

PEER-TO-PEER ARTICLES
WRITTEN BY YOU
OUR MEMBERS!

MEMBER FEATURES



MEET THE MEMBER

Christi Bintliff is a Practice Administrator and in-house coach for a multi-doctor dental practice in Durham, North Carolina. She is also a dental performance and development consultant with more than 30 years of experience in dental practice leadership and management. In 2019, she successfully launched her consulting company, LEAP 2 Solutions.

In her spare time, Christi enjoys DIY home projects, upcycling and repurposing discarded items in the most unexpected ways, and landscaping/gardening.

*How I
Nearly
(and why I'm
not the only one)*

BURNED OUT

MEMBER ARTICLE | BY CHRISTI BINTLIFF

In the last quarter of 2020, I found myself hitting the snooze button and struggling to get up to face the workday—something totally out of character for me. I love what I do. But after navigating through the nuisances of an unprecedented crisis in dentistry, I had lost the MEP in my step.

My mental, emotional, and physical (MEP) well-being tank was on empty. I found myself suppressing my exhaustion, and no one was the wiser. It was more important that I left my doctors and team shielded from the pressures and concerns we continued to face through Covid-19.

For more than 10 months, steps closer to burnout and MEP exhaustion, my dilemma had become a daily occurrence. The long hours of the work week had spilled over into evening calls/texts and weekends with no end in sight. Every day was one more crisis, one more problem, and one more HR issue that continued to weigh on me. Navigating delicate conversations, day-to-day tasks, and a stack of newly assigned duties meant I barely had time to eat or breathe. Taking time for a lunch hour or time away from the practice was a luxury I couldn't afford.

I thought I was handling things by not acknowledging burnout or giving into it. However, the signs were getting harder to suppress and much harder to ignore. Simple mistakes made by a team member would make seemed like a giant crisis. I'd often close my office door and cry in silence. Again, completely out of character for me. I usually see mistakes as a teaching moment. I see challenges as opportunities for personal and professional growth. Why was it different now? The difference was that I had been stretched beyond my limits during an uncertain and rapidly shifting environment. I was finding it harder to manage my feelings and exhaustion.

As managers, our role is to put to our own needs/feelings aside for the service of the team. The boundaries that I once held had become skewed. By not keeping them in place, I had sacrificed my own well-being. I only realized its affect much later in 2020, when my MEP exhaustion had pushed me to the brink of burnout.

BURNED OUT CONTINUED | PAGE 57

...BURNED OUT CONTINUED

Its suppression only manifested into a host of medical issues. I am not saying they didn't exist before. They just became front and center because I was mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted.

I am an enthusiastic workaholic. Sound familiar? This trait in and of itself puts us at risk of burnout, but there's another overlooked factor: how successful we are at MEP management.

Managing our mental, emotional, and physical well-being is crucial. There are high expectations and demands of managers; not just practice/team performance, but how we respond to challenges by balancing and maintaining the MEP in our step. We have been conditioned to always be "on". But when the stakes are high, pressure more intense, and the need to support others greater, there appear to be fewer avenues of support...setting the stage for burnout and MEP exhaustion.

Personally, I felt shame in acknowledging that I was struggling. That I was questioning a career change. That I needed to focus on my well-being. In business, we have been conditioned to see such scenarios as a taboo subject, and that experiencing them somehow makes us weak or unable to perform as a leader.

That's when I flipped the script to "there is no shame in my game" and decided to use my experience as an opportunity to address an issue that is steadily increasing with dental managers across the US.

When a car is due for an oil change, we change it because we know that performing regular maintenance is crucial for the car's performance. The same applies for us. Our body is the vehicle that drives us through work and life. We must regularly perform MEP maintenance.

Mayo Clinic developed questions as a tool to help recognize burnout symptoms:

- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, customers or clients?
- Do you lack the energy to be consistently productive?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate?

- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
- Have your sleep habits changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach or bowel problems, or other physical complaints?

If you answered yes to any of these questions like I did, you might be experiencing job burnout. If so, it's time to turn things around.

First, I had to personally acknowledge that I was on the cusp of burnout and MEP exhaustion.

Due to recent medical issues, I was able to talk with my primary care physician, who concurred some of my issues were a direct result of the onset of burnout/MEP exhaustion. She also noted that burnout has risen 33% as a result of the pandemic. My research confirmed this statistic, noting that healthcare workers were among the most seriously affected.

I am very fortunate to work with two amazing bosses. We have a great relationship, which allowed me to talk openly about what I had been experiencing. They had no idea and were so appreciative that I felt comfortable talking with them. Having their support and understanding was key in developing reasonable expectations of my role and shared accountability amongst the three of us.

Next, I built regular downtime into my schedule (such as regularly-scheduled breaks from work), along with daily renewal exercises, mediation, and uninterrupted vacations.

I am focusing on other things that I am passionate about, which are equally as challenging and rewarding as work.

While I love technology and social media, I have set boundaries on the time I spend on those platforms so I can be more present in my personal life. I seek to infuse positive and eliminate negative energy from my life. I'm also conscious about getting enough sleep, rest, and eating healthfully to help me regain momentum.

Through this stage I was not as organized in personal or professional life as I had been previously.

BURNED OUT CONTINUED | PAGE 60

...BURNED OUT CONTINUED

Now that I am the other side of burnout, I am reorganizing and reprioritizing my to-do lists.

By working with other leaders in similar industries who are navigating MEP exhaustion, it's been possible to work through this tricky situation.

Finally, I made self-assessment important to help me identify the triggers for burnout and MEP exhaustion,

so I know when it's time for a reboot. It's a constant work in progress.

Dental managers should be mindful of the potential of burnout and exhaustion because of their roles. Left unchecked, it can wreak havoc on your health, happiness, relationships, and job performance. ■



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