"Not in our company" you might say, but look around you. Have some of your employees seemed to have lost a certain spark? Do you see other employees who were enthusiastic and really cooking and now they look like charred remains or dying embers?

What about you? Are you feeling the effects of unrelenting stress and demands? You drag yourself out of bed, force yourself to get ready for work, and dread going to work all the way to the workplace. You feel as though you have been "rode hard and put up wet." You find yourself lacking in enthusiasm and pride in your work. If so, you may have joined a club that includes people from all walks of life, the burn out club. The dues are expensive, the benefits are few, but you can appreciate the company of other crashed and burned high fliers.

**Burnout of self and burnout of employees**

High stress and a sense of loss of control over one's life and business contribute to a stress syndrome known as burnout. What are the symptoms? Emotional and physical exhaustion, insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, sadness and depression, negativity, increased cynicism, deceased creativity, quickness to anger, defensiveness, edginess and quickness to blame others, detachment (especially from clients and staff) and loss of satisfaction or sense of accomplishment.
Considerations about burnout

- It may take several years before the symptoms of this syndrome to fully manifest themselves.
- It is often correlated with the process of grief, as a work-life dream is lost.
- Leadership requirements can also exact a price, because it often necessitates a re-shuffling of personal priorities. Often, the unwitting victim is one's personal life.
- People suffering from burnout seem to progressively feel a lack of personal accomplishment in their work.
- Burnout has been identified as a prime factor in turnover, absenteeism, reduced morale and various kinds of personal dysfunction.

The cause of executive burnout may be traced to perfectionism (trying to do too much because they expect it of themselves), business hero complex (feel that others expect it) or poor communication (failure to clearly define their limits to clients, co-workers, employees and others). It is necessary to determine the legitimate, realistic and feasible expectations of what you can do, at what pace and rhythm, for how long and what creative or rest breaks will be needed. If you do not clarify, and then communicate, your plan and needs to others, there is a danger that the expectations that others have about your time and attention may be too great.

What to do about burnout and how to get fired-up again

An understanding of the factors that lead to the feeling of burnout is important to the recovery process. If you don't know what contributed to burnout, you won't know what corrective measures to undertake. This will require an honest and in-depth assessment of how you became burned out. What self-esteem needs were you trying to meet by your personal and business related choices and decisions? Is there another way to address those needs in a less stressful manner?

"Is it necessary to leave my current position or company in order to overcome the burnout syndrome?" is an often-asked question. There are no absolute answers. If your corporation expects that you must continue working as you have -- and if there is not an appreciation or acknowledgment of your current condition, it may be necessary to change your environment. However, it would be an unusual corporation today that is unaware of the effects that prolonged demands are having on employees. Therefore, it is appropriate to first approach the company with an overview of what you are experiencing and ask for assistance in overcoming the burnout syndrome. You may retort "Ha! And just how long do you think that I
would be in the game if I admitted that I was so stressed that I can no longer handle my job?" There are risks that your confession may be fodder for the management or ownership of a company. However, unless burnout is addressed and treated, the effects will continue to erode away at your job productivity, quality of your work and attitude about your job.

Remember, stress can and does kill. The body has a no tolerance zone, which if entered into will manifest physical ailments or death. Studies have shown that more heart attacks occur on Monday morning than any other time of the week. The common factor here is that people are going back to work after a weekend off. What a shocking realization, that people are not dying to go to work but are dying because they are going to work. How many of the people who suffer the Monday Morning Syndrome have been experiencing undetected or untreated signs and symptoms of burnout?

Burnout is preventable. It requires an understanding that "heat" in the form of enthusiasm for a job is good for the employee and the business, but too much or prolonged heat can result in a scorched employee.

**What can you do?**

Try implementing a burnout avoidance program within your company. The components of the program include monitoring employees who look like candidates for early flameouts. You know the ones, burning the candle at both ends and trying to conquer and master all in an unrealistic time frame. Traditionally the workplace has rewarded that type of employee behavior by pats on the backs, promotions or other forms of recognition. The message is subtle but clear: We like that kind of attitude and action. But will it feel so good when the employee flames out?

As a manager or employer, do you encourage or even insist that employees take time off to vacate and recreate? Do you monitor your own actions to determine if you are setting an example that others will follow?

We can also learn a lesson about burnout from Mother Nature. She demonstrates the importance of balance. Even she recognizes that plants, trees and animals can't constantly grow and expand. They need an opportunity to rest and to replenish diminished resources. She provides this balance through the seasons of the year to accommodate the needs of nature.
Burnout is costly, and it is preventable. It takes a personal commitment by the employees, the management and by the company to take proactive steps to prevent or address early signs of burnout. It will take your commitment as a manager and as a person to detect and address those situations that lead up to this stress related syndrome.

It's sort of like Smokey Bear says ---
Only You Can Help Prevent "For-stress" Fires

**What Factors Seem To Essentially Contribute To Burnout Stress?**

1. Expectation of greater workload and longer hours

2. Loss of individual autonomy, over scheduling, predictable income, loss of trust and respect of your professional role

3. Pressure to take on more risks as your business system demands compliance and to decrease costs but increase “quality”

4. Inability to balance personal and professional life

5. Decreased company or peer socialization and collegiality

6. Lack of positive and timely feedback from management or the owners of the company

7. Difficulty in saying “No” (at work, home, church, volunteer activities, or in the community)

8. Unrealistic expectations from customers or employees.

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