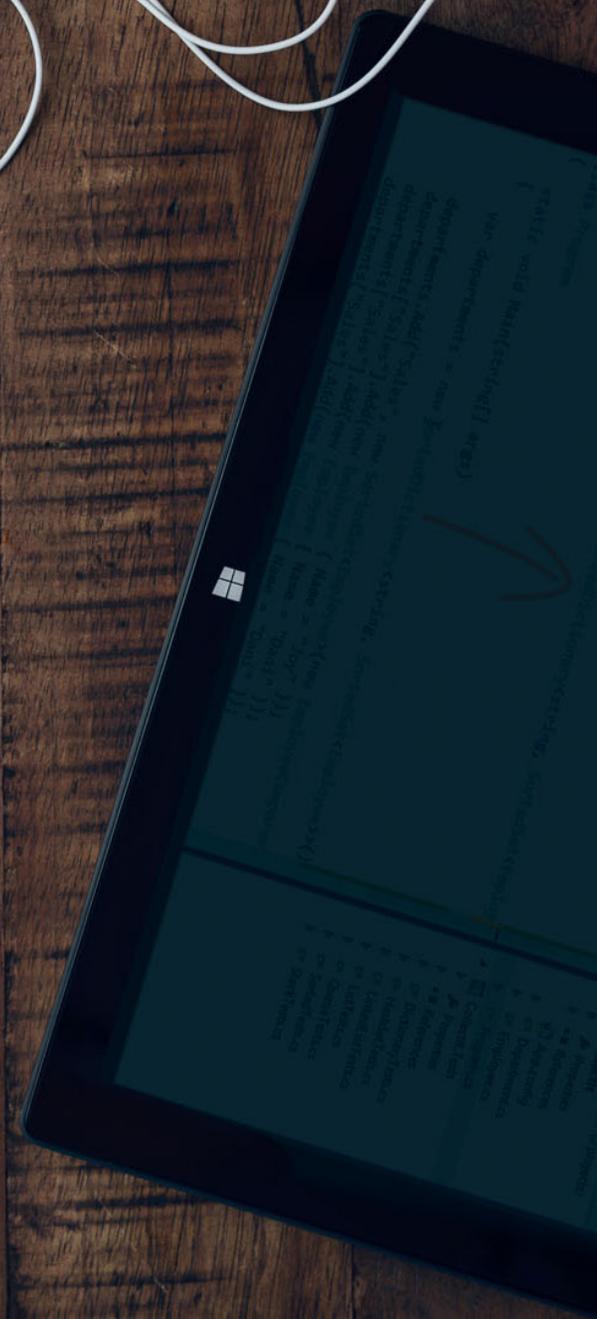




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# Battling burnout: How to keep your technology team productive and happy

SMARTER THAN YESTERDAY





## Beware of burnout

**In between maintaining compliance, keeping up with product release deadlines and trying to outpace your competitors, you've got a lot going on. Making sure your employees are actually happy at work is probably not the first thing on your mind when you wake up every morning. That is, until low employee engagement becomes a serious problem.**

Managing technology teams is a unique challenge. Not only must you attract top talent to your organization, but you also need to keep them challenged, productive and content enough to stay put. Tech teams are arguably some of the most overworked employees at your company. When burnout starts to impact overall engagement, your business as a whole will suffer.

In this guide, we'll discuss the impact of burnout, the part employee happiness plays on an organization's overall health and tips to help you create the optimal environment for your tech talent to thrive.

## BEWARE OF BURNOUT

Burnout can happen to anyone in any field or industry, but as you may have guessed, tech pros are some of the most susceptible. Almost all teams are understaffed, as there's a limited number of qualified professionals to fill open roles. That means employees are left picking up the slack and working longer hours to create solutions to business problems and provide around-the-clock service.

## HOW TECH TAKES A TOLL

Some causes of burnout are unique to tech teams. While a heavy workload can make anyone feel exhausted, software developers and IT ops pros are plagued with a to-do list where almost every task is "mission critical." When management or the executive team prioritizes all tech-related responsibilities as extremely urgent, employees struggle to know where to start, what really needs to be done first or what success looks like. All they know is that they have to be on high alert 24/7.

The inability to get this red-hot to-do list done makes teams feel like they've failed, which ultimately results in fear. To make matters worse, tech teams often avoid change for fear of failure. If your burned out workforce is afraid to innovate, you'll fall behind your competition.

Often, this overuse of "mission critical" job prioritization comes from upper management's lack of understanding. Instead of being supportive and recognizing the pile up of responsibilities, management can add on menial tasks that distract their employees from the work that actually is mission critical. And they might not provide their teams with adequate training to tackle these massive to-do lists.

Work overload can be broken down into quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative overload is when an employee feels they have too much on their plate to physically or mentally accomplish in the time given. Qualitative workload is the feeling that an employee's skills are insufficient for their responsibilities. Having the appropriate education and training equips workers with the skills to meet the demands of the job without becoming exhausted.

## THE BYPRODUCT OF BURNOUT

- **On your employees:** What happens when motivation wanes for a substantial period of time? Burnout is defined as "a condition that arises when prolonged stress causes energy to turn to exhaustion, involvement to turn to cynicism and efficacy to become a lack of accomplishment." Burnt out employees are stressed, exhausted, depressed and accident-prone.

- **On your business:** A tired, demotivated workforce costs your organization in dollars, output and product quality. According to the World Health Organization, stress costs US businesses an estimated \$300 billion each year. Part of that comes from high turnover. 52% of employees report that workplace stress has led them to look for a new job, decline a promotion or leave a job. \*

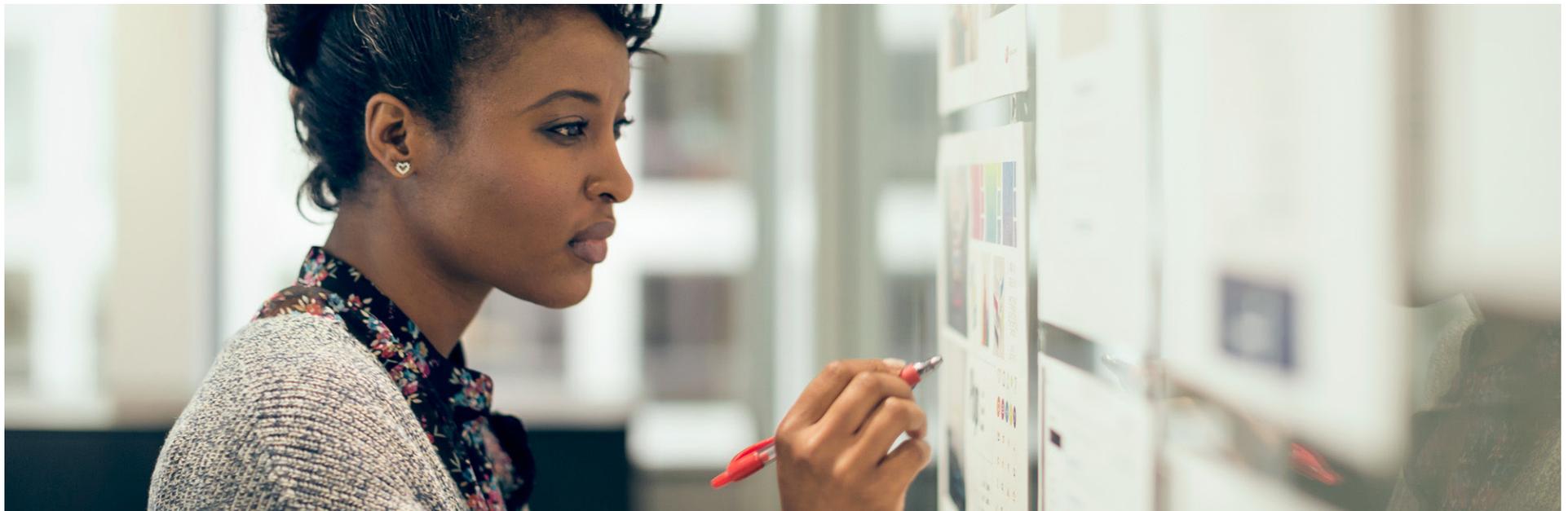
Turnover is no joke. “Research suggests that direct replacement costs can reach as high as 60% of an employee’s annual salary, with total costs associated with turnover ranging from 90-200% of an annual salary,” states the Society of Human Resource

Management. Think that bill is high? The average time it takes to fill a role is 24.5 days\*\*, meaning in addition to costs, your productivity is down for at least a month, in addition to the 1-2 years\*\*\* it takes for a new employee to reach full productivity.

- **Stress reduction is simple:** Luckily, even in the demanding field of technology, your team stands a chance at maintaining a healthy work-life balance and realistic workload without letting the business suffer. And it starts with culture. Create an environment that offers employees the chance to unwind, recharge and get back to business refreshed.

Only 25% of US corporations offer some sort of stress-reduction program\*\*\*\*. If your organization isn’t one of them, you’re missing out on a game-changer. Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini began offering meditation, yoga and acupuncture services to help his staff distress and saw that participants experienced 69 minutes of additional productivity per day.\*\*\*\*\*

Stress reduction doesn’t have to be costly either. Combat that 24/7 high alert expectation by enforcing an off-hours emergency-only rule for email or messaging apps. When used effectively (meaning



Economists at the University of Warwick found that unhappy workers are 10% less productive than their happy peers.

everyone participating understands the definition of “emergency”), this rule could give your employees back their personal hours and instill a healthier work-life balance.

Take that a step further by monitoring PTO time. We’re not saying you need to have a strict PTO policy, but rather create a system that encourages employees to use their vacation time, whether that be “penalizing” leftover PTO days at the end of the year or incentivizing time off by providing a small vacation stipend.

Other simple stress reduction measures your business can take include implementing flexible schedules to allow employees to keep up with their personal life and providing healthy snacks and meals or wellness benefits like gym reimbursement, quarterly chair massages or nap rooms.

#### **THE PURSUIT OF (EMPLOYEE) HAPPINESS**

As bad as burnout can be, sometimes it’s just the start of a downhill spiral. There are several reasons employees can begin to feel disengaged at work, and the scary thing is a lot of them are. According to 2014 research by Gallup, only 13% of employees are “highly engaged,” while 26% are “actively disengaged.” Even if you disregard the moral responsibility to keep workplace happiness up, the impact a disengaged workforce can have on a business’ bottom line can be devastating.

#### **THE WARNING SIGNS**

You don’t need to read an employee’s diary to notice a change in happiness. Disengagement has several warning signs and it often starts with lower quality output. Whether they’re performing at a slower pace, producing work with more errors or delivering poor customer service, you can attribute this decline to disengagement.

This decline in productivity isn’t imagined. Economists at the University of Warwick found that unhappy workers are 10% less productive than their happy peers. Unfortunately, a good chunk of the workforce falls into this demographic. According to Gallup, 26% are actively disengaged and only 13% are highly engaged. With that much of the workforce underperforming, it’s no surprise that organizations with predominately happy employees outperform their competition by 147% \*\*\*\*\*.

If a productivity hit is all you experience, consider yourself lucky. Highly disengaged employees can do more damage than that. According to workplace culture and happiness expert Kylie Hunt, these employees are more likely to have on the job accidents, produce defects, steal from their employer, miss days of work, quit and monopolize their manager’s time.

Severely disgruntled employees can go so far as to sabotage their company by abusing their internal privileges, publically badmouthing the company or stealing secrets. Internal threats can cause more damage than outside hackers and take even longer to discover.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Although the impact of burned out and disengaged employees is so easy to see, few companies have measures in place to prevent and combat the problem. According to Deloitte University Press' Global Human Capital Trends 2014 report, fewer than 8% of companies have these kinds of programs in place. Organizations who want to retain their top talent and outpace their competition can become irresistible to employees by keeping a few simple things in mind.

### **PEOPLE CRAVE RECOGNITION**

American psychologist and philosopher William James said, "The deepest principle to human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Recognition isn't just a nice gesture. It's scientifically proven to boost happiness. A mere thank you releases the hormone

oxytocin, making the receiver feel more happy, relaxed and collaborative.\*\*\*\*\* Google, voted best company to work for by Fortune, fully embraced the power of recognition with gThanks, a platform that easily allows employees to recognize each other's achievements.

### **INVEST IN YOUR STAFF**

If qualitative burnout attributes insufficient skills as a source of the problem, then the solution is providing opportunities for professional development. Embrace a culture of learning and offer tools like training, special assignments or mentoring to show your staff you care about growing their careers.

"Organizations with a strong learning culture are 92% more likely to develop novel products and processes, 52% more productive, 56% more likely to be the first to market with their products and services and 17% more profitable than their peers. Their engagement and retention rates are 30-50% higher," High-Impact learning culture: The 40 best practices for creating and empowered enterprise, Bersin by Deloitte.



Grow your employees to grow your business. Companies that heavily invest in learning and development “outperform their peers threefold in long-term profitability.” \*\*\*\*\* The confidence employees gain from having the right skills to do their jobs, not only helps them complete projects more efficiently, but inspires them to be innovative and push the business forward.

#### **ARTICULATE A CLEAR VISION**

Yes, we work to make a living, but we hope that work is meaningful and gives us purpose. When you convey your company vision to your team, you’re giving them a reason to give it their all. You’re supplying the “why” to what they’re doing every day. Transparency from management highly correlates with employee engagement. Relay your message clearly to keep your best employees from leaving and supporting someone else’s mission with their highly sought-after skills.

Finding top talent to join their teams is the number one concern keeping CEOs up at night. And hiring is only half the battle. Turnover in tech is high at an estimated three years. Retain star players for the long haul by making employee engagement a priority.



Help your technology team conquer burnout with Kylie Hunt's *Solving Workplace Grumpiness and Boosting Productivity Through Employee Happiness* courses. You can find them on Pluralsight's end-to-end technology learning platform.



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