

## Even the 'experts' can burn out

As a psych I knew a lot about stress and the perils of workplace stress and burnout. While I had seen it amongst colleagues I never thought it would happen to me. It was a busy time at work but I figured if I just worked a bit harder I would get through, I always did.

I found lots of way to get on top of things:

- ✓ Waking at 2 or 3 in the morning gave me extra time at work
- ✓ Eating on the fly meant more time at my desk
- ✓ A self managing team left me alone as they knew I was busy
- ✓ I was feeling too tired to exercise which also freed up time
- ✓ My partner was long time tolerant of my work habits when work needed to be done
- ✓ And what are weekends for?

I'd get one project across the line but keep up that same tempo and work habit into the next, even though I didn't need to. With the benefit of hindsight I ignored what were some pretty obvious warning signs I was not on a good track. What were once easy decisions and tasks churned out quickly seemed so much harder. Despite working long days and weekends I was starting to drop the ball on things and not performing at the top of my game. And I fluctuated between being short- fused and intolerant to others, and shut down and disconnected. I'd stopped enjoying my job. The problem was that when I was in the thick of things I was slow to recognise I'd lost my edge, and to recognise that working harder was not working smarter.

At these times it is those around us more likely to notice these warning signs. I fobbed off people's concerns, I knew that I had this. But then what should have been a bout of mild flu knocked me sideways. A blessing in disguise – it meant I had to take a break, and by doing that I realised that it was time to claim my life back.

In hindsight I realised there were some factors contributing to this:

- Stress is cumulative and I had some things going on in my personal life having lost a loved one and sustaining an injury with the frustrations of slow rehab and lingering chronic pain that helped establish those early morning wakeup patterns and getting by on less sleep.
- Injury stopped me from doing some of those things that were my usual release valves – for me it's getting out for a run (jog ☺) or out on the water.
- Like most of us I am passionate about what I do and like to do a good job
- I thought I was bullet proof, I'd always got through before. I have seen this described as 'the lies we tell ourselves' to deny signs of burnout – 'I am fine, I love my job, I am happy to take more on, I am just tired, You don't understand.... no one else can do this, People are depending on me, I will be fine once this is done, If people just let me do my job I'd be fine.' – that was me!!

With the benefit of hindsight, what might have helped me stay at the top of my game?

- Worklife balance and boundaries –not letting work define who I am or become
- Healthy habits -sleep, exercise, eating well

- Working well - doing the right things like prioritising, being realistic about what is achievable and sometimes saying no, taking regular breaks (leave and lunch breaks etc).
- Recognising the early warning signs –before judgement starts to slip.
- Recognising when it's time to pause – quietening the self chatter and accepting that pausing is sometimes important for being the best me.

How are you tracking, is it time to Press Pause? Time to get that balance back into your life?