

Running a lean machine? Get ready for the breakdown



July 29, 2011 by Tim Gould

Posted in:

The recession taught many employers they could carry smaller staffs and maintain profitability. But that concept has started to show its dark side — and HR will be in the thick of dealing with it.

The burnout bill is coming due.

According to a recent survey from [CareerBuilder](#), an astounding 77% of workers say they're "sometimes or always" burned out in their jobs.

And 43% say on-the-job stress levels have ratcheted up in the last six months.

Almost eight in ten workers burned out? No wonder we're hearing that workers would be willing to jump to new jobs at the first opportunity.

Three versions of the same story

How can HR help their organizations fight the burnout epidemic? The first step is understanding that it's not just a matter of employees simply being asked to do too much — although that's certainly a factor.

Researchers in Spain recently released the results of a [study on employee burnout](#). They contend the phenomenon takes three main forms:

“Frenetic” burnout: This occurs in the Type A, driven personalities — workaholics whose ambition pushes them to work past the normal limits of human endurance. They're often extremely successful, but their success doesn't last. They simply run out of gas.

This variety of burnout is unlikely to be connected to today's economic climate — workaholics are part of the picture no matter what business conditions exist.

“Underchallenged” burnout: This malaise falls under the phrase we've heard so often in the past year or so

— “employee engagement.” These workers just aren’t into their jobs. They’re bored, get no satisfaction from day-to-day duties, and don’t see much hope for personal growth.

Although these types, too, are ever-present in the workforce, the recession seems to have spawned an unusually large group of “disengaged” workers.

Finally, there the group that’s simply “worn out.” Not too hard to understand where these folks are coming from: they’re simply overworked, and likely are feeling unappreciated. They’re the losers in the “doing more with fewer people” philosophy a lot of companies have adopted over the past couple years.

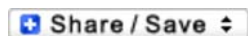
Where HR fits in

What’s HR’s role in dealing with the burnout issue?

Morale: HR pros can partner with upper management to establish recognition and reward programs that’ll help workers feel appreciated and valued.

Training: Helping employees learn new skills is a proven technique for increasing employee engagement. A cross-training program, developed with company managers, can help minimize workers’ feeling that they’re stuck in a dead-end job.

Recruiting: Companies can’t run on skeleton staffs forever — as the burnout trend ominously indicates. Along with finding the right people for new staff openings, HR managers can use internal transfers and promotions from within to fill spots that open as the economy improves.



Tags: [CareerBuilder](#), [employee burnout](#), [morale](#), [research](#)

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