

The Art of Bouncing Back

Occasionally being “in the pits” comes with living fully. There are all kinds of phrases that we use to describe feeling at a lower level than we’re used to or than we want to be at:

- Feeling low
- Blue Monday
- Hitting the wall
- On a downer
- Marking time
- Sub-par
- Just not myself
- Burned out

But it’s not the “low times” that we need to concentrate on, it’s how to bounce back from them. Maybe your first line of defense is to decide you *want* to do what you are doing in this field. And if you decide you don’t, become proactive in changing what is within your control. That’s a powerful word, *want*, rather than *have to* or *must*. I’ve noticed that when people want to be at a job (rather than feeling as though they have to be), being in the pits happens less frequently and not to the depth of those who feel stuck.

Here are 10 tips to help you avoid burnout.

1. **Start the day a little earlier.** While you might cherish that bit of extra sleep, getting up and doing something that makes you feel good in the morning—whether it’s exercising or having a cup of coffee or simply not rushing—starts the day off on a positive note.

2. **Have reasons for getting up, and review those reasons the night before.**

My father was a great believer in having goals set for the next day before he went to sleep. When your goals are strong enough, they not only pull you out of bed on time, but propel you through the day. Plus, when you have people to see, places to go, and projects to complete, you have less time to sit around and think about how bad you feel. Remember that a busy-day plan can still incorporate time for you—time to walk or exercise or play with your children.

3. **Be around positive people.** I’ve noticed that people in the pits often want to take others down with them. Don’t go there. To learn how to be positive, surround yourself with positive people whenever possible.

4. **Watch your diet.** It's true that some foods can energize us and others can pull us down. Learn your body and be alert to what you have eaten when you feel the best. Also note how much you have eaten when you feel at your peak. Be honest in your answers.
5. **Say you are a good person.** If you don't believe it, who will? The messages we run through our own minds have a powerful influence on our emotions.
6. **List negative things in your life on one side of a piece of paper, and list positive things on the other side.** Aim to have more positives listed than negatives. Figure out which negative items are within your control to change and which ones you need to learn to accept.
7. **Aim at doing your best each day.** Unlike money, time is not a renewable resource. The more time you feel burned out, the more you rob yourself of good times. And when you do your best at home, and as a professional in communication disorders, you inspire others to do the same.
8. **Reward yourself by doing something you enjoy.** Think about what helps you feel better, and then go for it. Maybe it's an ice-cream cone on a hot day. Maybe it's a walk along the river. If your reward is to go shopping, tread lightly when using credit cards. At bill time, you may end up even closer to burnout.
9. **Accomplish something. Then stand back and admire it.** I'm not talking about life-changing accomplishments. Clean a closet. Write to your mother. Do something that's been lingering too long on that list of things you'd like to do. Then enjoy the satisfaction of completing the task.
10. **Believe you are "in the peaks."** Thought precedes action. Focus on *peak* feelings, not *pit* feelings. If you're having trouble doing this, go visit people who have it way worse than you do. Maybe that means a trip to a hospice center or to a foreign country that has far fewer privileges than you have. Put your life in perspective. Often what throws us in the pits is minor compared to what other people cope with. And by helping someone else, you can feel better about yourself!

Helping someone? Isn't that exactly what professionals in communication disorders do every day? As someone who has spent his life in and around corporate America, I can tell you that you have a distinct advantage by

working in jobs that can help you avoid burnout, if you stay focused on those you help.

I've never figured out why, on average, people don't like their jobs. We know that most people hate unemployment, so why wouldn't they like employment?

Anyone who has gone through a major illness or accident, and has fought the recovery battle, can tell you the thrill of rejoining mainstream America at work. Funny how we sometimes appreciate our routines only after they are removed from us for a while.

I have also noticed how many people form some of their best social relationships through the work environment. Any parent who has opted to stay home to raise young children can tell you that one of the challenges is being away from other adults who provide mental stimulation.

Okay, I admit, even I don't like what I do on certain days. None of us is ever happy 100 percent of the time. With every job I've had, there have been some likes and some dislikes. But almost always, it's been my attitude about my job that took me closer to or further away from burnout.

You can check your job attitude by asking yourself some basic questions. The answers to the questions that follow may indicate whether it's best for you to appreciate your current job or to pursue a new one.

What's the worst job out there that I don't have to do?

If you think your job is bad, look around to see whose is worse. I remember one hot, muggy July day our sewer backed up. The person from our septic system company showed up donned in a wet suit and climbed down into our holding tank to fix the problem. I realized right then and there that there are many jobs out there that I don't have to do, and I'm very grateful for that! It's jobs like his that make my job seem like a piece of cake.

What's the worst job I've ever had that I'll never have to do again?

Often during my presentations, I'll ask people to think about their worst job ever. I've heard everything from digging graves to scraping mold off 20-pound cheese wheels. Most of us have had something that we would call a "worst job" and thinking about it can help put our present circumstances back into perspective.

What people would do anything to have my job?

Think how many people would love to have the level of education that you've achieved. Remember that there's a whole group of people out there who would love to do what you're doing. If I were to vacate the job I'm in now, I know lots of people who would love to put in their applications and would think they had won the lottery if they got the job. That keeps me going. On the flip side, if no one would apply for your current job, what does that tell you?

What do I need to change to make my job better?

To determine the answer to this question, I suggest that you list everything you would want in your ideal job. Check to see if anything on your list matches up with your current job. Of the items that don't, check how many factors you have some control over. If your current job has no ingredients of your perfect job and nothing can be changed that is within your control, then it's probably time to move on. If, on the other hand, there are some matches, or the possibility of change is there, explore those first.

What payments must I make that cause me to need this job?

There's nothing like debt to keep us motivated to go to work. All of us have obligations to loved ones and need to take employment seriously if for no other reason than the bills we have accumulated. We must keep our sights set on the results of our labor and how they affect our family members.

What skills should I learn to avoid burnout in my job?

Learning a new set of skills can perk up a job that is starting to get too hard, or in contrast, too routine. When skills allow us to do our jobs more efficiently, so much the better.

What skills would I need to learn for me to find a different job?

Go back and review what you wrote down for characteristics of your ideal job. List your current skill set versus the skill set you would need to learn for your ideal job. If the leap seems "doable," begin your transition plan. If the leap seems too distant, think in terms of a different, but not necessarily ideal, job. Look around you for jobs you would like to know more about. Interview the people doing those jobs and inquire about the skills needed.

What decision can I make to change my attitude and environment?

When changing jobs isn't feasible, you still do have control over your attitude toward your job. Sometimes a simple adjustment in your working environment can change your attitude and cause a domino effect in other aspects of your life. Put up pictures of your family or your pet, or treat yourself to some fresh-cut flowers. Brightening up your workspace can go a long way in improving your attitude.

In conclusion, view burnout in the workplace as a decision you can control. How? Perfect the art of bouncing back and take charge of your job attitude—The burnout flame won't have a chance!

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