

## CEP Magazine – August 2023



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### Navigating employee burnout in a new normal: The role of ethics and compliance

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By Dr. Camille Howard, CCEP, CCEP-I

Whether or not you believe the COVID-19 pandemic is over, it is essential for employers to realize we are in a new normal that has created change in the workplace and a surge in employee burnout. The American Psychological Association's 2021 "Stress in America" survey found that 61% of adults experienced undesired weight changes during the pandemic due to stress and burnout.<sup>[1]</sup> With remote work, increased workloads, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life still at an all-time high, it is no wonder employees are feeling exhausted and overwhelmed now that most organizations have returned to "normal" operations. Ethics and compliance professionals are crucial in mitigating the impact of pandemic-related burnout on organizational culture.

Employee burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 41% of employees reported feeling burned out at work, and 48% reported feeling mentally and physically exhausted.<sup>[2]</sup> Burnout can also erode trust in leaders and negatively affect the organization's overall morale. Ethics and compliance professionals can help address this issue by promoting work-life balance and mental health support. One way to promote work-life balance is by offering flexible schedules, allowing for time off, and promoting self-care. Employers should also train managers and supervisors to recognize signs of burnout and support employees. One best practice for organizations is to promote "mental health days," where employees are encouraged to take off at least once a quarter to decompress and reset as a part of their paid time-off benefits.

Despite the proven benefits of promoting work-life balance and mental health support, many employers remain resistant to implementing such policies—particularly as the pandemic subsides and businesses are focused on reengaging customers. Instead, some employers are pushing for employees to return to work, which can exacerbate feelings of burnout and contribute to a toxic work culture. This can be further aggravated by the fact that many employees significantly changed their lives since the pandemic. Whether it is a commitment to spending more time with family or pursuing personal passions, many employees are looking for ways not to be defined by work but by who they are outside of work.

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