



Having Conversations Around Burnout

For Supervisors

As leaders we play a crucial role in helping our employee avoid and overcome burnout, creating a positive work atmosphere, and driving engagement:

- **Recognize great work.** Let your employees know when work is done well—and do not let them downplay the significance of their accomplishments.
- **Offer support.** Create a culture in which seeking help is encouraged. In addition, proactively ask workers what you can do to help them perform their jobs better and avoid unnecessary stress.
- **Promote a healthy work/life balance.** Life happens. Let your workers take time to deal with personal responsibilities. It is “OK” for a leader to demonstrate their own work/life struggles.
- **Set realistic expectations.** It is important to the place realistic expectations on what your workforce can accomplish and understanding that an increased workload may require changing deadlines for other projects.

It can be difficult sometimes to know where to begin the conversation when you may think someone could be experiencing burnout. Have your employee take a quick [2-Minute Burnout Checkup](#), then use the results to help guide the conversation.

Below are some **helpful questions** to get the conversation started based around how they scored the [Burnout Check-Up](#). Keep the conversation open and interactive, ask for input and make it a collaborative process.

Conversation Starters:

Workload

- How well do your work priorities match up with our overall plan and goals?
- Which areas or projects should we focus on more? What areas should we focus on less to achieve this?
- How can we work together to come up with a more streamlined workflow?

Values

- How closely do the team’s values align with your own?

- How can we work together to bring your values and our team's values more in-sync with one another?

Reward

- How can we collaborate to create a system that more fully recognizes the excellent job that you and your colleagues do?
- What kind of recognition means the most to you?

Control

- How much influence do you feel you have over decisions that directly impact you?
- What can we do together to modify your work environment to allow you more flexibility in achieving your goals?

Fairness

- How fairly do you think you are treated?
- How can we improve the perception of fairness within the workplace?

Community

- How much does our workplace community help and encourage you, or does it take away from your energy?
- Are there certain areas in which our workplace community excels? Where does it need to get better?

When having the conversation... it is OK if you don't know the answer, the most important thing you can do is listen. *You can follow these few steps:*

1. Treat your employee's burnout concerns seriously.

To ensure your employee feels heard, make sure to allow them to fully express their thoughts without interrupting them. Try to wait seven seconds, or approximately two slow deep breath cycles, before responding. It's also important not to make assumptions about their feelings or the causes of their burnout. Practice active listening by repeating back what you've heard, also called paraphrasing. Ask if you've understood them correctly, and make sure you don't end the conversation until your employee feels that they've expressed what they need to say.

2. Understand their experience of burnout.

When an employee is upset, it can be hard to determine whether they're temporarily feeling negative emotions, are exhausted in the moment, or are truly burned out. Ask your employee how often they have been experiencing any area which scored over "7" on the burnout checkup.

3. Identify the root causes of their burnout.

Using the [Burnout Checkup](#), you can help focus in on the areas where employees may be experiencing the highest level of burnout.

4. Consider short- and long-term solutions.

Work together to see where you can make changes in the short-term, such as the next few weeks, and long-term solutions that could take months or even continued partnership to come up with a more robust strategy.

5. Create a plan.

Working together make a plan and be sure to schedule time to follow-up with your employee to see to see if any of the changes that were made have been helpful and to see if any further adjustments may be needed. It can take time to find the perfect fix, make sure to continue to have open conversations around the employee's concerns around Burnout.

Additional Resources –

- [What's Fueling Burnout in Your Organization? \(hbr.org\)](#) – A robust article discussing the ways complex organizational complexity and extended collaboration can add to stress, and the actions an organization can take to help prevent burnout.
- [A Two-Minute Burnout Checkup \(hbr.org\)](#) – A 2-minute checklist that helps pinpoint the areas in your life that may be contributing to your level of burnout. A great resource to use with a supervisor to explore ways to help.
- [Talking About Burnout Is Still Taboo at Work \(hbr.org\)](#) – Burnout can be hard to talk about with others and may sometimes contain a stigma attached to it. This article suggests ways to begin having this conversation and how it is okay to talk about stressors at work.

Looking to Learn More about Burnout?

If you feel you may need additional support, please reach out to the Employee Assistance Program at EAP@cityofmadison.com.