

Robinsons on Parallel Burnout in the Workplace

Stress and burnout are common challenges to folks in the workplace and elsewhere. Burnout is estimated to affect over 25% of the working population in a number of countries. Circumstances, beliefs, attitudes of the individual worker often increase feelings of stress and raise the risk of burnout. The ways we think about work related problems is the bottom line of where stress and burnout begin.

Even those who really enjoy working and love their jobs find that there is a pressure that they often put on themselves to perform perfectly. Learning to live with stress and actually embracing the positive aspects of it is a tremendous skill. The questions raised at ICASSI (the International Institute for Adlerian Psychology) by Karen John, Ph. D., psychologist and Adlerian Psychotherapist included:

- How can you find the rhythm in life----time together; time alone?
- When does burnout become Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in which folks literally wear themselves out?
- When does one lose a sense of self?
- What do we do with what we've got?
- Why is it that we feel like "there's always one more thing " we "must" do?
- Do we always have to get it better? Get it right?
- Why is it that what makes us good also makes us vulnerable?
- What is perfect? What is the worst? What is good enough?

Some of us drive ourselves; some of us are driven by others. It is not clear which of the drivers raises stress and burnout higher, but it is clear that both do. When we are getting really stressed, we go faster and harder, and we use our strengths to the max, and we are on our way to burnout! We realize that increasing our own and other's professional boundaries is one valuable approach to emotional well-being at work.

Adlerians talk about social interest, being a part of a group, a community. Dr. John reminded us that we, ourselves are part of the social group, and thus we need to take care of ourselves. Consequently, our class contracted together to LAUGH and maintain confidentiality. Laughter is the great leveler and relaxer. Even a smile on a face is a lift in today's world.

In the vein of laughter, Karen shared the following: **Working here is like being a mushroom—they keep us in the dark and throw a pile of S___ (stuff) on us.** You know she got a laugh out of that one. The group also contracted to be on time, share the time, listen, and ENCOURAGE each other. You can easily see that our group was set up to reduce stress in itself. Interestingly enough, this contract also works in a family or in the workplace.

When we come into this world, we are small and helpless. We see bigger, more powerful people. We start out looking up. As we grow and mature we begin to look out. If we are lucky, we learn to be a self-directed person who COUNTS. We learn we are CAPABLE and can handle what comes. We have COURAGE and have what it takes to face the challenges of life. We look for ways to CONTRIBUTE. We look out on others as equals who deserve dignity and respect, just as we do. If we don't learn the FOUR C'S (Count, Capable, Courage, and Contribute), we look down in our maturity from a superior position in our minds, and the stress increases. Looking out in social equality, being community minded is a much healthier, more cooperative approach to life.

We explored self care, care for the caregiver, good communication, relaxation, energizers/nutrients, drainers/toxins, sources of stress, expectations, assertiveness. Wow! What a class!

Notes:

1. The Four C's are attributed to Betty Lou Bettner, Ph. D., Adjunct Professor at Holy Family University Graduate School in Newtown, PA.
2. Karen John, Ph.D., Supervisor/Mentor of leaders of educational, social care and health services, Pen Green Research & University of Leicester, United Kingdom, MA and PhD students.