How to Avoid Burnout?

Steps for avoiding burnout maybe simple and easy; others may be more drastic. So, where do you start? The solutions that are usually put forward are “effective stress management” or short-term practices.

Here are some ideas for avoiding burnout and Inner Kill, whether you’re thinking about 60 minutes or 60 years. This is no manifesto for inaction. The alternative is to pursue depth of experience.
One Hour.

“Push the pause button” twice an hour. Those pause moments are crucial for making sense of the world. Take “three deep breaths” to focus on the now. This simple technique can help stop your mind from highjacking your attention and sending you off into the past or future. Go to www.donothingfor2minutes.com. You’ll find a sun setting over the sea, the gentle lull of waves and a timer, which counts down from two minutes while you do nothing. If you touch the keyboard, it resets the clock. The author Umberto Eco does everything at double pace with the hope that he can live twice as much as the rest of us. The danger is that we become human “doings” rather than human “beings,” constantly trying to get things done.

One Day.

Be curious. Routine is useful. But, it also distracts us from fully experiencing the world. Take a new route, meet someone new, open a new door, read a new magazine. All sorts of unknown things may come of it. Step outside of time. In his book, Flow, the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, describes the state of being so fully absorbed in an activity that time seems to disappear. One way to create such experiences is to commit one day to doing something just for curiosities sake.

One Week.

Every day, listen closely to another person. Give someone something you haven’t given them for ages – your undivided attention for 15 minutes. Without interrupting or contradicting them, let them tell you what they hope for, are afraid of, and annoyed about. Listen deeply. Stop imagining you know them already. It may be the greatest present you could give them. Author Gustave Flaubert said, “Anything becomes interesting if you look at it long enough.”

One Year.

Analyze your life work. We spend so much time working, but so little time reflecting on whether what we’re doing truly suits us. What other neglected “gifts”
may be sleeping deep within you? Imagine what you would like said about your
“life’s work” at your funeral. Write down your “calling” – what keeps calling you
– and take it seriously. Imagine how you would like your life to be without any
material or financial constraints. Then take one small step to start exploring your
vision. The only way to start is to start.

One Lifetime.

Rethink how you measure success. Often we limit our notions of success to those
we inherit from our families or culture. Reimagining what success really means
to us, and including the things that make us feel most alive, allows us greater
freedom in how we live our lives.

The ultimate solution to avoiding burnout is to “unlock the power of purpose.”
Look at the deeper impact of what you do every day. How does your work make
life better for other people? How could you “give” to others? What might you
achieve if you decided to dedicate years, rather than months, to something? What
project can you start that might sustain your passion for a lifetime?

One way to add meaning to your life (or work) is to give to others or to help them
in small ways. When you do this, it gives you “helpers high” – it re-energizes you
and helps you avoid burnout. •