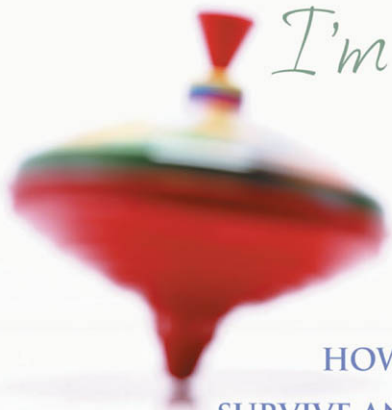


I SHOULD BE BURNT
OUT BY NOW...

*So How Come
I'm Not?*



HOW YOU CAN
SURVIVE AND THRIVE
IN TODAY'S UNCERTAIN WORLD

PEG NEUHAUSER · RAY BENDER · KIRK STROMBERG

*Praise for I Should Be Burnt Out By Now...
So How Come I'm Not?*

“This book is a timely reminder of just how much we can do to control our own lives and ensure our own mental well-being. It’s a practical guide filled with wide-ranging examples of how people have taken charge of their own lives in trying circumstances to not only avoid burning out, but to thrive. An uplifting read for anyone with a hectic and stressful life, which is, let’s face it, all of us.”

—Neil Bradford
Managing Director
Forrester North America

“Understanding burnout and how it happens is imperative in this day and age. The bottom line is, burnout is a choice. You can keep it from consuming you, and this book shows you how.”

—Jeffrey J. Jernigan
President & CEO
Union Bank

“Here is the how-to guide on thriving in today’s highly competitive world. The authors take their own advice and ‘lean into’ the lives of many people, drawing conclusions and checklists that inspire reflection and action in order to live a happy, fulfilling life. This is a book you’ll want to keep going back to.”

—Janice Wismer
Vice President, Human Resources
Canadian Tire Corporation Ltd.

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Introduction

Remember the old Timex watch commercials on television? “Takes a licking and keeps on ticking” was the message. The watches were put through all kinds of dramatic punishments, but in the end those watches were still ticking. The people you will read about in this book are like those watches. Their histories are filled with the usual range of life’s hard knocks, setbacks, and heartbreaks, but they found ways to survive and keep on ticking.

A few comments from the interviews:

During my nine-month job search, I didn’t really have any choice about burning out. I’m a very literal person. Failure was not an option. *Ina Lavin, human resources executive who was laid off*

When I leave one job or task and go to another, I leave it and take on the other one. I don’t allow any overlap. I work hard and do my darnedest, but once it’s done,

it's done. *Chad Reese, full-time manager, part-time university teacher, and married father of three children under seven years old*

I've always made an effort to have change in my life. Sometimes it was as small as changing the route I drove to work. I've changed jobs an average of once every four years. It helped me experience more, which has benefited my career. I guess that's why losing a job would not be the end of the world to me because I know there are other jobs out there. *Vickie J. Jones, insurance accounting operations manager and single mother of two children with a mother who has Alzheimer's*

I'm incapable of feeling sorry for myself. The first time I saw a small child in the treatment center, all feelings of self-pity disappeared. These children are unbelievable role models of courage and fortitude. I was encouraged by the older people too. They were experiencing great pain, but showed up every day ready for treatment. I was humbled by the way people acted with grace, although they faced an uncertain future. *Joe Galuszka, management consultant, married father of two children, and a cancer survivor*

Not Burning Out . . . One of Your Best Skills

There has been a great deal of talk during the past two decades about the serious problem of stress and burnout. Most of the discussion focuses on the pessimistic side of the story. The underlying assumption is that we are in a fierce struggle, one

that we frequently lose. Burnout is presented as almost inevitable, and solutions focusing on recovery are offered.

There is another, more optimistic side to the story. What about the people who endure tough times with courage and grace, or bounce back from crises with renewed energy when logic tells you the situation should have left them depleted and discouraged? For all the talk about burnout, the fact is that the majority of people spend most of their lives coping amazingly well. We are far more resilient and skilled at surviving and thriving than we give ourselves credit for. We take our successes for granted and pay relatively little attention to the skills and strategies used every day to handle whatever life throws at us.

What Does Success Look Like?

The people described in this book are not perfect. None of them claimed superhero status, and they would laugh at the suggestion. They told stories about tough times, failures, and struggles. Many described times in their lives when they burnt out for a while or at least came very close to doing so. But generally over the course of their lives, they functioned fairly well during uncertain or difficult times. Three key elements describe their success—most of the time they were able to:

- cope with disruptive change
- produce high-quality work
- live a happy or satisfying life

When these three things were not happening in their lives, they regained their footing fairly quickly and got back on track.

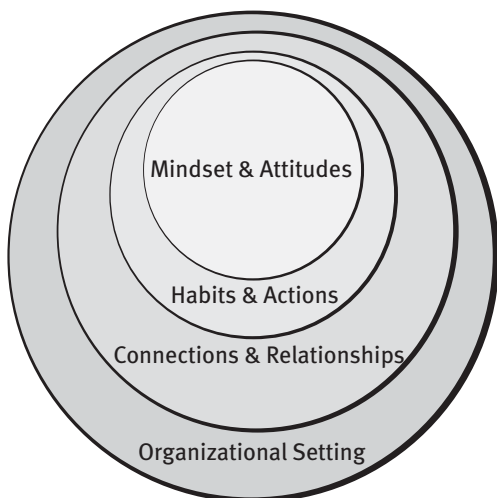
So What's the Secret of Their Success?

There are thousands of success stories every day about people who continue to survive and make the best of tough times. So how do they do it? What are the real stories of how individuals survive and even thrive during uncertain and difficult times? And what is their advice on preventing burnout?

This book answers these questions. The solutions are in the form of stories and tips from real people. Research for the book was conducted through interviews and surveys with people from a wide variety of occupations, ages, and geographical regions. The stories and tips in this book are taken from 1,000 pages of transcripts from seventy in-depth interviews and the results of 400 surveys.

The Structure of This Book

This book is divided into four parts covering the major themes emphasized in the interviews and surveys.



The figure represents the relationship among the four themes. As you move out from the center of the circle, the topics move from the internal, personal issues to the external, environmental issues.

Five Key Messages on Avoiding Burnout

The following statements are representative of the common messages that came up consistently in the interviews. Although everyone worded their opinions differently, there was a surprising degree of agreement across professions, age, geographical region, and gender.

Don't Wait for the Right Circumstances

You can't sit around waiting for the right circumstances to fall into place so you can be happy. Take the attitude that you will make the best of life no matter what the circumstances. When things get tough, don't wait to be rescued. Rescue yourself.

If You're Not Dead, It Can't Be That Bad

It's all about keeping things in perspective. People get too worked up about things that really don't matter that much. If the situation isn't going to kill you, maybe you are overreacting and wasting your energy.

It's a Skill That Takes Practice

Being good at not burning out is a skill more than a genetic personality trait. Just like any skill, you have to work at it. You can learn to manage your behavior and your thinking, but it takes discipline and practice to do it.

Nobody's Perfect

You can't get it right all the time. But when it all gets to you and you lose it, just get a grip on yourself again as fast as you can and keep going. There is no perfect score on this one. Just keep bouncing back.

Don't Look Back

Don't keep looking back over your shoulder at past mistakes or rough times. Learn everything you can from the experiences, and then let it go and move on. Don't waste your energy on the past.

Mindset and Attitudes

“Is the glass half empty, half full, or, as the engineers say, twice as big as it needs to be?”

“Mindset and Attitudes” is Part One because the people we interviewed told us that’s where it belongs. *How* you view your life is much more important than *what* is actually happening to you. These individuals have dealt with some of the hardest blows life can deliver—cancer, business failures, death, and miserable job situations—and survived. In many cases, they did more than survive. These situations were turned into worthwhile experiences from which they learned valuable lessons.

“I’m not a cancer survivor. I’m a cancer thriver!”
— *Cheryl Jernigan, community activist and former association executive*

“I have had major goals that were dashed—absolutely dashed. I prayed myself through those times. If you wallow, you are sunk. After a brief period of necessary mourning, I had to determine what had happened and how to recover.”
— *Ginna Gemmell, president and founder of GlidePath® from Alexandria, VA*

Some people describe themselves as mentally tough. Others say they are resilient and bounce back from adversity. And there are those who talk about drawing strength from their belief in a higher spiritual source. Each person uses different language and concepts and gives a variety of advice, but everyone agreed that mental attitude is key. Get that right and everything else follows.

Watch Your Thoughts

“**B**right people have the capacity of freaking out faster and more dramatically than anyone else.”¹ Burnout starts in the brain. Kelsey August, a thirty-four-year-old entrepreneur who has started and led three businesses and was the youngest woman to make the Inc. 500 list, described a scene from her life when her thoughts were getting in her way.

I remember when I hit my first wall. I was in a business owners’ group that met once a month. I got on my high horse at that meeting and started venting. “I’m expected to do everything around there. I have to do this, I have to do that...” They let me go on for about twenty minutes and then one of them looked at me and said, “You’re the business owner. What do you *think* your job description is, Kelsey? It’s no different for anyone else around here, and if it is, it’s because their business has matured. But it is impossible not to go through what you are going through for the first five years.”

¹ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (New York: Viking, 2001), 240.