

Preventing Burnout in the Modern American Workplace

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Key Takeaways

Section 1: The Extent of Workplace Burnout

36% of the US workforce say they suffer from burnout every week

Over half also suffer from fatigue, stress or frustration every week

54% of employees say their sleep is negatively affected by burnout, while **36%** say their productivity is damaged

Section 2: Who Burnout Affects the Most

46% of Generation Z say they suffer from burnout every week

64% of Generation Z say they have considered leaving their job due to the effects of burnout

25% of Generation Z take monthly sick days off work due to burnout

Section 3: Preventing Burnout in 2020

44% of the US workforce say a high-pressure working environment is the biggest contributor to burnout

50% of employees say their employers don't provide enough support for burnout

47% of the workforce say that a culture that promotes work/life balance is the best way to reduce the symptoms of burnout



About This Whitepaper

Work is a necessary part of everyday life. Equally fulfilling as it can be frustrating, research into the intensity of the modern American workplace is still in its infancy. For businesses, the culture and ethic of their office is a serious consideration. Energy and competitiveness can be incredibly valuable characteristics in the workplace, but how do you know if you've struck the right balance?

With this in mind, we conducted some research into a growing office health concern – “burnout”. Created in association with Censuswide, we asked 2,000 American employees about their workload in the office and the impact that has on everything from their productivity to their mental health. We then asked a number of business leaders and experts for their thoughts on how you can help keep employees fresh by staving off burnout in 2020 and beyond.

What we'll cover in this whitepaper:

- **What burnout is**
- **How common burnout is, and how it arises**
- **How burnout affects the lives of employees**
- **What business can do to reduce the damaging effects of burnout**

What Is Burnout?

For the purposes of the research presented in this whitepaper, we'll use the following definition of the state of burnout:

An overwhelming sense of emotional, physical and/or mental exhaustion.

The causes of burnout are known to be consistent and excessive levels of stress but, as we discovered in our research, other causes that contribute to burnout include anxiety and frustration. The effects can range from everything from a decrease in productivity to damaged mental health.

Awareness has been steadily rising, but 2019 has been a significant year for its diagnosis. The World Health Organization (WHO) now officially recognizes burnout in the International Classification of Diseases.

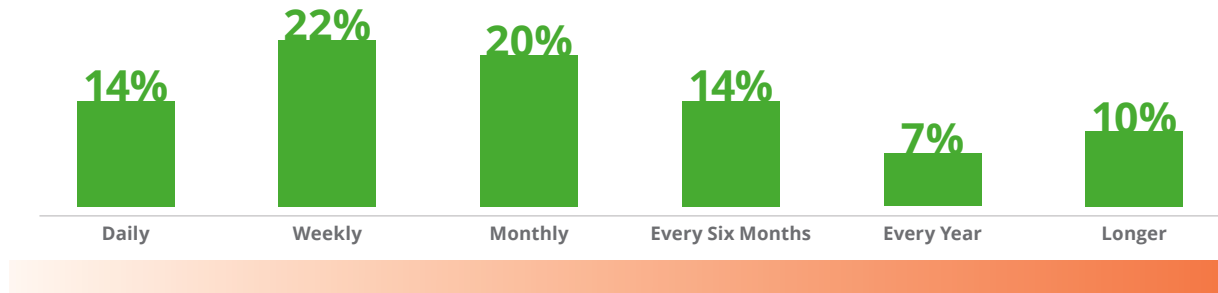
For business owners, it's important to recognize that the damage moves beyond the individual. Burnout is attributed to over \$125 billion of annual healthcare, 34% of annual salaries due to disengagement, and an increase in staff turnover of up 50%. When you include the research we present here, the argument for reducing employee burnout is compelling.

Section 1

The Extent of Workplace Burnout

First, we asked the 2,000 employees if they have suffered from burnout in their current role. 88% said they had, broken down into the following time periods:

How often the US workforce experience burnout



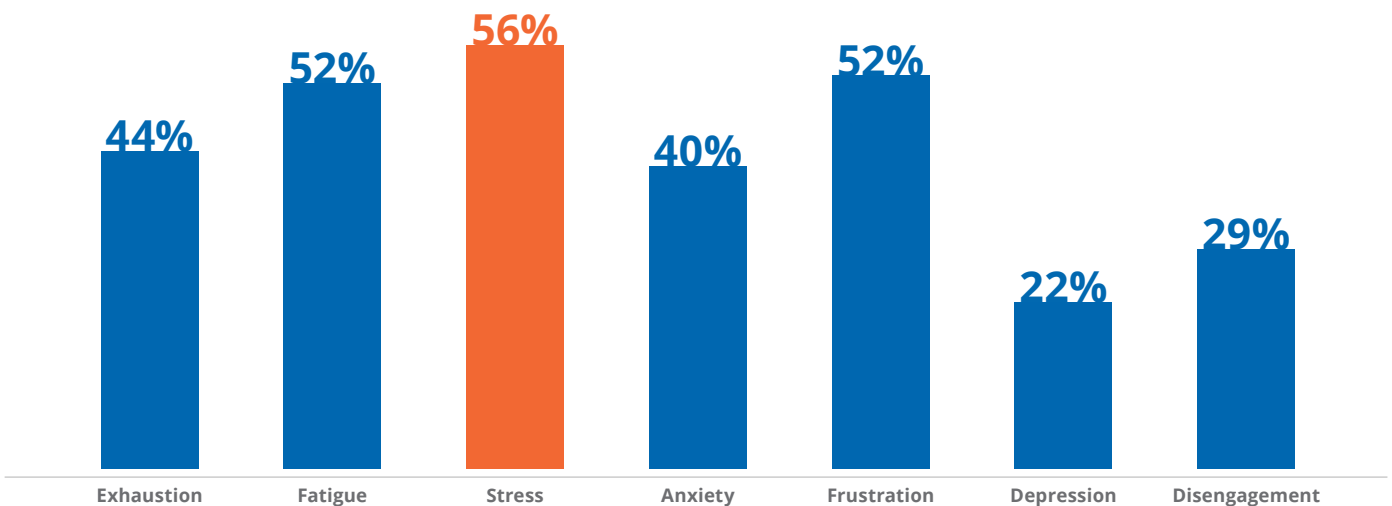
Aggregated together, and you begin to get a picture of how commonplace burnout has become in the modern American office. More than a third (36%) of employees said they suffer from burnout at least every week, with more than half (56%) experiencing it on at least a monthly basis.

Just 12% said they were yet to experience burnout in their current role. For businesses, your efforts to identify the causes of burnout and reduce them will concern almost nine in ten of all your workforce.

The Effect on the Workforce

Burnout is the culmination of many mental and emotional states. Individually, things like disengagement, frustration, and fatigue are damaging to employee state-of-mind, and they occur with regularity.

What percentage of the US workforce experience negative emotions every week



More than half of the American workforce say they are battling stress, fatigue, and frustration every single week, with issues such as exhaustion (44%) and anxiety (40%) not far behind. This mix of wellbeing issues and disconnect from work can have serious repercussions for the individuals and the businesses they work for.

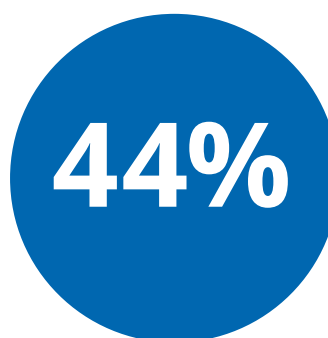
First, the wellbeing of employees. We asked our survey respondents what areas of their personal life had been negatively affected by burnout.

How burnout has negatively affected the personal lives of the US workforce

Sleep



Work/Life Balance



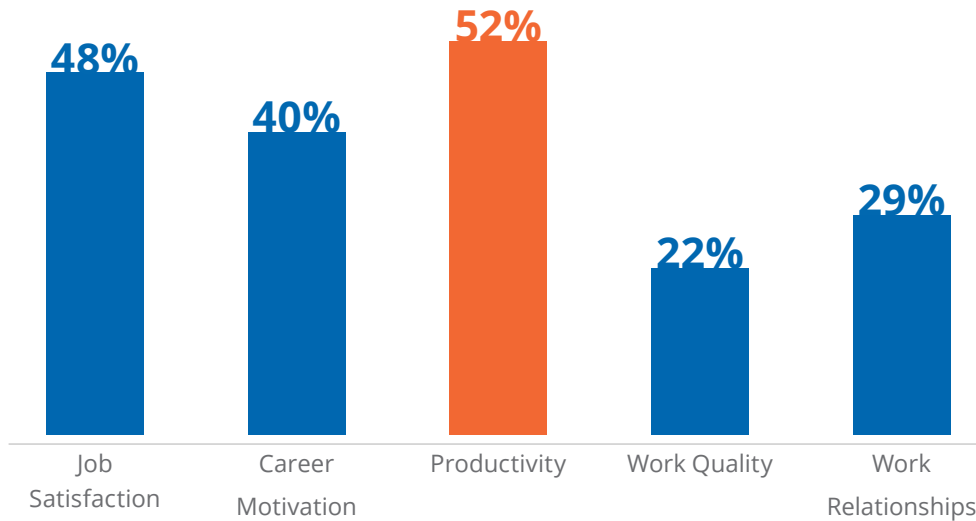
More than half of the US workforce that we surveyed said that burnout had affected their ability to sleep. As one of the most valuable parts of maintaining good health, businesses must do more to help unburden their staff of the worries that keep them up each night.

The large proportion of those with a poorer work/life balance should also be a cause for concern for businesses. As we uncover from the remaining research, businesses may think they're getting more out of their employees by pushing them harder, but the opposite is true in the long run. The financial strain on productivity, healthcare, and recruitment can see burnout drive up your expenditure.



The Effect on Business

It's not just the health and personal lives of individuals that suffer due to burnout. Whilst that should be enough to cause alarm for businesses everywhere, the damage caused by burnout can be measured in more business-specific terms.



We also asked respondents which work-related areas had been negatively affected by burnout:

More than half of the US workforce say their productivity has taken a hit due to the impact that burnout is having on their lives. Almost the same number said their job satisfaction has also declined.

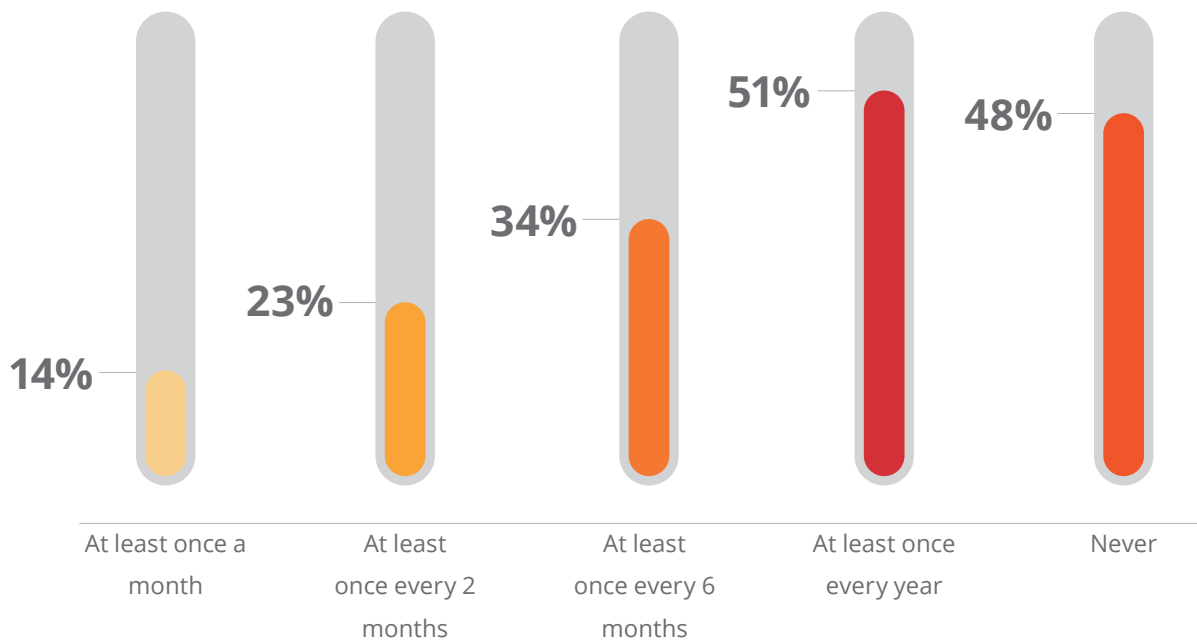
The results have revealed a workforce that is less productive when they're in their job, and less enthused about working at their current company. Studies elsewhere have highlighted the damage to business in real financial terms. A study in 2014 from research company Gallup totaled the damage of unhappy employees to be between \$450 billion and \$550 billion.

If the symptoms of burnout become too great, employees are less likely to make it to work and instead take a day off sick. Our research shows how often employees call in sick due to the stresses and strains of burnout.





How often the US workforce take sick days due to burnout



More than half of the US workforce take at least one sick day every year due to the negative effects of burnout. Within that, over a third (34%) take one at least once every six months, and almost a quarter (23%) take one at least every month.

Accumulate this significant number of sick days across your workforce and the cost to your business will soon skyrocket. In 2018, the Integrated Benefits Institute found the cost of illness-related productivity loss to be \$530 billion per year. This doesn't account for healthcare payouts, which the same report found cost \$880 billion every year.

Employee concern stretches well beyond a couple of days out the office sick, as our research shows:

67% of the US workforce are worried about the long-term effects of burnout on them

The evidence shows how much businesses suffer if they don't prioritize the health, wellbeing, and motivation of their staff. Those costs can continue to escalate when you consider the possibility of staff leaving the company altogether. We asked respondents if they'd considered leaving their current employer due to burnout.

55% of the US workforce have considered leaving their current employment due to a lack of support for burnout

Recruitment stands as one of the most avoidable expenditures for businesses that already have an established workforce. According to Glassdoor, the average US employer spends 24 days hiring for a role, totaling an average of \$4,000. That's without considering the cost to your business of not having that extra pair of hands, and the skills they bring, in your office.

If you don't support your burned-out employees, they will cost you financially with drops in productivity, and recruitment costs when you need to replace them.



Section 2

Who Burnout Affects the Most

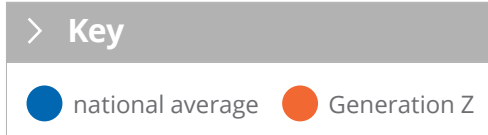
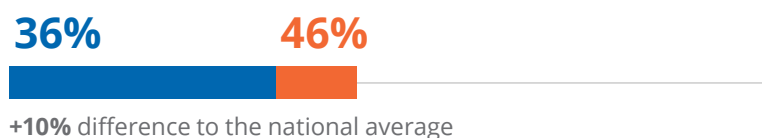
Depending on the makeup of your workforce, and the industry you work in, the likelihood and severity of burnout can differ – as our research displays.

The Generation Gap

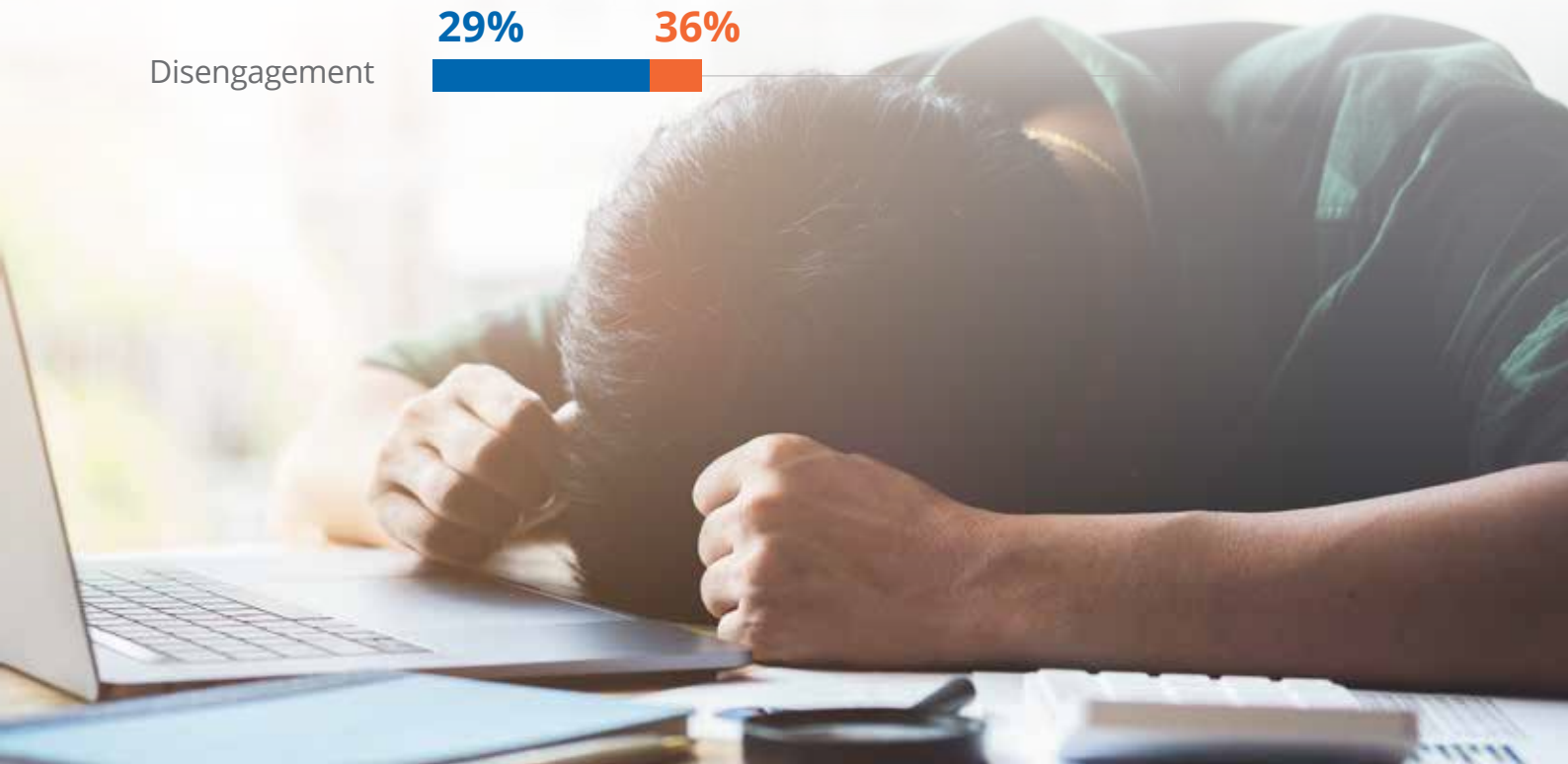
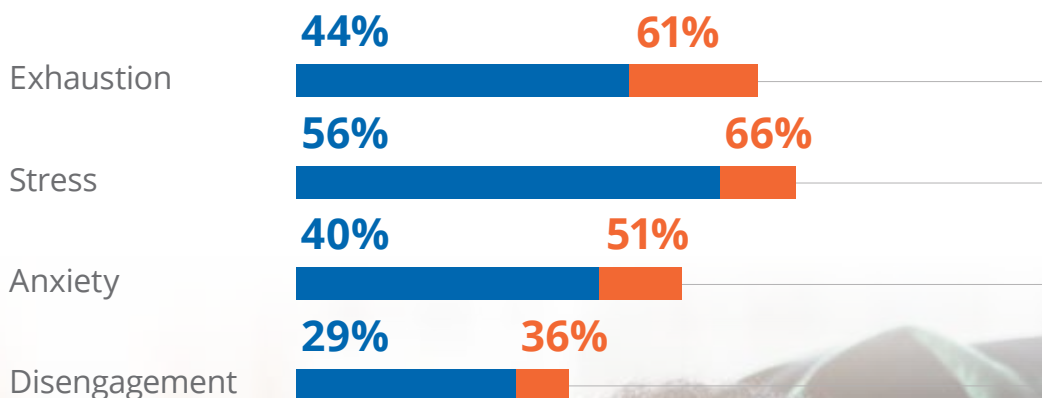
Generation Z (those currently aged 18-23) are now making their way into the office, either after graduation or straight from high school. Across almost all the data laid out above, Generation Z have been shown to be more susceptible to burnout and all the additional concerns that come with it.

Generation Z are more likely to:

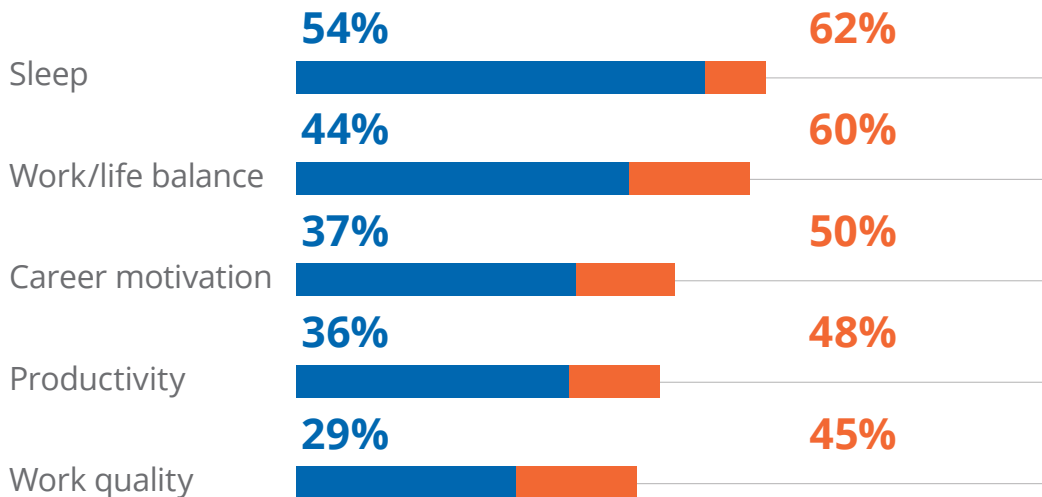
Suffer from weekly office burnout



Suffer from weekly burnout symptoms

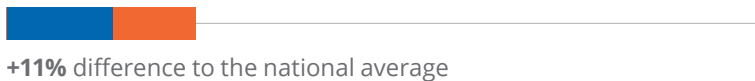


See burnout negatively affect aspects of their lives



Take a monthly sick day due to burnout

14% 25%



+11% difference to the national average

Worry about the long-term effects burnout is having on their health

67% 76%



+9% difference to the national average

Consider leaving their role due to a lack of support over burnout

55% 64%



+9% difference to the national average

Awareness of office burnout, and all the mental health-related issues that surround it, is growing. Younger generations are more in tune with the damage it causes and are more willing to speak out if they are having problems.

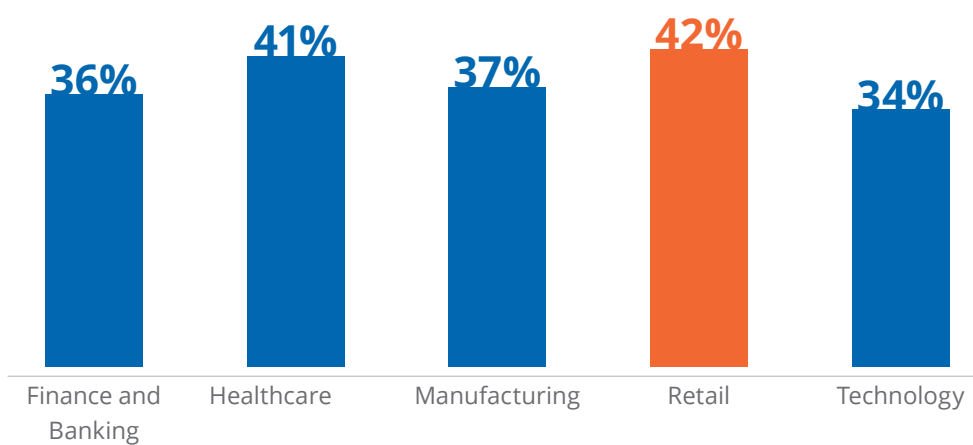
A better work/life balance is a high priority for much of Generation Z. If businesses aren't willing to help them achieve it, they risk missing out on the current crop of talent. They are more willing than any generation to take their skills elsewhere if they are suffering in their current environment. It's a growing trend that all businesses must take notice of.



Industries

The realities of some work environments make them more susceptible to burnout than others. We compared the burnout data across some key industries to see which employees were struggling the most.

Which US industries have the most weekly employee burnout



Regarded as two of the most fast-paced, intense industries out there, business-owners in healthcare and retail need to take special note of this research. For an industry as vital as healthcare, the potential long-term repercussions of burnout are beginning to be realized.

The Annals of Internal Medicine published a report in 2019 showing the total cost of burnout to be \$4.6 billion every year in the industry. In 2017, a study in Mayo Clinic Proceedings found that 1 in 50 physicians planned to leave the industry altogether in the following two years, and 1 in 5 planned to reduce their clinical hours over the next year.

High-intensity industries risk driving the workforce from their jobs. To arrest the decline, business leaders must recognize the difficulties their employees face and redress the imbalance in work and home life.

Section 3

Preventing Burnout in 2020

The evidence that employees are feeling the strain and exhaustion of workplace burnout is clear – but what are the solutions? We asked the US workforce what steps they'd like to see businesses make to control damaging burnout, plus how well they currently rate their employers' efforts.

What Employees Say

To identify where effective improvements can be made, you first need to find the source of employee burnout. We asked respondents to list the top contributors to burnout in their workforce.

Top 5 contributors to burnout in the US workplace

- 1. High-pressure working environment – 44%**
- 2. Lack of support or communication from management – 38%**
- 3. Unrealistic performance targets – 30%**
- 4. A culture that encourages poor work/life balance – 25%**
- 5. Unrealistic deadlines – 23%**

Common themes run through the findings – namely the company culture and poor management. The culture of any working environment is set by those leading the organization. It's acceptable to hope that your employees work hard and remain on task. It's a common misconception that crafting a high-pressure working environment, with unrealistic deadlines and targets, is the best long-term strategy for achieving business goals.

As we've seen throughout this research, if work/life balance begins to slip employees will begin to look elsewhere. The expectations of the workplace are shifting, the pendulum swinging towards a less intense environment. As businesses adjust and create a workplace that attracts and retains staff, yours will have to compete if you wish to secure the best talent on the market.

When it comes to how well businesses currently support employees through these pressures above, the workforce is split.

50% of the US workforce say their employer doesn't provide support for or combat the symptoms of burnout

What Employees Want

We've covered how widespread burnout is and why it occurs, but how do businesses begin to reduce it? We asked our respondents what they'd like their employers to provide in order to combat symptoms of burnout:

Top 5 solutions for preventing burnout in the US workplace

1. **A culture that supports work/life balance - 47%**
2. **Flexible working environment - 44%**
3. **Consistent feedback - 29%**
4. **Access to exercise facilities - 25%**
5. **Mindfulness techniques - 20%**

The solutions to burnout are heavily linked to the causes. Employees want to see a redressing of their work/life balance and greater consistency in the feedback they receive from management.

One of the most popular suggestions for redressing that balance is flexible working. As one of the most requested business perks of modern times, more and more businesses are allowing employees to fit their work life around their home life.

Research is beginning to mount up on a wide range of benefits employees and businesses can gain from introducing flexible working hours. In just one example, Staples found that 90% of employees believe flexible working arrangements would boost morale. Businesses would benefit too, with 67% saying they'd consider leaving their job if their work arrangements became less flexible.



10 Expert Tips to Limit Employee Burnout

Our research has highlighted how office burnout is a real concern, and businesses are beginning to act. We asked business leaders and experts in HR about their experiences tackling burnout in the US office. Here are 10 tips for every business, straight from the experts.

1. Tailor your Approach to Each Employee

“Interview each employee to see where they stand personally, physically, mentally, and nutritionally. We work to find custom holes in both their personal schedule and their workplace schedule to suggest possible downtime a few hours each week that can really make a difference / offer a bit of respite from the grind.”

Baron Christopher Hanson, Owner of Red Baron USA

2. Reduce Frustrating Protocols

“Frustration often fuels employee burnout. Therefore, streamline your processes by removing maddening protocols and multiple layers of approval. Review especially complicated and time-consuming procedures that could be revised to ease staff frustrations.”

Marsha Kelly, Best4Businesses.com

3. Reduce Frustrating Protocols

“I encourage my team to practice good sleep habits as it keeps the body rested, helps balance out hormones that affect one’s diet, mood, and levels of serotonin (happiness levels), and keeps one’s mental health in check as it is a proven way to minimize the risks of anxiety and depression.”

Liz Brown, Founder of Sleeping Lucid

4. Encourage Vacations

“Oftentimes companies around the world are making it difficult for their employees to take their vacation days because of how fast paced and stressful the jobs are. It is important to encourage employees to utilize all of their vacation days every year as well as give them generous vacation packages.”

*Susan Harris, Owner of Rooted Mama Health *

5. Listen to your Employees

“You can’t address burnout in the workplace if you don’t know it’s occurring. Try to be an approachable manager that employees can voice concerns to. This also creates a more comfortable working environment for all. An additional and even better option is to have them take anonymous surveys regarding their level of satisfaction at work.

Vinay Amin, CEO of Eu Natural

6. Sometimes, Say No

"Give yourself permission to say no. Whether it means sleeping in (no to an alarm clock), getting a massage, taking a walk, or just turning off my phone and computer (no, I will respond later on my own schedule), simple acts of letting myself relax and enjoy the moment are the very best gifts I can give myself."

Paige Arnof-Fenn Amin, CEO of Mavens & Moguls

7. Communicate Clearly

"When they feel like they're just guessing and hoping it works out, burnout is inevitable. Instead, take the time upfront to be very clear what your expectations are for what, how, and when the project or task should be completed. Be as specific as you can be and you will get better results from happier employees."

Adam Sanders, Director at Successful Release

8. Disconnect from Technology

"My favorite hack to avoid burnout is to disconnect from technology and focus on cultivating human, face to face relationships. Meeting for coffee or lunch not only allows you to refuel and recharge but it also can accomplish so much more than e-mail exchanges. Technology helps advance the conversation but it will never replace the human interaction that builds trust over time."

Paige Arnof-Fenn Amin, CEO of Mavens & Moguls

9. Create Non-Work Times

"We have found by implementing time throughout the day for socialization with other employees that don't include work talk is incredibly valuable to employee wellbeing. It is far too common for employees to go to lunch but the conversation is still only on work-related topics. This means the employees have no break from work. We installed a company lunch break every day that requires that there is zero talk about work-related topics."

Susan Harris, Owner of Rooted Mama Health

10. Give Positive Feedback

"Regularly review your employees' performance and find opportunities to publicly appreciate their hard work. This can be as simple as sharing their success in a team meeting or go further into things like additional compensation or other perks. Connecting performance with recognition and compensation tends to be very energizing to employees, especially top performers."

Adam Sanders, Director at Successful Release

Conclusion

Our research has only confirmed what the business and HR worlds are beginning to wake up to. Burnout is not only a genuine office concern, but it's widespread and costs companies millions in lost productivity, healthcare payouts, and recruitment costs.

Those who don't listen to their employees are destined to never hold onto the most important part of their business – people. Here, we've highlighted the most significant causes of workplace burnout: company culture, communication, and a lack of flexibility with the demands and expectations of modern life.

To implement real change, decisions must be made and policymaking done at the executive level. Company culture starts at the very top. The example you set filters down to every employee in your organization. If it doesn't match up with their expectations of a flexible workplace that encourages a balance between work and life, they'll find an organization that can match that.



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