



## EPISODE 27

### How to Avoid and Manage Employee Burnout in the New Year

**Intro:** Welcome to Strategic Insights, brought to you by PrideStaff. On each episode, we bring you interviews with leading management and employment experts from across the country. Your host for Strategic Insights is Brad Smith. And now here's Brad.

**Brad Smith:** Thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Strategic Insights from Pride Staff. I'm your host, Brad Smith. Today we have a great episode that I'm sure hits home with so many of our listeners. With a shortage of talent companies always looking to drive productivity and produce more, current employees are often left feeling burned out, they're feeling stressed. So, joining me today to discuss the topic of employee burnout is Gary Brons, owner and strategic partner of the Greenville, South Carolina PrideStaff office. Gary, thank you so much for joining us.

**Gary Brons:** Thanks for having me. So

**Brad Smith:** Today we're going to talk about ways to avoid and manage employee burnout. But before we jump in by outlining those ways, I want to talk about why this is so crucially important for our business success. And I want to share some stats. A survey from Indeed found that 52% of workers report feeling burned out. So more than half of the entire workforce is feeling strained, is feeling overburdened, is feeling stressed. Deloitte did a study and they found that 77% of workers had experienced burnout at some point in their current job, and they went on to find that the top driver of burnout was a lack of support and recognition from leadership. So, there's a lot we can do as leaders to help our teams.

And then Forbes went on to report that burned out workers are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times more likely to be hunting for a job. So, stress, burnout, overwork, overwhelm is leading to a lot of problems in the workforce and it's leading to a lot of problems for leaders. We have to replace those people that are out on sick days. Hopefully we can catch them before they leave, before they jump ship because we know how hard it is to find great talent. So, Gary, when you look at companies that are struggling, do these findings about burnout align with what you see in the market?

Gary Brons: Yeah, they sure do. It's kind of funny, we all think about the production worker, the front-line person, and what I see a lot of times that's missed is the management. A lot of supervisors and managers, they're being burnout, too. They're the salaried employee who has to work long hours when headcount shortages occur. They're expected to be there. They're expected to do whatever's needed. That affects them a lot. And I think sometimes that's just not seen. And as senior managers, it's our responsibility to look for things like that.

Also, I think at the production worker level, they come in, they do their job, but if they see their management, their leadership faltering and turnovers occurring, it makes them very uncomfortable and it creates stress that doesn't have to be there. It just impacts it in so many different ways. And a lot of times when you're having this kind of issue, there's a lot of turnover. There's a lot of knowledge leaving companies, and some of those are your key leaders, your supervisors, and when they leave that knowledge leaves, that's immeasurable.

And I think that typically when you're having burnout, you see it and you know it's there. You may not want to address it, maybe you don't know how to address it, which is obviously what we're trying to talk about today. But when you have it, it impacts every part of your business from the person who's answering your phones to the person cleaning your offices. It is from top to bottom and it needs to be addressed.

Brad Smith: So, Gary, why do you think it is so prevalent and why do you think it does penetrate every area of the organization today?

Gary Brons: Well, I do think, again, the fact that there's such a talent shortage and has been for a couple of years, people tend to leave if they're not happy with where they're at, which creates stress, which then creates people leaving, which creates stress. So, it's kind of a circular motion, and I think just the lack of longevity with employees creates stress. If you can create a team that can get together, can grow together, they just get stronger and stronger and they fight back anything that comes after them. And I think that it's kind of strange, but with the polarizing political environment and the unforgiving social media environments that we live in, I think people just have a lower morale about themselves. They just don't like the way things are going around them, and it creates an issue where people just aren't civil to each other anymore. And that is hard to build a team if there's people not being very civil. So that's something, again, as senior managers we need to address.

Brad Smith: Yeah, I think it certainly is, and I love your point of looking at every level of the organization. So, the frontline workers, management teams, senior leadership, what are some of the common signs and symptoms of burnout that we as managers, we as mid-level leaders and even senior leaders should be looking out for?

Gary Brons: I think the biggest one is just change in attitude. We all have that employee that's always been the cheerleader, the rah, rah, rah. They always were in the fight with you when maybe others weren't. Then all of a sudden you start seeing a change and they start to get quiet. They don't seem to get so charged up for some of the activities that you're going through. And then they get to the point where they kind of going for being quiet to almost being negative or challenging things. And if your best employee's doing that, then you know the mid-level level and the lower level are following suit or they may even be driving it. So, I think that that's just something to be looking for. It's usually a very slow change. It might take place over a year. It might take place over six months. Don't only happen over a weekend.

One of the things that I've seen in some of my business partners that I work with is someone will come in and they look like they're going to be a good fit, and honestly, they're just a cancer. They start driving a wedge between management and the employees. It's sometimes you don't see it, you don't even know it's there. That's what's creating that underground change in mentality. I think when you start hearing people challenging things that used to be every day, let's just say it's, "Hey, I need you to take your lunch from 11:30 to 12:30." Then all of a sudden one day out of the blue they go, "Why? I don't understand why I should take it from 11:30, 12:30. I want to take it from 12:30 to 1:30."

You kind of start have to ask yourself why all of a sudden, this change, why this challenge? And I think some managers like to address things in a group environment. They want to have a big group meeting and go over it. But if you have somebody that's doing this, take them aside. Take some one-on-one time with them, really dig, try to figure out what it is that's bothering them. They may not ever own up to it, but you may learn some things, especially if you talk to a couple of people. So those are some things that I would be looking for.

Brad Smith: Gar, I think those are some great points, and I want to reiterate that oftentimes we see this slow buildup, but you need to be aware, you need to be cognizant, you need to be looking at these signs so that you don't wait too long before stepping in, it can be irreversible. So, I love that you've outlined some things that we should really be taking into consideration and we can't wait. We need to have some open communication.

Gary Brons: That's correct.

Brad Smith: I think that's a good segue to our next question. What else can companies do to really create a supportive work environment, one that promotes employee well-being and helps prevent burnout?

Gary Brons: Okay. Again, there's been so much change in the way that companies run their businesses and the management thereof, and I think the old school manager approach to do it my way or the highway left a long time ago, and I'm glad to see that. I think with new managers, younger managers that are coming in and

finding their own way, they do need to understand that communication is really, in my opinion, the biggest key of all. You can manage effectively, you can have good teams, but if you're not talking and explaining what's going on and why you're making changes, this is a day and time when change is ongoing all the time. Just get good at explaining change, why you're doing it, what the expected outcome is, and then be prepared that if that doesn't happen, that you need to get back with your teams and explain to them what you're going to do to change direction.

Maybe a major contract fell through that you just told them you thought you got, or maybe you're going to add a new line of product and then you found the costs are too high and you're just not going to be able to do it. Just not doing it leaves them wondering. Go back to them, explain to them why you're changing direction after you just told them what you were planning on doing. Get them to understand. Things are always changing, but you're always going to let them know why and what you're going to do about it. In our business, we have a standard quarterly meeting, no matter what. I mean we talk every day, but every quarter we specifically sit down as a team and go over what our objectives were for the past quarter, how we did against them, what our goals are for next quarter, and how they change based on what happened last quarter.

So, the point is we're just always keeping our employees in the loop about what's changing instead of it catching them off guard. I think when employees get caught off guard, they get very nervous. Again, stress goes up, and the door is very close and they go out it. And they just don't want to come back because they just feel too unsure about things. I think that things won't always go as planned. Sometimes business takes dips. You have to show leadership at that point and get people to understand that it's okay, we've been through these before. We're going to come out of them and here's what we're going to do. People want leadership when they're employees. They don't like lip service, they don't like people that just do what they want to do and leave them in the lurch as far as what's going on.

And then the worst case scenario, if you know that you're going to have to cut back on your staff, come up with a strategic plan, maybe you let some attrition take place, maybe you do slowly get rid of some of the people that aren't the best employees, but if you just don't say anything and then you come in on Friday and you let go 15% of your staff or 20% of your staff, you're going to lose another 20% because they're all going to go home that weekend and think about it and decide they don't even want to come back because they know they're next, where a little communication would've maybe kept that from ever happening. So, communication to me is key. It solves a lot of issues and it keeps you from getting too off cycle.

Brad Smith:

Gary, a few things really stood out to me in that answer. One is obviously communication. We need to be clear, but we also need to explain the why. So if we just assume that our staff, our employees understand the why, that's a big

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assumption. We need to make sure that they clearly understand why we're instituting, why we're making change, why we're making recommendations. And then the other thing that really stood out to me is keeping employees in the loop and making sure that they're not caught off guard. Sometimes those conversations can be challenging, but to your point, if you don't have those challenging conversations upfront, you're going to have to have even more challenging conversations when employees are walking out the door. So great, great tips there.

We hear all about work-life balance and how important work-life balance can be in preventing burnout. What are some things that you've seen companies do to support their employees and make sure that they do have some semblance of work-life balance?

Gary Brons:

Okay. Obviously, every company has their own needs, their own schedules, their own approach to the way they do things, but sometimes it doesn't match that well with your employee base. And I'll give you a couple of examples. Some companies, they just need to work 12-hour shifts and one of our jobs is to communicate with our associates before they go to work for those companies that that's what's the expectation. But sometimes things that are happening don't make a lot of sense, and another example would be a company that works two weeks on day shift, then they switch to two weeks on night shift and then two weeks on day shift and then two weeks on night shift. That is very difficult for your workforce. And there are some people that just like working nights. Well, leave them on nights. Why make them go to days when you've got others that want to work days and not work nights?

And so, we try to work with our clients to understand, find a core group that wants to be on nights and leave them there. Take the people with longevity, put them on the A shift, and then you take the people in the middle and you say, unfortunately, you're going to be working part on days, part on nights, and that's just until you can find a home on one of those two shifts, that's what's going to happen. The people who want to work 12 hours, if you can find somebody who loves that, then you'll have an employee forever. If you have somebody who only wants to work eight hours and you can find a way to have part of your shifts go like 12-hour days, 12-hour nights, but then you have part of the group work, three eights, eight in the morning, eight in the afternoon, eight in the night. Try to find what your employees are really looking for. Try to match it if you can, and you'll find that you'll get a better longevity workforce, again, which will solve a lot of problems.

Another thing that we find is that some companies are very fair when it comes to issues with attendance or punctuality. They look at the circumstance and they just say, "Well, let's understand why you weren't on time today." And if the person has what seems to be a pretty good reason, we all get jaded. We've heard these reasons over and over and over. What do you mean another flat tire? Another battery went dead. Just have them bring in a receipt. If your battery went dead, I assume you bought a new battery. Bring me a copy. Or

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bring me a wrecker bill where somebody came out and jumped you off. That removes the doubt of whether it really happened or not. The people who are faking it, they can't bring it in, then you follow your normal process.

So, I find that companies that aren't too jaded, they accept the fact that life happens and people get caught up in things and they look at them on a one-on-one basis. They can keep people longer. The people who are very stringent and they don't really want to hear the reasons, okay, that's their process. They're just going to have turnover regularly.

Brad Smith: Yeah, so a little flexibility, I know, can go a long way. Another thing that I know can go a long way is providing employees with the opportunity to develop, the opportunity for advanced training. And that can help with employee morale, that can help reduce burnout and help reduce turnover. How important do you think training and professional development is?

Gary Brons: Well, I think it's very important, and I think any employee you ask would say the same thing. Obviously, there's a cost to it, there's a building it into your model, trying to find time. Maybe it's non-productive hours perhaps if they're doing some training. But what's the best employee you can have as somebody that has grown with you over the years, has learned new tasks, new job functions, they can help new people coming in because they've done a lot of different things. That new person coming in can see the older person who's actually moved up the ladder so they see something that they can move forward to. Now, however, you got some companies that really don't see that. Maybe they're small, they've only got a couple employees, and it's really not realistic that somebody's going to be able to move forward. Be honest with the people, and they'll see it. So, if you tell them they're going to be a supervisor in three years, they know they're not.

But maybe find something inside your company that they can run with. Give them a project. Maybe it's, "Hey, we want to start recycling this cardboard that we're throwing out every day. I want to put you in charge. I want you to try to figure out a solution. I want you to call-". Whatever you want to tell them to do, but give them something that makes them break away from their day-to-day job. They know they're adding value to the company and maybe five years down the road, they can say, "I've saved this company so much money through recycling that we used to not do," and they'll feel proud about it. So, there's ways to give people an opportunity to break away from what they do every day. It takes a little effort, takes a little money, but it can save good employees and make them long-term employees.

Brad Smith: Excellent. Gary, switching gears just a little bit, what role can a staffing agency like PrideStaff play in helping companies that are struggling with employee burnout, that are struggling with turnover or morale issues?

Gary Brons: One other opportunity is to look at your flexible workforce. That's where staffing really comes into play. We can provide employees to you. Let's say right

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now you're at the end of the year, you're going into the new year, maybe you got some new projects coming in and you don't have a full workforce for it. We can provide support through associates that might be able to do some of the lower hanging fruit. Maybe they're responsible for moving the pallets around, throwing the trash away, building boxes, instead of your employees taking their valuable time and doing those jobs, leave your employees doing the more valuable work, running the machines, producing the parts, doing the inspection work, the things that are very important to your customers, until you can get your employees up to speed.

These temporary associates that come in, in many cases, they're looking for a job and it's a perfect time for them to prove their attitude, their attendance, their punctuality, how they approach their job, and you'll find great employees that way. So, I think looking for staffing to help you with a flexible workforce as you're growing, that's a great thing and I really think in the next year we're going to see a lot of that because the economy, I believe is coming back and as it does, people will get caught short with not having enough workers, and PrideStaff can be there to support you in that arena.

Brad Smith: Gary, so many great tips today. Can you leave us with any success stories? Have you seen any companies that you've worked with or any in the PrideStaff system that have successfully implemented different things to reduce burnout, improve employee morale, and really drive and help a company turn their culture around?

Gary Brons: Well, I think we've talked about most of them throughout the talk here, but just to recap, I think finding employees for the right shift and trying to develop your shift around what your employee base needs. Obviously look at your pay and make sure you're being competitive in your market. You don't have to be the highest pay, but be competitive. Look at stepping up people over time. Give them raises as needed. If they stick around long enough, they should get more pay. Obviously, they're being more productive to you. Look at the documentation versus termination. If you can handle something like that, depending on the size of the company, you can generally fit that in.

And other than that, the communication, just explain to them what you're doing. It's a great time of year. It's the end of the year. You're rolling into the next year. Everybody's talking about New Year's resolutions. As a company, we typically, I know I do, and I think most companies have new year strategies, and it's a great time to tell your team, look, this is where we want to be at the end of this year, and you share with them that it's going to get better, stronger, better. Then they'll stick around. They'll join the ride with you, and hopefully they'll be a part of the solution.

Brad Smith: Great. I think that's a great way to sum it up, Gary. I really appreciate it. For those that are listening that need some help, that want to see what others in their market are doing to reduce burnout or reduce turnover, visit [PrideStaff.com](http://PrideStaff.com). Reach out to a local PrideStaff office, talk about what they're

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seeing in the market. Talk about different pay rates. We can run a free compensation report for you to give you an idea of what base pay really should look like, and have that conversation with your local market. They can share some invaluable insight and then also help support you with a temporary team to reduce turnover, reduce burnout, and improve employee morale. Gary, thank you so much for your time today and the great insight you shared. We really appreciate it.

Gary Brons: Thanks, Brad. Have a Happy New Year.

Brad Smith: Take care everyone. Bye.

Closing: Thank you for listening to Strategic Insights brought to you by PrideStaff. Whether you're looking for high level workforce consulting or staffing help to meet demands, PrideStaff is here to help.