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Work Related Stress Among Employees: The Burnout Epidemic & Ramifications to the Independent School World of Ashley Hall

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-- photo from Managed Healthcare Executives

Prologue:

The literature review in this paper is a review of what we currently know about chronic job-related stress and burn-out *as of the summer of 2021*. This is about to radically change. No one could have predicted the loss, grief, and pressures that would befall the world. In education, distance and hybrid learning doubled and sometimes tripled workloads; but this cannot compare to what the medical establishment has been and is still facing. The social, economic, and political upheaval in recent months has added layers of instability and uncertainty. Social isolation, then social distancing, and even technology all play a part. Substance abuse, including alcoholism, has skyrocketed; domestic violence is up; reports of mental illness has increased; and both statistics of suicide and homicide have reached new heights. It will be years before we know what this all means, but I do not doubt the research on chronic stress will continue to expand exponentially as organizational scientists and psychologists dissect the fallout.

There does need to be more research. The frame of my literature review is from the work of Christina Maslach and her esteemed colleagues, experts in the field. There is a lot known about what "job-related chronic stress" is and is not, who is affected, and why. There is even a growing amount of medical and psychological evidence about the effects of burnout. However, despite countless books and articles on self-care, there is very little scientific evidence to show that self-care is effective. In fact, the only proven strategy seems to be quitting employment or at least working much less, which is rarely a viable option. (Interestingly, Iceland just completed a national study on a shortened work week and found it to be "a resounding success." (Icelandic Work Week Study).

Any school, whether public or private, can have a culture that encourages the development or prevalence of burnout among the faculty and staff. In the worst environments, employees may feel helpless to help themselves. Student quality of care suffers. While this does not remove the individual's responsibility for her own self-care, many employees in today's workforce do not know they can set boundaries or ask for better: working yourself "to the nub" is the norm. Educators may feel hesitant to acknowledge a problem or take measures to protect themselves for fear of looking "weak" or "incompetent", even if they recognize the problem at all. These educators can certainly not model or teach skills they themselves do not possess.

Most adults understand that children may not hear what you say, but they copy what you do. Commonly, parents and teachers alike are told to not just "talk the talk, but walk the walk." Kids are watching us. They are watching how we cope with adversity. They are watching how others treat us. They are watching to see whether we develop boundaries, whether we speak up when we see injustice, and whether we show value to not only them, but to our families and

to ourselves. The school is their first look at a workplace, and they learn from us how they may expect to treat themselves or be treated by others. By watching the women and men around them, Ashley Hall students will see first-hand how to *be* educated women (and men) who are independent, ethically responsible, and prepared to face the challenges of society with confidence.

Now, for a disclaimer. This paper is interspersed with vignettes, describing independent school faculty members who are struggling from "burnout." All of these are true stories. Either these situations happened to me in previous employment or are the stories of colleagues from other independent school communities. However, ***none of the vignettes described have happened to me at Ashley Hall nor are they representative of Ashley Hall faculty or staff. Any resemblance to an Ashley Hall employee is purely coincidental.***

Chapter 1:

Description of the Problem & Past, Present, and Future Societal Factors

Amy

Amy was a new high school science teacher, young and initially passionate about her profession. Excited to make a difference in the world, she was eager to start her career at a prestigious private school outside of a major city. She envisioned molding the minds of future doctors, scientists, and leaders of our country… the very people she had admired as a student herself. Amy was at the top of her field academically, she had graduated from an elite university with a doctorate in her field, versed in the newest trends in educational pedology, and had a passion for science. Amy even enjoyed technology and had innovative ideas on how to incorporate technology into the high school classes she taught. She was thrilled at the unique chance at creating curricula in creative ways, something that was only possible in an independent school environment.

In many ways, Amy's first year as a schoolteacher was very successful. She was well-liked by her students, many of whom loved her creative teaching style. She would often stay late after school helping students, even eating lunch at her desk so she could work on curriculum or provide extra tutoring. She volunteered to coach the school's Robotics Team and their Science Olympiad Team. And, while she found that she had little time on her own in the evenings or on weekends, she gladly accepted the sacrifice to her social life so she could stay on top of her grading and curriculum preparation as well as attend her teams' weekend matches. Surely, this was what it would take to establish herself in her new career… and would be temporary, right?

Yet, Amy found the culture of the school to be more than a little disturbing. The chair of her department was nearing retirement, and many of the teachers saw this as a rare opportunity for advancement. (Teachers received "quality of life" raises of less than 2% a year, but a move to a department chair position meant a 10% raise and a chance to determine the pathway of the department in years to come). Unfortunately, Amy's arrival on the scene-- a popular female scientist with a doctorate and an innovative "21st Century Teaching Style" (a buzzword among the administration) -- appeared to be a threat. Some of her colleagues were polite, but cool, while others were openly hostile or skeptical of her teaching methods and opinions. One teacher even hinted that Amy was engaged in a sexual relationship with her principal, and this was why she was hired. Amy felt so uncomfortable that she started eating her lunch in her classroom every day, even when there was not a student she needed to meet with.

Unfortunately, the pace of work did not slow down in Amy's second year. The school assigned her to teach courses that were substantially different from what she had taught the previous year so she could not use most of the last year's prepared materials. The year also came with a new challenge. As Amy was now working with younger adolescents, she found the level of oversight from parents to be intrusive at best and abusive at worst. In particular, two or three sets of parents seem to question every aspect of Amy's curriculum, her teaching methods, and the use of technology in the classroom. Simply put, this was not how they *had learned science. These were successful people in their field, able to afford to send their children to the "best schools" and expected only the "best teaching." Amy spent large amounts of her time on the phone or in conferences with these few parents, explaining herself, her methods, her qualifications. She did not particularly feel supported by her administration, a fact that became apparent when she gave one student a failing grade for the term. The student had not turned in two major assignments, despite being given ample opportunity for extra help after school, and Amy had reached out to the parents frequently. The parents of the student complained to the administration, citing they had had to hire a private tutor to "reteach" Amy's curriculum to their child and the technological demands of the curriculum were "excessive." Amy was told in no uncertain terms that she would need to change the student's grade to a "gentleman's C" to calm down the parents, who turned out to be substantial donors to the school, as not to "ruin their son's chances at getting into a good college."*

By this time, Amy was feeling exhausted, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Whenever she saw the red voicemail light on her classroom phone or when an administrator came to speak to her, Amy felt a sick, knotted sensation in her stomach. She was losing weight, felt disconnected from her old set of friends, and had trouble sleeping… worrying what she would have to face the next day. She became cynical about the political machinations "behind the scenes" at the school and wondered if she was really making a difference at all.

When Amy was offered a private industry position after her second year, she made the heart-rending decision to leave education behind. Her parents expressed relief; they had always been not-so-secretly disappointed when their bright, accomplished daughter had become "just" a high school teacher. Their daughter could be successful (and financially more secure) in several respected scientific fields. Amy's parents put the past two years down as their daughter's "idealistic phase." And, while her hours continued to be long and just as arduous in her new job, Amy had to admit that her new position garnered much more social and financial respect.

While most of us would colloquially define the term "burnout" as "stressed," "worn-out," or even "frustrated," the professional literature has a very specific definition. Research defines burnout as "the most excessive type of occupational stress in which the employee experiences physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, caused by long-term exposure and involvement in emotionally demanding situations." (Mashlach, 1993) It is not a temporary condition or one that suddenly appears, only to "clear up" on its own. Personal, non-work-related factors such as a death in the family, divorce, or financial problems do not cause burnout (although occupational stress can make these worse and vice versa). Nor is it attributed to a particular failing of the individual. It affects both men and women, and those on the frontlines and those in more administrative or managerial positions. What can make this malady particularly insidious is that many sufferers either don't know they are "burned out," feel ashamed and blame themselves for it, or feel they have no options other than to "carry on."

Industrial Psychologists Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) propose that burnout is actually a syndrome with three specific diagnostic criteria: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal efficacy. Emotional exhaustion refers to the employee's feeling of overall fatigue that makes her lack the energy to dedicate to her work. She feels literally "drained," and may even dread getting up in the morning, perceiving work as "torture, which makes it difficult to endure" (Cavous & Demir, 2010). Depersonalization is the specific mental and emotional fatigue that causes an employee to lack the energy or desire to invest herself in the workplace community, including customers or students. This can appear as withdrawing or isolating herself from others (avoiding community get-togethers, eating lunch alone) or in negative behavior such as cynicism or pessimism when interacting with others. This seems to be a coping strategy, emotionally distancing herself from work is a move to protect the worker who may feel helpless to change her circumstance (Mashlach, Shaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). A low sense of personal efficacy is marked by the employee's feelings that her accomplishments do not matter, or she cannot accomplish anything.

Employees who experience burnout report overall fatigue and sleep issues, difficulty with concentration, feeling emotionally numb or "shut down," a loss of enjoyment, a sense of cynicism or pessimism; increased incidents of illness and/or increased absenteeism and "sick days;" tension; aches and pains; greater difficulties setting up and maintaining boundaries; high blood pressure; and increases in sadness and irritability. These symptoms usually bleed into other aspects of the worker's life, affecting her personal relationships with family and friends, her financial decisions, and even her health. Research has found strong correlations between burnout and heart attacks (Angerer, 2003), family problems and increased use of alcohol and drugs (Koeske & Koeske, 1989), and increased mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Gill, Faschner & Shackhar, 2006).

Perhaps most alarming are results from MRI scans of 110 participants' brains which found that burnout may alter the neural circuits of the brain. Johansson Golkar and his associates found that employees who demonstrate high levels of burnout showed corresponding changes in the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for regulating emotions (Golkar et al., 2014). Subsequent researchers have found this same association changes in cortical thinning, which is linked to fine motor function, as well as a difference in blood-oxygen-levels in the brain, which is associated with our ability to shift attention and process problems (Savic, 2013; Durning et al., 2013). The more long-term implications of burnout on cognitive functioning have yet to be determined.

Researchers have also been interested in the effect burnout has on *others*. That there is, in fact, a negative consequence on patients, students, clients, family members, and coworkers has long been a fundamental assumption. A community member that is burnt out, starting to isolate herself, becomes negative or cynical, or is altogether absent affects the entire community… and can have a contagion effect. How a person copes with the effects of burnout has other documented consequences. For example, Lowenstein (1991) reported that, in education, there is a clear correlation between teacher stress and students' stress levels.

Across the literature, burnout is described as being on a continuous spectrum. That is to say it is neither present nor absent, but referred to as "low," "medium," or "high." Burnout is further described as not a job-related stress that comes from a temporary situation such as a deadline, upcoming presentation, or a single conflict, but results from a "grinding down" from the day-to-day stress.

Research from Renzo Bianchi (2016) has shown that there is considerable stigma associated with the term and the condition of "burnout." Like many mental health issues, those who suffer are often seen (by themselves and others) as "insecure, inadequate, inferior, and weak." This encourages individuals to avoid treatment or even acknowledge that there is even a problem. Some research even suggests that the stigma associated with a mental health condition, whether it is chronic stress or depression, may be even more harmful than the condition itself (Cechnicki et al., 2011). Furthermore, burnout is socially contagious (Bakker et. al, 2005). As chronic occupational stress manifests both physical, psychological, and social systems, the prevalence in a community tends to grow-- while the stigma decreases the likelihood of help-seeking behaviors. Maslach and Leiter (2016) report that these findings argue for burnout to be considered not an individual syndrome but rather a characteristic of workgroups.

Researchers have found burnout in a wide range of work settings and populations; however, "high touch" occupations such as healthcare workers, educators, and police seem to have the highest rates. There appears to be something about working with other people in a face-to-face

way that contributes to the higher level of daily stress experienced by the worker. Demographically, many studies have been conducted to see if gender plays a part. However, while some studies have found women experience a higher rate of burnout, others have found the exact opposite. Likewise, burnout appears to occur at any age and at any time in a person's career. While much has been made of the "new teacher" burnout rate, studies have not shown conclusively that burnout is a new employee or a young person's problem. A younger employee may be able-- because of the lack of family and financial constraints-- to leave an unhappy job situation or career. Someone who is older and has invested a significant number of years in a career may not feel as free to do so. Again, from Maslach and Leiter:

> "Even when it's necessary, such a decision can be very painful if it means walking away from a career that was once a source of pride, prestige, and personal identity. As one high school teacher put it, 'I've been teaching for over twenty years, but I've lost my self-confidence. I can't keep doing this, I don't want to keep doing this, because I don't like the values of our society as I see them in schools-- anti-learning, anti-effort, anti-responsibility. If education isn't going to make a difference, then why have I been busting my buns? I just want to go somewhere else and have a life. So, I'm just in a basic survival mode now.'" (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; pg. 19)

Finally, there also seems to be no correlation between occupational stress and level of education. Again, some studies show a difference between non-university degree holders and those with a higher degree, while others show the opposite. Burnout Syndrome appears to be an equal opportunity problem. (Research review: Dimitrios & Konstantinos, 2014).

Presently, there is a move within the research community to re-categorize "burnout" as a type of depressive entity (Shonfeld and Bianchi, 2015). The World Health Organization recently announced that "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" will be included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), the international version of the diagnostic statistical manual used to identify and classify mental illnesses (May et al., 2020).

Initially the professional literature focused on the prevalence of job-related stress in the healthcare industry. This industry is well known to be an occupation where "front-line" clinicians constantly must be at their best, the hours are notoriously long, and the work emotionally difficult. Clinicians are uniquely 'face-to-face' with their customers… usually in moments of great distress. And, as the industry has transformed in the last two decades due to the ascent and confines of the Insurance Industry, increased technology use, and the development of the "gig" industry (short-term, contract jobs), the prevalence of burnout has grown substantially. At the extreme end, burnout has gained even more specific names such as "compassion fatigue," where the clinician no longer feels empathy or sympathy for the patient/

client, and "vicarious trauma," where the clinician develops signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from continuous exposure to others' traumas.

Soon enough, however, researchers recognized another occupation in which the prevalence of burnout was exceptionally high: education. Results of a 2013 Gallup-Health Index found that nearly half of all teachers surveyed in a K-12 setting reported high levels of daily stress during the school year. This is a level congruent with that of the healthcare industry. In another survey of 30,000 teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015), researchers found that while 89% were "enthusiastic" about teaching when they started the profession, only 15% still felt that way at the time of the survey. These researchers found that 10% of teachers leave the teaching profession after only a year, with teachers in urban areas leaving at an even higher rate: 70%. Additionally, 17% of teachers leave education after 5 years.

No area of today's workforce is immune to burnout. Researchers found that while burnout is most prevalent in the "high-touch" fields-- e.g., healthcare and education, or places where "people have to deal effectively with their clientele and provide good customer service" (Maslach & Leiter, pg. 20) --the economy shifting from manufacturing to a service industry has accounted for the number of occupations qualifying as "high touch." Renowned Organizational Psychologists Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter further argue that the problem's roots lie in economic trends such as globalization, technology changes such as automation, and management philosophies such as the redistribution of power to a central authority. Maslach and Leiter state:

> *"Workers are conceding their time. They are working longer hours. They are taking work home, often continuing after hours on computer equipment they have purchased themselves. They are devoting more time to tasks that are not personally rewarding, that is, that are not enjoyable and do not further their careers. They are even giving up long-cherished benefits, like fully paid health insurance and company-financed pension plans. Competitive pressures put an end to those practices, but do not necessarily improve things. In pushing for efficiency, competitive pressures make corporations myopic. They cut costs in the short term at the expense of programs and policies that would make sense in the long run." (*Maslach & Leiter, 1997, *pg. 5)*

Even the popular media has recognized the challenges of the new workplace. Daniel Markovits in his article "How Life Became an Endless, Terrible Competition" (*The Atlantic,* September 2019) argues that to succeed in today's competitive marketplace, workers must toil longer hours and be willing to place "himself, quite literally, at the disposal of others." Using the example of attorneys, Markovits explains that in 1965 many elite firms expected lawyers to bill approximately 1,300 fee-earning hours per year. However, by the year 2000, major law firms insisted that a quota of 2,400 billable hours was "not unreasonable" for any junior attorney who

wished to earn partnership. "Because not all the hours a lawyer works are billable, billing 2,400 hours could easily require working from 8 am until 8 pm, six days a week, every week of the year, without vacations or sick days" (Markovits, 2019). Finally, the author reminds us of Amazon's Jeff Bezos' infamous and generally adopted "leadership principles" which calls on managers to not just "hit a wall, to climb the wall." No excuses, get it done.

Derek Thompson, also in *The Atlantic,* described the American drive to work harder and longer as a "false American Dream." Calling the phenomena "Workism," Thompson proposes that work is now America's new religion. The profession has become the American worker's entire identity, the centerpiece of her life, and the job has become the vehicle to obtain purpose, a sense of transcension, self-actualization, and meaning. Work is now "God." Thompson argues that 100 years ago economists truly believed that the rise of technology would ease the burden on workers, make for increases in leisure time, and allow for innovation and creativity. However, this is not what has happened: Americans are spending more time at work, not less. Social media brings with it constant comparisons between individuals. Boundaries are eroding between work life and home life, thanks to technology, while "most available jobs do not stoke passions." (Thompson, 2019)

Naturally, all of this has a ripple effect. Several startling studies in recent years have shown that the effects of "workism" may have trickled down to affect the very students that independent schools serve. Again, from Markovits:

> "At one elite northeastern elementary school, for example, a teacher posted a "problem of the day," which students had to solve before going home, even though no time was set aside for working on it. The point of the exercise was to train fifth graders to snatch a few extra minutes of work time by multitasking or by sacrificing recess.
>
> Such demands exact a toll. Elite middle and high schools now commonly require three to five hours of homework a night; meanwhile, epidemiologists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have warned of schoolwork-induced sleep deprivation. Wealthy students show higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse than poor students do. They also suffer depression and anxiety at rates as much as triple those of their same-age peers throughout the country." (Markovits, 2019)

In *The Atlantic's* 2010 article "The Silicon Valley's Suicides," Hannah Rosin investigated a rash of suicides among the "best and brightest" in the highly affluent area of Palo Alto, California. This article highlighted the immense pressure and stress affluent adolescents are under as they are being groomed to follow in their parents' footsteps and join the endless cycle of competition. Statistics have shown that suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth 10 to 24-

years-old nationwide, but affluent adolescents have a higher rate of self-destructive behaviors than any other economic class.

Madeline Levine argues in her book *The Price of Privilege (2008)* that the economically privileged adolescents exhibit high rates of depression, anxiety, self-injurious behaviors (such as cutting, eating disorders, substance abuse, etc.) as well as suicidal actions. Levine found that a desperate need to compete, to be the best, to measure up to parents' expectations all frequently left these adolescents with no clear sense of self. While these children appeared bright, charming, socially skilled, afforded with every privilege, they were often very shallow, materialistic, and unable to cope with failure. The result is a generational class of stressed out, hopeless, and even self-destructive students.

The relationship between teachers' mental wellbeing and student success and mental health is well documented. Zhang and Sapp (2008) found that teacher burnout is predictive of lower student academic performance. Specifically, an unmotivated teacher often leads to unmotivated or less effective students. More alarmingly, a recent study found that burnout among educators directly influences students' level of the stress hormone cortisol; the more stressed the teacher, the higher the cortisol levels found in her students (Oberle & Schonert- Reichl, 2016). This should not, in retrospect, be that surprising when considering that the relationship between a teacher and her student is often one of the most powerful predictors of a student's comfort and success in the classroom.

There is far less research on chronic stress in the independent school community as compared to the public sectors. However, Brackett and Baron (2018) did report for the National Association of Independent schools that while the top three feelings from a national survey of teachers were *frustrated, overwhelmed,* and *stressed,* independent schoolteachers reported they were *frustrated, happy,* and *excited*. Though *frustration* was by far the most mentioned, this survey does seem to indicate that independent schoolteachers may be, in general, of a healthier mindset.

And yet, Curtis (2004) warns "the myth about the cushy life of a private school teacher" has been challenged by research. Eighty-five percent of independent schoolteachers reported excessive workloads were affecting their home life. In a survey done by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' (ATL), 35% said their excessive workload left them feeling daily exhausted and stressed, while 30% stated they had no time for a social life. A further 20% reported they were expected to respond immediately to parents' messages and to be "on call" outside of school hours. A 2021 VoicEd survey reported that private school teachers found their workload increased in the last year, with 25% reporting they are working at least 21 hours a week more than contracted. Twenty- seven percent of the teachers said they were expected to teach a subject outside of their specialty or training, with 60% of these reporting that they did

not feel they were supported or trained enough to deliver their curriculum. The ATL survey further reported independent schoolteachers admitted feeling insecure in their jobs as many are employed without contracts and their positions were dependent on enrollment factors or the "will" of the individual school.

The independent school world has its unique set of challenges. As we have seen, the population is uniquely fragile, becoming more so as society continues to lay the pressures on. The benefits of high parent involvement also bring a downside: a level of competitiveness and anxiety found only among the most successful professionals. And independent schools are a business. Student retention, enrollment management, and budgetary restraints are central considerations (NAIS Enrollment Management Handbook, 2021)

Aydin and Kaya (2016) did explore specific sources of stress for teachers working in an independent school environment. They found that "expectation of parents (high expectations, intervening with the teacher's duties), demands of administration (lack of encouragement, constant supervision), factors preventing teachers from revealing the problems with students or colleagues (problematic behaviors, academic incompetence), and anxiety of dismissal from their school" are all clear factors. The last factor-- fear of job termination-- seems to be significantly higher among female teachers, rather than their male coworkers. Additionally, researchers found that independent schoolteachers continue to face many of the same stressors as their public counterparts: lack of resources, factors originating from the teaching profession itself (such as "the exhausting and boring nature of the profession, low status, etc."), and those originating from colleagues, such as workplace relational aggression (gossiping, rivalry, competitiveness).

Nevertheless, independent schools have the unique opportunity to address the causes of burnout that plague the education sector in a way that the public system has no way to match. Independent schools have more freedom to make changes, institute expectations, and are generally small enough so that all personnel can feel like they have a voice. Teachers at a private school setting usually have a greater sense of control over their classroom environment and curriculum, enjoy a large amount of parental support, and have access to resources.

Chapter 2:

The Reasons for Burnout

There is a common viewpoint that burnout is the individual's fault and, as such, is her sole responsibility to fix. According to this theory, people who experience burnout are weak, lacking the fortitude and resilience to make it in the rough and tumble world of a competitive workplace. These are the complainers, those who are never happy with the status quo. Perhaps burnout is just depression manifesting in the workplace; the individual has underlying mental health issues that have bled into her ability to function on the job. Or burnout results from personal problems such as marital conflict, which has affected work performance.

While stress outside the workplace, mental health issues, and personality factors influence how each of us cope with stress on a day-to-day basis, the research just does not support the theory that burnout is the fault of the individual. Rather, the vast majority of the literature points to problems with organizational culture. In his article "Employee burnout Is a Problem With the Company, Not the Person," Eric Garton (2017) proposes that the practices of excessive collaboration, weak time-management disciplines and overloading the most capable are all contributing factors to employee burnout. He suggests companies should recognize that multi-tasking can be counterproductive, and the average frontline supervisor spends as much as a full business day just sending, reading, and answering email communications, many of which she should not have to address. Gardner questions whether most scheduled meetings are necessary. How frequently should meetings be scheduled? How long do they last and is there even a set agenda? And finally, who really needs to attend? (The argument being that the company has tied up workers who could be more effective elsewhere). Further, Gardner points out that while an average manager loses one day to email and other electronic communications, she typically loses two to meetings. But a talented manager will lose even more time as her excellent work earns her more responsibilities, assignments, and tasks.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) go even further. They propose that there are six specific factors that contribute most directly to the incidence of burnout: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness, and conflicting values.

1. Work Overload

Lydia

When the 2008 recession hit, Suburbia Academy likewise saw a drop in enrollment. The Board had recently made a large land purchase adjacent to the campus; but the purchase left outstanding debts. Administration cut the budget to the bone, not filling positions lost because of attrition, cutting "resource positions" such as assistant teaching staff, and demanding all teachers take on coaching duties rather than pay outside community coaches. Salaries were frozen or reduced. Faculty were told at every faculty meeting that they must do whatever is necessary to retain families, encourage families to choose Suburbia Academy over other competitors, and to "tighten their belts." Division Directors slashed departmental budgets and even counted the amount of paper used in the copy machines. Administrators gave each teacher one ink pen and told the faculty they could come for ink refills if the pen ran dry! Most teachers were thankful to have a job in this economy. Many of their public-school counterparts were dealing with job furloughs. Now, as they were told, was the time to show they were a "team player."

Lydia was one of three school counselors in a school of over a thousand students. She frequently spent her summers at the school, working on advisory and guidance curriculum, and helping with the summer programs. While she did not coach a sport, she ran several clubs after school, assisted in every Admission Open House, chaperoned every dance, and went on several overnight field trips with the students. She managed the calendar for her division and assisted the administration on a number of managerial tasks. However, when the budget cuts came down, Lydia was told in no uncertain terms that she was "resource staff" and her job was on the line. She could prove she was a "team player" by taking on an academic class. Though Lydia's background was not in education-- but in counseling-- and the subject was not one Lydia had been proficient in as a student, she gratefully agreed. She felt a twinge of ethical uncertainty about grading students she might later be expected to also counsel, but reassured herself that she knew several Independent School counselors who were being asked to teach AP Psychology or even coach varsity level sports.

What followed was three years of research, curriculum development, teaching, grading, and addressing student and parental concerns as a teacher on top of her duties as a counselor and a pseudo-administrator. Lydia devoted weekends to keeping ahead of the workload or attending one school function or another. Every evening was spent catching up on progress notes, grading papers, or trying to learn the academic material before the students did. Lydia was exhausted and

resentful. Though the department chairs of both her counseling department and her academic department were very complimentary of her work-- and parents requested her as their child's teacher-- there were some new individuals in the administration who now openly questioned her ethics: grading students who she might counsel. Suddenly, it was as if no one remembered that they had insisted she take on an academic class. Instead of showing she could be a "team player," taking on this load seemed to endanger her position even further.

Lydia was frustrated, complained endlessly about her job and the administration to her family, became increasingly paranoid about talking to coworkers, and felt overall wearied by the endless, hopeless round of work. It even became so bad that Lydia found herself physically sick on Monday mornings. But Lydia forced herself to keep going.

Maslach & Leiter report that "energy is a fundamental quality of engagement." In the eyes of the organization, a higher workload means higher productivity. From the employee's perspective, the higher workload means time and energy. While managers can ask employees to "work smarter, not harder," this is typically not realistic in practice. An employee that stretched too thin can only do so for a short amount of time-- the time and energy expended is too intense for healthy productivity and creativity. As the two researchers explain:

> "It takes considerably more energy to work in a creative, focused manner, solve complicated problems, and keep people fully informed of your contributions to collaborative projects. It takes energy to focus on others with genuine attention and respect; exhaustion undermines the capacity to work with feeling. The breakdown in a relationship with work increases these demands because individuals are attentive more closely to their employment situation, not just to their jobs. Because you can take nothing for granted, you have to spend more of your precious energy anticipating organizational problems. Positioning yourself to deal with downsizing and job restructuring is exhausting." (Mashlach & Leiter, pp. 41-42)

2. Lack of Control

James

James is a high school humanities teacher at Buckston Hall. He has worked at the day and boarding school for almost fifteen years and, for the majority of this time, was happy in his position. However, in recent years, James has begun to view his work as more of a drudgery… and he is doing all that he can to keep it together until his retirement in five years. The rules and policies that the new administration has implemented have become a burden, and James feels he can no longer do his job. Certainly, he feels he no longer controls his curriculum or time.

Instead, James feels micromanaged: the administration picked a new curriculum over what James has taught for years and feels is the best way to teach his subject, and he is spending all of his non-teaching time either in pointless meetings or in student supervisory duties. James also feels that his principal second-guesses his decisions, holding resources so that James cannot proceed without first going to the supervisor with "his hat out." For years, James has taken pride in his professionalism and ability to reach students, sharing his passion for the subject. Now James is cynical, feels disconnected from his students, and resentful of the administration. He points to the "final straw:" a required "time efficiency study," where faculty and staff had to account for their time-- in 15-minute increments-- for one week.

The ability of any professional to set priorities for everyday tasks, determine the best way to approach work, and decide about the use of resources is at the very heart of what it means to be a "professional." Without control, there is no way for an individual to achieve a balance between what the school wants and what the individual needs. The lack of control is particularly keenly felt when administration or managers make decisions about an employee's area of expertise-- when it is not theirs-- or without input from those most affected.

While complete control is not realistic or even desirable, there is a fine line between feeling respected and disrespected as a professional. Considering the professions where burnout is the highest, this makes sense. Insurance companies, often run by individuals with no experience "on the front lines," increasingly determine if or how patients are treated by healthcare professionals. The state and federal government is determining curriculum standards, what goes in or is taken out of textbooks, and how much time is allotted per subject matters.

3. Insufficient Reward

Bethany

Bethany was a school counselor at Starbrook Secular Academy in an urban center. A member of several professional associations, she frequently checked on their websites for information that might benefit her as a professional but also benefit her school. One day Bethany noticed that one association, specifically geared towards ethics and character education in independent schools, was offering to "recognize" schools which met criteria as "an ethical school." As a secular school in a deeply Christian area of the country, Bethany thought the school might see such a recognition as a boon, especially by Admissions who frequently competed with religious institutions. After reading over the criteria-- which was quite lengthy-- Bethany felt confident that her school could be recognized.

After the administration approved the project, Bethany spent every free moment at school, on weekends, and on vacations working on it: gathering materials; interviewing students, teachers, and other stakeholders; researching "best practices" in both character education and the field of ethics in schools; and writing a very long paper describing the school's program. The final part of the criteria was hosting a school visit, which Bethany arranged without cost to the school by "tagging" on to the President of the Association's planned visit to the city for a conference. She arranged for the President to see several aspects of the school's character education program in action and for him to interview teachers and students.

Following the visit, the association approved the school's application for recognition, but gave some constructive feedback on what the association saw the school did well and what it could improve. Bethany felt elated; the school could now proudly display this recognition on the school's website and in admissions material. Bethany even went to a picture frame shop and had the certificate framed so the school could display this in the reception area.

However, the school's reaction was far more lukewarm. What had been a major months-long project for Bethany turned out to be of little interest to the administration. Bethany was surprised that the recognition was never displayed on the school's web page and the certification-- so proudly framed-- ended up stuffed in the Middle School trophy case, behind old athletic trophies. When Bethany happened to come by the school during the following summer, she found the framed certificate sitting on the top of a full trash can, waiting to be dumped. Apparently, the Head's secretary was tasked with cleaning out the trophy cases and the Head had okayed it to be tossed.

Bethany was stunned. She had not expected (and did not get) any material reward or even public praise for her efforts. But, throwing away the proof of her hard work, the certification as a "School of Ethical Excellence," a certification which was technically good for three years? That was quite a blow. She had worked so hard, not for her own benefit but for the benefit of the school, and this is clearly what all of it meant to them!

Both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards must be considered for people to feel sufficiently rewarded. Maslach and Leiter write that people hope for material rewards such as money, prestige, and security. However, "an even greater contributor to the experience of burnout is the loss of the intrinsic reward of doing enjoyable work-- building expertise-- with respected colleagues" (pg. 45).

As organized labor has lost power over the last few decades and globalization pressures have increased-- including automation and jobs going overseas-- the structure of the American economy has changed. Besides cutting pay, benefits have been slashed from every quarter.

Most employees no longer can expect the security of a pension plan, paid healthcare, or even the security of seniority in a job. Full-time positions are now often held by two part-time employees (if not one), as a cost-saving measure regarding the payment of benefits. In fact, the rise of the "gig economy," where employees are "contract workers" has allowed employers to not have to pay benefits at all. The days of staying in one position and developing seniority in a company are gone. Particularly older employees, who are forced into early retirement or have been otherwise "let go," cannot command the salaries they earned through years of hard work under the former employer at a new company. And, because older Americans often come with health concerns, many employers are reluctant to take them on, despite their expertise in the field.

The intrinsic rewards-- finding joy in your work-- is the greatest loss. This is what a job is all about: the wonderful synchronicity of attention and energy used to tackle a problem either as an individual or as a member of a team. But work overload prevents employees from giving their full attention to a task and drains them of energy. A lack of control undermines their motivation and may also prevent employees from approaching the task in the most effective or creative way.

4. Breakdown in Community

Rosa

Rosa had been working as a middle school teacher at Pleasantville Day School for over 10 years when the faculty community took a radical turn. A new administrator took over as Division Head, and he hired a new male teacher in the math department. The administrator soon made it uncomfortably clear that he preferred male teachers over their female counterparts, openly saying at one point that "men were easier" and "women bring too much drama to the workplace." The new teacher, in turn, seemed to focus all of his energy on developing relationships with his students-- ignoring the other faculty members' attempts to befriend him or responding with surprising abruptness. At first, Rosa soothed her hurt colleagues' feelings by reminding them that this was the math teacher's first year, and it made sense that he would put all of his energy into his students. However, as the year turned into two, Rosa herself became increasingly uncomfortable with his behavior. The teacher seemed to have a marked preference over male students, giving them extra time, allowing them special privileges, and even eating lunch exclusively with his favorite male students... in his room, with the door closed. He was wildly popular among the boys, not only his math students but also the football players he now coached on the middle school team. Many vied for the opportunity to be in this teacher's exclusive group. Parents heaped praise on him, appreciating that this teacher and coach seemed to take a very

personal interest in their sons. His female students, however, were treated with impatience and the razor edge of a very sharp tongue. A number of girls confided in Rosa that they had feared this teacher and dread his class but dared not complain.

Rosa became increasingly anxious around the teacher. She taught one period in his classroom and his rules on how his class was to look and be kept after each class were precise. Any paper left out, or the blinds left open would result in a tantrum, even one in front of students. On one occasion, the enraged teacher got right up into her face-- in front of her class-- and told her "everyone is tired of your shit!" When she took this incident to her Division Director, however, she was told she was making too much of it and was being "too sensitive." Perhaps, he suggested, Rosa was just jealous of the new teacher's connection with so many of his students. He insisted the two "hug it out."

Finally, by the third year, Rosa's uncomfortableness was growing into alarm. The teacher's behavior had become more and more blatant: yelling at students in the hallway, insisting that certain male students "check in" with him between classes, and becoming increasingly abusive to faculty members he felt was undermining him or was trying to interfere with "his kids." Teachers walked on eggshells, camaraderie was lost, and everyone felt overall helpless to do anything. On several more occasions, Rosa brought up her concerns about the students to her supervisor, but was repeatedly told, "you just don't like him."

It was all too much to bear. The constant strain of worrying about this teacher's abusiveness, feeling belittled by administration, and powerlessness to stop the display of poor boundaries left Rosa feeling disheartened and disillusioned about the school. This was a school that prided itself on its anti-bullying program!

Psychologists Gary and Ruth Namie, experts in workplace abuse, report a surge of workplace bullying and abusive behaviors in recent years in their book The Bully at Work (2009). In the competitive workplace, particularly in places where it is difficult to advance up the ladder, such behavior may even be subtly or overtly encouraged. Only the strongest or the most ruthless will survive. Unfortunately, organizations that cannot nurture healthy relationships are vulnerable to unresolved conflicts and may not see the larger picture. A lack of community means a lack of collaboration, a drain on people's emotional and mental energy, and encourages bitterness, resentfulness, and a lack of productivity. "A work group in conflict works against itself" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, pg. 51).

In a 2019 article from *School Counselor,* Petraska and Tomashot's report that workplace harassment-- especially when it does not fall within the strict legal parameters of sexual or race discrimination-- is much "less talked about, reported, and believed." Using the definition from the Workplace Bullying Institute, the authors report such workplace abuse can include any coworker: a supervisor can target an employee; an employee can target a supervisor; or a coworker can target a colleague. Workplace abuse can include harsh criticism, social isolation/ exclusion, spreading rumors, setting impossible deadlines, overworking an employee, attacks on personal or physical characteristics, workplace mobbing (ganging up on the target), sabotaging, excessive teasing, removing job responsibility/ title, and overt or covert threats. And, according to the Workplace Bullying Institute, the targets are often the "best and brightest" in the company. Citing a 2012 *NEA Today* article, the authors further point out that aggressive parents who "threaten and intimidate their child's educator" do fall within the criteria of workplace abuse. "In most cases, there is no safe space to seek support and assistance or know who to turn to, particularly when there is a lack of administrative or union support. Targets who report workplace bullying to a supervisor or human resource representative, are terminated, or transferred from the job. It is rare that the bully is punished for his or her behavior." (Petraska & Tomashot, 2019).

In a 2017 Educator Quality of Life Survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers that surveyed nearly 5,000 public school educators found that 27% of educators said they had been threatened, bullied, or harassed, in comparison to 7% of employed adults in the general population. When asked who the bully was, 35% identified a principal or administrator, and 50% revealed that it was a student.

Petraska and Tomashot (2019) conclude with advice for educators when interviewing for a new position: "Ask about turnover rate; a high turnover rate is never a good sign." And, yet education has one of the highest turnover rates of any profession, with educators citing "lack of administrator support" as a key factor.

Frequent changes in leadership also undermines the workplace's sense of community. When the organization's goals keep changing, employees are often confused. What is expected of them? What does the organization value? "It is hard to be self-directing when you do not know what direction you want to take." (Maslach & Leiter, pg. 51). The lack of continuity leads to increased anxiety and overall insecurity among employees who are left fearful of making mistakes.

5. Absence of Fairness

Westbrook Academy Faculty

Westbrook Academy was proud to offer its employees "merit raises," rather than the traditional flat standard of living raises which are more typical. Each year, every member of the faculty and staff met with their respective supervisor and was rated on a variety of categories from "1" (unsatisfactory) to "5" (going above and beyond). The total average of all the categories determined a percentage raise, which theoretically could be as high as 5%. Knowing the categories in advance, the employees were therefore motivated to work hard and try to bring their score up as much as possible.

During one particular year, everything seemed to go as usual. Supervisors met individually with their teachers and staff, reviewed the criteria, went over what they felt needed to be improved and what they saw as particular strengths. The Supervisors were overall pleased with performance and scored their employees highly. Unfortunately, the total of the raises for all faculty and staff was larger than what the Board had budgeted… and money was tight. There was no way to pay the merit raises to the deserving faculty and staff without cutting into the funding of other pet projects. Instead, the Board and Head of School returned to the evaluations with "white out," lowering each individual score so that the total raises would more accurately fit the budget.

Later, what they did got out to the employee community! The faculty and staff had seen their initial scores during their individual evaluations and knew what raises were earned. They felt cheated and made to feel their hard work and sacrifices over the year were unappreciated. Morale took a nosedive… but, what could they do? Other than resigning in protest, there were no other avenues open to them.

When employees feel that the organization is being unfair, secretive, or underhanded, pride and connection to the community is lost. In today's competitive environment with power often centralized, companies have a tendency to make decisions without considering the impact on the "front-line staff." Central managers may also make decisions without informing employees as to the reasons, leaving a vacuum where guesswork and rumors can flourish. Particularly in times of organizational stress, such as a restructuring or downsizing, apparent unfair practices spread like wildfire throughout a workforce. Uneven distribution of rewards, such as rewarding CEO's extravagant bonuses or "golden parachutes," which are frequently reported upon in the media, can make the average worker more aware of the unfairness of the organizational culture.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) write:

> "A workplace is perceived to be fair when three key elements are present: trust, openness, and respect. When an organization achieves community, people trust one

another to fulfill their roles in shared projects, to communicate openly about their intentions, and to show mutual respect. When an organization acts fairly, it values every person who contributes to its success, it indicates that every individual is important. All three elements of fairness are essential to maintaining a person's engagement with work. In contrast, their absence contributes directly to burnout." (The Truth About Burnout, 1997, pg. 52)

6. Conflicting Values

Kim

As the public-school sector in the county strengthened with new charter schools and an International Baccalaureate high school program, Ridgeway Prep found it harder and harder to compete with "free." These new public-school options came with shiny new facilities, with all the bells and whistles, as well as publicity. At least two programs had been named as one of the "best public schools in the nation" by a popular magazine known for school rankings. Ridgeway Prep had the prestige of being known as a fine independent school, but in a time where university tuitions were ever rising, it became harder and harder to convince parents to invest the high tuition when many were sure they could get an equal, if not better, education for free.

To meet the budget, Ridgeway Prep found itself in the unenviable position of taking in students that the school would have declined just five years ago… students with disciplinary problems or special learning needs. In fact, Ridgeway Prep did not decline anyone; it was a well-known "secret" that the admissions committees accepted all paying applicants, unable to afford to decline.

Kim had been a teacher at Ridgeway Prep for almost 20 years, but recently earned a secondary master's degree in learning support. She has switched from a full-time teacher to a part-time learning specialist just this past year, taking the much smaller salary and benefits cut, hoping to build up the school's fledgling learning support program. She was paid to work 8 hours a week, but this was an impossible task. In one grade alone, over 45% of the student body had a diagnosed learning issue. Parents were constantly calling her, citing that the school had promised upon admissions that their children would get individualized care… but were finding that the teachers were not versed in special education or individualized learning methods considered "best practice" for their child's unique needs.

Kim was shocked and overwhelmed. These parents were upset, feeling the school had promised them one thing, then delivered on another. Kim felt strongly that if the school accepted students with clear-- and sometimes severe-- learning needs, they needed to fully invest in a support

program. Otherwise, they were just lying to parents, stealing their money, and setting up these fragile students for failure. And, on top of that, parents of students who were "above average" or "gifted" were demanding higher educational standards and resources for their children, recognizing what they called the "dumbing down" of the curriculum to accommodate the newest Ridgeway students.

Despite Kim's pleas that her hours be increased to reflect the time she was working, that sufficient resources be put into a learning support program, and that admissions and administrators be more forthcoming with parents as to the real state of support, the administration kept citing budgetary restraints. Finally, in desperation, Kim felt she had no choice but to resign her position. The values of the school did not match her values; she felt betrayed and walked away from her community of so many years, bitter.

Maslach and Leiter suggest in The Truth About Burnout that a mismatch between an employee's values and the organization's values is the hardest to overcome. An employee who feels that the organization does not share her ethics will usually leave, disillusioned by the experience. Sometimes the mismatch is clear from the start, such as in an employee who is comfortable with cutting corners or being dishonest on her timecard when the organization has clearly defined policies regarding behavioral expectations. However, the mismatch may not be so obvious. For example, a healthcare facility that proclaims, "we are family," then refuses to help a patient because of insurance; a telecommunications company that prides itself on "individual service," then treats individuals like numbers; or a school that promotes itself as a "caring community" with a rigorous "no bullying" student program, then allows faculty members to harass and abuse one another. The dissonance may not be so obvious at first but may become intolerable for the worker.

There is overlap here with other burnout factors. Unless the employee is in a leadership position, she is often helpless to change the culture. She is likely to see the environment as unfair or disingenuous. If the employee does not respect the company, leadership, and/ or her coworkers, she is unlikely to put effort into developing the community. Even those skilled at compartmentalizing are likely to avoid social and collaborative situations that would make them feel uncomfortable.

Chapter 3:

Strategies for Future Action

The popular media tout numerous "fixes" for individuals who are experiencing burnout; unfortunately, the scientific research in the field is not as conclusive. Instead, many of the individual strategies that are recommended to treat daily stress or even chronic anxiety and depression have not been useful in the treatment of work-related burnout. The common advice given-- being conscious of a work-life balance, mindfulness, skill-building, and so on-- are not proven to be effective.

Matt Plummer (2019) put together a comprehensive guide on methods that research has found "rarely works," "works with mixed or partial results," and recovery methods that are "proven to work" to alleviate burnout. He explains that while exercising regularly, getting enough light exposure, and building communication skills all have obvious health benefits and are proven ways to deal with ordinary stress and conflicts, these fall within the "rarely works" category when addressing burnout. Burnout is not regular daily stress. Plummer further explains that practicing mindfulness, using relaxation techniques, and engaging in cognitive behavioral therapy have an impact for some, but not for others. These methods can address specific symptoms of burnout, but none seem to speed burnout recovery. Plummer reports that there are only three things that show any substantial evidence of addressing the core issues associated with burnout. These are:

1. Working Less. This is by far the most substantially beneficial way to recover from burnout. This may mean cutting back on hours, setting definitive boundaries with your organization, or changing employment or even careers. Of course, this means that if you cut your hours from 8 hours to 5 hours a day, you do not maintain the current workload of 12 hours-- just from home. It also means if there is a significant mismatch between the employee and the organization's demonstration of fairness or values, time off will not help. A change in employment may be necessary for true recovery.

Monique Valcour (2016) concurs in her article, "Four Steps to Beating Burnout." A similar literature review to Plummer's work, she recognizes prioritizing self-care with time off, shifting your perspective to what you truly cannot change to what you can, and reducing exposure to job stressors are the only truly proven methods to address burnout.

Naturally, the problem with this proven individual recovery method is that it is difficult for most and even impossible for some. If you are a one-income household, you have dependents,

the job market is tough, you need to work enough to earn healthcare, or you have family who you have to consider-- these are all real-life factors. Also, if you want to stay with your employer, setting boundaries or asking to cut back on hours may cause a backlash: loss of promotional opportunities, salary, benefits, and even employment itself.

A very common misconception about the education field is that the school calendar is a deterrent against burnout. Teachers have arguably more "off-time" than other professions with built-in vacations such as holiday breaks and the summer months. And yet, research does not back up this theory. In fact, in a 2017 Educator Quality of Life Survey, 61 percent of educators felt their job was "always or often stressful," with an alarming 58 percent admitting their mental health had deteriorated as a result. How is this possible? Research from the City University of New York (2016) points to the mythology that many teachers believe themselves: "if I can only get to the weekend… If I can only make it to spring break… if I can only make it to the summer. I will be fine." Somehow then, the educator will catch up on rest, relaxation, and be "energized" for the next period of scheduled classes. And yet, as the teaching schedule is so intense during the school year, most teachers use their "off-times" to catch up on professional development, curriculum enhancement, and networking opportunities. Weekends are spent grading papers, marking exams, and preparing for the next week of lessons. Most teachers would agree there is no time set aside adequately for these activities during the day as they must attend meetings, have lunch-duty or recess-duty or tutorial sessions with individual students, return emails or make parent phone calls, or-- frankly-- run to the bathroom before the next group of students arrive. Research shows that summer vacations-- even when *actually* taken to "just rest" do not work long-term for those experiencing burnout. Teachers do return to school re-energized, but the effect only lasts 2- 3 weeks. Educators who feel burned out return again to their previous level of mental and physical exhaustion very rapidly, once "back in the trenches." The authors conclude: "A burned-out, depressed teacher who is in treatment with a skilled clinician may still be drained of energetic resources if the teacher's school does nothing to improve working conditions."

2. Finding Social Support. Building a community within the organization has proven effective in reducing burnout. A randomized trial at the Mayo Clinic found that providing a time and space for physicians to regularly meet in small groups to discuss their difficulties and support one another makes a significant difference. Lack of community is one of the six factors that leads to burnout, so building a community within a larger organization does seem to make a difference.

While it is important to let off steam, these cannot remain "gripe sessions," as negativity-- like positivity-- can be contagious. A healthy community will consider what is possible and support

one another as a group to make changes in the organization. Maslach and Leiter strongly endorse this method as the most effective strategy the individual has to combat what they call "crisis burnout." That is to say, when there are a group of people in an organization that feel overworked, unsupported, unconnected, and even mistreated, forming a "community" is the most effective strategy. This is not a prevention plan, but rather a "crisis" plan. The individual can build coalitions within the organization, meeting together to offer solace, support, and also to solve the issues that affect them. As part of a group, the individual has more power to negotiate compromises regarding workloads and recommend changes to the organization's leadership.

Again, Valcour agrees: "Given the influence of situational factors on burnout, it's likely that others in your organization are suffering too. If you band together, you can offer mutual support, identify problems, and brainstorm and advocate for solutions." The group is more powerful in influencing the company than any lone individual.

For this to work, however, there must be leadership within the group-- someone who organizes the group, can help facilitate ideas for addressing the perceived challenges (the six burnout factors) and speaks for the group when talking to organizational leadership. This takes courage. Many may be reluctant due to fear of being labeled a "troublemaker" or of other retribution. Some employees may not want to be openly associated with the group, again for the same reason, so their voices are not heard. Only in an environment where the organization is open to hearing the experiences of their employees and is willing to look at creative compromises that address both sides' needs would this work.

The process itself would be collaborative, so the individuals in the group would feel a sense of control. And, if done well, there would also be a building of community, a reinforcement of aligned values, a stronger recognition of fairness, while possibly addressing workload and reward issues. If the relationship between the employees and the organization is too damaged, then it is unlikely that an individual would have the courage to form a group and take concerns to leadership.

3. Mastering Challenges Outside of Work. Plummer contends that there is evidence that there are "three experiences that help professionals refuel before starting work again the next day: psychological detachment (basically, not thinking about work); relaxation; and mastery of a challenge outside of work (such as running a marathon, getting a book published, etc.). Psychological detachment in and of itself, however, can be a slippery slope. After all, detachment and cynicism are hallmarks of burnout. Being able to fully relax at home entails being able to turn off the phone, email, and stop working. This is challenging for many

professionals. Specifically for educators, evenings and weekends may be the only time to prepare lessons for the following day or week or is the only time available for grading, writing comments, or even responding to parent emails. Some schools require that level of responsiveness to students and parents, encouraging teachers to give out personal phone numbers and be "on-call" during non-work hours to demonstrate the importance of the student/ family-teacher relationship. Finally, mastery of a challenge definitely can help the individual feel more in control-- but takes a considerable amount of time and effort. In order to accomplish such a goal, most individuals MUST do the first recommendation and work less.

In summary, the research shows that while the individual does have power to address her own burnout, this may come with a significant cost. What may work for one individual may also not work for another as personality, ability to take leadership roles in a time of personal crisis, organizational willingness, and family factors all play a significant part.

Plummer points out that "people tend to focus on actions they can take instead of actions their company can make. While this is practical, one of the most well-supported conclusions of this research is that combining individual and organizational- level approaches is most effective." In the case of burnout, there is limited power the individual has to recover without the full support and participation of the organization itself.

The Case for Organizational Action

In their book The Truth About Burnout, industrial psychologists Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter acknowledge that most organizations are reluctant to address burnout. The two have come across several distinct attitudes among managers to justify this reluctance over the years. The first is the powerful belief that burnout is the individual's problem. There is some flaw or weakness to the employee's make-up that makes her unable to handle today's tough, competitive work environment. "Whatever your difficulty, or flaw, or weakness-- that's what needs to be fixed. To do that, you usually have to get rest, or get help, or get out. Getting rest is likely to mean taking time off, going on vacation, or developing a more relaxed lifestyle. Getting help usually means learning new skills, improving your health, or seeking counseling or another type of treatment. Getting out means leaving the job entirely." (pp 62-63) Additionally employers often assume the onus of responsibility is on the individual to fix herself and either get back with the program or go somewhere else. Researchers find that many organizations feel that burnout is not the employer's responsibility. And it seems-- in the short run-- cheaper to lose a few "problem individuals" than try to change the organization itself.

For those employers that recognize that burnout is a problem or recognize the long-term damage to the company, many still hold the belief that there is not much an organization can really do to address it. These employers may encourage individuals to look out for themselves, perhaps putting together work-life balance training or provide special workshops on coping strategies-- but put the initiative to make changes back on the individual. "There is a bit of benevolent paternalism at work here-- if you are unable to take care of yourself, the organization may try to point you in the right direction and see if you can figure things out on your own. But the implicit message is that the organization is helpless." (Maslach & Leiter, pg. 64). Again, the focus is back on the individual being solely responsible.

Another common belief Mashlach and Leiter found is the conviction that burnout does not have any substantial impact on an organization. How is this possible? Because most burned out individuals keep showing up and doing their job. Maybe not as effectively, creatively, or energetically as other employees, but such a performance issue is an individual issue that is addressed as any performance issue would be. Burnout is not against the law, does not often lead to (proven) death, and therefore is not a cause of concern as an issue that would result in costly litigation or embarrassing media attention. These employers do not see the long-term effects on the company, focusing rather on the short-term cost analysis.

This belief that burnout is an "personal problem" is often held by the individual employees themselves. Even when people realize that the problem is bigger than them, most erroneously assume that they can handle it on their own. It is true that the individual does have power to change herself, but rarely can a single person change a social environment other than to leave, which is not a feasible option for many. And, even if aware of the level of their job-related stress, many may not be cognizant of the impact on colleagues or customers. Many likely hide such a condition from an employer, fearing retribution.

Mashlach and Leiter go on to point out that the organization, contrary to these beliefs, has the greater power to really make an impact. For one, an organizational approach affects everyone in the company, not just the handful with the most serious or obvious burnout symptoms. As such, there is a preventive effect to such an approach-- likely to change the course of the group for the better. An organizational approach also goes far to build a supportive environment, building up the community. This is essential to a healthy culture. This is why Mashlach and Leiter call the organizational approach, not a "crisis-intervention" that is the only avenue of the individual, but the more powerful "Prevention and Building Engagement Approach."

So why act before burnout even has a chance to fester and grow? Frankly, it may make economic sense in the short-term. There are, in fact, many research studies that look at the financial impact on organizations-- billions are lost to worker's compensation, health care

benefits (physical health as well as mental health/ substance abuse treatment), absenteeism, and sick leave. Add in the losses incurred by errors, deteriorating work quality, and inadequate customer service relationships, the cost to an organization can be staggering. (See overview of Maslach's Burnout Inventory or review of the literature by Dimitrios and Konstantinos, 2014).

Turnover definitely has its costs. Studies on new employee searches and retraining have found that turnover costs the employers anywhere from 33% to 60% of a worker's annual salary to replace her and can balloon up to 200% overall (Work Institute 2017 Retention Report; Merhar, 2020; Hall, 2019; Author, 2021). The research has also concluded that a new employee often takes one to two years to reach the level of productivity of the "seasoned" employee and is more prone to customer service problems and errors as there is often a problem-solving learning curve. Other significant costs, other than financial, is the cost to the culture and community. "Whenever someone leaves, others take time to ask why." (Merhar, 2020).

In 2017, the Learning Policy Institute examined the cost of replacing experienced teachers with new hires in Canada. They found that the average new hire cost an additional $20,000 per employee in recruitment, separation, hire, and training costs. The costs to independent schools are smaller, but still significant: estimated by the Southern Association of Independent Schools in 2016 at $7,500. This cost adds up when you consider the number of new hires per school year. Further, teacher turnover negatively impacted student achievement, particularly for the most vulnerable students.

"It is far better to invest in avoiding burnout than to pick up the costs in its wake. But reducing the possibility of burnout is only part of a preventive approach. Even more important is increasing the chance that people remain engaged with their work." (Maslach and Leiter, pg. 102) This is an investment in the human capital-- in your workers, those who are the "face" of your organization to the outside world. An engaged and effective workforce pays its own dividends. Again, to quote Mashlach and Leiter: "Those major corporations that compete successfully on quality make a serious commitment to their workers. Excellence is not simply a slogan to use in advertisements or annual reports. A commitment to quality is evident in every aspect of such organizations." (pg. 102). Such a commitment is noted by customers, families, and the larger community.

In his book, <u>If Disney Ran Your Hospital: 9 ½ Things You Would Do Differently,</u> Fred Lee points out that customer loyalty is the key to a successful organization. The customer might be able to get a similar product or service at a lower price down the street but comes back again and again because they are not getting "just" a product or service with your organization… but an "experience" of such consistent quality and connection that to go elsewhere feels disloyal. To reach that point of difference in a competitive market, you must be willing to fully invest in

your workforce, particularly your front-line staff that works intimately with the customers. A company that has invested and motivated employees has put in the work to prevent burnout. The culture of a school that strategizes the psychological safety of its faculty and staff, encouraging supportive coworkers, open communication, and genuine support, will reap the benefits in a more engaged, more customer-service oriented community.

And yet, the "high touch" professions such as healthcare and education are the very professions that have some of the highest rates of employee burnout. Professions where compassion and engagement need to be the highest! Looking at the field of education in particular, there is considerable research as to the toll a burnt-out teacher can inadvertently have on her students. Maslach and Leiter write,

> "Students know when teachers are burned out. They see the teachers' impatience, inattention to their work, and lack of personal support for their efforts. A school that does not help its teachers remain engaged with their work makes less of a contribution to student learning." (pg. 73)

In a 2017 study Herman et. al. found that 93 percent of elementary school teachers experienced high levels of stress. The researchers point out that the demands of teaching can lead to emotional exhaustion "as teachers try to manage the emotional needs of their students in addition to their academic needs." However, they also did note that, despite the very high levels of stress, many teachers in their study showed a "remarkable ability to cope" (and avoid burnout), but only due to "proper support from their school."

In her 2017 article, "The Teacher Burnout Epidemic," Jenny Grant Rankin openly wonders if teaching is an "unsustainable profession." She points out that research is very clear:" stressed, overworked, and frustrated teachers are less able to connect in positive ways with students and to offer students the best instruction." However, the "removal" of such teachers is not the answer; the high teacher turnover rate also "robs students of stable adult relationships, hurts student achievement, disrupts school culture, and this can be especially damaging in minority populations as it erodes trust between teacher and student." (Neufeldnov, 2014).

Removing teachers who are suffering burnout can bring to light another important problem in the field of education: there are just fewer qualified teachers. In a 2019 article for the *National Independent School Association*, entitled "The Future of the Teaching Workforce," Donna Orem points out that teaching is no longer an aspiration for many students coming up the academic pipeline. Citing a recent poll, only 46 percent of parents admitted they would want their children to grow up to be teachers, down from 70 percent in just 2009. Parents reported real concerns that teachers are overworked, underpaid, and very underappreciated-- nothing they would wish for their son or daughter. The education profession brings neither status nor

financial security in American society. Rather, it is known to be a highly stressful job, with four driving factors cited: (1) Schools are often perceived to lack strong leadership or a healthy, supportive environment; (2) High- stakes testing, student behavior problems, and difficult parents are well-reported in the media; (3) Teachers often perceived as have little autonomy, little decision-making power, and often few resources; and, (4) Teachers must have extremely high social-emotional competence to cope with the daily stress and still nurture a healthy classroom. Orem further cites a 2016 UCLA study of college freshmen which found that only 5 percent showed an interest in education, half as many as expressed an interest ten years prior (Pryor et al., 2020).

However, the demand for teachers is increasing. Many states are already reporting teacher shortages, particularly in certain subject matters. The high level of teacher attrition plays a significant role. Orem states that of those teachers who leave the profession altogether, "lack of administrative support" is the factor most often reported. Other factors reported include poor school leadership, a lack of professional development opportunities, time for collaboration and planning, and no decision-making input. Particularly during times when a school is experimenting with a new teaching methodology, the poor implementation of the learning initiative can drive qualified teachers completely out of education.

In a 2020 article, columnist Andre Perry speculates that our country's recent pandemic and the subsequent economic recession will likely lead to many experienced educators taking early retirement. Distance learning has put a heavy toll on teachers as they struggle to transform classroom lessons and experiences into virtual ones. The technological learning curve has been steep for most, and many older teachers may not have the comfort-level or know-how to continually rise to meet the ever-changing technology demands. Perry reports that most recent federal data available noted that 23 percent of educators were between 50- 59 years old, and 7 percent were over the age of 60 in 2012. As the Covid-19 virus is deadliest among people at or over retirement age, many experienced educators may opt for retirement rather than run the risk of deadly exposure. And finally, those educators who have experienced national recessions in the past or national crises (such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans) know that education budgets are often the first to be cut at such times, allowing for fewer resources and more demands on teaching staff. The time may be ripe for those who can retire to do so.

Indeed, this prediction did end up having a ring of truth. The *Post and Courier* reported in March 2021 that "hundreds of South Carolina public school teachers have left their jobs since the school year started, pushing pre-pandemic shortages past the crisis level." At the time of the article publication, more than 500 vacancies remain in K-12 schools with an additional 677 teachers resigning over the last six months. Authors Benson and Adcox further rang the alarm

bell, stating the "the mid-year departures are particularly concerning, as it indicates teachers are so eager to leave, they're willing to risk losing their teaching license, at least temporarily, for breaking their contract."

Despite a legislative move to give teachers a $3,000 raise-- the largest single-year raise in South Carolina educational history-- a survey reported by Tanya Medis on teacher retention in March found that the problem is actually worsening. The survey found that 39% of teachers reported they do not intend to return to their current positions next year. One teacher said, "This year has definitely shown me that educators are super undervalued and not respected whatsoever."

Strategies for Organizational Action

So, what can an organization really do? Maslach and Leiter make the following recommendations to organizations who wish to combat burnout within their community:

1. Recognize that organizational culture plays a significant impact in worker wellbeing. "An organization cannot anticipate and avoid every situation in which employees may feel overworked, frustrated, or unappreciated. But a goal orientation continues to evolve. It can enhance the organization's capacity to respond effectively to the strains it will inevitably encounter. The ultimate goal is to build something positive, not simply eliminate the negative." (pg. 103)

2. Determine the extent and causes of the problem, if there is one, and what are the organization's strengths. To this end, a healthy organization will first determine if there is a problem, how significant it is, and what areas within the organization may have the most problems with burnout. Indeed, the best way to prevent burnout among your employees is to address it straight on and organization-wide before it ever has a chance to flourish. And the only way a company can know the extent and breadth of burnout among the workforce is to openly ask the employees in a way that they are likely to be truthful and self-reflective. Again, even if a worker is seriously burned out, he may be unaware of his condition, embarrassed or afraid to admit it for the reasons discussed previously; so, any survey would need to carefully avoid the term "burn out" and analyze the areas of organizational life that can affect the development of work-related stress.

There are several valid and reliable assessments to address chronic job-related stress and quality of life, one of the most oft cited is The Maslach Burnout Inventory (National Academy of Medicine, 2021). There is even a version of the MBI created and normed specifically for educators as well as a general survey appropriate for staff members. Additionally, both can include The Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS), which would indicate strengths and problem areas within the work environment that contribute to resilience or burnout. The results would be able to indicate if and where there is a problem, depending on whether it was set up by division groups or some other way, and what problems need to be addressed or what strengths can be enhanced. Maslach and Leiter explain that the six areas that are proven to directly influence the prevalence of burnout-- workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values-- are all shaped by a company's practices and structures. So if, for example, a school's administration found that there is a serious burnout problem and a perception of overwork in the Upper School Division, then the administrators can look directly at that division's duty schedule, class-load requirements, or meeting schedules. If the Lower School Division reports a lack of community, then administrators can look for teachers to work more closely on projects or even arrange the "faculty lounge" so that it functions more as a gathering place rather than a workplace. (See Appendix A for sample questions of the MBI and AWS).

Not only will management learn where the problem areas are, the MBI will also show what areas are healthiest in the organization. These strengths are areas that may be good places to build from. For example, if a school learns that the Preschool teachers feel very supportive, administrators can look at what works with this group and see if these same methods might be carried forward to other divisions.

> "Just as a financial audit is standard operating procedure to assess how an organization deals with its fiscal responsibilities, a staff audit assesses how an organization deals with its responsibilities to its employees. In other words, it reveals the extent to which the workplace is promoting their productivity and engagement. Without it, management may initiate programs that intend to help employees but completely miss the mark." (Maslach & Leiter, pg. 109)

3. Connect to the people. Any project that includes the employees for their own wellbeing needs to be an inclusive one that directly affects their relationship with the organization. The employees need to be involved, active participants. The organization may choose to only concentrate on a single area of the organizational culture, but as long as employees feel they have a voice, they will have buy-in, will feel valued, and strengthen their sense of community. This can be accomplished in small-group problem-solving meetings.

Further, the very act of asking for employee's feedback and allowing them to voice their viewpoints to management and to each other in a survey and then in committees, gives each the sense that their opinion matters-- that THEY matter-- and are "active, important, contributors." (Maslach& Leiter, pg. 107). That is a powerful message!

4. Ensure that any outcome actually affects the six factors that cause burnout: workload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness, and conflicting values. The process itself will likely improve the employee's sense of community, fairness, and shared values with the organization. However, to ensure that the other factors that you are targeting are being addressed, management will need to continue checking in with employees. The outcome is an iterative process. Indeed, organizations continue to grow and change as new challenges arise; but the continuous effort to give employees a voice and to make responsive improvements can make all the difference in their engagement. It is also important to remember that minor changes can make a profound impact.

Chapter 4:

In Light of the Pandemic

It will take years to understand what the stay-at-home orders, the social distancing, emergency distance-learning, the enormous toll on healthcare have done to our workforce. The effects of the pandemic will likely have long-term impacts, and no one knows how things will change if some form of social distancing is our new reality for the months and, perhaps, years to come. It may be that we will never go back to the way things were before. Certainly, at the point of writing this, the American media is reporting 1 out of 5 Americans are unemployed. The pressure on the healthcare industry and on healthcare workers has been immense, particularly as their own health and safety is compromised by their very work. School children have missed at least a quarter of "regular" schooling, some over a full year. The reports of a dangerous-- though thankfully rare-- effect of the coronavirus on children's immune systems, causing the immune system to attack the cardiovascular system, has understandably frightened many parents… and could very well alter any plans for even normalcy in schooling. At this point, experts are left just speculating what the next month might look like, never mind the new reality of a post-pandemic world.

Michelle Davis and Jeff Green (2020), columnists for *Bloomberg Business*, report that the stay-at-home order has already had an effect on employees feeling overworked and stressed. Citing that "America's always-on work culture has reached new heights," they state that the average employee who is working from home is now working three hours a day longer. This is more than other countries who are undergoing a pandemic-lockdown are reporting. The reason? Davis and Green speculate that the American workday has shifted. Without commutes, employees are waking up later in the day, but are "on" by nine o'clock and will still be working-- as measured by computer logins-- oftentimes into the early hours of the morning. Employees report there is no escape; there is nowhere to go, so "people feel like they have no legitimate excuse for being unavailable." Living spaces have turned into office spaces, so employees physically cannot leave work. The work-life balance and boundaries that healthy employees may carefully implement over the years to deal with daily stress are both out of the window. For some, work is the only human contact they have anymore. Add in the guilt. Many working employees realize they are lucky at this time to have a job and feel intense guilt if they are not working. Further, in this time of financial uncertainty, when the prospect of layoffs looms, employees feel they HAVE to work constantly to prove their worth, their value to the company. To not be available to a boss's text or a supervisor's email at 9 p.m. may appear as if the employee is not a "team player." Office-hours are now just too risky.

Davis and Green point out that employers, on the other hand, are reporting that work productivity is up. Citing an internal case study at an IT consulting company, a manager at the company thinks that remote work is here to stay. "Once the genie's out of the bottle, it's not going to go back." But these gains will have costs. Davis and Green go on to report that "by early April, 45 percent of workers said they were burnt out, according to a survey of 1,001 U.S employees by Eagle Hill Consulting. Almost half attributed the mental toll to an increased workload, the challenge of juggling personal and professional life, and a lack of communication and support from their employer."

The size of your living quarters and whether you have children also has an enormous impact. Those employees who live in smaller homes where there can be no physical separation from work and home life have higher blood pressure than those living in homes with extra rooms (preliminary research reported in the article). Two thirds of married couples with children in the United States are double-income families. With both parents working (or the single caretaker, in single-parent households), trying to fit in work between their children's distance learning sessions has been very difficult, if not impossible. Often one or the other has to give, and Davis and Green suggest it may be the distance learning.

Tim Walker, a columnist for *neaToday,* reports on a survey given to educators as school began to close due to the Coronavirus pandemic in March of 2020. In just three days, over 5,000 educators responded that they feel "anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad." One of the survey's authors went on to state: "Educators are pulled in a tremendous amount of directions. They're expected to provide this top-level educational experience with varying levels of support with different levels of experience. Add to this the outrageous stress about what is going on in the world right now."

It is unlikely that most educators would ask for more support or even allow an administrator to know they are struggling. Again, this may be due to the guilt mentioned in Davis and Green's article-- shame they are struggling when so many are lining up at food banks and cannot pay their bills-- and guilt because most educators know administrators are also under intense stress as well. It is also likely due to real fear. Public school teachers know from the 2008 recession that in economic downturns, education is often cut. Teachers are furloughed, class sizes increase, resources decrease-- and this is even with the protections inherent in a profession with a strong teachers' union. Indeed, Governor Kemp of Georgia has already issued a state-wide order that ALL departments cut their budgets by 14 percent to mitigate the financial crisis. For independent school educators, who are very aware that their continuing employment is based on enrollment numbers and tuition paid, the stakes are even higher. There is the fear of losing students who thrived with distance learning to home school options or that parents have taken

such a financial hit that they can no longer afford a private school education. It is far too risky to speak up about feeling overworked or stressed-out, to appear to be a "problem teacher," or even to ease up on the workload. Every teacher likely feels the intense pressure to be "worthy" of their salary and continued employment in today's uncertain environment.

Rhitu Chatterjee wrote an article in May of 2021 entitled "The Coronavirus Crisis: If Your Brain Feels Foggy And You're Tired All the Time, You're Not Alone." In this article, he interviewed mental health professionals who are reporting not only a surge of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, but an overall exhaustion, difficulty making decisions, irritability, trouble with making mistakes and misplacing things more often. Researchers are realizing that prolonged stress has put a heavy strain on our nervous system, which struggles to use more and more energy and keep our mind vigilant way past the point of "surge capacity." Sleep can get disrupted; even when we get the required amount of sleep, stress can unbalance the quality of our sleep patterns, leaving the sleep we get without the same restorative ability. Chronic stress also triggers low-grade inflammation, which worsens mood and causes even further fatigue. "After this long, most people have had some degree of anxiety, depression, trauma, something," says Dr. Jessica Gold, a psychologist interviewed. Fellow psychologist Kali Cyrus, however, warns that the normal coping strategies and self-care habits may not be working. "Your coping strategies might be able to refill you a certain percent, [but now] you're starting lower. So, it's not quite getting you where you need to be," she says.

One coping strategy that has surged in use in the last year is reportedly the use of alcohol or other similar substances. Lucy McBride has recently written an article on "Coronaphobia," the "unofficial" name for the fear of the coronavirus. She reports that alcohol use is the way many people are using to quiet "worry, fear, and the noisy brain" during the pandemic. Pointing out that the usual ways of coping during a trauma such as connecting with loved ones or exercising at the gym have been stripped away for a year, making this time uniquely traumatizing. Pointing out from her medical standpoint that there are real physical damages to the unrelenting stress of this time in history. Constant surges of stress hormones can make us feel both wired and tired, on alert and completely fatigued, ready to fight and also ready for sleep. When our blood pressure remains elevated too long, it damages blood vessels which in turn can lead to cardiovascular diseases. Warning that anxiety tends to shift our decision-making to "zero-risk-tolerance mode," McBride says we may then further isolate or shut down access to resources.

> "The health risks of social isolation are already clear-- from depression and anxiety to poor concentration and insomnia (all of which have surged in recent months, as have domestic violence, financial hardships, etc.). And, in a hypervigilant state, we're more likely to gravitate towards self-soothing behaviors, some of which-- like drinking alcohol

> or abusing other substances-- can exacerbate our underlying physical and mental health issues." (McBride, 2021)

Even within the occupation of education, which has borne the brunt of much of the difficulties of the pandemic there may be reason to be particularly concerned about the burden and subsequent wellbeing of those individuals who have had a unique position during the pandemic. School health care personnel-- nurses and counselors-- have vicarious traumatization with the surge of mental health issues. High levels of anxiety and depression may lead to compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Mashlach and Leiter (2016), in their research of psychologists and burnout, found that "contact with patients' families intensified these feelings, especially when family members expressed unrealistic expectations for treatment." Indeed, most school nurses have removed all normal boundaries to deal with the crisis, staying "on call" and on the "front line" 24/7 for months on end… frequently dealing with anxious and reactionary parents. Counselors, meanwhile, have found many avenues of referral closed as private counselors capped their patient caseloads, forcing them to provide therapeutic care for students, families, and co-workers at a level or outside their fields of expertise.

Sadly, even with vaccinations becoming more available to greater amounts of the population, researchers believe that there will be lasting effects. In an article published in 2021 entitled "Meet Gen C, the Covid Generation," Catherine Shoichet reports that while the pandemic has affected the lives, education, and development of all children (and adults), mental health experts fear that children aged 7- 9 might be most vulnerable. Although seniors in college and high school have received much publicity as they lost many "rites of passage," older children and teenagers in general have a far better grasp of the pandemic situation, can express their distress, and may even have some agency in decision making. Very young children, on the other hand, may not even remember a previous time when things were different. However, the "kids in the middle, who aren't as good at articulating complicated feelings and are still early in understanding the world, are really struggling." Shoichet further points to historic events-- such as the Great Depression-- where children at this age seemed to have the most difficulty with recovery. While it is still too early to tell if there will be a higher-than-expected level of resiliency in the population or if events will alter course yet again, schools will need a trauma-informed oasis of security with educators with the resources and skills to address a uniquely affected population of students.

Chapter 5:

Personal Reflections on the Self-Care Faculty Letters

With research on individual efficacy remaining poorly understood or inconclusive in the scientific literature, there does seem to be very few proven strategies to recommend to those suffering from burnout. Despite the numerous articles and books published indicating otherwise, once an employee is "burned out," the condition is clearly very difficult to remediate. It may seem surprising, therefore, that I volunteered to take on Ashley Hall's request to the Counseling Department to develop weekly self-care suggestions for the faculty and staff.

I am a counselor. It is not within my capability to admit to those seeking help that their cause is hopeless or that they are in any way helpless. Nor, at my core, do I believe this. For one, none of the research that I have been reviewing in the last 18 months have concluded that self-care is without merit. Indeed, the research in the field of positive psychology has shown that individuals who seem highly resilient have a healthy work-life balance. Highly resilient people set up boundaries, develop their social relationships, prioritize nonwork passions, and nurture their spiritual health. Self-care then may have a *preventive* effect for those individuals who are not yet suffering from burnout. Indeed, research has found that 7% of teachers were labeled "well-adjusted" in a 2018 survey, attributable to their "high levels of coping." (Terada, 2018).

Secondly, the literature clearly indicates that self-care is a very *individual* process. What works well for one person may only work a little for another or not at all for some. Add in whether a person commits to regular practice, feels "allowed" to practice self-care, and a host of other factors at play, it is hard to predict what might inspire or may be the right strategy to offer a particular individual even small relief. This may be a reason the literature appears so murky when it comes to effective strategies: what works for me may not work for others. Putting as many "tools" in the individual's "toolbox" may be a scattershot strategy but may also be the most effective for a large group of faculty and staff, each with individual coping backgrounds and willingness to practice self-care.

What the literature *is* clear on, however, is the detrimental effects of chronic stress and the continued release of the stress hormone cortisol into the body. Stress has not only short-term effects, but also long term and potentially deadly effects such as neurological and cardiac damage. The mental health and the potential detrimental effects to social relationships within and outside of school are also clearly defined. This includes relationships with colleagues and students; the teacher-student relationship being reported again and again as one of the most

important factors of student academic and emotional success in a school. Burnout cannot be ethically ignored in a school.

Finally, the intense emotions and fatigue demonstrated by my colleagues were the results of more than job-related stressors. The pandemic with the accompanying economic and political crisis led to financial strains, domestic instability, illness and grief, and a surge of mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, as well as substance abuse. Social isolation and then distancing suddenly ripped individuals from their most reliable support systems, with hurriedly devised technological ones forming poor substitutes. Routines that provided stability and reliability to our lives, such as going to the store or exercising at the gym, became fraught with real danger. The fact that I had colleagues that came to school in tears and left crying, was not *all* due to the doubling of our workload, the intense feeling of pressure many expressed over the "leveling up" technological requirements, or the loss of the personal connection with students. Clinical depression, anxiety, and other pressures were certainly at play.

The stress and exhaustion expressed by the faculty and staff members were at levels I had never seen at Ashley Hall. Empowering them with the belief that they could do something to help themselves was one thing I could do to help in some way. The result was seventeen self-care letters, disseminated electronically to all Ashley Hall faculty and staff every Friday almost weekly through the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Each was carefully researched and curated from literature specific to self-care for educators or were techniques specific to the alleviation of anxiety or depression. For example, the letter on mindfulness-- which has NOT been proven to be fully effective for chronic job-related stress-- has years of research to support its effectiveness in the treatment of anxiety. Cognitive strategies, such as reframing and countering negative thoughts also is a proven method to treat anxiety and depression. The letter specific to having the courage to ask for help was written to encourage employees who may fear the stigma of being seen as "weak" if they are struggling to look for assistance. I was inspired here by a colleague who advocated for herself and received the much-needed support (and a schedule change) from our Division Director.

That said, I am keenly aware that self-care by the individual is not nearly as effective as what the organization as a whole can do to alleviate burnout. While I did encourage faculty and staff to set up boundaries at work and home to limit their workload, the change of schedule mid-year to a shortened school day on Fridays and the return of most students to on-campus learning (decreasing scheduled class responsibilities), and the addition of support staff and "floating substitutes" likely made the most impact for the faculty and staff making it to the end of the year. At least, if the scientific research led by Mashlach and her colleagues is correct, the organization does have the greatest impact. Further, efforts made by administrators to

acknowledge the difficulty of the year, commend everyone for their efforts, and recognize each individual helped many feel rewarded for their work. And, finally, those administrators who went out of their way to connect with their colleagues-- commiserating when things seemed particularly unfair or tough, but also giving "permission" to sometimes do less than perfect work-- provided the social support to many in a world where social support felt particularly absent.

Terada (2018) pointed out that in the survey of educators conducted by University of Missouri 60% of study participants reported stress but were able to avoid burnout with proper support from their schools. Furthermore, this group of teachers' students demonstrated the same level of academic and behavioral success as the "well-adjusted" teachers' student groups. Schools can play an essential role in the mental and physical health of their student body by supporting the mental and physical health of the faculty.

For copies of the seventeen self-care letters, please look in Appendix B.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion-- Where Can We Go From Here?

As the world watched the Tokyo Olympics this past summer, the issue of mental health in America unexpectedly became a hot topic of conversation. Simone Biles, winner of 32 Olympic and World Championship medals, shocked everyone when she made the certainly heart-rending decision to step-down from multiple competitions, citing her mental health. Despite Naomi Osaka's decision to drop out of the French Open earlier this year and swimming phenom Michael Phelps' openness about his struggles with depression and suicidal ideation, the backlash and hail of criticism was intense. Many, including Congressmen and well-known newspaper editors, called Biles "weak," "a bad gymnast," and even questioned her patriotism to America. The stigma surrounding mental health and the belief in a culture of "Hit a wall? Go through it!" could not have been more apparent.

It is not surprising that many educators and staff are reluctant to admit to themselves that they are over-stressed and either heading towards burnout or already struggling with the disorder. Even fewer are likely to reveal this to an administrator or supervisor, especially if they are new and have not developed a trusting relationship with that individual or do not believe they will be supported. Furthermore, many insurance plans often actively discourage the individual from seeking professional help such as therapy. Many plans cover mental health care at a lower rate or include a high deductible, frequently making therapy cost-prohibitive for many educators. With this in mind and current research clearly demonstrating that the most effective approach includes a focus on building a positive school culture, a school-wide approach to chronic stress will likely benefit the most employees.

In Lever et al.'s 2017 article *School Mental Health Is Not Just for Students: Why Teacher and School Staff Wellness Matters,* the authors point out that comprehensive school wellness programs that address mental health are not only helpful for employee health and morale but make financial sense. Citing a review of health promotion programs, Lever et al. report that effective programs can decrease the number of sick days, on average, 28%, decreasing health costs by 26%, and lower worker's compensation/ disability costs by 30%. Further, the lower attrition rates can save a school tens of thousands of dollars per year-- especially as trends in education show that the pool of future educators is decreasing.

The good news is that independent schools have the capability to be leaders in addressing mental health and specifically burnout and may be already ahead of the game. A survey reported on by the National Association of Independent Schools (Brackett & Baron, 2018) found that teachers from private schools expressed greater happiness and excitement about their work

than either public or charter school educators. Granted this was pre-pandemic research, but it is unlikely that the pandemic stressors affected independent school educators more harshly than the public sector-- much of which remained in distance learning mode for much of the balance of the 2020-2021 school year.

The pandemic has taught most companies that they need to be flexible, responsive rather than reactive. It has also shown a light on some of the unhealthy work practices that were common-place even before COVID- 19. There is no doubt that researchers will be looking deeply into work culture and how it will need to shift and change as a result of this experience. Chronic stress, the work-life balance (especially of working women, specifically mothers) will be the focus of study.

Neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor points out that the work world is changing also due to the culture and demands of future generations. The Baby Boomer Generation, known as "loyal to the company" and "workaholics," is reaching retirement and aging out of the workforce. The smaller group of Generation X-ers, who still buy into the "hustle" work culture, are now reaching their 40's and 50's. The large Millennial Generation has, in contrast, been shown to value balance more than financial or status rewards. As a result, this generation is more comfortable with quitting jobs and even shifting careers if they are unhappy where they are. This generation demands work assignment and schedule flexibility and thrive with a personal touch. This trend looks like it will continue with Generation Z, whose oldest members are now completing college. This generation appears to prefer to be independent and self-directed (which makes them better "fits" for independent schools where this is still possible if they are willing to consider education as a viable career). Attracting and retaining quality educators and staff will increasingly be determined by the overall culture of the school.

Finally, the effects of teacher burnout on the student body have been carefully documented. Increasingly, the independent school student is appearing more and more fragile and "at risk" in the literature. The pandemic has only worsened the effects on these stressed-out, anxiety-ridden students. Again and again, however, research has shown that as the cortisol levels rise in teachers, cortisol levels correspondingly rise in their students. Burnout negatively impacts the student-teacher relationship, adversely affecting both academic performance and social-emotional wellbeing (with the most vulnerable students, such as minority students, the most impacted).

School is students' first look at a work environment and culture. They are watching and learning. From the adults surrounding them, they learn how to treat themselves, learn coping strategies, how to make mistakes, how to be resilient, and how to prioritize their mental health as well as their physical health. They look at how the adults treat one another and how

"authority" treats them. These are lessons they will carry forward into their own future work experiences. And as future leaders, they will likely have the power to set the tone in future work communities that will affect many others. What will they see at Ashley Hall?

For other suggestions on addressing chronic job-related stress, please see *Appendix C.*

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