

8 SIGNS YOU ARE HEADING FOR BURNOUT

How near are you from the cliff edge of burnout? Are you free-falling?

Over one year ago, I suffered from burnout in leadership. Some people don't believe in burnout. But it is very common in leadership and I know a lot of people who have experienced burn out. Maybe you are noticing that you are getting very near the edge of that cliff and maybe some of you are free falling already.

In leading and caring for others, I had not exercised enough self-care and I was free-falling. Here are 8 things I personally experienced and I really hope they can help you notice how near you are from the cliff edge of burnout before it's too late and you can do something about it. You may find this as a helpful way to notice burnout in someone on your team or on your leadership that you know or care about.

1. Your joy left

The joy and passion that once fuelled you is gone. You experience hopelessness and a sense of loss from deep within. If you are not energised by your work, it is possible that you are burned out.

2. You are easily irritated and frustrated, often becoming self-critical

Small things make you disproportionately angry. You have doubts about how much you have accomplished. You are feeling worthless, guilty and ashamed. When there is a lost of margin in our lives, we may feel irritated and anxious. This may trigger a flight or fight response. You may become curt and snappy with the people around you. When pain and grief has nowhere to turn, it often turn inwards and into anger.

3. You feel detached or numb from things you used to love

You are becoming cold, detached from, and cynical toward, the people you serve. Your self-protective mechanism has been activated. Withdrawal or emotional shutdown is one of the ways people use to cope with anxiety.

During my burnout, I experienced out of body experiences and I felt spaced out. Every Sunday when I was still pastoring in church, I would not be able to engage emotionally because of the pain and toxic environment. I would be able to imagine a time when I will not be there anymore but be in some place else and I would be able to imagine and feel deeply how the floodgates of my grief and pain would be opened and be poured out. But until then, the gates would be shut.

4. People drain you

Some people may think that it is an abomination for a pastor to say that people can be draining. But the fact is, as loving as you want to be, there are draining people around us. When you're are heathy, you are far more able to cope with them. But when you are near the edge of burnout, you become harsher and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve. You stop showing up right and struggle to be your best self.

5. You feel drained

You are feeling strained as your emotional resources become depleted. One recurring thing I said to myself when I was deep in the burnout zone was this "*I am so tired.*" The sense of loss, pain and helplessness was so deep that when I thought about being so tired, I would weep. The irony

is, even though you maybe exhausted, there will be moments when you would keep going and look as if you are completely fine. It's not only confusing to yourself but also to others.

6. Sleep and time off no longer reenergise you

You may have trouble sleeping. You feel restless even when you take time off and you feel worse or exhausted afterwards. I lacked the mindfulness or attentiveness to take captive our my overwhelming thoughts. As I say this I have to be compassionate to myself. It was what it was.

It can be so easy to have the habit of taking your stress and thoughts to bed. From my experience, our deepest emotions come out from our unconscious when we are asleep, especially for those who prioritise “thinking” rather than “feeling”. Time off or holiday can be more stressful than helpful. Overfunctioning and overactiveness are common coping strategies that people take when they feel anxious or fearful. You may feel that you have to plan before the time off. You have stopped knowing when doing enough is enough.

7. You struggle to concentrate and be productive

You feel as if your mind is zoning out or becoming foggy. Your capacity to think clearly is impaired.

8. You are self-medicating

Your coping mechanism has gone underground or dark. Whether that is overeating, overworking, drinking, sexual addiction, impulsive spending or even drugs, you have chosen a path of self-medication over self-care.

Identifying with just a few of these signs might just be a sign that you're tired. If you identify with half, you might be close to the edge. If you identify with most or all, well, you might be in the same place I found myself – burnout. If you are burnt out, I would encourage you to seek immediate professional help – a medical doctor and a trained Christian counsellor.

I would also encourage you to talk to a close circle of friends.