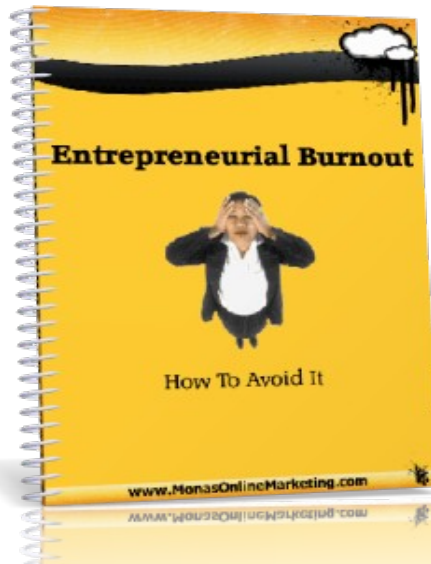


Entrepreneurial Burnout

# Entrepreneurial Burnout



## How To Avoid It

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## Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a dream for many, and a reality for comparatively few. Though many like the idea of starting a business and becoming their own bosses, it takes a special type of person to succeed as an entrepreneur. You've got to have a high tolerance for risk, a healthy self-esteem, and truckloads of motivation. Not every successful entrepreneur is born with these traits, but all must develop them if they do not come naturally.

It takes a lot of blood, sweat and tears to get a business off the ground. That's why it's so important for entrepreneurs to have a strong desire to succeed. When the going gets tough, you can't just call it a day. Few entrepreneurs hit a home run with their first idea. And even those who do invariably experience some bumps in the road before they get off the ground. But they keep at it until they get where they want to be.

This intense motivation and determination is good for any startup. And once your business is out of the startup phase, it can keep it running strong. But it can also have some not-so-positive effects. While hard work and intense focus are required to make your business a success, they can also greatly contribute to burnout.

Burnout has a way of bringing your progress to a screeching halt. It can cause you to run out of ideas and just get tired of it all. Some entrepreneurs have even given up because of severe burnout. It seems that the harder they try, the less they get accomplished, so they think, "Why bother?"

Don't let this happen to you. Of course you're eager to get your business going (or if it's already going strong, to keep it moving forward). But if you're not careful, you could lose momentum just by trying so hard. The good news is that entrepreneurial burnout can be avoided.

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## Symptoms of Burnout

If you're just getting started, or have been fortunate enough to have not experienced burnout, it's best to take steps to avoid it in the first place. We'll get to that shortly.

Some entrepreneurs are in the throes of burnout and don't even realize it. If you're one of them, it's important to take action to turn it around quickly. Here are some telltale signs:

- \* You have trouble concentrating on your work, and there's no other reasonable explanation for it. Certain health problems can cause trouble concentrating, so if it comes on suddenly or is severe, a trip to the doctor might be warranted. But if it only seems to occur when you're doing something that's business related, there's a good chance that burnout is to blame.
- \* You long to spend more time with your family or participating in your favorite sport or hobby. We all have certain things that we love to do, and it's understandable to miss them when you're spending most of your time trying to build a business. But if it's all you can think about, it could be a sign of burnout.
- \* Your business is causing you more stress than joy. There's no doubt that starting and running a business can be stressful. Most entrepreneurs enjoy what they're doing so much that it outweighs the stress. But when the stress becomes overwhelming, it's important to find a way to refocus on the parts of your business that make you happy.
- \* Your creativity goes south. You have trouble making decisions, solving problems and coming up with new ideas. Everybody hits a bump in the road sometimes, but if it starts to feel like a constant uphill battle, you've got a problem.

For some, burnout is glaringly obvious. For others, it can be hard to see. But if you have any of these symptoms, or if something about your business just doesn't feel right, burnout could very well be the problem.

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## Solutions for Burnout

The best course of action for an existing case of burnout depends on its cause. But the tips that follow are good rules to live by for any entrepreneur. All of these things can help to keep burnout at bay.

### Take Some Time for Yourself

One thing that many entrepreneurs fail to do is take time out for themselves. For some, the business practically takes up every waking moment. Others take time to take care of their families or other obligations, but they don't participate in any hobbies or activities that they enjoy. In either situation, burnout is virtually inevitable.

It's easy to see why so many entrepreneurs fall into this trap. Keeping a business running smoothly takes a lot of work, and business owners often feel that if they don't keep at it constantly, they will lose momentum. Some entrepreneurs also reason that because they love being an entrepreneur so much, they don't need any hobbies outside their businesses.

We've all heard the old saying, "All work and no play makes Johnny a dull, dull boy." Even if your work seems like play because you enjoy it so much, you owe it to yourself to pursue other interests. If you don't, your life will be out of balance.

Need some ideas? Here are some activities you might consider:

- \* Get reacquainted with your favorite sport. If you played tennis in high school, grab a friend and hit the court. If you were once an avid bowler, sign up for a league. It doesn't matter if you aren't great at it. The physical activity and opportunity to enjoy the company of others (or in the case of solo sports, have some productive alone time) will do you a world of good.
- \* Try a new hobby. It could be sewing, woodworking, or anything else that tickles your fancy. The point is to try something new. If you like it, buy some supplies and be sure to take time out to work at it at least once a week. If not, keep trying stuff until you find something you enjoy.

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- \* Join a club. Most clubs have regular meetings, so you'll have to tear yourself away from your work to attend them.
- \* Volunteer. Volunteering is done to help others, but you also gain numerous benefits from it. It makes you feel great because you're making a difference in the world. It gives you the opportunity to meet new people and experience new things. And if you commit to volunteering on a regular basis, it can be very helpful in preventing entrepreneurial burnout.
- \* Take a class that's unrelated to your business. Whether it's in ballroom dancing or a new language, you'll enrich your mind while taking it off of work for a while.
- \* Go to the spa or get a massage. If you need a quick pick-me-up, these activities will do very nicely.

If your life revolves around your business, you're going to get burned out at some point. Making it a point to regularly do things that you enjoy (and that have nothing to do with your business) will leave you feeling refreshed and ready to get back to business.

### **Stop Trying to Do It All Yourself**

Most beginning entrepreneurs must wear many hats in their businesses. This is especially true if they're working with a limited budget. Someone has to do the accounting, the marketing, the secretarial work and all of the other things that keep the business going. And when you're the only person in the company, that someone is usually you.

The problem is, this mindset of doing it all for oneself tends to stick. Even when the business is off the ground and doing well, some entrepreneurs continue to perform every function on their own. Maybe it just doesn't occur to them that they could hire other people to do these jobs. Or maybe they think they're saving money by not adding anyone else to the payroll. No matter what the reason, these entrepreneurs end up working long hours and doing tasks that they may not enjoy very much.

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If this sounds familiar, it's time to start thinking about hiring some help. Not only will you save yourself from working so hard, you can also open the door to making more money. That's because if you pay someone else to handle the tasks that do not directly generate profits, you'll have more time to concentrate on the activities that do make you money.

When it comes to getting others to do some of the work for you, you have a few options:

- \* Hire an employee. If you've handled things yourself thus far, one employee will likely be able to take care of all of your grunt work. Don't feel obligated to pay someone full-time, though. There are plenty of people who want or need part-time jobs, either working a few hours each workday or just a few full days a week.
- \* Outsource. Getting professional service providers to take care of certain aspects of your business is not only helpful, it's smart. Consider accounting, for example. You might be capable of handling it yourself, but a CPA is thoroughly trained in how to do it correctly. By hiring one, you reduce your risk of noncompliance with tax laws.
- \* Get a virtual assistant (VA). VAs can perform a wide variety of tasks for business owners. They can take calls, maintain websites, handle marketing and much more. Different VAs have different skill sets, but there's a high probability that you can find one to handle all or most of the things you need her to. A virtual assistant may work as an employee or as an independent contractor.
- \* Take on an intern. Interns work for little or no pay in exchange for on-the-job training. For those who really need to watch the bottom line, getting an intern is a good option. But remember that this will only work if you're hiring someone to do something that you know a great deal about.

If you try to take on too many different tasks in your business for too long, burnout will follow. This is especially true if you don't enjoy all of those tasks, and few of us do. But there are people out there who like them, so why not hand the work off to one of those people? It will be good for your business and good for you.

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## Just Say No

Entrepreneurs are a helpful lot. They try to accommodate every request, because they want to make a good impression on their customers and potential customers. If that means working longer hours or tackling a project they aren't particularly fond of, so be it.

That old adage, "The customer is always right," is true to some extent. If you don't take care of your customers, you'll eventually end up without any. But if you cater to their every whim, no matter how unreasonable, you'll find yourself resenting them, and by extension your business. That's no way to operate. Sometimes you just have to say no.

For instance, there are some customers out there who expect the businesses they patronize to be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For a large corporation, that's certainly feasible, but in practice rather rare. Your customers, if they are reasonable human beings, should know that you can't work all day every day. But some might insist on contacting you at all hours of the night, because they perceive their needs as being so important.

That's why it's crucial to set specific business hours. That's not to say that you can't work after those hours, or even that you can't communicate with clients outside of them. But it's best to require an appointment for anything that goes on outside of your regular business day or work week. It's also a good idea to maintain a separate phone line for business purposes, so when the work day is over, you can let calls go directly to an answering machine.

And then there are clients who expect you to take on any project they see fit to send your way. Maybe you're a web designer, and a client wants you to write content for his site. Or maybe you're a writer, and a client wants you to write on a subject with which you're just not comfortable. In these situations, there's nothing wrong with tactfully saying "no." By all means, suggest someone else who could handle the request if you can, but don't feel obligated to do these things because the client asked you to. If it's a client worth keeping, he will understand.

Saying no to customers can be tough, but sometimes it's necessary. If you do so with respect and help them solve their problems (even if it's by directing them elsewhere), they will in turn respect your boundaries.

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## Reward Yourself

One of the most important things an entrepreneur can do is set goals for his business. Goals help keep you motivated and aid in measuring your progress. And when you reach them, it makes you feel great!

But if you're not rewarding yourself for reaching your goals, that rush you get from reaching them begins to wear thin. Each victory becomes a little less enjoyable than the last. Pretty soon, you might find yourself wondering just what the point of setting goals is. As a result, you might begin to lose steam.

The solution? Reward yourself for a job well done. It's a simple concept, yet surprisingly few entrepreneurs put it into practice. If you have employees or contractors, you know that rewarding them for a job well done encourages more of the same. But as an entrepreneur, if you don't reward yourself, who's going to do it for you?

Planning a reward when you set a goal serves two purposes. First, it provides additional motivation. If you know you can expect something you've wanted when you reach a goal, it gives you that much more incentive to do your best. Second, the reward itself can help ward off burnout. Instead of working solely for the sake of building your business, you're also working toward something you desire.

In general, the best rewards are not related to your work. Instead, they involve things you enjoy in your personal life. You could reward yourself with a new pair of shoes, a day off, or a trip to the beach. By choosing rewards that have nothing to do with your business, you acknowledge that you're more than just an entrepreneur. And that's very important to your success.

## Take a Vacation

Many of the most successful entrepreneurs don't have to be involved in the day to day operations of their businesses. They've built their businesses to the point where they can delegate most tasks. These entrepreneurs rarely have a problem with taking a vacation.

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For the rest of us, vacations tend to be less frequent. In fact, some entrepreneurs do not appear to know the meaning of the word "vacation." They might work set hours each week and even take a day off every now and then, but they never take an extended break from running their businesses.

Think about it. If you were working a regular job, you would get some time off each week (usually at least 2 days). And if your employer provided benefits, you would probably get at least a week of paid vacation each year. Even employers that do not offer vacation pay allow workers to take time off without pay, because they know that it improves morale and productivity. As an entrepreneur, you owe it to yourself and your business to take some time off every now and then to recharge your batteries.

And don't fall into the trap of thinking that you should work during your vacation. While it's important to be reachable in the event of an emergency, a vacation is meant for getting away from work, not just moving it to a different setting. If you go to the Bahamas and spend the whole time on your laptop, it's not going to do you very much good.

On the other hand, don't feel like you shouldn't take a vacation if it's not feasible to go anywhere special. Just taking a week off and spending time with family or having fun in your own hometown can counter burnout, too. Keep in mind, however, that it may be even harder to resist the temptation to work when you're not far from the office.

It's rather ironic: One of the main reasons people choose to become entrepreneurs is because it offers more freedom than working for someone else. Yet all too often, they get so wrapped up in their businesses that they don't take advantage of that freedom. If you can't remember the last time you took a vacation, what are you waiting for? Take some time off!

### **Do Some Housecleaning**

If you've ever thoroughly cleaned your house, you know that it's amazing how much stuff can pile up in a short amount of time. When you clean out the closet, you're bound to find some clothes that no longer fit or just don't suit your tastes any more. Look under the bed or in the basement, and you might find supplies for a hobby that no longer interests you.

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These things can clutter our homes without us even realizing it, and when we get rid of them, we're amazed at how much space is freed up.

As an entrepreneur, you'll find that your business is prone to clutter, too. But it doesn't necessarily come in the form of tangible objects. It could be a service you're providing that isn't well received, or a marketing strategy that isn't working, or a standard procedure that no longer seems to serve any useful purpose.

A cluttered business can be very cumbersome to run. When you're bogged down with a bunch of things that just aren't working, it's hard to put enough energy toward the things that are working to reach your full potential. Every entrepreneur should set aside time to take regular inventory of her business in order to identify items that are just wasting valuable energy.

Here are some things to look for:

- \* How are each of your product lines/services doing? Are they profitable, and do you feel good about providing them to your customers?
- \* Do all of your administrative procedures provide value to the business? Each one should fulfill some sort of purpose, whether it's complying with laws or helping you run things more efficiently. Doing things a certain way just because that's how they've always been done isn't very productive.
- \* Do your advertising campaigns effectively reach and speak to your target market? What worked well a year ago might not be as effective now.
- \* Are your assets working for you? Some businesses have equipment that's rarely used that they must use valuable resources to maintain. And some have online resources such as domain names that they aren't using and probably never will. Unloading these can save you money and streamline your business.

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\* Are your employees and/or contractors serving a useful purpose? Sometimes we hire people to do a specific job and then keep them around just because we like their work. But if they're not contributing to your business, it's time to find a way for them to do so or send them on their way.

\* Are you over informing yourself? Staying abreast of developments in your field and new tricks and techniques is a good thing. But if you spend too much of your time doing so, you'll be less productive and more likely to experience burnout. Don't feel like you have to read every blog or subscribe to every publication that relates to your business.

Once you've found the things in your business that aren't working, you need to get rid of them. Don't hold onto them unless there is a legitimate reason that you will likely be able to use them at a later date. Letting go can be difficult, but once you've disposed of the things that are weighing you down, you'll find that your business is much more manageable.

### **Try Something New**

When business is good, it's easy to get stuck in a rut. You might reason that if things are going well, there's no need to change anything. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, right?

So you keep on doing what you're doing, and business continues to flourish. But after a while, doing the same thing begins to be a chore. You find yourself going through the motions, feeling like something's missing, but not sure what it is.

Avoiding change is bad for your morale, and it's also bad for business. Your customers' needs are constantly evolving. They might keep coming back for a while, but when someone else starts offering something that better meets their needs, they will likely move on. Just like you, they will get bored with the same old thing.

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If you find yourself feeling like you're spinning your wheels in your business, it's time to do something different. First, get rid of the things that aren't working as mentioned previously. Then start brainstorming some fresh, new ideas for your current line of products or services, or work on developing something completely original.

You don't have to launch something new right away. In fact, it's usually better if you don't. You need to take the time to do some market research and make sure that there's a need for it. But simply coming up with new ideas can breathe new life into your business. And if one doesn't pan out, you'll probably have enough energy left over to try something else.

An unwillingness to change can be a cause or a symptom of burnout. Either way, it must be addressed if your business is to succeed.

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# Burnout Isn't a Sign of Failure

Some small business owners see burnout as a sign that they aren't cut out to be entrepreneurs, or that they have chosen the wrong type of business. This is rarely the case. Most of the time, burnout comes from overworking yourself or focusing your energy in the wrong areas.

It's important to realize that every entrepreneur feels a little burned out every now and then, even those that own highly successful businesses. If you were working for someone else, doing something that you love, chances are good that you would still feel a bit disinterested every now and then. The fact that you're running a business of your own and enjoying the benefits of increased freedom and income potential doesn't make you immune.

When you start feeling a little overwhelmed, don't beat yourself up. Do something about it. If you sit down and evaluate your business carefully, the problem areas will reveal themselves. If you're having trouble identifying them yourself, talk to a fellow entrepreneur or a business coach. Someone outside of your business will be better able to look at things objectively.

Entrepreneurial burnout is no reason to give up on your business. In most cases, it is easily cured. As long as you don't let it go too long, it won't do irreparable damage.

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## The Best Resource

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