

# Five Ways to Reduce Employee Burnout

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



Five ideas for keeping your employees energized and engaged

The foodservice industry has always experienced challenges with burnout, but that's become an even greater concern in recent years. Stressful work environments, long hours, unpredictable schedules, low wages, the ongoing pandemic... you're undoubtedly familiar with these struggles in the industry. All of these issues can lead to low morale and poor productivity, and contribute to high levels of burnout (and subsequent turnover).

## WHAT IS BURNOUT?

The World Health Organization added burnout to their International Classification of Diseases in 2019. It is an occupational phenomenon (not a medical condition), defined as follows:

*"Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: 1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; 2) increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and 3) a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life."*

This is incredibly common in the foodservice industry. In fact, a 2019 survey by Paychex found that approximately 80 percent of people working in hospitality and 77 percent of people working in health care (both of which include foodservice employees) felt burned out. These numbers are far higher than in many other industries.



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## PREVENTING BURNOUT IN FOOD SERVICE

Luckily, there are steps you can take to reduce burnout in your kitchen. Here are five ideas for keeping your employees energized and engaged:

### 1. Provide reasonable workloads, scheduling, and compensation.

Towards the end of 2021, journalists coined the phrase “The Great Resignation” to refer to the increasing number of employees leaving their jobs. Quit rates in the foodservice industry in particular jumped considerably, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimating a 6.6 percent quit rate in September 2021 (compared to a 4.7 percent rate just a year prior). To give perspective, that means that one in every 15 foodservice employees left their job that month.

to better prevent burnout (and subsequently, resignation). Consider how you can better manage employee staffing and scheduling in your own organization to allow a reasonable workload for all. When possible, match employees with tasks that embrace their strengths to create more productivity (and positivity) in that schedule.

Similarly, providing higher wages may improve job satisfaction and reduce the need for employees to juggle multiple jobs, creating better work-life balance and reducing burnout. It also may attract better candidates to open positions.

Of course, fighting for higher salaries in your department can be a challenge, but quantifying the problem for upper management may help.

### PROVIDING HIGHER WAGES

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Why the exodus? Experts suggest resignation rates are higher in industries with demanding workloads and high levels of burnout. In addition, jobs that have low compensation rates may indirectly contribute to burnout and resignation by affecting job satisfaction, as suggested in an article in *Applied Nursing Research*.

While some tips in this article will help manage the “symptoms,” combating burnout needs to start with addressing these root causes.

Research has shown that employers who reduce staff shortages and excessive workloads are able

Consider showcasing turnover rate and the increased costs of training new employees. Estimate how these could be reduced with better wages for your staff.

### 2. Create clear job descriptions.

While it doesn’t sound like it would relate to burnout, unclear job descriptions can easily cause new employees to feel overwhelmed. If they start a position expecting one set of tasks and are quickly overloaded with additional responsibilities, they may experience frustration

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and develop negative feelings towards work.

Make sure that every employee clearly understands their role from the start of the hiring process. Accurate expectations will lead to fulfillment and comfort; unexpected responsibilities—especially those without proper training—will lead to frustration and burnout.

### 3. Consider organizational improvements.


Inefficient processes and procedures lead to annoyance at best—and burnout and quitting at worst. Open up discussions with your team to assess struggles in the facility.

For example, is there a better way to organize your kitchen's workflow? Are all the necessary resources available, or are employees having difficulty completing tasks because they don't have access to what they need? Does staff have adequate training for each task being performed?

As a manager, you should regularly assess these questions solo, as well as in conjunction with your staff. They can provide first-hand accounts of how problems are impacting the day-to-day operations, and ideas for improvements.

Maybe there's a new way of organizing inventory that will make it easier to stay on top of low-stock supplies. Perhaps creating a simple start-of-shift checklist will help employees remember every step that needs to be completed. Or if onboarding is an issue, maybe there's an online training subscription that you can purchase to help better prepare new hires.

Not every suggestion or idea will be feasible or logical, but the conversation should get those creative wheels turning and help you figure out changes to improve workflow and reduce burnout.



**WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS** can reduce stress, improve physical and mental health, and boost morale at your facility—all of which may contribute to reduced burnout and turnover.

### 4. Make sure employees feel valued.

Employees spend the large majority of their week at their job; it's an integral part of their life. When that person feels valued, respected, and supported at work, they're less likely to feel burned out.

Consider implementing these simple yet effective strategies:

- Treat all employees with dignity and respect. Avoid letting your own negative feelings or biases affect the way you manage your team.
- Celebrate successes, both large and small! Your team will feel energized by the recognition they receive for their efforts.
- Provide opportunities for open communication with your employees, so they feel comfortable bringing forth concerns or ideas (and feel like these are valued in the organization).
- Encourage lifelong learning. Give employees opportunities for growth so they may continue developing professionally.

- Get to know your employees. Different people respond best to different types of communication, and being aware of this can help you more effectively lead and motivate each person.
- Focus on constructive rather than combative feedback to help employees grow in their roles.

### 5. Implement workplace wellness programming.

Workplace wellness programs can reduce stress, improve physical and mental health, and boost morale at your facility—all of which may contribute to reduced burnout and turnover. This is particularly true when the programming includes a mindfulness or mental health component.

A study in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* evaluated the impact of digital mental health interventions in the workplace. The review found these programs had positive impacts on

both psychological well-being and work effectiveness.

Additional studies have shown benefits of workplace mindfulness training. A 2019 review in the *Journal of occupational health psychology* found these trainings were connected to improved mindfulness, reduced stress, reduced anxiety, and improved overall well-being.

While programming can be pricey to implement, there is evidence that workplace wellness may result in greater organizational savings by reducing absenteeism, increasing productivity, and/or lowering healthcare costs.

For example, a 2021 study in *Workplace health & safety* evaluated costs of a wellness program in a small long-term

care company. They estimated the program cost approximately \$132 per program participant over two years, but estimated that in return it saved approximately \$210 for each participant.

Similarly, a 2016 review in *The International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* concluded that there is moderate evidence that wellness programs result in increased productivity, decreased absenteeism, and/or reduced costs—specifically when interventions combine physical and mental health programming, provide access to clinical mental health treatment, and offer assistance with disability management programs.

Workplace wellness programming offers a true win-win, helping both the employees and employers when it comes to factors surrounding burnout.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Reducing employee burnout in the foodservice industry can feel like scaling a large mountain! But with each step you take—improving workflows, offering fair wages, supporting employees—you'll get closer to the summit; a place where employees feel content and valued in their role. Not only does this benefit the employee, but it benefits your facility as well with improved corporate culture and reduced resignation rates. **E**

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## CE Questions | MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



*This Level 1 article provides basic resources. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.*



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Reading *Five Ways to Reduce Employee Burnout* and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 GEN CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit [www.ANFPonline.org/market](http://www.ANFPonline.org/market) and select “Edge CE Articles” within the Publications Section. If you don’t see your article title on the first page, then search the title “*Five Ways to Reduce Employee Burnout*.” Once on the article title page, purchase the article and complete the CE quiz.

- Which of the following is *false* regarding burnout?
  - It is defined in the WHO International Classification of Diseases
  - The foodservice industry has one of the lowest rates of burnout
  - Burnout can lead to increased job turnover
- Which of the following statements best explains the trend in quitting rates in the foodservice industry?
  - More employees quit in September 2020 than September 2021
  - The same number of employees quit in September 2020 and September 2021
  - More employees quit in September 2021 than September 2020
- Which describes the relationship between compensation and burnout?
  - These two factors are unrelated
  - Compensation may indirectly affect burnout by impacting job satisfaction
  - Employees who are burned out should be paid less compensation
- Consider an employee’s timeline at a job. When is the *first time* their manager should implement procedures to reduce the risk of burnout?
  - Before hiring, when crafting an accurate job description
  - During training, to help them understand all tasks
  - When they notice an employee starting to suffer from burnout
- You notice your kitchen staff appears to be experiencing burnout. Which would likely be the best next step?
  - Ignore the problem; it will eventually pass
  - Hire new staff with a better attitude
  - Host an open conversation with your staff to hear their ideas for improvement
- Which of the following accurately summarizes the results of the 2021 study in Workplace Health & Safety regarding financial ROI of workplace wellness at a long-term care facility?
  - The facility spent more money on the program than they saved
  - The facility broke even
  - The facility saved money by implementing the program
- Which type of workplace wellness program is most likely to elicit improved psychological well-being, reduced anxiety, and improved productivity—thus reducing burnout?
  - Annual health fairs with biometric screenings
  - A combination of physical and mental health programming
  - Workplace wellness programming does not lead to these benefits

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