out often feel that they're neglecting their needs and work-life balance. A sense of burnout can be worsened by stressors in a person's personal life and other mental health concerns like depression and anxiety.

Recognizing burnout

Burnout can manifest in many unique ways depending on the person and the situation. Learning to recognize these signs in yourself and others can help you identify burnout and begin to address it. For some people, burnout causes their bodies to show stress in the following ways:

- Frequent stomachaches or digestive issues
- Aches in the stomach or head/neck
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping at night
- Feeling generally fatigued and tired at work

Sometimes, the effects of burnout are hard to see. They include mental changes like:

- Mood swings
- Irritability or feeling "low" at work
- Feeling anxious or wanting to avoid tough conversations at work
- Trouble focusing on a task
- Constant or upsetting thoughts about quitting your job

These physical and mental indicators can be a sign that burnout is affecting people in your workplace. If you think you're recognizing burnout in yourself or others, reach out to the Employee Assistance Office or LifeMatters for guidance. Remember: your role as a supervisor is NOT to diagnose employees or initiate conversations about a specific employee's mental health.

Addressing burnout

As a supervisor, there are steps you can take to address burnout on your team.

- **Consult with employee assistance.** The Employee Assistance Office and LifeMatters offer unlimited management consultation with experienced counselors. They can offer practical suggestions on how you can support individuals or your entire team in an appropriate way to

reduce burnout, tips on how to have tough conversations about burnout or stress, or provide personal support if you're experiencing burnout yourself. Reach out to the EAO at eao@mailplus.wisc.edu or 608-293-2987. Contact LifeMatters for a management consultation at 1-800-634-6433 or text "HELLO" to 61295.

- **Check your boundaries, and support your employees in doing the same.** Oftentimes, the stress that leads to burnout also erodes boundaries between work and your private life. Model healthy boundaries by keeping work at work and maintaining a realistic understanding of your team's workload. Take time to take care of your mental and physical health, and pursue activities outside of work that you find meaningful. Encourage and support your employees in doing the same. When you can, advocate for policies that prioritize a healthy work-life balance.
- **Learn how to refer your employees to campus and community resources.** A supervisor can be a crucial part of an employee's support system, which can also include colleagues, friends, family, and community ties. You can help them learn more about the many free and confidential resources available to them to support their mental health. Supervisor recommendations are trusted, and are one of the most common ways that employees at UW-Madison learn about employee assistance. Connecting folks to the appropriate resources can make the difference between a disengaged, burnt-out employee and someone who is able to recover from burnout and once again feel valued and revitalized at work. You can always consult with employee assistance for suggestions on how to share this information in a way that makes employees feel valued and meaningfully supported.

Learn about stress management in free virtual session

LifeMatters and the Employee Assistance Office are offering a virtual webinar on stress management on Wednesday, May 4, 11 a.m.–noon via Zoom. *Stress or Success? Thriving in a Chaotic World* offers a roadmap for employees who hope to incorporate principles of stress management into their daily lives. Practical ideas will be provided for building resilience and reducing stress through:

- Mindset and attitudes
- Habits and actions
- Connections and relationships

This webinar is offered at no cost to all UW–Madison employees. [Register online](#) to receive the Zoom link.

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