

Burnout Culture: Defining The Problem And Potential Solutions For Climbing Gyms

December 10, 2019

in [CWA Blog](#)



Burnout as defined by [The World Health Organization](#) (WHO) is a syndrome that occurs as the result of chronic workplace stress. Burnout isn't a temporary experience – in fact, it has become a societal epidemic that can have negative impacts on your business.

With [1 in 5 employees reporting they experience burnout](#), your gym might already be experiencing the effects of burnout. We're going to look at what burnout is and what you can do if your staff experiences it.

Burnout: What Does it Look Like?

When you're concerned your staff is underperforming and lacks motivation, it's important to determine their stage of burnout in order to implement a strategy to reduce the negative impact on your business.

Burnout has been added to the WHO's International Classification of Diseases and has three characteristics, as defined by the WHO:

1. feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job;
3. and reduced professional efficacy.

While staff can experience different symptoms, there are [five common stages of burnout](#):

1. **Honeymoon:** The experience of commitment, energy, and creativity.
2. **Onset of Stress:** The occasional experience of tough and challenging days here and there.

3. **Chronic Stress:** The consistent experience of every day being tough and challenging, depleted energy, anxiety, and lack of focus.
4. **Burnout:** The occasional experience of lack of motivation & creativity, low energy, pessimistic outlook, irritability, self-doubt, and isolation.
5. **Habitual Burnout:** Consistent and chronic mental and physical fatigue, depression, neglect of personal needs, and loss of motivation and creativity.

The Causes of Burnout Culture

According to Harvard Business Review, a workplace that doesn't promote a healthy work/life balance is at the highest risk of experiencing burnout culture. While individuals experience the consequences of burnout, the underlying cause of burnout is due to the organization's overall [workplace culture](#) and being trapped in the [busyness paradox](#).

The busyness paradox conflates the state of being busy (for example, getting sidetracked with low value tasks or running around putting out fires all day) with producing high quality work based on intentional strategic purpose.

Given that busyness is often looked at as a badge of honor, what steps can you take to shift how your organization approaches productivity and ultimately improve your workplace culture?

Managing Burnout in the Gym

Research shows that known [costs of turnover can be as much as 33% of an employee's annual salary](#), in addition to hidden costs such as reduced productivity, dissatisfied gym members, lowered staff morale, and compromised [workplace safety](#). Managing staff burnout not only reduces negative impacts on the bottom line, but also supports a dynamic and positive gym culture.

The good news is that burnout is preventable when you focus on the key elements that you can control in your gym:

- Labor
- Performance
- Morale

Labor, performance, and morale are measurable metrics that need to be tracked from an employee's start date and throughout their employment. Effective and consistent HR management can reduce and eliminate burnout. It is not enough to guess if your staff is struggling, you need data that includes:

1. **How many hours they are working:** Easily tracked through payroll and corrected through effective scheduling.
2. **What their performance is:** Determined through reviews and underperforming staff can improve through training and mentoring.
3. **The state of their morale:** Established through an employee survey that addresses how

the staff feels about working, the working conditions at your gym, and what the staff wants to see improved.

It is important to know which factor(s) are contributing to burnout. For instance, a staff member not working excessive hours with good morale and low performance may need additional training or mentoring. Likewise, a staff member with great performance and low morale may be working too much.

Once you determine how much each potential factor is contributing to burnout, work with your staff to implement a remedy. Most likely, each factor will have some play in burnout and working to remedy even one factor can help lessen the overall impact of burnout.

While you can use metrics to gauge what needs improvement, do not forget basics like communication and interacting with staff, especially when you host comps or events in your gym.

Planning is crucial to getting back to the day-to-day after a special event. "Having a plan to make the workload manageable before, during, and after an event is mandatory if you want to ensure that events have minimal impact on a commercial facility and its routesetters," says Brad Weaver from [Thread Climbing](#). "Having a plan in place and communicating that plan to the setting team and the gym staff helps set everyone's expectations and helps reduce the stress on everyone involved."

The bottom line is that though burnout is an individual experience, it's generally a [problem with the company, not the person](#). Depending on the size of your gym and how widespread your burnout problem is, it may be necessary to implement proactive cultural changes to how your business operates so that you are not constantly reacting to chronic cases of burnout in your staff.

About The Author



Amanda Ashley is a writer, climber, and a climbing mom. From her early days spent training on the musty community woody in The School at the New River Gorge to training in modern mega climbing gyms all over the West, she's seen the rise of climbing gyms and the evolution of routesetting up close and personal for the past 20 years. Amanda writes about climbers, routesetting, changes in climbing movement and performance, and the climbing industry. Amanda's work has appeared in Climbing Magazine, Climbing Business Journal, and the Utah Adventure Journal.



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