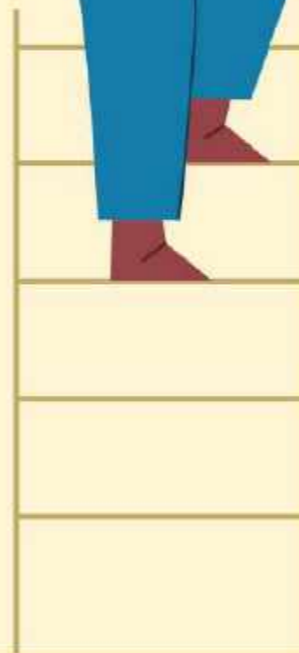
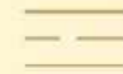


Changing Phase of **EMPLOYEE BURNOUT** & **OVERCOMING** it



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The Covid-19 pandemic has altered everyone's lifestyles in ways that were unthinkable merely some time ago. With nationwide lockdowns, everyone was forced to remain in their homes and this meant that offices were soon deserted. Office spaces bustling with the daily business soon started looking like empty remains of a bygone era. This unprecedented change was welcome for some employees, while others took it very badly. Soon, working from home became the new normal and along with it came additional stress and issues.

If you feel burnout setting in, if you feel demoralized and exhausted, it is best, for the sake of everyone, to withdraw and restore yourself

- Dalai Lama

Technology handicap and employee burnout were some of the first issues which became apparent once the world started moving towards work-from-home. The technological issues were soon resolved as humankind collectively took measures to ensure that everyone is connected via the internet and are able to carry on their daily tasks. Companies even provided internet connectivity and laptops to their employees to overcome the technological handicap.

However, the issue of employee burnout is far more complex. It has become even more cumbersome with the new kind of employee burnout and we are still struggling to eradicate it completely. Hence, let us discuss some of the ways we can lessen this burden...

As per the World Health Organization (WHO),

'Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

It is characterized by three dimensions:

- **feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;**
- **increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and**
- **reduced professional efficacy.**

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.'

As is clear from its definition, employee burnout leads to physical & mental exhaustion and stress, which leads to lower productivity culminating in poor business overall. The employees suffering from burnout would also be less aware of their surroundings which exponentially increases the chances of workplace accidents. All of these factors make the office a toxic environment to work in. Moreover, employee burnout is contagious as it starts affecting the team members and eventually spreads to other teams.

What is Employee Burnout?



What Is The New Phase Of Employee Burnout?

With the pandemic, all of the following factors affecting employee burnout have dialled up to eleven:

Excess job requirements
due to layoffs



Lack of remote work
training



Excruciating work
demands



Inefficient technology



Insufficient feedback



Miscommunication



The global analytics firm Gallup discovered a peculiar trend while researching the employee burnout and wellbeing during the pandemic, which they refer to as 'Wellbeing-Engagement Paradox': Usually, they are reciprocal of each other and are additive in nature. For example, engaged employees have fewer burnouts and they also exhibit improved wellbeing. However, in 2020, with the onset of the pandemic, these two factors became disconnected and this led to various issues for HR.

Initially, with the employees and employers trying to figure out the situation and adjusting to the new normal, there was a rise in employee engagement until June-July 2020. However, employee wellbeing was reduced drastically during the same period as this shift was taking a toll on them. Hence, the initial spike in the engagement soon dwindled down, which soon reached worrisome levels for the employers.

This is the new phase of burnout that has troubled the employees since the pandemic started. Various factors contribute to it and hence, we need to take a look at each of them individually to find out ways to

Signs of the new kind of Employee Burnout

There are some sure-fire ways to understand that your employees are being worn out by the extra duties and responsibilities that have developed due to the pandemic. The employees are adjusting to the new work from home system, while also taking care of their children, schooling them as well as attending to sick relatives in some cases.

Some of the major signs which the HR can identify employee burnout due to working from home are:

- Having trouble concentrating on tasks at hand
- Easily frustrated and angered
- Disengagement from work and family
- Discouraged, nervous or even overwhelmed
- Reduced professional efficiency
- Feeling cynic towards work
- Unable to complete work on time
- Unexpected mood swings
- Depression and hopelessness
- Physical fatigue
- Energy exhaustion
- Sleep issues
- Alcoholism

This list is not complete in any way and the employees might even showcase other symptoms due to their burnout. It is HR's responsibility to monitor these changes and ensure that the issue is identified and resolved at the earliest; even in cases where the employee might not come forward by themselves.

If your employees are showing any of these signs either in working from home or at work, it is good to have an honest chat with them. You will be able to understand whether the issue is minor or major and take relevant actions according to your findings. Some employees might feel better by coming back to work and being with their colleagues. Others might find it hard to get back and adjust to the daily work commute again. In some cases, they might even require professional counselling to get back on track.

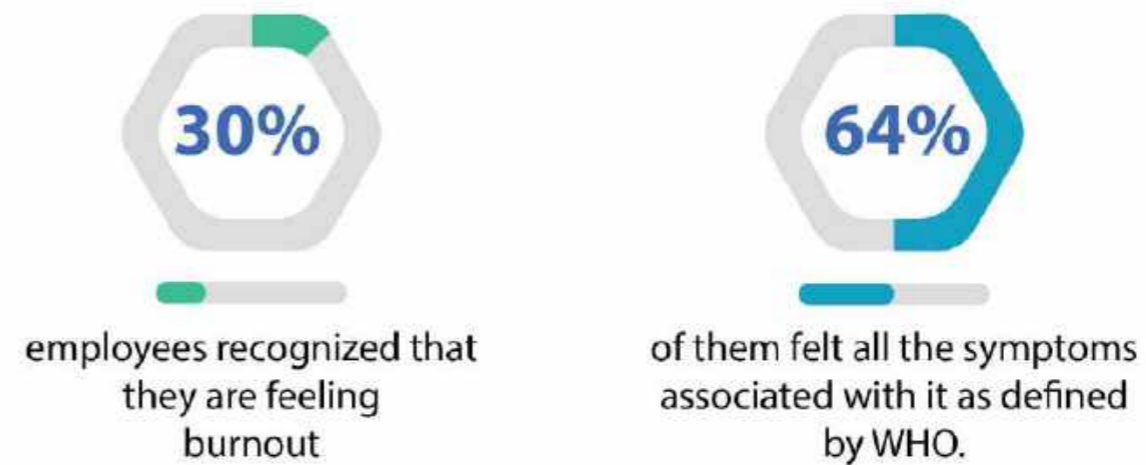
In these hard times, simple gestures from HR goes a long way in relieving them from their burnout. You can consider the following plan of action:

Dealing with Employee Burnout



ACKNOWLEDGE THE BURNOUT

The most important step in resolving employee burnout is to acknowledge its existence. A recent study by MetLife found that only



Hence, it is crucial that HR takes burnout seriously and comes up with initiatives to counter it. These kinds of initiatives will also renew the trust the employees have in their HR while also helping the company take care of its employees.



COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Communication is key in resolving most of the common issues around the workplace and it proves useful especially nowadays in these trying times. The HR department needs to draft clear policies about the steps taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19 at workspaces. On the other hand, clear posters should be put up to let the staff members know of the measures that they need to take to safeguard themselves.

Similarly, the employees need to be reassured that HR is available to resolve their physical and mental issues concerning their office. They need to feel free to connect with HR and share their burnout issues with them.

PROVIDE WORK FLEXIBILITY

As mentioned above, a major part of working from home is the intermingling of work and personal stuff. Hence, it is important that the employee is left to decide how to manage it. While some prefer to complete their tasks during business hours, others might decide to burn the midnight oil to complete the tasks.

Providing the flexibility to work at their convenience will go a long way in letting them know that their company is willing to adjust and is acknowledging their home needs. You also need to ensure that the managers do not misinterpret flexible working as an excuse to contact them and give tasks at odd times.



ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEES TO DISCUSS THEIR ISSUES

HR needs to encourage the employees to discuss their stress-related issues in the workplace. This will allow them to share their apprehensions while also accepting the fact that they can share their concerns with HR who will be able to help them.

Once they share their issues, it is up to HR to work with them to find creative solutions and utilize any company resources to help them. Some simple options which HR can take to help them include providing them with additional break time, motivate them for exercising, provide consulting with the in-house psychologist, etc.



GAMIFY EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Exercise and a healthy diet can do wonders for one's body, especially during these tiring times. A healthy body will also help in having a peaceful mind. This not only helps in reducing one's stress level but also boosts one's immunity.

Hence, HRs can provide some kind of incentives to gamify the process of keeping oneself fit and healthy. This will help in making the mundane activity rewarding and competitive. This also leads to employee engagement which is a win-win for any company.

ACTIVELY PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT

The HR can come up with various effective ways to engage the employees; these strategies could include developing a good employee recognition program, providing them full control on how they complete their tasks, provide self-confidence boosting sessions, career development opportunities, etc.

Since the employees are working from home, one also needs to consider that there might be additional household responsibilities that might cut into their working hours. In such cases, HR needs to come up with flexible working hours after discussing it with them.



SET CLEAR WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

Since the employees are working from home, their family life keeps interfering with their work-life and vice versa. As the HR, one can ensure that the latter doesn't happen while the employee ensures that the former happens rarely.

As both work and personal lives overlap, it is crucial to ensure that your employees maintain a work-life balance. They can create a dedicated workspace in their home for work and make sure that the tasks given are completed within the working hours. This ensures that they have a good amount of time to wind down with their family later.



ADDRESS PERFORMANCE ISSUES AMICABLY

An employee might have started having performance issues after the work from home system started. In this case, instead of assuming that they are becoming lethargic, it is better to confront the employee and get to the bottom of the matter.

While letting your employee know that you have noticed the dip in their performance, ensure that you also let them know that you are there to help and they can confide with you any issues at home that might be hampering their performance. If they reveal any symptoms of burnout, you can also use the company resources to offer them support to get over it.

REASSURE THAT TIME-OFFS ARE FOR THEIR OWN GOOD

Sometimes, it is simply better to let the employee take time-offs to rejuvenate themselves. In fact, studies have revealed that employees are taking less time-offs since the onset of the pandemic due to two reasons: one being that they are working from home and the added flexibility helps in avoiding leaves and two being that they are worried about job security due to the additional workload they have.

Hence, it is good to encourage the employees to utilize their accrued time-offs to spend time with their families. The worn-out employee will not only appreciate this gesture but also return to work with renewed energy.



PROVIDE 'WATERCOOLER' SESSIONS

It might seem counter-intuitive to give dedicated time to have 'watercooler' sessions. However, various studies have shown that it actually improves their mood and productivity. Even a 10-minute watercooler session allows the employee to wind down and having a casual chat with your colleague also help in gaining social support.

Man is, after all, a social being. Being forced to spend more than a year confined to our homes has made us crave social interaction and these watercooler sessions provide the way for just that.



Summary

To summarize, it is easy to reduce the new phase of employee burnout drastically by taking some extra steps as an HR. However, it is tough to remove it completely. This is where HRs need to get back to their roots and understand that genuinely caring about their employees and their wellbeing is the best way to tackle this issue. Once you sincerely put your efforts into employee welfare as an organization, you will soon find your employees cheerful and eager to get back on track and make the workplace the bustling business and creative hubs it once was.



About Pocket HRMS:

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