

Avoiding Business Burnout

By: Margaret Benefiel

In today's 24/7 business environment, burnout is a major problem among business executives. How much time and money is your company losing because of executive burnout? Do you know you can avoid burnout in your staff--and reap higher profits? Here are four things you can do this week to avoid business burnout now and in the future:

Focus on self-transformation.

For example, practice re-writing your job description given your evolving challenges, and think about how to become the perfect candidate for the job you already have. A leader who focuses first on self-transformation will have the energy and perspective needed to thrive. A focus on self-transformation also inspires confidence from employees, and can keep a leader attuned to issues of organizational transformation. Bob Carlson, board member and recently retired co-CEO of Reell Precision Manufacturing in St. Paul, MN, took seriously the challenge of living up to Reell's values and principles and in the process, found himself transformed: "Having to frame decisions within the context of Reell's values and principles, has made me a better person." As a result, he found that he had more energy, made better decisions, and that employees had more confidence in him.

Empower others to take ownership of the organization's values and mission.

Help employees to find their personal passions and connect those to the organization's values and mission. Once employees share the vision for the organization's future, the leader's personal load is lightened. Jean Quinn, co-director of Sophia Housing in Dublin, Ireland, is committed to empowering everyone in her organization. She recently trained her managers in how to see themselves as leaders so they would feel comfortable taking more responsibility. Her load was lightened and the organization's effectiveness increased dramatically.

Practice listening.

Listening is a powerful tool for understanding an organization, building relationships, and knowing how to invest energy strategically. This practice manifests as leaders listen to themselves, to their senior leadership team, to individual employees, and to a higher power. A leader can also provide guidelines for employees that encourage respectful listening. The resources of everyone's inner wisdom then are brought to bear on problem-solving and more effective decisions result. Focused listening times can be employed during staff meetings, daily briefings, or during separate designated listening times. Jim Fitzpatrick, CEO of Mercy Medical Center in Mason City, Iowa, commits himself to listening to the pulse of the organization, especially when making major decisions. Recently he appointed a Mission Discernment task force to help him listen to the wisdom of clinicians, financial managers, and chaplains in deciding how to address pre-adolescent mental health needs. The result? An effective partnership with a local outpatient mental health agency that increased energy and vision for all concerned.

Take breaks.

Everyone needs times of pulling away for refreshment and perspective. Leaders can't afford not to take time apart for renewal. This can be as simple as a walk outside at lunch, or a commute listening to music that feeds one's soul. Seeking out supportive friends or mentors both inside and outside of the organization can also help refresh the leader. Furthermore, leaders can provide opportunities for their teams to be refreshed, thus lightening their load. Etta Erickson, program director of oncology programs at HealthEast, a healthcare system in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, holds an annual overnight retreat for the oncology leaders' partnership council. Retreats include meditation time as well as time for telling funny stories and playing golf. Frequent breaks renew energy, give new perspective, and increase creativity and productivity.

There are dozens more ways to avoid burnout and achieve greater effectiveness by bringing spirituality into the workplace, but just start by following these four simple strategies and see how quickly your energy is renewed.

About The Author

Margaret Benefiel, PhD, teaches spirituality and organizational leadership at Andover Newton Theological School in Boston, and is CEO of ExecutiveSoul.com. Author of *Soul at Work: Spiritual Leadership in Organizations* (Seabury Books, 2005), she speaks widely, leads workshops and retreats, and offers spiritual direction to executives and organizations. She serves as Program Chair of the Academy of Management's Management, Spirituality, and Religion Group. Over 300 executives, managers, and other leaders have participated in her seminars and courses. Learn more at <http://www.ExecutiveSoul.com>.