

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Survival Tactics

(HOW TO SPARK WITHOUT INCINERATION)

Twice in my life I have experienced periods of mounting urgency and obsession with social action projects. This was coupled with a profound lethargy and deep exhaustion that a few days off did not relieve. I was not able to keep much perspective on my life. I did know, however, it was getting out of balance. Work took up nearly all of my time, one way or another. I kept saying "I can't stop now 'cos I gotta..."

I was getting sick more often and feeling more resentful particularly towards anybody who wanted something from me. Generally the feeling was of being shrivelled up inside, but pushing on regardless.

I did not realize then that I was suffering from burnout, a prolonged stress reaction. It probably would have helped had I realized that these types of symptoms are common among those who work in human services, such as health and welfare workers, police, teachers, ministry and people active in other forms of social change movements, but it can occur in any activity.

This section will focus on the conditions and dynamics that affect people active in social change movements, such as peace workers, environmentalists, social justice and community development workers. These pressures are common whether the activists are voluntary, semi-voluntary or employed by a community based group.

Sometimes the expression "burnout" is used quite superficially. For example it can be used to mean "I'm tired", as in "I'm feeling a bit burnt-out today". Sometimes cures are suggested glibly, as if it were just a simple and obvious matter. This usage of the expression "burnout" denies the depth of the anguish — the emotional and physical toll on the person experiencing full blown burnout.

Some people may experience burnout as a temporary malaise, make appropriate adjustments and continue on. For others burning-out means a stress related disease producing a major life crisis from which they may never fully recover. If the issues remain unresolved, the stressed person

"Burnout is a psychological metaphor — what has been damaged in the flames is the soul. Our souls and our bodies interact so closely that when one is damaged the other is usually in trouble too." — Patricia Vigderman.

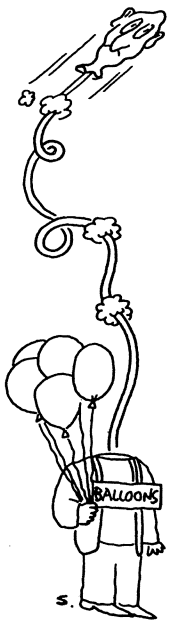


may avoid the field of social action altogether, retreating into intractable cynicism; alternatively, she or he may struggle on, being ineffectual or even obstructing others in achieving joint goals. This is a great tragedy. For this reason, burnout — its recognition, causes, prevention and cures — needs to be taken seriously.

SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

Burning-out is a downward spiral. When we cut ourselves off from sources of nourishment, be they the natural environment, loved ones, or from inner spiritual sources of renewal and inspiration, the problems compound. We get more and more caught up in the delusion of separateness. Like a ring-barked tree, we are surrounded by nourishment but unable to let it in. We can lose the sense of wonder at what is still unspoiled in this world and the daily miracles before our eyes. In our quest for a better world, we may be failing to take action on the one thing we can really do something about — our own lives.

"I just felt like I was trying to run on 'Empty'."



One of the many physical signs of burnout is chronic fatigue: bone weariness that sleep does not dispel. People become vulnerable to diseases or find they cannot throw off minor illnesses such as colds. Other symptoms are frequent headaches, stomach pains and backache. Sleep patterns are often affected: some people have trouble getting to sleep, others wake in the early hours with their thoughts racing. High stress levels may lead to weight loss, or conversely to gain from overeating. Sex may seem like too much trouble. Some people increase their use of tobacco, marijuana, alcohol or tranquilizers as an escape. As one sufferer put it, "I just felt like I was trying to run on 'Empty'."

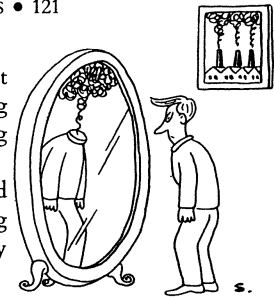
The emotional and mental effects can be even more distressing — for some it amounts to a personality change. Common feelings are depression, chronic anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed or besieged by demands. Ideas of entrapment are frequent, compounded by an inability to perceive other options. Hair-trigger emotions can quickly produce tears or flare-ups.

Colleagues may notice withdrawal into isolation, rigid thinking, cynicism and negativity in someone who had formerly been quite positive. Previously well balanced people may evidence distorted perceptions of reality, such as paranoia — thinking that others are against them. These sorts of reactions inevitably lead to relationship and family problems, all of which add to the overall stress.

Burnout is qualitatively different from an acute stress reaction caused by a sudden crisis or a short burst of overwork. The effects are usually deeper. It is also a spiritual crisis. Bewildered sufferers may find themselves beset by a sense of futility; their life may be devoid of joy, they may

resent others and crave isolation from something that once seemed important and attractive. They are likely to be ambivalent, caught between wanting to escape from the situation on one hand, and obsession with keeping on going, on the other.

A client described to me: "I felt pretty guilty, and even embarrassed for going on like this but I just couldn't scrape up the energy to do something about it. I didn't want to admit it had become that bad — I'm usually so nice. It wasn't till I hit the bottom that I really got the message."



Burnout is kindled by taking on too much, too intensely, for too long. But it is not that simple. There is usually a complex web of causes that includes personal or internal factors, structural or organizational factors and societal factors such as social injustice. Ultimately, however, it is the way in which an individual interprets or reacts to these factors which makes the difference.

Humans are capable of sustained hard work under very difficult conditions without showing signs of burnout. This is demonstrated by third world peasants who often toil from dawn to dusk under impossible conditions; or people who put in superhuman efforts during wartime or emergencies. They may suffer exhaustion, but not necessarily burnout. So what sorts of things make that difference?

MOTIVES AND SENSE OF IDENTITY

Ram Dass and Paul Gorman wrote in *How Can I Help?*

"It is not always our efforts that burn us out, it is where the mind is standing in relation to them." We may observe that the seeds of burnout are sown in how we enter into the helping act and in what we bring with us — particularly the models we have of ourselves. "Along with our clean shirt, good intentions and eagerness to serve, we've carried to work a number of needs and expectations. Sometimes burnout is simply our motives coming home to roost."

Social action is primarily motivated by idealistic values which can be very challenging to maintain in the face of a blatantly less-than-ideal world.

"The hotter the fire the better it burns; the more fiery the ambition, however, the greater the danger that the worker may burn out. Burnout is an occupational hazard for high achievers with high ideals."²

Our sense of identity or basic "OKness" can get excessively bound up in our work. Who we are can become equated with what we get done: "I can't be all bad if I do some good." When the problems we are tackling seem insurmountable and therefore don't get resolved quickly, self esteem can be badly eroded; or, driven by insecurity, we may set

CAUSES OF BURNOUT

PERSONAL FACTORS AS CAUSES OF BURNOUT

"Burnout is an occupational hazard for high achievers with high ideals." — Patricia Vizderman

up a situation to "prove" we are the only ones who can do the job properly. This excessive control may lead to a refusal to delegate or to an insistence on involvement in each stage of a project — with inevitable overload.

As we discussed in Chapter 4, "Insight as a Resource", our drive to change the "outer world" can be a reflection of an inner unresolved issue in our own life. I am not implying that we need to resolve the personal dimension to be authentically concerned for the world. However, awareness of these links will lessen potential distortions or the tendency to get obsessed. The fact that we realize an issue does have a personal dimension can be used to enrich our work.

OVEREXPOSURE AND OBSESSION

- "Classical environmentalism has bred a peculiar negative political malaise among its adherents. Alerted to fresh horrors almost daily, they research the extent of the new life threatening situation, rush to protest it, and campaign exhaustively to prevent a future occurrence. It's a valuable service of course, but imagine a hospital that consists of only an emergency room. No maternity care, no pediatric clinic, no promising therapy; just mangled trauma cases. Many of them are lost or drag on in wilting protraction, and if a few are saved, there are always more than can be handled jamming through the door. Rescuing the environment has become like running a battlefield aid station against the killing machine that operates just beyond reach and shifts its ground after each seeming defeat."³

Do you believe that if you just work a little harder it will stem the flood of demands? Do you put life on hold until everything is cleared up? Unfortunately in most cases the demands are endless. Even more effort at trying harder will never be enough.

The first stage in a stress reaction is the release of adrenalin, which gives temporary bursts of energy and even induces euphoria. It is possible to become addicted to this. By continually pushing themselves harder the adrenalin addict can stay stimulated, firing on all cylinders much of the time. Unfortunately this cannot last indefinitely. The next stage is running out of fuel. Depression, lethargy and lack of direction is the end result.

Similarly we can become hooked on bad news. Do you hunt out new information to keep you and those around you in a panic, or in a constant state of negativity? Our negative slant may result in bulletins that say "Here is another bit of bad news — you should be really outraged about this!" Or it can flourish in endless "ain't it awful" sessions.

EMOTIONAL ACCUMULATION

Even if we are not obsessively seeking out bad news, as people concerned about social issues we are more exposed to distressing realities. This

Do you put life on hold until everything is cleaned up?

awareness can be profoundly disturbing to a positive outlook on life and positive visions for the future. Feelings of grief, hopelessness, or despair may alternate with anger or even numbness and disbelief.

From time to time acknowledging the painful feelings and releasing them with support from others, often renews hope and energy. Finding out that others also care, brings us back to a simple vulnerability of being alive together in these daunting times. This process affirms the basic truth of our interconnectedness. Solutions will be woven out of our strength together rather than as separate, closed individuals. It is not merely a process of cathartic release. The issues still remain. But to share, validate and realize the power of our interconnectedness, while daring to speak our hopes and visions, keeps us from sinking into cynicism.

DENIAL OF PERSONAL NEEDS

As William Bryan, Director of the Northern Rockies Action Group, puts it:

"We just assume that the mission is more important than our personal needs. This is where a fundamental contradiction sets in. Those of us who are burnout-prone are also sensitive people who have feelings, want to be liked and recognized, and wish to do worthwhile things for other people. We want to do well and look good in the eyes of our peers, but unfortunately our peers are usually in the same dilemma. They also play down personal needs. Consequently, we fall into playing their game which is ours as well. This usually means that competition thrives between us... Who worked more hours last week? Who originated the better idea?... Purity tests abound as to who is the better environmentalist, feminist, civil rights advocate or socialist."⁴

Continuously pushing along and being strictly focussed on the task at hand is often a denial of our physical body and its basic needs. Missing exercise is a common habit, but this is just what's needed to cope with the stress. Aerobic exercise such as running, swimming or even brisk walking burns up the toxins produced by stress and contributes to relaxation. But there never seems to be enough time for that...

We may go further by ignoring messages from our bodies that we are tired and need a break (even to go to the toilet). How often do the cigarettes, sugar and coffee come out to override these messages to keep us going! If this becomes habitual our body has to resort to something more dramatic or painful to gain our attention.

Meals eaten tensely, on the run, are not digested properly. Takeaway foods are often not nutritious. Getting your nourishment this way eventually leads to health problems.

Evonne Rand is hard hitting:



Include yourself as a valid environmental concern!

"I am struck repeatedly by the degree to which people who are committed to 'good work' to making this world better to live in, do not include themselves as valid environmental concerns — not only at the level of potential burnout but also at the level of credibility. If you are saving the world and killing yourself (even passively by self-neglect) you will not be effective in your work. The people who you are trying to convince will not believe you. You can't abuse yourself and advocate that society not abuse the environment. It's a fundamental contradiction in terms — a good case of the old 'do as I say not as I do'.⁵

SELF NURTURING

Nurturing means, in the most simple sense, to attend to basic requirements: nourishing food, quality sleep, pleasant exercise and fresh air. However, taking care of ourselves extends well beyond this. Dealing with projects, people, and challenges on a daily basis (especially if it is done under pressure, with uncertainty and few external rewards) slowly drains our inner reserves. One way to "top up" again is to nurture ourselves, perhaps by little treats and pleasures, deep relaxation exercises, or meditation. Whatever renews and sustains one person may not do so for another. For some, renewal comes from a trip to the beach, a good novel, a sauna, or just wasting time on the veranda! As they say — whatever turns you on. Take the time to identify what the most valuable things are for you. (See *What revives me* p 130.)

When we are caught up in "Important Work" often self nurturing comes to be perceived as selfish or trivial; but it is these little treats and believing we are deserving of them, which can go a long way towards keeping on keeping on.

SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Support can come in many forms: from a luncheon meeting or a phone call to a more structured situation such as a formal support group. (See Chapter 10, "Support and Accountability Groups" and Chapter 8, "Working Together".) What is the quality of your conversations with people regarding your work? Is the nature of all interactions superficial and "doing" oriented?

Having the opportunity to reflect on your work with quality attention will aid in keeping things in balance. Take the time to review personal objectives, to realize what is working, celebrate what is going well, acknowledge difficulties and look for solutions. It is good to pay attention to the *how* rather than just the *what*. This sort of support is qualitatively different from informal discussions with co-workers which often lead to even more projects, requiring more effort...

Many activists can end up leading very unbalanced lives and may not notice until it is too late. One of the dilemmas of being committed to basic social change is that it touches all levels of our being. Involvement is not something that one can neatly close the door on at 5 pm. In fact for a lot of activists it might be a case of literally opening the door to the home-cum-office-cum- action headquarters: papers on the bed, meetings round the kitchen table... Operating in this way means there's no getting away from it!

Though all this activity has the potential to enrich our lives, it is this feature of unceasing demands which creates much fuel for burnout. It also leads to deterioration of relationships. After-hours phone calls, night organizing of meetings, weekend activities and work-related visitors infringe on the time with children or partners. Parties become just another venue to talk shop ("networking").

Do you, for instance, use your holidays as an opportunity for catching up on your workload or reading? Often families of activists are expected not only to make considerable financial sacrifices but also to forgo quality contact with each other because the immediate needs of "the cause" are more pressing.

There are many useful tools to keep control of workloads. Techniques such as timelines make it clear when things need to start and the critical points which need to be reached in order to finish on time. Time can be parcelled so it reflects priorities. Using such methods it is easier, for instance, to avoid things such as spending days organizing a demo (if it is not likely to get much attention) while direct personal lobbying of the power brokers is neglected. A simple guide for over expansion is to "Do less and do it better". A support group can help to organize these simple time management structures.

Use the organization's operating plan as a guide to priority areas and personal planning will flow on accordingly. Remember to integrate important events, holidays, opportunities for learning, and formulate a clear idea of what your limits are. (See weekly organizer sheet, p 136.)

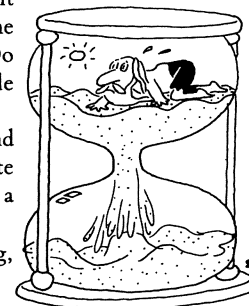
If you find you are perpetually too busy to do this level of planning, you must ask yourself who is actually in control of your life?

It is important to develop some objectivity about your work style, so you can remove counter-productive patterns — such as needing an imminent deadline to start producing. Explore ways to optimize your potential.

For Peter, the mornings are when inspiration flows, for me the late

INFRINGEMENT INTO PERSONAL LIFE

PERSONAL PLANNING AND TIME MANAGEMENT



WORK STYLE

night hours are the best. I need a long warm-up to a task with uninterrupted periods. Pat needs a lot of variety and people contact. Communicate these sorts of preferences to others, so there is less likelihood of misunderstanding. Do you do your best work doing when handling several things at once or when you can focus on one thing at a time?

- **TIME OUT** A basic anti-burnout strategy is to be able to take time off (as opposed to pseudo time off when you catch up on your work!). Take time off at the end of each day, each week, or take short breaks after intense bursts; and have a genuine annual holiday. That might require making agreements not to talk shop with colleagues, and having time when you're not "on call". Remember, the telephone does not always have to be answered. The concept of taking "sabbaticals" provides an opportunity for having some extended time away to rethink, renew and rest, without having to resign or burn out to do it.

The transition between being "on" and "off" may be important. Christina Maslach in her book *Burnout, the High Cost of Caring*⁶ uses the useful analogy of "decompression" time between working and nonworking times, that allows you to unwind and leave the job behind. For many it is an activity which is in sharp contrast to their typical work routine. Perhaps you want solitude, or to be very physical or to engage in something totally "unmeaningful".

Research into "peak performers" (people who excel in their chosen field) by Charles Garfield showed that nearly all of them were quite devoted to hobbies unrelated to their main area.

Time off is important for nurturing or initiating primary relationships. Also, building friendship and community networks are as important in creating a better world as the more overtly political work that we may engage in.

- **CRITICISM** Another source of stress may be the fear of reprisal or criticism. It is often a reality for people engaged in controversial issues. There may be fear of physical harm — for one's self or family, social ostracism, or criticism for not meeting society's or your family's particular expectations.

Expectations such as pursuing recognized careers, earning better money, or generally being more "normal" exert pressure on us. Bob described it: "Somehow I'd managed to ignore all the little jabs I'd been getting from the family and neighbors. But when I started to get exhausted and it just wasn't so clear cut any more, they got through my skin. I started to doubt everything." This is where a support group or community can



be extremely valuable: to provide some perspective, affirm the courage of your stand, or even arrange some protection.

However, for many of us the main source of corrosive criticism is internalized. In our continuous inner dialogue, there is a "voice" that gives us a hard time. It is a judgmental or parental part of our psyche. This part can be pretty difficult to please. Bringing this "self talk" into conscious awareness, and examining the rationality of its contents, will free us up to act in more life enhancing ways. (See the critic shrinking exercise, p 19.)

Such techniques as Voice Dialogue, Transactional Analysis, Gestalt, and Psychodrama, indepth journal writing or meditation, will develop insight into these personal dynamics. (Most bookshops have a personal growth section with self help books on these topics or look at noticeboards for practitioners or groups who provide these types of opportunities.) While we may not entirely silence the inner dialogue, we can "reprogram" it to be more affirming and accepting. If we see clearly the roots of the endless striving, and the constant battle to maintain our self esteem, burnout will be minimized.

One of the problems of trying to feel "good enough" is that sometimes the role models for effective activists are based on standards set by fanatical workaholics, or at least by people who have exceptional abilities to withstand stress. William Bryan describes this as the "Ralph Nader Syndrome", named after the legendary crusader for consumer rights in the late sixties who led a monastic lifestyle and worked phenomenal hours. Bryan claims few people are actually capable of keeping up this kind of pace, although we often judge ourselves and each other by these standards and thus set ourselves up for a sense of failure.

We need to check whether these seemingly admirable people do have a healthy work style. Perhaps they are one of the relatively rare racehorses who have exceptional ability to withstand stress. Or perhaps we don't see the whole story — the effects on their personal life or their health. Perhaps they are unwittingly on the road to burnout. We should look instead for role models of people who are effective but who also joyfully sustain themselves. (See exercise on Identifying role models, p 131.) Ask yourself whether you are aiming to be extraordinary in your work or are prepared to be more ordinary and relatively happy and healthy.

If you are feeling so insecure that you need to do more and more for longer and longer, you may be only making the assumption that you are

ROLE MODELS

Feeling insecure can lead to "doing more and more for longer and longer".

FEEDBACK

not meeting others' expectations — whether it is the committee, co-workers, funding bodies, or parents. The most direct way to work out the reality is by asking for feedback.

Some years ago I was working as a coordinator of the local Neighborhood Center. I took on more and more community development projects — just about anything that anybody suggested, plus any I could think of. We expanded the staff and extended the building rapidly and went through quite a bit of upheaval in the process. I was plagued by feelings of inadequacy, of not making a big enough difference. Inevitably I became overwhelmed, exhausted, and then I quit.

I failed to directly ask the staff or the management committee for feedback on my work, or for their actual expectations, nor was this feedback offered. From my contact with them later on, I gleaned they would have preferred me to slow down, stop generating “so damn many projects” — even if they were good ideas — and be more available for informal contact. It was a lesson.

One structure for getting feedback in a positive and constructive way is using the “clearness process”.⁷ (See Consultancy or Clearness Meetings, p 113.)

**WHEN ALL
ELSE FAILS
WE CAN
ALWAYS
LAUGH**

Let's challenge joylessness! Create opportunities to play at work and at home, in an innocent, spontaneous way. Doing this will recontact the inner child. This natural child part has enormous reserves of energy, joy and a great ability to bounce back. How often in the seriousness of saving the world does this aspect of ourselves get neglected! You may retort “How can I laugh when the issues I am facing are definitely not funny?”. However, Ram Dass and Paul Gorman⁸ point out that when facing apparently hopeless situations, we are living in the land of Catch 22:

“The challenge is to turn it into M*A*S*H*. Here we are in the service, with a crazy war going on all around, no idea when it will end, stuck every day with the same fellow idiots. Still we have to find some way to stay conscious. We'd better. Wounded people are coming in from out of the sky and they're screaming. . . . when we're hard on the job it's the one-pointed concentration of the surgeon . . . and the rest of the time we throw a party. We take in every absurd, contradictory, counterproductive aspect of the war zone and transform it into grist for irony, humor, irreverence and creative mischief. That's how we stay nimble inside.”

Although we need to know that what we pour our hearts and minds into is effective, at some point letting go of the results is also called for to enable us to continue sanely. “We do what we can. Yet we cannot presume to know the final meaning of our actions. We cannot help but see them against a larger backdrop in which the ultimate significance of a single life may not be clear. We often cannot be in a position to perceive the cumulative effect of individual actions.”⁹

In this line of work there is no place for excessive attachment to results. Fran Peavey taught us to chant with great vigor and clenched-fist salutes “The people united sometimes win and sometimes lose!”

EXERCISES

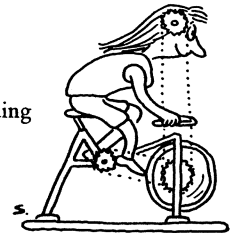
Burnout Rating Scale

Think over the past 3 months and answer the following questions according to how often you have experienced these symptoms.

- | |
|-----------------|
| 0 = Never |
| 1 = Very rarely |
| 2 = Rarely |
| 3 = Sometimes |
| 4 = Often |
| 5 = Very often |

Adding up your total score will give you some indication whether you are likely to burn out or not.

1. Do you feel fatigued in a way that rest or sleep does not relieve?
2. Do you feel more cynical, pessimistic or disillusioned about things you used to feel positive about?
3. Do you feel a sadness or an emptiness inside?
4. Do you have physical symptoms of stress, eg. insomnia, stomach pains, headaches, migraines?
5. Is your memory unreliable?
6. Are you irritable or emotional with a short fuse?
7. Have you been more susceptible to illness lately, eg. colds, 'flu, food allergies, hay fever?
8. Do you feel like isolating yourself from colleagues, friends or family?
9. Is it hard to enjoy yourself, have fun, relax and experience joy in your life?
10. Do you feel that you are accomplishing less in your work?



SCORING 0 -15 You are doing well.
 16-25 Some attention needed, you may be a candidate.
 26-35 You are on the road to burnout.
 Make changes now.
 36-50 You need to take action immediately — your
 health and well-being are threatened.

What revives me The purpose of this exercise is to identify things — activities, practises, responses — which nourish your inner being and revive you, and to extend your range. This exercise also helps to discourage patterns of self denial.

- **Individually, or in small groups, brainstorm things that you find revive you, keep you sane under pressure and contribute to staying in touch with yourself.**
- **Review: Which ones take little time or money? Which ones take solitude? Which ones need to be done with others?**
- **In pairs or small groups discuss the ones you do now and those you will/could do in future.**

If the above is done as a group exercise, the leader should encourage expressions of creativity, promote an atmosphere of respect, and emphasize the value of pleasurable things. Highlight the diversity.

This exercise can also be based on the theme of "What gives me pleasure?"

Create a retreat space

The purpose of this exercise is to create an imaginary place of escape and rest to use (in your imagination) whenever needed. The exercise can be extended to stimulate ideas and commitment for creating an actual private retreat place.

- Start with a brief relaxation exercise.
- Give yourself a few minutes to imagine your perfect retreat. Where is it? Perhaps on a deserted island, a four poster bed with the curtains drawn, a tent in the wilderness ... What are the surroundings like? The sounds? The smells? The textures? What might you have with you? Make it as vivid as you can ... This imaginary place is available to you whenever you need to relieve stress and it only takes a moment to get there.

- Share the image with a partner for a few minutes or make a painting of what you saw.
- How could you create a real life retreat place? It could be a seat in the garden, a tree house, a bath by candlelight, a table in the local library or cafe, or a secret walk. Is it possible to set aside a room or a corner in your house which is a "Breathing Space" — for quiet reflection or meditation? Decorate it in soothing colors and textures, perhaps with images that are calming or meaningful to you. Add a few soft cushions, perhaps a candle or lamp. Enjoy creating a special place.

The purpose of this exercise is to clarify who your role models are, and assess whether aspiring to be like them is healthy for you. It can be done alone or in groups of 2-3, taking it in turns to be the focus person. Partners ask questions and help to assess the effect these role models have. Take about 10-15 minutes each.

Identifying role models

- Close your eyes, relax deeply and let images arise of the people who have been role models for you. Who have you really wanted to be like — particularly in your work for social change?
- Draw a quick picture or write their names on bits of paper, then place these on the floor in different locations in the room.
- Go to stand on each spot and talk as if you were that person. How would s/he stand? Let yourself be the person for a time and ask: What are my good qualities and strengths? What are my weaknesses? What are other aspects of my life like? Is it lonely, exhausting? Do I know when to stop? How am I likely to end up? Continue doing this for each person you identified as important.
- Step back into being yourself and evaluate: How is having these people as role models stress-creating for me? Is it healthy for me to aspire to be like them? What needs modifying? In what ways is it unrealistic for me and my circumstances?

The purpose of this exercise is to identify things which make the transition from focussed work time to private or family time easier. Often when we are stressed, we neglect to make this transition, and the omission can lead to arguments, resentment and extra pressure.

Decompression activities

The exercise can be done as a personal compilation (even as a poem), or by talking in pairs, or as a group brainstorm.

1. What things help you to leave work behind, unwind and prepare yourself for a different part of your life?
2. What things do you do (or not do) presently which impede your making this transition?
3. What are some other possibilities that you haven't tried?
4. What will you make a commitment to yourself to do in the next week?

"Get off my back!"

This is a bioenergetics exercise which lifts your energy level and also raises awareness of burdens you may be carrying. It is fun to do in a group, and can be a good break in meetings.

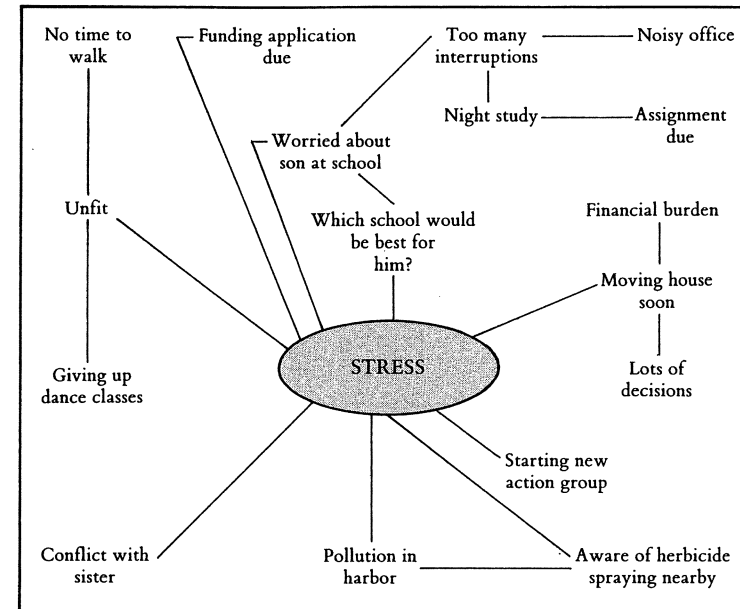
- Slump forward in a chair as if you were carrying a heavy burden. Visualize what you might be carrying currently in your life (or from the past): perhaps responsibilities, guilt, unfinished projects etc.
- Now leap up and vigorously thrust your elbows backwards with clenched fists while yelling out: "Get off my back!" Continue this for a few minutes till you have loosened your load. Then have a general shake out of your arms and legs to relax them.
- Sit and breathe quietly while you reflect on your experience for a few minutes.

Web chart for identifying stressors

The purpose of this exercise is to raise your awareness of things which are contributing to stress. You will need large sheets of paper and a few different colored pens.

- **Start with the word STRESS and put a circle around it, in the middle of the sheet of paper. Then quickly and without censoring, draw lines and bubbles with things that have lately been contributing to stress in your life. Start with the major ones or direct causes. Then flow on out to the more indirect causes. Draw lines to link ones which go together.**
- **Now go through and color in the ones you can do something about. Perhaps color code them; for instance, the more serious ones in red, less serious ones in pink etc. With which stresses do you need**

Your web chart may look something like this:



some help or cooperation to change? What steps can you take to lessening these factors in the next week? The next month?

A variation on this exercise, or a follow on, is to do the exercise in positive terms with WHOLENESS/ FEELING GOOD in the middle. Then draw a web of the things which contribute to that state in your life.

This exercise can be done alone or in pairs, taking it in turns to listen to one another.

1. What are the easiest things for you to say *no* to?
2. What are the hardest things for you to say *no* to?
3. What effect does it have on you when you won't say *no*?
4. What do you intend doing about this? Who could assist you?

Now take some time to practice saying No! to the things you have identified in question 2, with your partner trying to wheedle and persuade you to say yes.

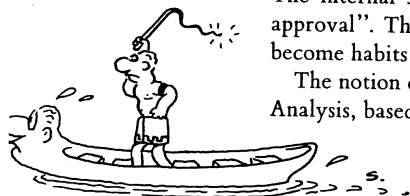
If you recognize that this is a difficult area for you, you could consider doing an assertiveness training class, or seek some personal therapy work around the issue of boundaries. It might make a big difference to the effectiveness of your work and your ability to avoid burnout.

Setting limits

Identifying your inner "drivers"

The purpose of this exercise is to identify what beliefs and internal statements we may be adhering to, which we use to drive ourselves hard. Though these "drivers" seem to be socially desirable superficially, to feel compelled internally to obey them can severely limit our ability to take good care of ourselves, to enjoy what we do and to succeed in our goals. The internal sense of a driver is "If I do this thing enough, I will get approval". These statements and beliefs are learnt in early childhood and become habits of living unless we consciously change them.

The notion of drivers used in this exercise is derived from Transactional Analysis, based on the work of Taibi Kahler and others.

**DRIVERS**

"Hurry Up" — This driver is present when you continually hassle yourself about time. Whatever it is you are doing, you feel like you should be doing it faster, leading to panic about not having enough time. It makes it hard to do anything in a relaxed way.

"Be Strong" — This driver tells you: "Don't show your feelings." "Don't ask for help, be the one to take on the responsibility." Such a message makes it hard to be vulnerable. Men especially are taught this one.

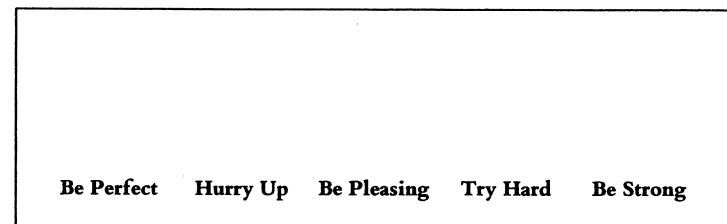
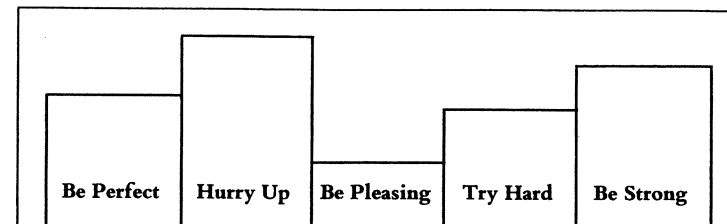
"Be Perfect" — This driver demands that you Be Good at Everything even if you're a beginner; don't make mistakes, and strive constantly to perfect yourself.

"Be Pleasing" — Try above all to meet other people's needs rather than your own. Do not show your displeasure, avoid conflict and smile even if you don't feel like it. Women especially are taught this one.

"Try Hard" — Engage in a lot of effort in what you do; put the emphasis on being seen to be trying, rather than succeeding. You tend to run around in circles a lot.

Do you recognize any of these as the way you behave?

It is useful to make a subjective assessment of the relative strength of each of these internal drivers for you, in order to understand where you need to pay particular attention and do some personal work to loosen their grip on your life. Try rating their relative strength, as in the example below.



The next stage is to either ask yourself these questions or with a partner take it in turns to reflect on the following:

1. In what way do the ones you rated highly operate in your life?
2. What effect do they have on your work for social change?
3. How might they contribute to burnout?
4. Do you notice yourself giving these kinds of messages to your children or your work colleagues?

It seems to take sustained awareness to decrease driver behavior. When we are under particular stress, we are more likely to revert to it. Gaining objectivity gives us a choice.

5. What sort of "permissions" would you need to give yourself in order to counteract the old driver habit?

eg. It is OK to do things at my pace.
To err is human.
Don't bother trying, just do it!
It is OK to please me.
Lots of people would love to help me.

Design just the right statements for yourself that you need to be reminded of, write them in big letters on paper, then stick them on the fridge door or the bathroom mirror. Tell your friends and/or your support groups how you intend to change these things. Ask people to remind you when

Weekly organizer worksheet

WEEK BEGINNING:

DONE	WHAT	WHO TO CONTACT	WHEN BY
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	WORK/SOCIAL ACTION		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	PERSONAL/FAMILY		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	SELF CARE/FUN/RELAXATION		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	HOLD FOR LATER		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	RUBBISH BIN		
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

they notice you getting into them again. Make a note in your diary to compare yourself in 6 months time.

NOTES

1. Ram Dass & Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1986.
2. Patricia Vigderman, *New Age Magazine*, Summer, 1985.
3. Peter Berg quoted by Ann Herbert in "Let the Good Times Last", *Awakening In The Nuclear Age Journal*, No 6, 1985.
4. Dr. William L. Bryan, *Preventing Burnout In The Public Interest Community*, Northern Rockies Action Group Paper Volume 3, No 3. 1980. NRAG, Helena, Montana. I am indebted to him for inspiration on sections of this and the next chapter.
5. Evonne Rand in Bryan, *Preventing Burnout...*
6. Cristina Maslach "Burnout — The Cost Of Caring", Spectrum Books, Prentice Hall, 1982.
7. Peter Woodrow, "Clearness Process for Supporting Individuals and Groups in Decision Making," New Society Publishers, Philadelphia.
8. Ram Dass & Gorman, *How Can I Help?*
9. *Ibid.*

PREVIOUS PAGE

USE COLORED PENS TO MARK HIGH PRIORITIES.
 IF THESE CATEGORIES DO NOT FIT — RENAME THEM.
 PHOTOCOPY THIS SHEET AND FILL IN WEEKLY TO KEEP
 THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE.