

[WORK SMARTER](#) // July 12, 2019

It's Possible to Avoid Burnout in a Fast-Paced Workplace. Here's How.

It starts with setting the right boundaries.

By [Marina Khidekel](#), Head of Content Development at Thrive Global



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A fast-moving work environment can foster innovation and help us channel [creative energy](#). That doesn't mean it's always easy to keep up though, as evidenced by the [epidemic of employee burnout](#). But mounting science has proven that we must prioritize our [well-being](#) in order to show up as our best selves in the workplace — and in life.

We asked members of the Thrive community to share their tips and tricks to avoid burnout, even when work is intense. Their ruthless prioritization and boundary-setting, as well as their deep understanding that [well-being fuels productivity](#), are evidence that burnout isn't the price we must pay for success.

Align your commitments, time, and energy

“Having experienced corporate burnout twice, I have found the secret to avoiding it is two-fold: setting healthy boundaries and finding balance. Recognizing that how we feel is directly connected to our productivity is a key indicator and tool for ongoing success. When we begin to feel overwhelmed, it takes time to step back, reevaluate our purpose, and connect with our vision. But it is well worth it, because doing so allows us to realign our commitments with both time and energy. A great win-win!”

—Trish Tonaj, author, Toronto, Canada

Realize that saying no is a form of self-care

“Burnout hasn’t been a problem for me since I learned a new word: no! Saying no to requests that distract me from pursuing my purpose frees me to focus on what’s important. In addition, I take time to exercise, pray or meditate, socialize, and have some play time. Saying no is a form of self-care. If you spread yourself too thin, it’s difficult to perform at your best level.”

—John Harrell, entrepreneur, Austin, TX

Schedule a slow-down

“The more fast-paced the environment, the more I slow down. I recommend setting an alarm every two or three hours to stop everything you’re doing for just three to five minutes. Use this time to breathe deeply (inhale for seven seconds and exhale for 10) and do simple stretches like touching your toes, gently twisting your torso, and rotating your neck. These few minutes to reconnect will get your blood flowing, help you recenter, and increase your focus.”

—GiGi Diaz, founder, Miami, FL

Get a pet to hold you accountable

“I got a dog. Running my own business is relentless — there is always another client to call, a blog to write, an interview to prepare for, invoices to raise, a proposal to write, a tweet to send. The list goes on. So I got a dog. I’m responsible for his well-being. I have to walk him everyday. He forces me to get up from my desk and get outside and forget about work for a bit. He also makes me laugh every day. In a way, he’s also responsible for my well-being.”

—Lucy Gower, business founder, Exeter, U.K.

Set boundaries with yourself and others

“In my years as a therapist and now as a business owner, there is one key component that has helped me with burnout and that is boundaries. I have learned the hard way that people will rise the boundary that you set. They are not going to set the boundaries for you because they benefit when you don’t have them. So I set clear boundaries around my time, specifically when I work, what I work on, and most importantly, when I stop working. I also set up boundaries around the space in which I work — no more working from a broken chair in a corner or around other people’s schedules. Lastly, I’ve created boundaries around my inner dialogue. We can’t always control what is going on around us, but we do have power over how we process it. Self-talk and mindset boundaries were key to helping me understand burnout so that I did not perpetuate it in my business.”

—Nicole Lewis-Keeber, therapist, Lancaster, PA

Change up your environment

“If you’re feeling burned out, I recommend doing these three things: Intentionally leave your desk and walk around, even if you have nowhere to go. Actually leave the office for lunch. If you brought your lunch, you can sit in the car. Take your time off. Stop rolling over paid time off. It is your time, so take it!”

—Marla J. Albertie, certified career and life coach, Jacksonville, FL

Incorporate Microsteps into your daily routine

“There’s no general recipe to avoid burnout but my strategy is New day, new [Microstep](#). Mindfulness meditation and journaling on Monday; gratitude practice and yoga on Tuesday; a dance class and fun with friends on Wednesday; forgiveness meditation and cleaning up my space on Thursday; cook or try one new healthy dish and drink on Friday; visit one new place on Saturday; sports and strategize for the week ahead on Sunday. Life is an adventure and an experiment, so why not try something new every day?”

—Alla Adam, blockchain solutions architect, Chicago, IL

Switch off from work mode

“I have found that setting boundaries on my work hours is necessary to avoid burnout at work. If I take my work home, my brain doesn’t

get a chance to switch off from work mode, which affects my quality of sleep. I allow myself to not feel guilty about having ‘me’ time once I leave work. Whether I listen to music, watch something on Netflix, or journal, switching off is necessary to keep my creative juices flowing at work.”

—Crystal Nicholls, dancer, London, UK

Think before the “yes”

“When a boss, supervisor, or colleague comes to you and asks you to add something to your plate, instead of just buckling under and saying yes without truly thinking about it, I encourage you to stop and smile. Then, say something like, ‘You know, I’d really like to help you with that, but I’ve got to check my schedule and see if I can fit it in.’ Review the reality of what it would mean to take on the additional task, and then decide if you’re truly interested. If you don’t take it on, you can put your creative juices to work and help find someone else who can.”

—Judy Marston, career transition specialist, Victoria, B.C., Canada

Embrace and extend empathy

“One of my company’s values is empathy, which is one of the reasons why I align so strongly with the culture. Empathy is exactly what I lean into to avoid burnout in our fast-paced start-up environment. Outwardly expressing compassion and care toward my coworkers is what helps me slow down and appreciate the hard work that we all put in every single day.”

—Melissa Muncy, content marketing, San Francisco, CA

Accept incompletions

“To avoid putting too much on my employees’ plates, I found myself taking on everything and filling *my* own plate too much. In an attempt to protect others from burnout, I was burning out myself. In the fast-paced, ever-changing non-profit world, last minute things require immediate attention and I was trying to do it all. I’ve learned to set priorities and let the non-pressing tasks wait, and support my employees in doing the same. What doesn’t get done at the end of your work day will be waiting for you tomorrow. Don’t stress — unplug when you leave the office and tackle it again tomorrow.”

—Carrie McEachran, executive director, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

Balance work sprints with “Thrive time”

“Burnout is an occupational hazard in my field and except in the case of vacation, I have to be available when needed after hours. My solution is to start each morning focused on recharging activities, like listening to a meditative recording, journaling, or exercising before heading into work so I arrive feeling more energetic and ready for the day. I also intentionally balance intense work sprints with a regular day off to recharge, rather than wait for an official vacation a couple of times a year, and encourage my employees to do the same. Those strategies reinforce my well-being while keeping me highly productive!”

—Shira Miller, chief communications officer, Atlanta, GA

Determine what you can delegate

“I prevent burnout when I’m busy by getting very clear about what activities contribute to my overall strategy, and filtering out those that don’t. It means communicating to others what I’m happy to do and what I can’t accommodate (yet). When I’m feeling overwhelmed, I also take a look at my commitments, projects, and meetings and ask, “What can I dump, delegate, or outsource?””

—Kelli Thompson, leadership coach, Omaha, NE

Celebrate victories both big and small

“Reward yourself for both big and small accomplishments in the workplace. That’s what has worked for me and I still live by it. In order to avoid burnout, small rewards here and there play a crucial role in maintaining balance. Rewards could be anything from taking your team out for a treat or letting yourself work from home. Small things bring great happiness.”

—Aakriti Agarwal, facilitator, Hyderabad, India

Meditate to enhance mindfulness

“Having my own business and being a part of the start-up environment taught me so much about managing stress and burnout. What has consistently made the difference has been meditation. Having a clear mind gives me the freedom to create my day as opposed to living through it. It’s a blank canvas to build on, as opposed to a constant pile up that leads to overwhelm and ultimately burnout. I’ve been able to make better decisions around my schedule (saying no is a must!) and find balance (by asking for help and not

playing the game alone).”

—Maytal Phillips, business coach, Los Angeles, CA

Channel your sense of humor

“After working in a fast-paced, frantic industry for over 35 years I can say that I have dealt with burnout most of my adult life. And the only way to deal with burnout is to treat each call, each co-worker, and each difficult task with a sense of humor — almost like you are playing a game. Make the game like a detective searching for clues, so when you solve the problem, you can call victory. Be the positive, funny person in the room or on the call and make work fun and more lighthearted. You will finish more tasks and go home smiling!”

—Lisa Andria, reinvention coach, Long Beach, CA

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Marina leads strategy, ideation and execution of Thrive Global content company-wide, including cross-platform brand partnership campaigns, editorial tentpoles and partnerships, and the voice of the Thrive app. In her role, she helps people tell their personal stories of going from surviving to thriving, brings Thrive's audience actionable, science-backed tips for reducing stress and improving their physical and mental well-being, and shares those insights on panels, at conferences, and in national outlets like NBC's TODAY.

Previously, Marina held senior editorial roles at *Women's Health*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Glamour*, where she edited award-winning health and mental health features and spearheaded the campaigns and partnerships around them.

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