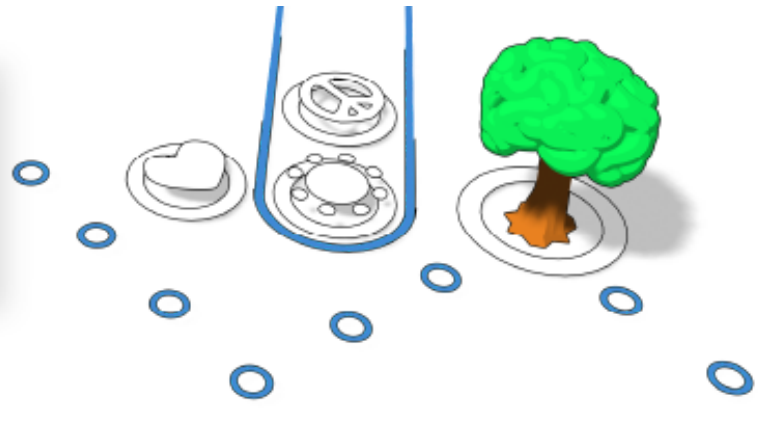


Think Well, Be Well



Finding Meaning at Work



Burnout is a combination of mental, physical and emotional exhaustion that develops gradually. It's a serious condition that, if left unaddressed, can impact you and your organization. One way to combat burnout is by finding meaning in your work.

Employee burnout has reached its highest levels in nearly a decade, according to a Glassdoor report.

This article explores how meaningful work can help reduce burnout and provides tips for bringing meaning into your day-to-day responsibilities.

How Burnout Affects Work

Burnout may occur when employees are constantly overworked, often due to staff shortages, poor leadership practices and unhealthy workplace dynamics. Employees who once enjoyed their jobs may start feeling disconnected or jaded when burnout sets in. Without proper intervention, burnout can lead to far-reaching consequences, including physical and mental health issues, as well as difficulty delivering high-quality results at work. Over time, this can lead to reduced performance and limited career advancement opportunities.

Why Meaningful Work Matters

According to the surgeon general's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being, "mattering at work" is essential to employee well-being. Most employees want to feel that their work has purpose and makes a positive impact. Studies show that employees who view their work as meaningful tend to be happier, more engaged and satisfied. During stressful periods or organizational changes, they're less likely to burn out and stay committed to their work. In contrast, feeling insignificant or overlooked can increase anxiety and depression.

Finding Meaning at Work

Research suggests that awareness can help you create meaning at work. When you pay attention to your thoughts and behaviors, you become more attuned to your co-workers and your environment. This heightened awareness helps boost empathy and enhance your communication skills, leading to more authentic and meaningful interactions. Awareness can also lead to flexible thinking. When faced with challenges, awareness enables you to be more adaptable and creative in solving problems, which, in turn, can add meaning to your work.

Your employer can help you understand how your role fits into the organization's mission, but you can also take charge. Here are simple steps to get started:

- **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness helps shift you out of autopilot. Deep breathing, journaling and other grounding techniques can provide clarity and help you recognize how your work contributes to broader goals.

- **Align your work with your values.** Choose or design tasks around values that matter to you. If you value growth, try out new skills. If you value being helpful, mentor someone. Integrating values into your tasks naturally makes work feel more meaningful.
- **Embrace growth and learning.** Meaning often comes from feeling like you're improving, not just completing tasks. Taking on new challenges or developing new skills can boost fulfillment and give your work a deeper sense of purpose.
- **Use feedback sessions to reflect.** During check-ins, set aside a few minutes to talk about what's going well, where you're improving and what you hope to accomplish. Seeing your progress laid out helps reinforce that your contributions matter.
- **Treat purpose as an ongoing journey.** Purpose isn't usually a destination nor a revelation. Viewing it as a lifelong process can help you see challenges as opportunities and each experience as part of your growth.
- **Celebrate progress and appreciate others.** Acknowledge your wins, no matter how small, and thank those who support you. Giving and receiving gratitude helps strengthen relationships and reminds you that your work has value.
- **See today as a step toward tomorrow.** Reflect on the skills you're developing today and how they can support your future goals. Viewing your current responsibilities as stepping stones can spark motivation and make each task feel more meaningful.

Conclusion

Finding meaning in your daily work can be an effective way to combat burnout. Meaning is deeply personal, and you often have control over what makes your work meaningful. However, if you're struggling with prolonged burnout, consider talking to your manager or consulting a health care professional.

This article is for informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. For further information, please consult a medical professional. © 2026 Zywave, Inc. All rights reserved.