



## FIVE PITFALLS OF WORK STRESS

Stressed-out employees create the problem themselves, losing control of the situation.

Whenever I read a report that says something like 42% of a company's employees suffer from burnout, I find myself asking: What about the other 58%? What are they doing to protect themselves? What can we learn from them?

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IF YOU HAVE A HABIT OF SAYING "YES" TO EVERY NEW REQUEST, TRY SAYING "NO" MORE OFTEN (EASIER SAID THAN DONE, I KNOW)

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As a qualitative researcher, I have interviewed hundreds of people – police chiefs, nurses, doctors, business leaders, teachers, and others – who find themselves constantly battling burnout. We are all triggered by stressors differently, our perceptions of stressors vary, and how we react to stress is also different. Some people appear to be resistant to burnout. And for the many who are at risk of falling into what I call self-sabotage traps, there are behaviours that can help us dig ourselves out.

First, to determine if you're at risk for burnout, take a close look at your patterns, also known as defensive routines. Are you sleeping less? Feeling more irritable? Drinking alcohol to distract yourself from your stress? These are all indicators that burnout may be sneaking up on you.

Then, check to see if you've fallen into one or more of these common self-sabotage traps, and use these countermeasures to protect yourself. You'll see that the tactics to stay out of burnout involve two critical emotional intelligence skills. First, self-awareness will help you take a close look at your defensive routines. Then, self-management will help you to begin changing your habits away from destructive behaviours toward more productive ones.

**The overly adaptable trap.** Being adaptable and embracing change can be good for you and your career – that is, until you overextend yourself. This is a common trap for so-called people-pleasers, who are driven by the urge to appeal to others or to fulfil what they perceive to be others' expectations of them.

Be aware that compliance comes at a cost. Your flexibility may be a liability if you sacrifice your own well-being simply to please others.

If you have a habit of saying "yes" to every new request, try saying "no" more often (easier said than done, I know). Start with low-stakes projects. Try to set better boundaries to protect your recharge time and be clear with both yourself and your manager about when you are and are not willing to work overtime.

## EMPLOYEES SUFFERING FROM IMPOSTER SYNDROME MUST LEARN TO MAKE SELF-COMPASSION – NOT DEBILITATING SELF-CRITICISM – A HABIT

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**The perfectionist trap.** Perfection may well be the enemy of our wellness. Problems start to surface, however, when we expect too much of ourselves. We become doubly trapped when we start to believe that others around us are perfect and that we need to be, too (see the imposter syndrome trap below).

Ask yourself: “How can I get things done without the heavy burden of it having to be perfect?” Try being kind and forgiving to yourself. Forget the self-blame; it’s only going to make you feel worse.



*Start with low-stakes projects, try to set boundaries to protect your recharge time.*

**The imposter syndrome trap.** Starting a new role, getting a promotion, or taking on a new project can trigger the imposter syndrome. We feel underqualified for our job. When paired with the perfectionist trap, people suffering from imposter syndrome run a substantially higher risk of overworking (see the next trap: over-engagement).

Breaking free from this trap starts with recognising your feelings of inadequacy and reframing your self-talk. To strengthen yourself in the fight against burnout, make self-compassion – not debilitating self-criticism – a habit.

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EVEN PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR JOBS ARE AT RISK OF BURNING OUT. TO FREE YOURSELF OF THIS TRAP OF OVER-ENGAGEMENT, FIRST CONSIDER WHETHER YOU ARE PUSHING YOURSELF TOO HARD

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**The over-engagement trap.** Even people who love their jobs are at risk of burning out. We pour ourselves into work that makes us feel engaged and happy and slowly begin to sacrifice time spent on things that recharge us, such as time with family, exercise, and almost always, sleep.

To free yourself of this trap, first consider whether you are pushing yourself too hard. Try setting clear boundaries around when you work so you can enjoy the benefits of pursuing a passion outside of work.

**The “I can’t do anything about it” trap.** Research psychologists have shown that individuals tend to cope with stressors in two different ways. “Problem-focused” coping helps us deal with stressors over which we believe we have control. These include the amount of extra work we willingly take on, deadlines we can change or negotiate, and other work-related problems that are “figure-out-able.” When we believe that we have little or no control over a stressor, we typically engage in “emotion-focused” coping. We use this most often when we are over-burdened with work, deadlines, and other pressures that, despite our best attempts, are inflexible or are otherwise out of our hands. People who spend a lot of time in emotion-focused coping (i.e., dealing with our emotions when we believe we can’t control something) face a significantly higher risk of burnout.

If you find yourself stuck in this trap, challenge your belief about which aspects of your reality you do or do not control. Think about the specific things causing you stress and ask yourself, “Is this deadline as rigid as I think it is?” Then, “What steps can I take to negotiate this deadline?” Any steps you take to feel more in control will help you feel less burned out.

Even when work fulfils us and aligns with our personal sense of purpose, falling into these traps can contribute to stress and burnout. Study after study shows that mindfulness practices can help us combat stress. Yet, most of us are guilty of letting our busy lives get in the way of being as mindful as we can or should be. Pay close attention to whether your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are amplifying your stress and/or compromising your sense of control over your work-life integration.

*Source (<https://www.vedomosti.ru/career/articles/2020/12/17/851465-pyat-lovushek>)*