



TOOL 1

S-T-O-P and Audit

The first tool in banishing burnout is called **S-T-O-P and Audit** and is designed to create self-awareness, the first part of emotional intelligence (EQ). Commonly, a problem arises when a person does not know how to self-regulate their emotions. Without self-awareness and self-regulation, it is common to see these types of behaviors occur:

- » Difficulty getting along with others (co-workers, clients, family members, etc.)
- » Snapping at co-worker
- » Angry outbursts
- » Feelings of resentment
- » Feelings of dread
- » Avoidance
- » Lack of sleep
- » Poor eating habits
- » Feelings of mental or emotional exhaustion
- » Loss of passion (for a job or hobby that was once loved)

When these behaviors are occurring on your team or in the workplace, these tools are a great way to help team members develop self-awareness and self-regulation: S-T-O-P and AUDIT.

S-T-O-P is an acronym developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the father of modern-day mindfulness, and stands for:

**STOP****TAKE A BREATH****OBSERVE****PROCEED**

This tool is critical for learning how to interrupt negative thoughts and then modulate your emotions.

HOW DOES IT WORK?**STOP**

The STOP reminds you to stop and think before you react to a stressor.

**TAKE A BREATH**

The deep breath engages the parasympathetic nervous system to help you calm yourself.

**OBSERVE**

Observing allows you to transfer your thinking from the Amygdala, the fight-flight-or freeze center of the brain to the Pre-frontal cortex, the rational, executive functioning part of the brain.

**PROCEED**

Allows you to be intentional about what you wish to say or do next and move forward with your thoughts, words, and actions carefully.

To develop STOP as a habit, remember to STOP every time something upsetting happens. It's a process of behavior change that requires continued practice.



The second part of this process is to **AUDIT** using the following Stress Audit. This tool helps you to dissect and understand your reactions after a stressful incident and allows you a vehicle to acknowledge your feelings, rather than ignore or repress them. Writing out what happened and how you reacted allows you to reflect and learn and may even lead you to issues lying beneath the surface.

STRESS AUDIT



STRESSOR

What happened?



REACTIONS

- Physical reactions
- Emotional reactions
- Verbal reaction
- Exacerbating behavior
- Addictive behaviors



TOOL 2

Know Your Stress, Convert Your Stress

The second tool to help you banish burnout is called **Know Your Stress, Convert Your Stress**. This helps to recognize and understand your personal reactions to stress and develop them into healthy behaviors.

The first step is to identify your typical stress reactions. A stress reaction is an acute emotional reaction related to extreme environmental stress. Two common stress reactions include overreaction and overgeneralization. These have also been referred to as cognitive distortions. *Cognitive* means the act of *thinking or reasoning*. Thus, cognitive distortions are essentially irrational, inaccurate, or false beliefs or thought patterns.

OVERREACTION

The first common stress reaction is overreaction which is when reactions become exaggerated. When we overreact, we tend to blow things out of proportion, losing control and also losing the ability to think clearly. That is because the Amygdala or fight-flight-or freeze part of the brain takes control, allowing the mind to cling to worst-case scenarios.

An example of such would be if you make a mistake on an important report, presentation, or project. Due to that one mistake, your mind goes to the worst-case scenario—that you will be fired.

OVERGENERALIZATION

Another common stress reaction is overgeneralization, which means to take an occurrence and generalize it to become something that *always* or *never* happens. This can lead us to lose perspective.

Here are some examples:

- » *Every time I send an email to one of the leaders, my manager criticizes me.*
- » *IT Support is never available when I need them.*
- » *My co-worker is always late to meetings.*

CONVERT THE REACTIONS

After you've identified the typical stress reactions you experience and the behavior patterns associated with them, the next step is to convert the reaction to more balanced thinking and develop them into healthy behaviors. In technical terms, this conversion is called *cognitive restructuring* or *cognitive reframing*. The goal of this process is to challenge any distorted cognitive reactions you may experience and convert those thoughts into a more realistic, rational response. This conversion helps you to calm down and take the angst out of your mind and body and replace that angst with clarity and logic.

When trying to process distorted cognitive reactions, ask yourself one or more of these questions:

- » *Am I responding emotionally or rationally?*
- » *Am I overreacting or overgeneralizing?*
- » *What evidence is there that my response is accurate?*
- » *Am I really worried or upset about something else?*

The conversion is where the magic of behavior change happens. With focus and practice, you will get better at catching yourself in the act of overreacting or overgeneralizing and asking yourself, "Is this level of anger commensurate with what is happening?" Often the answer is *no*, and then in the moment you can say to yourself, "It is not worth getting this upset over something so minor. I am going to stop this distorted thinking and make a decision to change my thoughts and my mood."



TOOL 3

Unpack Your Emotional Baggage

Emotional baggage refers to the feelings you have about your past and the things that have happened to you, which often have a negative effect on your behavior and attitudes. When people hold on to these emotional burdens, it can intensely impact the way they behave and respond to stress.

When you *unpack your emotional baggage*, you clear out the cobwebs of your memories and learn that a current situation likely has nothing to do with your past. More importantly, you become aware of situations where you may be overreacting to something in your current life that triggers an unresolved emotion or situation from your past. Any time you catch yourself in an overreaction, ask yourself, “Does this situation warrant this extreme reaction? What else may be causing me to act this way? Am I reacting to something buried deep inside me?”

Dr. Elayne Savage, practicing psychotherapist, workplace coach, and trainer explains in her book, *Don't Take It Personally! The Art of Dealing with Rejection* that childhood rejection wounds can come from parents, teachers, siblings, extended family, or friends. Rejection and criticism become internalized and develop into self-limiting beliefs in adulthood. These types of rejection messages may get translated in our minds as:

- » *I'm not smart enough*
- » *I'm not good enough*
- » *I'm not enough*

Many of us have heard these negative messages from our inner voice and may not be aware of where they originated. These negative thoughts may create a lack of trust in other people as well as ourselves and impact the way we see the world. They also impact our sense of psychological safety. Here is what you can do.

- » Set aside some quiet time to reflect and identify the source of your stress response.
- » Think back to a situation in the recent past when you felt excessively upset or you experienced one of the reactions described in Tool 2 – overreaction or overgeneralization. What happened and how did you feel?
- » Try to recall another previous situation when you experienced a similar reaction, no matter how long ago it was. What happened and how did you feel?
- » Identify the similarities and be specific (people involved, location, what was said, emotions involved, etc.)
- » Reframe the situation using rational logic and facts to develop a more appropriate response.

These exercises will begin to help you unpack your emotional baggage. Becoming your best emotional self at work requires understanding what distorted stress reactions you experience, where they come from, and learning to convert the reactions as mentioned in #2 *Know Your Stress, Convert Your Stress*. That is the goal of this tool.



TOOL 4

Practice Self-Care

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical and mental health which encompass so many facets of your life. Physical self-care includes nutrition, physical activity, and sleep while mental self-care incorporates emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Why is self-care one of the most important parts of banishing burnout? Because physical and mental health are at the crux of our ability to thrive, to do our work, and to have valuable personal relationships. Practicing self-care helps you develop a healthy body and a positive mind, which will enable you to be more resilient and resourceful when facing stressful situations.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important to find what you need and enjoy. It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you. In this toolkit, we focus on three important, yet often forgotten parts of self-care: sleep, sun, and managing your daily perspective.



GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep quality and quantity have a huge impact on your mood and productivity during working hours. Sleep insufficiency, insomnia, and other untreated sleep disorders are a growing concern for the American workforce, and you may be among those workers struggling with sleep issues.

[According to the CDC](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), one in three adults do not get enough sleep. The purpose of sleep is to rest and recharge to bring the body back to homeostasis. Important bodily functions such as repair and rejuvenation occur during sleep. It is no surprise that stress can impact the quality of your sleep so it is important to develop good nighttime habits that minimize stress and calm you to transition to peaceful sleep.

Nancy H. Rothstein, **The Sleep Ambassador**[®] recommends having a nightly sleep routine, that may include the following:

- » Take a warm shower or bath
- » Enjoy a cup of sleep-friendly tea (caffeine-free or herbal)
- » Read a relaxing book
- » Ensure the temperature in your bedroom is conducive for sleep (65 – 68 degrees)
- » Maintain a consistent bed and wake time to support your circadian rhythm
- » Put your phone away about an hour before you go to sleep



GET OUT IN THE SUN

Sunlight plays an important role in our well-being. Spending time outdoors and in sunlight impacts a variety of physical, mental, and emotional functions including, but not limited to:

- » Relieves stress by lowering cortisol (also known as the stress hormone)
- » Causes your brain to produce serotonin (also known as the happiness hormone) that can improve mood by alleviating pain, providing energy, and make you feel happy and well-rested
- » Produces endorphins (also known as the feel-good hormone)



- » Slows down the body's ability to produce melatonin (a hormone that regulates sleep) and helps balance your circadian rhythm
- » Boosts concentration and productivity
- » Enhances mental function and memory recall
- » Increases Vitamin D production, which has some powerful benefits to our body:
 - Strengthens immune system
 - Supports cardiovascular system
 - Enhances the growth of muscles, brain, etc.



MANAGE YOUR DAILY PERSPECTIVE

Managing your daily perspective is a mental self-care activity that can be accomplished with a morning ritual of clearing your brain of thoughts and feelings before starting your day. This idea comes from a book called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. The book was originally intended for artists and writers, but it applies to anyone who would like to connect to themselves and suggests committing to writing three pages per day when you first awaken.

[Research suggests](#) that writing with a pen and paper has a dramatic impact on the brain. Daily writing helps to let go of any residual negativity from the previous day and to let go of any worry for the day to come. Writing down your feelings helps to clear the worry out of your consciousness and bring up issues you didn't even know were there lying dormant.

Ridding yourself of all the little worries is a critical form of self-care. Letting go is one of the keys to banishing burnout.



TOOL 5

Set Healthy Boundaries

Have you ever said *yes* to something you wish you had said *no* to, at work or home? In this tool you will learn how to set healthy boundaries by identifying the feeling of overwhelm, communicating your needs, asking for feedback, and saying no at work, at home, and to yourself.



IDENTIFY OVERWHELM

Do you recognize the warning signs when you begin to feel overwhelmed by too many responsibilities and demands? Sometimes, it's hard to admit that you've reached your limit and need to take a break. Unfortunately, many of us ignore our feelings of overwhelm and end up forging ahead until we burn out. Warning signs to look out for include:

- » Mental or physical exhaustion
- » Feelings of ineffectiveness
- » Disengagement or isolation
- » Higher sensitivity to feedback
- » Avoidance of everyday situations, especially your least favorite work tasks
- » Snapping at co-workers, customers, or family members
- » Sleep problems
- » Digestive issues
- » Engaging in angry outbursts
- » Feeling resentful



COMMUNICATE NEEDS

It is important to remember that no one knows how you feel if you do not tell them, which is why it is essential that you communicate when you feel overwhelmed. When communicating that you are feeling overwhelmed, or on the verge of it, it's important to stay calm and speak rationally to best engage the person you are communicating with (co-worker, life partner, manager, client, etc.). The more time you give yourself to figure out what you are feeling and why, the more likely your response will yield your desired results to be listened to, acknowledged, and understood.

Setting boundaries is sometimes about knowing when and how to communicate the status of a project or situation. You are not really saying no to the other person, you are simply communicating that the situation needs attention. Here are some examples of phrases you can use to express your needs in an effective way:

- » It bothers me when...
- » It would be helpful if...
- » Could you please _____ when _____?

Another important part of communicating is asking for feedback, but for feedback to be effective, it needs to be delivered in a form that specifically suits your personality and work style. Workplace acknowledgments and positive reinforcement come in many forms. Which do you prefer? Identify your desired form of feedback and be sure to communicate that with others. Remember, they don't know if you don't tell them.



SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Saying no and setting boundaries is one of the hardest lessons to learn and yet one of the most important parts of self-care to manage stress. Here are some examples of ways to set healthy boundaries:



BOUNDARIES FOR YOUR SELF-CARE

Are you, like many workers over the past year and a half, loaded with back-to-back virtual meetings? *Zoom fatigue* has become a real phenomenon. It is important to set a boundary with your time, such as, “I need to end the meeting by 5 minutes till the hour.” Use that five minutes to decompress, breathe for 60 to 90 seconds, or get up and walk around outside.

BOUNDARIES WITH YOURSELF, OTHERS, AND YOUR SCHEDULE

It is important to be realistic about what you can actually accomplish each day. Whether you are being asked to do many things by others, or you simply have a passion for your work, it is easy to take on more than you can handle.

Time management can be a huge source of stress, usually because you are overloaded, or you place too many demands on yourself. You may simply need help managing your time. Time management skills can help you reduce the emotional burden of being disorganized with your time.

We all know that a large project or task needs to be broken down into smaller chunks. But how do you estimate how much time each task will take? If you are not sure, then try scheduling one hour each day for that task, and after a while, you will begin to get a feel for what you can accomplish in one hour.

Another excellent suggestion is to do the most difficult or most important task first, at the beginning of the day while you are fresh. Importance may be defined by a deadline. If something is due on Friday, you naturally will be more driven to work on it Thursday if you have not already completed it by then. Deadlines have a way of motivating us.

Finally, ask yourself, “By the end of the day, I will feel satisfied and less stressed if I accomplish the following tasks.”



TOOL 6

Recruit an Accountability Partner

CEOs have mastermind advisory groups. Managers have other managers from which to seek advice. Do you take advantage of having an accountability buddy?

If you are part of a team you hopefully have people around you, at least virtually, with which to talk about work projects. You might find support in a teammate, a friend, or a mentor. If you are an entrepreneur, you may find value in speaking with another entrepreneur in a similar profession, perhaps through an association of your peers to share ideas and get support.

The value of an accountability buddy is that sometimes you're not quite sure how to attack a difficult situation. You might be dreading a difficult conversation with a client, teammate, or manager. You may need support creating a presentation or writing some sort of report.

The person you choose should be someone you trust deeply and from whom you can seek advice as well as share celebrations with. Much success can come from having a "best friend at work." Humans are wired for social connection. The happiness chemical, oxytocin is released when we connect with a close friend or trusted confidante. We just feel better.

The relationship can take on different forms:

- » Temporary basis to help you create a presentation for management about a task force you are supporting.
- » Ongoing help to prepare yourself for a promotion and the way to put yourself forward.
- » One way to work with your accountability partner is to set a regular meeting day with the added commitment that you'll be available when you say you will. Whomever you choose, make sure that person has the time and the capability to work with you.

Tips for asking for help:

- » When asking someone to be your accountability partner be clear about what specific help you need and how long you might need that help. A partnership might work on a weekly or monthly schedule.
- » If the first person you ask says *no* do not be discouraged. They simply might be under a lot of pressure and not available at the time you ask.
- » Identify two or three people to ask so that when one says *no* you can move on to the next one.
- » Be respectful of other people's time. When it's time for your meetings, be prepared and be on time.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. People like helping other people and have gotten help themselves along the way.

Enlisting help from a coach or accountability partner is one of the best ways you can grow your career and understand what steps you need to get there. Go for it.



TOOL 7

Find Your Happy

“Find Your Happy” is all about dwelling in the little thrills of the day. For example, after a particularly tough workout how do you feel mentally? Are you happy? Do you take a few minutes to dwell there? Do you figuratively pat yourself on the back?

So what is happiness? Is it that elusive feeling you get from the idea of being rich or famous? No, not really. Happiness comes from within your brain. It’s a feeling of contentment or joy. Happiness can be found in quick and easy ways throughout the day and evening. Here are some strategies.



COMPLETION

Finishing a difficult project or something simple like cleaning out the garage fills us with a strong feeling of pride from the accomplishment.

Accomplishing a task that you felt was going to be a big challenge – that took days, weeks or even months releases dopamine. It’s that feeling of achievement when you finished. Look for those little moments of accomplishment at work, if possible, and focus on them, even for a moment or two. Take a moment to soak up the pride of accomplishment you feel. When you finish your day, write down how that accomplishment made you feel so you can experience the joy of your hard work from that day.



A JOB WELL DONE

This is an important piece for you managers. Showing that you value your employees is a huge part of caring for your employees and building loyalty, trust, and retention. People want to feel valued, and giving compliments when earned is the best way to show value. This creates happy feelings for both you and your employee.



VOLUNTEERING

See *Tool #10 Helping Others*.



SOCIALIZATION

Spending time with a good friend whom you trust produces a huge surge of oxytocin. Oxytocin comes from a feeling of **trust** or being able to **lean on a trusted advisor** or friend. It also comes from connection, belonging, and **social alliances**. One of the best ways to increase oxytocin at work is to develop a best friend or accountability buddy, someone you can rely on and trust. See *Tool #6 Accountability Partners*.



EXERCISE

It is widely known that twenty or thirty minutes of moderate or high aerobic activity releases endorphins, the *feel-good hormone*. Dopamine is also released because of the pride you feel from having completed the goal of exercise that day.



FUN

Doing something completely for fun, like going to the symphony or a concert or a good movie you've been looking forward to can be very relaxing. Hearing music that is either completely new and satisfying to you or that is one of your old favorites releases dopamine.

Many fun physical activities are very satisfying just for the happiness, not necessarily for the physical release. Skiing is one of those activities as are kayaking, swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and more.



THE SUN

Did you know that as soon as the sun hits your skin Vitamin D, *the sunshine vitamin* is released in the bloodstream and a myriad of physiological reactions occur which create mental clarity, good mood, and other physiological benefits?

In terms of stress and anxiety, light improves the communication between various parts of the brain to help us handle emotions. Furthermore, studies have shown that the more time you spend outdoors, the more serotonin you get and the happier you feel. And you also get a boost of endorphins, a feel-good hormone.

Conversely, decreased sun exposure is associated with a drop in serotonin levels which can lead to major depression. For more details see *Tool #4 Practice Self-Care*.



GRATITUDE

Dr. Shawn Achor, Harvard-based happiness researcher and author of *The Happiness Advantage* and several other books teaches that when you focus on three different reasons to be grateful every day, you will actually change the chemistry in the brain.

Many of these suggestions do not need to take up a lot of time...acknowledging gratitude or pride in yourself is quick but should not be skipped.



TOOL 8

Help Others



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HELPING OTHERS?

- » Focusing on someone less fortunate than you helps to get you out of your own head.
- » When someone has been helped by your attention, you feel better. The act of kindness elicits the feeling of kindness within you.
- » When you spend time with another person, you both benefit from the social connection.
- » Helping others is the right thing to do.

All the good feelings described above are explained by the release of oxytocin, the compassion hormone, in the brain. According to Stephanie Brown, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Preventive Medicine at Stony Brook University, “Giving back curtails the presence of stress hormones such as cortisol.”

In terms of workplaces, do volunteer projects together. Not only are you helping another group of people, but you are also bonding with your team by doing the effort together.

When searching for a new job, many candidates judge a company by its volunteer programs. These workers want to wake up in the morning feeling proud of their company. In that way, volunteering encourages longevity with the company.



HOW TO GET STARTED

Recommendations to create a company-wide volunteer program:

- » Get support from executives by tying the focus of the volunteer effort to the mission and values of the company. Ensure that volunteerism is integrated into the company culture.
- » Define a budget, if necessary.
- » A company-wide effort can connect people from different departments and establish inter-departmental teams, to encourage cross-cultural bonding.
- » Create a vibrant communication campaign to let everyone know. To that end, create a kick-off event ensuring leadership is involved.
- » Engage employees company-wide by having them choose recipient charities.
- » Encourage non-managers to take a leadership role, which will not only develop leadership skills but also enhance engagement.