

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1689 Is the Boss Burned Out?— Part 1

Whenever we speak of employee burnout, it's normally in the context of the non-managerial staff. Burnout and associated topics like work-life balance almost always focus on that work group. This week, we're going to flip the script and discuss burnout in the management ranks. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next on the Extra Point.

Burnout among leaders poses a significant risk, not just to the individuals affected but also to the entire organization. Leaders play a crucial role in shaping the tone, culture, and standards within their teams. When leaders are struggling, the repercussions can be both profound and widespread.

Fast Company magazine recently highlighted research by The Gallup Organization which reveals that employees with burnt-out managers are 50% more likely to experience burnout themselves. This focuses on how a leader's well-being is directly linked to the morale and productivity of their team.

Leaders often hesitate to acknowledge their burnout, as it challenges their self-image of strength, competence, and resilience — the qualities they have built their reputation on, and which contribute to their self-image as a corporate warrior.

Ironically, many attributes commonly admired in leaders, such as ambition, drive, focus, and determination can actually heighten their vulnerability to burnout.

Leaders like this image and push themselves to the brink while feeling the pressure to maintain an image of near invulnerability.

When a leader is burnt out, their effectiveness, communication style, and decision-making capabilities can deteriorate. The tired leader hits a wall and may end up throwing a wet blanket on the team's energy and morale, leading to a decline in overall workplace enthusiasm. So they try harder, and fail more.

Early detection of burnout is crucial, because addressing the issue promptly can prevent it from spreading and negatively impacting team dynamics.

So, how can I recognize when my boss is in the burned out stage? One key indicator is a diminishing vision. Effective leaders are driven by ambitious goals and a strong sense of purpose. When burnout sets in, what was so clear before is now cloudy. There was a plan, a definite plan and we all knew where we were headed. Now, the boss seems off-course.

Cognitive research shows that burnout can impair decision-making and cognitive flexibility, hindering leaders' ability to think creatively or take calculated risks.

You might notice your boss becoming less engaged in discussions about the "big picture" and broader implications of projects, avoiding strategic conversations, or showing reluctance to discuss goals. Maybe they're bogged down with concerns about day-to-day operational issues.

Guam has a number of large organizations, those with several hundred employees, then many in the mid-size category, next is a lot of mom and pops. Burnout in the management ranks affects them all.

While boss burnout may affect more people in those larger organizations, the impact may be more devastating the smaller we go. This is because the manager has a greater degree of personal responsibility and if their performance is compromised, it can have a destabilizing effect on the group as a whole.

If we notice that our leader is very likely a victim of burnout, this is a difficult situation to deal with. First, if they thought people felt this to be true, they would probably brush it off saying it's no big deal. You'll need to approach this matter carefully. (Con't.)

Here's what I suggest as a possible way to bring it up.

1. Recruit the person on the team who knows the boss best, or longest, and/or whose opinion he/she respects most. This person's views will carry the most weight.

2. This individual gathers the best evidence possible and presents it, along with the suggestion for the leader to take a step back, temporarily unload some responsibility and maybe take some time off.

3. When the boss returns, consider creating opportunities for rejuvenation. Organize brainstorming sessions that helps them to focus on the long-term goals again.

You gently nudge them towards high-level discussions, emphasizing the importance of long-term vision over immediate tasks. Over time, maybe this reignites the clarity that used to be there.

As noted earlier, this is even tougher in smaller teams, where the leader may be the focal point in more key areas.

Tomorrow, we'll drill down deeper into factors of boss burnout.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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