Are you experiencing Burnout?

Burnout is a state of mind that comes with long-term, unresolved stress that can negatively affect your work and your life. In an ideal world, nobody would experience burnout, however it is becoming more and more common with searches for "signs of burnout" increasing by 24% in 2020 compared to the previous year. Burnout is to do with experiencing chronic stress where the demands being placed on you exceed the resources you have available to deal with those stressors. Over a long period of time, this can leave you feeling totally drained and not performing at your best. Burnout reduces the connectivity between different parts of the brain which can lead to decreased creativity, working memory, and problem-solving skills. The closer our cognitive load (how much mental effort is being used, even in the background) gets us to using up our mental energy, the worse we are at the tasks we need to complete. Think of a bank account. When you have reserves, you have options. You can be a bit more creative with your money and maybe even treat yourself. When you're at base level you need to be careful, and your creativity is limited. If you go below base level (in the energy bank, this would be exhaustion), you're pushing yourself and running on empty. There comes a point where your body will declare you 'energy bankrupt'. This is burnout.

Signs to look out for that may indicate burnout:

A clear sign of burnout is **exhaustion** or a sense of having no energy at all. You may also experience a **lack of motivation**, not feeling enthusiastic about anything and find it harder and harder to get yourself up and going in the mornings. You might start feeling **frustration**, **cynicism** and being generally being more pessimistic on a daily basis. Another clear sign is being **preoccupied with work**…when you're not at work. If

work is interfering with your ability to recover from the stresses of the day and you're expending mental energy constantly mulling over your job, you may very well be burned out. Compare your job performance now to your job performance in previous years. Burnout tends to happen over an extended period of time so monitoring if there has been a **progressive slipping in your performance** can indicate if you're experiencing a temporary slump or experiencing more chronic burnout.

What can we do to manage our stress and prevent burnout?

- **Make fewer decisions**. The more decisions we make, the more our brain becomes fatigued as we use up the glucose that's fuelling our willpower and ability to make more decisions and higher quality decisions.
- **Stop browsing.** In your relaxation times, stop scrolling through newsfeeds and social media. Every little thing you're exposed to utilises your brain's resources. Each thing you look at, your brain has to make the decision of "do I pay attention, or do I not pay attention?" This decision is costing you focal resources later on even if you don't know it. When you stop and try and go back to one task, your brain is tired and struggles to focus. We also become prone to multi-tasking. When we multi-task, our work isn't focused, and we don't really accomplish anything.
- **Similarly, unplug**. Set boundaries and delegate times for checking emails, messages, and for engaging with online platforms.
- **Take relaxation seriously.** Truly think about what you do to relax and designate more time for it.
- **Find something that you're passionate about that** challenges you where you're able to 'switch off' and participate in rewarding non-work activities.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep leads to fatigue, demotivation, increased sensitivity, and impaired mental function. Make sure to get at least 6 hours of sleep a night.
- **Get organised.** Clear your head, put together a to do list, and then prioritise. Follow the 5 second rule. When a task pops into your head, do something about it within 5 seconds – whether it's making a note about it, putting an object in a place to remind you of the task, or actually starting the task. This makes it easier for your brain to commit the task to memory.
- **Define your mission.** Get clear on what you need to achieve. Make a plan to achieve that and minimise everything else. If we're not clear on our mission, it's very easy to take on too many other projects and we don't make any progress towards what we actually want to or need to do. Have a goal sheet, a time management sheet, or set a list of intentions for the day. That way you are not always acting in reaction or response.
- **Say no.** Immediately. To everything. Give yourself time to evaluate requests against your mission before committing to helping someone else or taking on a new task. Consider the time, energy and sanity you will need to put in and the possible outcomes, be it personal development, investment reward, or passion. If the input outweighs the output significantly, it's a hard no. You must set these criteria in order to know when to say no or you will end up feeling guilty and just say yes.

Your job is to go back to basics. Essentialism. Focus on one or two big things at a time and don't allow yourself to be distracted by the rest. Find the things that make you feel like you are progressing and move towards that mission.