



Surviving burnout

When stress starts to replace your old passion for work, make a change

by Julie L. Muir, CPM®

“...everything can be taken away from a person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”
—Victor Frankl

Back when I was 18, I desperately wanted to join the fast-paced working world in the big city. My first job? A receptionist for a Portland-based real estate management company. At the time, I had no idea that position would turn into a life-long career. Back then, I didn’t know many people who actually chose to work in the real estate profession.

Don’t get me wrong: learning the profession in the school of hard knocks was well worth it. I wouldn’t give up my personal experiences and on-the-job training for anything. But, when I reached the finish line I never thought I’d say to myself, “OK, I’m here... Now will someone please push me off a high-rise?” Can you say “burn-out?” Yep, burn baby burn.

At that point, I figured had two choices: Door #1—make the best of it and try to tweak things enough to keep me interested and fulfilled. Door #2—choose a totally different path and switch careers. But after all the time and energy I spent in developing my business acumen, my niche and my expertise, did I really want to go through all of that again? Well gee—No! So, Door #1 it was.

What I needed was to be refreshed. What I wanted was the drive and passion I had way back when. Most of all,

I didn’t want to be a grump anymore. Door #1 contained the fabulous prize of figuring out how to turn this burn around on my own. With a little help from books, seminars, friends and colleagues, I’ve learned several things over the years: 1) everyone has “baggage” that shapes and molds their persona; 2) I have to alter my expectations and change the way I interact with different personality types; and 3) attitudes are contagious.

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The way I see it, “burn-out” is a state of mind, a complex myriad of past experiences exacerbated by laziness. Emotional laziness, that is. I’m a firm believer that everyone’s emotional laziness can be changed. How that change occurs will be unique to the individual. Some people jog to relieve stress. Some people might try consulting on the side or delve into higher education.

I found that teaching gave me the greatest self-worth and a strong feeling

of pride. Taking the time to help others made me appreciate all of the eggs I’ve picked up and placed in my basket of knowledge over the years. Teaching made me smile whenever I saw that light bulb of understanding turn on in someone’s head.

One of the more memorable speakers I’ve heard, David Rabiner, CSP, of Rabiner Resources, teaches the ACL principle: Accept it, Change it or Leave it. I’m not choosing to Leave it. I don’t have to Accept it, so that means I have to Change it. I acknowledge that I’m burned out and that I’m the only one who can fix it.

Armed with this knowledge, I take a deep breath and tell myself every day that I really do like what I do. I’m good at what I do. I don’t let situations that are out of my control rule my life and determine my attitude. Changing my attitude will eventually allow that flame to falter bit by bit, day by day... until one day there will be nothing left but a puff of smoke! □

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