

BOOK REVIEW

Burnout: A guide to identifying recovery.

Authors: Gordon Parker, Gabriella Tavella and Kerrie Eyres. (2021).
Allen & Unwin, 273 pages.
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This book is written jointly by Professor Gordon Parker AO, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales, and founder of the Black Dog Institute; Gabriella Tavella is a research officer at the University of New South Wales, completing a PhD on burnout; and Kerrie Eyres AM, a psychologist and writer. Their intention is to provide helpful insights not only for those suffering from burnout, but also their families and friends, health care professionals, along with employers seeking to free workplaces from conditions that contribute to burnout.

Teachers, and health care professionals have been identified as ‘frontline workers’ in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Current research (see Bibliography) indicates higher levels of burnout than usual amongst teachers on a global scale resulting from the adjustments needed for teaching virtually via remote learning, and the uncertainty surrounding rapid school shutdowns in response to the pandemic. The content of this very readable book promises to be especially helpful for jaded teachers, school administrators and the parents of school children. The book is divided into three parts:

Part I What is burnout?

An expanded definition is provided beyond the three key symptoms as described by the World Health Organization, weighing up how burnout differs from depression, with new insights into the biology of burnout, producing changes in the body and brain.

Part II Causes of burnout

The seed and the soil, deals with occupations considered high risk, characteristics of toxic workplaces, and how perfectionism, rarely

recognised as a risk factor, can contribute to personal burnout.

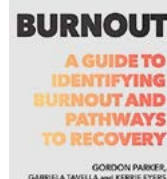
Part III Overcoming burnout and rekindling the flame. Guidelines are provided for managers, workers and caregivers for resolving burnout.

Appendices provide valuable resources and tools to work out whether a person suffers burnout or not: The Sydney Burnout Measure (SBM); Workplace triggers; Perfectionism scale; with Resources for workers and caregivers.

The authors acknowledge that while work can be a source of burnout, caring roles associated with family life may also produce burnout. Within the medical world, there has been no formal diagnosis of burnout as there is for anxiety or depression, hence difficulties arise in offering the best remedial approaches. In order to support the work of professionals in their diagnoses the authors argue that a broader set of symptoms needs to be identified. From their research, they developed *The Sydney Burnout Measure* that helps to quantify levels of burnout. The questionnaire associated with this tool (Appendix A), is available to the reader to help determine their level of burnout (or otherwise). In fact, it is suggested within the Introduction, that if the reader needs help fast, “go to Appendix A and complete the burnout questionnaire. Review your score and speed-read Part III for management suggestions” (p. 3).

A chapter is dedicated to perfectionism, viewed as “the key personality style that amplifies the risk of burnout” (p. 149), and another, to managing perfectionism. Seven basic steps to recovery from burnout are outlined:

1. Identify whether you have burnout (self-test on the *Sydney Burnout Measure* as a tool, for starters, and consult with a health professional).
2. Reflect on possible cause/causes for the burnout.
3. Analyse what might be some beneficial corrective strategies (whether they address work conditions or personality factors).
4. Seek support from a trustworthy person by discussing stressors and the best way for addressing them.
5. Attempt to change what you see as work stressors.



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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

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6. Consider whether you are displaying perfectionist traits, and if so, how to modulate them.
7. Identify and change daily habits that may be producing stress, by prioritising which responsibilities to disconnect from. “The moral here: if you don’t turn electronic devices off, you can’t turn yourself off” (p. 218). (Adapted from pp. 217-218)

Since burnout is considered a stress-induced state, the authors suggest an eighth step of trialling several individual de-stressing strategies such as exercise (attending to your body); meditation (feeding your soul); and practising mindfulness, engaging (or coming to) your senses.

In setting the scene for the book, the personal experiences of three well-recognised people, able to recover from burnout by reworking the patterns of their lives, are chronicled, sharing insight and practical wisdom. The most helpful strategies, detailed by participants in the research undertaken by the authors, are collated, contributing to a

broad-based management approach for both recognising and treating, in a tailored way, symptoms of burnout. This book is timely, for understanding mental health issues facing our society in a post-COVID world. **TEACH**

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