
burnout.io Documentation

Release 0.1

burnout.io

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“**Burnout** is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.” It manifests itself in ways including anxiety, loss of motivation and confidence, and even degradation of physical health. Burnout can be prevalent in organizations that promote **hero culture** and where employees maintain a strong **sense of duty** or feel they have no alternatives in the employment market.

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The following seems to be a reasonable approach to figuring out work-related burnout:

Determine if the causes are localized (self-inflicted). Determine if the causes are external (management, work environment, etc.) and if it can be changed. Find someplace new if the issues can't be fixed.

CHAPTER 2

Why?

At the 2014 DevOpsDays Pittsburgh conference, Jennifer Davis gave a talk titled, “From Hero to Zero” ([updated at DevOpsDays Boston 2014](#)) which sparked additional exploration of burnout during an Open Space discussion.

The site was originally built with IT professionals in mind, but the concepts here can apply to many other fields as well.

3.1 Actionables

3.1.1 Steps to Fighting Burnout

The general consensus seems to be that there are three steps in fighting against burnout:

1. Determine if it's self-inflicted.

If you can take some time off, be removed from on-call for a bit, or allow that next task to wait until you become yourself again, *do it*. Get some sleep and figure out what it will take to remove the strain.

The objective is to maintain a healthy work-life balance. **Stop being a hero.** There is no benefit if the toll is so great that your personal life and relationships suffer.

Make sure when you aren't in the office you spend some time doing something completely unrelated to your profession. We are all passionate about what we do, but if your hobby happens to be the same as your job, you may experience burnout much faster.

2. Determine if it's an external pressure.

- Management says they need that new feature *now*.
- You're not allowed to fix the technical debt and apply band-aids instead.
- You're constantly fighting fires.
- The only reason everything is working is because you put in too many hours a week.

If these sorts of situations sound familiar and you're burning out, it's time for the external factors to change.

Find out what is causing the problem.

Burnout can be caused by mindless repetition and interruptions. Or it can be middle-management setting unrealistic deadlines. Document the causes, then find ways to alleviate them.

Communicate the burnout to people who can help.

Sometimes all it takes is explaining the problem and talking it out with management and coworkers. Middle-management should exist to help specifically with these kinds of problems.

Say “no” to unreasonable requests.

Say “no” if a request is unreasonable, but try to provide feedback in order to prevent the pattern from continuing.

Don’t allow yourself to be talked down when it comes to time estimates. Instead, learn [Defense Against the Dark Art of Estimation Bargaining](#)

“Yes, and…”

If “no” doesn’t work, try using the [Yes, and… technique](#) in order to emphasize your willingness to work with the requester but also take the opportunity to establish some boundaries and tradeoffs.

For example:

- “Yes, we’ll make sure Feature X is our top priority, and to accommodate the new timeline we can put Features Y and Z on hold until the next release.”
- “Yes, we can plan on adding Project X to our responsibilities, and we can take some time to plan the hiring we’ll have to do in order to meet that goal.”

3.2 More Ideas

3.2.1 More ideas to help recover from burnout

Acknowledge your feelings.

How are you feeling? It is valid. Share your feelings with your support network. This helps build *resilience*. Recognize your state in the *exhaustion funnel* and how that will impact your decisions.

Build your identity.

You are more than your job. You are more than the contributions that you make to open source projects. Who are you?

Understanding who you are and what you value can help keep you afloat when traumatic events like a company layoff occur. If your identity is derived from your job, losing your job can leave you feeling like you have no meaning or value. Companies fail all the time. More startups close than make it to a finish line. Avoid tying your mental health to the success of something outside of your control.

Fuel up

Know yourself. Know what energizes or calms you. Whether it's reading, non-technical activity time, being off in a forest with the greenery, or something else. Monitor your "fuel" levels and recognize when you need to take a break. Talk to your Support network and ask them to give you external signals.

A few ways to fuel up at home & work

Take micro-breaks and play

It can help to take some time for micro-breaks and play. It sounds a bit unconventional to say "play," but it can be a helpful step in breaking the burnout cycle. Micro-breaks can be helpful by taking the step back from the work and getting your mind off of whatever is causing the burnout. Micro-breaks come in a variety of forms:

- Getting up from the desk/cube and taking 15 minutes to walk around the office, get outside, and get some air/sunshine
- Grab a colleague and talk about anything other than the task(s) at hand. This will take practice, but can be beneficial in ways other than taking a break—it may open doors to move to a position that can be less stressful
- Get a pair of baseball gloves, or a frisbee, go out into the parking lot (if available, if not, a green space), and toss the ball/frisbee around for a few minutes.

A note on micro-breaks:

If it's not possible to take these sorts of breaks, do your best to not take work home, if at all possible. The expectation that you have to work all the time, even at home, isn't realistic and can create feelings of guilt when not engaged in work. If this is the case for you, enlist the help of someone in your support community—a significant other, family member, peer or friend to help keep you accountable to not spend all of your time working and send you signals (or blatantly tell you) when work has become an unhealthy priority. When possible, take the time at home to enjoy your home and play

3.3 Resources

3.3.1 List of Resources

We've all struggled with being burnt out and it's not easy. That's why we've compiled a list of resources here that have helped us, as well as other in the community, in the fight against burnout.

Talking to a Real Person

There's always someone available in our gitter channel. If you'd like to talk with someone who's been through the cycle of burnout, reach out! We'd love to help in any way we can:

You can also find others you can talk to who have gone through similar experiences. There are people at conferences, on [Reddit](#), on [Twitter](#), and maybe even at your workplace who know what you are going through and can help.

Online Resources

- [Critical Mental Health Resources For College Students](#)
- [If Me](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid](#)
- [HelpGuide.org](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [NAMI Local Chapters](#)
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [BlueHackers](#)
- [Geek Mental Help Week](#)
- [Mental Illness Happy Hour](#)
- [Mind Mental Health Charity](#)
- [LIS Mental Health Doc](#)

Further Reading

There are a number of courageous people in the community talking about burnout, their experiences with it and how they've made progress. Read more about what they have to say at the [Further reading](#) page.

3.4 Further Reading

We've all faced burnout—here are some quotes from around the community.

“Horde statistics: 1 in 3 thought about quitting because of stress, 75% are not engaged with their work, over 1 million absent per day...” - [Avoiding Burnout: The Zombie Survival Guide](#) - David Manners

“EDD [Experience Driven Development] - some basic information around the topic mental health/illness in IT” - [EDD \(Experience Driven > Development\)](#) - Michael Scholl

“Mental disorders are the largest contributor to disease burden in North America, but the developer community and those who employ us are afraid to face the problem head-on. In this talk, we'll examine the state of mental health awareness in the developer workplace, why most developers feel it isn't safe to talk about mental health, and what we can do to change the culture and save lives.” - [Stronger Than Fear: > Mental Health in the Developer Community](#) - Ed Finkler

“While critically important as a tool to help, these solutions also don't directly address the path to burnout. They don't tackle the systemic problems within both startups and larger organizations that lead to burnout. They gloss over the patterned behaviors of sociopathic (or even merely incompetent) managers.” - [Dodging Burnout, 4 Hours at a Time](#) - J. Paul Reed

“You didn't mean to end up here. You didn't even see it coming... It all started with a chance to earn a living doing something you loved. Your dream job. Creating things instead of rotting in a cubicle. You weren't just going to make a living—you were going to leave your mark on the world.” - [The Cult of Work You Never Meant to Join](#) - Jason Lengstorf

“If... you work for someone for money, you’re just a factor of production... You’re trading your time, your skills, your talent for that money... Every time you stay after work late, you’re giving away that time away for free.” - [Go the F*** Home](#) - Pam Selle

“It is true that I would insist that I could handle it, and I guess I did, but don’t organizations have a responsibility to their employees to stop them from harming themselves in the name of the job?” - [A > Year of Fire and Fog](#) - Alex Nobert

“Sometimes it’s the feelings of burnout... things we struggle with in our jobs, particularly with some of the ill-defined tasks that we get as software developers, and some of the high-stress workplaces that we put ourselves in that demand constant contact and constant availability.” - ‘Node

3.5 Contribute

We value your ideas! If you’d like to help improve Burnout.io, do whatever works best for you:

- [Open an issue](#)
- [Fork the project](#) and submit a PR
- [Send an email](#)
- [Reach out on twitter](#)

3.5.1 Info for Contributing to Burnout.io

- This project is written in [reStructuredText](#) and [Markdown](#)
- Hosted by [Read the Docs](#)
- Tested by rendering in [Sphinx](#) on [Travis CI](#)

If you are looking to add content, fix formatting, syntax, typos or other wonderful things, please follow this process:

- Clone the project
- Install Sphinx: `pip install -r requirements.txt`
- Check out a branch to make your changes on: `git checkout --branch <my_topic>`
- Execute `make html` to build the docs in to `_build/`
- Make your changes
- Execute `make html` again and verify your changes don’t cause any warnings/errors
- Commit with a descriptive message, and submit a pull request from your branch to `master`
- We’ll review the change, and either merge it or provide some feedback. Community review is also encouraged.

3.5.2 Current Build Status

Documentation Status

[travis_build_status](#)