Recognizing Burnout

What is Burnout?

Burnout is defined as a pervasive state of mental, physical and emotional exhaustion. Burnout is multidimensional, often due to several conflicting roles, events and responsibilities in your life. It can result in a number of adverse effects, such as anxiety, depression, feeling overwhelmed and isolated, and an inability to meet demands. Common stressors include a combination of: job demands, school demands, carer fatigue, and interpersonal conflict. One's experience with burnout is highly personal and subjective, thereby, signs of burnout may vary.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE BURNOUT IN YOURSELF:

➢ Lack of energy and motivation, easily fatigued
➢ Frequent illnesses such as colds, migraines, headaches, muscle pains
➢ Changes in appetite
➢ Change in sleep quality and/or quantity
➢ Chronic feelings of self-doubt
➢ Irritability
➢ Cynicism and pessimism
➢ Feelings of isolation
➢ Feelings of dread
➢ Loss of satisfaction from activities that previously were enjoyable
➢ Putting off things to do
➢ Disengaging from work, family, or personal responsibilities
➢ Substance abuse

Burnout is often co-morbid with or precedent to many mental health problems. It is important to recognize these symptoms early to address them at their root or reach out for professional services.

Treatment:

➢ Seek professional help through workplace referrals or EAP
➢ Counselling
➢ Self-care behaviour (i.e. Meditation, exercise, reading)
➢ Short-term or long-term break (from work or familiar responsibilities)
➢ Reduce screen time
➢ Build or call upon your social network
➢ Seek community support groups or support services

How to Recognize burnout in your employees

It is important as a manager, supervisor or team leader to recognize if one of your employees may need help. While burnout can begin in any facet of an employee's life, it has ripple-like effects that will inevitably carry over to their work life. Look out for the following signs and aim to address these signs with compassionate language:

➢ Loss of enthusiasm in their work
➢ Frequently working late
➢ Unable or difficulty in meeting deadlines
➢ Disinterested or quiet demeanor
➢ Seemingly detached from their environment and coworkers
➢ Interpersonal conflict
➢ Decline in overall performance

Potential Causes:

➢ Lack of control
➢ Lack of accommodations or supports
➢ Conflicting responsibilities
➢ Inadequate resources to perform job
➢ Uncaring/unsupportive workplace culture
➢ Lack of time
➢ Lack of rewards
➢ Financial constraints

Prevention:

➢ Increase participation in decision making processes. This gives employees greater control in their own choices and ability to contribute to decisions, thereby increasing satisfaction
➢ Offer flexibility in their work arrangements. Employees will have greater sense of control over their environment that allow them to set routines or schedules most beneficial to them.
➢ Increased communication. By fostering discussions, employees may feel less isolated and receive greater social supports.
➢ Increasing feedback about performance using compassionate language. The language that supervisors and coworkers use implicitly convey messages and attitudes. Using supportive language creates a more friendly and compassionate environment.

Tips from Psychotherapy

➢ Express empathy – requires reflecting, listening and attention to your employee. Matching facial expressions, affect vocal tone, inflection and energy levels are basic ways for supervisors and coworkers to demonstrate empathy and respect towards others in difficult situations.
➢ Other suggestions include: not interrupting someone's talking, not being judgmental, not dismissing someone's belief, and not talking too much in general.

- Avoid argumentation – argumentation results in individuals not truly hearing each other and often can devolve into power struggles and demotivation. Adjust to employee resistance instead of direct opposition, using roll with resistance techniques
- Roll with resistance – recognize that attacking or confronting someone or an issue head on is often ineffective. In order to elicit change in behavior, employees must feel heard and respected. Common techniques involve making factual or neutral statements ("you are unhappy with your situation"), to help legitimize feelings and move employees out of patterns of argumentation, frustration, and denial.
- Develop discrepancy – focus attention on how employee's current situation is different from their ideal in order to build a goal. Separate the person from their behaviors to foster constructive discussions on how elicit change.
- Support self-efficacy – employers need to develop sense of self-efficacy in their employees to keep them motivated. This often involves fostering feelings of hope, support but also feasibility in accomplishing and maintaining changes. Unless employees believe what they want/are doing is possible, their behavior will revert to denial.

Guidelines taken from Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1983). Preventing employee burnout. Personnel, 60(2), 58-68.

Other Supports

The **CSA B701:17 Carer-inclusive and accommodating organizations Standard and B701HB-18 Helping worker-carers in your organization Handbook** are formalized tools to help employers create, implement and maintain carer-friendly workplace practices, irrespective of size or sector. Carer-employees can refer to these tools for strategies of how to approach their employer in determining ways to support and accommodate them.

Allison M. Williams, PhD, Professor of School of Earth, Environment and Society, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada
Principal, CIHR/SSHRC Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant "Scaling up the Carer-Inclusive Accommodating Organizations Standard" FRN: HWP-146001 (CIHR); 890-2016-3018 (SSHRC)