



Frank Carter, Ph.D.

400 Prospect Street, Suite 1A

La Jolla, CA 92037

858-454-2828

peaks@roadrunner.com

Website: peaks-coaching.com

“Is it burnout?; Probably not!”

by Frank Carter, PhD

The reason why pop psychology is pop is because it makes us feel better. But feeling better is not necessarily feeling emotionally healthy. Unfortunately, denying the truth or running away from the past simply relieves the tension that we feel, but it doesn't change anything. Men and women in business experience a lot of pressure in the modern world. Whether supervised or in a management position, the drive to relieve the tension is unmistakably ubiquitous, while resulting in a wide assortment of compromised forms of relief.

Even under the best of circumstances, the most experienced and prepared individual can sometimes be faced with a problem or challenge that seriously calls into question their ability to resolve the issue and succeed. Imagine being the president of the United States and trying to make decisions that balance all the diplomatic interests at one time. Clearly, the need to establish priorities and accepting the reality, which is that you cannot please everyone all of the time, needs to be part of your decision model. It's easy to see how a president without an ability to establish priorities can easily become overwhelmed. I think the same can be said for any entrepreneurial professional.

Men and women who work really hard do so with the belief that there is a positive outcome in mind. As destructive as excessive overworking can be, there is a positive outcome held in mind that is fantasized. That fantasized positive outcome is that others will appreciate us for how hard we work for them. Sometimes it works to cover-up the deeper pain for a long time, and sometimes it doesn't. Why? Because there is more going on. When we have to fantasize that other people will appreciate how hard we work for them, the mere act of fantasizing this anticipation of approval reflects a deeper belief that their approval may not be forthcoming. The need to fantasize that it will be forthcoming is the way we cover-up the fact that it may not be forthcoming, especially when we needed it.

Attempting to deny the truth, we can work really hard, I mean really really hard, for days on end, weeks and months and then, exhausted and unmotivated, someone tells us we are probably burned out. It's important to recognize that it's not like you didn't do it to yourself. You did it to yourself, but the better question is why? Why did you drive yourself into the ground? On the surface, you will say that you were doing it for your family. To yourself, you will daydream that someone will appreciate you, if you sacrifice yourself for them. But in reality, in the emotional reality of human behavior, there is another explanation.

Pop psychology calls it burnout and it's easy to accept such a diagnosis with a certain degree of pride that you work yourself to the point of exhaustion. This heroism deserves to be recognized, appreciated and rewarded, but it never is. The reason why burnout is never rewarded is because you created this opportunity to work yourself into exhaustion in order to cover-up some deeper feelings. The brain of other people knows this and is not impressed.

The capacity for the human brain to protect itself by engaging in feelings that distract it from the true feelings, and behaviors that distract it from the true nature of its being, is simply a survival strategy designed to keep it working, to keep it productive, to ensure its survival. Continuing to believe that one must survive is not a choice, but how one chooses to survive is sometimes a choice.

I say that it is sometimes a choice because sometimes we grow up in families that teach us how to feel good about ourselves and how to feel good about others. Sometimes we grow up in families that teach us how to feel bad about ourselves, and how to feel bad about others. Beyond the experience of family which is not a choice, there is the capacity for self reflection which allows a balancing of our self-interest with the interest of others. This self reflection involves a comprehension of the social forces at work. Such comprehension allows us to perpetuate a sense of balance, as well as a sense of control that allows us to feel secure.

Men and women who burnout by working themselves to exhaustion are simply perpetuating the fantasy that they can cover up their deeper needs for security. While they may be able to cover it up their deeper needs for security from others for a while (5-15 years), they can't do it indefinitely. And in the mean time, they are walking around with the truth under their breath that they remain constantly vulnerable in the world.

Yes, you can physically burn yourself out. This is a physical exhaustion. Then there is the emotional exhaustion that comes from denying the truth about how safe you feel. Take the time to tell the truth. The brain knows the truth, even if you don't, and that's the funny part about doing coaching. The typical coaching client only knows what they feel, but they don't know why. They only know that something tells them that something isn't right. This voice is the truth of universal consciousness acting to protect the psyche. To ignore this voice is to live in peril. In other words, self-denial is a survival strategy, but taken to the extreme, when self-denial becomes chronic, the price that is paid cannot be justified, and the inability to recover to your previous glory is eliminated.

Is it really burnout? Are you really physically exhausted from overworking? Or are you becoming emotionally overwhelmed with the fact that you can't cover-up the truth any longer? The brain will insist on relief, because the brain knows the truth, even if you don't.