

Bounce Back from Burnout

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Around April and May of every year I often hear from Toastmaster leaders that they feel burned out, tired, or 'stale.' I'm not surprised, because I remember having some of those same feelings when I was serving as a Top Three Officer. Can you bounce back from being burned out, you ask? Absolutely! Here are some ways that you may be able to get back that spring in your step.

Identify what is Causing Most of the 'Burned Out' Feeling

Burn out occurs when you have a high degree of stress with no relief for an extended period of time. If you can identify what's causing all or most of the stress, then you can figure out an action plan to decrease or at least manage the stress. Here are some common stress creators for Toastmaster leaders: (1) unresolved conflict in the person's team; (2) increased work loads at the job decreasing the time they have available to attend to the District's needs; (3) marital difficulties; (4) working very hard month after month to meet the District's goals, but not having much to show for it; (5) criticism of the leader by key people in the District; (6) trying to please everybody; (7) working very hard over an extended period without getting adequate rest; and (8) lack of balance in the person's life style for a long period of time.

Take Specific, Direct Actions to Relieve the Stress

Don't beat around the bush. If you want to bounce back from burn out, you've got to be bold! One very successful District leader told me that when she spotted those burn out signs, she made arrangements for District functions to be handled by reliable people and went on a week's vacation where she was away from telephones and meetings. My wife and I made it a rule that when our family was at dinner, neither our children nor we would answer the telephone. Some leadership teams that have had conflict have gone so far as to get a knowledgeable mediator to work with them. If the cause of the stress is lack of balance in your life, then reassess the way you spend your time, what your priorities should be in order to regain the balance you need, and then make it happen!

Here are some examples of positive actions you can take:

Lack of exercise: make appointments with yourself to go to the local exercise Club on specific days at specific times to exercise. If someone tries to book you for that time period, check your day planner and say, "Sorry, I already have an engagement at that time."

Not spending enough time with your spouse: Arrange to meet your spouse for lunch during the week. Arrange for a babysitter and go out on a biweekly date.

Working very hard for the District but little to no progress being made: You might be working very hard at the wrong things. Go back to basics. Study the District mission statement if you are a District Officer. Study the Club mission statement if you are a Club Officer. Focus only on things that will directly have ramifications on the critical success factors for your office. Consult other knowledgeable and successful Toastmaster leaders.

Trying to please everybody: That's a no-win situation. People who tend to do this have low self-confidence and self esteem. Get help from a counselor if necessary.

Realize that you are a person of worth and have much to offer. Be grateful for those who help you and also be grateful for those who give you a hard time because they are making you reassess many false assumptions you are laboring under. Focus on getting the job done in the right way and forget the popularity contest.

Trust The Higher Power of the Universe

The higher power in my universe is God. Whatever your religion and whatever your acknowledged higher power, make room for spiritual growth and peace in your heart. We human beings have a body, mind, and spirit. If we are too busy to pay attention to matters of the spirit, then we are too busy. Take time to mediate or pray. If you can do neither, sit comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed, close your eyes, and breathe deeply, putting your full attention on each breath, as it enters you through your nose and exits you through your nose. Let all other thoughts fall away gently from your mind. Discover the healing balm of silence.

Reduce the Clutter

Simplify your life so that you are attending to your priorities first. Reduce distractions. Look at your daily planner, or personal digital assistant, or calendar where you record all your appointments. Ask yourself what you can cut out so that you have more 'white space' in your life.

Take Time to Play

Don't take yourself so seriously. When is the last time you had a good belly laugh? Do you have a hobby that is different from your work or Toastmasters activities? If so, spend a little time each week on that hobby or interest. You will be able to return to your Toastmasters work with a new zest.

Commit to the Bounce

General George Patton, who barely passed from West Point but later went on to become one of the Second World War's most successful field commanders said, "Success in life is not determined by how high you rise but how high you bounce back from adversity."

Like General Patton, make a decision that your bounce back from burn out is for the long run. Stick to the changes you make in your life. You will wonder how you lived any other way. Good luck. Bounce high!