



## **Talent Management Perspectives**

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# **Three Tips to Avoid Employee Burnout**

**By Sarita Bhakuni**

Would you buy a premium Italian sports car and then drive it into the ground? Of course not — you'd maintain it. Yet, when it comes to star employees, many companies do just that.

The same driving passion that fuels top talent performance often comes with a tendency to work seemingly without ceasing. Shortsighted managers encourage, and sometimes even demand, this. However, just like a car, a person can only be driven so far, so fast, before burnout manifests itself.

In the case of one nonprofit, results from an assessment used for leadership development and performance improvement indicated a group of individuals that would have excelled in any sector. However, scores also showed an overall low level of self-care, indicating that team members were actually pushing themselves to the point of counter productivity.

The ideology of many employees in the United States is: The harder you work, the more successful you'll be. But consider the dark side — highly motivated and passionate employees take on too much and start to lose focus. Passion, productivity, quality and fulfillment give way to stress, frustration and lower performance. In a vicious cycle, these employees often try to get back on top by working more, which only creates more stress and even lower productivity. In the worst cases, some of these passionate high performers become people who passionately hate their jobs.

When companies lose top talent to burnout, they lose both their investment and future productivity. Furthermore, highly productive teams can be torn apart by an employee who has reached his or her limit. As burned-out employees are increasingly prone to error, this may lead to mistakes that can cause irreparable damage — particularly in this cyber age.

Therefore, it's important to recognize the signs of strain, the most common of which include distraction, loss of ability to focus, increased irritability and overall loss of a normally well-managed temperament.

Leaders can't afford to sit back and watch the organization's best employees rev their engines until the "check engine" light acknowledges the lack of maintenance. By creating an environment that encourages self-care, they can reduce the chances that those warning lights will come on in the first place.

**Help people objectively evaluate priorities.** Sometimes, when individuals feel overwhelmed by their workload, it becomes difficult to know where to start. Therefore, leaders should consider giving them space — perhaps even a mandate — to take the time to gain clarity. This may mean time in the office to think and plan, or time away from the office.

**Present balance as a priority.** Make sure your employees take their vacation time. Mandatory vacation days can go a long way to building loyalty. In the aforementioned nonprofit, if workers push themselves too hard, coworkers will encourage them to take a break and recharge their batteries.

**Set an example.** The CEO responding to email while on vacation or working through illness may illustrate her dedication to the company, but it also sends another message: We expect you to be on call 24/7. This is a sure recipe for burnout.

An organization's highest performers may have the most creative and productive horsepower, but leaders need to make sure they retain the passion that fuels their acceleration. It may seem counterintuitive, but striking a healthy balance — which may mean asking employees to work less — can actually make star employees more productive, reduce burnout and increase retention. <

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