Preventing Burnout: Strategies and Tips For Activists

STANDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
KEY DIMENSIONS OF BURNOUT

BURN  - expresses as irritability, frustration, anger, cynicism and possibly bitterness and grief

OUT  - feeling drained, exhausted, powerless. Decreased passion and enthusiasm. Feelings of detachment (don’t care) not just from others but emotionally and mentally from our work.

INEFFICACY  - burnout is often accompanied by negative self-evaluation, self doubt, feelings of incompetency.
WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?

• Part of a large complex global problem
• Climate crisis overwhelming and urgent
• Carrying a burden of knowledge that society as a whole is unable or unwilling to face.
• Being made aware of disturbing and negative information and future projections
• High levels of investment and unrelenting commitment to an issue

CONTEXT
• face resistance (e.g. fossil fuel industry and government, climate denialists)
• Facing harassment and threats.
There is mounting evidence (Chen and Gorski 2015) serious impact activist burnout is having on activists and movements.

Culture of martyrdom that discourages conversations about burnout and self-care persists

Deeply sensitive to injustices

Infighting and tense relationships within organisations

Research about it is scarce but starting to rise

Are Activists neglecting themselves whilst helping others and the planet. (Boeckenhoff 2021)
### WARNING SIGNS OF BURNOUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMOTIONAL SIGNS</th>
<th>COGNITIVE (personal thoughts) SIGNS</th>
<th>BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS</th>
<th>PHYSIOLOGICAL (how your body reacts) SIGNS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rage over trivial matters</td>
<td>• Difficulty in making decisions or staying focused</td>
<td>• Imbalance between work, family, play, hobbies</td>
<td>• A general sense of running on empty</td>
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<td>• Feeling guilty for resting, doing pleasurable things</td>
<td>• A growing tendency to think negatively</td>
<td>• Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning</td>
<td>• Muscle tension, headache, backache, tiredness.</td>
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<td>• Feelings of hopelessness</td>
<td>• A loss of sense of purpose and energy</td>
<td>• Becoming accident prone, procrastination</td>
<td>• Severe and life-threatening illness</td>
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WHAT ARE WE DEALING WITH

HEALTHCARE
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE (Barnwell 2021)
WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

• GARETH BARNWELL (2021) STATES THAT CLIMATE CHANGE HAS PROFOUND ADVERSE MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS FOR THOSE LIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA

• CLIMATE CHANGE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DEEPEN THE WOUNDS OF HISTORICAL INJUSTICES.
  WILL AFFECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

• MOST SOUTH AFRICANS WILL STRUGGLE TO ADAPT TO ADVANCING CLIMATE SHOCKS, DAMAGE TO OUR OCEANS, FOOD SECURITY, IMPACTS ON LIVELIHOODS, DISASTERS, WATER INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC LOSSES.

• GOVERNMENTS LACK OF ACTION CREATES A DEEP SENSE OF BETRAYAL AND TRAUMA, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

• THOSE SUPPOSED TO SAFEGUARD COMMUNITIES ARE MAKING DECISIONS THAT WILL HAVE IRREVERSIBLE AND PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES FOR PEOPLES MENTAL HEALTH
FEELINGS
Alone
Guilty
Outrage
Overwhelmed
Futility
Frustration
Hopeless
helpless
• Found himself ill and close to burnout… working excessive hours,
• travelling intensively, feeling sick and
• suffering from severe uncontrolled high blood pressure.
• Friends and family warned that it was a simple choice… change or not be around for much longer.
• Needed to develop a more **SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE**
• Then he could contribute for another 10 to 20 years.
WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?

NONHLE MBUTHUMA

Please watch video from 3 minutes 24 seconds to 4 minutes 36 seconds.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccGGJYfxhbY
INTERVIEW WITH NONHLE

- Her work is extremely stressful, she is dealing with death threats, one always feels stressed.
- You question yourself whether you are doing the right thing or not.
- She needs and receives support from the following pillars in her life:
  - her organisation
  - her community
  - her family
Nonhle says she needs to get emotional support at times, and this means she needs someone to speak and cry too, and who can listen to the stresses she is under.

A human rights organisation has paid for an open door for her to receive psychological help when ever she needs it. She speaks to a psychologist when she starts feeling burnout coming.

When she feel burnout coming one of the first things that happen is that she finds herself unable to sleep she says its like a car, have to have a service now and then, to keep everything running properly.

Most importantly she has learnt along the way that the consequences of not getting help means that you can damage yourself, but also cause huge damage to others around you.
PRACTICAL TIPS FROM NONHLE

- HAVING **SELF AWARENESS** IS VITAL. **CARING FOR YOURSELF IS ESSENTIAL**

- **NATURE** PLAYS A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF HER HEALING WORK

- SHE WALKS AROUND IN HER **GARDEN** AND IN THE **FOREST**, SHE LISTENS TO THE BIRDS AND RELAXES BY THE **OCEAN**.

- SHE FINDS PLAYING WITH **SMALL CHILDREN** HELPS TOO.
1. SUPPORT

Surround yourself with a good support system

Connect with other activists

Share your struggles.
2. REST

Take time to restore

spiritually

mentally

emotionally
3. SWITCH OFF (boundaries) just don’t go there
ACTION STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVISTS

4. BALANCE

WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?
SOME PRACTICAL TIPS TO END WITH

• DEEP BREATHING
  • 6 : 6 : 8 technique
  • Reduces blood pressure
  • Calms the mind
  • Focuses one on counting

• SELF CARE
  • Eat regular and nutritious meals
  • Get enough sleep
  • Exercise/ movement
  • Spirituality/commune with nature - reaffirm why you are doing this.
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