

Preventing Instructor Burnout

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by

Vic Richardson

Farm Business Management Instructor  
Owatonna, Minnesota

The Farm and Ranch Business Management Instructor of today is faced with pressures from many sources. We are expected to assist rural America in any and every way possible. Of course our major responsibility of providing farm business management education and assisting our farmer-rancher cooperators in obtaining a year-end business enterprise analysis is always present. But some of our added duties and responsibilities now include assistance in lender-debtor mediations, debt restructuring, monthly computerized farm and ranch records, periodic cash-flow updates for our cooperators, income tax advice and implications, government program interpreter, computerized farm and ranch decision aids, profitable commodity marketing strategies, community and area public relations for agriculture, etc.

This busy, frustrated instructor also has the stress and pressure of families, social organizations and church. Every individual is exposed to these types of challenges, but not every individual is also carrying the professional load we also bear. As a result, the actual and potential burnout rate among Farm and Ranch Business Management Instructors is great. However, steps can and should be taken to correct or change this path to destruction.

Buildings occasionally burn out. Where there once had been activity, there are now only crumbling reminders of energy and life. Some bricks or concrete may be left; some outlines of windows. Indeed, the outer shell may seem almost intact. Only if you venture inside will you be struck by the full force of the desolation. Likewise, people, as well as buildings, sometimes burn out.

Under the strain of living in our complex world, our inner resources are consumed as if by fire, leaving a great emptiness inside, although our outer shells may be more or less unchanged. The typical individual who is burned out or approaching that condition displays these characteristics: their lives seem to have lost meaning; they are unable to get along with family, friends, and co-workers; they are disillusioned with their marriages and careers; they are tired, filled with frustration, and forced to put forth increasing amounts of energy to maintain the pace they have set for themselves.

For the burned out individual, energy is turned into ennui, enthusiasm into anger, and optimism to despair. The harder such an individual works and plays, the more stubbornly satisfaction seems to elude him.

Burn-out is robbing our profession of what it can least

afford to lose: high-achievers. These are not failure-oriented or habitually self-destructive people. On the contrary, they are the ones most likely to succeed. Much of the reason for such devastation must be attributed to the times we live in, the swift acceleration of change and the depersonalization of work situations.

All of us experience the tiredness brought about by the various demands of the job. The candidate for Burn-out responds by pushing himself even more. Work becomes paramount, neglecting health and family in the process. For such an individual to turn the tide, he must teach himself new ways of looking at work and dealing with it.

The Farm and Ranch Business Management Instructor of today is caught with a combination of forces, many of which are unable to be controlled - the sheer number of people worked with, the inadequate office, the lack of proper training, difficult administrators to deal with and the lack of sympathy from the general community. When these factors are combined with the natural forces everyone experiences, problems arise.

Here are some questions you should ask yourself to gauge your susceptibility to being burned out:

- \* Do you have a sense of depletion, of being burned out?
- \* Is something wrong with the relationship you're in?
- \* Does the position you worked so hard to attain seem meaningless to you now?
- \* Do your children seem restless and remote?
- \* Are co-workers goofing off?
- \* Is the organization a maze of red tape and foul-ups?
- \* Are friends no longer as stimulating?
- \* Do you seek increasingly dangerous diversions to bring a sense of liveliness or joy into your life?
- \* Would you like to pack it all in and run away?

If you find yourself agreeing with these questions, it's time to start looking for answers. Maybe, you're showing signs of burn-out, and if you are, there's a lot you can do about it.

Burn-out signals not despair but hope. Recognized and attended to, it can become a positive energy force, signifying that the time has come for a cease and desist action, a hard look at yourself, and a change to something new. In every fire, there are glowing embers. You can use them to rekindle the spark.

Some further questions to ask yourself are:

- \* Are your days marked by fatigue and tension?
- \* Where's that old dynamic you who used to start every day with enthusiasm and vigor?
- \* Why is the life you embarked upon with such high expectations letting you down at every turn?
- \* Why does it seem you have gotten what you wanted only to find you don't want it? ;;;

There are answers to those questions.

As Farm and Ranch Business Management Instructors we make excessive demands on ourselves, all the time draining ourselves of energy. Our accomplishments must become ever worthier to prove the rightness of the exhausting struggle. It seems that to maintain our position, we must constantly excel. Unfortunately, the harder we try, the more we impair our efficiency. About the only thing we succeed in doing is burning ourselves out more. If we do achieve our goals, we find little pleasure in them because we're too tired to enjoy them. So our efforts end in disappointment; our attitudes in cynicism. Our resources exhaust themselves. Our endeavors produce nothing.

A person who is burning out is not on the surface, a very sympathetic figure. He or she may be cranky, critical, angry, rigid, resistant to suggestions, and given to behavior patterns that turn people off.

Burn-out is not a condition that gets better by being ignored. Nor is it any kind of disgrace. On the contrary, it's a problem born of good intentions. The people who fall prey to it are, for the most part, decent individuals who have striven hard to reach a goal. Their schedules are busy, and whatever the project or job, they can be counted on to do more than their share.

Often, burn-out is the consequence of a work situation in which the person gets the feeling he's batting his head against the wall day after day, year after year. The helping professions, such as the teaching of Farm and Ranch Business Management Education, are a good example. We hope to have an impact on the lives we deal with.

A Burn-out is "someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward." Whenever the expectation level is dramatically opposed to reality and the person persists in trying to reach that expectation, trouble is on the way. Deep inside, friction is building up, the inevitable result of which will be depletion of the individual's resources an attrition of his vitality, energy, and ability to function.

Burn-out is defined as: To deplete oneself, to exhaust one's physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by one's self or by the values of society.

Not every personality is susceptible to Burn-out. It would be virtually impossible for the underachiever to get into that state. Or the happy-go-lucky individual with fairly modest aspirations. Burn-out is pretty much limited to dynamic, charismatic, goal-oriented men or women or to determined idealists. These are the people who are overcommitted or overdedicated. Often, such a person's goals have been externally imposed. Somehow, he embarked on his present course because it was expected of him.

Possibly you have occasional flashes that life has become one huge burden, that your calendar is fuller than you can handle. But because of habit or expectations, you push through those thoughts and drive yourself forward. If this is the case, take a good, hard look inside.

Dr. Herbert J. Freudenberger in his book Burn-Out provided the process to follow in taking a good, hard look inside. That process is as follows:

"First think about your image, that competent you others have come to expect so much of. Think about your schedule, the tasks you perform, your family's expectations, your own expectations of yourself. Get a pad and write a short vignette of the 'you' the world sees and hears every day. Then put your pad aside and close your eyes. Let that other you emerge. The real you that's tucked away beneath all those layers. The one you see first thing in the morning when you walk into the bathroom to prepare for the day ahead. The one you get brief glimpses of when you're all by yourself and feeling kind of beat. Now let that real you speak. Hear some of his or her feelings. And for once, listen. Don't shut that voice away. It may have important things to say.

There's a chance, the first time you look for this neglected part of yourself, that you won't get much of a message. The voice may come through a little muffled, the picture a bit out of focus. After all, it's been a long time. It may take a few sessions to establish what is, in essence, a new relationship.

Whether you get a lot or a little, however, turn to a fresh page of your pad and write a second vignette. Even if only fragments of thoughts came through, jot them down. Whatever feelings you noticed - no matter how fleeting - include them. They'll be important later, and right now, they'll let you start comparing the two "yous." As you get your first real look at the differences between them, you'll be taking a big step toward closing the gap. And if you're on a Burn-out course, that gap has to be closed. Since being out of touch with, or shutting off, large parts of yourself is a primary contributor to Burn-

out, your greatest protection against it is self-awareness.

No one on the outside can effectively point out your inner conflicts. Even the most skilled professional can only guide you to seeing them for yourself. You have to be willing to look honestly and deeply and to incur some pain, but you'll be saving yourself a thousand times more pain later on. As you continue reading, you'll find many concrete measures you can take to help yourself. But, in order for those measures to work, these excursions into self-awareness are imperative. The more you know about yourself, the better. And if you think you're ready to take a risk, there's one other thing you can do right now: TELL SOMEONE YOU TRUST ONE SMALL FACT YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF. Share a nonperfection. If you don't feel ready, just keep the possibility in mind and, in the meantime, share it with yourself. If you think you can try it comfortably, then by all means do. You don't have to go into a lengthy explanation, nor do you have to be overly revealing. Something as simple as, 'I've been doing some thinking and I realize I'm very tired,' will do. Or 'I'm disenchanted', or 'I'm sad a lot lately'. Or 'I'm getting little joy out of life'. Or 'I'm eating too much, drinking too much, smoking too much'. Or whatever it is you're feeling.

Telling will make it more real for you. And more than likely, you'll feel a great sense of relief at having it out in the open. The important thing is not to expect too much at first. Remember, the other person isn't familiar with this side of you, any more than you are. You may get a startled reaction or none at all, but that doesn't matter. What counts at this point is that you're letting the authentic you speak. You are pushing the image aside a little."

Creating the image was probably a good idea at the time. It filled some existing need. The trouble is the human body is a creature of habit, and habits aren't easy to break. Role playing becomes so much a part of the person that he doesn't even know he's doing it. If we reviewed our lives every couple of years the way we check our clothes closets, we might discard outmoded behavior the way we discard outmoded clothing. But while we can be objective about our wardrobes, it's much more difficult to evaluate ourselves.

Just as individuals build protective facades for themselves, so do groups, and since the members of the group pick up on the image and feed it back to each other, it becomes reinforced a thousand-fold. This is especially true for teachers of Farm and Ranch Business Management Education. As a group, we create a picture of our role approaching the Super Hero. We not only are expected to do the basics, but to continually perform additional tasks whenever needed. The principles we abide with are passed out in the form of rules and regulations.

If you are burning out, it is imperative to integrate the "you" that's been suppressed for so long and the "you" of the image. Each one represents a valid side of you and can be a

powerful source of energy. If half this energy is being used to suppress the other half, it's no wonder one burns out.

As you examine the two yous, you are taking a big step toward integration and vitality. Separation leads to burn-out and burn-out is a killer of energy. You need your full supply to combat burn-out. By releasing the inner you, you'll be increasing your strength and authenticating your image. You'll be making it possible for yourself to use your image instead of being consumed by it.

It's not always easy to see the signs of burn-out since they've been building up over a long period of time. But one of the surest ways you can tell if you're burning out is to look at your energy level. If it is noticeably lower than it used to be, something is wrong.

At the beginning of burn-out, you try to deny it by working harder. People around you may realize you're not accomplishing anything, but you don't realize it. You feel abused and put upon and you blame your tiredness on your increasing workload. You begin to hate your job and your surroundings and everyone connected with them. If you feel your energy ebbing, there are things you ought to be doing about it. And one of the things you don't want to do is deny the fact.

By trusting the real you when it suggests imposing some limitations, you'll become stronger, not weaker as you fear. You will stop draining yourself, and when you do participate in an event, you'll have something real to offer. Give your image permission to rest awhile and stop being buffeted about what people will think. That won't be easy for your proud-spirited image to go along with, but if you can accomplish it, congratulate yourself. You've taken a big step in the right direction.

Try some measures that will dispel the symptoms instead of making them. One very positive step you can take is to break your pattern. Work with figures all day? Try crossword puzzles or detective stories. Exercise your brain in a different way. Pick whatever it is you think you'll enjoy - as long as it's not the same as what you've been concentrating on for so long.

Burn-out is inevitable whenever the expectation level is dramatically opposed to reality and the person persists in trying to reach that expectation. With Farm and Ranch Business Management Education, we each feel and know the expectation placed upon us by the people we work with, our administrators, and the community as a whole. If we cannot realistically meet those expectations, burn-out is inevitable.

The symptoms of Burn-out include:

1. Exhaustion

Exhaustion is hard for the potential Burn-out to face

because it's a complete reversal from the high energy level he's accustomed to and relies on for keeping up with his crowded schedule. Pay special attention to tiredness. It's the best indicator for catching Burn-out early and easy to recognize.

## 2. Detachment

Detachment begins as a self-protective device to help ward off pain. When you feel let down by people and situations, there's a temptation to tell yourself, "I don't care, it wasn't important anyway," and move away from the things that used to involve you.

## 3. Boredom and Cynicism

These are natural companions - one begets the other; detachment begets them both. You begin to question the value of activities and friendships, even of life itself. You become skeptical of people's motives.

## 4. Impatience and Heightened Irritability

Impatience in a mild form is a built-in characteristic of Burn-out candidates. With their big supply of energy, they have always been able to do things quickly and get on to something else. As the Burn-out increases and one's own ability to accomplish things diminishes, their impatience grows and spills over into irritability with everyone around them.

## 5. A Sense of Omnipotence

A feeling exists that says "No one else can do it. Only I can." Sentiments like that are not the expression of a healthy ego. A person who feels he's indispensable is in reality a block to progress and the initiative of others.

## 6. A Suspicion of Being Unappreciated

With the decrease in energy comes an increase of effort, but not necessarily of result. The Burn-out, of course, never sees that, and he feels as if no appreciation is being shown toward him. He gets bitter and increasingly angry.

## 7. Paranoia

It's just one small step from feeling unappreciated to feeling downright mistreated. When things are going wrong, a vague feeling sets in that someone must be at fault. The administrator, co-workers, a spouse, a child-anyone handy will serve.

## 8. Disorientation

As a Burn-out advances, the individual feels a growing separation from his environment. Difficulty is experienced with one's thought process and ability to stay interested in a particular subject for any period of time. Speech patterns will falter as one forgets what he started to say. Names and dates will elude him. His concentration span will be much more limited.

## 9. Psychosomatic Complaints

Psychosomatic complaints are real, but they're induced or prolonged by stress and emotional tension. Somehow, physical complaints seem more "respectable" than emotional ones, and easier to cope with.

## 10. Depression

In a Burn-out, depression is usually temporary, specific, and localized, pertaining more or less to one area of life. One may be depressed while at work, but okay at home. Anger is often displayed along with the depression.

That's a long list and probably contains some symptoms you can identify with. However, even if you nodded your head "yes" to every single one of these symptoms, don't be alarmed. It probably means only that you're tense and tired and tending to exaggerate your situation. Besides, a symptom is not a disease. It's simply one part of an alert system that's telling you something's wrong and it's time to take action.

Burn-out becomes self-generating. One symptom leads to the next until it seems nothing short of the calvary will be able to rescue you. But such is not the case if you recognize the early symptoms and take appropriate action to correct the situation.

Think about the situations in your life and how they make you feel. Concentrate particularly on three areas: Do these situations supply you with energy or drain you? Do you feel involved in them or detached? Are you enthusiastic about them or cynical? Jot down your answers and then describe the way you feel about your feelings. A feeling recognized and explained can quickly fade away.

The real danger in a burn-out situation is nonfeeling, the denial that anything is wrong. As soon as denial enters the picture, the person's symptoms become enemies instead of allies. They're no longer able to help, because no matter how loudly they cry out, no one is listening. Denial heralds a second stage of burn-out, just as exhaustion heralds the first.

To check yourself in determining if denial is creeping into your behavior, do this simple test. Ask yourself how many times.



lately-- you've caught yourself saying, or thinking, "I don't care." Then ask yourself if it's true there's no caring left. Unpleasantness and danger don't disappear just because we've buried our heads. No, that's denial taken to its ultimate level, and that kind of denial never works.

One of the ways we can strengthen ourselves is by learning to acknowledge that the world is the way it is and accepting that fact as one of the conditions we have to live with. We can't despair over it, dwell on the pity of it, or agitate about it.

Self-awareness is the biggest single gift we can give ourselves during our lifetime. And it cannot be acquired without an expenditure of time and effort. To succeed in averting a Burn-out, it's imperative to continue monitoring yourself. Only you know when it's time for you to stop driving yourself. Only you can tell when your resources and abilities are depleted. You're the best judge of the gap between your wish to do and the energy you have available for the doing. You owe it to yourself to keep tabs.

Burn-out prevention is far less expensive than burn-out treatment. And prevention is possible for the person who includes four elements in his daily routine: sufficient rest, vigorous exercise, proper nourishment, and a little fun.

Some suggestions for coping with stress are:

1. Communicate your feelings

Talk to your family about the pressures you are under to relieve some tensions and help avoid family conflicts that lead to further stress.

2.\* Relax through recreation

Regularly perform light exercise, such as walking and hobbies, as well as small group activities with close family members. Getting away, even for just a long weekend, can be very helpful.

3.\* Manage your workload

When there's too much to do, hire extra help. Set a plan, establish goals, attain the goals and then relax. Don't feel guilty because you're not working.

4.\* Eliminate unnecessary hazards

Use of faulty equipment and failure to adhere to safety principles can lead to high-stress situation.

5. Seek professional help

Talk to a physician, mental health worker or clergyman when personal problems appear out of control.

Techniques doctors recommend for successful stress and burn-out management are:

- \* Learn to accept what you can't change.
- \* Keep physically healthy.
- \* Get plenty of physical exercise.
- \* Don't prescribe medication for yourself to relieve tension.
- \* Recreation is important to relax your mind and body.
- \* Talk about your worries.
- \* Buy and borrow wisely.
- \* Take one thing at a time.
- \* Get your mind off yourself and your problems.
- \* Get involved.

Central to the whole matter of stress and burn-out are your work habits. Those who study stress say many of the problems they see start with poor time management. Goal setting is an important part of managing the activities that take up time. We continually extol our cooperators to set aside time for this task and, yet, fail to do the same for ourselves.

In conclusion, it is well to remember a statement made many years ago by Dr. Heartsill Wilson:

"This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good. What I do today is important because I'm exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever leaving something in its place I have traded for it. I want it to be gain not loss; good not evil; success not failure, in order that I shall not forget the price I paid for it."

*Stress becomes great, instead of finding a solution, we opt for sedation (An easy out)*