STAR UPDATE

MONTHLY INSIGHTS FROM THE **MRI**NETWORK TEAM OF STAFFING PROFESSIONALS, TALENT ADVISORS & RECRUITMENT EXPERTS

How to Have Conversations with Your Team About Burnout_

By Annette Wehrli

One 2020 was a tough year. In addition to impacting how we conduct our personal lives, the pandemic has drastically transformed the World of Work and, unfortunately, many employees are feeling burnt out as a result.

To start with, many people have reached a point of general pandemic fatigue. This has gone on far much longer than anyone anticipated; life patterns have been disrupted, relationships have been strained and/or lost, and general stress levels have skyrocketed.

For some people, burnout is intensified by the pressure of physically going to work during a global pandemic; this is especially true for healthcare professionals and other essential workers, but applies to many other employees who must work in a public setting.

For others, it's the shift to remote work. In our always-on digital world, creating work-life balance has been a challenge of its own, and now many people are also taking on the role of teacher and daily caregiver. Add the general fatigue they're feeling and you have the perfect storm for physical and emotional decline.

It's not surprising that working from home can contribute to a handful of significant mental health challenges. People who live and work alone, for example, can feel isolated, which may contribute to depression and anxiety. On the other end of the spectrum, employees who live in a house full of children, other adults, and pets can battle impatience and anger.

[Recent research](#) shows that employees across the globe have been working 2.5 more hours per day on average since the start of the pandemic — and in a survey of 133 U.K. companies, 44% of employees said their workloads have increased since going remote. Another 31% said this change in environment has also had a direct impact on their mental wellbeing.

If not addressed, burnout can have intense consequences on both individual and organizational health. As we continue to pivot, here are some things you can do to better support your employees.

Consider Your Corporate Culture

First and foremost, make sure your approach to talking about burnout aligns with your organizational culture. Companies that reward long hours and unrealistic workloads will have a tougher time communicating about this than those that prioritize balance and safety during these unusual times. Your organization's culture sets the tone for having successful conversations about stress and fatigue with employees.

Acknowledge That Burnout Exists

Accept that employees in your organization are suffering from burnout. Many people have learned how to camouflage it — whether they're in the office or working from home — so it's important that you acknowledge it exists and invite discussion about how to address it.

This is critical to minimizing the negative stigma around burnout. Employees often believe that reporting burnout makes them seem weak; some managers believe that one day of rest can make everything better. These and many other stigmas get in the way of effective conversations around this critical topic. The World Health Organization's recent decision to redefine burnout as a "syndrome" further proves that it needs to be acknowledged.

Check In On Your Own Mental Wellness

It's not likely that you will help others if you aren't healthy. To ensure you're in a solid place to have conversations about burnout with your team, check in on your own wellbeing first. Doing a quick self-assessment by asking questions like, "Do I find it hard to concentrate?" and "Is stress interfering with my sleep?" or "Do I isolate, or act out in unhealthy ways when I think about work?" From there, you can take steps to minimize stress or get help, if needed.

Learn to Recognize the Signs of Burnout

It can be difficult to recognize burnout in others — especially since it can begin with increased enthusiasm and the compulsion to prove oneself. When employees first take on a new task, such as working remotely, they may feel a surge of creativity and commitment. But if stress isn't well-managed, people can begin to suffer both mentally and physically.

While not everyone experiences burnout in the same way, there are some common behaviors to watch for:

- **Lack of energy:** Exhaustion that isn't cured by rest is perhaps the most obvious sign.

- **Frequent illness:** Chronic stress can also lead to a number of physical symptoms, including headaches, dizziness, stomach pain, frequent colds, and shortness of breath.
- **Irritability:** Employees that act unusually impatient or angry towards colleagues may be having trouble coping.

Plan in Advance

Position your conversations about mental wellness and/or burnout to go well by preparing ahead of time — these aren't conversations to "wing". Check in with your organization's legal and HR teams to ensure that the support you're offering follows protocol. It's also helpful to get clarity on the available internal and external resources (e.g. Employee Assistance Programs). Taking these steps in advance can prepare you to offer a helpful solution or action plan.

We can't always control burnout — but we can control how we discuss it with employees. Acknowledging how you and your team feels, making time to check in, and encouraging everyone in the organization to do the same are a few ways to help each other through difficult times. We're all in this together.