

# SOUND MIND, SOUND BODY COLUMN:

## Yoga: Hope for the burned out

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Research indicates employee burnout is on the rise with the increase of market pressures, understaffed organizations, poor company trainings and long hours of work.

The catch phrase of the 1980s or the "disease of modern life", employee burnout has been an ongoing struggle for many Americans in the work force for decades.

But yoga, a discipline with a much longer history than burnout, can help alleviate these problems.

The concept of employee burnout arose in 1956 beginning with Hans Selye, who studied stress and the effect it had on individuals. The term was officially labeled in 1974 by psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberger. He defined burnout as "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward."

Burnout leaves professionals emotionally, physically and mentally exhausted leading to turnover, absenteeism and decreased productivity. Generally, fatigued employees have difficulty finding balance between family and work. Once burnout occurs the employee has a tendency to lose motivation and strength of mind in work to result in statements including, "I've had it," "I'm tired" or worst of all, "I quit."

The American Institute of Stress says the U.S. economy spends about \$300 million per year on employee burnout issues. Stress-related incidents are one of the top expenses for companies today. Mental and physical stress related issues include hair loss, heart palpitations, digestive issues, fertility problems, headaches, neck and back pain, panic attacks, depression and insomnia. Stress affects mood and behaviors, and damages the internal organs and bodily tissues.

Encountered stress instantly affects the nervous system. This system sends, receives and processes the nervous impulses throughout the whole body. The stress experience "flows" through the body in a specific method.

First stress is processed and "written" through the nervous system, and repeated in our minds. Stress moves to be encoded in the muscular tissues and movement patterns of the physical body. Finally, stress is recorded in the emotions and buried deep in the body or internal organs.

One technique for countering these problems is yoga, which originated in Indian culture.

Its original form consisted of a complex system of spiritual, moral and physical practices aimed at attaining self-awareness through postures, breathing exercises and meditation.

Yoga as a science and Eastern philosophy has been incorporated into Western society and psychotherapies as a mature way of viewing life, emotions and situations. In work as in life, employees encounter positive and negative emotions daily.

Negative emotions are not necessarily "bad" due to the lessons learned, but employees must train themselves to control negative emotions, thoughts and actions. Consequently, yoga research states, "employees can learn emotionally how to handle unpleasant feelings by recognizing them, accepting them and allowing themselves to go about their business."

Physically, yoga is the only form of exercise that "massages" the internal organs. Not only can yoga relieve many physical pains, but these simple postures trigger seven glands of the endocrine system. These glands secrete hormones directly into the blood. During yoga, glands are activated and can release "help" for certain ailments directly and indirectly to the body and mind. Yoga assists the body indirectly by relieving stress, which in turn can reduce stress related ailments such as hair loss or panic attacks. Directly, yoga postures open or compress organs and glands to directly aid physical disease.

A person encountering stress, for example, can develop constipation and become angry and irritable. When he completes a forward fold, he places the hands near the feet and compresses the belly and the digestive organs together, stimulating and triggering the endocrine gland, the pancreas.

This intricate, scientific exercise allows individuals to balance life and work in order to avoid the downward spiral of stress and disease, and yoga can aid employees to recognize uncontrollable situations and let the situation take its course.

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