Why Employees Burn Out:

The Burnout During Organizational Change Model (B-DOC)

Burnout and Organizational Change

Repeated research studies have consistently reported that over 70% of change initiatives fail: The anticipated return on investment is never achieved. Employee change resistance is higher than what was originally anticipated. Downsizing and layoffs demoralize employee motivation. Instead of *improving* the workplace, the culture has deteriorated. Senior leaders ask, "Why did this happen?"

Based on my research, I believe that the underlying cause for all of these lackluster results is **burnout.**

But does employee burnout simply reflect the individual's inability to deal with change?

Or is employee burnout the result of poor change management?

Or is burnout the result of the physical fatigue of overworked employees who are trying to achieve lofty change goals?

The answer is...

> *Over 70% of change initiatives fail.*

The Burnout Triumvirate

Employee burnout during organizational change is not the result of *just* the employee, the environment, or the worker's health. Burnout is the culmination of 3 distinct factors:

1) The employee's personality
2) The organization's leadership and change management
3) The physical symptoms that precipitate and mitigate burnout
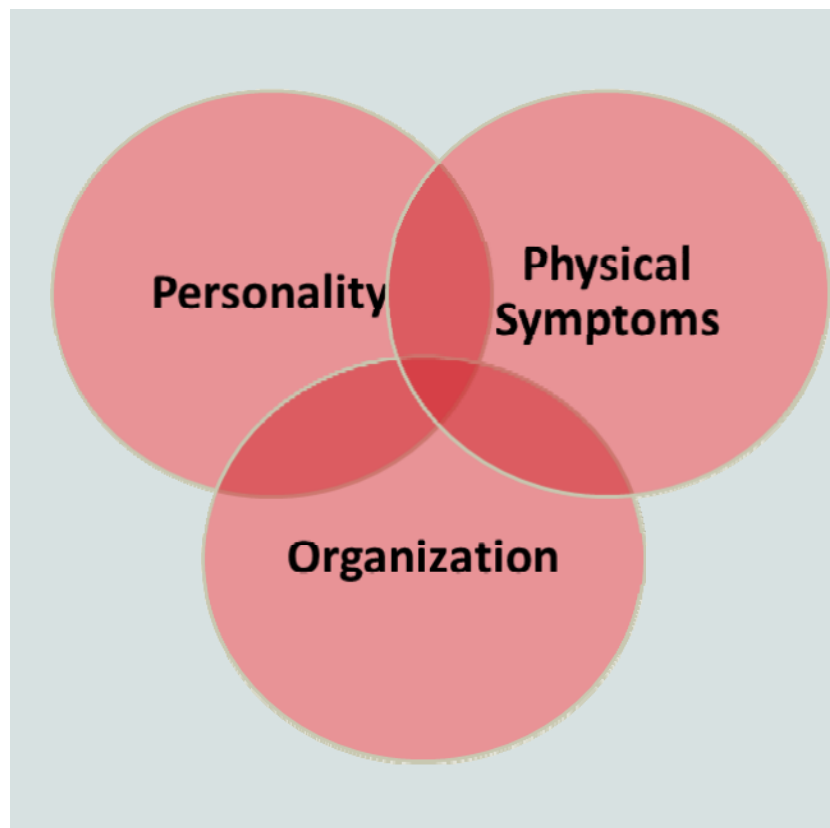
Personality and Burnout

The Type A "over-achiever" is particularly prone to burnout. Often described as a perfectionist, these workers also tend to be the "stars" within an organization.

And as "stars," they are often given more assignments that are of particular importance to the organization.

Stars also tend to *not* refuse these assignments — no matter how much is already on their plates.

Another key personality trait is directly related to the individual's job choice. Those working in "caregiver" positions tend to be more prone to burnout.

These caregivers gravitate toward jobs in which they can make a difference in their clients' lives.

The problem is that they often care *too much* — becoming so closely entwined that their clients' challenges and problems become their own.

> *High achievers and caregivers are more prone to burnout.*

But advising them to *not* care about what happens to their clients (or patients or students) is contradictory to the personality traits that led them into these fields in the first place.

Physical Symptoms and Burnout

One of the most notable signs of burnout is exhaustion: both physical and psychological.

Sleep tends to be the one thing that burned out workers crave. Sleep disturbances are common and can take many forms:

- Waking up every hour
- Waking up every night at 3:00 AM
- Lying awake for hours before actually falling asleep
- (On the other end of the continuum) instantly falling asleep at any time during the day

Eating changes are also common. Although many people overeat and don't remember what they have eaten, other burned out workers "forget" to eat. Weight gain or loss often accompanies burnout.

Sleep problems, weight gain or loss, and personality changes are common signs of burnout.

Friends and colleagues are usually the first to notice changes in the burned out worker's personality. Denial is common in both the early and late stages of burnout. Crankiness, impatience, anger, poor interpersonal communications, and an inability to concentrate are often present.

To offset these physical and psychological feelings, most burned out workers engage in "false cures." These range from smoking, drinking, or drug use to shopping binges and workaholism.

10 Organizational Factors That Create Burnout

Burnout is **NOT** simply an individual's maladaptive response to stress.

Work environments strongly influence an employee's attitudes, behaviors, levels of motivation, and feelings of stress.

Many organizations unwittingly build cultures and work environments that actually *create* burnout. Not only are these environments toxic to employees, but they are also toxic to any efforts to increase organizational performance, productivity, and customer satisfaction.

An organization creates a stressful work environment through its leadership, policies, procedures, and strategy:

- Poor leadership
- Lack of organizational caring
- Role of other workers
- Politics or sabotage
- Lack of resources
- Overemphasis on ROI
- Work overload
- Poor communication
- Unethical or illegal requests
- No vision or direction

Since the company is responsible for creating the work environment, they are also responsible for introducing remedies to the stress that they create. As Abraham Maslow observed, "sick people are made by a sick culture."

The Descent Into Burnout Is Quick…

Burnout during organizational change tends to occur rather quickly — but it differs depending on whether the employee is a change *leader* OR a change *target*. (The difference is based on the amount of control that the employee has over the changes that are taking place.)

The initial **hope** and enthusiasm for the change initiative is replaced with **frustration**. The worker feels that he/she is not receiving the promised resources and support to create the required changes.

Frustration is rapidly replaced with **anger** directed at the entire process, the company's leaders, and the work-life conflicts resulting from the poorly managed changes.

For self-preservation as a way to mitigate the physical and psychological distress that the employee is experiencing, **apathy** characterizes the worker's views toward nearly everything relating to not only the change initiative but the job and company as well.
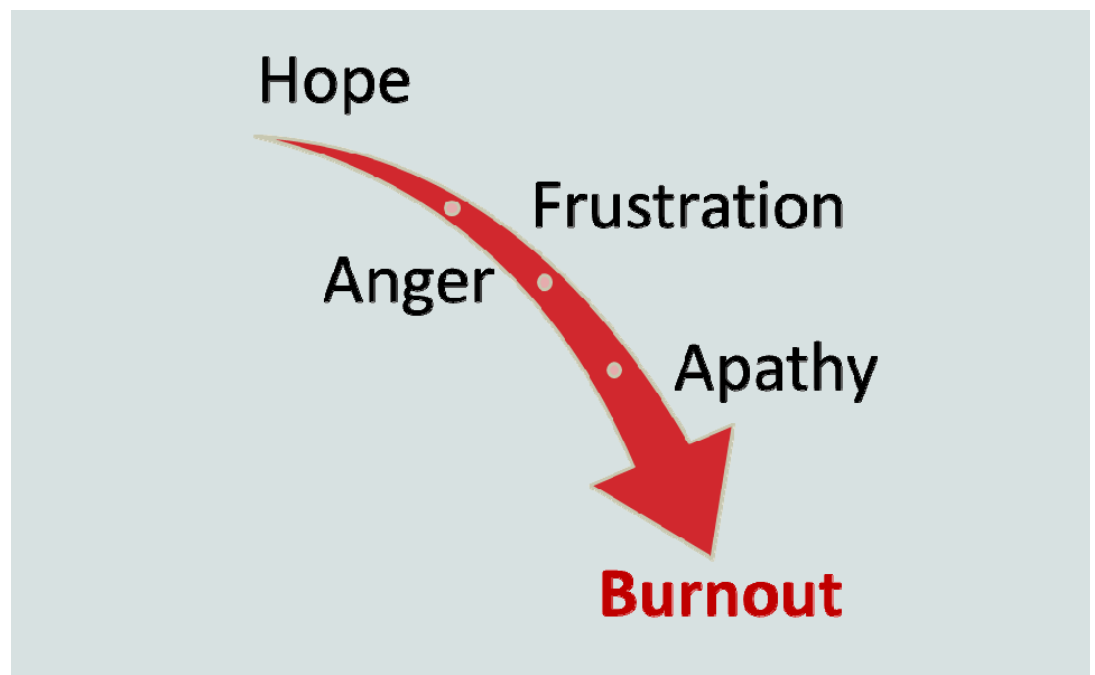
The speed at which employees move through each of the preceding stages of burnout is staggering — particularly for change targets.

Based on my research, **change targets** tend to fully burn out within **6 months** of the onset of the organizational change initiative. Instead of "ramping up" to implement even more changes, they tend to actively resist, covertly sabotage, or simply ignore what is required.

In contrast, **change leaders** experience burnout **1 to 2 years** after starting the change initiative. Perhaps this is because their subordinates (the change *targets*) have already burned out up to 18 months earlier.

The challenge of motivating burned out workers to actively embrace change, learn new methods, and modify their perceptions and behaviors is a Herculean task — particularly if they are in the apathy stage.

But Recovery From Burnout Is Slow…

Burnout is not something that people can just "get over." It is a gut-wrenching and slow process that requires a fundamental shift in one's attitude toward work.

In order to regain control, the burned out worker will attempt to remove him/herself from the stressful work situation. Since many workers do not have the financial resources to simply quit their jobs, they will psychologically remove themselves from work.

The worker will be even less engaged or responsive to the changes, overtly or covertly sabotage the process, or ignore it altogether.

During this time, it is imperative that the burned out employee take the time to develop greater self-knowledge and understanding of what happened. Only then can acceptance occur.

Burnout recovery is a surprisingly long process that can easily take *up to 2 years* — and the employee will no longer have the same perceptions, expectations, or level of commitment to the job, the company, or even the industry.
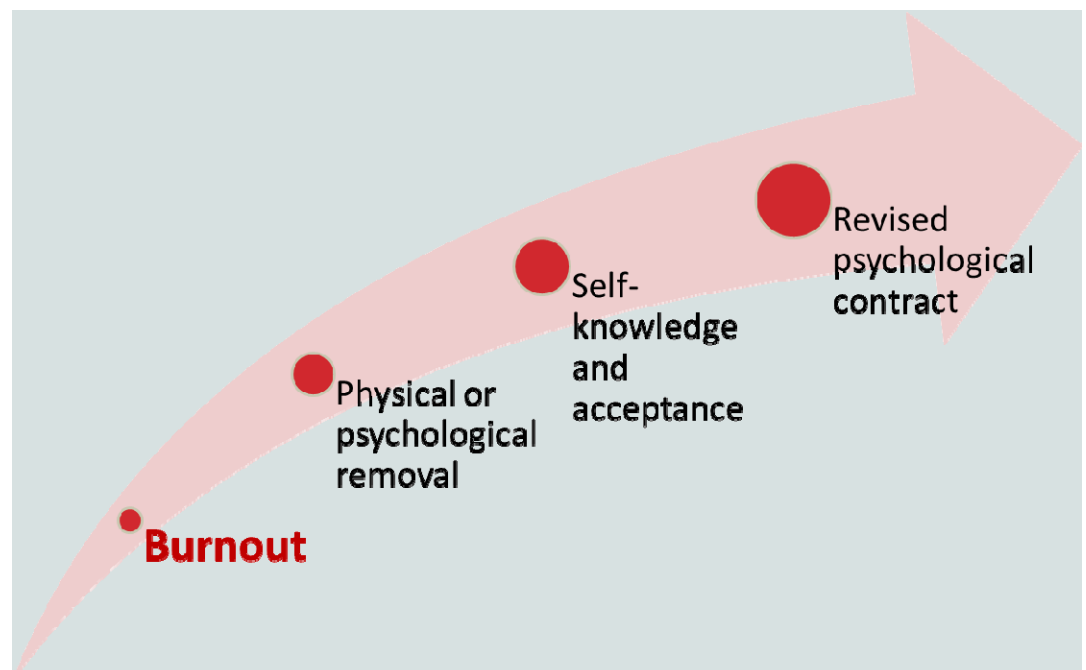
B-DOC: The Burnout During Organizational Change Model

Burnout is *not* something that an individual can just "get over." A good night's sleep cannot "cure" burnout.

Burnout is *not* the result of an individual worker's inability to adapt to stress. The organization through its policies, processes, and leadership greatly influence the level and scope of burnout in its workforce.

Burnout deeply affects the individual by fundamentally changing the way in which he/she views work, career, and the psychological contract with the employer.
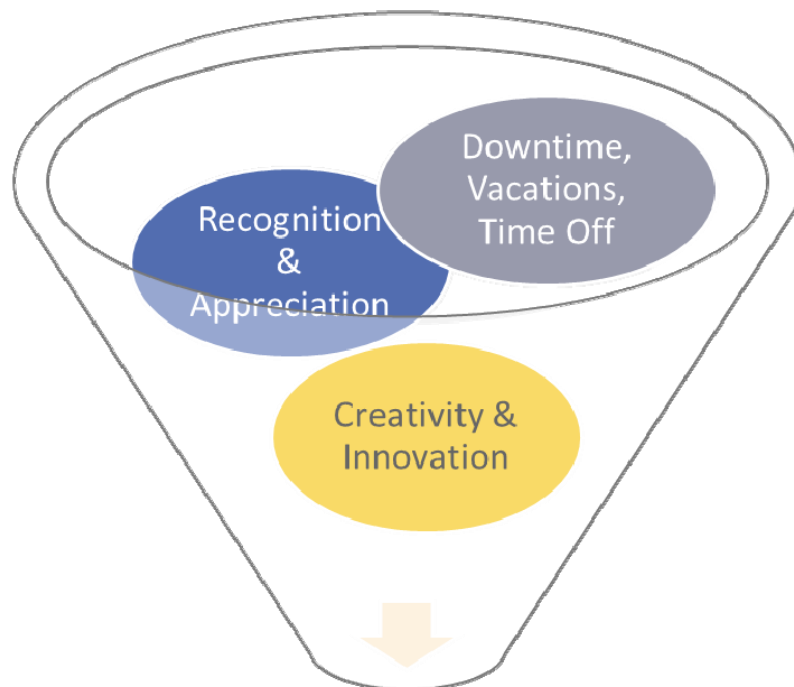
Repeated burnout can lead to a disengaged workforce and poor organizational performance.
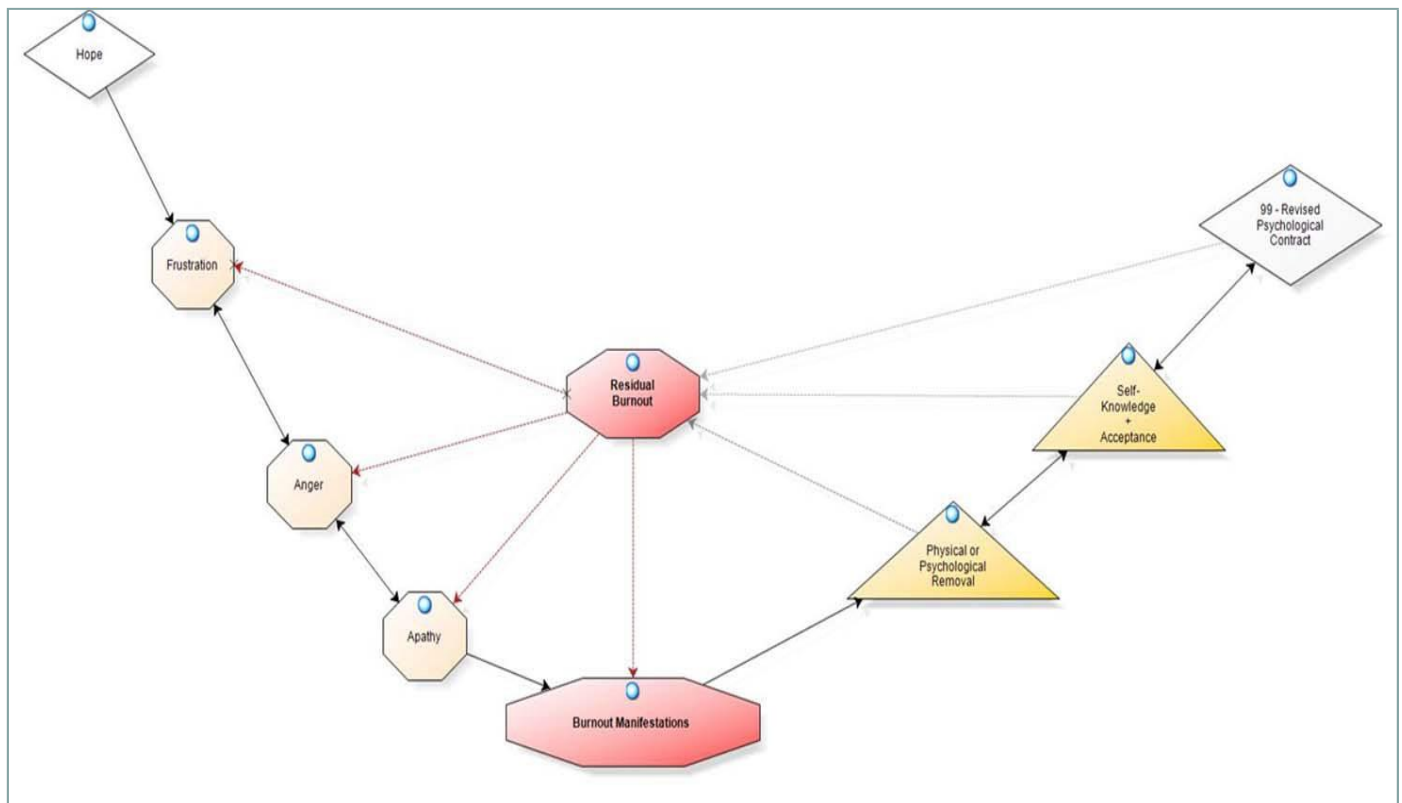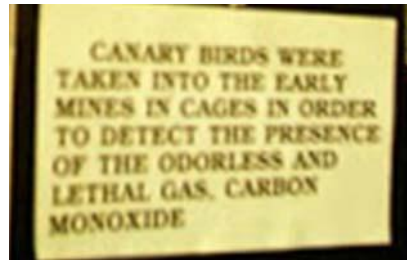
Moving Your Employees Out of Burnout

Burnout is rampant in today's age of constant, unrelenting change. But there are things that companies can do to help their employees avoid burnout as well as recover from it.

- Provide downtime after periods of particularly difficult change activities. Even better, incorporate "rest breaks" during lengthy stages of the change initiative.

- Don't let your own stress interfere with courtesy: always recognize employees for their hard work and tell them *why* you appreciate their efforts.

- Think outside the box and be creative in developing stress breakers within the workplace. Some of the highest performing companies embrace "unconventional practices" to help recognize, appreciate, and motivate their workers.

- ***Remember:*** A company is only as good as its people — don't let your star performers leave your high stress workplace for a more appreciative one at your competitor!

Recognition & Appreciation

Downtime, Vacations, Time Off

Creativity & Innovation

Performance, Productivity & Satisfaction

Burnout: The Canary in the Coal Mine

CANARY BIRDS WERE TAKEN INTO THE EARLY MINES IN CAGES IN ORDER TO DETECT THE PRESENCE OF THE ODORLESS AND LETHAL GAS, CARBON MONOXIDE

Burned out workers are physically and psychologically incapable of committing fully to the demands of today's constantly changing environment. The result is a loss of sustainability and growth:

- With no new ideas, there can be no new products to meet changing customer demands.
- Missed deadlines lead to lost opportunities.
- Angry or frustrated workers cannot effectively service customers — who are then more likely to go to competitors.
- Neurological changes in the brain immobilize workers' problem-solving and decision-making.
- There is a higher likelihood of lawsuits stemming from the results of all of the above.

Steps You Can Take to Overcome Burnout

There are 9 different strategies that have been found to effectively overcome burnout.

NOTE: These steps do *not* avoid the need for the employee to physically or psychologically withdraw from the stressful work environment, nor are these methods to bypass the self-reflective reframing of the psychological employment contract.

IMPORTANT: Although legal action is one possible action taken by the participants in my research, it is only useful in situations where specific employment laws or regulations have been violated. Therefore, seek the advice of a skilled employment attorney to ensure that your policies and procedures comply with relevant laws.
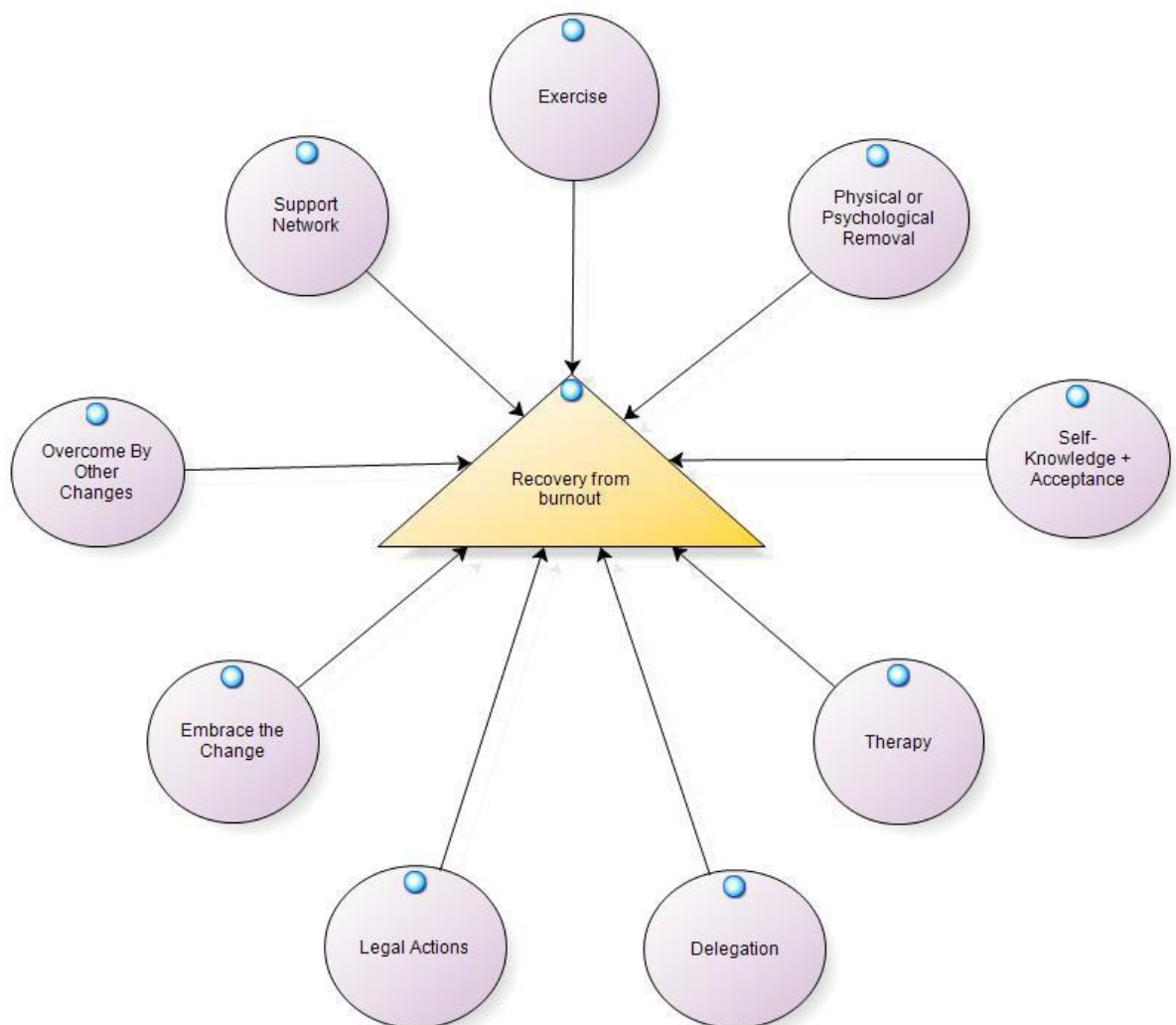
About Change Management Solutions, Inc.

Change Management Solutions, Inc., is an e-learning company dedicated to eradicating workplace burnout by focusing on 5 organizational culprits:

1. Job change
2. Organizational change
3. Work-life imbalance
4. Poor organizational leadership and management
5. Ineffective human resources

"Burnout-free" companies create win-win environments for the company *and* its workers. Employees are more engaged, committed, and energized to come to work. Organizations are better able to create a culture of creativity, innovation, adaptability, and responsiveness to a constantly changing marketplace.

We offer 3 training channels to address different learning styles and needs:

- *On-demand:* Self-paced e-courses
- *Blended courses:* Virtual e-courses combined with live OR online workshops
- *Customized courses:* Combines on-demand e-courses, live webinars, and individual OR group coaching
- *Live:* Keynote addresses and convention workshops

About Dr. Geri Puleo

Dr. Geri Puleo, SPHR (founder and President/ CEO) has effectively worked with clients in the areas of leadership, change management, human resources, and career coaching for over 25 years.

A skilled keynote speaker and trainer, Dr. Puleo's 22-minute TEDx Talk, *Burnout and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: More Similar Than You Think,* has been viewed over 145,000 times on YouTube (available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFkI69zJzLI).

Dr. Puleo holds both Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) and SHRM-Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) certifications. She was the founding chapter president for Tri-State SHRM (affiliated with the Society for Human Resource Management). In addition, for the past 15 years, she developed and taught onsite, online, and blended courses for undergraduates and graduates at a variety of universities.

To learn more, please visit our blog (www.a-new-way-to-work.com) or website (www.ChangeWithoutBurnout.com). For specific questions, please email us at geri@gapuleo.com.