First Choice Health®

Employee Assistance Program (FCH EAP)



Leading Through Tough Times: Protecting Your Energy To Support Your Team

Katie Best, LCSW | Director of Client Services EAP

When budgets get tight, staffing is short, and everyone is asked to "do more with less," leaders carry a double load. You are working hard to keep operations running smoothly while also serving as the primary shock absorber for your team's anxiety and stress. Leaders across industries are feeling the weight and strain of this dynamic time. Because leaders are used to pressing through fatigue, many don't realize they are burning out until they reach total exhaustion. As a leader and a therapist, I know that ignoring our well-being isn't sustainable. Stress isn't something we can eliminate entirely; what we can change is how we respond to it so we can stay grounded for the long haul.

Burnout Happens

Burnout often occurs when there is a mismatch between what you expected your job to be and what you are actually dealing with day-to-day. When resources are limited or expectations keep shifting, a lack of control can easily set in. The World Health Organization recognizes burnout as a workplace-related condition marked by deep emotional exhaustion, feeling detached or cynical about work, and a sense that your efforts aren't making enough of a difference.

How to Recognize Burnout

While burnout shares symptoms with clinical depression, it is primarily a response to workplace circumstances. Recognizing the following signs is an indicator that it is time to adjust.

- **Emotional and Physical Fatigue:** Feeling perpetually drained, dissatisfied with work, or noticing a drop in day-to-day performance.
- **Shifts in Mood:** Frustration, irritability, or heightened reactions to routine work challenges.
- **Physical and Behavioral Toll:** Changes in sleep or eating habits, stopping hobbies, or experiencing stress-related physical symptoms like headaches, back pain, or high blood pressure.

Practical Ways to Protect Your Well-Being
Real resilience isn't about making big changes, and real solutions do not happen overnight. It requires a willingness to step outside our comfort zone and tolerate a bit of as we try out new habits. Simple changes like the following can be implemented consistently over time for lasting results.

- **Shift Control Where You Can**
  - **Audit your day:** Look closely at where your energy goes. Try to balance energy-draining tasks with moments that connect you back to meaning and purpose.
  - **Keep daily goals realistic:** Giant "to-do" lists only fuel anxiety. Keep your daily list short and give yourself credit for completing core priorities. It's amazing how physically checking an item off a to-do list can give you energy to move on to the next task.
- **Create Transition Rituals**
  - **Mark the end of your shift:** Find a routine—whether it's your drive home, changing out of work clothes, listening to music, or taking a short walk—that helps you symbolically "take off the workday uniform."
  - **Remember your whole self:** Remind yourself that your "work self" is only one part of who you are. Protect time for family, friends, and things that bring you simple joy.
- **Protect Your Rest**
  - **Take 10-minute breathers:** Set aside 10 minutes in the morning or afternoon to clear your mind, practice slow, deep breathing, and focus on what is going well.
  - **Prioritize sleep:** Sleep deprivation is widespread and significantly increases the risk of mood disruptions and depression. Getting adequate rest is essential care for your mind and body.
  - **Put your phone down:** Too much screen time can contribute to anxiety, stress, and physical symptoms like headaches. Monitor your screen time and ensure you take breaks from your computer, phone, or other electronic devices.
- **Stay Connected**
  - **Leadership can feel isolating:** Having a trusted person or colleague you can speak with candidly reduces loneliness and gives you perspective when things get heavy.

Taking care of yourself isn't a luxury—it's what makes good leadership possible. Reaching out for support isn't a sign you can't handle your job; it's a smart, proactive way to keep yourself healthy. FCH EAP is your confidential sounding board and can help with:

- **Consultations:** Guidance on team dynamics, workplace stress, and leading through change.
- **Short-Term Counseling Referrals:** Confidential support from licensed professionals.
- **Team & Workplace Resources:** Practical training to help your entire crew stay resilient.

FCH EAP | Call us at 800-777-4114

If you or someone you know needs the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988 or use the chat function online at 988lifeline.org.