

advancing women in business



AVOIDING BURNOUT



CONTENTS



About this workbook

Section 1. The lead up to burnout 4
What do the symptoms of burnout look like? 5

Stage one: Stress arousal6What is stress?6The stress scale9Stress symptoms10

Stage two: Energy conservation 12
Change the situation 13
Change your reaction (become resilient) 13
Stage three: Exhaustion 14

Section 2. Being proactive about preventing burnout 16 Step changes 17 Work 17 Life 17 Personal 18 Set clear boundaries 20 21 Setting your boundaries Be proactive in your thinking 23 Build support networks 24 Pulling it altogether 26

Further reading 27

3



ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

FOUNDED IN 1999 EVERYWOMAN is an organisation that works to advance women in business.

Whether they are part of a large corporate entity, an SME or own a company, most people we come across are committed to their work life and want to do well for themselves and their stakeholders. The best way to achieve this is to make sure you look after yourself and your overall wellbeing, and be aware of the level of pressure and stress you are under. Most people we have met that succeed have usually learnt how to deal with the pressure from internal and external forces, and have not allowed the business to completely take over their lives. However, that is the big picture statement.

When we look at speci ic moments most people talk about a time when work almost or did become too much, and of times when a few or several balls tumbled to the ground.

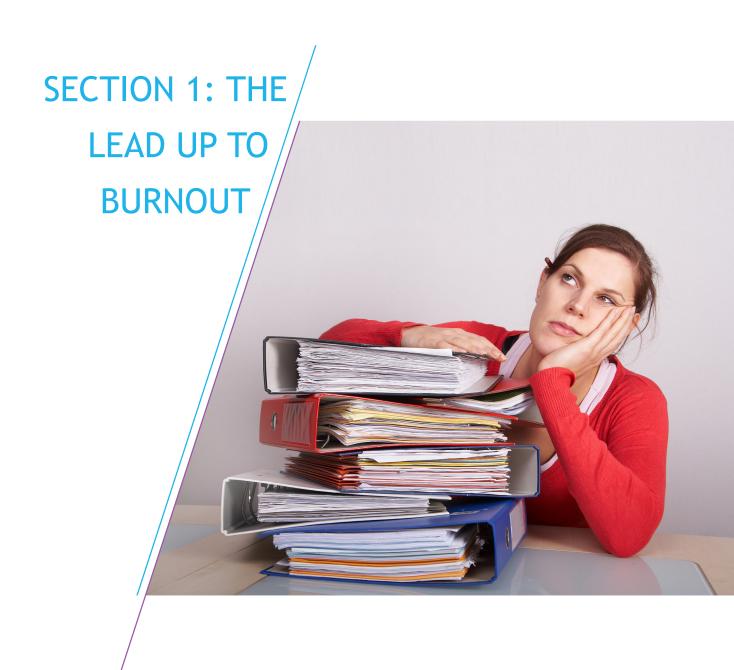
The term burnout is often used to describe a range of feelings of stress, which is why it is important to truly understand what

burnout is. A person might have a few external symptoms but more importantly there is very little working on the inside, and therefore it's very hard to kick start them back into action.

This workbook will help you recognise what working up to burnout looks like, so that you can proactively help yourself to deal with stress and pressure ensuring you don't hit the inal burnout stage. It is a guide to best practice. You will discover tools that will support you to build your resources and strengths, so you can deliver your best in the workplace and in your personal life.

Think carefully and take time to complete the exercises. Some may require deep thinking and getting perspective from other people so you can develop a workable action plan to keep pressure at an appropriate level.







The lead up to burnout

/ IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT TAKES A LOT FOR SOMEONE TO GET TRUE BURNOUT; it is not simply about being overly tired or demotivated. It is where you feel chronically fatigued and almost unable to participate in any part of work or life. We often see potential burnout approaching other people but as with many things in life, it is more difficult to recognise it in ourselves.

What do the symptoms of burnout look like?

Unlike intermittent stress, where we may feel bouts of anxiety and tension, burnout is a result of being in a prolonged state of anxiety.

Physically we could feel exhausted, drained, body unaligned, headaches, dizziness, loss of appetite, or notice changes to bodily functions.

Emotionally we could feel alone, unsupported, demotivated, negative, a sense of failure, unwilling to be part of something, or want to retreat into ourselves.

Behaviourally we might; push people away, isolate ourselves, snap at people.

Having one or two of these symptoms doesn't mean you have burnout, you need to look at them in relation to each other.

Take a few moments to think about which of these symptoms you may be feeling.

Physicians use three key phrases when describing all medical situations

- Acute sudden and major
- Chronic ongoing
- Preventive needed before you hit the above states

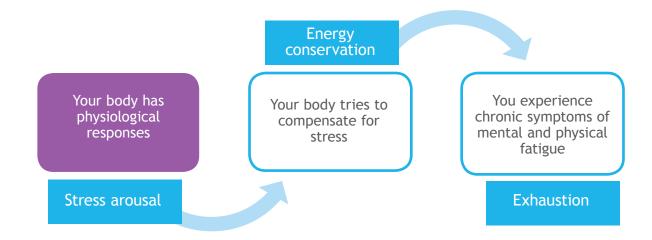
These also relate to stress and burnout, which means we should be able to prevent burnout happening if we take the correct steps and actions.

"Burnout is when you are emotionally, physically and mentally exhausted."

SUSAN SCOTT



To avoid or prevent something from happening we need to understand where it comes from and how to recognise it. Let's put it into context, burnout is what happens after the final stage of a negative build-up of sustained stress. The lead up to total burnout starts with stress arousal, which leads to energy conservation and finally exhaustion.



Stage one: Stress arousal

Avoiding burnout is about having the ability to recognise when negative stress is affecting you and making the effort to change what needs changing.

Sounds simple but in truth it takes effort, persistence and self-awareness, and of course practice. So let's try to ascertain where your stress might come from and ways you can handle it effectively.

What is stress?

The definition of stress is subjective because individuals have different triggers and coping mechanisms. Even physicians and researchers define it differently – is it about the circumstance, the action, the trigger, the emotion or the result? Probably everything!

Definitions include:

- Stress is often a harmful reaction people have to undue pressure and demands placed on them at work
- Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand
- Stress can be a response to an inappropriate level of pressure



What comes to your mind when you think of the word 'stress'? See how you feel and think when reading these statements:

- You are getting ready to leave work to have an anniversary dinner with your partner and your boss asks if you can practice for a major pitch to a new client
- You are trying to find a place to escape for a weekend break with friends
- A text message saying 'please call me urgently'
- You are stuck in heavy traffic on the way to an important meeting
- You have a third interview for a new job
- You have just found out you got a new role more challenging and demanding

Stress can:

- Give you energy to perform at your best
- Give you a focus
- Help you identify areas you need to develop
- Ensure you have the fight or flight response

Negative and unhelpful stress is often created by your mind jumping backwards or forwards. When this happens we lose focus, and the loss of focus is what can get the physical symptoms of stress kicking into action. It is part and parcel of who we are – its origins lie in a survival response that has been within us humans for all time – this is the fight or flight response.

When we are faced with a perceived 'threat', our brain releases glucocorticoids called adrenaline and cortisol - these prepare us for a fight, which is helpful in the right situation. The problem is that prolonged exposure to these glucocorticoids is usually harmful. The key is to use the adrenalin to help you stay focused and work out a plan of action.

To learn to truly manage stress you need to:

- Identify the sources of stress
- Understand your normal coping strategy
- Identify and take on board healthier ways to manage your stress.

1. Identify the sources of stress

Knowing your triggers of stress is important and we know stress triggers are subjective, but there are some events that will inevitably cause a stressful situation. Being able to identify the impact that these situations might have can be crucial to avoiding burnout.

Pressure can motivate you towards a deadline, help you make a decision, perform better and think positively (think about athletics competitions with 80,000 people watching, or speaking at packed conference). Negative stress often comes from pressure that has built up beyond a useful and comfortable level.



EXERCISE

| When has pressure helped you? |
|---|
| Thinking of your previous response, did this pressure build too much, and become negative stress? Give an example and what you think the trigger was. |
| What are some of your stress triggers? It may help to put them under the headings: |
| Work |
| Life |
| Personal |
| |

Are some stresses worse than others?

Some people find it helpful to be able to put a figure against the impact of events on stress. The Social Readjustment Rating Scale was created by Thomas Holmes & Richard Rahe at the University of Washington School of Medicine in the late 1960s, to provide a standardised measure of the impact of a wide range of common stressors.

Each life event is assigned a value in arbitrary 'life changing units' chosen to reflect the relative amount of stress the event causes in the population studied. Stress is cumulative, so to estimate the total stress you are experiencing, add up the values corresponding to the events that have occurred in your life over the past year.

This scale isn't there to increase your stress levels, it is about being able to try and objectively look at something that is very subjective. This can help you see the knock on effect of events in your stress at work.



The stress scale

To use the scale, simply add up the values for all of the listed life events that have occurred to you within the past year. If a particular event has happened to you more than once within the last 12 months, multiply the value by the number of occurrences. Enter your value total at the end of the list (overleaf).

| | Life event | Value | Tick if this applies |
|----|---|-------|----------------------|
| 1 | Death of a spouse | 100 | |
| 2 | Divorce | 73 | |
| 3 | Marital separation | 65 | |
| 4 | Jail term | 63 | |
| 5 | Death of a close family member | 63 | |
| 6 | Personal injury or illness | 53 | |
| 7 | Marriage | 50 | |
| 8 | Fired at work | 47 | |
| 9 | Marital reconciliation | 45 | |
| 10 | Retirement | 45 | |
| 11 | Change in health of family member | 44 | |
| 12 | Pregnancy | 40 | |
| 13 | Sex difficulties | 39 | |
| 14 | Gain of new family member | 39 | |
| 15 | Business readjustment | 39 | |
| 16 | Change in financial state | 38 | |
| 17 | Death of a close friend | 37 | |
| 18 | Change to a different line of work | 36 | |
| 19 | Change in number of arguments with spouse | 35 | |
| 20 | A large mortgage or loan | 31 | |
| 21 | Foreclosure of mortgage or loan | 30 | |
| 22 | Change in responsibilities at work | 29 | |
| 23 | Son or daughter leaving home | 29 | |
| 24 | Trouble with in-laws | 29 | |
| 25 | Outstanding personal achievement | 28 | |
| 26 | Spouse begins or stops work | 26 | |
| 27 | Begin or end school/college | 26 | |
| 28 | Change in living conditions | 25 | |
| 29 | Revision of personal habits | 24 | |
| 30 | Trouble with the boss | 23 | |



| | Life event | Value | Tick if this applies |
|----|---|-------|----------------------|
| 31 | Change in work hours or conditions | 20 | |
| 32 | Change in residence | 20 | |
| 33 | Change in school/college | 20 | |
| 34 | Change in recreation | 19 | |
| 35 | Change in church activities | 19 | |
| 36 | Change in social activities | 18 | |
| 37 | A moderate loan or mortgage | 17 | |
| 38 | Change in sleeping habits | 16 | |
| 39 | Change in number of family get-togethers | 15 | |
| 40 | Change in eating habits | 15 | |
| 41 | Vacation | 13 | |
| 42 | Christmas | 12 | |
| 43 | Other - describe and assign points yourself | | |

This table is taken from "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213-218, Copyright © 1967 Published by Elsevier Science Inc.

Now add up your scores.

People react differently to stress – it is about their ability to cope. But general guidelines are that if you score under 150 you probably have a low level of stress triggers and therefore are less prone to developing a stress-related disorder such as burnout and the knock on effect.

Over 300 you have about an 80% chance of developing sickness and burnout. The key word is 'chance' – this book will help you think about how you can prevent and handle negative stress so that chance will become much smaller.

Stress symptoms

Now you have identified where your stress might come from let's look at the symptoms it evokes. These symptoms are the first stage of burnout – stress arousal.





Anxiety is our reaction to feeling 'something isn't quite right'. We feel uncomfortable with a situation and usually the anxiety builds as we become more and more unsure of the outcome or the way to solve the problem. This is where negative self-talk and doubt comes into play.

Tension builds up as a reaction to anxiety. When we hit that 'fight or flight' moment chemicals are released in our system that cause our body to tense up, in order to be ready to take on the stressor.

Physically our body can react in many ways. You will probably know your own physical indicators which may include your heart beating quickly, head rush or dizziness, stomach ache, headache (especially tension headache, which can often be felt up your spine and through your neck), twitches, trembling, fatigue, inability to fall asleep or stay asleep.

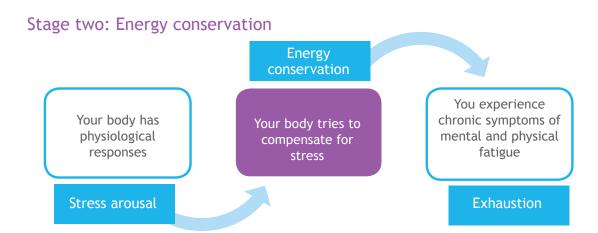
Which of these symptoms have you felt in the past (or maybe now)? How do you cope under stress now? Everyone reacts differently so it is important to understand what you are experiencing when you feel stressed, and how you perceive that you cope with the stress. The key to stress management is to learn from your own experiences and make the adjustments you need, to be more effective the next time.

EXERCISE

| Describe a recent situation you found stressful. Be specific about the forms of stress you experienced and what you did to cope. How did the coping work out? Would you prefer to have seen and done things differently? Try and articulate these clearly. |
|--|
| A recent situation I found stressful was: |
| I experienced the following forms of stress: |
| I coped by: |
| The outcome of my coping was: |
| Looking back at the situation, I would have preferred to: |
| This would have achieved: |

Reflective practice is one way to learn from what we have experienced in the past. Use this whenever you have been through a situation that you handled well and want to learn from, or want to deal with differently.





The second stage of the lead up to burnout is what you do to compensate for the stress you have started to build up. It may be that you deal with it positively, for example realising you need more sleep, learning to say'No', getting help from others, or exercising more, etc. However many of us don't do this and the negative side of energy conservation can look like this:

- Being late for work, social events
- Saying no at the last minute
- Procrastinating
- Avoiding intimacy
- Increase use of caffeine products or prescription drugs/alcohol
- Negative self-talk
- Apathy
- Becoming cynical

EXERCISE

Can you think of a time when you have experienced any of the above, as a result of pressure and negative stressful situations?

What was the situation?

What did you do to 'conserve energy'?

How were you able to avoid (or not) heading for exhaustion?

Sticking to the status quo won't work. You need to make a change.



Change the situation

- 1. Avoid the situation
- Be in control and learn to say 'No' even if to yourself
- Differentiate between 'must' and 'could'
- Avoid people or topics that fire you up

If you can't avoid it alter it

- Turn inner dialogue outwards by either speaking to a trusted friend or writing a journal
- Seek support
- Put in your own restrictions/boundaries (see handling boundaries section)
- 2. Change your reaction (become resilient)

Adapt how you react

- Shift perspectives
- Put the situation in context
- Find something positive as a take away

Understand what you can't change

- Identify what you can influence and what you can be concerned about
- Learn to get over things
- Don't let one situation bleed into another
- Learn how to take time out to de-stress and relax

EXERCISE

What can you do to positively handle stress?

What has worked in the past?

What should you do more of?

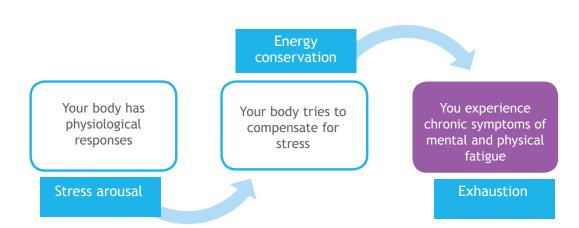
What have you seen work with other people that you would like to try?

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."

AMERICAN THEOLOGIAN REINHOLD NIEBUHR



Stage three: Exhaustion



The last phase before burnout is exhaustion.

This is often where people get a sense that something is wrong. Stress arousal and energy conservation may be reactions we have had throughout our life at a variety of times and we have learned, maybe subconsciously, to pull back and find ways to deal with the unhelpful stress.

Exhaustion is where we start to give up and the symptoms become so chronic and intense that we can't really miss the signs. They include chronic sadness, depression, negativity, withdrawing completely from family and friends, chronic headaches and chronic tiredness.

It is important to note the build-up to burnout is a process and this means you should have the opportunity to recognise the symptoms presented, and then be proactive in precluding burnout. Here are some triggers that can lead to burnout:

| Work | Not being valued Having no control over your work and work load Job expectations - much too high or much too low Unrelenting pressure Unhealthy and negative environment Being unable to challenge behaviour or decisions |
|----------|--|
| Life | Having no work/life integration Letting go of social interaction and fun activities Not having down-time |
| Personal | Lack of self-awareness of what is happening to you Lack of self-esteem Wanting to control everything (and often everyone) Being a perfectionist Always holding yourself up against higher standards than others |



EXERCISE

Looking through the list of triggers (and add some of your own), what could eventually lead you to burnout?

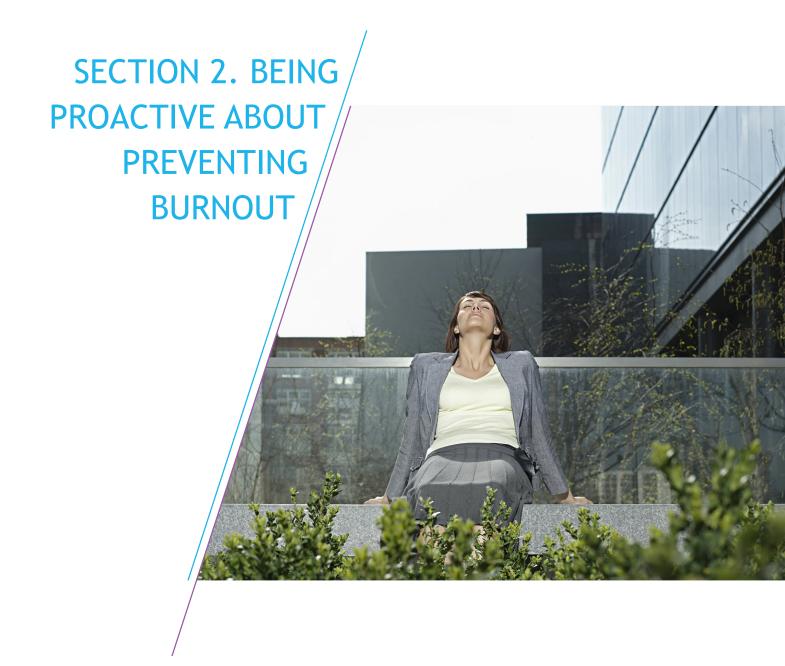
We often hear the term work-life balance, but most of us know realistically it is more about being able to positively integrate your work and life at a level you feel comfortable with.

If something is not working in one part of our lives it can easily have a knock on effect to other aspects. Likewise, and more importantly, if something is working well, or you have achieved balance in one aspect of your life, you can help yourself to realise this impact throughout. For example, if you are eating healthily and getting proper rest you can more easily face the long hours and challenges that work throws at you.

"Burnout is not a condition that gets better by being ignored. Nor is it any kind of disgrace."

HERBERT J. FREUDENBERGER







Step changes

WE EXPLORED SOME OF THE TRIGGERS THAT CAN LEAD TO BURN OUT

AT WORK, in life and in your personal life in the previous section of the workbook. Here we look at some step changes you could consider to address some of the triggers:

Work

- Have an open and honest discussion with your line manager
- Spread your work load delegate
- Prioritise your workload what is really important and business critical, what can wait?
- Review your work flow and processes how can they be stream-lined or even eliminated?
- Create workable, realistic goals and build an action plan to achieve them
- Know how to use your technology to your best ability
- Understand how much of your day is proactive versus reactive and plan accordingly
- Know what your values are and ensure they are aligned with your work
- Get your work environment right for you is your desk cluttered?
- Manage your career create a workable career plan
- Build in learning and reflecting time
- Celebrate your successes
- Set clear boundaries

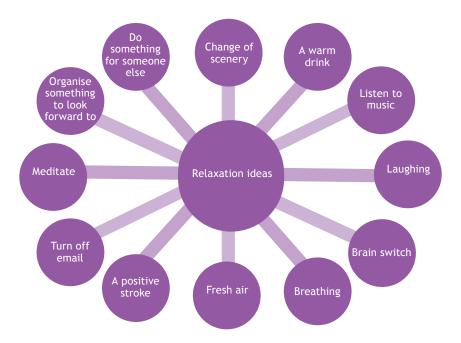
Please note: Many of these actions fall under being able to manage your time effectively. Read the everywomanNetwork workbook 'Managing Your Time' for more details.

Life

- Build a good support network
- Get some proper sleep
- Take in fresh air
- Exercise regularly; this could include walking with a friend or a dog, using stairs instead of the elevator or joining a sports team
- Watch what you eat. Enjoy eating but make sure some of it is healthy and nutritious, trying new foods and cooking can be a good way to switch off
- Make time to switch off technology



Take a break and relax, consider which of these relaxation ideas might work for you:



Online tools like www.getsomeheadspace.com are great for meditation and relaxation.

What can you do to revitalise yourself and sustain your energy and commitment, knowing that working life often exhausts your resources?

Personal

These are things many of us do when we feel under pressure or stressed, and should be avoided:

- Drink excessive amounts of coffee, energy drinks or alcohol
- Take risks you shouldn't
- Stay up late and wake up early trying to work every moment
- Fight against those who are trying to help
- Deny the existence of pressure or stress

There is a very strong correlation between those people who are high in emotional intelligence and the ability to avoid negative stress. Being emotionally intelligent involves a high level of self-awareness and self-motivation so:

- Know what your hot buttons and triggers are
- Work towards a goal and know when you are going off course
- Shift your perspective and be proactive in your thinking
- Break out of negative self-talk
- Turn pessimistic thinking into optimistic thinking

2. BEING PROACTIVE ABOUT PREVENTING BURNOUT



EXERCISE

| Write down the items on your 'vice' list that could be a warning that your stress is turning negative. |
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| When we try to be perfect, we are setting ourselves up to fail. Think about the realistic step changes you can make toward avoiding burnout. |
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Set clear boundaries

SETTING BOUNDARIES AT WORK IS ALL ABOUT THE NEED TO CLARIFY what is acceptable to you and what is not, in terms of many workplace issues including social behaviour, spillage into personal life, the space we need, and the degree of autonomy and freedom we have within our job role. Most importantly, learn how to set and work within boundaries, and then be proactive about prevention.

This sets the expectation of what we will and will not accept, so that we can clearly see when things aren't working as they need to, so we can do something about it.

When you are a child, boundaries are clearly set for the most part. As you grow, the boundaries become redefined and are less rigid. When we enter the business world, we know boundaries exist but they are often a movable feast and very much in the eye of the beholder. For example, if you don't mind being called on the weekend for a work issue the chances are you will (often subconsciously) have the same boundary for those you manage.

There are some boundaries that are usually very clear for example, sexual harassment or bullying, lying, stealing, verbal and physical abuse.

Managing expectations is vital in getting boundaries clarified and understood, so when starting a new role, project or assignment make sure you know:

- Who you report to
- Who reports directly to you
- What indirect reporting looks like in your organisation
- How confidentiality is kept in your organisation
- Who is responsible for giving you feedback
- Who should/can you give feedback to and about
- Who gives you assignments, sets your priorities and clarifies your objectives

Understand the interpersonal boundaries that you need to be aware of and may need to set. These will include how you communicate with people, how to separate work and personal life, and awareness of mindsets and unconscious bias.

We spend a lot of time at work so often get to know people quite well. Remember though that people hold different boundaries - some will find it uncomfortable to discuss private matters, or will tell too much in your view. Some will happily discuss what they do outside the office others will not. You need to be really aware of this when someone new joins your team, you may have a high threshold on office banter and fun, which may be deemed as unsuitable or uncomfortable for the new member of the team.



Our mindsets and unconscious bias can often frame how we interact with someone, so be aware of some of the subconscious boundaries you may have. For example, not giving someone a piece of work to do because you don't like their boss, not including someone in an email because of their behaviour towards a colleague or perhaps giving someone a great project to work on because they went to the same university as you. We often don't realise that we have made these decisions and they can form real or perceived boundaries in other peoples view.

Setting your boundaries

- 1. Determine what your own boundaries and limits are, these should include areas you have no flexibility on, and those which are moveable or perhaps don't even matter to you personally. E.g. when you first started work you may not have had boundaries in the hours you put in and when you could be contacted to come in to work at the last minute. Now you may have commitments that fall on a specific day so you are not available. List a few of your boundaries and note how flexible they are.
- 2. Share and communicate these boundaries with the relevant people, be clear about who needs to know.
- 3. Be open to discussion and understand the knock on effect of being too rigid with your boundaries. How does your discussion need to look or sound?

It is never too late to establish boundaries, so even if you are feeling overwhelmed and worried about changing parameters, it is better to have the conversation and negotiate a way forward than allow the boundary vagueness to turn into negative stress and affect you more deeply. It is so much easier than trying to push back once burnout has hit you full force.



EXERCISE

| Think about situations you are uncomfortable with: |
|--|
| Who is involved? Example: the person who sits next to me. |
| What is the boundary? Example: she makes little, often inappropriate, comments as others walk by. |
| How does it look now? Example: she says things and I try to ignore her. Sometimes she repeats them to make sure I have heard but not in a nasty way. |
| How would you like it be? Example: I don't want her to make the comments because I don't want to be perceived as enjoying them and it also distracts me from my work. |
| What can you do about it? Example: have an honest conversation. Tell her that it makes you uncomfortable and that although maybe you know she knows everyone in the office, you are not interested in hearing details about individuals. Also mention that it distracts you. |
| What I can do to broaden that support network? |



Be proactive in your thinking

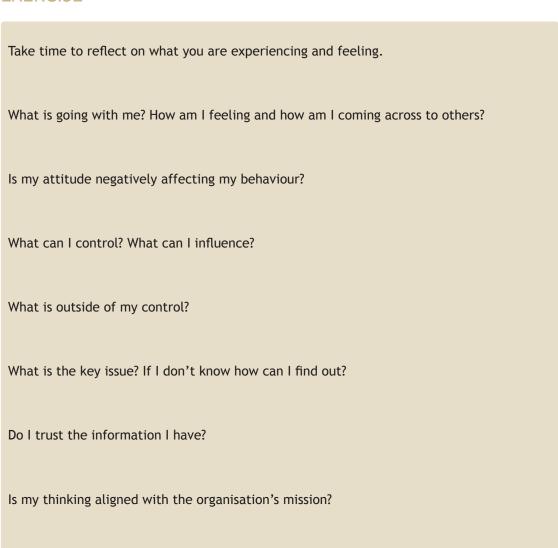
AS WE MENTIONED EARLIER THE BODY KICK-STARTS A RANGE OF REACTIONS

when exposed to stressful situations, and your thinking pattern is no different. Being self-aware is vital because if you are going to avoid burnout you must understand our own pressure-handling cognitive process.

When you are feeling tense or stressed through this process will help you take control.

- 1. Identify that there is a reason for tension and stress in the first place
- 2. Be aware of internal (often negative) talk
- 3. Tune into your attitude, this will in turn affect your behaviour
- 4. Be honest with yourself about the situation

EXERCISE





Build support networks

TWO-THIRDS OF BRITONS SAY THEY HAVE FEWER THAN FIVE PEOPLE THEY CAN COUNT ON IN A CRISIS, according to the YouGov survey of 2,045 internet users, which was commissioned by Links of London.

Feeling alone, without an idea of who can help, is a typical symptom of burnout, so it's important to know who we can turn to for advice, support, resource and inspiration. The last thing you want to worry about when you are under pressure is figuring out who can help and how much you can trust them.

EXERCISE

Take some time to think about who you can call on when you feel you can't quite do it all on your own. In the past few months, who have you supported and how did you help? Who can do the same for you?

Think about different aspects of your life inside and outside the work environment, and the people you engage with. What are their strengths and who can give you the right kind of support?

Now let's use this as a starting point to create a list of stakeholders who can help you when things go wrong, and understand how they can help you. You may still need help from someone you cannot completely trust, because they may offer you a resource you can't otherwise tap into. Just speak to them with caution.

Complete the following. My support network includes:

| Person's Name | How they can help |
|---------------|-------------------|
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Review your list and see if there are any areas you may need help with that can't be covered by anyone in your network. If there are, make a plan to broaden your network over the next three months, again be proactive and don't wait until the crisis has occurred to find out who can help! (See the everywomanNetwork wookbook 'An Introduction to Building Strong Networks' for more about this).

| What areas might I need support in that I don't have someone who I can call on? |
|---|
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| What I can do to broaden that support network? |
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Pulling it all together

YOU SHOULD NOW FEEL MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT WHAT BURNOUT IS AND THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO AVOID complete burnout. Remember it is a process, which means you should have time to turn things around, if you choose to. Try incorporating the habits and tips in this workbook into your life, work and personal, and you will surely notice a difference in yourself and the situations you find yourself stressed about.

Start out by

Identifying your stress triggers and looking at the stressful situations and your reactions. Take time to reflect so that you can learn from your successes and mistakes.

Then

Learn how to identify what works for you and what the knock-on effect is. Come up with ways to be proactive in dealing with your triggers. Develop your own list of relaxation ideas to pull from.

Finally

Understand that stress and pressure can be a great help to get work done and keep energy going. Learn to differentiate between good and bad stress and help others you work with understand how to change situations so they are best placed to continue to work effectively and productively. Prevention of burnout is essential in leading a happy healthy life.

Recognise what you can do specifically, don't just think about it, make a plan and put it into action!



advancing women in business



This workbook has been produced and edited by everywoman, with content commissioned from associate expert Sara Parsons. It is part of the everywoman portfolio of resources that have been specially created to support and develop women as they advance their careers and businesses.

everywoman Expert



Sara Parsons has been an everywoman Associate for 10 years and has worked in the field of Personal Development globally for 16 with clients such as; Paramount Pictures, The RSA, Ipsos MORI, RNLI, Oxford University Press. She holds an honours business degree and is a qualified expert in many professional assessments including Belbin and MBTI - the Myers-Briggs profile. Sara is passionate about inspiring and supporting women to reach into the potential they often don't know they possess.

Further reading

- Darrin Zeer The Office Spa
- Butler and Tony Hope Manage Your Mind: The Mental Fitness Guide
- Elizabeth O'Brien The Stress-Free You: How to Live Stress-Free and Feel Great Every Day, Starting Today
- everywomanNetwork's Managing your Time and Tackling Critical Situations.

Go to everywoman.com/development for more personal development workbooks, tools and a schedule of our online seminars.

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