

## How Burnout Makes Us Less Creative



### Warm up:

- Do you understand the term burnout? What does it mean?
- Nowadays more people are taking time off due to stress. Why do you think that is?
- Do you know anyone who has suffered from a burnout?
- Do you feel guilty if you haven't been productive enough during the day?
- Do you like working under pressure?
- Have you ever worked over the weekend to meet a deadline?
- Do you think employees should be banned from sending emails and working outside of work hours?
- Have you used any apps to organise your time better (i.e *task apps, calendar apps, time management apps*)? If yes, which apps? Did they help?
- Do you have a good work-life balance?
- Do you ever delegate tasks when you are too busy? (*at home or at work*)



### 1. Write down tips to improve work-life balance and compare with your partner:

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### 2. What do you think of the quote below? What do you think a “knowledge worker” is?



*Today, knowledge workers are facing a big challenge. We're expected to be constantly productive and creative in equal measure.'*

- Rahaf Harfoush



3. You are going to watch a video which contains the following vocabulary. Match the vocabulary on the left with its definition on the right:

- |                 |    |  |
|-----------------|----|--|
| a. obsession    | 7  | 1. the opposite, less good/popular side of something |
| b. literally    | 11 | 2. to wait for something in fear                     |
| c. to indicate  | 10 | 3. to learn or do a lot in a short period of time    |
| d. consistent   | 6  | 4. the feeling that you have good qualities          |
| e. to dread     | 2  | 5. to change continually                             |
| f. to cram      | 3  | 6. something done the same way over time             |
| g. flipside     | 1  | 7. something that you can't stop thinking about      |
| h. self-worth   | 4  | 8. to take something apart                           |
| i. to fluctuate | 5  | 9. someone who often stays up late                   |
| j. night owl    | 9  | 10. to show/to point out                             |
| k. to dismantle | 8  | 11. completely / no exaggeration                     |



4. Watch the video *How burnout makes us less creative by Rahaf Harfoush*<sup>1</sup> and answer the following questions:

a) Harfoush says that she 'suffered an episode of burnout.' What were some of the symptoms of this episode?

00:00

A few years ago, my obsession with productivity got so bad that I suffered an episode of burn-out that scared the hell out of me. I'm talking insomnia, weight gain, hair loss -- the works. I was so overworked that my brain literally couldn't come up with another idea.

b) What criticisms does Harfoush make regarding how companies adapted from an industrial based economy to a knowledge based economy?

00:50

OK, let's talk about productivity for a second. Historically, productivity as we know it today was used during the industrial revolution. It was a system that measured performance based on consistent output. You clocked into your shift and were responsible for creating X number of widgets on the assembly line. At the end of the day, it was pretty easy to see who worked hard and who hadn't. When we shifted to a knowledge economy, people suddenly had tasks that were much more abstract, things like writing, problem-solving or strategizing, tasks that weren't easy to measure. Companies struggled to figure out how to tell who was working and who wasn't, so they just adopted the old systems as best as they could, leading to things like the dreaded time sheet where everyone is under pressure to justify how they spend every second of their day.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dvhu2OK7ffg&ab\\_channel=TED](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dvhu2OK7ffg&ab_channel=TED)

c) According to Harfoush knowledge workers are expected to be both productive and creative. What is the problem with this?

02:02

But it's actually almost impossible for our brains to continuously generate new ideas with no rest. In fact, downtime is a necessity for our brain to recover and to operate properly. Consider that according to a team of researchers from the University of Southern California, letting our minds wander is an essential mental state that helps us develop our identity, process social interactions, and it even influences our internal moral compass. Our need for a break flies in the face of our cultural narrative about hustling, in other words, the stories that we as a society tell each other about what success looks like and what it takes to get there. Stories like the American Dream, which is one of our most deeply rooted beliefs. This tells us that if we work hard, we'll be successful.

d) According to Harfoush, what is the flipside of the idea of 'the American Dream'?

2:10

But there's a flip side. If you aren't successful, it must mean that you're not working hard enough. And if you don't think you're doing enough, of course you're going to stay late, pull all-nighters and push yourself hard even when you know better.

e) How much of their vacation leave does the average American worker take ?

03:03

Productivity has wrapped itself up in our self-worth, so that it's almost impossible for us to allow ourselves to stop working. The average US employee only takes half of their allocated paid vacation leave, further proving that even if we have the option to take a break, we don't.



5. Harfoush says we need to ask ourselves these 4 questions to make positive changes. Answer these questions and then discuss with a partner.

- Does being busy make you feel valuable?
- Who do you hold up as an example of success?
- Where did your ideas of work ethic come from?
- How much of who you are is linked to what you do?



6. Discuss the following with your class or partner:

- What did you think about Harfoush's video?
- Are you a night owl or an early bird?
- Are you a creative person? If so what inspires your creativity?
- What is the last creative thing you did? When did you do it? If it's been a long time, why is that?

- (If you have children) What creative things have you seen your children doing? Do you feel more creative around them?
- If you received 500 dollars for coming up with the best solution to an organisational problem, do you think you would be more or less creative?
- The founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics once said “We fail forward to success”. What do you think she meant by this? Have you ever “failed forward”?