

# Burnout or Boredom?

Teresa F Sonsthagen, BS, LVT  
North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND 58105

## Abstract

Even the greatest job loses its attraction after awhile and you may start thinking about or even searching for a new job. Do you feel burned out, overworked and underpaid? It must be time to leave! Experts recommend that you think long and hard before quitting. In this presentation, we will discuss five areas to explore before moving to “greener” pastures.

## Résumé

Même le travail le plus fantastique exerce une moins grande attraction après quelque temps et ce fait peut vous amener à penser à chercher un nouveau travail ou même à passer à l'action. Vous sentez-vous vidé, surmené et sous-payé ? Ce doit être le temps de partir ! Les experts recommandent d'y réfléchir longtemps et sérieusement avant de quitter. Dans cette présentation, nous allons aborder cinq aspects à considérer avant de décider de changer d'horizons.

## What is Burnout?

If you are feeling any or all of the symptoms listed below, then you may be approaching or are suffering from burnout:

- You feel an inability to be effective at work.
- Demands on you are higher than what you feel you are able to meet.
- Going to work feels like a dreaded chore.
- You feel drained, tired and bored throughout the workday.
- You feel guilty about your lack of motivation.
- You feel futile, hopeless or trapped.

At some point we may be feeling any or all of these symptoms, no matter how much we love our jobs! Is it truly burnout or boredom? Well, it could be both! There are a number of things suggested by the experts that you can do to bring back your interest in the job that you already have.

### 1. “Find meaning in your work!”

“People don't burn out because of overwork and stress in general, but because the work they are doing doesn't mean anything to them.”

Career counselor Lory Block says that “finding significance in your work is not a matter of choos-

ing the right career or working for the right company. Instead, it involves taking charge of putting meaning in your work – right where you are.”<sup>1</sup>

Mark Sanborn writes in *The Fred Factor* that Fred, his mailman, gave him remarkable service with nothing more than a blue uniform, a mailbag and an active imagination. “Fred is proof that there are no insignificant or ordinary jobs when they are performed by significant and extraordinary people. People give the work they do dignity.”

Martin Luther King also weighs in on this topic. He said, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’ This is something I've always believed, taking pride in what you do.”

You are the only one that can give your work meaning, because meaning comes from within rather than from the circumstances around you. While at work, give your job your best effort. Knowing you've done your best, independent of the support, acknowledgement or reward of others, is a key determinant in a fulfilling career.

Set up a project that means something special to you. Sit down with your supervisor and ask if there is something he/she has been meaning to do, but just hasn't had time to do it. Or if you have an idea for a project that would benefit the workplace, discuss your idea with him/her. Get feedback and permission and then go for it! Often, by reconnecting to your job by doing something you really care about, you bring yourself out of the rut and reduce your boredom.

### 2. “Delegate.”

Think you are the only one who can get things done...right! Because of our basic personality, we often take on task after task in order to please our bosses, and in some strange way it fills a need within us. However, this often leaves us overloaded with work. Sit down and examine what it is you are expected to do. Prioritize those things that you have to or want to do and hand out the rest.

“Talk to your supervisor or boss about letting go of some of the work that is driving you crazy.”<sup>5</sup> Explain what is happening and ask for help in selecting those tasks that you would like to keep do-

ing. Make suggestions on who could take on the tasks that you just can't do anymore. If you look closely at the other employees you will probably find someone for whom the task is a chance to excel. This can help them feel more a part of the team.

Once you give something away – you are not allowed to take it back or be mad that the new person doesn't do it EXACTLY like you did. Everyone has a different way of doing things and my motto has always been, "As long as 1. nobody gets hurt or dies and 2. the job gets done – I DON'T CARE WHO OR HOW IT IS ACCOMPLISHED!"

### 3. "Get one unpleasant task out of the way."<sup>17</sup>

We all have one duty that we do at work that is unpleasant for us. It is human nature to put that task off until it is impossible to ignore it any longer. However it is constantly there, hanging over our heads. Pretty soon it feels like this dark, angry cloud just follows us wherever we go. As in the old Nike ads, you might as well "just do it" and get it over with. Procrastination is one of the most sure-fire ways to increase your stress load and reduce your morale. Grab onto that task with both hands, and get it done even if you have to stay late. Life is just much too short to have that kind of junk hanging over your head.

Craving the adrenaline rush and feeling rewarded by the thrill of completing something at the last minute? If you are seeking an adrenaline rush, go skydiving.

### 4. "Make time for fun."<sup>18</sup>

People on the verge of burnout are usually spending less time with family and friends. Make a point of getting away from everything—phone, faxes and email. Spend the day just with you or loved ones. If you have trouble getting away from the workplace, maybe you can introduce more fun there. Technically, it's called executive recreation. Telling funny stories, bringing a treat for everyone to share at break or lunch, or sending goofy emails are just a few ways to make life more fun. The short recess from your daily tasks is more than compensated by a refreshed and relaxed attitude. If you aren't having fun at what you do, you will most certainly burn out faster than another person in the same position. If the atmosphere in your place of work is in a constant state of seriousness, make it your mission to lighten it up. Smile, tell a joke, share a funny cartoon, poke fun at yourself in a kind way, celebrate fun theme days like National Potato Day or National Friendship Day...

By being the "office clown", or a more politically correct title the "office social director", you bring

up your co-workers' morale along with your own, and as an added benefit it builds staff cohesion and a sense of team.

### 5. "Share your enthusiasm, rather than your complaints."<sup>19</sup>

"Complaining to each other about how miserable you are rarely makes you feel any better."<sup>5</sup> One person can bring morale plummeting to the ground. If the person happens to be a chronic complainer, there isn't a lot you can do. However, one way to deal with a chronic complainer or negative comments is to counter with a positive attitude or comment. Do this immediately after the negative behavior! It's fun to watch them try to convince you that life is miserable. Some will eventually realize life isn't really that bad. Remember that enthusiasm, just like complaining, is contagious. It is just a bit harder to come down with a good case of positive attitude!

If you find yourself commiserating with the complainer or YOU are the complainer, try to evaluate what impact negative comments have on your co-workers. I think that if you could step outside of yourself and see what it does to morale, you would be more conscientious toward your work-mates.

### 6. "Have something else important in your life."<sup>19</sup>

"Don't make work the center of your life."<sup>19</sup> You spend nine to 10 hours a day with these people; even a husband and a wife need a break from each other on a daily basis! Find interests outside of work that will meet your needs. This is especially important, because work isn't supposed to meet your every need. Studies have shown that people with interests outside of work have a "better perspective on work." What are your dreams, what are your goals, what makes you happy? Find it and then go after it.

How about taking a class, setting one night aside to pursue a hobby, or getting physical by joining a workout group? Look around in your community. There are dozens of charitable organizations for just about everything under the sun!

The idea is, if you are not getting positive reinforcement or you can't build your self esteem at work, start looking for it outside of work.

Before you put in your two-week notice to go searching for that new dream job – take a look around, you might already be there!

Try to recapture the enthusiasm and excitement you felt when you started your current job. Remember how each day was new and was an adventure. The only thing that has changed is your perception of the posi-

tion; the shininess has worn off! Your reasons for taking this job are all still there. You are just seeing the reality of everyday business.

### References

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3. *GMAC Real Estate* newsletter, February 2002.
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