

What is Burnout?

Burnout is a phenomenon that is difficult to define and understand though it generally develops within a process that involves an individual and his work environment. Burnout is not acknowledged as a mental disorder; instead, it is seen as an adjustment disorder.

Burnout happens gradually. It develops in four stages that occur fairly rapidly depending on the individual's tolerance for stress. The first stage is idealism, whereby the individual has a high level of energy and is full of great ambitions, ideals and goals. Such individuals are totally devoted to the organization that employs them, even if the work is extremely demanding and the conditions in which it is performed are not easy.

The second stage is a plateau. This is where the individual realizes that in spite of constant effort, results do not meet expectations and the organization always expects more. Efforts are not acknowledged and as a result, the individual will push themselves harder and often work evenings and on weekends to meet expectations.

The next stage is disillusionment. The individual is tired and disappointed, the organization's expectations are disproportionate, and there is still no acknowledgement for the work done. It feels like there is no way to win and the individual often becomes impatient, irritable or cynical. Some will start taking stimulants to perform and sleeping pills to sleep during this frustrating period.

The final stage is total demoralization. At this point, these individuals lose all interest in their work, have used up all their energy reserves, feel totally discouraged, and are unable to work. This stage is burnout.