

5 Strategies for Beating the Burnout Battle

By Connie Warasila and Ann Gilbert

Burnout comes in three flavors: emotional, mental and/or physical exhaustion. Either one can stop you in your tracks and cause you to miss out on relationships, work and self-fulfillment. Burnout is created by excessive and prolonged stress that leads to physical and emotional exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Knowing the warning signs can help you avoid the fall into full-blown burnout. Catch the signs of burnout and start making changes to avoid a full crash and demanding recovery. Denial of the warning signs guarantees that symptoms will begin to pile up and eventually cause your mind and/or body to shut down.

After teaching for a combined time of 65 years, the authors of this article have had plenty of opportunities to practice burnout avoidance. As a fitness professional, you will also experience the stress of serving others and denying yourself. By reading this article, you will learn from experienced and wise mentors. Remember, you can also seek information from your peers.

Recognizing the signs of burnout

Mental, emotional, and physical burnout are very closely related. Symptoms of each overlap greatly and can be difficult to categorize.

MENTAL:

- Faulty memory
- Impaired concentration/attention
- Lack of creativity

EMOTIONAL:

- Low self-esteem
- Fear of starting something new
- Avoidance of evaluation
- Emotional instability
- Impatience & Anger
- Disillusionment/Resentment
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Cynical thinking
- Disinterest in work/hobbies
- Easily overwhelmed
- Bored by tasks
- Feeling unappreciated
- Emotions are blunted
- Detachment/Depression
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to cope
- Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early

PHYSICAL:

- Pain/Injury
- Denial of pain/injury
- Lack of cross-training
- Weight gain or loss
- Digestion problems
- Chronic illness
- Chronic fatigue
- Compromised immune system
- Headaches, back pain, muscle aches
- Sleeplessness
- Loss of appetite

Causes of Burnout

What causes this to happen? Too much work/responsibility, lifestyle, personality traits, spare time activities, home demands, disposition – or all of these? Burnout is more common among people who work in the healthcare field due to their focus on the lives of their clients. That is very similar to careers in fitness. We are care givers to a large number of people. For fitness instructors burnout contributors could look like this:

- Teaching/Managing too many classes
- Teaching all the same kind of class
- Teaching too many days in a row
- Subbing too many classes in addition to your regularly scheduled classes
- Sacrificing sleep/social engagements/food/self-renewal activities for teaching
- Demanding perfection of yourself and students
- No spare time
- Resenting your supervisor/students/fellow instructors
- An over-developed sense of importance
- Lack of control about when and what you teach
- Unwillingness to give up a stressful class or format

Recovering from Burnout

If you recognize yourself in the lists above, you may be burned out or possibly on your way. Here are 4 steps to get back on track:

1. STOP!
 - a. Take a break.
 - b. Or at least slow WAY down.
 - c. Reduce commitments.
 - d. Rest.
2. Get support.
 - a. Share your feelings with loved ones, family, friends and fellow instructors. Choose wisely – different friends offer different types of support.
 - b. Seek medical attention for physical needs.
 - c. Seek out appropriate therapy, if necessary.

3. Reset goals and priorities.
 - a. Take the time to evaluate your past and future goals. Re-write realistic goals that are measurable and have deadlines. Remember to set smaller, achievable goals that lead to larger goals.
 - b. Decide on time boundaries. Put a limit on the time you designate for work, family, hobbies, etc.
 - c. Determine if there are past goals that are no longer realistic. It may be time to let go.
4. Returning to teaching:
 - a. Address past issues that may have contributed to your burnout.
 - b. Ask for class formats and times that help you form a balanced approach to teaching.
 - c. Give yourself permission to take a break, go on vacation and rejuvenate.

5 Strategies for Consistent Rejuvenation

The secret to avoiding burnout is constant attention to your own care. Take enough time for yourself to ensure you are healthfully growing. As Ann Gilbert says, "You are either progressing or regressing; there is no word as 'gressing'." The longer you stay in your comfort zone the more you risk discontentment. You may be wedged into an unhealthy pattern leading to physical and mental burnout.

Here are 5 strategies to progress in life and avoid a burnout episode. You may notice some strategies that have kept your mentor or favorite instructor in growth mode over the years.

1. Self-evaluation: refer to the RIPPLE Sheet.
 - a. SWOT- strengths, opportunities that are out there for which you can reach, and weaknesses and threats that keep you from growing
 - b. Film yourself and watch it
 - c. Team teach often
 - d. Ask clients for feedback, verbal or a written survey
 - e. Create an action plan after evaluation, with 3 things TO DO
 - f. Be accountable to other people
2. Continuing education – you should recertify every 2 years, not only to keep you up-to-date on industry trends, but also to rejuvenate your career.
 - a. Set money aside in your budget yearly to cover training expenses.
 - b. Choose wisely and education with purpose.
 - c. Plan it a year ahead.

- d. Create an action plan after training.
- e. Work towards becoming a CEC provider, creating your own program.
- 3. Be a visionary
 - a. Establish time management practices.
 - b. Set goals 6-9 months ahead using the SMART Method: Smart, measurable, attainable, realistic, in a specific time frame.
 - c. See yourself as a business person - establish a business plan.
 - d. Study the industry trends.
 - e. Learn a new format or program.
 - f. Create a network so you are not alone.
 - g. Branding: create name and logo recognition.
 - h. Write articles, blogs, tips for clients, add videos to YouTube.
- 4. Rest – could be 1 day or maybe even 6 months.
 - a. Timing
 - b. Duration
 - c. Mode
 - d. Fears: losing the class and income, seeming weak, criticized change in physique, signs of aging. Be willing to surrender a class in order to invest in your own health and longevity in your career.
 - e. Daily rest: meditation, reading, checking out
 - f. Weekly rest: day off, get a sub
 - g. Monthly: spa treatment, massage, restorative yoga
 - h. Yearly: self-maintenance, annual physical, vacation
- 5. Balance - Fit people are really only healthy if they adhere to all 5 aspects of being physically fit, including addressing cardiovascular endurance, muscular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility and body composition. Balance in your personal life and professional life are both equally important. Activities in your personal life will affect your perspective on your professional life.

All of these strategies contribute to a healthy fitness career. Strive to find balance not only in your physical health, but also in your life, overall. Carve out time for yourself, friends and family, career and varied interests. Take care of yourself so you can keep helping others discover their healthiest life.

- Which one of these is NOT a type of burnout?
 - Emotional
 - Physical
 - Material
 - Mental
- Burnout is created by excessive and prolonged stress that leads to physical and emotional exhaustion, cynicism and detachment.
 - TRUE
 - FALSE
- Mental, emotional, and physical burnout are not related.
 - TRUE
 - FALSE
- Why is burnout more common among people who work in the healthcare field?
 - Because of their focus on the lives of their clients.
 - Because of workplace pressure to exceed expectations.
 - Because of their unhealthy lifestyles.
 - Because of their lack of social interactions.
- Which of these is NOT a cause for burnout?
 - Teaching/Managing too many classes
 - Subbing too many classes in addition to your regularly scheduled classes
 - Sacrificing sleep/social engagements/food/self-renewal activities for teaching
 - Demanding perfection of yourself and students
 - All of these are causes for burnout.
- What are the four steps associated with a burnout?
 - Be ready, reset goals and priorities, STOP, return to teaching
 - return to teaching, be ready, reset goals and priorities, and get support
 - STOP, Get support, reset goals and priorities, return to teaching
 - STOP, reset goals and priorities, motivate, and get support
- The longer you stay in your comfort zone the _____ you risk discontentment.
 - less
 - more
 - often
 - fewer
- The 5 strategies to progress in life and avoid a burnout are self-evaluation, continuing education, be a visionary, rest, and balance.
 - True
 - False
- It's important to rejuvenate and keep up with current trends in the industry. This falls under which of the 5 strategies to progress in life?
 - Continuing Education
 - Self-Evaluation
 - Be a visionary
 - Balance
- Setting goals 6-9 months ahead using the SMART method: Smart, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Specific time frame. The SMART method falls under which of the 5 categories.
 - Continuing Education
 - Self-Evaluation
 - Be Visionary
 - Rest

Answers: 1. C; 2. A; 3. B; 4. A; 5. E; 6. C; 7. B; 8. A; 9. A; 10. C