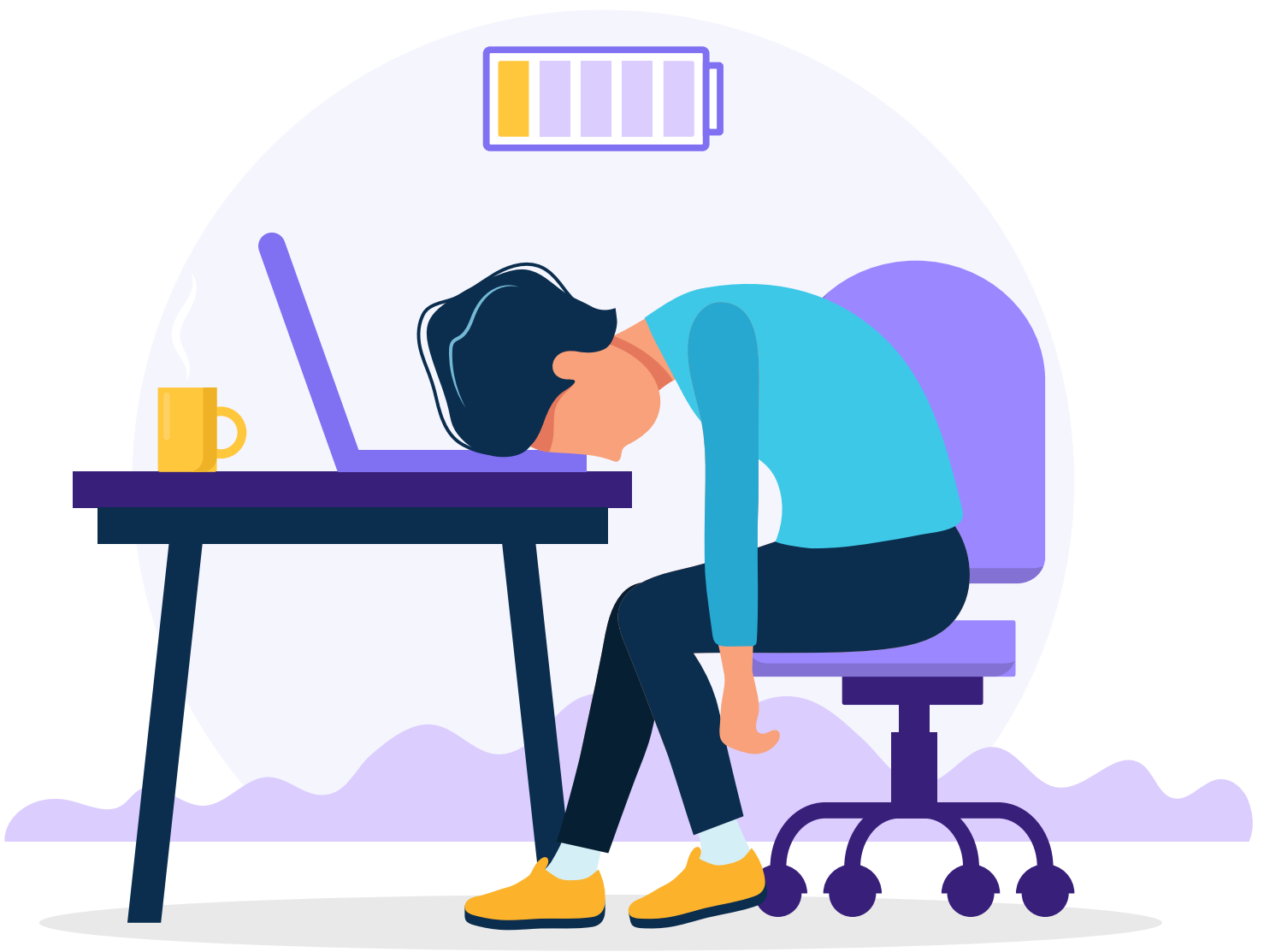


# Leadership Thoughts

CEO TO CEO

## PREVENTING REMOTE EMPLOYEE BURNOUT



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## Preventing Remote Employee Burnout

The shift to telecommuting and the use of some amazing technology has made it possible for employees to work at home while staying safe and preventing the spread of COVID-19, but after five weeks, it has also created more than a few challenges. Employees at all levels are showing signs of increased stress and burnout is becoming a real concern.

### **What is burnout?**

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when people feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

While the perception may be that your employees' workloads haven't really increased and the only real difference is that everyone is working from home, the uncertainty around this pandemic is probably elevating your employees' overall stress levels significantly. It's important to watch out for prolonged stress because its effects won't just disappear when everyone gets back the office. Employee burnout has the potential to significantly impact your business.

Some early warning signs of burnout include:

- Anxiety or depression
- Low morale or a short temper
- Headache or stomach and back problems
- Exhaustion or fatigue

In the longer term, burnout can lead to decreased productivity and employee engagement due to feelings of negativism or cynicism, and chronic health conditions. And because we are all at home, that burnout can easily extend to into your employees' personal lives, causing marital or family problems.



# REMOTE working burnout

You can't control an employee's home life, and it may not be possible to eliminate job stress altogether, but there are things you can do to help your employees manage it effectively.

## Help Employees Manage their Workload & Hours

Helping employees manage their workload starts by acknowledging that not everyone will be able to navigate working from home in the same way as everyone else...or even the same way they did five weeks ago. A lot of good intentions may have gone by the wayside by now.

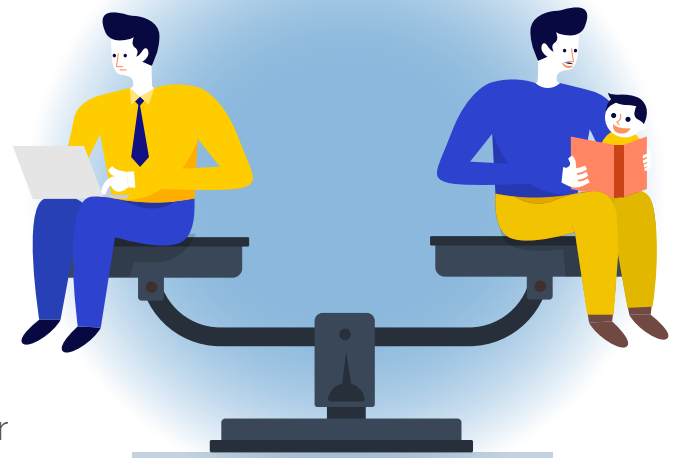
- Set clear expectations for working hours and productivity...acknowledging what is flexible and what is not.
- Make sure workloads are appropriate.
- Keep in mind that some employees will have to balance caregiving with telecommuting responsibilities.
- Be flexible and understand that not all employees will thrive while telecommuting.
- Don't assign busy work assuming that people at home need something to do.
- Require managers to regularly check in with employees to facilitate communication.

- Give managers strategies to keep employees engaged and motivated.
- Encourage teams like Sales, who are used to spending their time meeting with prospects or clients, to try new messaging or new ways of doing things.
- Recognize and celebrate employees' successes. This contributes to morale and decreases stress levels.

Your frontline managers are crucial to workload management, but it's important to remember that your leadership team and managers are employees too. They are going to have many of the same struggles. And this is new to everyone...motivating employees via email, web calls and social media is uncharted territory and everybody is looking for support.

## Encourage Balance

Many of us have had the mentality that this would only be a few weeks and then we would get back to normal. But 'normal' may be taking on a whole new meaning. Even if stay-in-place orders are lifted in the next couple weeks, there will probably still be some sort of distancing guidelines that remain in place. It's quite possible that many of us will be working from home for months.



Some enjoy, and have always had, a routine around working from home, but most of us have not. Realizing that we aren't all getting back to the office soon will be hard on some employees. Even though you may have done a company meeting weeks ago, where you laid out guidelines around performance and encouraged everyone to find work/family balance, it might be time to do it again.

Some work-from-home survival tips are worth repeating:

- If possible, designate a workspace and keep a schedule.
- It's important to stay active and exercise.
- Dogs bark. Kids get hungry. The wi-fi acts up. Cut yourself and each other some slack.
- It's ok to take a day off. That's what your PTO plan is for.
- Take advantage of employee benefits like telehealth or EAP counseling resources.

But more importantly, as company leadership, you should emulate the behavior you want from your managers.

- Take the time to learn what your managers are struggling with and encourage them to do the same with their teams.
- Embrace the need for connection by scheduling optional Zoom coffee/lunch/happy hours.
- Start meetings with a few minutes of chit chat and share what you are struggling with.
- Don't send emails at 8:00 at night and on Sundays that could easily be held till the next workday.
- Encourage everyone to be honest and reach out if they need help.

## Address Employee Concerns

One of the hardest parts of being in charge during a situation like this pandemic is to project confident leadership when there is so much unknown. But communication – and lots of it – is critical. Good news or bad...employees want to know you have a plan.

The amount of information that can be shared will differ from company to company, but employees often feel less stress when they understand the bigger picture.

- Company financials prior to the pandemic and expectations for the future
- News about their industry overall...especially the good stuff

- How the company is being creative around, or adapting to, what may be a 'new normal'
- Any opportunities for out-of-the box thinking to help move the company forward
- How decisions will be made (and communicated) as stay-at-home orders are removed

## Take Care of Yourself

And finally, take care of yourself first. Nobody is expecting you to be Superman or Wonder Woman, and frankly, no one wants you to be. Reporting to someone who appears flawless is exhausting. Be open to letting your team know when you are struggling and where you need help. Limit your own work hours and take time to recharge. And control the amount of negative information you allow yourself to be inundated with. Your own burnout can sink the whole operation and your team needs you to help guide them toward the success waiting ahead.

## For More Information

Burnout is a serious syndrome that may be affecting your employees. As such, it's important that you recognize the signs of burnout and take steps to prevent it while your employees are working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidelines are being developed for "Opening Up America" but no timelines have been set and we will probably be returning to the office in phases. The best way to ensure your company is ready, is to ensure your employees are happy, healthy and ready to go.

For more information on stress reduction resources for employees, contact Filice Insurance today at [ask@filice.com](mailto:ask@filice.com)

