

DEALING WITH BURNOUT

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT:

- Ask for help. No shame. Be sure to be very clear as to what you need – a common burnout mistake is expecting others to figure this out.
- Prioritize. It may be that you are genuinely overdoing it, or have taken on too much. Hand off some things -- even if they are not the things you most want to hand off. Scale back. This is often hard to do alone, so get someone you trust to help. Doing the right thing sometimes means saying no.
- Eat healthy. Pressure may make you feel that you must drink lots of caffeine and eat fast foods and low-nutrition comfort foods. Avoid doing this. When in doubt, eat high-power traditional foods, fruits and lots of greens. Also, be sure to stay hydrated by drinking lots of water. These will help to restore your energy and prevent a health crash.
- Get 'āina time in. Spiritual practice and connecting to the land will keep you going for a long time.
- If you are having a mental health crisis -- e.g. serious depression, suicidal thoughts, drug binge, uncontrollable rage -- get help immediately. There is no shame in this.

HELPING SOMEONE WITH BURNOUT:

- People with burnout need a lot of support and encouragement -- even if they do not seem to respond well. Good communication is key. Relief is crucial.
- People experiencing burnout may also need some reality checking. Because personal commitment is a factor for burnout, the person may not allow others to help. Often this is very real -- it may not be possible for the person to hand off or scale back things that only he or she understands and has been working on for a long time, and certain elements may be very complicated to explain. Still, if the cycle continues in a negative direction, a crisis such as a major emotional, interpersonal, or health breakdown is likely. Providing support that is requested, along with being realistic about everyone's capacities, is important.
- It is not good to ostracize someone with burnout, even if it is "for his/her own good". Forcing a "break" through alienation could quickly lead to a large crisis, and often creates major problems in group cohesion overall. If it becomes truly necessary to relieve someone of a task against his or her will, be sure that ongoing support is in place as well, and remains so. If this is not done, instability can result, losing volunteers and energy, and there can be great trauma for the person.

This fight is so long

Still we're here, standing strong

Through the fires, through the tears

Children of a thousand years

The strength of those who came before

Will see us through this bitter war

Their love shines through our every stand

For this, our great beloved land

Brother, it's no shame to cry

The sacred water of your eyes

Is medicine of the most sacred kind

To heal the deep wounds of mankind

Sister, I see that you are tired

You've been through sorrow, killing, fires

And you cannot find a place to rest

Still, may with peace your heart be blessed

You and I, we'll carry on

For those to come, and those who've gone

And through the laughter and the tears

I'm so glad that you are here.

FIGHTING ACTIVIST BURNOUT

A WELLNESS GUIDE FOR
NATIVE WARRIORS AND OTHERS
ON THE FRONT LINES FRONT LINES
OF CONSCIOUS REVOLUTION



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WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Serious burnout occurs when workloads and chronic stress exceed people's ability to cope and rebalance over an extended period of time.

It is not only activists who experience burnout. Many jobs are famous for high burnout rates. However, activist burnout can be very serious for many reasons.

SOME CAUSES OF ACTIVIST BURNOUT:

- **Activism is an uphill battle.** There are often far too few people fighting really big battles against really powerful foes. And the battles can go on for a LONG time (sometimes generations in the case of native activists), which can be very draining.
- **Imposed foreign battlefields** such as hearings, courts, government meetings and even websites can be really awful. The cultural dissonance and friction uses up a lot of energy, leading to burnout faster.
- **Related problems**, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression are also high among activists. So activist burnout can be very serious.
- **A lot of negativity often surrounds activism.** Media criticism, government attacks, and sometimes activists' own communities can sometimes be big sources of negativity. This is a major burnout factor.
- **Internal conflict** is a reality of activism. Amongst other reasons, strategy is often very complicated, and can easily lead to people getting hurt, even when everyone is trying their best. If conflict is not resolved regularly, it escalates, increasing burnout.

SIGNS OF ACTIVIST BURNOUT:

People experiencing burnout often feel very alone, unappreciated or abandoned. They may feel like others around them are demanding too much from them, and not giving enough support. Whether this is true or not, the feeling is very real. They may lash out, get very emotional, or close up completely. Avoidance or a lot of blame, especially from someone who is usually positive, can be a burnout symptom.

Other signs include fatigue, depression, "toxic" reactions to things that seem small to others, stomach problems, sleep problems, muscular pain, headaches, weak immunity (frequent or lasting colds, for example), "snapping" or crying unexpectedly, drug or alcohol regressions, and unsafe behavior.

WHY IS BURNOUT DANGEROUS?

Burnout destroys people's health. It can kill. It can disable entire movements. Here are some of the many problems it causes:

EFFECTS ON PERSON:

- Direct effects on health related to chronic stress. Hyperventilation and other breathing problems. Ulcers and digestive problems. Anomaly health problems (unexplained problems that have never occurred before). Over time, there is an increased risk of heart disease, cancers and other serious illnesses.
- Increased vulnerability to drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse. Poor diet. Inability to "get a grip" on these things, leading to depression.
- Increased likelihood of high-risk sex, fights, accidents, conflicts, etc.
- Mental health problems, breakdowns. Suicidal behavior or thoughts aren't uncommon.

EFFECTS ON FAMILY, COMMUNITY, FELLOW ACTIVISTS & OTHERS:

- Reduced group effectiveness. Generally increased stress.
- **Burnout is contagious.** Many people may be experiencing burnout at once. This can lead to a very high-stress environment.
- People may feel that they are under attack or abandoned, and may lash out or sabotage relationships. They may put impossible pressure on others, either other activists or family members (or both) because their own burdens are unmanageable.
- No time for families and basic needs.
- Quitting suddenly is common. This leaves others hanging and often resentful, which spreads burnout.
- Opponents may deliberately exploit burnout. This may be as simple as attacking when people are obviously exhausted, or as complex as British infiltrators whose tactics were revealed to include "counseling" burned-out activists to get sensitive information.

BURNOUT PREVENTION

The best way to deal with burnout, by far, is to keep it from happening in the first place. Some ways to stay healthy:

FOR GROUPS:

- Resolve conflicts early, and regularly. Unresolved conflict builds up over time, and is a major burnout factor. One caution: do not mix conflict resolution and decision making -- keep these separate. Improve communication continually, and work in fun time together, too. Don't let online conflicts get out of control. Resolve problems face to face, and ASAP.
- Utilize supporters. Feelings of underappreciation are major burnout factor. Little things, like a meal delivered to the front lines, a letter of support, some hot tea for a sick activist, can really help -- and in quantity. "Backstage" supporters are often good resources, and are best mobilized early on.
- Coordinate pace. Avoid spreading too thin. A large, spread-out movement is more likely to collapse than a solid, focused one. That goes for people, too. Be sure everyone has relief and rest.
- Keep a cultural foundation. Our ancient cultures survived for a long, long time, including some unbelievably hard times. A lot of methods for preventing burnout are in the culture itself -- they just need to be practiced.

FOR INDIVIDUALS:

- Set boundaries BEFORE you need them. It is much better to lay boundaries early than to have to slam them down (possibly resentfully) later. You can make exceptions, but don't muddle clarity. Address problems firmly, but resist urge to blame.
- Pace yourself. Discipline yourself to take breaks, even if it is just for a moment. When working against a deadline, stand every few minutes. Take deep breaths. Stretch. Drink water. Etc.
- 24/7 actions are brutal. Resist the urge to stay up multiple nights in a row unless you can sleep well in the day. Find time to get quality sleep.
- Keep flexible. Disappointment can result from high expectations of others, and cause burnout. Screwups are human. Address them proactively, or let them go for real.
- Practice good nutrition. Lots of sugar, refined starch and/or caffeine is a recipe for burnout. Limit these. Eat fresh foods and ensure adequate water, Vitamins C, B12 (and other B's), and potassium. Traditional foods are usually best for many reasons.
- Go to the ocean or other healing place often. Recharge. Pule. Spiritual practice is crucial, too.