

PREVENTING BURNOUT
by Patty Wells

"BURNOUT IS COMMON, BUT IT IS NOT MANDATORY"

That's a favorite sentence of mine from one of the books from which this material is adapted, *Customer Service; The Other Half of Your Job*.

Burnout has become a hot topic in the trendy management books. This is useful information for us to examine, because there are few endeavors that have quite as much potential for creating burnout as convention running. We're not making big bucks from it. The time you spend working on a convention may be from one year on a regional to six years on a worldcon from bid through completion. I personally had an entire marriage that lasted less than the latter. No matter how hard you work you will get complaints. The bigger the convention, the more you are working with larger numbers of demanding attendees, guests, artists and dealers. And, no matter what the size of the convention, the actual con itself requires you to be working too intensely, with too many people, on too little sleep.

So if we know we're extra prone to burnout what do we do?

RECOGNIZE AND WATCH FOR THE SIGNALS

Check all of the following which apply to you:

- G Decreased concentration; you sit down before a terminal and find yourself unable to remember what you were looking for.
- G Communicating less with others; are you putting off talking to people you need to connect with and/or avoiding meeting and phone calls?
- G Complaining; you repeatedly express negative feelings, sounding like a tape recorder.
- G A Short Fuse; Small things that you can usually handle get to you and you overreact.
- G Suspicion of Joy; you see someone happy with their job and finding yourself thinking that they're too happy, no one feels that good working on a convention.
- G Use of Artificial Stimulants; we all joke about the amount of caffeine we use to get by on, or the amount of alcohol drunk at convention parties. Do you see yourself increasing your consumption?

YOU ANSWERED YES TO HOW MANY QUESTIONS? NOW WHAT?

Now is there anything you can do? These are some of the most mentioned methods for heading off the problem:

1. Take care of yourself physically: the cliched 5 and 2 rule (5 hours of sleep, 2 meals/day for a worldcon) is a good idea for any convention. As much as we despise it, exercise helps reduce stress. Exercise stimulates oxygen flow to the brain. Without ample oxygen, your thinking ability drops. Honestly, it is the number one way to prevent burnout. Nothing beats regular exercise, which we all say we're going to do, but even a brisk walk outside the hotel at con will help.
2. Take care of yourself emotionally; work to achieve what you want with the convention. This does not mean screaming loudest at the committee meetings. Ask for what you want directly, don't feel resentful that no one noticed it directly. (The other people on your committee are as strung out as you are.) Ask people to notice your work accomplishments, rather than hoping they will.
3. Setting Measurable Targets; you aren't going to please everybody. What are some of the most important tasks in your area? Can you quantify them in some way? For example, 50 people registered an hour, X number of

volunteers recruited for an area, opening an area on time each day. It will take practice to and either direction from and/or understanding your committee to help decide what are the most important tasks. When you accomplish these goals either solicit some congratulations, or reward yourself for it. Picking out rewards and deciding you deserve them in the rush of the convention also takes a lot of practice.

4. Trying to avoid the temptation to complain. This may be the hardest for us to do. It is appropriate to complain to someone who can help manage the problem. You want to make operations run smoothly. If you begin to complain to friends, you tend to continue. It gets tiring, rouses more negative feelings and can have interesting repercussions. In convention running you are very likely to be working with that person again and probably socializing with them.
5. Communicating what you feel directly and skillfully. Again, this is incredibly hard. In addition to the stresses of running a convention, we all have a great deal of personal investment in our role. One good way of phrasing it can be; When you say.... I feel that... For example, "When you say this is all screwed up, I fell like I don't have anything specific I can do." Reinforcing your communications with positives, e.g., "I would like to help you."
6. Find spirit raisers for yourself and other on the concom. It can be simple things like food treats at meetings. It can be silly in-jokes expressed in ribbons or buttons.
7. Say something nice to someone else. Say something good to someone in a thankless job, like registration or office. Just looking for something good to compliment is good for you. It makes it more likely that someone will remember to notice your good work. And if nothing else their stunned expression when you tell them they've done a good job will be entertaining enough to make it worthwhile.

None of this is easy to do in the furor of last minute con preparations or at the con itself. Any of it you can do will help. Find one or two things you can think out in advance and make yourself try them.