

Stress and Burnout



Dr. Amir Georges Sabongui holds a PhD in psychology and specializes in developing long-term partnerships with organizations to provide corporate leadership coaching, directing crisis and conflict interventions, and facilitating training workshops on a variety of topics such as: managing stress, preventing burnout, communication skills, defusing workplace conflict among countless others. He is highly sought after as a dynamic and engaging speaker and has been featured in the media ranging from the ABC Prime Time Live, City TV, CBC television, The National Post, The Montreal Gazette, CIAD Radio among others. He is also a former senior Naval Officer and has commanded patrol boats during search and rescue operations and was director of operations for a crisis response team during multi-national NATO exercises. He still works closely with the Canadian military and has led an 8-year research programme to help identify the factors that create high-performance work teams required to function under extreme conditions. He is also the author of several books, including *Diamonds or Dust: What Makes People Shine or Crumble Under Pressure* and directs both the Alpha Medical Clinic, an integrative mind-body medical centre providing corporate and executive health services, and Wellness Professionals, an alliance of professionals that provide organizational health and leadership development through corporate training.

If you're feeling stressed, you're not alone!

Recent statistics reveal that from 1991 to 2001, the number of hours spent at work for the average North American has gone up by ten to twenty percent: this really means one to two extra hours of work PER DAY! In a recent survey, more than half of respondents reported that their work milieu was the #1 source of stress in their lives: this is up from 27% ten years ago. But even though many employers admit that their employees are overworked, they too seem to feel helpless to do anything about the increased workload, claiming that it is necessary in order to maintain their competitiveness in the modern marketplace¹.

Over a half million Canadians are absent from work each week for stress related problems, making stress the # 1 cause of short term absences². The number of disability claims

for burnout has gone up 500% in the past ten years, even though the number of disability claims for physical health problems has been consistently *decreasing* to half what it was ten years ago³. In fact, stress and burnout is the #2 cause of long-term disability, just behind cardiac problems. However, since we know that there is a strong link between stress and coronary heart disease, stress becomes the #1 factor predicting long-term disability. Insurance companies predict that the greatest increase in indemnity requests in this decade will be for stress related mental health problems⁴. Stress and burnout has become the biggest concern for employers in this decade.

A recent report released by the *Ordre des Psychologues du Québec*⁵ reveals that forty percent of patients who consult psychologists consult for work-stress related issues including: (a) feeling overworked and overwhelmed, (b) conflicts with bosses and colleagues, and (c) problems adapting to changes at

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1. Results of studies published for Health Canada by Duxbury & Higgins (2001). For more information, see www.hc-sc.gc.ca.

2. Conseil du patronat du Québec (1998). L'absentéisme en milieu de travail, partie 2 : État de la situation. Bulletin des relations du travail, 29 (310).

3. Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal (2001). Garde notre onde en Santé : Une nouvel éclairage sur la santé mentale des adultes Montréalais.

4. Ranno, JP (2000). Santé mentale et stress au travail. Vice-présidence, Opérations vue et groupe invalidité, Sun Life, Montréal, Canada.

5. Mario Poirier (2002), Pour l'Ordre des Psychologues du Québec. La vie au travail : Symposium Santé mentale et travail.



work. By the time they are seen in psychology offices, many of these patients are reporting moderate to severe symptoms of depression (42% of the time) and anxiety (34% of the time).



The overwhelming amount of statistics only proves the undeniably increasing danger of stress and burnout for the wellbeing of any organization. Are you burnt out? Are your co-workers or employees?

12 Ways to Reduce Burnout...

- *Learn to put your mask on first! Remember those flight safety briefings that you get whenever you take a plane? They tell you to put your oxygen mask on first before trying to help someone else! By putting your mask on first, you are in a better position to help others. If you don't, you risk becoming a burden for others.*
- *Learn to say no – without feeling guilty*
- *Learn to set limits and respect them*
- *Schedule some time for yourself and make it as important as time scheduled for your clients*
- *Learn some relaxation techniques and practice them daily*
- *If you are not happy with your life right now, nothing more that you accumulate will bring you more happiness*
- *Create a positive social-support network*
- *Don't put all of your eggs in one basket: Investing too much energy into your work leaves you more vulnerable if you should happen to have a bad day in that environment. Divide your energy by investing yourself in fulfilling personal hobbies and fulfilling personal/emotional relationships*
- *Eliminate negative self-talk and catastrophic thinking. Do you talk to yourself like you would talk to your best friend, in an encouraging, supportive manner, or are you harsh and critical towards yourself? Do you tend to imagine the worst-case scenario?*
- *Engage in some vigorous physical activity and exercise regularly (including sex!) – the endorphins help burn off a lot of your stress and tension*
- *Learn to identify the difference between things you can control and things you can't*
- *And if you are even the least bit worried about your emotional health, don't wait to ask for help, whether from friends or from a professional – Most of us have a tendency to underestimate the impact of our problems on ourselves.*