The reality of burnout among software professionals Santosh Hari

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NEWSIGNATURE

I'm in danger of burning out



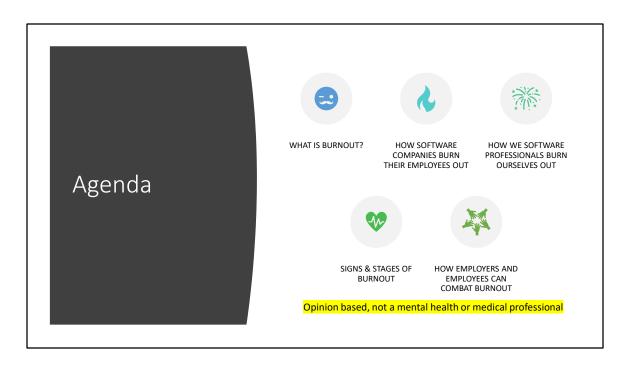
As you can see I do a lot of things.

If I'm not real careful I will burn out
I'm not here to give medical advice,
but I don't think we take mental health seriously enough
In our field and in this country and it begins with self-care
If I can get one person in this room to become aware
I will consider my work done



COMBINATION OF FACTORS:

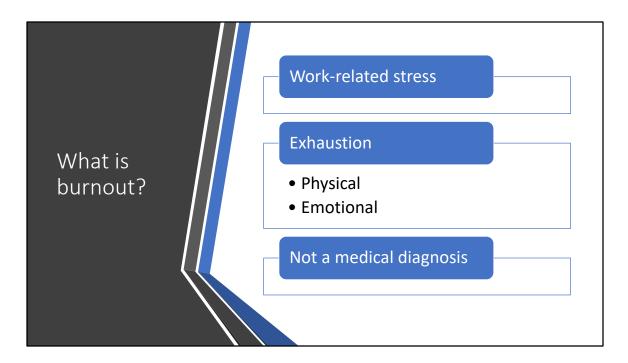
- REDUCTION OF WORKFORCE, HAD TO CARRY THE LOAD OF OTHERS
- TREADMILL SPRINTS/DEVELOPMENT CYCLES
- CREATED MY OWN PERSONAL PAGING MONSTER
- NO ACTIVITIES TO LOOK FORWARD TO OUTSIDE OF WORK



What is burnout

How software companies burn their employees out How we software professionals burn ourselves out Signs and stages of burnout How employers and employees can combat burnout

Opinion based, not a mental health or medical professional



Job burnout is a special type of work-related stress —

a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity.

"Burnout" isn't a medical diagnosis.

Some experts think that other conditions, such as depression, are behind burnout. Some research suggests that many people who experience symptoms of job burnout don't believe their jobs are the main cause.

Whatever the cause, job burnout can affect your physical and mental health.

- 1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- 2) increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job;
- 3) reduced professional efficacy.

Consider how to know if you've got job burnout and what you can do about it.

Gallup Poll on burnout



7500 employees



23% burned out always or often



67% felt burned out at some stage

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx

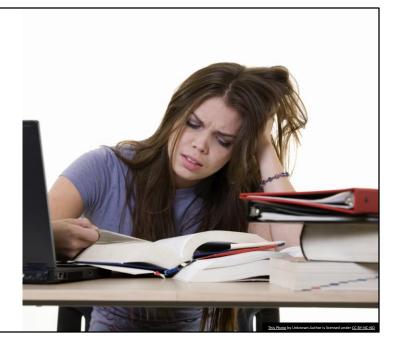




Origins of burnout

Term came from space scientists
Scientist used to work long hours
Took a toll on their health and family lives
The **velocity** of a rocket at the time when depletion of the fuel or oxidant occurs things burned out like ball bearing

Software Companies become Burnout Shops



Huge problem in software companies particularly startups

This kind of business model is what used to be called a "burnout shop" — one whose management policies and practices lead to burnout for many employees, as an intentional stress test — to extract the maximum benefit possible from an employee.

The underlying assumption is that employees who burn out are not the best ones, so they are expendable and disposable.

But is it really the employee who is not measuring up?

Or is the problem the system that creates the chronic conditions for burnout, with so many negative consequences for employees?

Companies collect big data on what works for them but not the human costs Attitude that burnout is a personal failing





Major problem in medium to large size software companies

The scope of the work is so large compared with the available time that the team dispenses with conventional planning and estimation.

They dive right in, focusing on the functionality directed by the key stakeholder.

The team delivers as much of the most important functionality as they can within the allotted time.

If any key functionality remains unfinished, they cover for it manually while continuing to tie up loose ends after the delivery date.

To be sure they can get as much work done as possible, the team uses methods and techniques they know are effective,

and they dispense with activities that don't directly help them deliver.

When the project ends, the survivors crash for several days to recover from the exertion.



Burned out
employee
==
canary in coal
mine

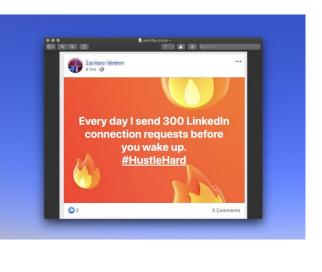
Canary in a coal mine
Warning sign of a toxic work environment
Response should focus on making environment less toxic
People try to make the canary tougher instead of fixing the environment



Cultural gaslighting







Every day social media, particularly Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn are filled with posts of people flexing about how hard they work When everyone else is sleeping

Alexis Ohanian, founder of Reddit "idea that unless you're suffering, grinding, working every hour of every day, You're not working hard enough"

Quantity is not always quality In fact, too much quantity has a different name: spam People are getting rich off making you believe you can get rich

We don't need to justify our existence by solely work Just say no to Hustleporn



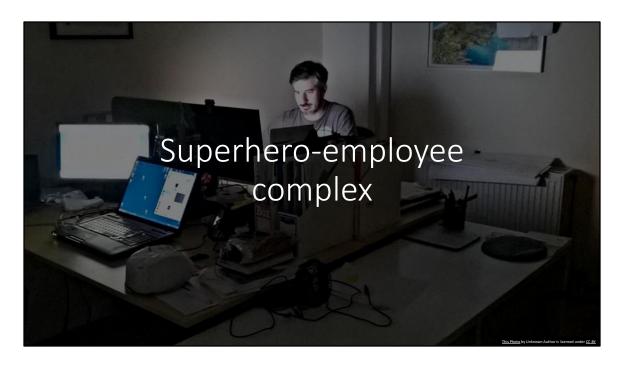
This is how we communicate now.

We curate our lives and create a culture of competition Additionally you have all these influencers/celebrities tweeting, facebooking, instagramming

About conferences, cool trips, how great their jobs are Our worth is measured in likes



There are constant alerts! No wonder we all suffer from anxiety!



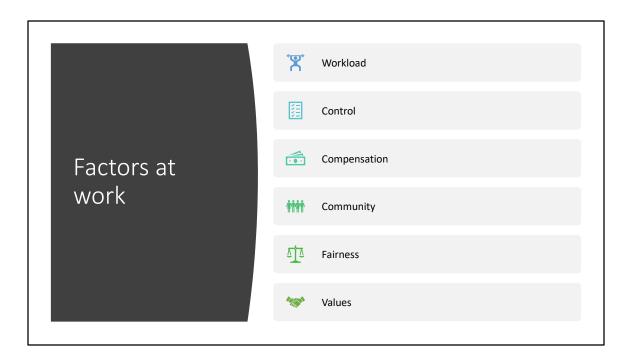
The addiction to being a hero is no different than any other addiction: heroes to spend the bulk of their time on saving the day, and nowhere near enough time on transferring knowledge and skills to others

No matter how brilliant, hard-working, and heroic an you might be, no human can keep up the pace forever and as soon as you can't, they'll penalize you.

Startups look for heros.

The truth is that you won't get rich by joining a start-up, but you'll work yourself to death making the founders rich.





Not in order of importance.

Workload = amount of work a person can reasonably accomplish in allocated time based on their current skillset

Control = autonomy, wiggle room for doing a good job

Reward = not always salary or perks but also social rewards, recognition

Community = work place community, people who you come in contact with regularly.

Do you have an environment in which you can mutually count on each other or is it socially toxic

Fairness = whatever our policies are, are they fairly administered

Values = gives meaning to the work we do.

If one or more areas have problem = greater burnout risk

On the flip side

Lack of control

Overload

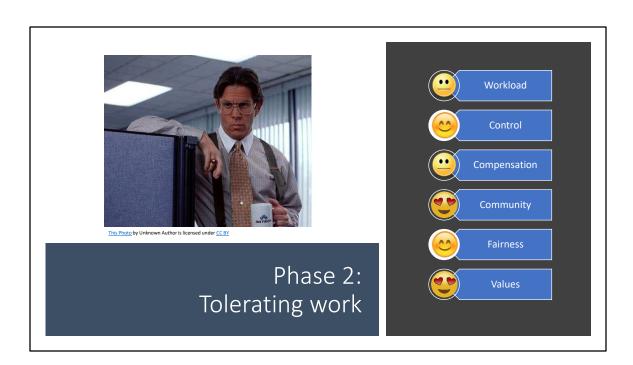
Breakdown of community = socially toxic environment

Absence of fairness = discrimination, glass ceilings

Value conflicts = wrong unethical, preaching one and doing something else Insufficient reward.. "a good day is when ... nothing bad happens"



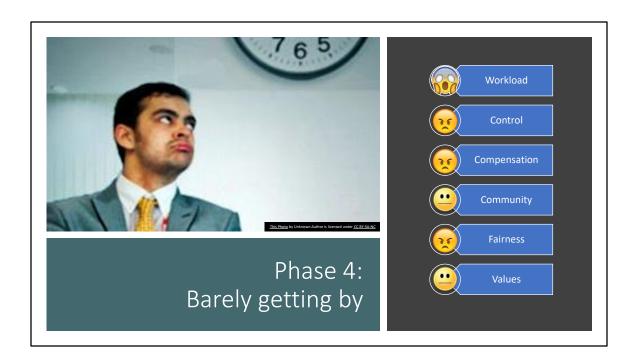
Focused
100% engaged
honeymoon phase
Control
Compensation
Community
Fairness
Values
All areas seem well taken care of
Even if one area is worse off, others compensate for it
This is probably an unicorn company-person fit



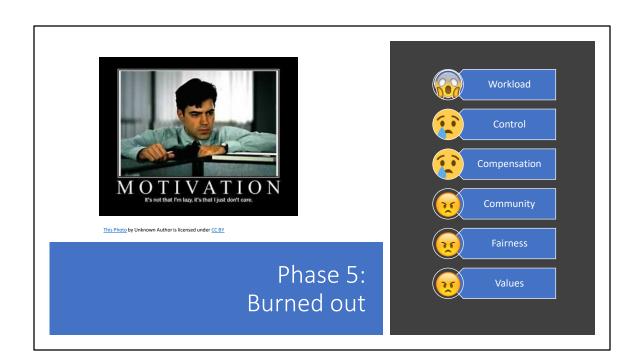
Manageable workload
Job feel fair
Values are still intact
Low pay or loss of control
And believe it or not, this is where most of our industry is



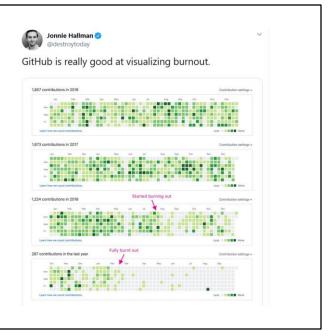
Work load gets out of control (burning from both ends)
Obviously feeling of control is low to negative
You don't feel like compensation meets workload
Still like the work community and values of the company
Fairness feels off because of workload and compensation
Most common stage



Everything feels out of control
Work load excessive
Not happy with compensation
Community turns toxic
Feeling of Fairness may start to disappear (related to community)
Values may start to slip (related to community)



Everything feels out of control Work load excessive Not happy with compensation Community turns toxic No feeling of fairness or trust Unethical stuff going on (no values) GitHub activity as an indicator for burnout





Understand your role (Clear expectations)

People can become exhausted simply by trying to figure out what they are supposed to be doing.

Reduce multitasking

Multi-tasking reduces your productivity because your brain can only focus on one thing at a time – this continued stress leads to burnout.

Learn to say no

If another task is given to you,

ask your manager what they suggest you drop in order to complete that task.

For larger projects break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

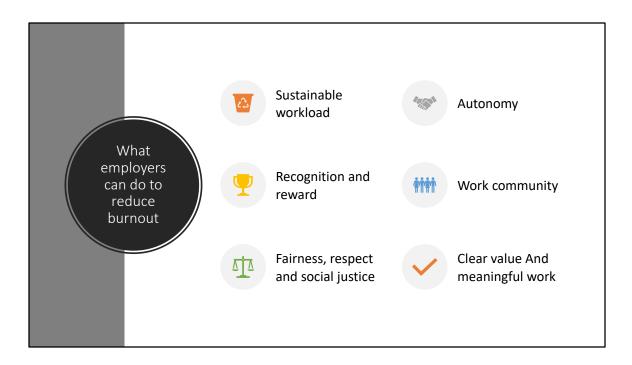
Your employer will ask and ask because they expect you to know your limits.

Reduce social media and notifications

Turn off your damn notifications. Stop being influenced by social media

Get a life outside of work

Get exercise and sleep



Sustainable workload

Provide autonomy

Recognition and reward

Supportive work community (No Asshole Rule)

Fairness, Respect and Social Justice

Clear values and meaningful work

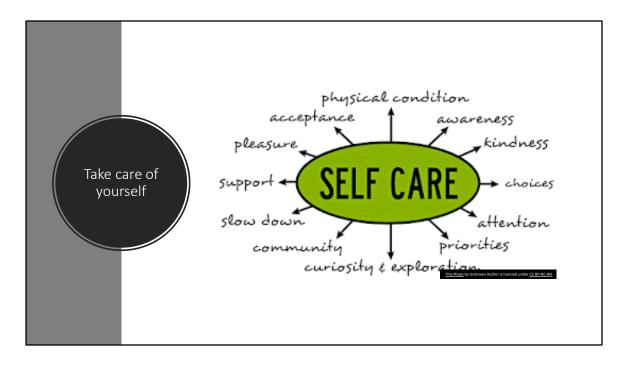
Have an honest self assessment and see where they grade on each of these factors $% \left(1\right) =\left(1\right) \left(1\right)$

Fix fixable factors

Be honest about factors which cannot be fixed

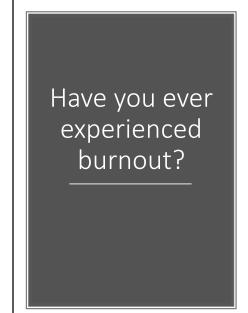
Open internal communication

Be deliberate about building a culture



Listen to your body and mind Have empathy towards others Get involved in community and talk to others







References

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- Dan Pink The puzzling science of motivation https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_the_puzzle_of_motivation
- The No Asshole Rule Robert Sutton https://www.amazon.com/Asshole-Rule-Civilized-Workplace-Surviving/dp/1600245854

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