

Nitzotzot Min HaNer #2

BURN-OUT

In this second issue of our monthly newsletter we will discuss the issue of “burnout” and how to recharge your batteries.

We will deal with:

- 1. The symptoms of burnout*
- 2. Causes of burnout*
- 3. Curing burnout*
- 4. Preventing burnout*

1. The symptoms of burnout.

Burnout is a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. It is a response to the chronic emotional and physical strain of a high powered, or otherwise demanding position.

There are both psychological and physiological symptoms indicative of burnout.

Physiological symptoms might include chest pains, frequent headaches, colds etc

Psychological symptoms include apathy, irritability, boredom, rejection of input from others, an increasingly negative attitude to one’s work and the undermining of one’s self-confidence and self-concept.

In cases of long-term burnout the person may stop caring altogether. One begins to say to oneself, “This is just a job. I will do what needs to be done, but I have no interest in doing anything more. Free moments begin to become painful experiences.” This could produce a vicious cycle whereby one no longer has any job satisfaction. Eventually, this creeps into other aspects of the person’s life, including family relationships.

2. Causes of burnout

- Excessively high and stressful workload
- Difficulty in measuring the success of the undertaking
- Lack of positive feedback and recognition
- Tediousness and lack of challenge
- Failing to set feasible and attainable goals
- No access to a support system

3. Curing burnout

There is a huge difference between the way one deals with short-term as opposed to longer-term burnout. We will deal with short-term burnout here, and follow up with a separate newsletter on long-term burnout.

- Take a break – this might involve removing oneself totally from the scene for a number of days. For some people, regular vacations don’t work. One can feel burnt out three days

after coming back from a vacation. What is needed are emergency breaks, a few days at a time, whenever the situation arises. (If you find you need these breaks more than three or four times a year then you are in an unhealthy work environment, even by kiruv standards.) You don't even have to leave town, as long as no-one knows where you are. Book into the local hotel, (no-one but your wife should know where you are) and just do nothing but read, relax, exercise – until you feel that you are going out of your mind. Then you are ready to come back.

- Vigorous physical exercise or sports that involve playing with others (table-tennis), besides being healthy, are actually relaxing because it is much harder to think when you are panting for breath. (Walking probably won't be enough to do this – some people are quite good at thinking while they walk.) Here we are not talking to the regular, healthy exerciser. We are talking to the guy who drives five yards to minyan. Emergency exercise – just for a week can be very therapeutic.
- Instead of taking a break, which is the natural reaction, do the opposite. Plunge deeper into your workload. (This will not work if you are suffering from physical exhaustion.) However, use your burnout as an opportunity to try some new and diverse avenues to accomplish one's goals. Use your burnout to give yourself the courage to risk failure. You would be amazed at the new sense of vitality which this approach might give.

4. Preventing burnout

- Design ways of increasing job satisfaction – the most important way of accomplishing this is setting and attaining realistic goals. (See last month's email). If you don't have goals, you can't measure your progress, and that leads to feeling blah. Working toward attaining realistic goals gives one a sense of growth and fulfilment.
- In last month's newsletter we gave a comprehensive presentation of how to set goals. But for emergency burn-outs, we suggest the following short-cut. Produce for yourself 3 documents:
 - ❖ An in-depth assessment of the current situation that faces you
 - ❖ Realistic goals for the next 6 months – these need to be broad in range and low in expectation, though still challenging. Clearly defined targets and goals help people keep focused. This prevents the burnout and feelings of depression caused when one is just floundering around without clear-cut aims. Goals that are relatively low in expectation allow one to feel the thrill of achievement – a good way to counter burnout
 - ❖ After 6 months – an assessment of how successfully one has accomplished ones goals. This will either give you a real sense of satisfaction or it will tell you to take a hard look at yourself. More on that in the next newsletter.

In order to write these documents you are also going to have to have to take a break, and hole up in a hotel. You will never find the few clear hours of thinking you need for this if you try to do it within a normal working day. In fact, your frustrated attempts will burn you out more. So book into that hotel, now and in six months time. When you get to your hotel room (overlooking the Alps or the train station, it doesn't matter), don't take a break before starting to work. Plunge right in, and take the non-working part of the break (if there is time) at the end. Make sure that there are things in your goals which excite you personally. Maybe in perfect times you would have prioritized things a bit differently. But if we don't take care of the patient, you will be no good to the Jewish Nation.

And finally: A short-list of things which help to prevent burn-out

- Learn at least 5 minutes every night for yourself. Even if you are yotzei your chiyuv of “Vehagisa bo yomam valaila” by giving a shiur or preparing for one, there is nothing like the unadulterated joy of learning, just for yourself. You may be so tired that you can’t concentrate on Gemorrah, have no cheshek for mishnayos, etc. Find something that turns you on, that generally comes in small bites and that you can handle at this time. You would be amazed how much you can get through with five minutes a night. The satisfaction will give you a much better feeling when you drop into bed. Some of the texts which you could use are the Chofetz Chaim, the Sefer HaChinuch, Avos, a few pesukim of the Parsha with the Pirush of the Seforno.
- At the beginning of each working day, decide on one thing that you would really like to do. Schedule it into your diary and hold all calls during this time. It does not have to be anything dramatic. It could be clearing out a closet, getting a proposal finished, sorting out a billing mess, or choosing and booking a place for the next seminar.
- At the end of each working day, contemplate what you learned new that day – even if it was making a mistake. This will certainly increase the chance of you looking at each day as a positive experience. .
- Constantly remind yourself of the benefits of being in your area. You get to work for the Jewish people, you get to ask this Gadol a Sheala, you get to be in a Jewish environment, you are forced to prepare shiurim, you are able to give your family an insight into the broader concept of Klal Yisroel, etc.
- Break long-term aims into achievable short-term goals
- Really apply time management principles. In and of themselves these will not provide fulfilment. But they will prevent frustration at spinning your wheels.
- Look after yourself physically. Of course, we all know that. But here we are talking burnout. Exercise is physically challenging, but does two things: It gives you energy; while you are doing it, it takes your mind off things.
- Look after yourself professionally. Keep yourself updated on new ideas and projects run by others in the field. Go to at least one convention per year and learn one new skill per year. It could be computers, how to run a dinner or how to run a beginner’s minyan.
- Keep in touch with your support system
- Celebrate your successes
- Share responsibility – For those of you who are one man shows at the top, you know by now how lonely it is. But ask yourself whether you ever committed yourself to really looking for a partner. We at Ner LeElef get approached about hundreds of openings a year. But we almost never get approached about someone looking for a partner.
- Develop creative ideas and strategies. Every month, Ner LeElef has a C (=Creativity) Week Session. We take any topic, (including the ones discussed here) and we throw them around. These are scheduled meetings, not left to chance. We find ourselves really refreshed by them.
- Close down whatever is not working. It is a real burnout to be running something which is not producing. Setting realistic goals and assessing their success is the first step towards working up the courage needed to admit failure. Dragging on with a project that is going nowhere is counterproductive. It prevents positive self-image – something, which is very necessary in preventing burnout.

YIDDISHKEIT THROUGH ENGLISH **IN NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES**

One of the problems in the non-religious schools is the strong competition for the hours of learning English versus learning Jewish studies and Hebrew. Most of the parents demand the English, as do the children.

To address this problem Rabbi Chaim Ben Nun proposes a plan where English could be learned through programs in which Orthodoxy and the basics of Yahadut are taught. This way the students would benefit from learning English, and learn about Yiddishkeit in a way that will allow the students to value their Yahadut by having it presented to them in an “international” language.

This can literally be a transformation, and the hours that the students will be learning about their Yahadut can thereby be doubled and tripled.