



**Resources for a  
Workforce in Transition**

# Thriving Amid Times of High Job Turnover

Even with the pandemic still uncontrolled in many regions, major industries across the globe are reporting job turnover rates of 35 percent and higher. Worse, this unprecedented level of turnover is showing no signs of retreat.

In one recent survey, more than half of employees polled in North America said they planned to switch jobs in 2021. Another study found that a quarter of workers planned to quit their jobs outright once the pandemic fully subsided. Respondents cited many reasons for seeking change, including burnout, need for better work-life balance, disconnection from their employer and a diminishment in company culture.

Whatever the reason for the turnover, the impact on those who remain on the job has been significant. Office friendships and institutional knowledge have been lost, work has begun to pile up, and the continuity that helps careers thrive has been broken. Add to this the uncertainty and upheaval caused by the pandemic itself, and you have the perfect recipe for stress, anxiety and burnout.

If you find yourself in the role of office survivor, the following information can help you avoid the worst of the potential impacts so you can continue to seek opportunities to thrive in this new workplace landscape.

## Buffering Against Burnout

Burnout has become especially pervasive amid the fast-paced culture and chronic stress we have grown used to in the past decade. The constant juggling of work, family and other responsibilities had major implications for health even before being exacerbated by the pandemic. Now burnout has become a pandemic of its own in many areas.

### Signs of Burnout

- Excessive fatigue
- Insomnia
- Susceptibility to illness
- Irritability and mood disorders
- Errors at work
- Decreased productivity
- Loss of overall vitality

## 3 Rs to Counteract Burnout

### Recognize

Recognize signs of burnout by determining which of the below is relatable and how strongly on a scale of 1-10.

- **Exhaustion.** Immense emotional, physical and/or cognitive fatigue, dread waking up to face responsibilities of the day
- **Cynicism.** Feeling unengaged or disconnected from the purpose of your daily responsibilities, loss of motivation, bleak outlook
- **Inefficacy.** Lack of productivity and feelings of incompetence: "I don't think I am making a difference"

### Respond

- **Seek support.** Whether a partner, family, friend, or licensed mental health professional, talk with someone who will listen without judgment.
- **Focus on what you can control.** Shift energy and attention to what is in your power to improve your situation. What is the next step that can be taken?
- **Find meaning.** Reflect on what is meaningful in your day to day. How can your experience shape your future or purpose?
- **Set boundaries.** Be aware of what you commit to. Saying "no" allows you to say "yes" to the commitments you actually want to make.
- **Disconnect from technology.** Set a time each day to take a break from your laptop, phone, email, and social media.
- **Energy balance.** Make sure to identify and incorporate activities that give you energy to help counteract those that drain you.

## Recharge

- Weave in small behaviors throughout the day to start to detach, increase your emotional threshold, and build resilience. Some ideas: meditation, a short walk, listening to music, or quality time with your family.
- Whether you have two minutes or two hours, every minute you can take for yourself improves the quality of your day and life.
- Consider a “menu” of options or rituals for different amounts of time you have available throughout the day, week and month.
  - 10-minute morning meditation
  - 5-minute mindfulness breaks
  - Weekly hike in the woods
  - Monthly massage

Once you have determined the rituals or activities you want to insert into your schedule, consider booking them into your calendar or planner. Your emotional and physical well-being must be a top priority in order to do your best with other priorities.

# Navigating Workplace Change

Many of us will be returning to a changed workplace, whether in the way we do work, the people we're working with or even our attitude about working. Such changes can leave us feeling vulnerable, anxious and even angry.

Whenever life throws us off course, it presents an opportunity to pause, reassess and reflect on what we truly want to create. Then we can move forward feeling more on course.

One's perspective about what's happening is critical. With a job transition – or any type of change – including a troubled relationship or unplanned life adjustment, one voice within us states, "Why is this happening to me?" while another voice may ask, "What's the lesson in this for me?" or "How do I use this experience to help me grow, and how might I take advantage of this chance for a fresh start?" While it is important to be realistic about all aspects of life transitions and to acknowledge feelings of sadness, anger, frustration and fear, your next move is a crucial choice. Do you want to remain stuck in pain and stress, or are you ready to focus your energy forward, looking at how best to learn from the experience?

Change can be scary and may leave you feeling overwhelmed. Follow the steps below to get started. Keep in mind: It is dangerous to oversimplify the complex nature of any life transition, so tailor these suggestions to your own unique reality.

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** Let yourself feel what you feel, and find a way to release some of the emotion. Physical activity, writing down your thoughts or talking with others can help let this energy out and prevent the distraction of negative thoughts and self-defeating behaviors.
- **Reflect and refocus.** Take stock of what you still have, and express gratitude, such as, "I still have my ability to think, my special talents and my aspirations. I'm grateful for relationships and for my family." Take a walk, a bike ride or a longer hot shower than usual, and ask yourself some powerful questions, such as, "How do I want to feel three months from now? What will it take to get there? What does my ideal week look like? What could I do to realize that? Who could help with that?"
- **Choose.** Entertain the notion that everything is a choice. Decide what you want to choose as the next chapter of your life. Simply choosing, however, doesn't guarantee you'll get it. The power of your intentions makes a huge difference. Feeling like you have a choice is certainly better than feeling like you have no influence, so why not adopt this philosophy? Choosing what matters most and what you'll honor as authentic priorities is absolutely up to you. It is about being resilient and truly empowered to choose your life's course rather than being a victim of circumstance and replaying old thought patterns.
- **Get into action.** Start by visualizing how you want to feel or where you want to be, perhaps three months from now. Work backwards from this goal until you find something small enough that you can do the next day or the next week. Picking first steps and finding the right people for encouragement and support will help you realize your goal.
- **Utilize your Employee Assistance Program.** Did you know that your EAP is a free, confidential service for you and your household family members that can take on your To-Do List and provide you with the amount of time necessary to manage the changes around you? Examples of services include:
  - Personalized concierge resources including child-, elder- and pet-care solutions, transportation and local errand resources, low-cost home repair and utility assistance, etc.
  - Telephonic appointments with on-staff attorneys and financial planners to assist with personal legal matters and financial issues that may have arisen during your time away from the workplace.
  - Confidential guidance from a local counselor to provide stress management assistance during the time of transition.

# Surviving Change and Getting Back to Work

Nearly every business experiences workplace turnover, especially after an economic shock such as one caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Industries across the U.S. are experiencing unprecedented numbers of open positions as employees reassess their career plans. Knowing that, however, doesn't make it any less difficult for those who remain at a workplace. For those facing such a situation, the following information can help.

## How to Cope

Anxiety, depression and confusion are typical reactions to workplace turnover. You may feel happy to have a job you enjoy, yet feel less than optimistic about the company. These feelings are valid. Instead of dwelling on the recent change, however, try to keep an open mind and a positive outlook, which can make it easier to cope with the situation.

- Be objective
- Find constructive ways to express your thoughts and feelings
- Balance your time carefully
- Don't try to cope by using alcohol or drugs
- Focus on enhancing your work skills
- Rise to the challenge

## Talking with Management

When job turnover occurs, you are likely to have questions and comments, not to mention anxiety. Some topics you might want to discuss with your manager during this time might include:

- The need for increased guidance, leadership and open communication
- Honesty about future expectations
- Changes to expect in your duties and those of your colleagues
- Inside opportunities to create new challenges and professional growth
- Assistance with time management. (Remember, now, more than ever, balancing work and home is vital to your emotional health and productivity.)
- Suggestions for taking an active, positive role in improving morale among your colleagues

## Accepting and Moving On

So you made it through the turnover period. One way to deal with the situation is to accept what has happened and keep moving forward. Maybe this is an opportunity to advance within the company; a chance to learn additional industry-related skills and management tools; and a way to showcase your value.

# Managing your Emotions in the Workplace

Everyone experiences emotions at work. We get frustrated with bosses giving more work when they don't understand how much we already have. We get upset with co-workers who don't do their jobs so we cannot do ours. We get angry with irate customers who don't realize we are only trying to help. We worry about an uncertain future, especially in times like these.

But with all these emotions, most people don't think they have anything to do with how they are feeling. They believe their emotions are a result of an external cause, i.e., the circumstances or situations of their lives or the behavior of others. It looks that way because that's how you have been taught to think about emotions. It just isn't true.

The first key to handling your emotions in the workplace is to recognize that you have something to do with it! Actually the root word is emote, which implies an action or moving energy. So, emotions are an attempt to express outwardly what we believe.

How you feel is a reflection of how you think. Negative thoughts produce negative emotions and behaviors. Positive thoughts produce positive emotions and behaviors. So emotion is not something that happens to you, it's actually something you are doing.

## Managing Thoughts

### Identify Facts vs. Beliefs

Our thoughts about what is true in our lives cause our emotional responses. Thoughts are our perceptions and are comprised of attitudes, prejudices, judgments and beliefs that we think are true. When faced with a situation, ascertain the exact facts about the incidents in your life; separate your beliefs about these facts right in the beginning.

### Identify Beliefs About Yourself

A primary influence on our abilities to deal successfully with life's challenges is our own belief about us. If you believe yourself to be a loving and kind person, yet you are always feeling sad, tired or angry, work to uncover the true facts from your irrational and unproductive beliefs so you can begin to change.

### Accept Responsibility for your Thoughts

Having discovered negative self-beliefs, you need to ask yourself whether it is good to hold such beliefs. Of course, your answer should be "no." Recognize that, for whatever reason, you have chosen to accept irrational self-defeating beliefs in the past and you are going to choose to believe something more positive in the future. Your thoughts are not determined by others or by what happens around you; your thoughts result from your own choice. Change and growth occur by taking responsibility for what you are choosing to believe within yourself.

## Managing Emotions

### Be Aware of "Doing" an Emotion

There is a moment when you decide that a particular emotional response is the action to take in a situation. In some cases that moment is unconscious, but often it is a conscious decision. Although it requires much practice, become more aware at the onset of an emotion and you will realize you have the ability to choose a better more productive emotional response in the future.

### Accept Responsibility for your Emotions

You feel what you choose to feel and express what you want to express. What "they" did may be very wrong, but that does not obligate you to feel a particular way in response. You can give yourself the ability to respond in new and more caring ways for yourself and others. You can always clean up your act!

## Managing Behaviors

### Identify your Desired Behavioral Goals

How do you want to come across in a situation? What is the desired outcome for the situation you are in? Behavior is motivated by conscious and unconscious desires, so become aware of the conscious desires of a situation.

### Identify the Relationship to your Present Behavior and your Desired Goals

The way you behave is often counterproductive to your goals. So recognize the difference between the ways you are responding and what the outcome is and you will increase the possibility of choosing the most appropriate behavior.

## Getting Back into the Habit of Success

There are some basic habits shared by everyone who achieves success on the job. As we get back into the swing of the workplace, it's probably not a bad idea to keep these habits in mind:

- **List your to-dos for the week and prioritize.** Keep in mind that prioritizing your tasks takes a lot of mental effort. Try planning when your brain is freshest. For some people, this may mean first thing in the morning; others may prefer to wait until later in the day.
- **Organize tasks by importance and how long you think you will need to complete each task.** Make sure to coordinate your schedule with when you are more productive.
- **Establish a routine for daily tasks.** A routine can help make you more efficient. For example, if you need extra time to get focused in the morning, answer routine emails when you get in. This will give you time to settle in and prepare to take on bigger tasks that require more focus.
- **Schedule similar tasks back-to-back.** Try making all your phone calls one after another or writing and sending emails all at one time.
- **Take breaks.** Complex tasks, like writing or strategizing, take a lot of brain work. It is critical to give your brain a chance to relax. Before you begin, take a short walk or socialize with a co-worker. When you get back to work, it will likely be easier to focus.
- **Don't multitask.** When you do, you divide your attention between two activities. It is easier to forget things because your focus is split. Focus on one item at a time to ensure that you catch any mistakes and do not have to redo the task.
- **Go slow.** It will actually save you time in the long run. Instead of rushing a response to a critical email, take the time to write a thoughtful and thorough reply. This will help prevent confusion. When writing a report, work slowly and talk with others about your conclusions. Doing so will help you better understand your findings.
- **Organize your day around your body's energy levels.** Tackle your most important work when you have the most energy and save low-intensity tasks for periods when energy is low.
- **Take care of your health.** It's hard to be productive and successful when you're tired, are battling a health condition or your body is craving nutrients you're not giving it due to a poor diet.



## The Work Day Flow

Creating and following a daily work routine can help you stay focused and organized, especially when returning to the workplace after an unplanned absence or other disruption. Consider integrating the following information into your daily schedule:

- **Get your sleep.** Most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep every night.
- **Have breakfast.** Studies show that eating breakfast can improve concentration and performance.
- **Drink water.** Keep a water bottle on your desk to stay hydrated throughout the day. For every 100 milligrams of caffeine you have (the amount present in two cups of black tea or one cup of coffee) you should have a cup of water.
- **Move.** Set aside a few minutes throughout your day to get up and stretch your legs. Taking a break from your desk allows your mind to refresh and regain focus.

## Getting Along With Co-workers

Developing good work relationships can be difficult because everyone has different personalities, working styles, goals, attitudes and moods. Add to that all the job turnover and the stress people are feeling in trying to regain a sense of normalcy after the recent outbreak, and you can see how conflict can arise. Working well with others involves understanding human nature, being willing to compromise, and looking beyond the surface to understand people and the reasons for their actions.

Employees who get along with different types of people in the workplace show off their flexibility and adaptability, two traits that are highly sought after by employers. For a company to be able to regain its momentum and be successful, employees need to respect each other and work together. The most important thing to remember when dealing with co-workers, especially difficult co-workers, is to remain professional. Here's how:

- Treat others as you would like to be treated
- Keep an open mind
- Focus on team spirit
- Be cheerful, and do not concentrate on minor disappointments or issues
- Be polite
- Never lie or spread gossip
- Never confront or ignore a co-worker
- Never make promises to others that you cannot keep
- Be kind and encouraging to co-workers
- Take an interest in their lives and activities
- Do not discuss topics in the office that would make co-workers uncomfortable
- Respect a co-worker's decision not to participate in a conversation that makes him or her uncomfortable
- Do not worry about receiving praise or credit; concentrate on doing a good job and keep a good work ethic, and praise will naturally follow
- Try to work out problems with co-workers before going to a supervisor
- Respect the moods of fellow employees (understand that everyone has a bad day every now and then)
- Try to solve problems instead of creating them

# Dealing With Difficult People

Work relationships can be challenging because people have different personalities, working styles, goals, attitudes and moods. This can especially be true these days, when most people are feeling elevated levels of stress as they work to re-establish their routines amid a changed landscape for careers and social lives. Working well with others involves understanding human nature, being willing to compromise and looking beyond the surface to understand people and the reasons for their actions. Here are some ways you can improve your interactions with people at work.

## Co-workers

- Always remain professional.
- Be polite, keep an open mind and treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Stay positive and do not concentrate on minor disappointments or issues.
- Do not discuss topics in the office that would make co-workers uncomfortable.

## Managers, Supervisors and Bosses

- Do not be afraid to talk to the boss about problems or questions.
- Express feelings in positive ways.
- Maintain a professional relationship with mutual respect.

## Customers

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Be polite, even when a customer is rude.
- Always be eager to provide assistance.
- Apologize to the customer if he or she is dissatisfied.
- Try to resolve any issues the customer presents.

# Job Stress in Stressful Times

Even under normal circumstances, everyone experiences some amount of stress in their occupation. In extraordinary times such as we are currently facing, stress will likely be a problem for most if not all of us. Over time, stress can affect job performance, impair physical and mental health and cause strains on your relationships. Although job stress may be unavoidable, it can be manageable when you adopt the appropriate techniques and attitude.

## Understanding Stress

Stress is a normal response to life changes. An ability to react to stress is crucial for human survival. Each of us possesses an innate “fight or flight” response mechanism to potentially harmful or dangerous situations. When faced with stress, the adrenal glands secrete stimulating hormones; extra glucose is burned for energy; the heart rate accelerates; blood is channeled to working muscles; and your brain releases epinephrine, cortisone and other hormones to get you ready for the challenge.

While stress can keep you sharp and alert, prolonged stress can strain the body. Unrelieved tension builds up, causing an array of physiological and psychological symptoms that may include:

- A weakened immune system (lower white blood cell count)
- Headaches and migraines
- Stomachaches and ulcers
- Back and muscular pain
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Concentration difficulties
- Chronic fatigue
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Dizziness and lightheadedness
- Depression
- Panic attacks

Job stress also may lead to:

- Deterioration in work relationships
- Decreased productivity
- Low workplace morale
- Work absenteeism
- Substance abuse

## Common Causes of Job Stress

Job stress often is caused by:

- Job insecurity (downsizing, co-worker terminations)
- Lack of creativity and flexibility in your position
- Deadline pressures
- Excessive workloads
- A workplace change (e.g., department restructuring, office relocation)
- A leaner workforce and limited resources
- Stressed co-workers and bosses
- Intimidating technology
- Information overload

## Ways to Cope with Workplace Stress

If you feel yourself getting stressed about your job, try these tips to decrease your stress level and improve your performance:

- **Identify your stressors.** By recognizing the reasons behind your stress, you can learn to feel more in control and work to change the stress. Determine whether the stress you experience at work is due to worries or conflict at home.

- **Avoid setting too many lofty goals.** Set realistic expectations, and attempt challenges that are doable.
- **Anticipate boss and co-worker stress.** Prepare a few responses to stressful situations that may be presented to you by a supervisor or co-worker. For example, instead of reacting hastily to a question or request by a co-worker, ask whether you can get back to the person with your decision at a later time.
- **Learn to delegate responsibilities.** If you are a manager, empower your subordinates to take on more responsibilities and make more decisions. Encourage this as an opportunity for growth and training for a possible future promotion. Divide extra tasks fairly and reasonably.
- **Be more assertive in your responses to requests.** Be honest, but tactful. Learn to seek alternatives or to say no when necessary.
- **Examine your schedule.** Is your work schedule compatible with your home/personal life? Perhaps you can try a different shift, vary your work days or arrange to work from home on certain days.
- **Redefine your role.** Work with your supervisor on revising your job description to include more creative, empowering and satisfying duties.
- **Consider a different position, department or work location.** Ask your boss if this is possible.

Here are some suggestions for getting organized to eliminate clutter and reduce stress. These tips are especially important as we all begin to resume our workplace routines:

- **Organize your workspace.** Rearrange it for maximum efficiency. Create lists and schedules to help you meet deadlines.
- **Tackle one task at a time if possible.** List your duties in order of priority, and complete one at a time. This can make you feel more organized and in control, leading to a sense of greater accomplishment.
- **Learn time-management techniques.** Take a class or read books on how to better manage your time.
- **Do not procrastinate.** Tackle your most difficult projects first. Putting them off may lead to increased anxiety and stress.

Relaxation and exercise are effective ways to reduce stress. Follow these ideas:

- **Take occasional breaks.** Listen to your body. If you feel tired, nervous, tense or have achy muscles, take a break. Step away from your work for a few minutes, or practice relaxation techniques to recharge your mind and body. Do not work through lunch; take a real break.
- **Take breaks between meetings.** Try not to schedule too many meetings back to back.
- **Practice yoga and stretching exercises.** These can relieve tension, make your body more limber and flexible, and produce an overall calming effect.
- **Create an exercise routine.** Use your lunch break to work out or go for a brisk walk, or exercise before or after work. Exercise has been proven to work off stress by burning off excess adrenaline and relieving tension.
- **Practice breathing exercises.** Drawing slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm promotes a more efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide than chest or shoulder breathing. Exhale slowly and evenly. If you are highly stressed, try this while lying on your back.
- **Practice progressive muscle-relaxation techniques.** These involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. For example, make a fist, and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Finally, relax your hand, and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your other hand, your neck, your face, limbs, etc.
- **Try meditation.** By sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes and freeing your mind from its many concerns for even a few minutes each day, you can learn to achieve relaxation quickly.
- **Attempt imagery techniques.** Try concentrating on an image that symbolizes your stress, such as a giant ball that slowly begins to shrink; you also can let your mind go blank. Try the infinity exercise: draw and continue to trace the infinity sign slowly without losing eye contact. Alternate drawing hands, then trace the sign with both hands. Draw the sign in the air with your fingertips if you do not have pen and paper. This exercise stimulates peripheral vision and produces a calming effect.
- **Ergonomically improve your workspace.** A more supportive, comfortable chair, desk and computer accessories may reduce physical stress.

- **Socialize with co-workers.** Do not be an island; strike up interesting conversations with fellow employees to release tension.
- **Take advantage of paid days off.** Consider spreading your days off over several weeks instead of taking them all at once.
- **Minimize taking work home.** Enjoy your time away from work, and use it to recharge yourself. Teach yourself to be efficient at work so that you can enjoy your time at home.
- **Get involved with hobbies.** Join a work-sponsored sports team. Take an art class. Stay active with your children's sports and activities.
- **Learn to laugh more at life.** Try to find humor in negative outcomes. Relieve tension by laughing at your mistakes and faults and working to improve them.
- **Consider counseling.** Talk therapy with a professional can release pent-up anxiety and prove to be an effective outlet for discharging unhealthy stress.

Remember that stress affects not only job performance, but also career satisfaction. Be aware of the consequences stress is imposing on your life, and make a commitment to reduce your stress level.

## Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress)

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