

Introduction

Remember the old Timex watch commercials on television? “Takes a licking and keeps on ticking” was the message. The watches were put through all kinds of dramatic punishments, but in the end those watches were still ticking. The people you will read about in this book are like those watches. Their histories are filled with the usual range of life’s hard knocks, setbacks, and heartbreaks, but they found ways to survive and keep on ticking.

A few comments from the interviews:

During my nine-month job search, I didn’t really have any choice about burning out. I’m a very literal person. Failure was not an option. *Ina Lavin, human resources executive who was laid off*

When I leave one job or task and go to another, I leave it and take on the other one. I don’t allow any overlap. I work hard and do my darnedest, but once it’s done,

it's done. Chad Reese, full-time manager, part-time university teacher, and married father of three children under seven years old

I've always made an effort to have change in my life. Sometimes it was as small as changing the route I drove to work. I've changed jobs an average of once every four years. It helped me experience more, which has benefited my career. I guess that's why losing a job would not be the end of the world to me because I know there are other jobs out there. Vickie J. Jones, insurance accounting operations manager and single mother of two children with a mother who has Alzheimer's

I'm incapable of feeling sorry for myself. The first time I saw a small child in the treatment center, all feelings of self-pity disappeared. These children are unbelievable role models of courage and fortitude. I was encouraged by the older people too. They were experiencing great pain, but showed up every day ready for treatment. I was humbled by the way people acted with grace, although they faced an uncertain future. Joe Galuszka, management consultant, married father of two children, and a cancer survivor

Not Burning Out . . . One of Your Best Skills

There has been a great deal of talk during the past two decades about the serious problem of stress and burnout. Most of the discussion focuses on the pessimistic side of the story. The underlying assumption is that we are in a fierce struggle, one

that we frequently lose. Burnout is presented as almost inevitable, and solutions focusing on recovery are offered.

There is another, more optimistic side to the story. What about the people who endure tough times with courage and grace, or bounce back from crises with renewed energy when logic tells you the situation should have left them depleted and discouraged? For all the talk about burnout, the fact is that the majority of people spend most of their lives coping amazingly well. We are far more resilient and skilled at surviving and thriving than we give ourselves credit for. We take our successes for granted and pay relatively little attention to the skills and strategies used every day to handle whatever life throws at us.

What Does Success Look Like?

The people described in this book are not perfect. None of them claimed superhero status, and they would laugh at the suggestion. They told stories about tough times, failures, and struggles. Many described times in their lives when they burnt out for a while or at least came very close to doing so. But generally over the course of their lives, they functioned fairly well during uncertain or difficult times. Three key elements describe their success—most of the time they were able to:

- cope with disruptive change
- produce high-quality work
- live a happy or satisfying life

When these three things were not happening in their lives, they regained their footing fairly quickly and got back on track.

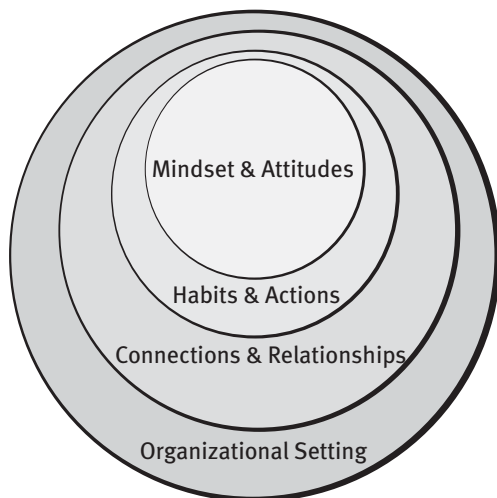
So What's the Secret of Their Success?

There are thousands of success stories every day about people who continue to survive and make the best of tough times. So how do they do it? What are the real stories of how individuals survive and even thrive during uncertain and difficult times? And what is their advice on preventing burnout?

This book answers these questions. The solutions are in the form of stories and tips from real people. Research for the book was conducted through interviews and surveys with people from a wide variety of occupations, ages, and geographical regions. The stories and tips in this book are taken from 1,000 pages of transcripts from seventy in-depth interviews and the results of 400 surveys.

The Structure of This Book

This book is divided into four parts covering the major themes emphasized in the interviews and surveys.



The figure represents the relationship among the four themes. As you move out from the center of the circle, the topics move from the internal, personal issues to the external, environmental issues.

Five Key Messages on Avoiding Burnout

The following statements are representative of the common messages that came up consistently in the interviews. Although everyone worded their opinions differently, there was a surprising degree of agreement across professions, age, geographical region, and gender.

Don't Wait for the Right Circumstances

You can't sit around waiting for the right circumstances to fall into place so you can be happy. Take the attitude that you will make the best of life no matter what the circumstances. When things get tough, don't wait to be rescued. Rescue yourself.

If You're Not Dead, It Can't Be That Bad

It's all about keeping things in perspective. People get too worked up about things that really don't matter that much. If the situation isn't going to kill you, maybe you are overreacting and wasting your energy.

It's a Skill That Takes Practice

Being good at not burning out is a skill more than a genetic personality trait. Just like any skill, you have to work at it. You can learn to manage your behavior and your thinking, but it takes discipline and practice to do it.

Nobody's Perfect

You can't get it right all the time. But when it all gets to you and you lose it, just get a grip on yourself again as fast as you can and keep going. There is no perfect score on this one. Just keep bouncing back.

Don't Look Back

Don't keep looking back over your shoulder at past mistakes or rough times. Learn everything you can from the experiences, and then let it go and move on. Don't waste your energy on the past.