

Leaders' Burnout Radar Playbook



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This playbook provides practical tools for identifying, addressing, and preventing leadership burnout.

Introduction & Overview

Burnout is not a buzzword, it's a leadership signal.

In today's hybrid and high-pressure workplaces, burnout is no longer just a personal struggle; it has become a significant issue affecting organizations. It's a systemic risk that silently erodes performance, creativity, and retention across teams. Research shows that chronic stress often builds up unnoticed, masked by busyness or "pushing through." That's why leaders need more than empathy; they need radar.

This guide uses the **Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI)** framework three angles on burnout you can actually see:



Personal Burnout (PB)

Overall physical/mental exhaustion



Work-Related Burnout (WB)

Exhaustion clearly tied to the job



Client-Related Burnout (CB)

Exhaustion from dealing with customers/users/patients
(swap "client" with whoever your team serves)

Ready to transform your leadership wellbeing?

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How It Works: 3 Simple Moves

3 Simple Moves:



01 Scan the last 4–6 weeks.

01

For each statement, rate what you truly observed:
1 = Never ... 5 = Always.



02 Sum each dimension.

02

Use the cutoffs to tag **Low / Medium / High** risk. (Adjust bands if your team trends higher/lower.)



03 Match the tag to an action

03

Pick from the tailored options below; each includes the “why” so you can explain it.

Ground Rules

Scores open a conversation, they don’t close it.

No surprise ratings, share what you noticed and listen back.

Treat this as a support tool, not performance evidence.



Personal Burnout (PB)

___/30

___ Risk

"This employee..." looks generally depleted—on or off task.

Low: ≤12 | Medium: 13–20 | High: ≥21

He/She appears constantly tired, rubbing eyes or yawning, and says things like "I feel exhausted."

1

2

3

4

5

He/She moves or speaks slowly, as if weighed down by fatigue, and mentions physical aches.

1

2

3

4

5

He/She shows signs of emotional drain, with teariness, irritability, or a short fuse.

1

2

3

4

5

He/She voices "I can't take it anymore," sounding defeated or on the brink.

1

2

3

4

5

He/She seems worn out by midday, with heavy sighs or a slumping posture in the afternoon.

1

2

3

4

5

He/She complains of being weak or getting sick easily, citing low energy or frequent colds.

1

2

3

4

5



Low Risk (≤ 12)

Keep the tank full

Energy Mapping

Once a month, map peak/low energy hours; schedule heavy lifts in green zones.

Why this works: *Optimizes natural energy rhythms*

Micro-Reset Norms

Institutionalize 3–5 minute movement/eye breaks between meetings. You model it first.

Why this works: *Prevents energy depletion accumulation*

Peer Recharge Pods

Tiny groups take a weekly 'power pause' (stretch, deep-breath, quick game).

Why this works: *Social recovery multiplies individual efforts*



Medium Risk (13–20)

Patch cracks before they widen

Energy Mapping

Introduce HRV/breath apps; start meetings with a 2-minute reset. Normalize recovery.

Why this works: *Makes stress response visible and manageable*

Creative Buffer Blocks

Two 15-minute 'play' slots a week (tinker, doodle, build). Play = cognitive reset.

Why this works: *Activates different brain networks for restoration*

Boundary Rituals

Help them define a shift-off ritual (close laptop + short walk). Train the brain to exit work mode.

Why this works: *Creates psychological separation from work stress*



High Risk (≥ 21)

Move fast and layer support

Digital Detox Window

Protect a half-day monthly with zero meetings/pings. Call it a performance safeguard.

Why this works: *Allows nervous system complete recovery*

Workload Hackathon

60 minutes to crowdsource what to automate, delegate, or drop. You remove barriers.

Why this works: *Immediately reduces cognitive load*

Professional Support

Offer coaching/counseling (4–6 week sprint). Normalize by sharing uptake rates, not names.

Why this works: *Provides expert intervention for burnout patterns*

Leader Move Quick Reference

Low: Protect good habits, add growth/play opportunities

Medium: Block weekly 30-min personal-care slot team-wide

High: Enable full unplugged day within a week and model it



Work-Related Burnout (WB)

 /35 Risk

"This employee..." is exhausted specifically because of work factors—pace, volume, pressure.

Low: ≤14 | Medium: 15–24 | High: ≥25

Says "It's the workload/process that's killing me."

1

2

3

4

5

Jumps from one "urgent" task to the next—no room for deep work.

1

2

3

4

5

Makes more mistakes or rushed hand-offs when deadlines loom.

1

2

3

4

5

Gets visibly annoyed at shifting priorities: "Why are we doing this again?"

1

2

3

4

5

Stops pitching process fixes: "It won't change anyway."

1

2

3

4

5

Powers through lunch or breaks—and then crashes mid-afternoon.

1

2

3

4

5

Says "I can't keep up" or "I have nothing left to give."

1

2

3

4

5



Low Risk (≤ 14)

Protect healthy work design

Focus Block Guardrails

Keep no-meeting focus times sacred.

Why this works: Preserves deep work capacity

Process Tune-Ups

Quarterly mini-retros to trim friction before it piles up.

Why this works: Prevents gradual system degradation

Win the Week Ritual

Friday 10-minute reflection: 'What worked? What was messy?' then fix something small.

Why this works: Builds continuous improvement habits



Medium Risk (15-24)

Tidy the system, not just the person

Priority Trade-Off Rules

Make 'what drops when X pops up' explicit. Reduce whiplash.

Why this works: Eliminates decision fatigue and context switching

Workload Transparency

Visualize tasks in a shared board so invisible overload surfaces.

Why this works: Makes workload visible for better distribution

Two-Week Fix Sprint

Pick one annoying process each fortnight; remove a step or automate a piece.

Why this works: *Reduces friction systematically over time*



High Risk (≥ 21)

Redesign, don't just reassure

Role & Scope Audit

Sit down, list responsibilities, cut or sequence. Decide what waits.

Why this works: *Immediately reduces overwhelming scope*

Resource Escalation

Make the case upward for headcount/tools; bring data (hours, error rates).

Why this works: *Addresses systemic under-resourcing*

Rotations/Backups

Build cross-training so one person isn't the single point of failure.

Why this works: *Distributes critical knowledge and reduces pressure*

System-Level Thinking

Work-Related Burnout often signals broken processes, not broken people. Focus on **fixing the system** rather than asking individuals to adapt to dysfunction.



Client-Related Burnout (CB)

___/30

___ Risk

"This employee..." is drained by people they must help/serve.
(Use "client" to mean customers, patients, users—whoever they serve.)

Low: ≤12 | Medium: 13–20 | High: ≥21

Seems to dread client interactions, saying things like "Ugh, another call with them."

1 2 3 4 5

Appears frustrated by clients, rolling eyes or cutting people off mid-conversation.

1 2 3 4 5

Shows energy drain after client work, looking fatigued or "checked out" once calls end.

1 2 3 4 5

Complains they give more than they get back, e.g. "I keep helping and nothing changes."

1 2 3 4 5

Voices being tired of client work, with comments like "I'm just so done with these requests."

1 2 3 4 5

Questions how long they can keep handling clients, saying "How much longer can I do this?"

1 2 3 4 5



Low Risk (≤ 12)

Keep empathy fresh, not forced

Gratitude Pings

Daily shout-outs for great client moments. You kick it off.

Why this works: Reinforces positive client interactions

Voice-Note Kudos

Weekly 30-second appreciation voice notes between peers. Human voice matters.

Why this works: Maintains human connection in digital work

Shadow & Share

Monthly 1-hour 'see what they see' shadowing across roles to maintain empathy.

Why this works: Prevents isolation and builds understanding



Medium Risk (13-20)

Rehumanize and rebalance contact

Perspective Prompts

Keep cue cards handy ('What might they need?') before tough calls.

Why this works: Shifts from reactive to empathetic mindset

Coffee Roulette

Random 10-minute informal chats across teams to rebuild connection bandwidth.

Why this works: Restores social energy and perspective

Story Minutes

5 minutes in team meetings for someone to share a client story—feelings included.

Why this works: *Normalizes emotional aspects of client work*



High Risk (≥ 21)

Rebuild emotional skill and boundaries

Active Listening Drills

Short, practice-based EQ workshops—role-play, don't lecture.

Why this works: *Rebuilds empathy skills through practice*

Mentorship Circles

Bi-weekly peer groups focused on tricky client situations; normalize struggle.

Why this works: *Provides safe space to process difficult interactions*

Boundary Scripts

Provide go-to phrases to set limits kindly (e.g., 'Here's what I can do today...').

Why this works: *Protects emotional energy while maintaining service*

Protecting Empathy

Client-Related Burnout often stems from **compassion fatigue**. The goal isn't to care less, but to **care more sustainably** through better boundaries and support systems.

Bringing It Together: Overall Risk Profile

Low Overall Risk: All dimensions low.

Leader move: Protect good habits, add growth/play opportunities, pilot wellness ideas.

Medium Overall Risk: One or more dimensions strained.

Leader move:

- Block a weekly 30-minute personal-care slot team-wide.
- Create a peer “support pod” (bi-weekly share hacks + wins).
- Run two tiny experiments this month (e.g., “no Slack mornings”); pulse how people feel

High Overall Risk: Chronic fatigue, detachment, or client drain is loud.

Leader move:

- Enable a full unplugged day within a week and model it.
- Offer professional help visibly and stigma-free.
- Audit role + workload together: What goes, what shifts, what waits?

Conversation Cues (Use After Scoring)

Openers:

"What's been draining/energizing you lately?"

"Where is work feeling heavy?"

Deepening:

"When do you feel most/least engaged in a typical day?"

"Which interactions leave you wiped?"

Closing:

"One small change in the next two weeks that would help most?"

"What block can I remove?"

Make It Stick

Monthly Pulse: 3 ultra-short proxy items (one per dimension) to catch drift early

Team Heatmap: Track % in High for each dimension. If $\geq 30\%$, fix the system, not the people

Measure Impact: Pair actions with quick pulses, attendance, or error rates. Did stress ease?



Real-Life Scenarios



"The Endless Sprint"

High PB + High WB

Wilma, senior dev, pushed two releases with nights/weekends. Camera off, late replies, constant 'I can't keep up.'

You Notice:

Visible fatigue, 'I'm drowning,' missing stand-ups.

Your Intent:

Understand energy drain, shed load, kill 'only I can do it.'

Try Saying:

- "Walk me through when your energy drops fastest in a week."
- "If we cut 20% of your workload today, what goes first?"
- "What can we automate/delegate/ditch right now?"

Commit To:

One concrete workload tweak + a 2-week follow-up.

Success Signals:

She expresses relief/clarity; a tangible change gets logged.



"Everyone's Wrong but Me"

High CB (or WB if no clients)

Joseph, support specialist, sarcastic on Slack, calls customers 'ridiculous,' blames teammates.

You Notice:

Eye rolls, dismissive comments, others avoid him.

Your Intent:

Lower defenses, surface the hurt/exhaustion, reintroduce empathy micro-practices.

Try Saying:

- "When you say 'they're always wrong,' what's underneath that?"
- "What would make these interactions less draining?"
- "Let's test one small reconnection habit this week what feels doable?"

Commit To:

One empathy practice + a tone-tracking check (pulse/peer feedback).

Success Signals:

Language softens; he accepts/initiates a connection step.



"Invisible Wins"

Medium WB (meaning/impact erosion)

Donna, junior analyst, shrugs off praise: 'It was nothing.' Stays silent, hides ideas.

You Notice:

Downplaying, low energy post-success, hiding in meetings.

Your Intent:

Make impact visible, name strengths, provide safe stretch.

Try Saying:

- *"This report saved us X hours—did you see that impact?"*
- *"Where would you like a small, safe stretch next month?"*
- *"Let's build a win board together—I'll start."*

Commit To:

One stretch task + explicit support; monthly success playbook.

Success Signals:

She can name an impact area; volunteers an idea.



"Quiet at the Exit"

Mixed medium/high across dimensions

Danny, mid-level PM, does minimum, fewer updates, keeps distance.

You Notice:

Transaction-only interactions, 'Just tell me what to do,' silence on long-term plans.

Your Intent:

Surface real blockers (overload, misfit), reset priorities, lighten scope.

Try Saying:

- *"If we're brutally honest, what should we stop doing?"*
- *"Which parts of your role give vs. drain energy?"*
- *"What clarity/support would re-engage you?"*

Commit To:

One role/priority shift + 2–3 week check-in.

Success Signals:

He names a real need; you both agree on a concrete change.



Resources & Reading List

Tools, books, and support networks for your journey

Recommended Reading

The Burnout Challenge

by Dr. Christina Maslach

Research-based strategies for leadership resilience

The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It

by Jennifer Moss

Burnout is driven by chronic workplace stress; employers must lead prevention

The Healthy Workplace: How to Improve the Well-Being of Your Employees

by Leigh Stringer

A healthy work culture boosts productivity and cuts burnout.

Recommended Listening / Viewing

TEDx – The Cost of High Achievement

by Dr. Geri Puleo

Why “always on” culture leads to collapse, not success. 

Copenhagen Burnout Inventory

A free, validated burnout survey for HR use. 

Recommended Articles

Org Chart Burnout



HBR - Auger-Domínguez

Burnout manifests differently at each hierarchy level.

Addressing employee burnout: Are you solving the right problem?



McKinsey Health Institute

Fix organizational systems, not people, to fight burnout.

Employee Burnout: The Causes and Cures



Gallup

Five root causes of burnout, all linked to managers and clarity.

Get Connected



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