



# Trying to be Everything to Everyone: Let's Talk About Burnout

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## About This Talk

- What is Burnout and What is Unique About the Security Industry
- The Problem with Burnout Solutions
- Burnout Taxonomy and Taking the First Step to Reducing Burnout
- Examples of Burnout Motivators and Hidden Causes of Burnout
- Advices, Tips, and Resources
- Q & A

### Community Follow-Up Discussion

2:30pm in South Pacific J

Join me for a community session where we can take this information and apply it to some real-life personal situations

## About Me



Stacy Thayer, Ph.D., MBA

- Grew up in Boston, calling local BBSes and attending 2600 meetings. Founder of SOURCE Security Conferences in Boston, Seattle, Barcelona, and Dublin before it was acquired in 2014. Worked at security companies like Veracode and Netography.
- Went to college to study online communication and got a Ph.D. in Clinical and Organizational/Business Psychology and an MBA to be able to balance the business and social aspects of a work environment
- Research has explored online communication as it relates to depression and anxiety, and factors that contribute to job satisfaction and employment engagement in the technology sector, and burnout in technology, including the security industry
- Currently an Adjunct Professor of Cyberpsychology at Norfolk State University. Cyberpsychology is the study of how humans interact with technology.

# What is Burnout?

**Occupational Burnout** is clinically defined as a psychological syndrome that occurs due to chronic emotional **interpersonal stressors** on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016)

**Interpersonal** – relating to relationships or communication between people

# Responses to Burnout

Our responses to burnout are broken up into three key dimensions:

- **Emotional Exhaustion:** the feeling of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources
- **Cynicism:** a negative, overly detached, and indifferent attitude toward work\*
- **Professional Efficacy:** a decline of experienced competence and achievement in one's work

*\* A research study several other security professionals and I conducted in 2012 showed that security professionals were more likely to express burnout through cynicism*

## Burnout Can Impact All Parts of Your Life

- Not limited to one area of your life
- You are one person with many different parts of your life
- Feeling burnt out in one area of your life can lead you to feeling burnt out in other areas



# Burnout in the Security Industry

- **High levels of mental workload.** Must quickly and effectively respond to urgent cyber events, maintain hyper-vigilance, and experience high risk and job demands
- **Anticipate cyber-attacks.** Perform threat modeling, respond to many different data sources, lead incident response, filter out false positives, and manage exhausting and complicated data triage to maintain cyber-awareness
- **Shortage in staffing and increase in workload.** Shortage of talent and not enough budget or priority for headcount.
- **Often struggle to find their place within an organization.** Due to the specialized knowledge required to work in cybersecurity, research shows that confusing and inefficient reporting structures, changing job descriptions, resistance to internal security policies, and the need to balance technology and business acumen
- **Work is often not appreciated within the organization.** Budgets are not approved, security polices are seen as intrusive and time consuming, good work is rarely recognized or rewarded

# Commonly Found Solutions for Burnout

- Changing work patterns : working less, taking more breaks, avoiding overtime work, balancing work with the rest of one's life
- Developing coping skills: stress management, take a vacation, set boundaries
- Obtaining social support: interaction with friends, colleagues, and family
- Relaxation strategies: meditation, breathing exercises, new hobbies
- Promoting good health and fitness: work out, eat right, get good sleep
- Developing a better self-understanding: use various self-analytic techniques, counseling, or therapy

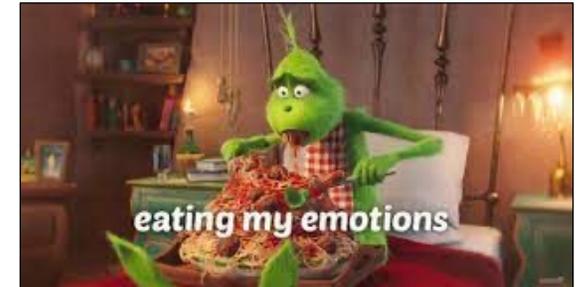
Thanks for the reminder to schedule some “self care”. I’ll be sure to add that to the long list of other sh💩 I don’t have time to get done.

Housewife Plus

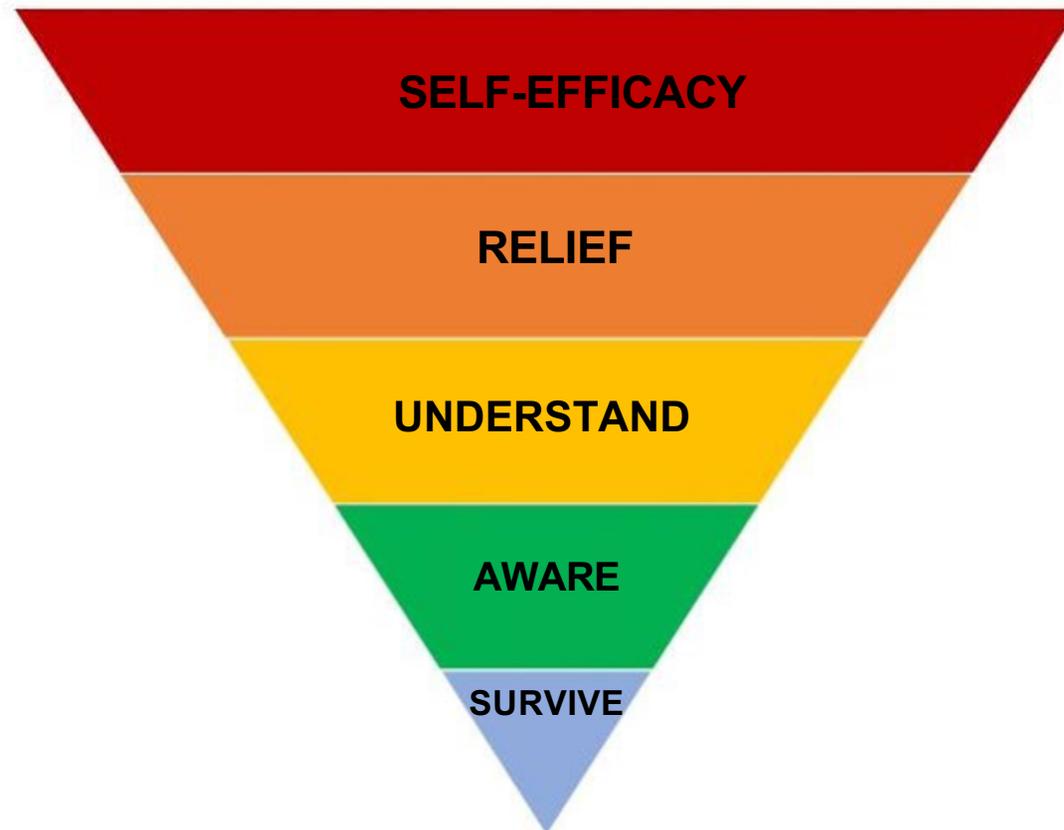
# The Realities of Burnout

Self care is cancelled,  
we're drinking  
whiskey and listening  
to Slayer.

“Have you been practicing  
self-care?”



# Burnout Taxonomy



## Taking the First Step to Reduce Burnout

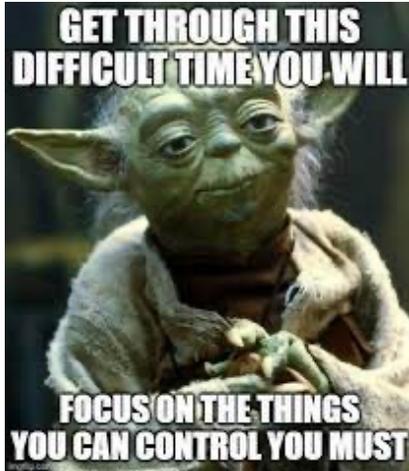
- Research shows that Social Learning Theory and Self-Efficacy are the most effective way to reduce burnout.
- This is the belief in your own ability to learn from a situation and control your behaviors to achieve a desired result. **The more that you learn about yourself and your relationship with burnout and your hidden triggers, the better you will be at managing it**
- Self-efficacy can help manage negative emotions and reactions, which can help you recognize and anticipate work related stressors and help reduce burnout symptoms
- The situational factors that impact burnout are often short term or fall into the “Can’t Change” bucket
- It’s asking you to do the work, but **THIS DOES NOT MEAN BURNOUT IS YOUR FAULT**

# What We Cannot Control

- Toxic work environment
- Lack of support
- Poor leadership/management
- Unsupportive HR
- Co-workers
- Challenges in the security industry



# What We Can Control



- Patterns of behaviors
- How you respond to triggers
- How much fears and insecurities affect you
- How you define your self-worth
- Your relationship with your work and your co-workers
- Where you place your boundaries and how you communicate them
- Your mental script and narrative

## Real World Example: Too much work and not enough resources

You have a backup of scans to perform and systems to audit and not enough time or staff to do them. You have already stayed late several times in the past week, and you are feeling overwhelmed by the never-ending list. They must get done but you are feeling increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed.

- 1. Emotional Exhaustion:** I will stay late and work as hard as I must in order to get this done. I will push myself as hard as I must. *Emotions: Depressed, anxious, approval seeking, sensation seeking*
- 2. Cynicism:** This is such poor management. I'm going to work my 9-5pm and if it doesn't get done, it's not my problem. *Emotions: anger, resentment, blaming*
- 3. Professional Efficacy:** I used to really enjoy doing this. I used to feel like I could whip through these and like I was awesome at this. Now I feel bogged down and like whatever I do, it's just not good enough. I don't even know if I am doing a good job at these anymore. *Emotions: Helpless, defeated, frustrated, let down, disappointed*

## Emotional Exhaustion: What Motivates to Push Yourself So Hard?

- Stimulation and the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that is difficult to find in other areas of your life?
- A desire for approval? To be recognized or praised for their work by their managers and coworkers?
- To be a White Knight? To help and protect an organization and the people in it?
- Personal pride? To be proud of the quality of work your produce?
- Overachiever? Fear Of Missing Out



Whatever the reason, by recognizing what drives you to care deeply about your work that you push yourself to the limit and beyond, the first step is the recognize why it happens and how it guides your sense of self worth.

# Cynicism: When Was Trust Broken?

- When was relationship damaged? When did you lose hope?
- Can that trust be regained? Do you even want to try to rebuild the relationship?
- Are you okay being indifferent with your work and maintaining status quo?
- Do you feel like your work matters? Do you feel like you matter to your job?
- Can you let go of the resentment and negativity?



Cynicism is often the most challenging to overcome because it deals with a lost of trust and hope and there are often feelings of betrayal or rejection. It's often not that you don't care, but that you do not feel safe to care or to invest yourself in your work.

# Professional Efficacy: When Did You Stop Feeling Good Enough?

- What does success look like? What does failure look like? What is good enough? What does a good employee look like? A good parent? Partner?
- Does Imposter Syndrome come into play here?
- How often do you feel fear or anxiety? How often do you fear losing your job?
- When was the last time you feel like you were good at something? When was the last time you felt valued?

Professional Efficacy can lead to the core of reducing burnout because it is the key to our self worth and value and how effective we are at setting boundaries

# Burnout Taxonomy

**SELF-EFFICACY**

Knowing your self worth and value, finding what brings you joy, being able to say no without fear, recognizing the triggers and signs of burnout

**RELIEF**

Accepting our limitations, communicating our needs, setting healthy boundaries, that we feel confident to enforce, having solutions and coping strategies

**UNDERSTAND**

Acknowledge what we can and can't control, recognize what motivates our behaviors and drive, and what we can do about it

**AWARE**

Realizing we are burnt out, we need help, and that we want to be the source and the catalyst for change, start to recognize triggers

**SURVIVE**

Suffering, may be anxious and depressed, may use unhealthy coping mechanisms

## Advice and Tips

**Know your limits, and your goals, and how to realistically achieve them.** What are your goals, where do you want to be. Do not overwhelm yourself with all the things you should do. It's ok to start small and to have limits. We all have them and if we do not know what they are, we "should all over ourselves" and put ourselves in jeopardy.

**Ask for help.** Experts comes in many forms. Life coaches, therapists, friends, books, etc. Professionals can help identify triggers, patterns of behaviors, and can help create goals and establish boundaries.

**Recognize the triggers.** Know your toxic inner critic/outer critic and what triggers a negative response. You can write it down to look for patterns in your behavior.

**Set expectations and get specific about what is being asked of you.** Set the bar. Do you need to work 10 hours a day? Do you need to work weekends? Do you need to be everything to everyone? Are their choices you both can make that can set boundaries? The **42% Rule** says that 42% of your day should be spent resting or doing something stress-relieving.

**What energizes you?** This goes beyond coping mechanisms or stress relief. Something that makes you feel good about yourself, gives you feelings of self-worth, and makes you feel like the awesome person you are.

**What do you want?** While it it would be nice if the world acted the way it should, it often does not. However, it is important to have an idea of what you want in life. What are your goals? What are you working for? What motivates you? Where are you going and what will it look like when you get there? Be sure the celebrate each step along the way.

# What Are Your Resources and Tools?

- Professional Licensed Therapist
- Life Coach
- Physical/Personal Trainer
- Self Care Coach
- Communication Coach
- Apps: Mood Mission, Happify, Headspace, Sunset Health
- Self-Help Books
- Career Books/Guidance
- Multi-lingual research
- Online Support Groups/Message Boards/Chat Rooms



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