



Burn out is bad. Prevent it.

I burnt out in April 2017. Until then, I didn't understand what it meant to burn out. To be honest, I looked down on people who didn't seem to be in 'go mode' all the time. When someone spoke about self-care, sleeping well or taking time out due to mental health concerns, I discounted it to not having capacity, a lot of drive, a sense of urgency, or a big dream. Then I burnt out.

I find it hard to explain how it feels, so I will give examples of what happened to me. I couldn't get out of bed. The week it started, I cancelled all my commitments because I felt like a car that crashed into a wall and would be written off. Brushing my teeth was a non-starter. My entire life felt like a waste of time and I wondered what the point of being here was. All my efforts seemed to have amounted to nothing. At the height of it, it felt like I was going to lose my mind. One night, my wife shook me vigorously to wake me up. She said I was begging in my sleep not to lose my mind. From speaking to other burnout survivors, my experience isn't unique to me. People often ask me why I burnt out, so I will share why we burn out and how to prevent it.

A reason we burn out is that we ignore the warning signs. One day my wife was driving and the fuel gauge indicated low fuel. She ignored it, thinking she would soon be home. At the worst possible time, on the motorway, she ran out of fuel. Luckily, she was able to get the hard shoulder before the car stopped. If

she didn't, it would likely have been a tragic story. Burnout is similar: you don't know when you will run out of the ability to continue. Unfortunately, we don't have a fuel gauge that tells us "no more fuel", so we need to be aware of the warning signs.

Warning signs to look out for:

1. The harder you push, the slower you go. My wife realised something was wrong because the harder she pressed the accelerator, the slower the car went. When you push harder but are not as effective, you need to pause and make some changes.
2. When you just go through the motions. The "I can't be bothered, whatever will be will be" attitude is a sure sign that you are burning out.
3. When you keep saying to yourself, "I am almost there". When I burnt out, I knew I was at my wits' end, but I kept saying, "let me just get this done." It is like the fuel gauge screaming red, but you keep driving past petrol stations, thinking you are almost there.

As bad as burnout is, we should do our best to prevent it. A starting point is not to ignore the warning signs. In my book *Count The Cost: The 5 Unspoken Rules of Sustainable Success*, I give more warning signs and talk about what triggers us to keep going until we crash and burn. I wrote it because burning out is in the top three devastating things that have happened to me.

Memorable quote: "If you ignore the warning signs, a tragedy awaits you ahead" – Cory J Herdon

Coaching tip: Reflect on the warning signs shared above, are you ignoring any of them?

Leadership challenge: Am I leading the people around me towards or away from burnout?



Uche Ezichi is an executive coach, speaker and facilitator with more than 15 years of experience working in and with FTSE 100 companies and leading business schools. *Count the Cost: The 5 Unspoken Rules of Sustainable Success* is out now in paperback and Kindle. Follow Uche at www.ucheezichi.com.