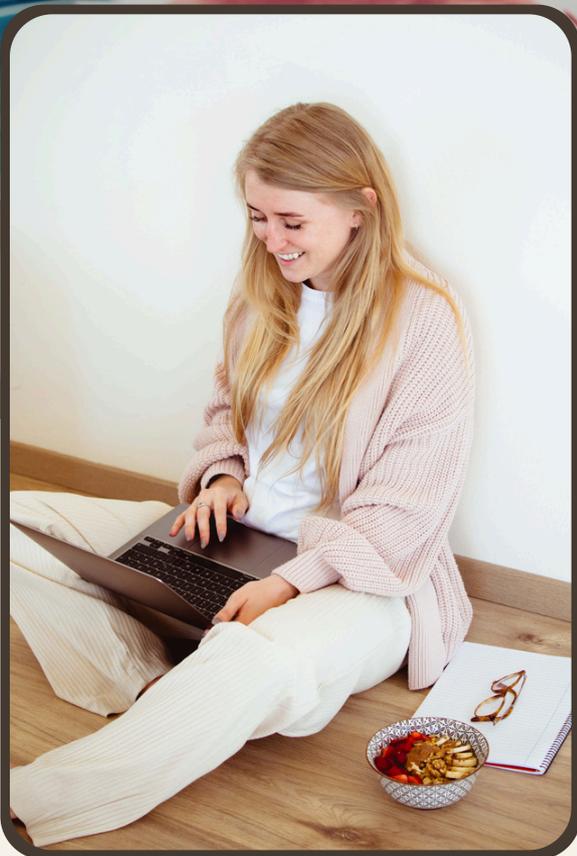


FROM BURNOUT TO RE-ENGAGEMENT

A Playbook for HR and People Teams

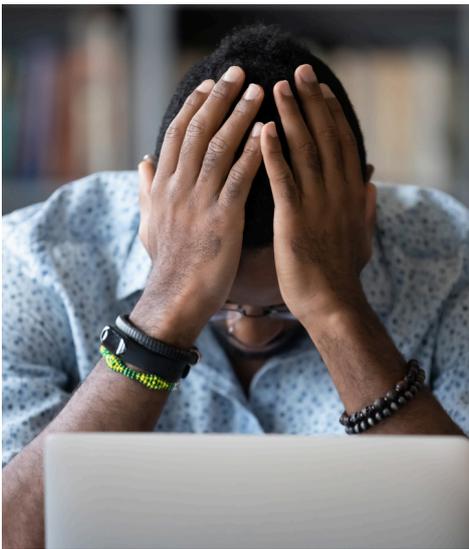


An informative guide
to repairing burnout in the
workplace

BY JESSICA RAYNO

Introduction

This guide is designed for HR leaders and people managers who are seeing the early signs of burnout—but are struggling to address it with the tools, language, or budget they currently have. If engagement is slipping, energy feels thin, or retention conversations are becoming more frequent, this guide is meant to help you intervene earlier and more effectively.



Did You Know?

Burnout isn't always obvious. Many employees continue to meet expectations while disengaging—making burnout easy to miss until productivity drops or turnover spikes.

Inside, we focus on solving a specific problem: how to move burnout from an abstract well-being concern into something you can identify, discuss, and address through practical workplace interventions. Rather than prescribing massive cultural overhauls, this guide centers on realistic actions HR teams can take—especially those that fit within existing programs, mental health budgets, and day-to-day workflows.

You'll walk away with clear language to name what's happening (from quiet cracking to disengagement), data you can use to build alignment with leadership, and tangible levers you can pull—such as development opportunities, manager enablement, and structured mental breaks. By reducing burnout we can improve productivity, retention, and morale.



Creative Thinking

Companies that foster creativity in the workplace are much more likely to be high-performance organizations, according to McKinsey.

Supporting creativity can be a great way to boost employee mental health and reduce burnout.

Burnout Leads to Significant Financial Costs to Your Business

Burnout is no longer a fringe issue — it's a systemic workplace challenge with measurable costs. According to a study published by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, it costs a 1,000 person company on average around \$5 million annually, from \$4,200 per salaried employee to \$10,000 for managers.

Shockingly, this means that burnout can cost employers more than health insurance, often more than double!

Key Impacts of Burnout

Burnout is a state of chronic stress that leads to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, lack of focus, and reduced productivity. When left unaddressed, burnout can drive turnover, increase absenteeism, damage workplace culture, and erode your employer brand.



- 1. Reduced effectiveness & innovation**
Burnout impairs focus, creativity, and motivation, leading to slower execution and lower-quality outcomes.
- 2. Employee health & attendance risks**
Sustained stress increases the likelihood of anxiety, depression, physical fatigue, and burnout-related leave, contributing to higher absenteeism.
- 3. Financial & operational costs**
Organizations experience losses through decreased productivity, higher turnover, recruitment and training expenses, and rising healthcare claims.
- 4. Erosion of engagement & culture**
Burnout spreads quickly within teams, lowering morale, weakening collaboration, and damaging trust in leadership.

Compounding the issue, employees may hesitate to speak up due to fear of repercussions, lack of perceived support, or a workplace culture that discourages open communication. In fact, on average only three out of ten employees feel comfortable enough to share their opinions at work.

Clearly, the costs of burnout are too high to ignore without negatively impacting the business. Fortunately, there are interventions that HR can implement to help prevent costly downstream impacts.

“As organizations navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape, including geopolitical uncertainties and the growing influence of AI, addressing burnout is not just a priority; it's a survival strategy.

Forbes

It's Not Just About The Salary

For employees, work satisfaction is no longer defined by salary alone. While fair compensation remains essential, people increasingly stay, engage, and perform at their best when they feel respected, supported, and connected to purpose. This behavior is even more prevalent in younger generations.

In a study performed by Ford, over half of U.S. workers were willing to take a 20% pay cut in exchange for a higher quality of life.

Employees Agree

76% of professionals have said that stress at work has negatively impacted their relationships.

72% stated that working in a job that increases personal stress isn't worth it.

Ford Trends

Apart from salary, where should strategic employers invest? It's no secret that stress is a pervasive issue in the modern workplace, so many businesses have been investing in wellbeing. In fact, 52% of U.S. companies offer employee wellness programs, with adoption continuing to increase over time as more organizations recognize their importance.

It makes sense that companies are investing in wellness – the results speak for themselves. Organizations with comprehensive wellness initiatives report a 24% reduction in healthcare costs and a 26% drop in sick days, while corporate wellness programs can boost productivity by up to 12%.

In fact, a Wellhub survey of 2,000 HR leaders found that nearly two-thirds of those with holistic programs are seeing an ROI of \$2 for every \$1 spent.

Similarly, a Deloitte analysis of seven companies over three years found an ROI of \$1.17–1.60, which grew the longer the programs were in place. This demonstrates that strategic wellness investments pay dividends for both employees and the business.

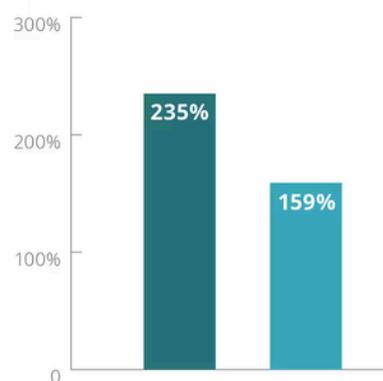
interesting data

An analysis by Deloitte shows a correlation between companies with high health & wellness scores and overall S&P 500 appreciation.

The ROI of investment in mental health programs

Stock appreciation based on S&P 500 Index of companies over six-year period

- Companies with high health and wellness scores
- Overall S&P 500 appreciation



Note: Both US and Canadian companies were included in this analysis.

Source: Deloitte analysis.

Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

“Don't think of well-being as a cost; instead, view it as an investment in the workforce's well-being and the overall forging of the company's resilience. [Forbes](#)”

Before Burnout: Quiet Cracking, Quiet Quitting, Boreout (and What They Reveal)

New terms related to burnout have been circulating, reflecting subtle disengagement beyond classic burnout.

- 1. Quiet Cracking**
Employees continue to function outwardly, but are unraveling internally. It's a less visible form of burnout where people cope just enough to stay employed while feeling deeply overwhelmed.
- 2. Quiet Quitting**
It's not about leaving the job, but scaling back effort to “just enough” — doing only what is required. It's a survival response to chronic stress and lack of recognition or support.
- 3. Boreout**
A mismatch between skills and tasks leading to boredom, lack of challenge, and frustration. Often overlooked, it's burnout by way of under-utilization.



Burned Out

“Overworked and burned out, it was time to stage my rebellion. I chose to work from home as much as possible, even when most of my colleagues were in the office. I'd wiggle my mouse to appear active, take long midday gym breaks, and became an expert on all plotlines of The Real Housewives franchise.”

[[business insider](#)]

Employees experiencing these challenges are less likely to go beyond their core responsibilities, contribute ideas, or participate in company events, resulting in growing disengagement. Over time, this disengagement can slow productivity and quietly erode trust and collective energy across the organization—often culminating in employees choosing to leave altogether.

“Quiet Cracking isn’t just a well-being issue—it’s a business issue”, says TalentLMS

“When employees quietly crack, they take productivity, creativity, and loyalty with them.”

The good news is that these patterns are early warnings and they are highly addressable when organizations intentionally implement support systems before disengagement becomes burnout or attrition.

Healing Burnout: Practical Strategies HR Can Lead Today

Healing burnout doesn’t require a sweeping cultural overhaul to begin making an impact. Many of the most effective interventions sit squarely within HR’s sphere of influence — small, intentional changes that improve clarity, capability, and day-to-day experience at work. When combined thoughtfully, these actions help employees reset, reconnect, and re-engage before burnout deepens.

1. Invest in Employee Development (and Let Employees Choose)

Feeling stagnant or undervalued is a major contributor to quiet cracking. Employees who receive comprehensive training at work feel more confident and efficient — especially when they have some agency in choosing what they learn. Development builds resilience by reminding employees that they are growing, not just producing.

HR teams can:

- Build skill variety into roles; Monotony and over-specialization contribute to quiet cracking. Try cross-training, stretch assignments, & short-term skill rotations
- Create low-pressure learning formats; not all training needs to be formal. Lunch-and-learns, peer-led sessions, microlearning modules, and creative workshops lower the barrier to participation and reduce learning fatigue
- Offer “how we work” training; Training in prioritization, workload management, communication boundaries, and decision-making reduces cognitive overload



interesting stat

Employees who receive training at work were 140% more likely to feel job secure, more confident and valued.

2. Enable Managers to Lead Well (Without Burning Out)

Managers drive your workplace culture, but they also deal with burnout themselves. The cost of manager burnout can be more than twice a salaried employee.

HR teams can:

- Promote a culture of wellbeing, starting from the top. Support leaders in prioritizing their own wellbeing through use of PTO, taking breaks, and setting work/life boundaries.
- Provide manager training that teaches managers how to be coaches. Implement assessments to identify training gaps in areas such as communication, task prioritization, and conflict resolution.
- Offer peer-level networking opportunities to reduce isolation and help managers learn and feel supported by other senior leaders.

Because managers directly shape daily experience, even modest improvements in how they listen and respond can significantly reduce stress and disengagement.

Managers can **boost employee performance by up to 29%** by connecting employees with individuals who have the right skills or knowledge to provide feedback and coaching based on each employee's development needs.

3. Create Psychological Safety Through Small Signals

Psychological safety is crucial for mitigating burnout while strengthening organizational resilience, according to the [Marsh 2024 Global Risks Report](#). However, it isn't built through grand declarations — psychological safety is created through everyday cues and consistent reinforcement.

HR teams can reinforce it by:

- Creating opt-in, low-stakes connection moments; peer appreciation, facilitated conversations, or fun group workshops allow people to show up as humans without pressure to perform.
- Embedding it into onboarding; introduce psychological safety concepts from day one to set the right tone and behavioral expectations for new hires.
- Creating opportunities to be messy, authentic, and imperfect in a low-risk environment.

When employees feel safe speaking up, they're more likely to raise concerns early — before stress becomes burnout.

What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological safety isn't about constant niceties; it's about creating an environment where productive disagreement is possible and people feel safe sharing ideas — even unfinished or unconventional ones.

[Forbes](#) describes four distinguishing features:

1. "I can bring my authentic self to work."
2. "I feel empowered to make decisions independently."
3. "Our work and work practices promote autonomy and dignity."
4. "I can voice my opinion openly without fear of repercussion."

4. Normalize Mental Breaks as a Productivity Tool

One of the most underused burnout interventions is intentional mental breaks during the workday. Burnout often builds not because people aren't invested in their work – but because they never fully disconnect or reset.

HR teams can:

- Encourage structured pauses in the workweek. Planned non-task time is linked with better health and performance outcomes.
- Offer creativity boosting experiences. Studies show that engaging in artistic activities can significantly boost team morale, foster open communication, and reduce stress.
- Position breaks as a way to restore focus, not reduce output. Science Direct found that engaging in workday respite activities (relaxing, enjoyable breaks) helps employees psychologically detach from work, increasing intrinsic motivation and decreasing stress.



Creativity-focused mental breaks give employees permission to step out of “doing mode,” actively interrupt burnout patterns, and help employees reconnect with themselves and each other.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Burnout is not an inevitable byproduct of modern work. It is the result of sustained pressure without sufficient recovery, clarity, or connection—and that means it is also preventable. As the data shows, the cost of inaction is high, but the path forward does not require massive structural change to begin making progress.

HR teams are uniquely positioned to intervene early: by investing in development, supporting managers, clarifying expectations, fostering psychological safety, and normalizing meaningful mental breaks during the workday. These actions help employees reset before disengagement turns into attrition—and help organizations protect both performance and people.

The most effective organizations are moving beyond passive wellness perks toward intentional, human-centered interventions that fit into the flow of work. When employees are given space to pause, reconnect, and engage creatively, they return with greater focus, energy, and resilience.

Addressing burnout is no longer just a well-being initiative—it's a strategic investment in the sustainability of your workforce. And it starts with small, thoughtful steps leaders can take today.

With the right strategy, workplace burnout becomes an opportunity to redesign healthier, more productive, and more human work.



Take a Creativity Break with The Cozy Artist

Need a way for your team to reset, reconnect, and recharge? Cozy Artist workshops bring hands-on creative experiences to your workplace – a proven way to lower stress, spark collaboration, and boost engagement.

Available for businesses local to New Hampshire, these sessions make intentional mental breaks easy, meaningful, and fun – giving your team a chance to step out of “doing mode” and return energized.



Thank you!

After 15 years as a corporate high performer, I see the burn out plaguing our employees. Now I'm working to heal the corporate world through art & creativity.

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