



Burnout: How to Put Out The Fire

"It's frustrating. I used to be able to see my team. We were all in the same space. If we needed to get something done, we got together and just did it. Now, just to talk with them, I have to schedule a Zoom meeting that fits with all of their schedules. I've never felt so ineffective, tired, and frustrated as a leader."

For anyone trying to hold a team together, it will come as no surprise that burnout is the [number one reason](#) people look for a new job. And nearly [60% of millennials](#) and Gen Z, 54% of Gen X, and 31% of Baby Boomers—employees as well as managers—say they are burned out.

We believe managers can reduce employee burnout by leading and coaching differently. The cure is not more control over work methods or the timing and location of work. What our research revealed is that "Gives me autonomy and does not micromanage" is the number one behavior employees want their managers to adopt and improve. This is ranked higher than providing recognition, supporting career development, or sharing information. It is what employees need most in order to do their best work—and not feel burned out.

We analyzed and compared the performance of hundreds of first-line managers and team leaders across 900 diverse organizations. Here's what we learned:

- There is a direct link between burnout, micromanagement and autonomy.
- With the best of intentions, managers often get in their own way by engaging in unintentional micromanagement triggered by commonly held beliefs around how to ensure accountability and efficiency—beliefs that may be outdated or inadequate in a world dealing with divisive issues and a prolonged pandemic.
- Too many employees feel that autonomy is lacking and micromanagement is rampant. In our study, they rated 50% of their managers and team leaders

"The line between an efficient manager and a micromanager is sometimes blurred, and it's easy to cross it, unaware you're on a slippery slope to becoming a dysfunctional boss."

Aaron Haynes, "7 Warning Signs You're the Dreaded Micromanager,"
Entrepreneur.com, March 8, 2017

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as micromanagers. This tells us that managers don't recognize their own micromanagement or are unaware of how their behavior impacts their employees' performance and commitment and contributes to burnout.

- Micromanagement—whether unintentional or not—dampens commitment. Autonomy enhances it.

Remote work makes micromanagement even more prevalent. Research published in [2020 by the Harvard Business Review](#) showed that a large number of managers are struggling to manage their remote work forces effectively. When managers cannot directly observe their employees, many doubt whether their employees are actually working. As a result, many workers feel that they are not trusted and are being micromanaged by their bosses.

A related finding from the [Great Place to Work \(GPTW\)](#) organization's study that gathered more than 1.7 million survey responses from 1,570 companies found that employees who experience burnout are three times more likely to have been micromanaged by their direct manager.

On the positive side, employees who say they are "committed to a very great extent" also say that their managers are "very or extremely effective" at "granting autonomy." Autonomy helps employees manage their job demands, workload, and work environment. It gives them an element of control over their workday as well as the opportunity to take responsibility for a measure of their own success. It is the best coping mechanism a manager can provide to combat burnout.

Managers today are under extraordinary pressure to address burnout and keep employees engaged and productive. On one hand they have to understand and accommodate the new world of employee expectations and requirements. On the other hand, they have to fulfill their own, often daunting, organizational and business goals.

This kind of balancing act is difficult—even in the easiest of times. Getting the balance right, however, especially in hybrid and remote work settings, is mission critical.

Granting autonomy is the answer to the manager's question, how do I avoid micromanagement and prevent burnout? Learning what autonomy is, why it works, what management actions support it, how to use it as a management tool or method, and how to grant it while maintaining accountability, reliability, and responsibility is more than worth it. It's mission critical.

Our program, [Leading with Autonomy](#), can help. Visit us at www.begreatllc.com

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