

How Burnt Out Are You Really?

Are you just having a bad day, or is it time to quit your job? Or are you in serious need of some R&R (if only you could find the time)? Answering these ten questions should point you in the right direction... or confirm what you already suspect.

This isn't really about getting a particular score but about noticing the pattern of your answers. If you can't choose between two answers, pick both. If you can't relate to a certain question, skip it.

Some of these questions are specifically for teachers, but you can easily adapt them to suit your own situation: for example, instead of "your students" you can think about your clients, patients, customers or parishioners.

1. Complete this sentence: In my free time...
 - a) I relax and enjoy myself.
 - b) What's "free time"?
 - c) I do things that mean more to me than my job.
 - d) I complain about work.

2. How do you feel after a really tough day?
 - a) "I'm glad that's over."
 - b) "I wish I didn't have so much work to do tonight."
 - c) "I wonder if this job is worth all the hassle."
 - d) "I can't take many more days like this."

3. How do you feel about your students (or the group you serve)?
 - a) I get as much from them as they get from me.
 - b) There aren't enough hours in the day to meet all their needs.
 - c) I have trouble relating to them sometimes.
 - d) Honestly? I don't really like them.

4. What kind of relationship do you have with your colleagues?
 - a) We get along really well.
 - b) I wish we had more time to chat and share ideas.
 - c) I feel like we're working at cross-purposes sometimes.
 - d) Why would I want any kind of relationship with those people?

5. Do you feel like your work has a positive impact?
- a) Absolutely!
 - b) Yes, and I'm always looking for ways to make an even bigger impact.
 - c) I used to think it did, but I'm not sure anymore.
 - d) Nope.
6. How do you feel about the subject you teach (or the main focus of your job)?
- a) I love it!
 - b) I wish I had more time to focus on it, instead of all the meetings and paperwork.
 - c) It's OK, I guess.
 - d) I've lost whatever interest I once had.
7. How did you feel when you accepted your current job?
- a) Elated.
 - b) Challenged.
 - c) I can't remember.
 - d) Despairing.
8. How did you feel after work last Friday?
- a) "What a great week!"
 - b) "Two more work days 'til Monday..."
 - c) "I hope next week will be better."
 - d) I couldn't stop crying.
9. You get into an argument with one of your students (or clients): What's your reaction?
- a) "I'm hurt. I thought all my students loved me."
 - b) "That wouldn't have happened if I weren't so frazzled."
 - c) "That wouldn't have happened if I didn't have to enforce rules I don't even agree with."
 - d) "Not again."

10. Overall, which word best describes your current job?

- a) Great!
- b) Exhausting.
- c) Frustrating.
- d) Pointless.

If your answers are...

Mostly A's: You have the occasional bad day like anyone, but basically you're in a job that really suits you, and you seem to have a lot of positive energy.

Mostly B's: You're committed to your work, but it's taking a lot out of you. Even if it feels like you have no time for yourself, you need to figure out some ways to recharge.

Mostly C's: You've got a lot to offer, but you don't seem to be in the right niche. Could you apply to a different school? Change the level or subject you teach? Go into (or get out of) administration? Change careers completely?

Mostly D's: You should seriously consider quitting, retiring, or taking a leave of absence. This doesn't make you a bad person, or even necessarily a bad teacher. It's just time to move on, as soon as you can responsibly do so: Make sure you can pay for basic expenses, and try not to leave anyone in the lurch. Hang in there!

Mindfulness and Self-Care for Teachers

The Courage to Teach by Parker J. Palmer

"This book is for teachers who have good days and bad, and whose bad days bring the suffering that comes only from something one loves."

Everybody Present: Mindfulness in Education by Nikolaj and Didde Flor Rotne

Instructions for beginning a personal mindfulness practice and then introducing mindfulness to students.

Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness by Deborah Schoeberlein

A solid introduction to mindfulness practice, designed for teachers to use ourselves and/or with our students.

Never Work Harder Than Your Students by Robyn Jackson

"Give the right work to the students. It's about getting clarity on what is your work and what is their work, and making sure that you do your work and they do theirs."

A Path with Heart: The Inner Journey to Teaching Mastery by Pete Reilly

"Teaching with heart doesn't mean... that academic performance is overlooked or that we allow ourselves to be manipulated or pushed around. Instead, we're teachers made up of strong hearts, heroic hearts, hearts that persevere. We let nothing get in the way of what's best for our students."

Teaching: The Sacred Art by Jane Vennard

"When we gently review a day, a week, or a semester of our teaching with compassion and kindness toward ourselves, we are able to see what we might do differently another time and affirm that we did the best we could, given the situation."

Awaken Your Senses by Brent Bill and Beth Booram

By engaging our senses, we'll be more physically present and feel closer to God as we become "alive to the beauty and suffering in life, to all its possibilities and cries for healing."

Buddha Standard Time by Surya Das

“It’s not time that we lack in our rushed lives, but focus.” Traditional Buddhist teachings can help us face the challenge of remaining present and focused in our increasingly fast-paced, frenzily-scheduled world.

Good Citizens by Thich Nhat Hanh

A mindfulness practice can help us to stay grounded rather than ground down, fired up rather than burnt out, “strong enough to handle the deep pain within ourselves and the world.”

How to Train a Wild Elephant by Jan Chozen Bays

Fifty-three short chapters giving a specific focus for the coming week, such as “a media fast,” “mindful driving,” or “leave things better than you found them.”

In This Moment by Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson

Recent research about the neuroplasticity of the brain; “brain training” exercises to increase our skillfulness in the five facets of mindfulness.

Mindful Compassion by Paul Gilbert and Choden

“Mindful compassion... is about seeking the truth of how we create suffering within our own minds and how we can create suffering in the social systems we are part of. With this wisdom about suffering we can set out to alleviate and prevent it.”

The Practicing Happiness Workbook by Ruth Baer

A series of mindfulness skills we can practice in order to give greater meaning and purpose to our lives, enjoy positive situations more fully, and effectively cope with unpleasant situations.

Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff

Techniques for being gentler with ourselves and for correcting behavior without shaming.

Yoga Sparks by Carol Krucoff

108 “micropractices” that focus on the four main aspects of yoga: posture, breathing, meditation, and ethical behavior.