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Title: When wellbeing works: Building your mental and emotional muscles

We all know about Burnout, but who has heard about Rust Out? And what about how both can lead to "Quiet Quitting"? And it's NOT that we necessarily need more incentives or extrinsic motivators, but rather a little appreciation of our internal strength can go a long way.

In my session I'll be talking about some of the key psychological issues facing the workplace and then putting you through your paces with a wellbeing workout which you can then try with teams - and family - to manage stress at the point of crisis, build and unlock your personal resilience around it, and then identify your future goals so you can thrive.

Defining Burnout

Exhaustion (also referred to as "burnout") may be defined as the physiological state the body falls into after a period of stress.

Unfortunately, as much as we may want to believe we are invincible we all have a level of stress up to which we can tolerate, beyond which – the mind may just about be willing, but the body is not...think of it like an elastic band – continue to stretch it and at some point it may snap or go flaccid and cease to function as an elastic band – this would be known as "exhaustion" – or burnout.

Signs of burnout

Psychological

- *Irritability*
- *Seeming very tired – or complaining they aren't sleeping*
- *Tearfulness*
- *Inability to focus/zoning out*

Social

- *Not voicing concerns or stopped talking to management despite an "open door" policy*
- *A change in eating habits – eating or drinking more or less than usual- and if eating more - often of high calorie items*
- *Refusing invitations, or alternatively going to all of them and perhaps over indulging in a noticeable manner (that differs from their usual behaviour)*

Biological

- *Susceptibility to illness (often because of a depression of the immune system)*
- *...or other signs indicative of potential physical health issues*

Practical

- *Missing deadlines (when they have otherwise been on time)*
- *Not volunteering for something (again when they would otherwise have done so) – or alternatively consistently seeking things that would get them involved, when previously they have always gone home on time*
- *Work which is not to their usual standards*
- *Staying very late or arriving very early to "get things done"*

Verbal

- Phrases such as “I wish I could just stop” or “I just need to be somewhere else” – seemingly throwaway phrases, but if they are said often enough, this can be a prompt to ask “Are you OK?”....twice¹!
- OR – if OTHERS are voicing concerns about someone, while it is best not to become embroiled in gossip, it may be worth keeping an eye out for them yourself...and similarly, if someone voices a concern to you, especially if they have no other agenda except your best interest, then take a moment to heed it...it will have taken them quite a lot to say it!

With regards to the practical signs, it is sometimes about knowing the “baseline” behaviour so that any differences can be noticed.

Then there are the more subtle signs which may need closer observation, for example, slumping or a slower walk, or a lapse in personal grooming.

AND – please be aware that sometimes, if someone has been down and they “suddenly” seem better, but still don’t engage with their immediate friends and network, there COULD still be something wrong, they might have just chosen to absolutely compartmentalise...again – ASK are you ok – twice!!!

It never hurts, if you do notice any of these – or recognise them in yourself – to stop and ask “are you/am I ok?” and know where to seek professional intervention.

...then Ask Twice

If you hear the response “I’m Fine” – ask again “Are you REALLY OK?”

Rust Out – when it’s also up to the organisation to intervene!!

Rust Out was the name applied to the boredom experienced by employees by Paula Coles (2019) Burnout is active – it is about trying to do more than is possible until there is no energy left. But a rusty object doesn’t necessarily actively “choose” to rust...it is *left to rust* by careless owners!

(However, behaviours can be similar to Burnout!)

Quiet Quitting

“Quiet quitting” became a TikTok trend in 2022. It describes the gradual withdrawal from a work relationship, and even if it’s not a form of protest, it is likely to happen when people are working through their notice or have made the decision to leave, but it also happens as people reassert their boundaries – if it’s not in my job description, it’s not being done.

¹ I cannot ever say this enough - always “ask twice” if you are worried about someone as often the first time they will say they are fine, but the second time is harder to find an excuse for.

YOUR WORKOUT

Stress at work can be due to lack of stimulation as well as over stimulation!

The “Window of Tolerance” (to borrow a term from trauma research by Siegel) – can vary throughout our lives based on a period of consistent experience, will affect our current needs and preferences. He uses this term to describe our psychological and sometimes physical response to adversity. If we have been through a lot of trauma or adversity our tolerance is likely to be smaller and so some of us may have become more cautious, if we haven’t had much – or even haven’t had *enough* – then for others we are perhaps more willing to take risks.

HOW BROAD IS YOUR WINDOW AND WHERE ARE YOU NOW

Under stimulated

Over stimulated

Tolerance

Consider trying the “thought categorising” exercise to gain insights into where you are!!

Check your thinking!

During this exercise, categorise the thoughts that you have eg:

To Do

Waste of Time/Complaint

Frustration/Stress

Positivity and relaxation...and so on

It’s really not easy to tell ourselves to “relax” – so we need to find other ways of supporting others and ourselves when under a prolonged period of stress.

PART 1: Reduce the impact of stress in the moment

54321 (getting you grounded outside your head)

5 things you can see

4 things you can hear

3 things you can touch

2 things you can smell

1 think you can taste

STOP Technique for negative thinking

Stop: Reflect on what thoughts of insecurity drive you to do. Eg: get into a funk, throw a pity party in your head, look for other jobs

Take a step back Explore some of the consequences of the actions you have taken and decide whether they serve you or not

Observe other options: Ask yourself: How might I behave if I didn’t have that thought

Proceed: From those behaviours – proceed with a different response (anything at all) next time you recognise those thoughts

TIPP Technique

Temperature

Intensity

Paired muscle relaxation

Paced breathing

A “CALM KIT”

Items eg: textures, temperatures, fiddle toys

Affirmations: eg. Even if I can't control anything else, I can control my breathing

Useful numbers: eg. Best friend/GP/Mentor

Things to do that make you smile: eg. Books, images, pictures

Recognising stress before it takes hold:

The body scan

This is similar to the “Paired muscle relaxation” of the TIPP technique. If you are able to recognise what your body feels like when it is tense and when it is relaxed, you can read the signals from your physicality before your mind tells you there's something to deal with.

The emotional scan

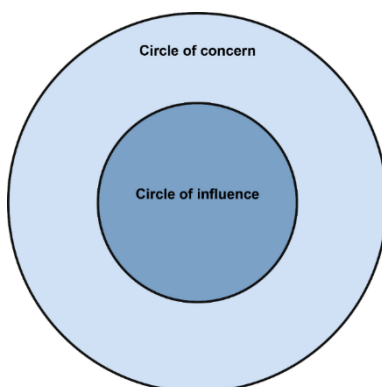
In the same way as knowing how your body feels can indicate stress, it can also indicate your emotional state – if you learn to read the signals. Imagine a time you were:

- Angry
- Happy
- Sad
- Content
- Fearful
- Confident

By doing this, you might also be able to better understand that “feeling in your bones/gut/back-of-my-mind”

PART 2: Reduce cortisol production (resilience to manage stress)

CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE (do what you CAN do!)



Boosting our positive energy regularly not only can rebalance the brain chemistry positively, but makes it more likely that we will continue with whatever we have set out to do!



Try the “SPICES” self care challenge (Lawton)
– by engaging with different ways to “feel good” (and add flavour to your life 😊) – you will begin to recognise what you like and how it benefits you. The key to the SPICES challenge is VARIETY!

Appreciate gratitude.

Who thanked or appreciated me today?

A large, light purple rectangular area with wavy, scalloped edges on the top and bottom, intended for writing answers to the question above.

Build a network of warm coals over damp squibs!

The “Gratitude stretch”

- Great for posture
- No need for formal journaling
- Under 30 seconds

Arms – One thing I’m grateful for

Legs – One person I’m grateful for

Shake – What I’m looking forward to today

SECRET TIP: Then actively choose to spend time with those people (and the others can, quite legitimately be told – “I’m sorry, already booked up!”)

a) Set boundaries

“No” is a complete sentence, but if you struggle try:

DELAY – I can tell you later

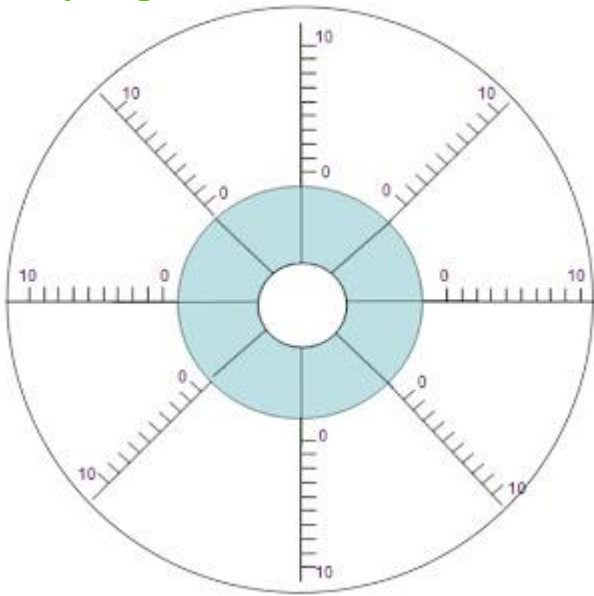
DEFER – I can’t but X can/Here’s one I made earlier

DICTATE – I can only help between x and y

ASK: How would YOU like me to help you!?

PART 3: My commitment to me – what can I do to boost my mental health?

Know your goals



Use this to break down your goal(s) or even projects into manageable pieces AND get a clear visual of the areas that need work and those with which you are on track.

SKILLS V STRENGTHS

Know how to spend your time (and energy!)



DO IT!

Building our mental and emotional strength is the same as building physical strength – you have to practice. In the same way as lifting one set of weights will not build muscle, doing the exercises here once may make you feel good for now, but you need to be consistent for sustainable change.

End

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