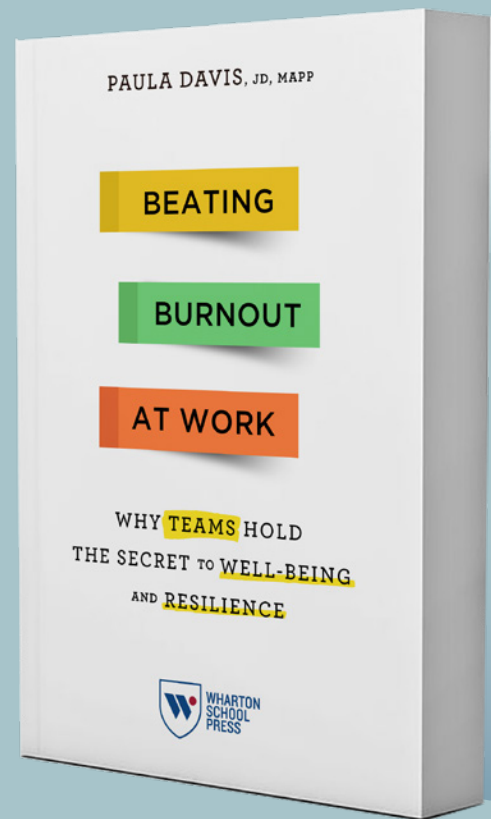


# *Beating Burnout at Work*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



*Beating Burnout at Work: Why Teams Hold the Secret to Well-Being and Resilience* is a first-of-its-kind, science-backed toolkit, which takes a holistic approach to burnout prevention by helping individuals, teams, and leaders build resilience and thrive at work.

In *Beating Burnout at Work*, Paula Davis, founder of the Stress & Resilience Institute, offers an actionable method to help leaders create cultures of well-being and resilience in their organizations.



To learn more, visit: [wsp.wharton.upenn.edu/book/beating-burnout-at-work](https://wsp.wharton.upenn.edu/book/beating-burnout-at-work)

## Questions for Discussion

1. The three main dimensions of burnout are chronic exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Do you see any symptoms of burnout in yourself or your organization?
2. According to Davis, “Burnout is caused by an imbalance between your job demands and job resources, and it’s more likely to occur when job demands outweigh job resources.” The following tables represent a list of key job demands that drive burnout and job resources that slow it down.

Which core 6 job demand drivers of burnout create stress for your team? Your organization? You? What is within your control to address or fix these issues? What are your assumptions about burnout and the people who have experienced it?

Job Demands: The Core 6
Lack of autonomy
High workload and work pressure, particularly without adequate staffing
Lack of support from leaders and/or colleagues
Unfairness (lack of transparency; arbitrary decision-making; favoritism)
Values disconnect
Lack of recognition

How are the following job resources being incorporated in your team? In your organization? Where is improvement needed? What generational differences do you notice, if any?

Job Resources
High-quality relationships with colleagues; social support
Decision authority; participation in decision-making
Feedback
Autonomy and job control
Development opportunities
Leader support
Recognition
Having meaningful work; impact
Role clarity

3. Davis created a Resilient Teams Inventory to help pinpoint areas of team resilience that are working well or need to be improved. Table 3.1 includes some of the statements she uses to evaluate team resilience. The scale for each question ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” If you score between 41 and 50, your team is showing signs of resilience and thriving. If it is between 31 and 40, your team has some strengths, but it also has areas of improvement. Any lower than 30, and you have some serious work to do. Is your team PRIMED for resilience, thriving, and sustainable success?

**Table 3.1. Resilient Teams Inventory**

Statement	Score
1. We know our resources and use them regularly.	
2. We adapt well to change.	
3. Setbacks don't affect our team for long—we pivot quickly.	
4. We pay attention and respond to early signs of stress and burnout in team members.	
5. Being on this team is energizing.	
6. Our work is a source of meaning and inspiration, and we regularly discuss the impact we make within the organization.	
7. We are good at having difficult conversations within the group.	
8. It's easy to ask other members of this team for help.	
9. We are focused on learning and growth and continually improving how our team works.	
10. My team members trust each other.	

4. In chapter 4, Davis suggests that burnout can be alleviated by learning to promote your psychological needs: the ABC needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence. Hybrid work is creating tension between the need for autonomy and the need for belonging. What are you doing to solve this tension? How can you incorporate the ABC needs framework into your mentoring and onboarding programs?
5. Creating psychological safety, or a sense of trust among the team, is also important. How do you maintain psychological safety on the teams you lead? How has that changed in a hybrid work environment? How do you create trust with new team members? How has hybrid work made this more of a challenge? When was the last time someone on your team disagreed with you, or was confused and said something?
6. Relationships with others promote productivity and mental health. In chapter 5, Davis points out that working from home can take away from this important feature of the workplace. What are ways to make connections in the virtual office? Has your organization struggled to stay connected in a hybrid work environment? What have you tried that was successful? How do you know your team members feel like they belong? How are team members recognized?
7. In chapter 7, Davis notes worst-case scenario thinking, or catastrophizing, is a common reaction to stress. What are ways you limit catastrophizing? What are stressors your team worries about?
8. In chapter 8, Davis outlines five qualities leaders should practice when helping their team adapt to stress:
  - Keep people informed (**Inform**)
  - Encourage team members to suggest ideas for improvement (**Engage**)
  - Have regular career development conversations (**Develop**)
  - Provide regular feedback and coaching (**Inspire**)
  - Recognize people for a job well done (**Recognize**)

Which are in practice at your organization? Where is there room for improvement?

9. After reading *Beating Burnout at Work*, what steps would you like to take for yourself, your team, and/or your organization?



## In Conversation with Paula Davis

Burnout has become one of the most talked about workplace topics, and its impact is far-reaching. The 24/7 pace of work and scant resources often put busy professionals on a path to burnout, a cycle that only accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Burnout affects the health and well-being of the entire organization, yet most attempts to help focus on quick-fix strategies aimed at individuals.

In *Beating Burnout at Work: Why Teams Hold the Secret to Well-Being and Resilience*, Paula Davis, founder of the Stress & Resilience Institute, explores a new solution to the burnout problem at work: a comprehensive approach focused on building the resilience of teams of all sizes. Davis argues that teams, and their leaders, are uniquely positioned to create the type of cultures that are needed to prevent burnout.

Wharton School Press sat down with Davis to talk about her book, her own burnout story, and how to start on the path to resilience and thriving.

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**The book starts with your experience with burnout as a lawyer. What are the signs and symptoms of burnout, and how did your experience inspire you to help others manage stress and resilience?**

**Paula Davis:** There were three big warning signs that I missed when I was going through this process. The first one was that I was chronically physically and emotionally exhausted. Because I didn't know what was happening at the time, I really didn't know what to look for. But this was definitely a big one.

No matter what I did on the weekends to try and recover, nothing seemed to work. I absolutely hated Sunday nights, because I would stare at the clock on the wall thinking, if I could just freeze time I won't have to go in to work and become more exhausted this week, because I'm not even recovered from last week and the week before. That was a big one.

The second big warning sign that I missed was that I was chronically cynical. People just started to really bug me, and that's not my usual personality.

I noticed that I was outwardly very professional in all of my dealings with my clients, but inwardly there was a lot of eye-rolling going on. I would think to myself, do we really have to talk about this issue? Can you solve this on your own? It was really not a good way to think, because my job as a lawyer was to help real estate clients solve really complex challenges with their deals.

Lastly, I started to notice that I was becoming more ineffective. Not in my ability to be a good lawyer, but really starting to lose my confidence in terms of seeing a path forward for myself in the profession. That led to a lot of, why bother, who cares? Why am I doing this? Am I really making an impact? Again, with my clients, it was: You're not going to listen to my advice, so why bother, who cares?

What's interesting is that once I finally got out of my law practice and started to research burnout, those three warning signs that I missed are actually the three main symptoms of burnout. As soon as I realized that, I understood more about what was going on. Then I just really felt called to help other busy professionals in some way to not have to go through the same process. My burnout lasted almost a year, and it progressed to a really bad place. I was getting panic attacks on almost a daily basis, and I was in the emergency room twice because I had stomach aches from the stress that were so bad that I couldn't stand up.

I realized at that point that some big changes had to happen. I don't want people to get anywhere near that point. I want to be able to help people understand a little bit more about what burnout is and give them some tools to help.

**There are tons of lessons and takeaways in the book, but if you had to pick one lesson that you hope readers take away with them, what would that be?**

**Davis:** I think that the big message is the “aha” that I had as I was learning about burnout and educating myself about what this is. Globally, burnout is a systemic issue. I know that so many people put a lot of blame on themselves individually and feel like they can't say anything about it if they feel like they're burning out at work. It is definitely a system-wide problem with system-wide causes that needs system-wide strategies—which is why I wanted to focus on teams being these little mini systems within the bigger organizations.

Your individual wiring and personality traits and things like that do play into the burnout equation, but it's also a much bigger issue from a leadership and organization standpoint. When we can start to look at the problem in this holistic way, we can all open our eyes and figure out and implement specific strategies that will help.

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*“I want to be able to help people understand a little bit more about what burnout is and give them some tools to help.”*

—PAULA DAVIS

## About the Author



Paula Davis JD, MAPP, is the Founder and CEO of the Stress & Resilience Institute, a training and consulting firm that partners with organizations to help them reduce burnout and build resilience at the team, leader, and organizational level.

Paula left her law practice after seven years and earned a master's degree in applied positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. As part of her post-graduate training, Paula was selected to be part of the University of Pennsylvania faculty teaching and training resilience skills to soldiers as part of the Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness program. The Penn team trained resilience skills to more than 40,000 soldiers and their family members.

Paula is the author of *Beating Burnout at Work: Why Teams Hold the Secret to Well-Being & Resilience* (Wharton School Press), which is about burnout prevention using a teams-based approach.

Her expertise has been featured in *The New York Times*, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, and many other publications. Paula is also a contributor to *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, and *Psychology Today*.

Paula is a two-time recipient of the distinguished teaching award from the Medical College of Wisconsin. She has been a guest lecturer at Wharton Executive Education.

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