

Prevent and Overcome Burnout: A STRENGTHS-BASED GUIDE

Everyone is at risk of burnout — from your most engaged employees to the ones simply watching the clock tick by. Here's a guide to help you, your teams and your organization fight and minimize burnout.

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What Is Burnout?

Burnout is one of the most pressing issues facing the global workforce. In fact, 28% of workers say that they feel burned out at work either “very often” or “always.”

Fighting burnout is something that nearly all workers must do at some point, as only 24% report that they “rarely” or “never” feel burned out at work.

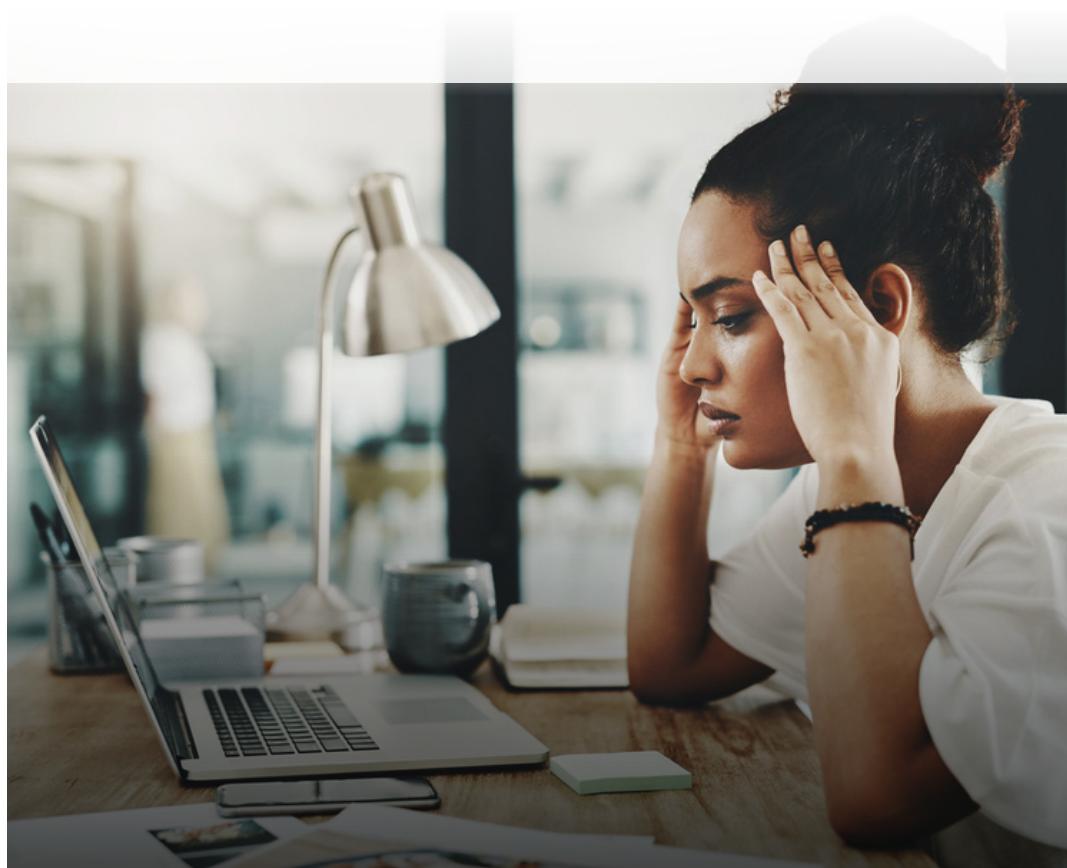
So, what is burnout?

According to the World Health Organization, burnout is conceptualized as “a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”

Did you catch that? There’s a distinction between stress and burnout — and our hope is that this guide will help you learn how to use your strengths to either:

- 1) prevent burnout by properly managing stress, or
- 2) overcome the burnout you’re experiencing.

Let’s start by understanding how people naturally cope.



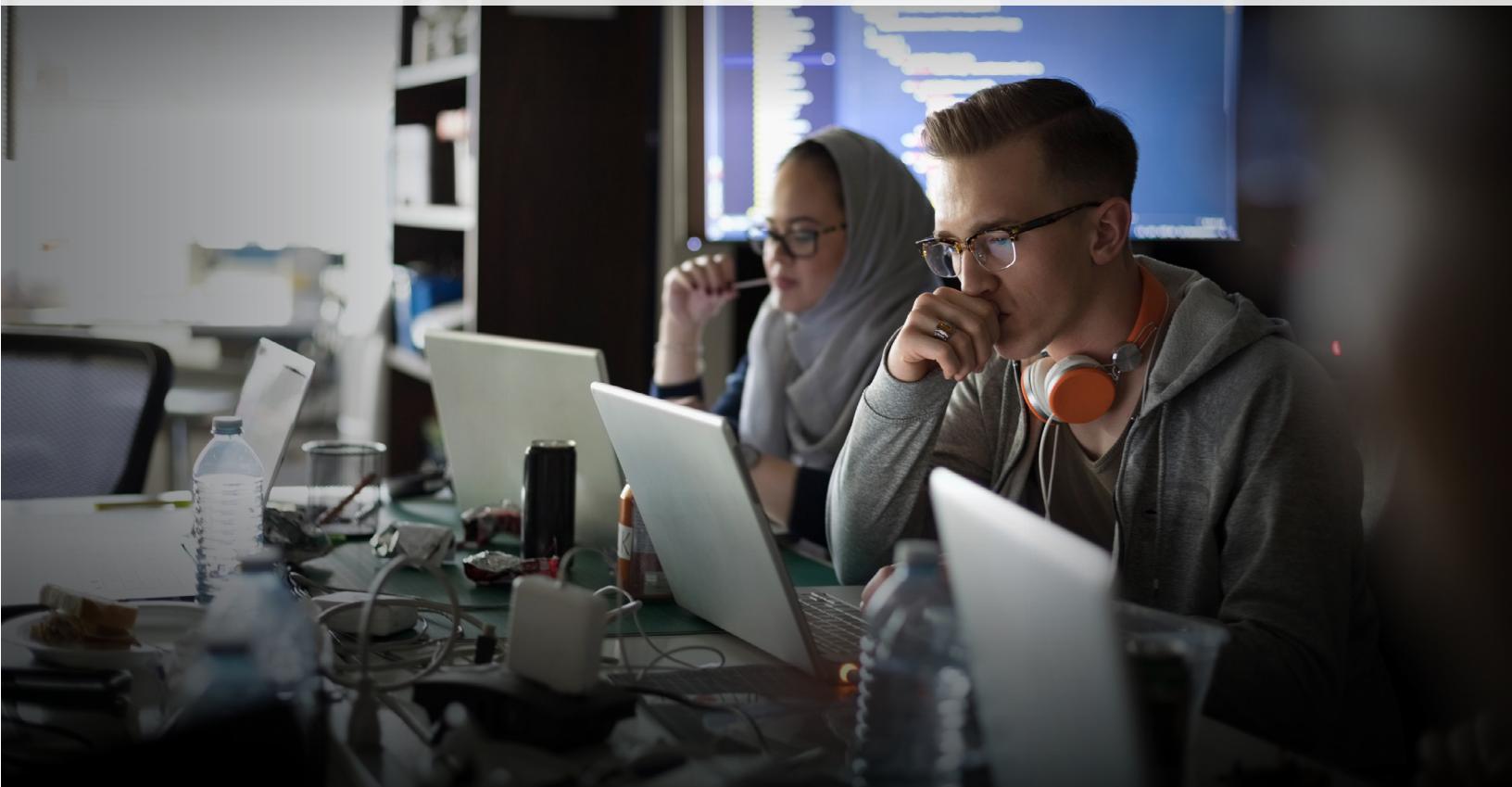
Our Burnout Study

Given the widespread nature of burnout, Gallup conducted a study of workers within our database of individuals who have completed the CliftonStrengths assessment.

In early 2022, we asked over 3,000 employees what they do to help themselves feel more productive when they are overwhelmed or frustrated by their job. The coping strategies they were asked about ranged from reframing how they think about their stressors and engaging in nonwork activities to seeking support from others.

Unsurprisingly, people opted for a range of coping strategies, with the most common being very consistent with their **dominant strengths**. However, the most common coping strategies were not always the most effective ones, and some employees seemed to prefer strategies that were not the most effective for them.

So, what were some of these strategies? And how effective were they?



Your Coping Strategies: Activity

Before we make connections between coping strategies and outcomes, complete the activity below.

When you're feeling burned out, which of these things do you do?

(For each coping strategy, check the box that applies best.)

I ALMOST ALWAYS DO THIS.	COPING STRATEGY	I RARELY EVER DO THIS.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I spend more time with family and friends outside of work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I start getting back to work as quickly as possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I think about how my work affects others.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I take more breaks during the workday to relax.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I exercise or engage in physical activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I think about how my work contributes to my future goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I think about how others I work with might feel about the same situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I stop and take my time to think through my situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>

After considering which statements you apply most often, read the next page to learn more about how your natural response to feeling overwhelmed may provide clues to your talents.

What strategies do workers tend to turn to when they are beginning to feel burned out at work? The answer may depend on their strengths.

Refer to the exercise you completed on the previous page. For the strategies that you marked as "I almost always do this," look below to see which of the CliftonStrengths domains those strategies fall under. Maybe your coping techniques are mostly in one or two domains. Maybe you have some in all four.

This is our first clue to our innate talents — our natural patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. Once you've read through this page, keep reading to see if those coping strategies are the most effective for you or if there is a better strategy that you have not tried.

EXECUTING

When workers with dominant Executing themes feel overwhelmed or frustrated by their job, they are more likely than others to take actions that give them a sense of accomplishment. They tend to get back to work as quickly as possible or find other ways to motivate themselves to avoid delays and keep going.

*I start getting back to work as quickly as possible.
I exercise or engage in physical activity.*

INFLUENCING

Workers with dominant Influencing themes who experience burnout turn to coping strategies that allow them to make an impact on others or on the future. They are more likely than others to spend more time with family and friends outside of work or to think about how their work contributes to their future goals.

*I spend more time with family and friends outside of work.
I think about how my work contributes to my future goals.*

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Workers with dominant Relationship Building themes tend to reframe their work stress from the perspective of others. They are more likely to consider how others they work with would feel about the same situation, to think about how their work affects others or to seek help from others.

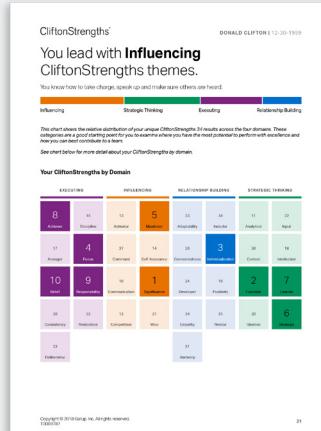
*I think about how others I work with might feel about the same situations.
I think about how my work affects others.*

STRATEGIC THINKING

Workers with dominant Strategic Thinking themes tend to allow themselves the space to think through their frustration when they are burned out. They are more likely than others to stop and take time to think through their situation or take more breaks during the workday to relax.

*I stop and take my time to think through my situation.
I take more breaks during the workday to relax.*

Discover what makes you unique and learn your strengths today.



Instinctual vs. Recommended Strategies

People have burnout coping strategies that they naturally gravitate toward, and those strategies can be quite effective. However, there are different ways to fight burnout.

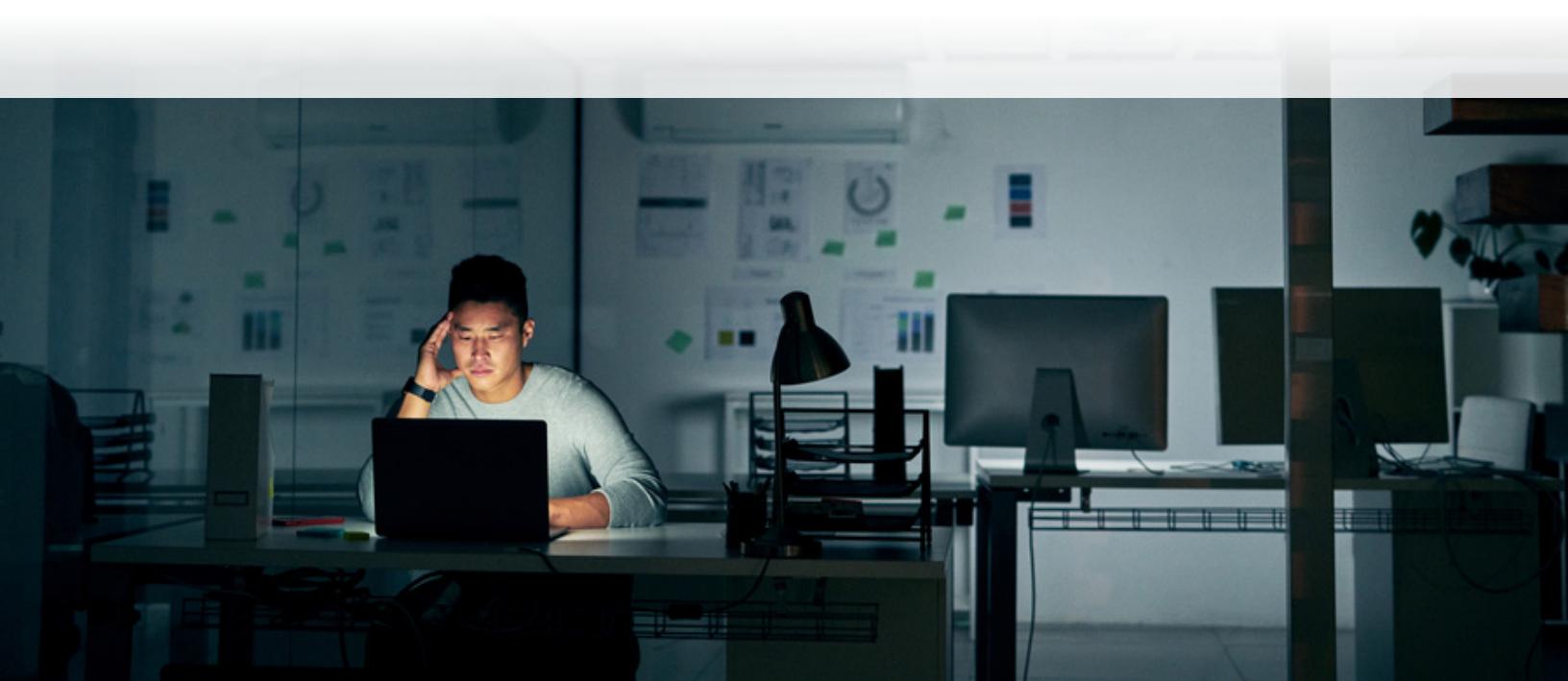
Many individuals use simple strategies like stopping to think or using humor to deflect. Others go on a vacation or lower their expectations altogether.

Workers who rely on the strategies that come naturally to them may overlook opportunities to use strategies that are even more effective for reducing burnout.

In fact, this happens more often than you think.

See how the effectiveness of instinctual coping strategies compares with the effectiveness of these recommended, and often overlooked, strategies.

And for those looking to overcome burnout in their organization,



The table below illustrates the coping strategies that people with different strengths use, as well as a few burnout coping strategies that could be even *more effective than those they naturally prefer*.

The percentages indicate changes in burnout that people with different strengths profiles experience after using each coping strategy.

While these coping strategies may go against what people with these strengths profiles naturally want to do when they feel burned out, Gallup data indicate that they can better help people reduce symptoms of burnout.

EXECUTING DOMAIN			
INSTINCTUAL BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES		RECOMMENDED BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES	
	% change in burnout symptoms		% change in burnout symptoms
I start getting back to work as quickly as possible.	-15%	I stop and take my time to think through my situation.	-48%
I exercise or engage in physical activity.	-20%	I try to find what is positive about my current work situation.	-46%

INFLUENCING DOMAIN			
INSTINCTUAL BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES		RECOMMENDED BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES	
	% change in burnout symptoms		% change in burnout symptoms
I spend more time with family and friends outside of work.	-34%	I exercise or engage in physical activity.	-48%
I think about how my work contributes to my future goals.	-28%	I think about how I approached similar situations before.	-41%

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING DOMAIN			
INSTINCTUAL BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES		RECOMMENDED BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES	
		% change in burnout symptoms	% change in burnout symptoms
I think about how others I work with might feel about the same situations.	+35%	I think about how I approached similar situations before.	-43%
	-13%	I use relaxation or mindfulness exercises such as meditation, prayer or yoga.	-33%
STRATEGIC THINKING DOMAIN			
INSTINCTUAL BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES		RECOMMENDED BURNOUT COPING STRATEGIES	
		% change in burnout symptoms	% change in burnout symptoms
I stop and take my time to think through my situation.	-16%	I think about my current situation as a challenge to find a way to succeed.	-42%
	-21%	I spend more time with family and friends outside of work.	-34%

Oftentimes, an individual's natural coping mechanism is generally less effective than coping strategies that use and capitalize on their strengths.

Just because something comes naturally doesn't mean it may be best. Sometimes our natural responses to burnout feel helpful in the moment, but they don't help facilitate lasting change. It is also helpful to broaden our set of strategies so that we have more ways of managing our responses to burnout. Some of our less natural responses may be more useful in certain situations, and having more tools will also make us more resilient when our default responses are not working.

People with dominant **Executing themes** naturally turn toward coping strategies that give them a sense of getting things done, but they may reduce their burnout symptoms more if they occasionally pause to reframe how they think about their situation. They may benefit from stopping to take time to think through their situation and trying to find what is positive about their current work situation.

People with dominant **Influencing themes** naturally turn toward coping strategies that give them a sense of having an impact on others, but they experience even greater reductions in burnout from exercising or engaging in physical activity or from considering how they have approached similar situations before.

People with dominant **Relationship Building themes** naturally think of others around them, but these aren't always effective ways of reducing burnout. Those who think about how others they work with would feel in the same situations actually experience higher levels of burnout than those who do not. These workers may overlook opportunities to look inward — they achieve larger reductions in burnout from thinking about how they have approached similar situations before or from engaging in relaxation or mindfulness exercises.

People with dominant **Strategic Thinking themes** naturally give themselves space to think when they experience burnout, but they benefit even more from either reframing their thoughts or stepping away from work. They experience the highest reductions in burnout from reframing their situation as a challenge to find a way to succeed.

Tips for Overcoming Burnout: For Individuals

Most people feel burned out at work, at least from time to time. This is normal — but workers have access to a range of effective coping strategies that can help diminish their stress.

The findings from this study indicate that people fight burnout differently according to their most dominant CliftonStrengths themes. Workers can minimize the extent to which they experience burnout during their daily work activities if they understand their strengths, the coping strategies that come easily to them, and even the strategies that may not come as easily.

Gallup recommends the following three actions:

1) Understand which burnout coping strategies tend to be effective and which do not.

For example, most people benefit from reminding themselves they can succeed, and most people do not benefit from lowering their expectations.

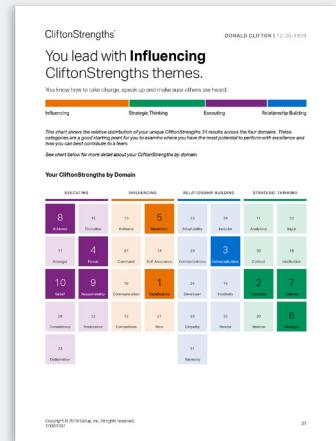
2) Lean into the effective burnout coping strategies that align with your strengths.

If you lead with Executing themes, you may feel less burned out after taking actions that help you get things done. However, if you have dominant Strategic Thinking themes, you may benefit from pausing to think through the situation.

3) Consider trying some new coping strategies.

You may find that some of these work better than your default choices. For example, people with dominant Relationship Building themes may overlook inward-focused strategies like meditation that can help reduce their burnout symptoms.

Discover what makes you unique and learn your strengths today.



Tips for Overcoming Burnout: For Organizations

Leaders are responsible for empowering managers with the necessary development and resources to create a successful work environment. Managers are your best solution for preventing or eliminating burnout when they take the time to learn what's behind burnout and are open to changing how they manage their teams.

Managers can start by considering the most common root causes of burnout and then taking action to mitigate them:

CAUSE: UNFAIR TREATMENT AT WORK

SOLUTIONS:

- Treat everyone with respect, and insist that employees do likewise.
- Lead with honesty, transparency and integrity.
- Apply rules with fairness.
- When making a decision, consider the impact it will have on every individual.
- Honor the opinions and contributions of every employee.

CAUSE: UNMANAGEABLE WORKLOAD

SOLUTIONS:

- Discuss the source of the workload and whether you may be able to help reduce it.
- Make it safe for employees to ask for help.
- Identify core requirements, eliminate unnecessary steps or tasks, and reassign tasks as needed.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities going forward.

CAUSE: UNCLEAR COMMUNICATION FROM MANAGERS

SOLUTIONS:

- Have more frequent, informal one-on-one Check-In conversations.
- Schedule regular status meetings for the team.
- Focus on high-priority assignments or goals, taking care to discuss the reasons they are important.
- Encourage employees to ask about topics they want to know more about.
- Follow up on any discussions with notes and expectations.

CAUSE: LACK OF MANAGER SUPPORT

SOLUTIONS:

- Regularly encourage employees and express your appreciation for their contributions.
- Coach each employee on how to play to their strengths and overcome obstacles.
- Ask how you can best support them to achieve their best performance.
- Have short "Quick Connects" at least once a week. These are informal five- to 15-minute opportunities for you to find out how they are doing and offer your help if needed.

CAUSE: UNREASONABLE TIME PRESSURE

SOLUTIONS:

- Employees often have conflicting priorities. Involve them in setting deadlines that are realistic, and give them as much autonomy as possible in how they meet their goals.
- Proactively communicate about work that is coming, and set clear expectations.
- Discuss any barriers that may impede their work and how they can best balance demands for speed and quality.
- Help employees set aside time for unforeseen events, and give them flexibility in accomplishing tasks.

The best solution to organizational burnout is to be proactive. Beat burnout before it begins by following the solutions above, and to create an individualized solution for your workplace.