



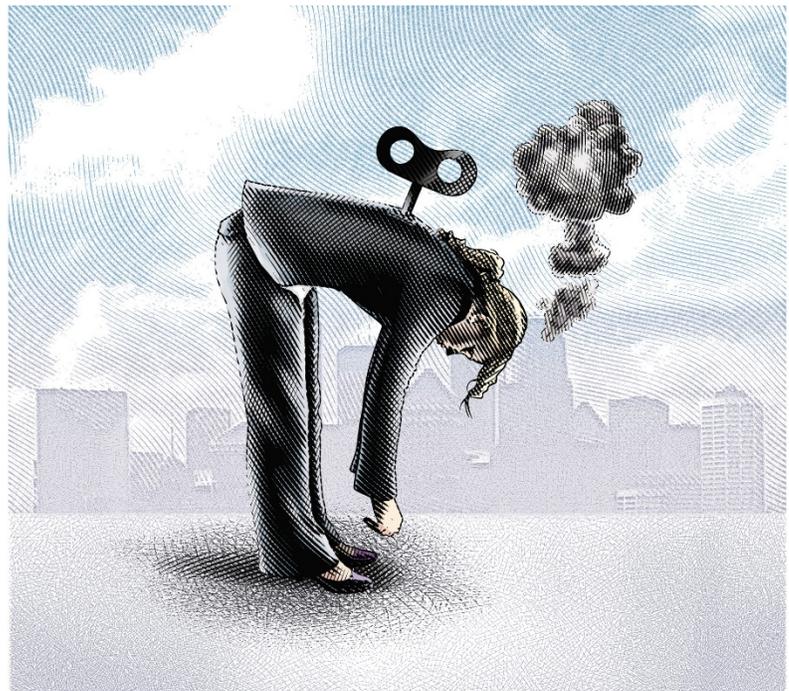
HOW TO COPE WITH BURNOUT

Work-related burnout or the inability to manage work demands that exceed your ability to cope often due to diminished resources including diminishing time, mental and energetic resources, and often a consequent diminishment in the willingness to invest the effort needed to complete work tasks.

In an article in the European Journal of Clinical Investigation entitled “Strategies used by individuals to prevent burnout,” researchers identified three ways in which people tend to react to burnout:

PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Problem-focused coping is an attempt to respond directly to the stressful situation in a way that makes it less demanding and more motivating. This could involve restructuring the work, learning new ways to perform a task, or eliminating some of the internal or external stressors that make work difficult. The effectiveness of problem-focused coping



has been found to depend on whether or not an employee has sufficient control over the potential stressors in the environment. Persistent use of problem-focused coping strategies when there are few possibilities of controlling or changing the environmental stressors can make things worse.

EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING

Emotional-focused coping attempts to alter the emotional response to stressful events. Reacting to emotional exhaustion or disengagement at work may reinforce feelings of helplessness and futility. It is not recommended.

AVOIDANCE COPING

Avoidance coping is a refusal to face problematic or stressful situations. In less controllable circumstances, strategies oriented to the problem in combination with strategies geared to avoidance have been found to be useful for improving adaptation and well-being. In other words, if you can change things, try that. If you have no power to change, don't obsess about it. Otherwise, avoidance is not recommended.

In their examination of coping strategies for managing demands that exceed an individual's resources, the researchers developed a new model called SOC: combined use of Selection, Optimization and Compensation. These strategies, alone or in combination, were found to buffer the unfavourable effects of burnout. The SOC model was developed partly to explain how individuals might deal with diminishing resources that come with illness or physical deterioration – conditions that are especially applicable to aging workers. It consists of the following management strategies:

- **Selection:** This involves selecting the goals to pursue – acknowledging that you can't accomplish everything – and then setting goal priorities. It may include abandoning nonimportant or less critical goals.
- **Optimization:** This is about optimizing and using goal-relevant means. For example, it may mean learning new procedures for performing certain tasks or making other attempts at adaptation.
- **Compensation:** This involves using compensatory means to maintain goal attainment when previously employed resources are no longer available or blocked. It might entail using external aid.

A combined use of selection, optimization and compensation strategies has been found to buffer the unfavourable effects of burnout-related disengagement from task performance, including the failure to adapt to organizational change. Compensation was found to be the most successful strategy in buffering these problems. Using different external resources, such as the help of others or technology, helps to relieve some of the stress associated with burnout. It is even more effective when used in conjunction with optimization – by increasing effort or by learning new skills. The selection has the obvious disadvantage of eliminating some tasks, which will then be left incomplete. The ultimate goal of the SOC strategy is to facilitate optimal allocation of individual resources so that people can function in the face of challenges.

IN THE WORKPLACE

Of course, you're not alone in this. In some cases, especially when an employee does not have control over potential changes in the environment. Additional research shows that employers can also take actions to eliminate stress factors on the job. Here are some examples:

- Job redesign or labour flexibility practices that prioritize an employee's wellness. This could mean flex hours, job sharing or outsourcing some of the work.
- Secondary interventions framed to assist employees in coping with work stress, including wellness programs, planned social events, provision of recreational facilities, stress management training and development.
- Tertiary interventions, aimed at helping employees who already have formed signs and symptoms of illness and other adversarial outcomes from work stress and burnout. These can include remedial actions such as counselling, employee assistance programs and rehabilitation sessions.

REFERENCES

European Journal of Clinical Investigation, November 2015, Evangelia Demerouti

Human Performance Management Group, Department of Industrial Engineering & Innovation Sciences, Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Occupational Stress: A Review on Conceptualisations, Causes and Cure Akanji Babatunde Doctoral Researcher, University of Wales, United Kingdom, Royal Hill, London, United Kingdom, SE10 8RD

Economic Insights - Trends & Challenges is the property of Petroleum - Gas University of Ploiesti

© Public Services Health and Safety Association