

Where, oh, where has your enthusiasm gone? Oh, where, oh, where can it be? Have you lost the excitement you once found in your work? In your mind's eye, has your once fulfilling career morphed into nothing more than a job you feel obliged to go to in order to collect a paycheck? If you've gone from being a pleasant professional to a disgruntled grouch, you may be suffering from a serious case of burnout.

"Burnout occurs on three levels," says Morton Tener, a professor of business education at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. He says there is institutional burnout, where there may be a lack of company support; interpersonal burnout, which can result from poor relations among staff and/or a lack of competence; and individual burnout, where a professional might perceive that success, however hard they strive, is unlikely.

Tener says that in order to determine the stage of burnout in which you are operating, you must perform an honest self-appraisal. He suggests that you start by asking yourself the following questions:

What was my original motivation to perform? When, specifically, did I lose it? Why?

What were my original objectives in this position? Have I reached them? Were they unrealistic? Is it time for another challenge?

Do I blame others for my lack of success?

"If you are truly battling with burnout, many of your answers to the above will be negative," says Tener. The following suggestions may help you begin to recover from your current case of burnout, and prevent future occurrences.

Understand that you must be willing to change what's inside you before you can change the things around you.

Know that tribulations and pressures sometimes come with the territory, but you have the power to control how you react to them.

Develop realistic goals before beginning new projects. Make sure the stress you feel to perform isn't being brought on by your harshest critic-yourself.

Realize that you can't please everyone all of the time, and that you will be more successful in your office endeavors at certain times-when overall morale is high, for example-than at others.

Maintain a positive attitude. Approach new challenges with the expectation that they will be rewarding, even if only for the lessons they teach you.

Flex your creativity. Though company policies and procedures may not change much, you can always come up with innovative ways to carry them out.

Don't let negative circumstances at work affect you personally. For example, under no circumstances should you allow a job, colleagues, or management to kill your passion for what you love to do.

Keep your self-image intact. Learn how to separate what you do from who you are. They are not the same. For example, get in the habit of saying, "I make my living as a...," rather than "I am a..." This way, you can avoid believing the hype attached to your professional position-and internalizing all the stresses and strains that go with it.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

In the battle against burnout, you have to know the enemy before you can defeat it. Make it a point to study material by experts in the field, Tener suggests. Here's a short reading list to help you get started:

Dear Job Stressed: Answers for the Overworked, Overwrought and Overwhelmed by Mary H. Dempcy and Rene Tihista (Consulting Psychologists Press, \$15.95)

Overcoming Job Burnout: How to Renew Enthusiasm For Work by Dr. Beverly Potter (Ronin Publishing, \$14.95)

The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It by Chirstina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (Jossey-Bass, \$25)