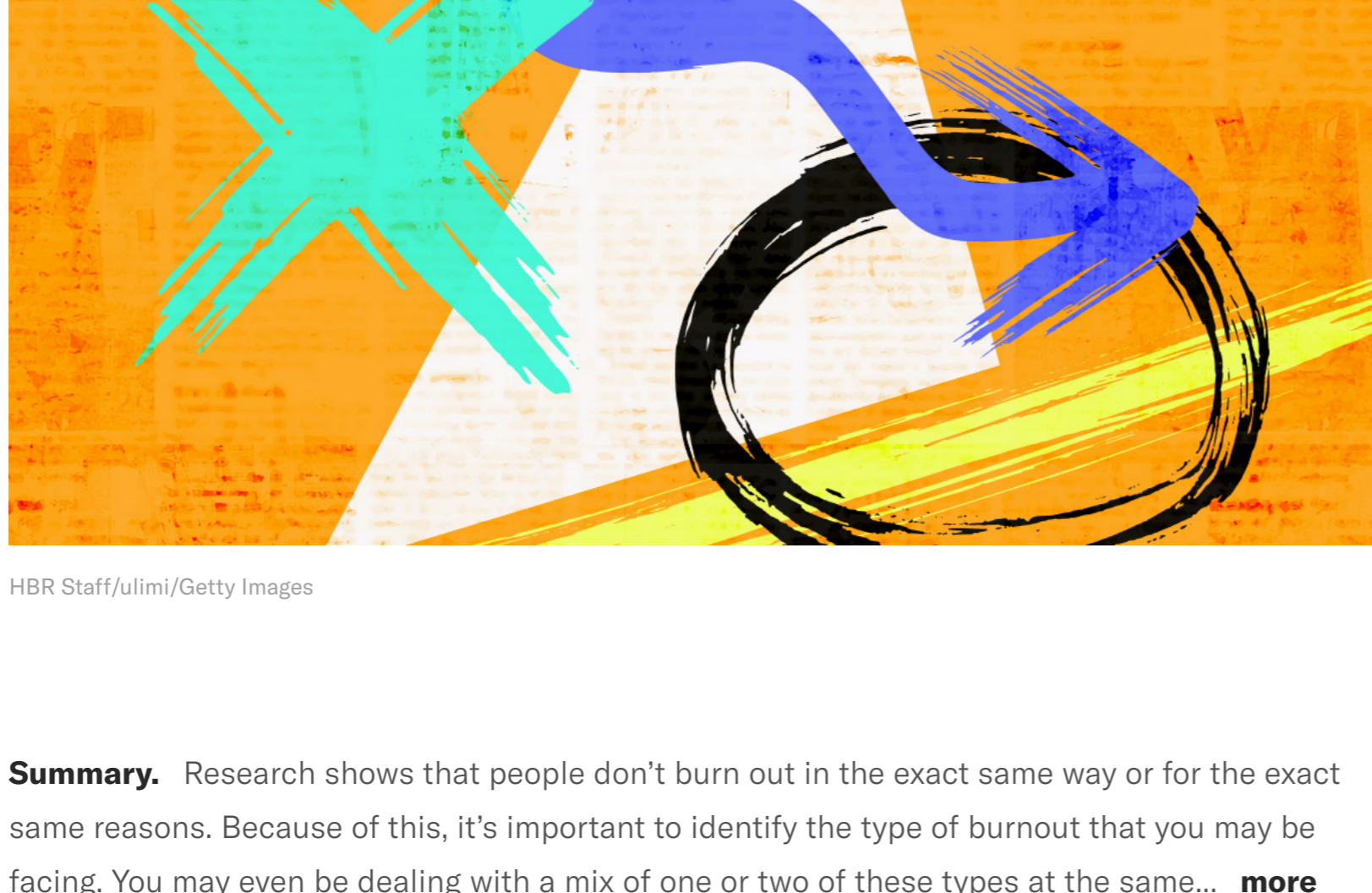


Burnout

# 3 Types of Burnout, and How to Overcome Them

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HBR Staff/Julini/Getty Images

**Summary.** Research shows that people don't burn out in the exact same way or for the exact same reasons. Because of this, it's important to identify the type of burnout that you may be facing. You may even be dealing with a mix of one or two of these types at the same... [more](#)

Take a moment to bring to mind a person who's burned out. You're likely picturing someone who is overbooked and overwhelmed, drowning in multiple demands and competing priorities.

But, burnout is far more nuanced than simply being busy and tired.

For years, it was believed that everyone reacted to chronic workplace stress in the same way. But [research has revealed](#) that burnout manifests itself in different ways depending on a person's work environment as well as their internal resources, including dedication to their job and coping mechanisms.

Let's take a closer look at [the three types of burnout](#) and how you can overcome each one.

## Overload Burnout

Overload burnout occurs when you work harder and more frantically to achieve success, often to the detriment of your health and personal life. This is the type of burnout that most people are familiar with, and it's also the most common.

Overload burnout typically affects highly dedicated employees who feel obligated to work at an unsustainable pace. As a result, they drive themselves to the point of physical and mental exhaustion.

Professionals with overload burnout tend to cope by venting their emotions to others (i.e. complaining about how tired and overwhelmed they are). This subtype is also quick to jump into problem-solving mode, creating more work and responsibility for themselves, which only exacerbates their stress.

### Signs to watch out for:

- You overlook your own needs or personal life to fulfill work demands
- You invest more than is healthy in your commitment to your career or ambitions
- You endanger your well-being to achieve your goals

### How to address it:

Researchers note that the way out of overload burnout is two-fold. First, it's important to develop stronger [emotion regulation skills](#), such as naming and processing your emotions and [reframing negative self-talk](#). For instance, you could reframe the belief that you need to work all the time to be successful to "enjoying my life helps me become more successful." After all, resting is not a reward for success. It's a prerequisite for performance.

Second, it's crucial to separate your self-worth from your work. "Consequently, by learning to keep a certain distance from work....," researchers Jesús Montero-Marín and Javier García-Campayo write, "individuals could avoid excessive involvement and prevent burnout."

Strive to diversify your identity — to [create self-complexity](#) — by investing in different areas of your life beyond work. You might decide to devote time to your role as a spouse, parent, or friend. During the pandemic, one of my clients restored an old identity by renewing his pilot's license. Volunteering with the Civil Air Patrol proved to be a healthy forcing function to get away from his computer, while also contributing to his sense of well-being.

## Under-Challenged Burnout

You might be surprised to find out that burnout can result from doing too little. Under-challenged burnout could be considered the opposite of the overload subtype. It occurs when you're bored and not stimulated by your job, which leads to a lack of motivation. People with under-challenged burnout may feel underappreciated and become frustrated because their role lacks learning opportunities, [room for growth](#), or meaningful connection with co-workers and leadership.

Workers who feel their tasks are monotonous and unfulfilling tend to lose passion and become cynical and lethargic. They cope with the stress of being under-challenged through avoidance — distraction, dissociation, or thought suppression (i.e. ordering themselves to "Stop thinking about that").

### Signs to watch out for:

- You would like to work on assignments and tasks that are more challenging
- You feel your job does not offer you opportunities to develop your abilities
- You feel that your current role is hampering your ability to advance and develop your talents

### How to address it:

When you're demoralized, it can be hard to care about much of anything. Lower the stakes by simply exploring your curiosities. Set a goal to learn a new skill in the next 30 days to kickstart your motivation. Start small and don't overwhelm yourself. Perhaps you spend an hour or two a week learning to code or devote 20 minutes a day practicing a new language.

Making strides towards something that feels fun and meaningful to you creates a flywheel of momentum that can lift you out of a funk. Even if the skill isn't directly related to your job, you'll likely find that the positive energy spills over to reinvigorate your passion for your work — or that it inspires your career to move in a new direction.

You might also try [job crafting](#) to turn the job you have into the one you want. Again, baby steps are key. Focusing on incremental changes can add up to big results. Take my client, Alice, a product management lead. As the pandemic wore on, she increasingly felt underchallenged by her role, which mostly comprised of team performance management. So, I gave her an assignment. For two weeks, she tracked what tasks created the most [psychological flow](#). A clear pattern emerged: Talking to customers lit her up, as did solving challenging workflow problems. Alice's manager was ecstatic when she proposed a new research project combining those skill sets to innovate the company's core product.

## Neglect burnout

The final type of burnout is the worn-out subtype. This is also called neglect burnout, because it can result from feeling helpless in the face of challenges. Neglect burnout occurs when you aren't given enough structure, direction, or guidance in the workplace. You may find it difficult to keep up with demands or otherwise feel unable to meet expectations. Over time, this can make you feel incompetent, frustrated, and uncertain.

The worn-out worker copes through learned helplessness, which occurs when a person feels unable to find solutions to difficult situations — even when ones are available. In other words, people with learned helplessness tend to feel incapable of making any positive difference in their circumstances. In other words, when things at work don't turn out as they should, those with neglect burnout become passive and stop trying.

### Signs to watch out for:

- You stop trying when work situations don't go as planned
- You give up in response to obstacles or setbacks you face at work
- You feel demoralized when you get up in the morning and have to face another day at work

### How to address it:

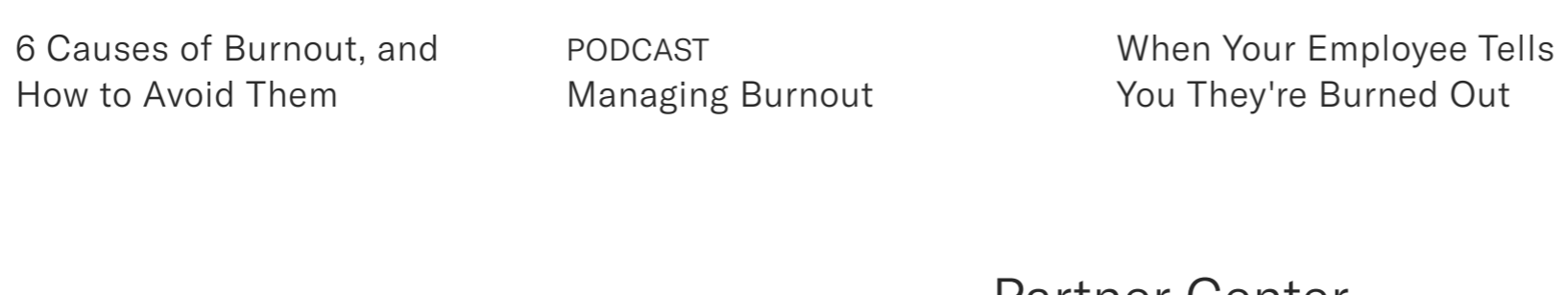
Find ways to regain a sense of agency over your role. Try creating a to-do list. What can you get off your plate by outsourcing, delegating, or delaying? Look for obligations you need to say "no" to all together and hone the skill of setting stronger boundaries. A great place to start is by identifying situations where you feel an intense sense of resentment. This is an emotional signal that you need to put healthier limits in place.

Likewise, consider talking to your boss about your workload. You could explain how you're currently spending your time and ask, "Are my priorities consistent with yours? What would you like me to change?" Or, "If we could take Project A off of my plate, then I'd have more time to focus on our team's strategic priorities and ultimately deliver on the key goals we've evaluated against." Your manager will likely be thrilled you're thinking about the big picture and taking initiative.

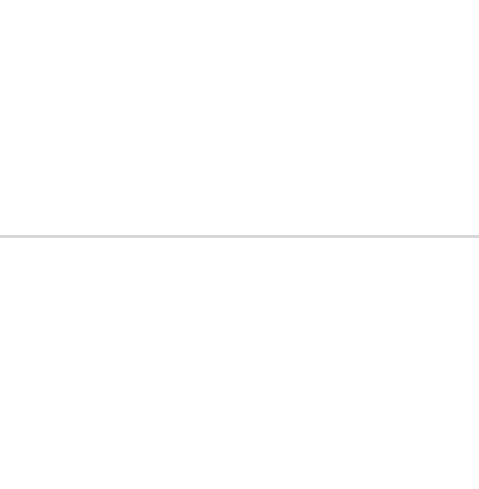
Most importantly, focus on what you can control. Outside of office hours, be bullish about self-care. Create routines and rituals that ground you, such as a daily walk or journaling practice. When you feel helpless about changing tides at work, some semblance of predictability is essential.

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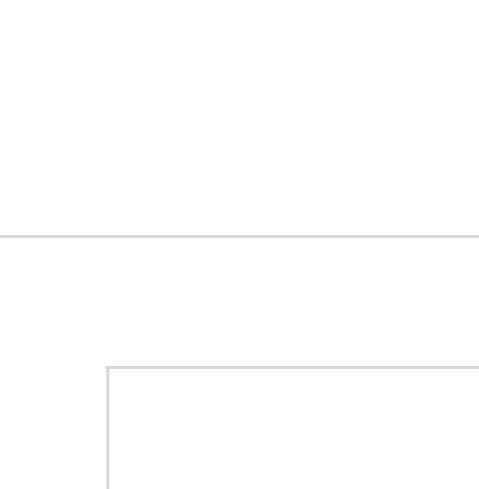
Because people don't burn out in the exact same way or for the exact same reasons, it's important to identify the type of burnout that you may be facing. You may even be dealing with a mix of one or two of these types at the same time. Determining where you're at makes it easier to find targeted solutions to solve the specific challenges ahead of you.



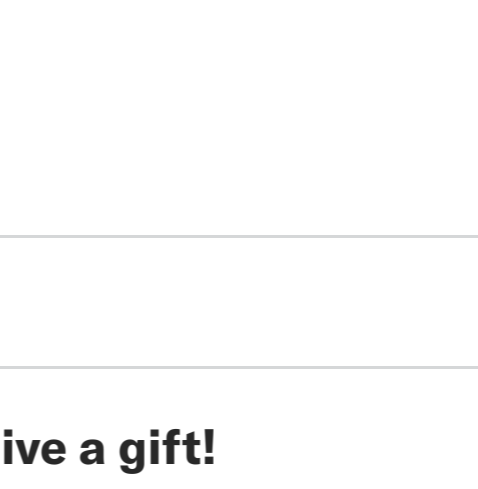
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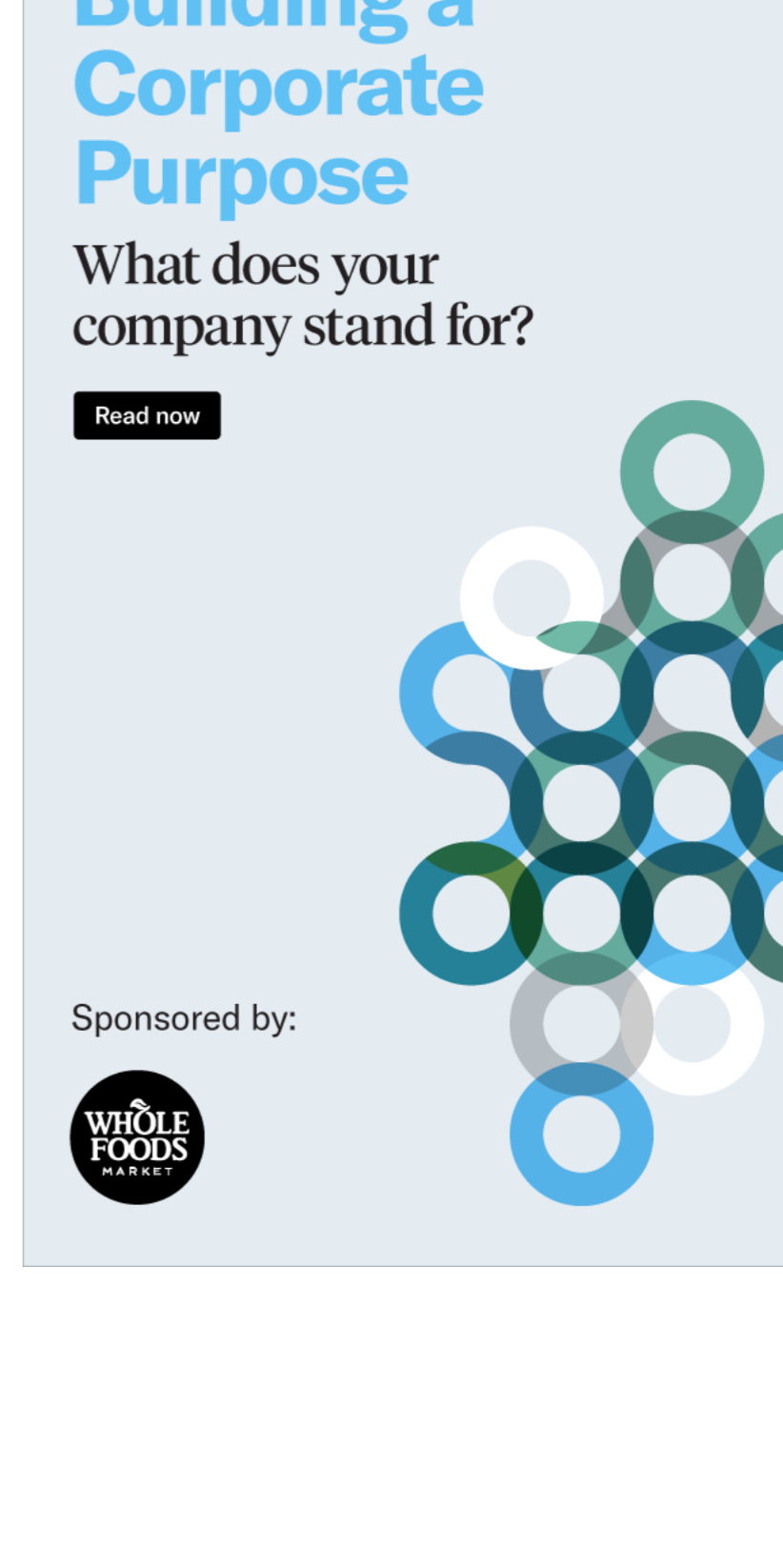


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Beating Burnout

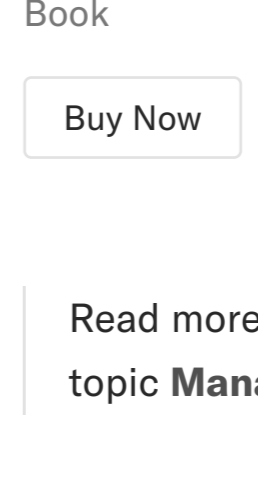
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