

PEOPLE ARE NOT **ROBOTS**

BY HEIDI TOTOS

The trend, of the last few decades, where people have been expected to give ever increasing amounts of their time, energy and focus to work, just does not make sense. In many arenas it seems people are expected not to have a personal life. Many industries and professions expect 24/7 availability and commitment. Sour looks and sarcastic jibes can far too often be heard where employees try to work in a bit of time for themselves or their family. Under such conditions people inevitably burn out.

Some of the causes of burnout are:

- Unhealthy work environments where managers bully and micromanage their staff
- A lack of control over decisions and workload
- A lack of fit between an employee's personality and the requirements of the position
- Boredom; routine and mundane tasks daily
- Constant activity that never allows for calmer moments
- Expectations not clearly set out
- A lack of work life-fit

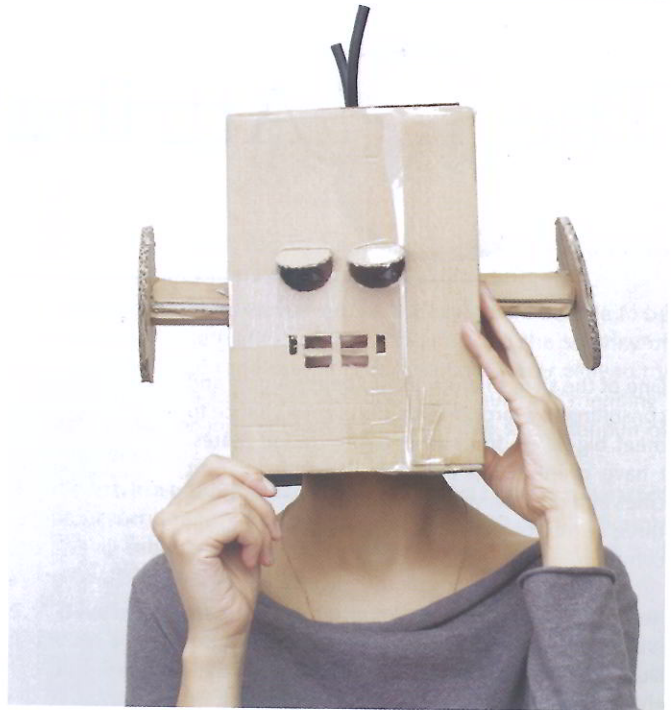
Those experiencing burnout are unlikely to have a meltdown and spend the day crying in the bathroom. They are more likely to slowly lose interest in their job and become less productive in subtle ways.

Keeping a lookout for the signs could help with preventing the inevitable production decrease related to burnout. Some of the signs include:

- Being critical and irritated with co-workers, clients, family and friends
- Procrastination; finding it difficult to get started in the mornings
- Apathy; lacking energy and interest in activities in the work environment
- Depression; disillusioned about work and life
- Frequent physical complaints that weren't there before
- Change in sleep habits, resulting in coming to work unrested
- Lateness and absenteeism
- Working hard without producing results
- Value clashes between employee and organisation

People experiencing burnout may well be going through the motions, but are less likely to be driving themselves to achieve results. They are often unable to walk away from a job that is asking too much of them, especially those providing for others. As a result they do the minimum they can to stay under the radar.

There is however a positive side to burnout. Once the employee realises that they are experiencing burnout they begin to ask themselves some questions as to why that is. For instance they may wonder what their actual interests and skills are; what they are hoping to accomplish at work; whether there is enough balance between work and life and how they can go about changing things for the better.



Research shows working flexibly leads to more engaged employees with lower levels of stress. Allowing employees to handle the pressures of work and life in a more thoughtful manner will lead to a better work-life fit, which should help to reduce burnout.

Take action and spot the signs of burnout, before everyday becomes a bad day that a burned out staff member has to make it through. People are not robots.

5 Tips to keep burnout at bay:

1. Take care of your physical and emotional wellbeing by exercising, eating healthy food and getting enough sleep.
2. Be vigilant and take action when you see signs of burnout, by managing your stress proactively and seeking support from others.
3. Switch off technology and take a break from e-mail, Twitter and FaceBook updates for a few hours every day.
4. Re-evaluate your goals and priorities. Then set boundaries and say no to requests that are not part of your plan.
5. Do something for yourself. Take up a hobby, pamper yourself or take time to relax away from work related activities.



Heidi Totos is an Industrial Psychologist specialising in Flexinmix, the empowering of organisations to create sustainable flexible workplace arrangements with positive bottom-line benefits. She runs a workshop where flexible workplace programmes that suit organisations are developed, and team leaders are given the knowledge and skills necessary to foster and support flexibility in their organisations.

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