



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## How to Repair Moral Injury Before You Burn Out

Excerpts adapted from L.S. Dugdale, MD

**People struggle with burnout. Many professions are prone to it, such as healthcare, education, caregiving, and service industries. However, every employee population is at risk, and burnout can show up for any individual. It's best to know what to look for in the early stages. Learn to recognize burnout precursors, moral injury, and moral distress.**

The term “moral injury” typically refers to the harm that results from being required to violate deeply held beliefs in a high-stakes situation, either because a superior requires it or because circumstances demand it. Moral injury as a concept has its origins in the military veteran literature. Soldiers might be required to shell an area where women and children are known to be present because they're ordered to do so or because they feel they have no choice. Other times they may bear witness to acts they feel are morally repugnant but are powerless to intervene.

In all scenarios, moral injury induces feelings of guilt, shame, and social withdrawal . . . Moral distress is perhaps best understood as a milder form of moral injury . . . burnout classically refers to “a combination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment.” Its symptoms include numbness, carelessness, and disengagement. It is the final consequence of

unmitigated moral injury and drives people to addiction, therapy, and/or career change.

Putting these three together, we might say that moral distress is the acute discomfort one feels when constrained from doing what is right. If sustained and chronic, moral distress becomes moral injury, which, if persistent, becomes burnout.

## Coping with Burnout

Adapted from Delvina Miremadi

**Burnout is another way of describing the feeling of insurmountable stress that leaves you feeling delusional and completely exhausted. Burnout can happen to anyone – managers and employees alike.**

It is a serious issue that impacts all aspects of your life and daily functioning. If you or someone you know is suffering with burnout, here are some warning signs to look for:

- A sudden change in work performance and attitude
- A drop in drive and motivation
- An increase in negativity and confrontation
- Feeling a general lack in fresh ideas and creativity
- Frequently running late to work
- A rapid increase in time off

## Dealing with Burnout

How do you stop burnout in your team? You need to pay attention to your employees, monitor their work and listen for conversations that hint at bigger issues.

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If the damage is already done, you need to work quickly to help the employee recover before the burnout gets worse. Here are some common issues that lead to burnout:

### Missed Opportunities

Employees who miss out on a promotion, don't receive a bonus when they're told it's coming, or aren't rewarded with feedback or support for a job well-done are more likely to experience burnout. They need to know that their hard work is noticed and that their efforts will be rewarded. By not recognizing employees, you might make them feel as if their work is undervalued or has no real contribution to the success of the organization.

### Reorganization

A changing office climate can cause feelings of anxiety to develop. Employees might be concerned about a shift in roles or responsibilities. They might be concerned that the processes they have control over might be handed off to someone else. Long periods of anxiety can quickly wear on an employee and lead to burnout.

### Uncertainty

A company that has experienced a failure or setback, is struggling to find a new customer base, or is experiencing layoffs, can expect to see a rise in employee burnout. Many employees are expected to take on the work of two or three employees without an increase in pay or time off. The fear of job loss coupled with the extra demand on their time and work performance can rush them into feeling burnout.

### Change in Career Track

An employee planning on transitioning into another job or leaving for another organization is likely to experience burnout in his or her present position. The present position might feel tired or uninspired to the employee, causing him or her to slowly retreat from daily responsibilities and goals.

### Provide a Release Valve

Burnout is often linked to feelings of frustration – frustration over not being in control, not having an impact, or not having a voice that's heard. By providing opportunities for employees to vent their frustrations, release the tensions that they carry, and engage in healthy recreational activities, you help them unwind, recharge, and feel renewed in the workplace.

### References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-lost-art/202208/how-repair-moral-injury-you-burn-out>

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