### [**Motivating Remote Workers**](https://medium.com/the-learning-strategist-iq/motivating-remote-workers-d621d7fa3ecd?source=your_stories_page-------------------------------------)

## **How to Help Employees With Remote Work Burnout**

Do your remote employees seem unmotivated, cynical, and even a little angry? Has their productivity dropped? Do they just seem to not care? Pay attention, because your employees are burning out.

In fact, a November 2020 Spring Health [survey](https://lp.springhealth.com/burnout-nation) of 1,136 employed adults found that 76% of remote employees are currently experiencing burnout!

“Worker burnout symptoms include exhaustion, reduced work performance, and feeling negative, cynical, or detached from work,” Spring Health’s study notes.

Likewise, a late 2020 [study](https://asana.com/resources/anatomy-of-work) by Asana that surveyed 13,000 employees worldwide pegged the level of burnout at 71%.

This is a crisis.

It’s not just having to work remotely all the time that is causing this level of burnout. The anxiety, fear and even frustration from multiple triggers — the Covid-19 pandemic itself, the layoffs and business downsizing that took place, an increase in caretaking duties at home because the kids are out of school — these are all factors in burnout. Some employees have experienced the illness themselves or had relatives who suffered, or even passed away, from the Covid virus or its after-effects. Their salaries may have been temporarily reduced — while it keeps more employees on the payroll, it’s additional financial stress. Social and political turmoil also played a significant role in burning out employees.

It’s clear that almost all of us have had it with remote work.

But as a manager, you can’t just throw up your hands and say, that’s it. You have to somehow re-energize your employees to keep them productive. Because some companies are literally relying solely on their employees’ abilities more than anything else. Other sources of income and growth aren’t available at the moment for many companies.

## **Keep Communicating**

Workers need to know that they can talk about their stress and feelings of burnout without repercussions. They need to know that they are supported in the workplace — even when they’re miles from the workplace.

“As we navigate various transitions over the coming months and years, leaders are likely to see employees struggle with anxiety, depression, burnout, trauma, and PTSD,” wrote Kelly Greenwood and Natash Krol in an HBR [article](https://hbr.org/2020/08/8-ways-managers-can-support-employees-mental-health).

Provide multiple channels for employees to reach out for help. That can include creating an open-door channel to the HR department, anonymous surveys to get feedback and suggestions and gauge employees’ feelings of burnout, and training managers in ways to encourage open communication and provide supportive feedback.

Even providing information that seems mundane can keep employees feeling less isolated and stressed out. Mentioning birthdays, sending a note about changes to work hours, and helping employees prioritize their workload can all help boost mental health, Greenwood and Krol note.

## **Accommodate Employees’ Needs**

Work-life balance is always essential to employee success, and it’s been hard to achieve over the past year. Some employees are parents who suddenly have to care for their homebound, school-age children while juggling a full-time workload. Some employees are caring for their parents or other loved ones who may need more time and attention. And many employees are dealing with the loss of loved ones.

Be more accommodating than you normally would with employees. When they communicate to you that they are dealing with a personal issue, work with them to help them rebalance. Say, for example, an employee needs to take a family member to physical therapy once per week to help them recover from an illness or injury. Giving them an extra two hours off per week can take away some of their stress, and that in turn can help them stay energized and stave off burnout. Two hours a week is a small concession that could have great returns for the company in terms of productivity.

## **Become a Considerate Zoom Speaker**

We’ve all experienced that moment where several people are on a Zoom call, and two or more of us start speaking at the same time. And then, one person will usually say, “I’m sorry, you go ahead,” and let the other person speak.

This is an example of what linguist Deborah Tannen described in a 2012 paper as “high-involvement” versus “considerate” styles of speaking.

High-involvement speakers tend to be more interactive in conversations, tend to interrupt more, and start speaking after shorter pauses in a conversation. Considerate speakers hang back a bit in conversation, tend to interrupt less, and tolerate longer pauses in a conversation.

A high-involvement style might be seen by others as disruptive, even though the high-involvement speaker had no intention to be that way. You’ve perhaps had a colleague on a Zoom call who’s been enthusiastic about an initiative, for example, and who excitedly interrupts others to talk about it on the call.

“Studying the transcript of an exchange she had with a colleague, Tannen pointed out how her own high-involvement style was interpreted by her high-considerateness interlocutor not as enthusiastic support but as disruptive,” wrote Clare C.H. in a Medium [post detailing](https://humanparts.medium.com/why-conversing-over-zoom-is-harder-for-some-than-others-e3209821ba20) the paper and these speaking styles.

Neither speaking style is wrong; I want to emphasize that. But the considerate style of speaking works much better in a Zoom call where multiple attendees are participating in the conversation.

“We all more or less have to adopt a considerate style in order to make Zoom calls work because the readiness with which high-involvement people usually interject doesn’t translate well to the digital realm,” Clare C.H. writes.

## **Rebalance Workloads**

Due to layoffs and furloughs, many workers who remained employed full-time suddenly had to take on the work of their colleagues. The result has been overwhelming workloads for many.

As a manager, find out how much work your team is shouldering and [rebalance](https://asana.com/resources/effectively-manage-team-workload) that load.

1. Figure out the team’s workload and capacity: What projects and/or processes is your team responsible for?
2. Break down individual workloads and allocate resources more evenly: Who has been assigned to do what? Are they doing too much?
3. Make sure productivity tools are being used effectively: Is the team using multiple tools to accomplish the same task — i.e., two team members each using a different project management app? Is a program being underutilized? Why?
4. Adjust workloads as needed afterward: Check in with the team on a routine basis, whether that’s weekly, biweekly or monthly, to ensure their workload stays balanced.
5. Streamline processes to help work proceed more efficiently: That includes day-to-day stuff like meetings. For example, many companies are adopting limited-meeting guidelines or even a no-meeting day each week so employees can focus on their work.

## **Increase Personal Days and Flex Time**

Respondents to Spring Health’s survey overwhelmingly said that reducing their work hours would help them avoid or reduce burnout. Being offered more paid time off was an extremely popular option.

Look into ways that your company can give employees more time off to just tune out and re-energize.

One simple way to do this is to institute “summer Fridays,” a [half-day off](https://www.fastcompany.com/90425734/lessons-from-introducing-half-day-friday-policy) on the last day of the work week. Encourage employees to shut down their laptops a few hours early and spend time with their family, exercise, or just relax. “Summer Fridays were a stress-free way to remind myself that I can call it a day without feeling an unhealthy level of self-inflicted pressure to keep working into the night. This felt like a message of ‘we trust you’ and ‘work at a healthy pace,’” an employee of startup Buffer told the company in a 2019 survey.

## **Educate Employees on Ways to Prevent or Reduce Burnout**

Practicing self-care, talking with friends and loved ones, and limiting their time on social media or watching the news are all great ways to prevent or mitigate burnout, Spring Health notes.

Larger companies can incorporate lessons on preventing burnout in their LMS. Smaller companies can provide educational material to their employees, point them to free and helpful instructional videos online, or hire a professional to host Zoom courses to teach these skills to employees.

## **Offer Therapy and Health/Wellness Options**

One thing that many companies are adopting in the teeth of the pandemic is access to mental health professionals at no additional cost to the employee.

If the company’s health plan doesn’t offer robust mental health coverage, look into a new policy that does offer it.

## **Be A Model for Preventing Burnout**

Managers and business owners rarely take a break themselves, even when their employees are done for the day or taking a break. But for your own health — and the health of your workers — you need to break this pattern.

If you want employees to take that half-day on Fridays, you need to shut down your laptop, too. If you want them to reach out to HR or a provided mental health professional, then you need to reach out for your own health, as well. And then, you need to share that you’re doing this. You don’t have to share the details. But if possible, mention that you have reached out for a resource.

“Share that you’re taking a walk in the middle of the day, having a therapy appointment, or prioritizing a staycation (and actually turning off email) so that you don’t burn out,” Greenwood and Krol wrote.

This level of sharing can have a profound effect on your employees: If you are taking advantage of the options available to prevent or reduce burnout, they will feel much more confident about using those options, too.

The bonus for managers is that by being the model for their employees in taking time off, implementing self-care, and asking for help, they prevent getting burned out themselves. And they can continue to be effective managers. This is a win-win, and the effects last a lifetime.

## SOURCES

<https://lp.springhealth.com/burnout-nation>

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