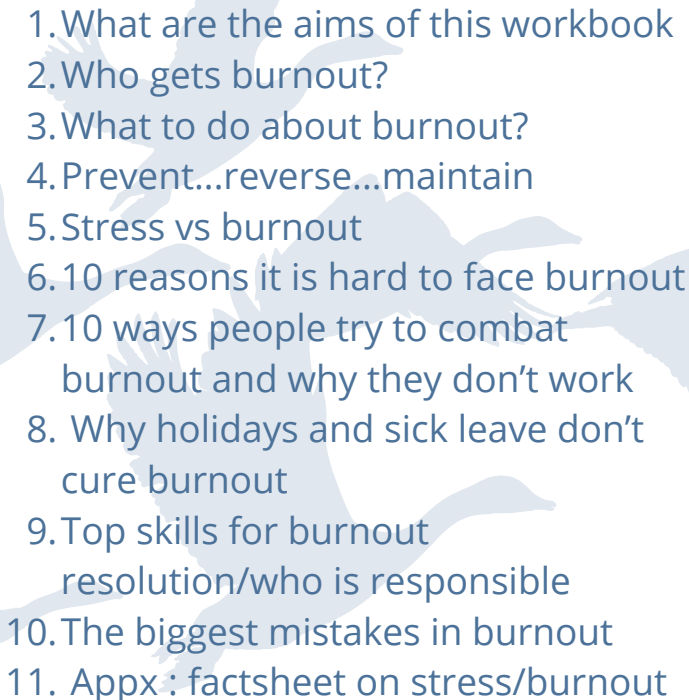

BURNOUT - WHERE TO BEGIN

by Head Goose
Dr Sonia Hutton-Taylor



burnoutgeese.com

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1: What are the aims?

Why do you think you are doing this workbook?

The geese are delighted that you have decided to complete this workbook. A big hello from us all at BGHQ

Everyone with burnout who has admitted that they have it (or have a score indicative of burnout from our test) tends to want it gone ASAP. Ideally by tomorrow. Those with burnout are only too aware of the symptoms....(exhaustion, cynicism and low efficacy) and life effects (on health, relationships, career, work, finances). The question is - where to begin?

The big challenge with burnout is that in most cases it has probably been lurking for a while and in some cases - years. A challenge that has arisen over months/years is not going to evaporate in

- a short workbook
- a one hour consultation
- a few techniques thrown at it in the hope that one might stick

That said - some improvements and early gains may occur from short term efforts. But beware... hitting ones head against a brick wall (it being just so nice when it stops) is partially applicable to burnout. Any slight easing of the burnout can mimic recovery (the sheer relief) when in fact burnout has merely ebbed temporarily. Burnout needs time to heal and this means consistent allocation of time to facilitate healing. How long it will take depends on things like how long you have had burnout, how bad it is and how much support you receive.

This "apparent" easing or "pseudo-recovery" of burnout is responsible for some typical burnout "patterns".... here are the three most common:

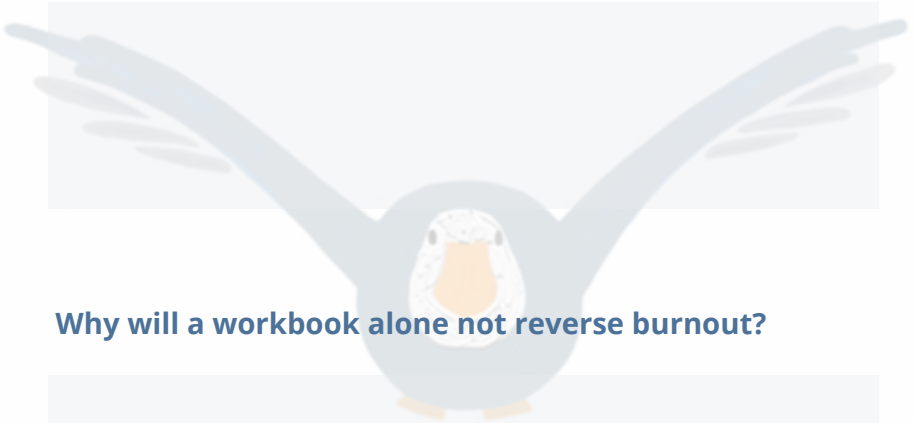
1. suppressing burnout - often for years - with an almost imperceptible worsening until severe burnout finally manifests
2. cyclical burnout - where an undulating pattern emerges (bit better - worse.... bit better... worse) creating a never ending circuit
3. recurrent burnout - burnout appears to have shifted completely but because of incomplete resolution it has merely gone underground only to reemerge even after radical changes have been implemented

The aim of this workbook is not to begin a full reversal plan...yet ... but to prepare the ground with foundations... to foster realistic expectations from the start. Without this - the journey back to full energy will soon feel like quicksand. Full and permanent recovery from burnout requires a grasp of the importance of a steady , structured & tenacious approach

questions section 1

How long have you had burnout? How many times?

Describe any of the three patterns you have noticed



Why will a workbook alone not reverse burnout?

Notes

2: Who gets burnout?



Many of us identify strongly with our work roles and this can fuel burnout, along with other contributing factors. The full list of what can comprise a burnout generating cocktail is long but in short...an imbalance between energy in and energy out occurs.

In theory anyone can get burnout if the balance gets far enough off kilter. Lazy people generally don't get burnout. It is mainly experienced by hardworking and dedicated people whose traits are likely to include

- they want to do well
- they like to achieve
- they set high standards
- they don't like letting anyone down (high levels of responsibility)

Could the Dali Lama get burnout - in theory yes but he prioritises returning to his core self - in meditation. And he regards this as an essential element of his job - even though some might consider it as "doing nothing".

*"One of the best holidays I've had was camping on a course of pole lathing in a forest. I decided to not mention what I did for living. It really allowed me to reengage with myself at core and not as a professional. At the start of the week it was really quite hard but by the end of the week it was almost as if I had never worked! This gave a wonderful "reset" button" **Head Goose***

Any reverse burnout solution must include allocating time to refilling ones energy cup and reengaging with oneself... especially if a job is demanding. And sometimes when a job has been full on along with over identification the skills to a) stop b) re-engage with self and c) refill the cup - have been forgotten (or perhaps for some these skills just never developed).

.Those with a singular intense self identification with work or those juggling multiple roles, will most probably find this protection of personal "me" time a real challenge and may even feel they are being selfish. They are not. It may also feel quite alien. However resetting this self care thermostat is a vital thing to grasp- not just for recovering from burnout but also - sustaining that recovery longer term.

Fortunately burnout is not rocket science. Burnout reversal is not rocket science. Reversing burnout however is potentially complex to navigate alone. But you are not alone - you now have "the geese".

questions section 2

Who else do you know with burnout - why do you think they have it?

Describe how any of the 4 traits impact on you

Describe a way you might reach your core self /be at peace? When did you try this (if ever)?

Notes

3: What to do about burnout?

The most common questions from those who have burnout are... "what can I do to get rid of burnout?" and "how long will it take?". They are one of those "how long is a piece of string" questions.

Burnout is multifactorial in genesis, effects and the "cure cocktail" required to reverse it and then keep it reversed. Burnout can begin to start reversing within weeks of addressing it fully but complete resolution is unlikely to be less than 3 months and could be up to 2 years.

Burnout advice is available all over the internet and from professions of varying backgrounds (nutrition, counselling, sport, life coaches etc.). These burnout fixers have some success with some clients in terms of helping to stop the spiral into burnout and may even see complete reversals. But our experience is that burnout is not homogeneous, one size does not fit all and some techniques actually slow the resolution of burnout.

There is a real danger that sticking plasters are applied to burnout by those whose grasp of it is monodimensional. This means that the true multitude of core issues bringing burnout on are never addressed. This can in turn cause long low grade but persisting entrenched burnout.

As for how long does it take to reverse? This depends on things like...

1. How long it has been there
2. How bad it has become
3. How convinced a person is that they must do something about it
4. What support comes from family, friends, GP, occ health and work
5. What hindrance comes from family, friends, GP, occ health and work
6. What resources are available (eg. budget for training or support)
7. Whether a person is currently on sick leave or not
8. Whether reduced duties can be easily negotiated or not

The answer to "what do I do about burnout?" is - for most sufferers a steady, supported & structured process that is fundamentally learning orientated and involving one or more or all of the following elements...

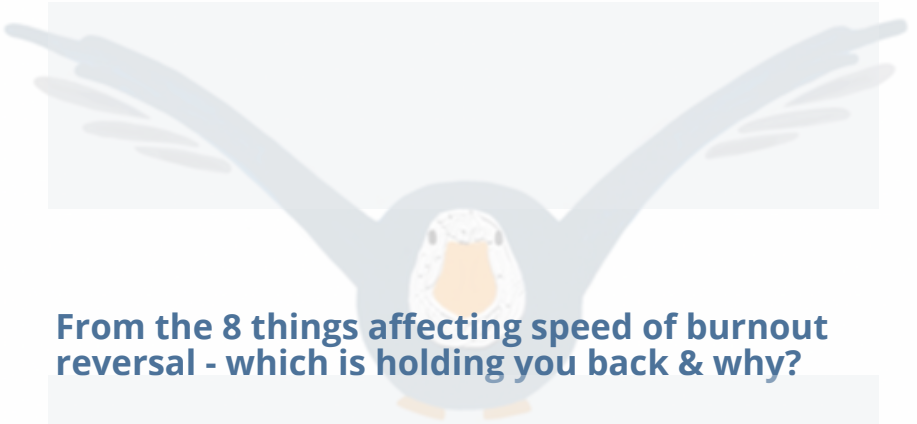
workbooks
coaching
group learning
DIY/self directed learning/ecourses
health assessments
psychotherapy
career guidance
advocacy/job renegotiation



questions section 3

Explain your time frame for burnout reversal

Have you had burnout advice - did it work?



From the 8 things affecting speed of burnout reversal - which is holding you back & why?

Notes

4: Prevent..reverse..maintain

There are three vital phases in burnout

Firstly - there is prevention. In an ideal world you would not have got burnout in the first place. But of course - it happens.

Secondly - once it has arisen - there is a need to both face up to it and to look at how to reverse it effectively... thoroughly and promptly.

Thirdly - once the burnout is in retreat and healing - there is a need to keep it that way. In some ways this is the biggest challenge.

All three require some informed awareness of burnout, what it is, how and what it damages, how it comes on/creeps up, And an understanding of all three is crucial to identifying, facing, fixing burnout and sustaining a balanced life without any burnout in sight. Alternatively to remain in the dark about these issues means

- you won't be wary of or alert to burnoutogenic situations
- you won't spot stress or burnout in yourself at the early stages
- you won't have the resources/skills at hand to tackle burnout
- you are more likely to ignore burnout until it is so bad you need an extensive range of supports or radical solutions to reverse it
- you won't spot burnout in colleagues or staff or friends or family

The burnout geese are very anti anything resembling a " sticking plasters onto burnout" approach. Merely putting a finger in the dam and not addressing the structural weakness or conditions causing the hole merely perpetuates burnout for the sufferer. It also contributes to a toleration of burnout fuelling cultures and condones burnout generating habits. This in turn paves the way for burnout plummets into ill health.

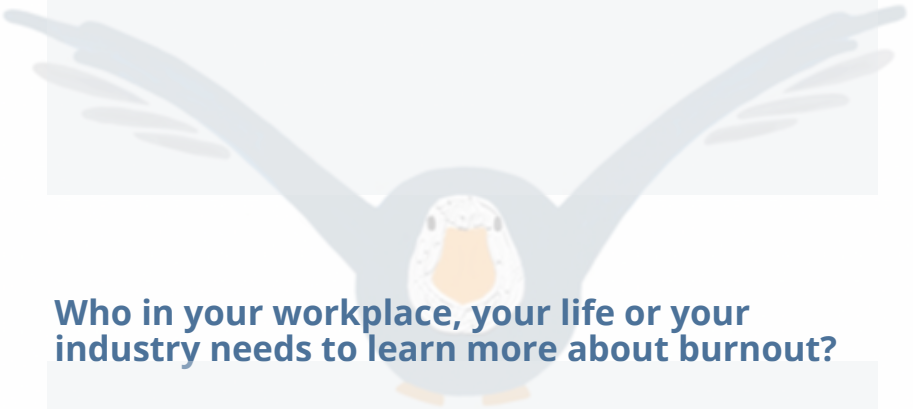
It is import for you to learn steps not only to get out of burnout but to fully understand the process by which you fell into it, to not blame, to learn skills for noticing burnout early signs in yourself and others and to have strategies for avoiding burnout in the future.

Every school leaver, every student and every employee needs to know about burnout so that they can do two things...put burnout into a clear perspective where it cannot hide and know what it is - way before ending up.... in it. With some professions or industries showing 50% of personnel with burnout this is fast becoming a mandatory training

questions section 4

Which phase of burnout do you need to tackle?

What is the problem with only looking at burnout reversal steps?



Who in your workplace, your life or your industry needs to learn more about burnout?

Notes

5: Stress vs burnout

The confusion surrounding stress and how it is different to burnout or how it relates to burnout is quite profound. Even experienced clinicians are not always au fait with the interplay between these.

We have known family and workmates of burnout sufferers be extremely dismissive of a person suffering with burnout. This is entirely due to a mixture of bias, judging, misconceptions and ignorance but it compounds the pain of burnout for the sufferer.

The sort of phrases that can get trotted out include a range from downright abusive through to platitudes and advice that the person who is delivering it is not remotely qualified to give.

Grow up

Grow a pair

Just have a good holiday

Have an early night if you are tired

Get a new mattress/blackout blind

Stop burning the midnight oil

Well so and so doesn't have burnout and you do the same job

....and worse

Some organisations and bosses however take an immensely constructive approach to burnout having perhaps supported personnel with burnout in the past or have experienced it themselves. Despite workplace support however....many people with burnout are extremely fearful of admitting to having it.

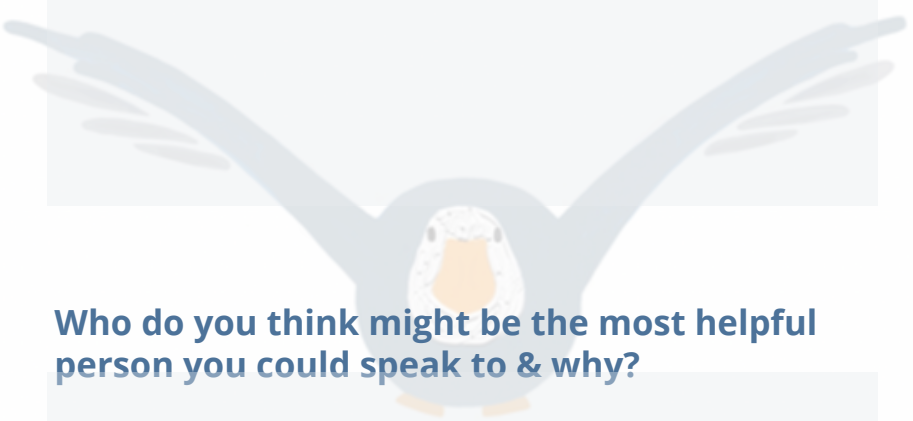
Our factsheet on stress vs burnout is available as a download from the link in the appendix. It may be copied in its existing format only and distributed to anyone you think might find it useful. We particularly suggest giving it to anyone with whom you may need to have a discussion about your burnout....whether this is your GP, your boss, your spouse or a workmate.

Please read the factsheet now.

questions section 5

Have you had anyone attempt to dismiss your burnout & how did this make you feel?

How would you summarise the different between stress and burnout?



Who do you think might be the most helpful person you could speak to & why?

Notes

6: Ten reasons it's hard to face burnout

It's normal and OK to feel nervous about addressing burnout. In fact there are some very genuine and understandable reasons why you might be avoiding or struggling to face up to burnout...

- No idea where to begin or how to continue to tackle it
- Conflicting or unhelpful advice from all quarters
- Tried various things but nothing has worked so ...given up
- Too tired to even think about it - all energy goes to merely hanging on in there
- Lack of empathy/support - family, colleagues, boss, GP
- Feel it is a sign of weakness to admit it - not to mention guilt!
- Not understanding the difference between stress and burnout
- Worry about keeping a job or income - what will work think/ do ?
- Fear that admitting it will uncover other complex issues (career mismatch , sick leave, who to tell you have burnout...when & how, resigning & more)
- Not knowing how long it will take to resolve so it is hard to plan ways forwards

If any of these are affecting or thwarting your ability to address your burnout it is absolutely essential to begin examining them and finding strategies to overcome them. Otherwise barriers remain that will contribute to burnout resolution being an uphill struggle or even resolution not really getting underway at all.

So the process of full burnout recovery is not just about knowing some "tips or tricks" for getting to feel a bit better - it is more about gaining a deep understanding of burnout itself as well as what has co-authored your own burnout story.

questions section 6

What is the top reason that has made burnout hard for you to face up to . If there is more than one try to prioritise these. If there is a reason we have not indicated within the ten above - feel free to add another.

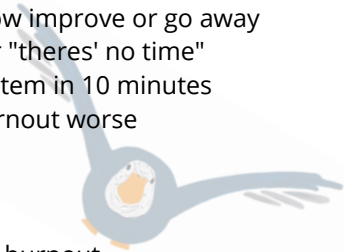
what is holding you back from beating burnout?	what is the most important thing you can do for this?
top reason here	
example: conflicting advice	Stop listening to non experts

Notes

7 Ten ways used to beat burnout which don't work

This is a list of some common ways people approach burnout - each of them at some point may well have reversed someone's burnout somewhere so the solution for you might well be in this list but.... there are inherent flaws in each of them. At times it can be a challenge to get the sequence and combination right too as it is common to need a multifaceted approach.

- 1 deny - thinking that doing so makes it somehow improve or go away
- 2 procrastinate / avoid - you'll tackle it "later" or "theres' no time"
- 3 GP... expecting a burnout reversal support system in 10 minutes
- 4 sick leave - this can at times seem to make burnout worse
- 5 a holiday - this often makes burnout worse
- 6 change job -
- 7 change career
- 8 sabbatical - in our view a bad way to deal with burnout
- 9 modify job (eg cut hours) - make make things "tolerable" but that is not resolution.
- 10 therapy - may deal with part of the burnout need but not all



And why don't they work?

They don't work because they are not addressing all the core fundamentals of burnoutogenesis. Each one alone is preventing or patching up one small area. None of them address burnout fully and at least two keep it going.

Lets look at sabbaticals for example

Taking a sabbatical because you have burnout is a desperate step. Sabbaticals are supposed to be fun, well planned learning experiences... refreshing and uplifting and bringing new skills or attitudes into the workplace. They are not designed to reverse burnout nor are they a replacement for sick leave needed to recover full health. Using a sabbatical for burnout is not unusual but it wastes an opportunity to really get something useful from it by using it up to get burnout under control. Plus if the full repertoire of burnout causes remain unaddressed the burnout will most likely return at some point.

We have an ecourse that delves deeper into these ten areas.

questions section 7

What approaches have you used or might consider using to deal with burnout (you can choose from above 10 or come up with your own). Then outline some pros and cons.



way	pros	cons
example deny	means dont have to face up	means it lingers on and on

Notes

8: Holidays and sick leave

Holidays

Many people assume that a holiday will be good for burnout.

If someone is stressed by work - a holiday will generally refresh but if burnout has taken hold - a holiday can do the complete opposite. Why is this?

- Burnout depletes all energy right to the bottom of the tank and so even planning a holiday can be tough going
- even thinking of going on it is hard work and not fun
- packing and travelling are utterly draining
- the holiday is often spent sleeping or avoiding others
- the thought of returning to work is horrendous
- the burnout may even be worse on return

Sick leave

At times sick leave is an essential part of burnout recovery. It may even need to be enforced sick leave if a person is in denial. However, merely sending someone home as a way of reversing burnout is ill advised. The sick leave needs to be combined with a comprehensive approach to reversing burnout - for example from the approaches mentioned within in this workbook.

We have more than one documented case of someone being sent home on sick leave for severe burnout only for them to become deeply depressed sitting at home alone with their burnout... sometimes to suicidal level .

So sick leave has a place in burnout but it needs.... along with other methods... to be used carefully and strategically and not just with an assumption that a good rest is enough.

The other challenge with sick leave is how long does it need to be. It is common for multiple, short, consecutive extensions which can cause repeating dread in the sufferer... when what would be most effective is a decent chunk and an overall master plan



questions section 8

Have you had a holiday since you got burnout and how did it make you feel?

Have you had any sick leave for burnout?
Do you think you need some?



Why may short intermittent or repeat consecutive short bursts of sick leave not reverse burnout?

Notes

9: Skills and responsibility

Skills

As with career planning and career management skills - the burnout reversal skills that will be most helpful to you right now are unique to you.

Some skills that people with burnout need to brush up on might include the following

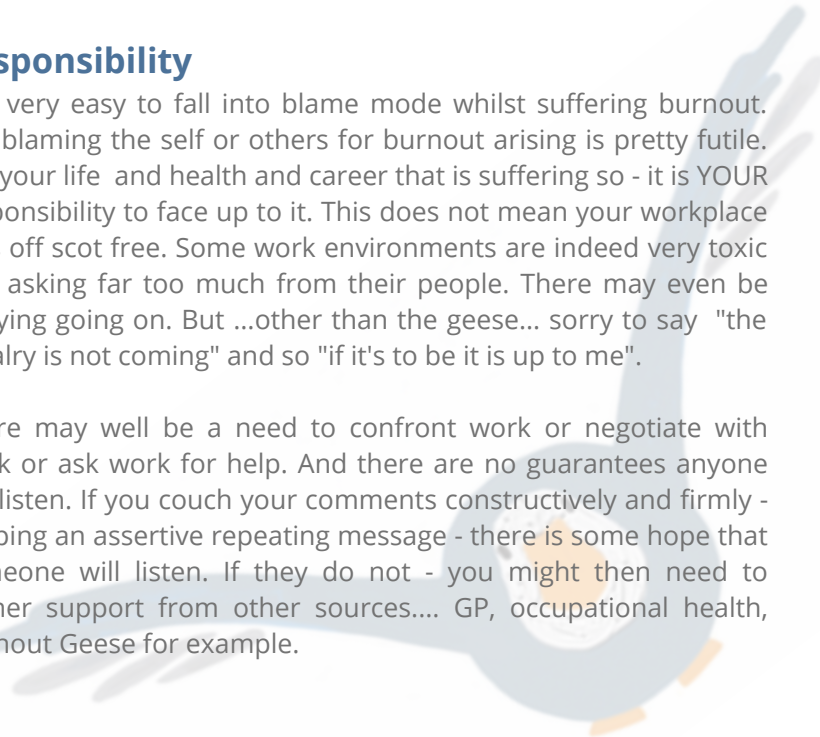
- Assertiveness (how to say no)
- Asking for help
- Self care/ prioritising own health
- How to relax deeply
- Acceptance
- Letting go

The more these skills can be highlighted, developed or explored when someone has burnout - the better.

Responsibility

it is very easy to fall into blame mode whilst suffering burnout. But blaming the self or others for burnout arising is pretty futile. It is your life and health and career that is suffering so - it is YOUR responsibility to face up to it. This does not mean your workplace gets off scot free. Some work environments are indeed very toxic and asking far too much from their people. There may even be bullying going on. But ...other than the geese... sorry to say "the cavalry is not coming" and so "if it's to be it is up to me".

There may well be a need to confront work or negotiate with work or ask work for help. And there are no guarantees anyone will listen. If you couch your comments constructively and firmly - keeping an assertive repeating message - there is some hope that someone will listen. If they do not - you might then need to garner support from other sources.... GP, occupational health, Burnout Geese for example.



questions section 9

What skills might help your burnout?

Who is responsible for reversing your burnout and why?



What role models do you have for both burnout generation and... for achieving balance?

Notes

10: Mistakes made in burnout

number 1

To ignore burnout for too long.

Denial is not just a river in Egypt... so the saying goes.

number 2

To not seek help.

Admittedly seeking help is not always easy to do nor easy to find but it is the key to turning burnout from a painful life draining ball and chain and into a return to full energy and engagement in life.

number 3

To think that tolerating burnout is somehow a good thing.

It really isn't. People often think that they are somehow doing everyone a favour by not facing it and not dealing with it. However the main benefit in burnout is... seeing it gone - for everyone concerned.

number 4

To put too much focus on "correcting" symptoms.

When the approach to burnout is narrow and without an overall and comprehensive recovery strategy and a well planned phased return to work (or work modifications if sick leave is not current) this invites a recurrent pattern - relapsing burnout.

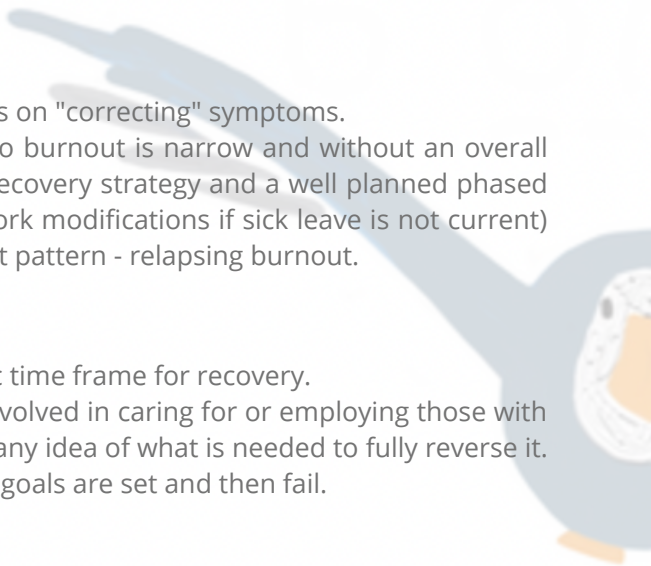
number 5

To not build a realistic time frame for recovery.

Far too often those involved in caring for or employing those with burnout do not have any idea of what is needed to fully reverse it. As a result unrealistic goals are set and then fail.

number 6

To not build in enough modification to work pace or load on a permanent basis. It is great if the outcome from burnout support allows a full return to previous duties. This is possible. However, it is not uncommon for permanent changes to be needed.



questions section 10



Which mistakes above might you have made?

Why is knowing the common mistakes of use?

Try to think of one other mistake you may have made that has made burnout worse

Notes

Appendix

Stress vs burnout factsheet

burnoutgeese.com/stress

Feel free to print out this factsheet and share it with colleagues or friends who can be supportive

Take the burnout test

burnoutgeese.com/test

for the first time or as a repeat to see how the burnout is doing

Download our burnout wall planner

burnoutgeese.com/planner

This can be used in A4 format (it'll be small but can still be useful for planning breaks and weekends in a well spread fashion) but ideally send to a printer and you can have it blown up to A1 for the wall

Notes

11: Where now?

Feedback

Reflection on this workbook is valuable for both you & the geese as it helps everyone learn.

If you would like to share what you feel you have learned with us - we would be very grateful.

Questions to mull & share (send to joinus@burnoutgeese.com)

A What do you feel is the most important message you now can take away from completing this workbook?

B How would you explain to someone who has not done the workbook ...who might find it helpful and why?

C What is the top action you will implement as a result of completing this workbook?

D What further help do you feel you might need?

E Which of the following appeal to you as ways of exploring burnout recovery or better work life balance

- **further workbooks**
- **coaching 1:1**
- **virtual group learning**
- **DIY/self directed learning/ecourses**
- **health assessments**
- **psychotherapy**
- **career guidance**
- **advocacy/job renegotiation**

