



## PANDEMIC BURNOUT:

### *Know Your Boiling Point*

Dr. Shelle Welty  
Clinical Associate, Headington Institute

Have you heard the fable of the frog thrown into a pot of boiling water? It tells us that a frog thrown into a pot of boiling water will immediately jump back out. Alternatively, a frog that is put into a pot that is gradually heated to boiling will acclimate to the changing temperature and never jump out--thus BOILING TO DEATH!

Months ago, we all joined a heroic effort to keep the world running in spite of a pandemic. We turned kitchen tables into work spaces and conducted work via numerous zoom sessions. Like the proverbial frog, the heat was rising in our pots. We hoped that the pot would cool again soon enough, though, and we would get back to our room temperature work settings. The pot is not cooling, though. Instead, the temperature is continuing to rise. We all need to take a minute to check our temperatures before we “boil” and reach the unfortunate state of burnout at work.

→Take a moment to complete [this survey](#) to check your burnout temperature.

Use the following guidelines to reduce your burnout temperature or keep it low.:

#### **1. Prioritize sleep. We need 7-9 hours per night to function well emotionally, cognitively and physically.**

- Exercise can improve sleep quality and quantity. Aim for at least 30-40 minutes of moderately strenuous exercise daily. If you cannot make this goal, exercise as much as you can. There are many apps with very good 7-minute exercise routines.
- Eliminate or reduce alcohol and caffeine intake.
- Put away screens an hour before bedtime.
- Incorporate gentle stretching into your bedtime routine. Be especially mindful of stretching your neck and shoulders after a day of computer work.
- Keep your sleep and wake schedule as consistent as possible.

#### **2. Reflect on what is most meaningful to you about your job.**

Consider how you can focus more on those aspects of the work. Talk with your supervisor about ways to shift some of your responsibilities, at least for a while, to give you more exposure to the meaningful parts of your work.



**3. Take steps to keep your life in balance. Ask yourself these questions:**

- What defines you besides your job? Are you giving those areas enough attention?
- Are you looking for moments of joy each day?
- Are you engaging with loved ones in ways that feel fulfilling to you? You may need to talk with some friends or family members to find ways, in the current often-virtual world, to interact in meaningful ways.
- Do you have a place where it is safe and helpful to acknowledge and express your feelings? If not, it may be helpful to reach out to a mental health professional. Many jobs provide access to at least a limited number of sessions with a professional. Don't hesitate to use that resource.
- It's important to take the measures necessary to keep your cool even as the temperature rises!