



Balance or Burnout

A framework for activist wellbeing

There are two characteristics needed to create burnout, and they apply across all levels of scale, from individual through group, to planetary burnout or health.

The first requirement is a culture where a naturally self balancing system is heading out of balance. The second requirement for a system to reach burnout is that signals of distress or deterioration are ignored.

Here are some of the things that we need to balance:

Time spent stimulating the sympathetic nervous system Action. In emergency: fight or flight	Time spent stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system Rest or digest. In emergency: freeze
Giving Time, energy, money, commitment, attention	Receiving Appreciation, connection, warmth, money, care
Action Meetings, projects, building, growing, doing	Rest Downtime, silence, solitude, socials
Talking	Listening
Doing Pushing to get things to happen	Being Letting go into the flow, surrender
Focus on work, using will	Focus on relationships, care and connection
Knowing through mind, body, rational thought	Knowing through intuition, feelings, dreams
Positivity, optimism	Hurt and painful feelings given expression
Strength	Vulnerability

A culture creating burnout will override the signals of this imbalance, misinterpret them, or fail to find a remedy. It can be helpful to see that responding to feedback requires several stages:

1. Having space to notice the feedback
2. Understanding the feedback
3. Taking action to remedy the problem
4. Overcoming resistance
5. Reviewing the effect of the remedy

What needs balancing in your life?

How could you build in space to notice feedback and act to remedy the problem?

Source: Excerpt from article by Sophy Banks, former Inner Transition Coordinator of the Transition Network. Read the whole article: <http://plantothrive.net.au/2016/05/balance-or-burnout/>

Prompts for reflection

Take some time to think about:

1. How do you currently make space in your life so you can notice feedback about your wellbeing? How could you in the future?
2. If you listen to feedback (from your body, feelings, thoughts etc) what might it tell you about what you need?
3. What's one action you could take to respond to that feedback – or generally prioritise your own needs and wellbeing?
4. What might get in the way of taking that action? How could you overcome resistance?
5. How can you tell how useful such an action is? How can you help yourself stay on track?
6. Now consider your group or organisation. How could you build in mechanisms to notice feedback, understand it, take action to remedy problems, and assess effectiveness? What could you do to create a healthier culture?

The Maslach Burnout Inventory identifies six areas leading to burnout:

- Workload (too much work, not enough resources)
- Control (micromanagement, lack of influence, accountability without power)
- Reward (not enough pay, appreciation, or satisfaction)
- Community (isolation, conflict, disrespect)
- Fairness (discrimination, favoritism)
- Values (ethical conflicts, meaningless tasks)

Becoming clearer about the causes of burnout can help define action to address them. It can also help us to recognise what is within our control and outside of our control, what we can affect as individuals and what requires collective responses.

- You might like to rate each of these areas in your current life. Which require change? How could you get more of what you need in these areas?
- How could your group/organisation address these different areas to prevent burnout among members/staff?