

The Burnout Assessment

A structured look at exhaustion, workload and where things stand, across three research frameworks.

This assessment brings together three separate, well-established ways of looking at burnout: which parts of you are depleted, which parts of your job are working against you, and how far along the process you are. Each framework asks a different question, so the assessment gives you three readouts, not one score.

There is no pass or fail, and no single number at the end that decides anything. The point is to provide you with information so you can assess your next steps.

This is not a clinical assessment. If you wish to undertake a formal clinical assessment to determine whether you are burned out, you will need to engage a clinical psychologist to take you through that process.

The time required to complete this will vary. I encourage you to take your time and do it somewhere you will not be interrupted. Fifteen minutes should be sufficient to provide considered answers, although some people do require more time. Responses should relate to how things have been over the past two to four weeks, not how you think they should be, and not just how you were on your best or worst day.

The Three Dimensions of Burnout

Maslach & Jackson, 1981

This section looks at where you are at on a personal level.

Christina Maslach's original research identified three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism/ depersonalisation, and inefficacy/reduced productivity. These are three distinct components. There may be correlation between them, but that is not always the case.

Emotional exhaustion is the depletion of your emotional resources under sustained demand. It is usually the first of the three to appear.

Depersonalisation, often called cynicism outside clinical or human-service settings, is a psychological defence that shows up once reserves start running low: a flattening or hardening in how you relate to people.

Reduced productivity is a decline, real or perceived, in your own sense of competence and effectiveness. It tends to be the subtlest of the three, and is often the last to develop.

WORTH KNOWING BEFORE YOU START

Burnout is when all three dimensions are elevated. This is the most severe pattern. Many people run high on only one or two dimensions. That still matters. Even if only one category has a high rating it requires attention, as it may lead to burnout if not addressed.

Emotional Exhaustion

0 = never · 6 = every day

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
I feel emotionally drained before the working day is half over.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wake up already anticipating how tired I will be by the end of the day.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working closely with people, clients, colleagues, the other side, takes more out of me than it used to.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel used up, like I have nothing left to give, by the time I get home.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Small demands that never used to bother me now feel like too much.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Average of your five answers

Depersonalisation / Cynicism

0 = never · 6 = every day

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
I have become more detached or short with people I used to be patient with.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I catch myself going through the motions rather than genuinely engaging with the work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have started to see the people I work with as problems to manage rather than people to help.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I feel less concerned about what happens to the people I work with than I used to. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

My comments about work have an edge of contempt in them that was not there before. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Average of your five answers

Reduced Personal Accomplishment

0 = never · 6 = every day

This dimension runs in the opposite direction to the first two. Here, a low frequency is the concern, not a high one.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
I feel I am effectively handling the problems that come up in my work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am positively influencing people's lives through my work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel genuinely pleased with myself after finishing something at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have accomplished things in this job that I consider genuinely worthwhile.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I deal calmly and effectively with difficult situations at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Average of your five answers

Reading your three scores

These subscales are read independently. There is no combined total, and that is deliberate: exhaustion, cynicism and a fading sense of competence are different problems, and averaging them across would hide which one is actually driving things for you.

DIMENSION	FLAG ZONE	WHAT IT SUGGESTS
Emotional Exhaustion	Average of 4 or higher (a few times a week or more)	Your emotional resources are running below what the demands on you require. This is usually the first sign to appear.
Depersonalisation / Cynicism	Average of 4 or higher (a few times a week or more)	A defensive distance has set in, often below your own awareness. It can look like efficiency from the outside while feeling like numbness from the inside.
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Average of 2 or lower (once a month or less)	Your sense of doing the work well has eroded, whether or not your actual performance has changed. This one runs in reverse, so a low score is the flag here, not a high one.

ONE DIMENSION BEING PRESENT IS ENOUGH TO MATTER

A single elevated dimension, on its own, is worth taking seriously. Waiting for all three before you act tends to mean waiting until things are much further along.

The Six Areas of Worklife

Maslach & Leiter, 1999 / 2004

This section looks at where the job itself is working against you. Maslach and Leiter's research found that burnout results from a mismatch between a person and their job across six specific conditions, not from any personal weakness or lack of resilience.

For each area below, consider the factors that contribute to it, then rate how well that area currently fits for you. This is a fit scale, not a stress scale: stress is the downstream feeling, mismatch is the mechanism.

RATING SCALE FOR EACH AREA

- 1, Strong fit.** This is not an issue for me. No real friction.
- 2, Mostly fits.** Small issues occasionally, but only a small impact on me.
- 3, Mixed.** Fits some of the time, works against me other times. Noticeable but not constant.
- 4, Poor fit.** This is an issue for me. There is regular friction for me.
- 5, Serious mismatch.** This is a serious issue for me. It is a significant, ongoing source of friction.

1 Workload

Considerations: hours (50+ reduces productivity), deadlines, physical volume of work, complexity of work, priorities, skill-set to perform tasks, resources (people, equipment, technology), workplace culture.

How well does this fit right now?

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strong fit	Mostly fits	Mixed	Poor fit	Serious mismatch

2 Control

Considerations: managing your schedule, being able to say "no", controlling how you work, identifying a clear career path, having access to resources, micromanagement by leaders, input into decisions that affect your work and how you are able to do it.

How well does this fit right now?

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strong fit	Mostly fits	Mixed	Poor fit	Serious mismatch

3 Rewards

Considerations: financial rewards, recognition, respect, praise, progression, not being seen as a number or a "bum on a seat".

How well does this fit right now?

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strong fit	Mostly fits	Mixed	Poor fit	Serious mismatch

4 Community

Considerations: psychological safety, work silos, cliques, poorly managed conflict, bullying (including micro-aggressions or being ostracised), imbalances in age and experience, your personality, already feeling burnt out.

How well does this fit right now?

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strong fit	Mostly fits	Mixed	Poor fit	Serious mismatch

5 Fairness

Considerations: how you are treated compared to colleagues, favouritism, unequal pay, perks or prestige, how promotions are handled and who receives them, equality of workloads, communication and whether it causes conflict.

How well does this fit right now?

1
Strong fit

2
Mostly fits

3
Mixed

4
Poor fit

5
Serious mismatch

6 Values

Do your personal values align with the organisation's values.

How well does this fit right now?

1
Strong fit

2
Mostly fits

3
Mixed

4
Poor fit

5
Serious mismatch

ON VALUES SPECIFICALLY

Values sits closest to identity, and some research shows that a strong mismatch here may increase the likelihood of burnout. This is not a settled finding, other research has pointed to Workload or Control playing that role instead. For this exercise, treat a serious mismatch between your values and the organisation's values as a signal of higher burnout risk, not a fixed rule.

Your clearest mismatch

Look back over your six ratings. Which one or two sit highest.

Stages of Burnout

Freudenberger & North

Herbert Freudenberger coined the term burnout in 1974. He and Gail North later published a twelve-phase model of how it develops over time, with labels such as Compulsion to Prove Oneself, Displacement of Conflicts and Revision of Values, not the five stages below.

The five-stage version is a widely used simplification that gets attributed to Freudenberger and North throughout the popular literature, but it does not appear in their original published work, and the attribution is not well sourced, at least one account traces it to researchers at Winona State University instead. Treat it as a widely used framework inspired by their idea of burnout as a progression, rather than a direct citation.

This is a different kind of model to the first two. It is not measuring dimensions or job fit, it is a timeline: where you sit in a progression. Read through the five stages and mark whichever one currently describes you best.

- 1 **Honeymoon**
High energy and enthusiasm for the work. Over-commitment starts here, often disguised as dedication: taking on more than is sustainable, skipping lunch, working the odd extra hour, and setting aside your own needs to prove your worth.
☐ This is where I am now
- 2 **Onset of Stress**
The early signs of stress appear, still occasional rather than constant: irritability, disrupted sleep, a low background anxiety, less time for things outside work.
☐ This is where I am now
- 3 **Chronic Stress**
The signs from stage two stop being occasional and become a regular pattern: persistent exhaustion, cynicism creeping in, procrastination, withdrawal from people, physical symptoms that keep recurring.
☐ This is where I am now
- 4 **Burnout**
An acute crisis point, a genuine event with a sharp, visible contrast to your baseline: obsessive focus on what is wrong, deep self-doubt, a sense of total depletion, sometimes a breakdown moment that is hard to ignore.
☐ This is where I am now
- 5 **Habitual Burnout**
The crisis has become the ordinary state of things. This stage is more dangerous than stage four because the felt contrast is gone: chronic sadness, fatigue and physical or mental strain no longer register as a warning, they just read as how things are.
☐ This is where I am now

WHY STAGE FIVE IS EASY TO MISS

In stage four, something feels acutely wrong and that feeling is itself a signal. In stage five, the signal is gone, not because things have improved but because the crisis has been going on long enough to become the new normal. If nothing currently feels alarming but you recognise the description above, that absence of alarm may be the thing worth paying attention to.

What Your Results Suggest

These three frameworks measure different things, so they are not meant to collapse into a single score. What matters is the pattern across them: where the strain is landing inside you, which parts of the job are actually driving it, and how far along the process things have gone.

In your own words

Looking at your three readouts together, what pattern do you see. Write it as you would say it to someone, not as a summary of numbers.

A note on what training can and cannot do

Well-being practices, including breathwork and nervous system training, genuinely help, and they are worth doing regardless of what your results show. What they change is how your body carries the load: steadier physiology, faster recovery between demands, more capacity in the moment. What they do not change is the load itself.

The six areas of worklife are structural features that individual well-being practices do not resolve on their own. Identifying which areas of work are contributing to burnout matters for building a complete solution, one that addresses the job as well as the person in it. For example, if workload is the issue, the more useful question is what can actually change in the workplace to resolve that.

Reading the pattern

If your clearest area is Workload or Values

These carry the strongest structural weight of the six. Worth naming plainly to yourself, and worth a direct conversation with whoever can actually change them, before deciding what to do next.

If exhaustion is your highest reading, but cynicism and accomplishment are not

This often reflects an early or acute pattern rather than an entrenched one. It tends to respond well to combining recovery practices with addressing the specific driver behind it.

If you recognised stage four or five in Part Three

Worth treating as a genuine long-term issue rather than something to push through. That does not mean crisis, it means the current approach, whatever it is, has run its course. External support, including working with a GP, psychologist or other health provider, is recommended.

If your six driver ratings are mostly fine, but your dimension scores are still high

Worth looking at whether the strain is coming from somewhere outside work, or whether it has simply been building for long enough that the job itself is no longer the main driver.

*Seeing the shape of this clearly is the useful part. What you do with it is
yours to decide, in your own time.*

Simon Fogarty
THE BURNT OUT LAWYER

simon@theburntoutlawyer.co.nz · 021 375 124
theburntoutlawyer.co.nz

© 2026 Simon Fogarty, The Burnt Out Lawyer. All rights reserved.