

# Achieving More by Doing Less - How Burnout Prevention Can Improve Productivity

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# The problem

- Most of us work in a fast-paced environment
- A lot of us enjoy being busy
- We are often asked to “do more with less”
  - ... which translates to working longer hours

# The problem

- We can do it for a two week sprint, and crush it
- We can do it for a month straight
- We can't do it forever

# The problem



TECH

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Laurence Bradford Former Contributor

I write about tech companies, careers, and in-demand skills.

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# The problem

- If we refuse to stop, our bodies will force us to



# Burnout

- Chronic response to stress in the workplace
- Characterized by:
  - Exhaustion
  - Depersonalization
  - Reduced personal accomplishment

# Exhaustion - Not just feeling tired

- Physical Exhaustion
- Mental Exhaustion
- Emotional Exhaustion

# Exhaustion - Not just feeling tired

- Thoughts like:
  - I can't get out of bed today
  - I can't do this
  - I can't deal with this

# Depersonalization - Just a cog in the machine

- Feelings of being a robot just going through the motions
- You don't feel "like yourself"
- Loss of empathy towards others

# Depersonalization - Just a cog in the machine

- Thoughts like:
  - What did I even do all day?
  - Why can't (coworker) get their #@#\$%^ together?
  - I am surrounded by incompetence

# Reduced Personal Accomplishment

- Finding no meaning or joy in the work we do
- Feeling ineffective
- Poor professional self-esteem

# A potentially explosive mix

- Scenario:
  - You are surrounded by ineffective #\$\$%!@
  - You are exhausted and feel like you are carrying the team alone
  - You don't feel like you are achieving anything
- ... What happens next?

# The ‘\${introvertOrExtrovert}plosion’

- Weakly correlated with introversion and extroversion, people may:
  - Explode: And everyone hears it
  - Implode: And they “disappear”



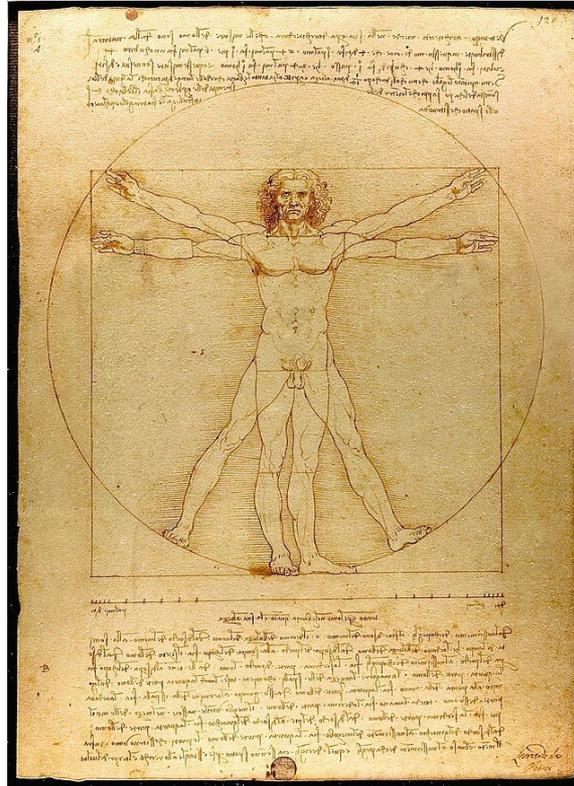
## ... and not just at work

- People bring their burnout home
  - Interpersonal conflict with family members
  - Exhaustion even when not at work
  - Decreased feelings of personal accomplishment in all areas of life

# How do I know if I am experiencing burnout?

- If you:
  - Feel frustrated and unsatisfied at work
  - Struggle to get through your day
  - Are having frequent arguments/disagreements at work (or at home)
  - Find it hard to interact with others and just want to be left alone
- You may be experiencing burnout

# The Limits of the Human Body



# How can we avoid burning out?

- We should work within the limits of what our bodies are able to do!

# The Limits of the Human Body

- How long can you focus on a task non-stop?

# The Limits of the Human Body

- Out of the 8 (...ish) hours we work every day, how many hours are truly productive?

# Our limits

- Our body is a finely tuned machine that evolved over millions of years

# Our limits

- ...for hunting, gathering and all sorts of things we never do anymore



# The solution

- The human body is great at two things:
  - Short bursts of intense activity
  - Long stretches of moderate activity

# The solution

- Leverage the strengths built into our body
- **Avoid spending energy on low yield efforts**
- Give yourself the best chance to be productive during your productivity window

# What works?

- Creating the right environment for ourselves
- Learn to notice the signs that your body is reaching its limit
  - And accept that the limits may vary from day to day

# Take a break so you can go home earlier

- ???

# Take a break so you can go home earlier

- Take **meaningful** breaks
  - Stop thinking about work!
- Take **enough** breaks
- Don't “multitask”

# Mindfulness

- Being present and “in the moment”
- Accepting the ups and downs of the workplace
- ... taking breaks (did I mention that?)
- Little routines or rituals that ground you

# Pomodoro method

- Blocks of 25 minutes of work followed by 5 minute breaks
- A longer 15-30 minute break every 4 blocks of work

# Take a break to go home earlier

- Find ways to reset from a “burst of intense activity” to allow you to do it again
- ... and again
- ... until it's time to go home

# What works?

- Learn to say no
- Learn to accept when others say no to you

# Managing to increase productivity



# How to achieve more by doing less?

- Limiting stretches of “above and beyond” effort for any one person (or team)
- You won't get 40+ hours of productivity out of every worker every week

# Above and beyond

- Teams should achieve their goals on time more often than not
- If not, the goals (or the team) needs to change

# Above and beyond

- The unexpected happens
  - It's fair to ask people to work hard
  - It's not fair to set that as the new baseline

## To summarize:

- Learn about your own limits
- Respect your limits
- Aim for achievement, not just being busy
- As a manager, reward high performing teams with *normal* periods, not just more high-intensity work

# Thank you!

- Questions?

# Don't suffer in silence

- Talk to your family doctor
- Reach out to your workplaces' EAP, or a professional therapist
  
- [matiaswengiel@gmail.com](mailto:matiaswengiel@gmail.com) - feel free to reach out if you'd like to talk about burnout (or anything else)

# References

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