

Huffington

Of Burnout and Better Ways

A couple of weeks ago, I had an hour between meetings so I stopped by to visit with my five- year-old granddaughter, Riley Marie. I hadn't seen her for a week because I was traveling and as soon as I walked into the living room, she ran over, gave me a hug, and asked me something, big blue eyes shining.

"Granddaddy will you read to me?" she said. In a flash she was back with one of her favorite books and snuggled up into my lap. The book was *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne.

The first chapter began with these words:

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs behind Christopher Robin, bump, bump, bump on the back of his head. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels there must be a better way. If only he could stop bumping long enough to think about it.

That passage stuck with me over the next few weeks as I traveled from meeting to meeting. That's exactly what I had been seeing in the companies I was working with. People were living their professional and personal lives at such a frantic pace, bumping from one task or meeting to the other and all the while intuitively knowing... *there must be a better way.*

Through the years I have observed that this bump, bump, bumping on a daily basis eventually takes its toll in the form of negative stress. This stress impacts not only productivity, service, and communication but more importantly our health and well-being.

For nearly twenty years I have studied three major aspects of stress, *frequency, intensity, and duration.* The alarming thing about the stress we are experiencing today is that it is more frequent, more intense and lasts longer. The combination of these factors can lead to *burn-out.*

Burn-out: physical, mental and emotional exhaustion from long-term investment in demanding situations. Fatigue or frustration from commitment to a cause, a company or relationship that is no longer rewarding.

In her book, *Burnout: the Cost of Caring*, Christina Maslach shares a searing story from her own life. She said, "Just like a teapot, I was on the fire, with water boiling... working hard to handle problems and do good. But after several years, the water had boiled

away, and yet I was still on fire...a burned out teapot in danger of cracking.” Under such pressure, formerly caring, committed people can become calloused or cynical in self defense. For more about Christiana Maslach and her work:

<http://maslach.socialpsychology.org/>

Sometimes people with hard driving “type A” personalities put enormous pressure on themselves and others in a relentless effort to succeed. Their self esteem may depend on their success. Dr. Stephen Covey once said that “many people spend their lives climbing the ladder to success and one day they reach the top and discover the ladder is against the wrong wall.” Steven Covey’s Website: <https://www.stephencovey.com/>

A friend of mine who is a middle school principal told me that that achievement fatigue begins as early as middle school. She said students sometimes feel such pressure to make a certain grade that they “fall apart” if they don’t.

But take heart; there are better ways. There are things employers can do to re-structure jobs so that employees can succeed professionally and still stay healthy. There are steps individuals can take to improve their own lives.

I will cover these topics in upcoming posts. Look for them.