

# Control Burnout: Work Smarter, Not Harder



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Many people experience burnout symptoms almost regularly in today's fast-paced, reach-you-anywhere/anytime, high-tech world. But letting them continue for too long is what can lead to complete breakdown. Recognizing symptoms early on can aid in better managing them.

The No. 1 burnout symptom landscape professionals experience is not being able to stop thinking about work after getting home (81 percent). This is followed by 66 percent who are fatigued/exhausted, 61 percent who have lost motivation, and 53 percent who say they have difficulty with work and personal relationships, per *Turf's* survey. Rounding out the list is negativity, decreased satisfaction, health problems, cognitive difficulties and poor self-care.

Those in the landscape industry suffering burnout aren't alone. A ComPsych survey of more than 5,100 North American workers found that 62 percent felt high levels of stress, loss of control and extreme fatigue. This research also linked burnout to many negative physical and mental health outcomes, including coronary artery disease, hypertension, sleep disturbances, depression and anxiety, not to mention increased alcohol and drug use. On top of that, burnout can produce feelings of alienation, damage relationships and diminish long-term career prospects, explains Monique Valcour, an executive coach and management professor.

And it's not just running a business in tough economic times that leads to burnout; owners who are hitting their financial goals can also suffer burnout.

"When you're feeling burned out, the enterprise you've sculpted with such passion can start to feel like a burden," explains Beverly Jones, a leadership and transitions coach, [Clearways Consulting](#), Washington, D.C.

"I've heard a landscape contractor describe his business as a 'hungry monster,' draining his energy with demands for more clients, projects and cash."

Business owners naturally throw themselves into their work, expecting their businesses to provide total fulfillment, adds Elizabeth Isele, co-founder of the Washington think tank Senior Entrepreneurship Works. "They forget earlier life lessons, like the need for balance and the importance of relationships," she says.

Delegation, downsizing and sticking to more manageable schedules are all ways to get into a routine that encourages a balance between hard work and recharging batteries.

After suffering blood pressure scares and surgeries, Brett Seltz says he did what he needed to do for his own sanity: "I took control. I backed off of field work and took command of my own schedule."

Today, Seltz works for himself at [Seltz Design](#). "I still work for three to four builders who I've been working with for years, but I just focus on consulting and design," he says. "My favorite work to do for them is designing landscapes for spec homes. I also will do some residential home designs and project management.

"I decided to work smarter, not harder," he explains. "It's refreshing to know that if someone calls, I can add them to my client list or refer them to someone else. My phone doesn't ring as much. I don't get as many emails, but when I look at the amount of expenses I had before with 25 to 30 employees and equipment, I was doing a ton more work but paying more in worker's compensation and labor and wasn't making as much money as I do now with a simpler business. Sometimes bigger isn't better."

The biggest benefit: "I can pick and choose what I do and keep my stress in check," Seltz says. "It's enabled me to take a big sigh of relief."

While some landscape professionals find pulling back helps them better manage stress and find balance, others find fresh energy by launching new projects or services.

That's what Jacob Godar does. The owner of [Scooter's Lawn Care](#) in Springfield, Illinois, started his business full-time in 2015. Beginning with mowing and maintenance services, he focused hard on perfecting the service. "I would look at how I can do it better and then how I can get others to do it the same way," he says. "I'd work at it and work at it until I maxed myself out."

The next year he got his pesticide license and started providing lawn care treatments. The shift to a new service reinvigorated him. Now he's doing the same thing with landscape installation services. Scooter's Lawn Care hit the \$288,000 revenue mark last year and is looking at reaching \$600,000 this year.

"An intense focus on one set of activities can wear you out," Jones explains.

“But a fresh project just may stimulate your creativity – and turn your burnout into a roaring flame.”