

WORKPLACE STRESS TEST

Being in the wrong job is a major source of workplace stress. The bigger the gap between your personal knowledge, skills and abilities on the one hand and your preferences and needs on the other hand and your job, the higher are your odds of burning out. Burnout has 3 components: exhaustion (lost energy), cynicism (lost enthusiasm), and inefficacy (lost self-confidence and capacity to perform), but even one can be enough to suffer serious consequences. No two experiences of burnout are exactly alike, however, and recovery requires that you pinpoint the unique workplace conditions that are contributing to your stress.

One way to do this is to use your self-awareness skills to tune in and discover what your experience of burnout is trying to tell you. If you found yourself to be in the “Stress” Quadrant, take this test to find out possible underlying causes.

Circle the answer that describes you best on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

	<i>Part A</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I am feeling underutilised at work	1	2	3	4	5
2	I feel that my efforts and skills are not being applied in the best way	1	2	3	4	5
3	I feel challenged in a good way at work	1	2	3	4	5
4	I'm feeling persistently restless, bored, directionless or disengaged most of the time	1	2	3	4	5

If you've scored high for Q1, Q2 and Q4, it's likely you've outgrown your current role are seeking a challenge that will stretch you in a meaningful and inspiring way.

Engage in some self-reflection: What makes you feel motivated, engaged, and energised at work? What are your skills, interests, and passions that you enjoy and excel at? What opportunities are within your reach that will allow you to better utilise them? What professional development can reignite your passion and bring joy? What new relationships can help you discover new opportunities?



	<i>Part B</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Agree	Strongly agree
5	When I was hired, I expected the current amount of workload.	1	2	3	4	5
6	My actual current responsibilities have met my expectations for this role.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The organisational culture is aligned with my pre-hire expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
8	My compensation matches my expectations for this role.	1	2	3	4	5

If you've scored low for Q5-Q8, you may be feeling a disconnect between what you expected when you were hired and what you actually experience at work. In occupational psychology this is known as a breach in the psychological contract with your organisation. This can result in distrust, disengagement, and compromised performance, and if these conditions persist, they can devolve into cynicism and burnout.

Reflect to pinpoint exactly where your expectations aren't squaring with your experience. This is key to resolving this dangerous disconnect.



Next, determine why it occurred. Is miscommunication to blame? Did you take on extra responsibilities after a coworker left? Is it an organisational issue, such as restructuring or new leadership?




Speak with your manager about clarifying your role, responsibilities, and expectations, and work together to identify a set of shared objectives and goals that honor what's important to you. Keep those lines of communication open — ongoing talks with leadership ensure that you remain in alignment.


	<i>Part C</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Agree	Strongly agree
9	I feel that overwork is expected from me.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I can achieve my daily goals in the designated work hours.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I feel that I'm expected to be "always on".	1	2	3	4	5
12	I feel that personal sacrifices for work are encouraged.	1	2	3	4	5

If you've scored high for Q9, Q11 and Q12, your work culture may normalise, glorify and reward overwork, thus creating a breeding ground for burnout. But not only is this unsustainable, it isn't even effective: chronic overwork leads to a decrease in productivity, higher absenteeism and turnover, poorer health, and burnout.

When this happens, it's time to put your priorities back where they belong: on your own well-being. Reflect on how you can communicate and maintain your boundaries regarding when you are (and importantly, are not) available.



Examine your tasks and see where "the three Ds" could apply: What can you Delegate, De-emphasize, or Discontinue?



Find ways to engage in regular periods of rest and renewal where you fully disconnect from your job and reconnect with family, friends, and personal activities you enjoy. Taking time to decompress and recharge interrupts the stress cycle and prevents work-related stress from becoming chronic and taking us into the danger zone of burnout.

	<i>Part D</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Agree	Strongly agree
13	My workplace culture is aligned with my principles and ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
14	My workplace culture makes it difficult for me to find meaning and purpose in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I often witness behaviors that leave people feeling belittled, disrespected, intimidated, unsafe, or undermined.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I feel expected to act in ways that violate my moral code.	1	2	3	4	5

If you've scored low for Q13 and high for Q14, your work culture does not align with your values. This should never be ignored. If you want to remain in your role and it's possible to reach an acceptable solution, talk to your manager well before your well-being is compromised.

If you've scored high for Q15 and Q16, your stress may stem from a work environment that allows or ignores unacceptable workplace behaviours such as harassment, unfair treatment, cutthroat competition, manipulation, gossiping, gaslighting, or abusive management. People who work in toxic environments often feel overwhelmed, distrustful, and cynical, and become disengaged as a form of self-protection.

If you believe you are working in a toxic work environment, don't waste your time trying to advocate for culture change, hoping that the harmful behaviours will stop, or counting on self-care strategies to make your job tolerable. In the immediate term, protect yourself by doing whatever you can to reduce your exposure to noxious coworkers. But your first and best form of self-care is to develop an exit strategy and leave.



Your experiences and emotions provide trustworthy data that can reveal what's contributing to your workplace stress and leading to burnout. Using your self-awareness to pay attention to and act on that information allows you to take back some of the control and agency that work-related stress has claimed, and opens up a path to restoring your well-being and reconnecting with your enthusiasm for work.

If you suspect you may be at risk of burning out, take the [Burnout Quiz](#).