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Getting Back to the Job You Love

Reconnecting with passion to battle burnout.

What if half of the team members providing healthcare to patients and their families were burned out? That unsatisfying prospect is an unsettling reality, considering burnout has reached epidemic proportions, now affecting up to 60 percent of physicians and 50 percent of nurses, depending on specialty. The costs of burnout to organizations and providers are devastating, with negative effects on employee turnover, safety, quality, productivity and personal health.

When the way everyone is working isn't working anymore, how can healthcare leaders begin to battle burnout in their own careers and the careers of those with whom they work?

Defining Burnout and Rustout

Burnout is best defined as a syndrome caused by a mismatch between increasing job stressors and the adaptive capacity and resiliency needed to deal with those stressors. This discrepancy results in three cardinal symptoms:

1. Emotional exhaustion
2. Cynicism
3. Loss of efficacy or sense of personal accomplishment

Burnout results from a "passion disconnect," when the passion that brought executives to healthcare leadership and sustained them in doing their difficult, yet rewarding, work has been divorced from the daily reality of the joy of providing care.

Reconnecting with passion is the path to "getting back to the job you love," which is why people came to healthcare in the first place.

Some physicians, nurses and healthcare leaders are perhaps less likely to burn out than they are to "rust out." Rustout is an appropriate metaphor for those whose passion has gradually declined so the skills of adaptive capacity and fire of personal passion have gradually frozen up, much like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*. In addition to rekindling their passion, these individuals need the right oil applied to their joints to get them moving again.

Framing the Problem of Burnout

The framework in which burnout occurs consists of three elements:

- Instilling a culture of passion and fulfillment.
- Hardwiring flow and fulfillment (systems and processes).
- Reigniting passion and personal resilience.

Culture and the systems and processes by which work is done are *organizational resilience*, while reigniting passion is *personal resilience*. Most work about burnout has concentrated almost exclusively on personal resilience, while far too little has focused on the necessity of changing the culture and systems in which we work to hardwire flow

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Demand Capacity Questions

Use these five demand capacity questions to help hardwire patient flow, decrease job stressors and increase resiliency:

- Who is coming?
- When are they coming?
- What are they going to need?
- Will the resources be available to meet their needs?
- What will happen if the resources aren't available?

(efficiency and purpose in work) and fulfillment (a commitment by the organization to meet the needs of those who care for patients). When the system produces burnout in 50 percent of its talent, the *system* must be changed, not just the *people*.

Burnout Solutions

Christina Maslach, PhD, of the University of California, Berkeley, notes six domains that cause the mismatch of job stressors and adaptive capacity that lead to burnout. The six domains include solutions for addressing burnout:

1. Diminishing workload demands and increasing organizational and personal adaptive capacity.
2. Regaining control.

3. Giving and getting rewards and recognition.
4. Rebuilding community in the workplace.
5. Returning fairness to an unfair environment.
6. Reinfusing values into practice.

The following are strategies to implement to help address these domains:

Decrease Demands and Increase Resiliency

- “Take on the EHR” via a committed team of passionate clinicians working with the organization’s EHR vendor to decrease clicks, increase ease of use, connect meaning to purpose

and develop voice recognition systems.

- Stop saying, “That’s just the EHR—you just have to get used to it!”
- Use the five demand capacity questions to hardwire patient flow (See “Demand Capacity Questions” on Page 40).
- Use this thought exercise with team members to redesign culture, hardwire patient flow and create hope that change can come:
 - What do you love? Accentuate it.
 - What do you hate? Eliminate it (if possible).
 - What do you tolerate? Minimize it.

Regaining/Seizing Control

- Control comes from effective, empowered leaders who are capable of making decisions; teams with great leaders don’t burn out.
- Introduce the concept of clinicians as chief story tellers for the patient, in control of being the guide to explain complexity of care.
- Use scribes to free clinicians from the computer.
- Encourage staff to do the things we tell our patients to do when it comes to healthy habits and resiliency.
- Teach multitasking strategies to everyone.

Giving and Getting Rewards and Recognition

- Reward oneself for remembering one makes a difference in people’s lives.
- Say “thank you” 50 times per day: Giving thanks encourages getting thanks.
- Tell your team members the organization is a great place to

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work because each of them is a great team member and trusted to make decisions.

Rebuilding Community in the Workplace

- Re-recruit “A” team members.
- Use the language of teams with patients such as, “You have a team of people caring for you, all of whom are committed to excellence.”
- Try clinical huddles; they build community.
- Round on patients on the next unit—ED physicians and nurses should round on admitted patients, and ICU physicians and nurses should round on step-down units—or at home.

Returning Fairness to an Unfair Environment

- Create mutual accountability among teams.
- Find unfair systems and processes and eliminate them.
- Stop doing processes that make no sense.
- Use the power of the elevator speech to communicate fairness.

Reinfuse Values Into Practice

- State your values daily. If leaders don’t know them, how will they embody them?
- Constantly reconnect passion to purpose.
- Sit down. Eye-to-eye contact is a value.

- Keep a patient journal to remind yourself of how you embodied values and changed systems and culture.

These burnout solutions increase resiliency, decrease job stressors and are highly effective in getting team members back to the jobs they love. ▲

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