

Special Report: Tips to Reduce Stress and Burnout For Small Business Owners

Designed Especially for You by



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Job Stress or Burnout?

What is the difference between job stress and burnout? The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines job **stress** as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.”

Experts believe that **burnout** often begins with “the honeymoon phase” of a job when everything seems exciting and new. You take on more work than you can do and willingly give up time at home to handle the extra work load. Eventually the overload catches up with you and you start resenting the work.

Can you relate to this situation? You are excited about starting your own business because you know you can do a great job, better than your previous employer. So you start your business only to find out that there is a lot more to running a business than you counted on. You are responsible for doing the job, sales, finances, personnel and more. The requirements of your business do not match your capabilities, resources or need for fulfillment. You begin to resent working long hours just to keep the business afloat, much less grow it.



Early Warning Signs of Too Much Stress

Stress-related illnesses do not occur without warning. We simply shut off our early-warning system. Keep an eye out for the following early warning signs that were developed by Neil S. Hibler, Ph.D. How many of these signs do you see in yourself?

Emotional Signs:

Apathy	The blahs, feeling of sadness, recreation that is no longer pleasurable.
Anxiety	Restlessness, agitation, insecurity, sense of worthlessness.
Irritability	Feeling hypersensitive, defensive, arrogant or argumentative.
Mental Fatigue	Feeling preoccupied, having difficulty concentrating, trouble thinking flexibly.
Overcompensation or Denial	Grandiosity (exaggerating the importance of your activities to yourself and others), working too hard, denying that you have problems, ignoring symptoms, feeling suspicious.

Behavioral Signs:

Avoiding	Keeping to yourself, avoiding work, having trouble accepting responsibility, neglecting responsibility.
Extremes	Alcoholism, gambling, spending sprees, sexual promiscuity.
Administrative Problems	Being late for work, poor appearance, poor personal hygiene, being accident prone.
Legal Problems	Indebtedness, shoplifting, traffic tickets, inability to control violent impulses.



Physical Signs:

Excessive Worrying	Excessive worrying about or denial of illness.
Frequent Illness	Catching colds frequently or other ailments.
Physical Exhaustion	Extremely tired all the time.
Over Reliance on Self-Medication	Using medications like aspirin, antacids, etc.
Ailments	Headache, insomnia, appetite changes, weight gain or loss, frequent indigestion, nausea, nervous diarrhea, constipation, sexual problems.

How did you do? Did you recognize any of the signs of stress in yourself? As your tolerance for stress gets lower, little things can seem bigger. Learning to identify what bugs you is the first step in getting your stress under control.



What's Bugging You?

For each of the following questions, choose a number between 1 and 6 that describes how much the action bugs you. Use a 1 to indicate what hardly bugs you at all to a 6 that what always bugs you a lot! You can skip questions that do not apply.

Does It Bug You At Work?

- _____ 1. When someone else drinks the last cup of coffee and *you* have to make a new pot.
- _____ 2. When you get lost in a series of voice mail messages.
- _____ 3. When you play phone tag and don't get the person you need to speak with right away.
- _____ 4. When co-workers/employees talk too much.
- _____ 5. When employees borrow your things.
- _____ 6. When you have to work late.
- _____ 7. When employees or family interrupt you with things they think are important.
- _____ 8. When you have too many meetings.
- _____ 9. When others arrive late to meetings



Does It Bug You At Home?

- _____ 10. When someone eats the last bowl of your favorite cereal.
- _____ 11. When someone doesn't put their things away.
- _____ 12. When someone puts an empty ice tray back in the freezer.
- _____ 13. When telephone salespersons call during dinner.
- _____ 14. When you can hear your neighbor's stereo.
- _____ 15. When your neighbor's dog barks constantly.
- _____ 16. When you get an overdraft notice from the bank.
- _____ 17. When it rains on Saturday.
- _____ 18. When someone takes long showers and uses up all the hot water.
- _____ 19. When neighbors ask to borrow things.



Does It Bug You While Driving?

- _____ 20. When another driver cuts you off.
- _____ 21. When you are in a hurry and the person in front of you drives exactly the speed limit.
- _____ 22. When you get a parking ticket.
- _____ 23. When you get caught at a long stop light.
- _____ 24. When a driver tailgates behind you.
- _____ 25. When you get a flat tire.
- _____ 26. When truckers straddle the emergency lane to keep you from passing.
- _____ 27. When you get stuck in traffic.
- _____ 28. When you get a tiny dent or ding in the side of your car.

Add up your total score. Divide it by the number of questions you answered. This will give you your average score.

What Your Score Means

If your average falls between 1-2; you are very stress hardy (or fool hardy: few people do this well, so you may be denying your stress).

Between 2-3: you are dealing with stress very well.

Between 3-4: you are doing better than average.

Between 4-5: you are not handling stress very well and could use some help.

Between 5-6: you need more help than we can give you. You might want to seek professional advice.



If you only answered a few questions as “always bugs me a lot” maybe you can eliminate these sources of stress easily. If your average score was above 4, you need a preventative approach to stress management, an approach that builds your resistance to stress. Beginning a regular exercise routine or practicing relaxation techniques every day can erase the built up stress and revitalize you. You will be able to take your stress more in stride.

The Goal is Control

People who feel in control of their lives seem to handle stress better than those who don't. When you are feeling stressed, always ask yourself: Is there any aspect of this situation that I *can* control? For example, if you don't know the answer to a problem, getting together with other business owners to talk about options can help you feel more in control.

Getting organized both at home and at work is probably the quickest, easiest and most reliable way to start feeling a sense of control. Whether that means cleaning your desk, tidying your car, or working from a to-do list, these things give you an immediate sense of control over your environment.

Gaining an immediate sense of control over your environment is not always possible. For example, you can't control the weather, the traffic or other people's behavior. But you can carry an umbrella, choose another mode of transportation, or change your own behavior.



When you focus on the things that you can control and let go of the things you can't, you'll be surprised by how much less stress you experience.

4 Stress Coping Techniques

Use the following 4 techniques when you can actually anticipate stressful situations.

1. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation.** Learn to tense and relax various muscle groups in your body. Start by making a fist with each hand and tense all the muscles in your upper body. Tighten all the muscles from your shoulders down to your waist. Hold it for a few seconds and then release: Letting all the tension flow right out of your arms, hands, shoulders and abdomen. Allow yourself a few minutes to enjoy the warmth and relaxation that accompanies this release of tension.

Now try this in the muscles of your face and head. Clamp your jaw and your eyelids shut tight and scrunch your whole face into the tightest frown you can make. Hold the tension for a few seconds and then release. Take a moment to enjoy the relaxation that follows. You can do this with your back muscles by imagining that you are trying to squeeze a lemon between your shoulder blades. You can do this with

your leg muscles by lifting your legs off the floor and pointing your toes out straight. Always remember to hold the tension for at least 15 seconds and then allow the muscles to fully relax afterward.



2. **Autogenic Imagery.** Imagine a particular place where you feel comfortable, usually in natural surroundings. (You can do this sitting at your desk.) Maybe it's a lake where you went last summer or a scenic view of a sunset on the shore. Close your eyes and focus on the image (you might find this difficult at first) and hold onto this image until you feel the same way you did when you were actually there.

3. **Role Playing.** Role playing is a fun, simple method of preparation which helps you to preview stressful events before they occur. If you are nervous about an upcoming meeting with a client, find someone to play the role of your client and then practice your sales presentation. By role playing you remove much of your fear by eliminating the unknowns.

4. **Deep Breathing.** When you are nervous or tense, your breathing is shallow and you take in less oxygen. Taking several deep breaths before an event instantly counteracts the effects of stress. Try placing one hand over your navel as you breathe in. If you are breathing diaphragmatically (deeply), you will feel your hand rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.



Stress and Time Management

Time is the greatest asset you have. Unfortunately, stress robs you of this asset by making you unproductive, unfocused and unhealthy. The key to successful stress management is productive and prioritized use of your time. Here are 5 ideas for how you can manage stress and time.

1. **Create a comfortable morning routine.** Do you normally get up at 7:30, rush through a shower, grab a muffin and throw yourself into the day? Try getting up at 6:30. Eat a healthy breakfast. Enjoy your shower. Ease into the day with the goal of arriving at work at least 15 minutes *early*.
2. **Planning the Day.** Having arrived early, devote this time purely to planning. Planning is the most important thing you do on any given day. Spending 10 to 15 minutes every morning mapping out your day can save up to 6 hours a week.
3. **60 Minutes of Focus.** Spend 60-90 minutes each day working on a project that will have a long-term payoff for you personally. This should be something that directs you toward your biggest goal in life. Whether that's to be a better writer, a better salesperson, a better parent, or even in better shape. First decide what your number one long-term goal is. (Something that takes 6 months or more.) Break it down into steps and devote at least one *uninterrupted* hour to accomplishing this goal, every day, five days a week, until it's done.



4. **Give Yourself a Break.** If you are working hard, a short break can be a real motivator. You can't possibly work at the same thing for 8 hours straight. Your breaks are vital to your success. Physically, or at least mentally, get away from your work space. Whatever gets you away from where you have been for the last several hours will help you return refreshed. If you are inside all day try to go outside. If you can't go outside, walk around your building.

5. **When the Day is Done.** Give yourself something to look forward to at the end of every day. This will help you mentally turn off work the minute you step through your front door. REMEMBER: YOU ARE MUCH MORE THAN YOUR WORK. Cook a fancy meal. Rent a video. Put the kids to bed early and prepare a candlelight dinner for your spouse or significant other. Don't watch the late night news. It is designed to upset you. As you close your eyes to sleep, ponder five things you have to be grateful for.

Build a Support Network

A network of social support is considered by many to be the best antidote against stress you can find. In the book, *Stress and Performance at the Top*, a group of CEO's were surveyed to find out first, how well they coped with stress, and second what their coping methods were. Of the CEO's who coped best with stress, it seemed that a strong network of social support was their number one method of coping. Your network of social support can include your friends, family, church, community and professional contacts.

How to Build a Healthy Support Network

Make time for the people you supervise. We all supervise others in some way or another. Offering advice, teaching, giving simple hints and just finding out what's on a person's mind is well worth your time. When this person is overworked as the result of your assignments, offer to help. Be genuinely concerned about the welfare and personal interests of these people and prove it by remembering the names of their children, what their hobbies are and some of their outside interests.



Return the favor. When a person does you a favor, return it or at least say thank you. This is such an easy way to build a formidable network of social support and yet people consistently forget to do this. When a client gives you a referral send a thank you note. When a co-worker helps you, help them right back. When you hear yourself saying: "if there is ever anything I can do for you, let me know," remind yourself that nobody takes this line seriously. You must figure out how you can return the favor or say thank you in a meaningful way. When you do this you will have not added another link to your network of support.



Avoid damaging relationships. Avoid people who are always negative. They will only bring you down. Those who have nothing good to say, generally have nothing good to offer. Try supplying a contrasting opinion, for example “actually, I think we can do this,” or “but we will save a lot of time in the long run.” No opinion and a smile suggest to others that you empathize, but you don’t agree. Either way, you will begin to weed out those who might be a part of a healthy support network from those who won’t.

Get support outside of work. Join a master-mind group. This is a group of business owners from different industries who get together on a regular basis to share problems and offer support and advice. Sometimes these are called CEO roundtables or some other name. By sharing, everyone benefits.

20 Things I Have to be Grateful For

The final suggestion I have is to write down a list of 20 Things you have to be grateful for. Everyone has something to be grateful for, and you probably have much more to be grateful for than you even realize. Whether it’s a loyal dog, a reliable car, a parent who loves you, or even just your health, these things should not be taken for granted. Write down the 20 things you have to be grateful for and notice how just contemplating these things can lift your spirits. If this is the case, spend some time thinking about this list every day. Post it on the bathroom mirror. Review your top five items in your mind every night before going to sleep.



20 Things I'm Grateful For

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____



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Deb Miller is a small business owner and consulting professional with more than 20 years of experience. Her clients include small business owners, health care, manufacturing and financial organization.

Deb's personal philosophy for growth for herself and her clients is to learn something new every year. It is part of her personal business plan and is taken very seriously. As a result, Deb has amassed a number of certifications and experiences that you will not find everywhere.

For example, Deb earned a Master's Degree from Purdue University in Professional Communication. She completed a Six Sigma Black Belt certification, one of the first projects focusing on non-profit organizations. Deb is Lean in Health Care certified. She completed the nationally recognized certification as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR).

Now I want to help you to improve all aspects of your business by placing you on a solid footing, which begins with organization. Getting all of your ducks in a row will not only better prepare you for unforeseen problems and save you countless hours of time, but it will have residual benefits as well, such as decreased stress and an increase in personal productivity and self-esteem. It starts a snowball effect that can eventually lead to a dramatic increase in profits.



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To your greater success!

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