



BURNOUT AT WORK

Everything these days is getting bigger, faster and wider, and employees have to keep pace. But at some point, the human motor overheats. Whilst burnout was previously scoffed at as a fashionable complaint, the symptoms of total burnout are now taken very seriously - just not usually by the people actually suffering from it.

THERE IS A DANGEROUSLY FINE LINE BETWEEN EXHAUSTION AND BURNOUT

Stress is part of working life. And all employees have days when the challenges they face seem too great and their motivation too weak. Fatigue at the end of the working day is far from being a symptom of burnout, but it's certainly a sign that we have all but forgotten to balance out stress with relaxation.

Unfortunately it's not possible to diagnose burnout simply on the basis of typical stress symptoms - it goes much deeper. Even though doctors warn against generic symptoms of burnout, there are definitely indications that a person is at risk of crossing the line between exhaustion and burnout:

People suffering from burnout often describe it as the complete inability to find any sense in their work or even to simply find a reason to get up in the morning. And they don't mean once a week, but every day. And not only on work days, but at the weekend too.

Feeling burnt out due to persistent psychological stress from work is very closely linked to other illnesses such as depression or imminent heart attack. And if the initial stages of burnout go unnoticed or are not treated, the consequences are virtually impossible to predict.

Furthermore, physical complaints such as dyspepsia or a permanent headache can occur, which the people concerned don't usually recognise as symptoms of burnout, despite the fact that the body usually raises the alarm faster than the mind.

THE QUALITY OF WORK PUT TO THE TEST

If work is the stress factor, it should be also be the focus of the treatment. Shouldn't it? The problem of burnout is multifaceted:

Although diagnosis today can seem quick, the people concerned still hesitate much too long before seeking help in the first place. After all, being "ill due to stress" sounds too much like failure. But anyone who suffers from insomnia, persistent anxiety or unexplained physical problems for more than two weeks should definitely seek medical advice.

Often, it's not easy to tell which aspects of work are actually to blame for stress. It needn't necessarily be the quantity of work an employee has to handle. Burnout symptoms can also be triggered by a lack of recognition, permanent pressure from line managers or simply being assigned the wrong tasks, which are too hard or too easy for the employee in question.

But before these factors can be analysed, the risk must be identified. And this requires a good level of attentiveness. Not only must the person concerned admit that something is not right, but their environment - in particular within the company - must also step up. If a colleague's behaviour changes noticeably, perhaps isolating themselves further or becoming noticeably more cynical or aggressive, then it's time to raise concerns. Sometimes this small impulse from outside is enough to trigger an important thought process to help steer a person away from becoming a burnout case.

And what next? It's a case of applying the brakes and finding ways to move away from stress. This could simply mean reducing the number of hours spent at work and consistently turning down overtime, through to restructuring an entire business. If the structures at work are responsible for an employee's illness, then the employer is obligated to change them.

THE MAGIC OF "NO": FROM NOW ON, I MATTER

But regardless of the environmental changes: The person concerned must be the focus of burnout avoidance. And many such people must learn to develop a healthy sense of egoism. Instead of always saying yes, they should learn the magic of saying no and realise that the world won't stop spinning just because they choose not to work themselves into the ground. They must also learn to formulate their needs in terms of work - first of all for themselves and then for the decision-maker. Anyone who knows exactly what they are worth can make corresponding demands in terms of workplace design. And if none of that helps, the only thing left is a clean break - a new job, deliberately taking time out, therapeutic treatment.

It takes effort. After all, people have come to define themselves through their work. But it is precisely this definition that often leads to burnout. And then the person may no longer be capable of working any more, and will also have lost a significant amount of their quality of life. That's why it's worth asking every employee to stop for a moment now and again to question their own actions and examine their physical and mental health. If the answers are not positive, immediate intervention - even on a small scale - can help prevent the worst.