

## The Forgotten Face Of Executive Burnout



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Business leaders are focused on building resiliency into their workforce, equipping associates with the mindsets and skill-sets to navigate continuous change, and building a high-trust environment where creativity flourishes and an organization achieves consistent, predictable results.

There isn't an option to focus on results *only* beyond perhaps a short-term burst; not if the organization wants to achieve results now *and* in the future. CEOs and other top leaders must also lead culture and skill-building initiatives and behave in ways that energize (or reenergize, as the case may be) their teams.

It's critical work in a world where the results need to be obtained, but at the same time, none of us want to lead a burned-out team or organization. Yet, one thing is often overlooked: the leaders themselves. Not even AI can replace human leadership. And the fact remains that leaders are also humans and their most critical "tool" is themselves.

You may have heard the quote, "You can't pour from an empty cup."

Yet many top leaders, including CEOs and others in the C-suite, are attempting to do just that. No fewer than three-quarters of business leaders said they're facing work-related obstacles when it comes to maintaining their well-being, according to a major Deloitte [survey](#) last year. Nearly seven in 10 leaders told Deloitte they'd thought about quitting. And a national [survey](#) of healthcare executives found a similar percentage admitting to struggling recently with burnout.

Here are four ways for you and your top leaders in the organization to help turn the tide on those statistics.

**1. Make coaching a priority.** At a previous employer, leaders were required to collaborate every two years with an executive coach certified by the International Coaching Federation to focus on improving their executive skillset. This has become a ubiquitous phenomenon even in those organizations where it's not required. The majority of CEOs and other top executives I now work with have coaches.

It's indispensable for achievers who often find themselves isolated and constantly in high demand situations, and not focusing on the mind, body, spirit and emotional strength required for continued high performance. One metaphor I've heard used is that of the "corporate athlete," originated in a book by Jack Groppe and Jim Loehr more than 20 years ago. Executive coaches understand that, for a corporate athlete, there is no off-season.

In addition to individually focused executive coaches, peer networks like YPO and Vistage, or Chief, which is women-focused, as well as multiple other smaller organizations, can be helpful. These organizations let a high-functioning executive discuss issues with those facing similar challenges from outside their own organization.

If you or your leaders of leaders are not in productive individual or peer coaching relationships, look at what makes sense to support within your organization or find another alternative, such as a buddy or mentor. There are deep benefits all around.

**2. Show your leaders a path to victory.** Leaders want to win. And if they don't display goal-orientation, vision and energy, everyone on the team will likely underperform. But it's just as essential to remember *why* you're doing what you're doing since this larger purpose is key to avoiding burnout.

CEOs and the leadership team need to see the connection between their daily progress and meaningful outcomes, just as they are charged with doing for their teams. When you're a leader of leaders, the big priority is to make sure your leaders see the path toward a winning outcome and understand the why behind the what.

Remember as well to create opportunities for expanded contribution for the leaders who report directly to you. They too desire to feel like they are being invested in and developed for future challenges. It could be as simple as letting someone pursue a side project at work of their own making. Or, if in line with the broader mission, taking on a new role or stretching the boundaries of the one they have currently.

**3. Model the necessity of recharging.** Nobody gets a late-night email, text or call from me unless it is truly urgent. It's the same on weekends. If you're an executive or manager, you might enjoy taking dedicated time on the weekend to do deep thinking about strategic opportunities or challenges after a work week of nonstop meetings. My caution would be sending all your ideas to your team on Saturday or Sunday. You can always write them and schedule them for Monday delivery unless it's mission critical.

One quarter of the executives in that Deloitte survey said they don't disconnect because they believe their workload would be unmanageable when they return, or they're afraid they'll miss out on important emails. While it is often just not practical to implement, when possible, I avoid sending meeting recordings, project notes and action items to team members when they are on vacation, and instead send a summary closer to their return date.

We recently had a board member speak to an internal employee resource group. She advised knowing your handful of "no do-over" moments in life. She stated that one of hers was parent-

teacher conferences and described the lengths she had gone to in order to attend. I vividly remember the look on several employees' faces in response to her transparency. Show people that *you* value your life outside of work.

**4. Prioritize the non-negotiables.** This one is simple. In a 1996 [story](#) that looked at the burnout phenomenon as far back as World War II, the Harvard Business Review wrote that prevention is the best cure. Keep an eye on your team. Even on critical problems, don't let your leaders get stretched too thin if you want them to remain effective for the long haul.

Here's an anecdote that really resonated for me: When I was helping to plan a wedding for one of my daughters, there was a meeting on a Friday with a caterer I really wanted to attend but overlapped with an important business meeting. My boss said to me, "Don't worry about not attending the meeting. I know you – I know you'll get the work done and done well. Go enjoy this time with your daughter." My takeaway: He had confidence in me *and* was focused on my well-being.

We sacrifice a lot for work, but there are some personal commitments that must be prioritized. I call these the non-negotiables. Reality is reality, but if you support your leaders' non-negotiables and demonstrate that you value them as whole people, you impact engagement and avoid burnout. Which, of course, impacts loyalty to the work and the organization. Flexibility to lead a busy life – who wouldn't deeply value that?

In other words: Lead the way. All the encouragement in the world about balance is worth so much less if you're not demonstrating what it looks like for you – and making it safe for others to do the same. Don't forget that the leaders working to keep employees reenergized need to do so themselves.



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