

# burnout

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*Nine key questions will help you identify burnout; some steps that you can take*

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by  
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Have you lost the enthusiasm you once had? Does your career lack meaning? Do your campers and counselors get on your nerves? Are you out of touch with developments in the field? Are you failing to perceive the needs of your campers and staff? If you answer yes to the above, you are a victim of burnout.

Director burnout could be on one of three levels: individual, interpersonal, or institutional. The burnout on an individual basis can be due to personality, job stress, or job description redundancy. The interpersonal portion is the role that other people play in the interaction with the director which can be seen in the difficulties or the satisfaction with co-workers, campers, and parents. The institutional contribution to burnout is a result of government regulations, professional standard requirements, heavy workloads, and poor management.

To make an honest appraisal of oneself and to determine at what stage of the burnout spectrum you are, ask yourself the following questions.

1. What were my objectives 10, 20 years ago? Have I reached them? Have I failed? Have I reached them and am now bored?
2. What part of my professional activities do I enjoy—administering a camp program? soliciting for camper enrollment? financial activities? camp promotion? none of the above?
3. Am I an imaginative and creative director?
4. Do I blame spoiled kids, over-demanding parents, and incompetent staffs for my attitude?
5. Do I follow through with plans and projects?
6. Am I willing to accept criticism and react constructively to it?
7. Am I active in the profession by attending meetings, reading journals, inviting accreditation visits, exchanging ideas with other camp directors, etc.?

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8. Am I spending less time with campers and the program and looking for ways to escape?
9. What is my level of enthusiasm?

We can turn negative indicators into positive strategies by being honest with oneself, recognizing pitfalls, and updating our objectives and perceptions. The following are practical suggestions that may be helpful.

**1. Understand self and take corrective action.**

Read materials written by experts in camping, education, business and psychology. Attend professional meetings and compare your objectives and activities to other successful camp directors. Take college courses in related areas. There are many colleges and professional organizations that offer courses and seminars. Solicit post-season evaluations from parents, campers, and staff. Participate in inter-camp visitations, and critique and exchange notes and ideas. Develop current goals before the beginning of each camp season.

**2. Realize that tribulations, pressures, and responsibilities are part and parcel of camp administration.**

In dealing with children a camp director is responsible with the most important commodity a family has to offer. Planning, programming, and problem solving of a camp community are demanding and challenging. Like coaches and politicians, camp directors will win some and lose some. We must realize that you cannot satisfy all people all the time. Develop a mindset that if I try my best and consider the welfare of the campers as central in my thinking, I have given my best effort.

**3. Be positive.**

Approach the new camp year with the expectations that it will be fun and rewarding and that you can influence the future. Develop a close relationship with campers, staff and parents, and become part of the program as much as possible. During the "off-season," distribute a camp newspaper, visit homes, telephone and attend social functions of camp families. Demonstrate interest and concern of all members of your camp community.

**4. Try to be innovative.**

Though there are parameters and institutional rules, there are a variety of ways to implement camp programs and accomplish objectives. Before one can make changes, one must be willing to change oneself. Camp directors should desire to grow in administrative capability, perspective and relationships regardless of the years of experience in the profession.

**5. Keep a good self-image.**

As a camp director, one must be strong in body, mind and spirit. Have confidence in self. Accept the criticisms as well as the praise. Remember you may be a target of criticism, but you are still the expert. After you review the circumstances of any situation and you believe you are right, stand up for your convictions.

Let people know that profit is not your only motive, but that love of young children and advancement of the camping profession are priorities. Camp directors do care and offer contributions that the family and school cannot provide. □