

The Burnout Fix

What's in it for me? Learn how to thrive in the modern workplace.

As we all know, the nature of work has changed considerably over the past couple of decades. And, as a result, modern workplaces are in constant flux; they're having to adapt to new technologies, expanding global trade, and frequent restructuring. One of the unfortunate consequences of all this change and uncertainty is an epidemic of burnout. Employees often work long hours, hustling to get ahead, but in the process they're losing touch with their inner compass. That's where these blinks come in. Drawing on over 15 years of coaching high-level executives, Dr. Jacinta Jiménez reveals the secrets to developing resilience in the modern workplace. Most importantly, you'll learn how to stop trying to live up to some external standard of success and instead discover what makes work meaningful for you. In these blinks, you'll learn

why nature is so important for your psychological well-being; how showing vulnerability is the key to strong leadership; and why any job can be meaningful if you have a sense of purpose.

Working harder or smarter isn't enough to survive the pressures of the modern workplace.

In grad school at Stanford, Dr. Jacinta Jiménez was a typical straight-A student. The child of first-generation immigrants, she'd internalized the message that hard work was the secret to success. But one day, it all came tumbling down. She got a call from her mother that her brother had been hospitalized. Jiménez ended up needing to play a big role in his care along with balancing her dissertation writing, lab work, and other responsibilities. But instead of adjusting her schedule or asking for support, she reasoned that she could get through it by just hustling harder, working smarter, and eliminating social activities. Soon, she became completely exhausted. She lost all pleasure in her work and struggled to get up in the morning. In short, she started experiencing burnout. The key message here is: Working harder or smarter isn't enough to survive the pressures of the modern workplace. All of us come under pressure at points in our careers, but we're often ill-equipped to deal with it. Like Jiménez, most of us still believe that being successful means having "grit" and being able to tough out the bad times. But, as the burnout epidemic shows, grit isn't enough to survive and thrive in the modern workplace. In 2019, the World Health Organization officially classified burnout as a major global health challenge. And a recent Deloitte workplace study found that 77 percent of the employees interviewed had experienced burnout. Workplace stress has created unsustainable cycles of employee turnover and absenteeism, and it's a contributing factor in 120,000 deaths every year in the United States. Anyone entering the modern workplace should assume that burnout is one of the greatest risks that they'll face. This may sound fatalistic, but it's actually pragmatic and empowering. With this knowledge, employees can take proactive strategies to foster resilience and avoid burnout before it starts. Learning from her own difficult experience – and those of her hundreds of clients – Jiménez developed several core strategies that allow modern workers to stay in tune with their own personal pulse and vitality, no

matter the situation they're in. By making feasible goals, interrogating negative thinking, and taking time to rest and connect, you can also learn how to develop your own resilience and create a career fueled by sustainable growth instead of chronic stress.

Dramatic success is created through gradual, sustainable growth.

When we think of people who've achieved extraordinary things – people like J.K. Rowling, Beyoncé, or Walt Disney – we may assume that there's something innately special about them. They must be born with the huge amounts of talent they possess. While these celebrities are extremely talented, that's only one small piece of the picture. If we look more closely at their journeys to success, we'll see that it took them many years to achieve the results they did. Rowling's first Harry Potter book took seven years to write, and it was rejected by twelve publishers. Beyoncé's first girl group was a bust. And Disney's first company failed too. Success, for all of them, was a hard slog that took years to achieve. What they all had in common was that they weren't deterred by failure. They learned from their mistakes, pivoted in new directions, and persisted in the face of rejection. The key message here is: Dramatic success is created through gradual, sustainable growth. Many of us believe that success should be instant. We reason that if we want to achieve big results, we need to take big risks and throw ourselves headfirst into new projects. But trying to do too much too quickly just isn't sustainable. Take the example of Ricardo, a vice president of a start-up. He'd been given feedback that he needed to improve his public speaking skills. So he volunteered to give a major presentation for the entire company. But, despite all his preparation, he stumbled through the presentation. He failed. That left him feeling hopeless and wanting to give up altogether. He was trapped on a wheel of weariness in which he took big risks but failed to improve. The problem? He'd thrown himself into the deep end without taking time to clarify his goals. When you're developing your skills, you should set goals that lie just outside of your comfort zone – with the right amount of tension. If the stretch is too big, you'll get discouraged. Too small, and you'll get bored. Ricardo should have taken some time to explore exactly what he found challenging about public speaking. Then he could have started with a small stretch goal of giving a briefing to a small team. After practicing several times and reflecting on what worked – and what didn't – he could have moved up to that big presentation.

Mindfulness reduces stress and the risk of burnout.

Have you ever spent one of your cherished weekends worrying about something that's going on at work? Or have you found that you couldn't really be mentally present at a meeting because you were replaying something your boss had said? As a response to stress, our minds go into overdrive and often become filled with negative thoughts. These thoughts cause us to lose focus and enjoyment in our work. Even worse, they cloud our perceptions of reality. We lose our ability to see situations clearly or make good decisions. The key message here is: Mindfulness reduces stress and the risk of burnout. Humans find it difficult to deal with uncertainty. Faced with a lack of information, we tend to fill in our own interpretations. Unfortunately, we also often

assume the worst. One executive, Rebecca, spent a lot of time preparing an important presentation that she was very excited about. She sent it to a mentor for feedback, but he never replied. Rebecca was confident that his lack of response meant he hated the presentation. The more anxious she became, the more her mind filled with negative thoughts. Rebecca was stuck in a downward thought spiral. We all become stuck in these spirals. But by learning some simple mindfulness techniques, we can deal with them differently. The next time a worrying thought pops up, try becoming curious about it instead of instantly concerned. Ask yourself what thoughts you're having right now – and what evidence there is to back them up. For example, is there proof that your mentor or boss hated your presentation? Next, adopt an actively compassionate stance toward yourself. Many of us are our own worst critics. We think that being critical helps us succeed, but perfectionist tendencies actually make people less innovative and productive. So instead of responding with knee-jerk self-criticism, try having compassion for your stressful thoughts. Think about what you'd tell a close friend who was in the same situation. The final step is examining the information you've gathered by becoming aware of your thoughts. What have you learned about your thoughts, and what fuels them? And what action can you take? In Rebecca's case, she could decide to follow up with her mentor to ask him what he really thinks instead of assuming the worst. We can't control our stressful thoughts. But we can learn strategies for how to respond to them.

Make time for silence, sanctuary, and solitude in your daily life.

What do Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates have in common? Well, apart from being two of the most ambitious people on the planet, they also prioritize time for leisure. Oprah Winfrey speaks often about how important it is to spend time in her beautiful garden, harvesting her own crops and taking her dog for walks. Bill Gates goes on regular retreats, where he reads books, walks on the beach, and gathers his thoughts. Studies have shown that working harder and longer doesn't automatically equal better quality work. In fact, our productivity decreases with longer work hours. We're humans, not machines. If we're spending 70 hours a week working, we'll wear ourselves out. We all need to take the time to pause and nurture ourselves. The key message here is: Make time for silence, sanctuary, and solitude in your daily life. While we can't all escape to a lavish garden or beachside retreat, we can build moments of calm into our daily lives. One of the most important ways is to disconnect from technology. Most of us suffer from information overload. We're bombarded by distressing news all the time, and we're constantly responding to messages. Setting times of the day when you're offline is invaluable for your mental health. Monitor your digital habits over the course of a week. Then decide which habits add value to your life – and which only serve to distract you or stress you out. Slowly start reducing your time online. The second habit to cultivate is spending time in nature. How often were you outside in the past week? Being in nature for even 20 minutes a day is enormously beneficial for maintaining a sense of calm. Practice building time outdoors into your schedule. Sit in the garden at lunch instead of at your desk. Or walk to the grocery store instead of automatically hopping in your car. The third strategy for building calm into our lives is solitude. Many of us actively resist being alone. It can make us feel lonely or indulgent. But solitude is essential for recharging our batteries and giving ourselves the space to think. We don't need to go on silent retreats. We can build solitude into our daily lives by letting ourselves get lost in our thoughts during our daily commutes – or by journaling for ten minutes before

getting up in the morning.

Successful people seek out support and connection.

Colin was the partner at the law firm who everyone depended on. But then his husband got cancer. Colin was responsible for the enormous task of caring for him along with his other responsibilities. He was exhausted and stressed, but he had no idea how to reach out for support. Like so many business leaders, Colin had internalized the idea that showing vulnerability and reaching out was a sign of weakness. But, actually, it takes great courage to ask for help. When Colin finally did reach out to his team, they responded with compassion and brought home-cooked food for his family every day. Employee morale soared, and the team got closer because everyone felt invested in helping. Colin not only got the practical and emotional support he needed; he also set a powerful example by demonstrating to his team that no one needs to struggle alone. The key message here is: Successful people seek out support and connection. Humans are wired for social connection. In fact, a 2019 study by leadership development company BetterUp showed that employees who felt a strong sense of belonging at work increased their productivity by 56 percent. The number of sick days they took decreased by an enormous 75 percent. So, how can you learn to seek out support and connection at work? One of the best ways is to cultivate compassion for your colleagues, and practice being there for them. Check in with coworkers who seem to be having a bad day, and offer them support. But helping people doesn't mean indiscriminately saying yes. In fact, having healthy boundaries is key to building strong relationships. Consider what you need to thrive and what you realistically have to give. One of the best ways to feel connected is by making sure that your networks are as diverse as possible. People who interact with colleagues and friends who are different from them have more cognitive flexibility and are more resilient in the face of change. They also have better ideas because they're exposed to a range of perspectives. Consider who's in your network. Who are your close friends? Who do you chat with when you pick your kids up from school? Practice switching up your social habits and developing connections with people who are different from you.

Creating a personal mission statement will allow you to stay on track.

Imagine you're swimming in a fast-flowing river, paddling desperately against currents that are carrying you in multiple directions. That's what life feels like for many of us these days. Modern life is so busy and demanding that we will all get swept up in a tide of conflicting demands unless we prioritize what matters most to us. Identifying your core mission is like chartering your own boat. Instead of being pushed around, you'll be able to plot your own course – and stick to it. What do you stand for? Why do you get up in the morning? These may seem like heavy questions. But they're the most important ones that we could ever ask ourselves. These are the questions that help us see what makes our work – and lives – meaningful. The key message here is: Creating a personal mission statement will allow you to stay on track. The author's grandmother worked as a housekeeper at a motel. Stripping beds and cleaning up after guests may not seem like meaningful work to some people. But, to her grandmother, it was – because she was

in touch with her “personal why.” Her grandmother’s mission in life was to help her daughters and granddaughters get an education. Each day she brought home a paycheck from the motel, she was fulfilling that core mission. Knowing that allowed her to get immense satisfaction from her work. What brings meaning to your life? To answer that question, you need to go back to your core and explore what your values are. Values are traits like compassion, integrity, or areas of life that you hold sacred – like family or service. Pick five values that are most important to you. These values are your guiding lights. Next, identify your unique skills. Ask yourself how your best friend would describe what you’re good at. Or what your colleagues always come to you for. Choose three top skills, such as storytelling, design, or negotiation. Finally, identify your meaningful pursuit. This is the impact that you make – or wish to make – in your life. Ask yourself why you chose this job, how your work relates to society as a whole, and why your work matters. Once you’ve gone through these steps, you’re ready to combine your values, skills, and meaningful pursuit to create your personal mission statement! Put this statement somewhere you can see it every day. Each time you need to make a decision, go back to it. It will be your charter ship, guiding you through turbulent waters.

We need to regulate our energy levels and emotions.

Do you come home exhausted even though you’re not working long hours? Then it’s possible that some of your activities are draining your energy. We’re used to keeping track of how much time we spend on certain activities. But we’re less used to tracking how much energy they cost. Energy is our most precious resource – the thing that fuels our days and gives us vitality. If parts of our lives are sapping our energy, then we need to know about it. The best way to do that is to conduct an energy audit. Track your energy levels over the course of a whole week, and keep a daily diary. Which situations leave you feeling revitalized and full of life, and which leave you feeling exhausted? The key message here is: We need to regulate our energy levels and emotions. Keeping the diary could point to environmental factors that don’t work for you. For example, some people are highly sensitive to light and noise. Others find it stressful to have to engage in social interactions all day. Sometimes, the diary will reveal that certain people always leave you feeling crummy. Like energy vampires, they deplete your ideas and motivation – or just require enormous amounts of patience and attention. Tracking your energy will allow you to find ways to bring balance to your day. For example, if you have to have a meeting with a vampire, you can schedule a revitalizing walk afterwards. If you know that a noisy office saps your vitality, you can request a move to a quieter desk, work from home more, or at least invest in noise-canceling headphones. While monitoring your energy levels, it’s also essential to tune into your emotions as you go through your day. Emotions are messengers from your subconscious. They let you know when something’s not working for you, or if something crosses a personal boundary. On the flip side, they’ll tell you when you are living by your values – you can’t fake joyful enthusiasm. So, how can you develop your emotional literacy and learn to interpret the messages your feelings are sending you? First, work on expanding your emotional vocabulary. This means identifying, as specifically as possible, how you’re feeling. Say you’re feeling “down.” Don’t stop there – dig deeper. Are you frustrated? Or despondent? Or chagrined? These emotions all have different charges, as well as different messages and solutions. Tracking your energy and becoming receptive to your emotions will allow you to stay on track through the day, and it’ll keep your personal

pulse beating strong.

Leaders have a big role to play in creating workplaces where employees can thrive.

Imagine you're an overworked employee who's routinely forced to slog through the weekends and deal with constant stress. When you start feeling burned out and approach your boss, she refuses to adjust your workload – and instead blames you for not being resilient enough. She then sends you to a mindfulness seminar. But all the mindfulness seminars in the world won't help you avoid burnout if the structural conditions of your job are unbearable. It's not enough to put a self-care Band-Aid on a toxic work environment. Leaders also need to step up to create systemic change. The key message here is: Leaders have a big role to play in creating workplaces where employees can thrive. But how can you, as a leader, create a healthy, dynamic work environment? First, it's essential to allow employees a sense of agency. That means letting them feel in control of their workload and how they carry out their tasks. To do this, communicate clear expectations – make sure employees know exactly what they need to do in order to be successful at their jobs. Also make sure that your demands are reasonable and that your employees have all the training and resources they need to excel. But don't micromanage them. Show that you trust them to get the work done in their own way. Give honest feedback, as well as opportunities for employees to develop new skills and take on new challenges. Second, as a leader you're responsible for creating an equitable workplace. What does that mean in practice? Nothing kills employee motivation faster than a dishonest or unfair work environment. Bias, discrimination, or bullying will destroy any sense of community and contribute to stress and isolation. So make sure to proactively tackle bias in your hiring practices and workplace policies. Prioritize honesty and transparency by making salaries public and the criteria for promotions explicit. Employees should also have safe ways to air grievances or concerns. Most importantly, make sure that your company culture matches the values of your mission statement. Equitable workplaces create a sense of psychological safety; employees then feel empowered to take risks and are more likely to bring innovative ideas to the table – contributing lasting value to the company. An equitable workplace is, in the end, also a profitable one.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: Burnout is avoidable if you take steps to develop your personal resilience. Resilience isn't about toughing it out or having grit. Instead, it's about making space for vulnerability, tuning into your thoughts and emotions, and learning to ask for help. It's also about building positive communities at work and finding connection with other people. Company leaders have just as big a role to play in preventing employee burnout. They can do this by creating equitable workplaces where employees feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety. Actionable advice: Make a "to-don't" list. Usually, we make lists of things we need to remember to do. But equally important are lists to remind ourselves of things we shouldn't do because they sap our time and energy. Does speaking to your mother while you're at work leave you feeling frustrated and distracted? Or do you get trapped in an endless cycle of online shopping

that robs you of precious time that you could be spending in nature? Add these and other “don'ts” to your list, and hang it above your desk where you can see it. Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to with The Burnout Fix as the subject line and share your thoughts!