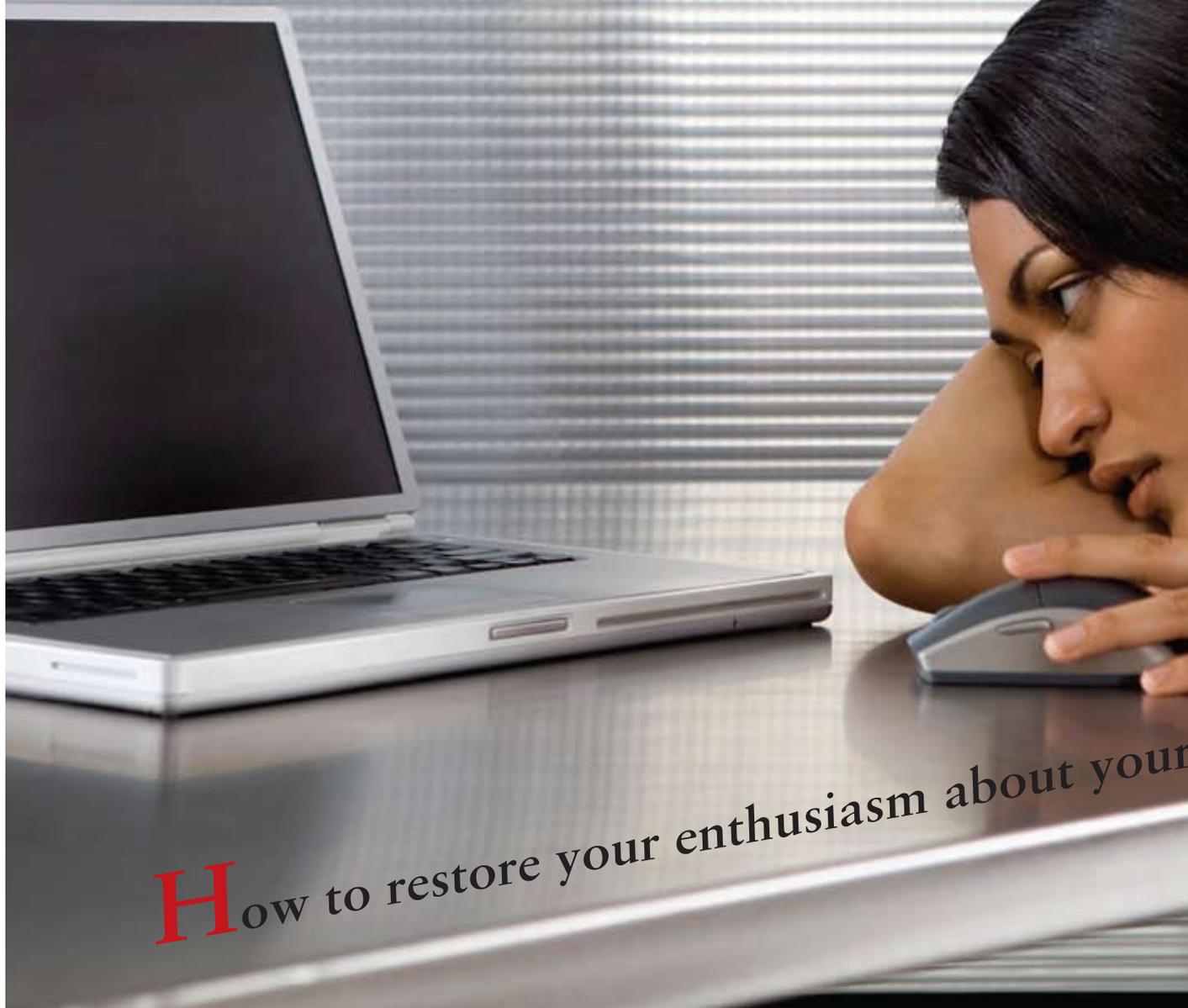


# Extinguishing **Burn**



**H**ow to restore your enthusiasm about your

# burnout

by Kenya McCullum



**D**o you dread the sound of your alarm clock every morning? Are you feeling irritable at work and find yourself complaining about your job when you're not at work? Are you having more headaches than usual? Are you chomping on Tums all day followed by swigs of a Pepto-Bismol chaser? If this sounds like your daily routine, you may be suffering from burnout and if you don't do something about it now, it may have negative consequences on your health, your psyche and your career.

## What Is Burnout?

Since the 1970s, burnout has been identified as a long-term exhaustion— both mental and physical— that employees feel when they are stressed and overworked. This feeling of exhaustion can manifest itself in different ways for all of us and can include feelings of hopelessness, irritability, or physical and mental fatigue. Oftentimes, job burnout can lead to physical illness such as severe headaches or migraines and nausea. Unfortunately, we usually don't take burnout seriously until these ailments present themselves.

It's also important to address the mental side effects of burnout. Feelings of depression during a bout of burnout can be crippling if they aren't addressed and in extreme cases, you can develop addictive behaviors like bingeing on food, excessive drinking, or using drugs in order to numb the pain.

Burnout can also have catastrophic effects on your career, as one element of the condition is a general lack of productivity at work. Studies show that, on average, employees will put 80% effort into their job. However, burned out employees will only put a 60%

effort—if that—into their work. This can often lead to what human resource consultant Patricia Mathews calls “retired on the job,” when an employee comes to work but is so unproductive that they’re not much more than an expensive piece of furniture collecting a paycheck.

“These people hadn’t prepared themselves for other options with their current employer and they hadn’t gone through the training and development, but they’ve already been working for their employer for so long that for them to leave would be extremely costly,” she said. “So, these employees tend to come into work everyday and basically warm a chair for eight hours.”

Mathews noted that the “retired on the job” employee is an extreme case, which is often allowed to take place in large companies where one employee’s unproductiveness can go unnoticed for long periods of time. Commonly, however, burned out employees are often so negative at work that they can become the rotten apple that threatens to spoil the morale of a whole department.

Consultant Susan Heathfield, who writes the Human Resources guide on About.com, said that employers know that employees with bad attitudes can spread that negativity to other employees and that can be a cause for termination.

## Combating Burnout

If you’re experiencing burnout, the first thing you need to do is determine where it’s coming from. An effective way of doing this is to sit down and write a detailed list of pros and cons about your job. This can reveal exactly what makes you happy, what drives you, what drives you crazy, and what negative circumstances are in your control to change. Once you’ve done this, there are several strategies that you can use to put a wet blanket on your burnout.

### Speak up

When you have determined the aspects of your job that are causing you stress, let your boss know. Employers are usually open to working on solutions that will alleviate their employees’ burnout, whether it is by changing their job responsibilities or getting them extra help with their current ones. Most of the time, employers have no idea that you’re burned out unless you tell them.

“Too many people suffer in silence. People need to speak up because the average boss is not a tyrant and they are completely blind sometimes to what people are going through,” said Paul Gibson, a human resources veteran and member of the special expertise panel of the Society for Human Resource Management. “The average manager doesn’t have the time to be sensitive or perceptive to people who are burning out until it is collapse time.”

### Ask for new projects

You may be thinking, “Wait a minute, I’m already burned out and you’re suggesting that I take on more work?” Although it may sound like a counterintuitive method of handling burnout, sometimes doing work that you’re interested in, and don’t normally do, can break up the monotony of your day and brighten your outlook. If this is not possible, try to concentrate on the parts of your job that you enjoy—because no one hates every aspect of their job—so it doesn’t feel like the undesirable parts are dominating all of your time.

### Take some time off

A long weekend is sometimes enough to rejuvenate you, even if you don’t take a trip. But in order for this to work, you have to leave the stress of your office at your desk—no laptops, no phone calls and no Blackberries allowed.

### Pat yourself on the back

According to Heathfield, spending a little bit of time reflecting on the good job you’re doing can lift your spirits enough to overcome burnout. “Just working on your résumé and starting to get it out there can give you a whole new outlook on your life because when you look at your résumé and develop it, you are looking at what your key accomplishments and contributions have been,” she said. “Saying positive things about yourself can help you see things in a different light.”

### Get a life

You may love your job, but if too much of your identity is wrapped up in your work, you are more likely to experience burnout. In order to recover from, or prevent, burnout, you must have a sense of balance in your life. Instead of bringing the work home that stresses you out, try spending your free time engaging in activities that relax you and make you happy, like spending more time with friends and family, or concentrating on hobbies. Adding more fun into your life can tip the scales to a more balanced life.

### Pursue new job opportunities

Sometimes even when you work on improving your job situation, you may decide that it’s time to move on to a new job, new company or even a new industry. But you still need to deal with your current job, so employing the coping mechanisms discussed here can go a long way to keeping you sane as you job hunt and make the transition into a new position.

#### About the author:

Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer whose work can be found at [www.km-com.com](http://www.km-com.com). To break of the monotony of her day and prevent burnout, she blogs about off-beat news stories at [www.uselessonline.com](http://www.uselessonline.com).