

Individual Strategies for Avoiding Professional Burnout (The W.A.R.T.S. Model)

Although organizations often contribute to the development of burnout in their employees, each individual person can take many actions to protect him- or herself. These actions can be grouped into the following categories:

- Work Practices;
- Attitudes;
- Relationships;
- Thoughts; and
- Self-care.

<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
“W” is for Work Practices		
Manage energy wisely.	We have limited amounts of energy. Without time for recovery after we expend energy, the “tank” eventually runs dry. A relentless, intense pace eventually produces diminishing benefits.	Establish priorities. Expend energy on the most important tasks. Leave time for recovery. Take momentary breaks throughout the work day. Avoid the “superwoman (superman)” complex.
Engage in productive, not busy, work.	There are endless opportunities to spend time on relatively unimportant tasks. Focusing on trivial tasks accomplishes little and wastes time.	Consult with colleagues and supervisors to identify the major objectives of your group. Spend most of your time contributing to those major objectives. Don’t try to fool yourself and others that your busy-ness is necessarily productive. Before spending much time on something, always ask, “How does this contribute to what we’re really trying to achieve here?”



<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
Practice delegation and team work.	We don't have the time, energy or expertise to "do it all" ourselves. Other people are often more willing and able to perform certain tasks.	Ask, "Is this something that can be done quicker and better by someone else?" Engage in mutually respectful and beneficial negotiations with colleagues.
Engage in ongoing learning.	In the Information Age, knowledge is perhaps the greatest asset. Learning maintains competence. Learning contributes to sense of achievement and effectiveness.	Schedule time each week for learning. Share your learning with colleagues to build community and capacity.
Focus on the needs of the client (customer).	Meeting the needs of clients provides a sense of professional accomplishment and satisfaction. Customer service is the foundation of public and private institutions.	Identify who your external and internal customers are. Ask your customers what they need. Tailor your products and services to meet those needs. Collect feedback from customers.
Negotiate the amount and timing of work you assume.	We sometimes feel like we have no choice when work is given to us. Good negotiators demonstrate this to be false.	Take a negotiation skills course. Negotiate agreements that are in the best, <i>long-term</i> , interests of all parties.
Take responsibility for managing your own career.	Take out a pen and calculate the percentage of your life that you spend working. Shouldn't something so important be managed by you?	Consult a career counselor. Choose work that you enjoy. Have the courage to change. If you stay in a job you dislike, don't blame anybody else.



<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
“A” is for Attitudes		
Don't let your career ambition become blind ambition.	It's healthy to have goals and aspirations for your career. But it is not healthy to allow your ambition to compromise your health, integrity and relationships.	From time to time, ask yourself whether the attention you're spending on your career is at the expense of your health, integrity and relationships. Ask that same question to your life partner, a trusted friend, and your physician. Listen objectively to the responses and make sensible adjustments to your life-work balance.
Don't let your material aspirations develop into greed.	We all have legitimate material needs and desires. However, when our material desires become extreme, we can easily lose track of what truly matters to us and our loved ones.	Don't justify the <i>excessive</i> pursuit of money by saying "I'm doing it all for my family." Engage in honest and respectful dialogue with your family members about the benefits and costs of your spending habits.
Practice focusing and attentiveness.	We sometimes become so preoccupied with balancing life and work that we do a disservice to both.	When you are at work, try to focus your undivided attention on work. When you are with family and friends, try to focus your undivided attention on them.
Behave assertively in a conflict.	If you feel guilty when you say "No," or alternatively, take the other person's head off when you say "No," you are probably not handling conflict effectively. Assertiveness is a conflict resolution strategy that is respectful of both your needs and those of the other person.	Take a course or read a book on assertiveness training.



<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
“R” is for Relationships		
Save time and energy for family.	For most of us, being involved in loving, secure relationships with a partner and family provides enormous emotional and material support. Like any important relationships, family relationships must be respected and nurtured.	Reserve major blocks of time each week for family relationships. Except in emergencies, do not allow work to interfere with this family time. When work infringes on family time, make up that time as soon as possible.
Save time and energy for friends.	While perhaps not as important as family, friends provide another source of support and loyalty.	Reserve some blocks of time each week for friends. As a rule, do not allow work or family commitments to interfere with this time. When other commitments do infringe, make up that time with friends as soon as possible.
Develop supportive relationships with colleagues.	Hostile and unsupportive work environments are a major contributor to professional burnout.	Practice emotional intelligence at work. Resolve conflicts constructively. Promote respectful work environments. Avoid ruthless competition with colleagues. Try to have fun while getting the job done.
Contribute to your community.	Most of us get satisfaction by helping others. Contributing to the well-being of others increases our self-esteem and makes us feel part of a human community.	Volunteer your time to worthy causes. Focus on the positive difference you’re making in individual lives.
If you are a person of faith, pray.	Not everyone believes in a higher being. However, many who do gain great support and strength through prayer.	Seek guidance from spiritual leaders about practicing your faith. Make time for prayer and religious observance. Put the core philosophy of your faith into practice. Practice spiritual respect and tolerance.



<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
“T” is for Thoughts		
“I don’t have to be perfect, just competent.”	Usually we don’t have the time or the energy to pursue perfection in our work. If we demand perfection of ourselves or others, we’re setting ourselves up for failure and disappointment.	In consultation with colleagues and supervisors, define what constitutes a competent job. Aim for that.
“I will do as good a job as I can reasonably do, with available time and resources.”	In the real world, there are only so much time and resources available. If we try to achieve more than is feasible, with available time and resources, we will get frustrated and discouraged.	In consultation with colleagues and supervisors, determine the time and resources available for a particular task or project. Reach agreement on the quantity and quality of work that can be achieved.
“Some things simply have to be put off until tomorrow or later.”	For most of us, the reality is that there’s too much to do and not enough time to do it. Trying to get everything done is self-defeating.	At the beginning of each day, identify in order of priority the most important things we’d like to accomplish. Try to get as many of the most important things done as possible...but don’t be surprised or disappointed if you don’t get them all done.
“S” is for Self-Care		
Engage in regular physical exercise.	Contributes enormously to overall health. Reduces stress. Increases physical and mental stamina. Improves sleep. Often has an energizing effect.	Check with your doctor before starting. Consult an exercise trainer. Establish a regular routine. Aim for gradual, but steady, progress.
Get plenty of sleep.	Restores physical and mental energy. Provides an escape from stress and worry.	Discuss your individual sleep needs with a physician. Seek expert advice in dealing with sleep disorders. Maintain a regular sleep routine. Don’t deny your need for sleep.



<i>What to Do</i>	<i>Why to Do It</i>	<i>How to Do It</i>
Practice healthy nutrition.	Contributes enormously to overall health. Foods play a large role in increasing or decreasing our energy levels.	Follow the 2007 <i>Canada Food Guide</i> . Avoid fad diets. Observe portion control. Consult a nutritionist about the need for dietary supplements.
Practice relaxation and stress reduction.	A certain amount of pressure and stress helps us focus, keeps us interested, and motivates us for action. When pressure and stress get too high, however, our discomfort increases and our performance deteriorates.	Recognize the relationship between stress and a sense of control. Practice meditation, yoga, tai chi, and/or martial arts. Practice stretching and deep breathing.
Engage in <i>genuine</i> recreation.	Activities that are truly recreational leave us feeling renewed and re-energized. In contrast, some recreational activities leave us feeling depleted and de-energized.	Find recreation that is enjoyable, not obligatory. Engage in individual and/or team sports. Develop hobbies. Cultivate artistic interests and abilities. Schedule regular holidays. Don't work on holidays. Pursue recreation that takes your mind off work.
Avoid addictive behaviours.	Addictions are expensive. Addictions damage physical and mental health. Many addictions are illegal. Addictions reduce our personal control over our lives.	Limit or eliminate consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, recreational drugs. Join addictions support groups. Recognize the power and dangers of "positive" addictions (workaholism, exercise addiction).
Practice spirituality.	Associated strongly with many positive health outcomes. Helps us find meaning in our lives. Helps us achieve appropriate perspective on life's challenges and difficulties.	Participate in an organized religious community. Cultivate personal spirituality. Practice spiritual respect and tolerance.

