



Workforce Exhaustion

Confronting exhaustion and creating your own fresh start moment

Bri Hayllar
Senior Consultant – Psychologist



Outline

1

Context

2

**Challenges
(and opportunities)**

3

Considerations

4

Care



Context

What is workforce exhaustion?



Exhaustion at work

Stage 1: Emotional exhaustion

- High job demands trigger emotional exhaustion (e.g. high workload, low work-life boundaries).

Stage 2: Isolation and irritability

- Emotional exhaustion in turn can lead to behaviour and attitude changes, such as feeling negative or cynical in relation to your job or broader life, withdrawal, feeling irritable or isolated.

Stage 3: Reduced professional capability

- If the behaviour and attitude change of stage 2 persist, the achievement of work goals can be hampered, leading to reduced feelings of personal accomplishment.

> BURNOUT



Workforce exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. It emerges from excessive and prolonged stress.

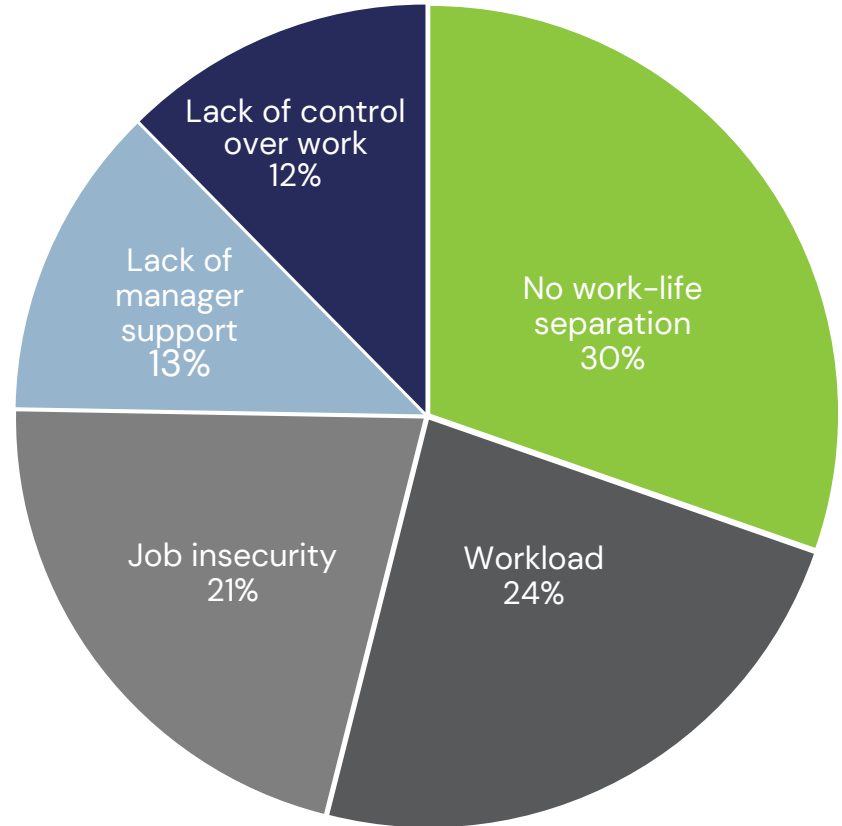
Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001

Causes: Workplace factors

7 in 10

Professionals are suffering from exhaustion and burnout in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

SOURCE: [HRD](#)





Signs of exhaustion

Emotional

- Lack of motivation
- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Irritability
- Nervousness
- Feeling hopeless

Physical

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Lack of appetite
- Sore muscles

Behavioural

- Decline in productivity / effectiveness
- Increased absenteeism
- Withdrawal
- Lower commitment to the organisation
- Difficulty concentrating

What other signs have you observed in yourself or others?



Challenges

What causes workforce exhaustion and why has the pandemic exacerbated workforce exhaustion?

The COVID-19 context



Long duration

Persistent stress

Rollercoaster

Limited opportunity for recovery

Ongoing uncertainty...



“

We are trying to sprint through what has become a marathon—an unsustainable pace. This is why we find ourselves in the early stages of a potentially prolonged period of disillusionment, grief, and exhaustion—a period that may get worse before it gets better.

McKinsey & Co.



Burnout is skyrocketing thanks to COVID-19, and people pinning their hopes on the Christmas break to ‘fix’ it should adjust their expectations.

HR Daily, 2021

Keep in mind

- **Exhaustion builds up over time** – it may take time to reverse.
- **We may have developed some ineffective work practices** – or lost some effective ones.
- **Taking leave is a short-term solution** that doesn’t address the issue long term.

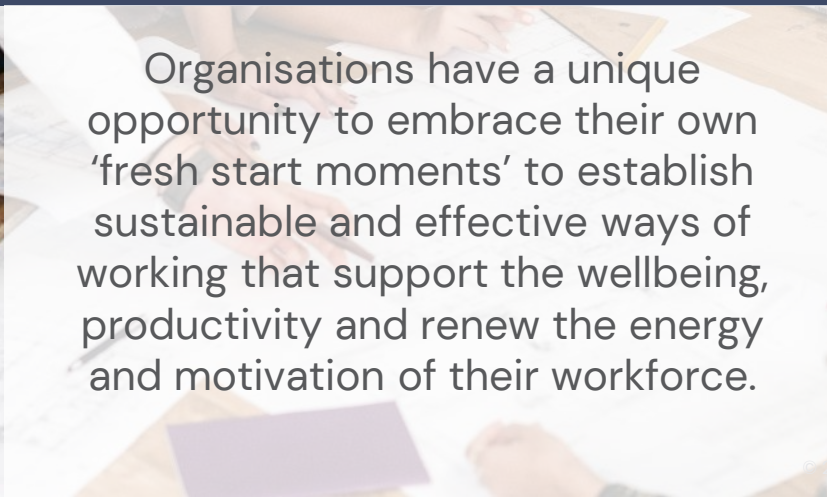
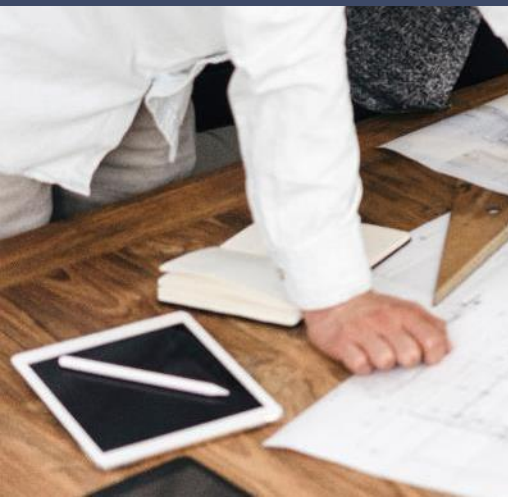


Considerations

Creating a toolbox to help ourselves and others to re-energise



How do we re-energise ourselves and our workforce as we face our 'next normal'?



Organisations have a unique opportunity to embrace their own 'fresh start moments' to establish sustainable and effective ways of working that support the wellbeing, productivity and renew the energy and motivation of their workforce.

Tools for re-energising

1

**Create Clear
Boundaries**

2

**Self Care and
Rest**

3

**Weave
Wellbeing into
Work**

4

**Focus on Social
Connection**

1. Create clear boundaries

The pitfall of flexible working: 'Availability creep':

- Many are feeling the pressure to be always available for work.
- In a recent study, over one third of respondents indicated that they feel an obligation to be available 24/7 for their workplace.
- Leads to inadequate psychological recovery from work.

“



Adam Grant ✓
@AdamMGrant

It's impossible to please everyone. The question is whether you're disappointing the right people.

Part of setting healthy boundaries is deciding who you're willing to let down—and who has the right to make you feel guilty.

Not everyone deserves power over your emotions.



Tools for boundary setting

1. **Ground boundaries in reality, not concrete** (they need to be flexible).
2. **Adjust boundaries based upon the context and what is right for you!** (it's not 'one size fits all').
3. **Set clear expectations** (where, when and how?).
4. **Think about the best channel to communicate your boundaries** (not the easiest or most comfortable).
5. **Expect and prepare for 'Push Back'**.
6. **Harness stakeholder engagement and negotiate if necessary** (discuss your perspective and find a mutually beneficial solution).
7. **Watch for less obvious signs of when boundaries may have been violated** (e.g. gut reactions).
8. **Be clear on which boundaries are critical** (the non-negotiable).
9. **Develop the ability to say 'No'**.

Where have you been able to set clear work-life boundaries?

Draw Your Line in the Sand: How to Say 'No!'



“ There are only 24 hours in the day, and our energy levels are not infinite. When we say 'yes' to something we are also saying 'no' to something else. What is the opportunity cost? Is it a cost we are happy to pay?

Handy Hints for Saying 'No'

- **Be brief, clear and direct** (avoid long ramblings).
- **Ensure the word 'No' is in the sentence.**
- **Speak slowly with warmth** (so it doesn't sound abrupt).
- **Be polite** (e.g. 'thank you for asking ...').
- **Honestly explain but don't justify or make excuses** (justification invites the receiver to place blame).
- **Don't over apologise** (the receiver will pick up the apology rather than the message).
- **Be honest about your feelings** (e.g. 'I find this difficult').
- **Acknowledge the feelings of the other person** (i.e. their right to be upset).
- **Emphasise that it's a request that is being rejected not the person.**
- **Watch your body language to make sure it's congruent** (e.g. verbal 'No' with no verbal 'Yes' equals confusion).
- **Don't lay blame for your refusal at the feet of others** (take responsibility).
- **Watch out for the in-direct 'No'** (e.g. inventing excuses).
- **Develop different ways of saying 'No' depending on the situation.**

Different Ways of Saying 'No'

- DIRECT 'NO':**
The aim is to say NO without apologising or giving reasons. The other person has the need but you do not have to allow them to pass it onto you.
- EMPATHIC 'NO':**
Involves reflecting back the facts and feelings of the request (expressing your understanding of the other person), then adding your assertive refusal at the end.
- REASONED 'NO':**
This briefly gives the genuine reason for the refusal.
- RAINCHECK 'NO':**
This says NO to the present request but leaves room for negotiation. It is a NO but to soften it, the possibility of saying yes in the future is offered.
- ENQUIRING 'NO':**
This is not a definite NO and again could be a prelude to negotiation.
- EXTRA TIME 'NO':**
This asks for time to consider the request (time to reflect/gather more information/ask for advice) before responding to the other person. It is of course far easier to say NO after the half-NO of delaying an answer.
- BROKEN RECORD 'NO':**
This involves...

Line in the Sand: How to Say 'No!'

...not infinite. ...something else. ...?

of Saying 'No'

...apologising or giving ...the need but you do not ...onto you.

...facts and feelings of the ...understanding of the other ...assertive refusal at the end.

...the reason for the refusal.

...nt request but leaves room ...but to soften it, the possibility ...is offered.

...and again could be a prelude

...consider the request (time to ...ormation/ask for advice) before ...person. It is of course far easier ...i-NO of delaying an answer.

...g a simple statement of refusal ...hen the request is very persistent.

.../setting-boundaries-saying-no-nicely

Resource: How to say 'No!'

2. Self-care and rest

We 'know' self-care is not selfish or self-indulgent yet many of us struggle to give self-care the time it requires.

- Reframing self-care as essential
- We need plans and routines
- It is even more important in times of uncertainty and stress



“

Pay yourself first – every Friday morning I plan the following week's self-care commitments before I plan work.

Rowena Hennigan



Tools to promote self-care

Begin by asking yourself regularly:

What do I need for self-care? Do I need to add or change anything for improvement?

Think some more about your own personal self-care 'profile':

- Is it exercise?
- Creative activities? Cooking? Craft?
- Reading? DIY?
- Music? Singing? Dancing?
- Learning something new?

Self-care can be scheduled in short and long blocks of time, while always reflecting on your changing needs:

- Longer self care blocks = 40 minutes.
- Shorter blocks = 10 minutes away from workspace and without devices if you can.

“

Self care is not about pampering it is about protecting our health and wellbeing.

Vanessa Miles

SOURCE: R. HENNINGAN, 2021



Tools to promote rest

Physical rest: active forms (yoga, stretching and massage) as well as passive (sleeping and napping).

Mental rest: schedule short breaks every 2 hours in the work day to remind you to slow down.

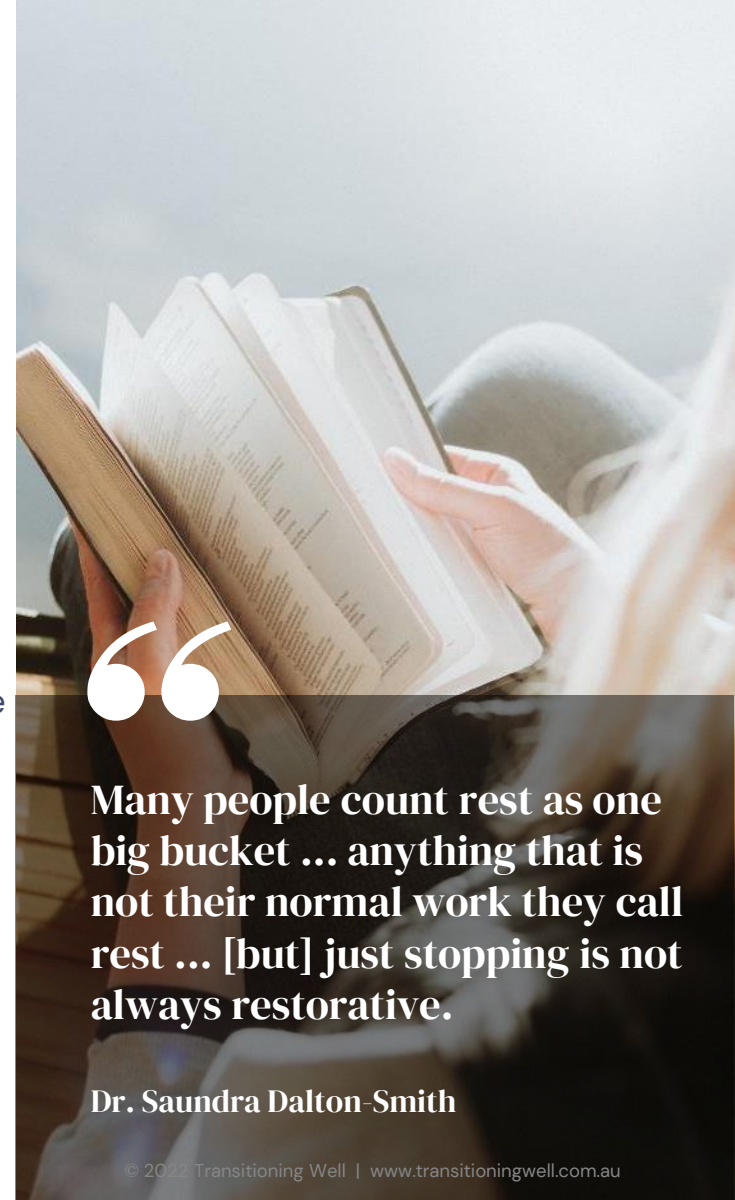
Sensory rest: lights, screens and noise are overstimulating for humans. Pause during the day in a quieter space and unplug when you're finished work.

Creative rest: we need to take a break from the problem solving to allow creativity to flourish. Nature and the arts are great ways to shift gears.

Emotional rest: where can you cut back on people pleasing and be more authentic about how you feel?

Social rest needs: which relationships give you energy and which wear you out? Prioritise time with supportive people.

Spiritual rest: to feel a sense of belonging and purpose through meditation, community involvement or prayer.



Many people count rest as one big bucket ... anything that is not their normal work they call rest ... [but] just stopping is not always restorative.

Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith

SOURCE: S. DALTON-SMITH, 2021

Resource: Recuperation Plan



TRANSITIONING
well

My Recuperation Plan

“ As important as it is to have a plan for doing work, it is perhaps more important to have a plan for rest, relaxation, self care & sleep.
”
Akiraq Brust

When we activate the Relaxation Response, we are protecting two activities at the very heart of wellbeing—rest and recovery.

Creating a routine that includes relaxing activities benefits our bodies and brains. You will be more productive when you get back to work, and creativity and innovation will have more opportunities to surface.

If you are adding new activities to your schedule (even relaxing ones!) remember to start small, start slow, be specific, and be realistic.

Connect with a friend or family member to help you both stay on track.

Remember, being consistent is more important than being perfect. **So, enjoy yourself!**

SEE OVER THE PAGE FOR ACTIVITIES THAT WE KNOW CREATE A RELAXATION RESPONSE (PARTICULARLY THE FIRST SIX) AND ADD SOME OF YOUR OWN.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

Progressive
Muscle
Relaxation

Mindfulness
Activity

a movie/series

ndle

e

aint

e

your people

ell (TW)

3. Weave wellbeing into work

The Power of the Pause

5 QUICK CHECK-IN PROMPTS

Set a timer to remind you to try this at least twice a day.

Create a ritual by turning away from your computer or desk while you ask yourself:

How am I feeling right now?

What is stressing me most at the moment?

How is my body?

What can I do to be kinder to myself?

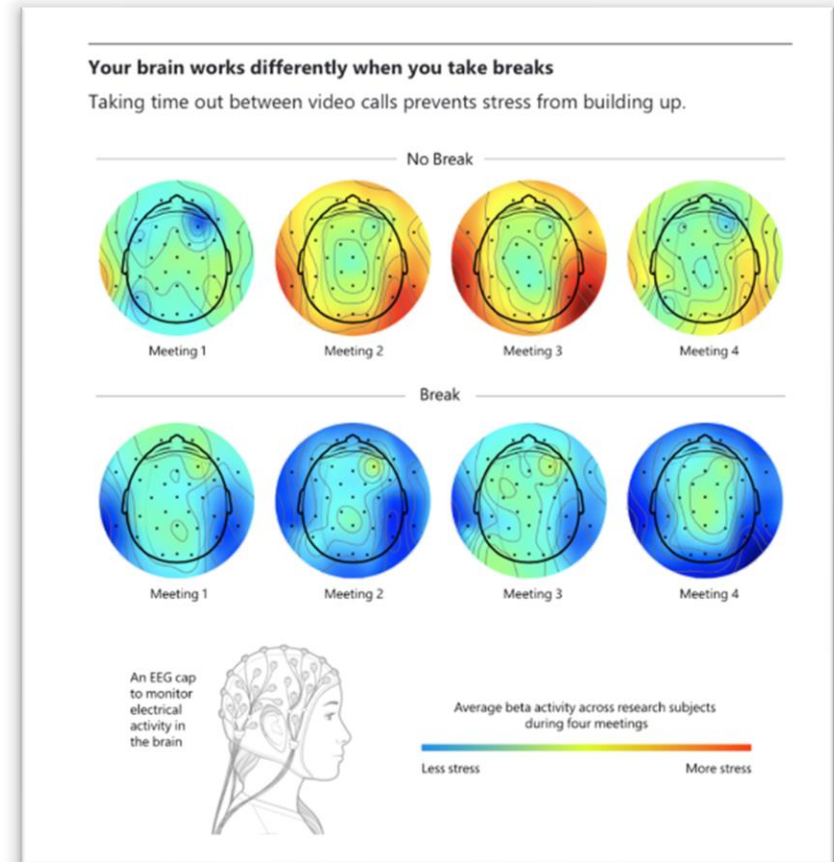
Am I HALT?
Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired?



Tools for weaving wellbeing into work

5 QUICK WELLBEING RESET ACTIVITIES

1. **Do a quick body scan from head to toe** – as you notice tension or aches, see if you can relax some of those muscles.
2. **Breathe** – try 10 slower, deeper breaths to increase oxygen in your circulation, create a calming response and assist focus.
3. **Stretch** – tension and pain are messages to stop what you're doing and move.
4. **Regular short but breaks away from the desk** – several movement breaks can be as beneficial as one longer period of exercise at the end of the day.
5. **Hunt the good stuff** – reflecting on even the smallest event that has gone well is a powerful wellbeing booster.





“

Kindness, fun, and cooperative collaboration is just as important to the bottom line as your daily to-do list.

4. Focus on social connection

- **A sense of belonging** and social connectedness are significant protective factors against the risk of workforce exhaustion and burnout.
- **Building positive relationships** makes work easier, and makes us more productive and happier.
- **It's important to re-establish human connections** after the pandemic period.
- **Younger employees** and those who joined the team while WFH feel this disconnection most.
- **Connecting as often as you can with colleagues who are supportive and positive**



Tools to focus on social connection

Returning to the office:

- Do staggered returns consider your personal connections?
- Buddy with a colleague who joined the team during remote working.

Share stories:

- This connects humans to one another faster.

Create new rituals in the team (or bring back old ones):

- Monday morning coffee, celebrate birthdays, casual Fridays, lunch once a week.

Connections outside work hours:

- Gather at the end of the week – if your team is hybrid, alternate between in-person and virtually.
- Team activities outside work (e.g. training for an event, and/or fundraising or volunteering).
- Holiday BBQs or parties.

What are some of your team rituals?



Researchers have found, especially in times of great uncertainty, rituals become important anchors for us to cling on to normalcy and create more certainty in our lives.

Next steps?

Thinking about re-energising ...

What has been your key take away?

What is something that you can do differently starting tomorrow?

“

Changes that are too small to fail ... the building blocks of habits.



Care & Support

Ways to support ourselves and others if we feel like we need more purpose and meaning



Other helpful resources

Find out about the support options through your employer – P&C/HR, EAP

Reach out and talk it through:

- Beyond Blue 1800 512 348;
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- [Find a professional – Beyond Blue](#)

Find a psychologist:

- [A practical guide to finding good psychological support](#)

Find out more about COVID-19 Medicare Funded Support:

- [COVID-19: Medicare funded psychology services | APS](#)

Have a read about coping with COVID-19 by the APS:

- [COVID-19 information](#)

Do an 'Online Wellbeing Check' by SuperFriend:

- [Wellbeing check-in and action plan – SuperFriend](#)

Get some support for your relationships and family:

- Relationships Australia 1300 364 277 www.relationships.org.au
- Domestic Violence Victoria
www.dvvic.org.au/covid-19-and-family-violence



Leaders in Work-Life Wellbeing Support

Bri Hayllar

P: 1300 824 808

E: bri.hayllar@transitioningwell.com.au

W: www.transitioningwell.com.au



[Sign up to our newsletter 'The Well Informed'](#)

© 2021 Transitioning Well Pty Ltd. All Rights Reserved. No part of this PowerPoint Presentation may be utilised for commercial activities, reproduced, copied or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the expressed written consent from TW.