
Burnout Immunity

How Emotional Intelligence Can Help You Build Your Resilience and Heal Your Relationship with Work

by
Dr. Kandi Wiens

Most of the stories we see about burnout center on its skyrocketing rates around the world. But there's a small percentage of high performing people who, despite being under intense stress, manage to avoid the crippling effects of burnout. What is their secret?

Integrating hundreds of in-depth interviews and science-backed research, [Dr. Kandi Wiens](#)—Senior Fellow at the **University of Pennsylvania**—reveals what sets these individuals apart in [**BURNOUT IMMUNITY: How Emotional Intelligence Can Help You Build Your Resilience and Heal Your Relationship with Work**](#) (Harper Business; April 23, 2024).

After experiencing a life-threatening health crisis due to burnout, Dr. Wiens left a lucrative consulting career and enrolled in a doctoral program at The University of Pennsylvania to better understand what has become a national epidemic. In her research, she uncovered that people with high degrees of Emotional Intelligence (EI) develop superior coping abilities, helping them successfully manage stress and immunize themselves against burnout.

In **BURNOUT IMMUNITY**, readers discover specific triggers that make them more vulnerable to burnout and learn the five principles for building EI skills to effectively cope with high stress work environments. Combining real-life case studies with in-depth research, Dr. Wiens provides more constructive ways to deal with stress that will leave you energized and motivated—not overwhelmed and exhausted.

Filled with practical tools and strategies for any job role or industry, **BURNOUT IMMUNITY** reveals:

- “The Burnout Risk Assessment” that can help you identify your stress thresholds and pinpoint specific events that make you more susceptible to burnout
- Key signs your work environment does not align with your temperament or personality
- Helpful ways to respond to stress so you can use it to your advantage
- Your ‘sweet spot’ of stress—how to determine the best level of stress that will motivate you without leading to burnout
- Strategies for leaders to help employees manage stress effectively and prevent burnout
- Common thinking traps that damage your ability to process and navigate stress
- Three steps for recovering from burnout to lead a productive and happy life

No one is immune to stress, but everyone can acquire burnout immunity.



About the Author

Kandi Wiens, EdD, MEd, MBA is the bestselling author of ***Burnout Immunity***. She is also a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, director of the Penn Master's in Medical Education Program and the Penn Health Professions Education Certificate Program, and academic director of the PennCLO Master's Program.

Kandi is honored to be included in the [Thinkers50 Radar class of 2024](#). Her work has been prominently featured in Fast Company, CNBC Make It, Leader to Leader, the Harvard Business Review and in several Harvard Business Review Press books.

Kandi holds a Master's degree as well as a Doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania, an MBA from the University of Oregon, and a BS in Business Administration from Montana State University.

Burnout Immunity has been featured in:

[The Financial Times](#), [The Guardian](#), [Forbes](#), [TIME](#), [CNBC Make It](#), [New York Times "Well"](#), [New York Post](#), [Fortune](#), [Men's Health](#), [Harvard Business Review](#), [Fast Company](#), [Next Big Idea Club](#), [Big Think](#), [Bloomberg Radio](#), [Tamron Hall, Inc.](#), [NBC New York](#), [NBC DFW](#), [Wharton Business Daily](#), SHRM, and more!

Advanced Praise for Burnout Immunity

"[This] book reads like a survival guide for white-collar professionals in the grip of workplace trauma. Wiens pairs this anthropology of emotional intelligence "strategies" with a practical synthesis of research on burnout to date. While beating it may still require root-and-branch reform to company culture, Wiens' guide will be useful to those struggling now."

— **Financial Times**

"Kandi Wiens has written a marvelously readable and extremely practical guide to handling the stress in our own lives. Anyone will find her prescriptions for burnout antidotes both useful and powerful. And *Burnout Immunity* offers a strong case for the benefits of emotional intelligence."

— **Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* and *Optimal***

“Somewhere between feeling frazzled, exhausted, sad, and lonely and feeling on top of the world is the zone of most of real life. This practical synthesis of excellent research-based ideas is a guidebook to renewal. It reminds us not to waste the precious moments and possibilities, then shows us how.”

— **Richard Boyatzis, PhD, Distinguished University Professor at Case Western Reserve University and coauthor of the international bestseller *Primal Leadership* and *Helping People Change***

“A timely and vital resource for addressing the pervasive issue of burnout in corporate America. Drawing from her own experiences and her extensive research, Dr. Kandi Wiens provides valuable insights and practical strategies to combat burnout and invest in the emotional intelligence that will give you lasting passion in your career. This book is a must-read for anyone looking to prioritize their well-being and have a healthier, more sustainable relationship with work.”

— **Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, Thinkers50 #1 executive coach and *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Earned Life*, *Triggers*, and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There***

“Finally, a book about stress and burnout that goes beyond ‘eat right and exercise!’ Dr. Kandi Wiens offers a smart new way to deal with the pressures of our (too often toxic) workplaces, take control of our lives, and stop the vicious cycle that has us work too hard, put up with too much, burnout, and hit replay.

You’ll find exactly what you need to develop your emotional intelligence and resilience while building a better, healthier life overall. I wish I’d read this excellent book years ago. It would have saved a lot of pain.”

— **Annie McKee, PhD, author, speaker, coach, and adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education**

A conversation with the author of *Burnout Immunity*

1. While burnout has become a national epidemic, a small percentage of high performers seem to avoid it. What are they doing differently?

I’ve discovered something remarkable in my research with over 200 people who describe their work-related stress as severe, very severe, or worst possible (can you imagine?!). Despite the psychologically hazardous conditions they work in, some of them have avoided burnout (and dare I say, many of them even enjoy their demanding jobs) – or they’ve achieved what I call burnout immunity – by honing and applying their emotional intelligence in five very specific ways: Awareness, Regulation, Meaningful Connections, Mindset, and the 3Rx Prescription (Recover, Reconnect, and Reimagine).

2. What led you to begin researching burnout at The University of Pennsylvania and what did your research consist of?

After burnout caused a life-threatening health crisis in my own life, I left a lucrative career in management consulting and enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania to understand why burnout was leaving millions of us sick, exhausted, unmotivated, and feeling stuck and ineffective. Since 2015, I've interviewed over 200 research participants and have conducted numerous studies in large law enforcement agencies, including a longitudinal study for the Los Angeles Police Department.

3. Based on your research, what skills, principles, and strategies are common among individuals with burnout immunity?

Burnout immunity is a set of emotional intelligence-based skills, principles, and strategies that enable us to build resilience and heal from an unhealthy relationship with work. It includes developing a strong awareness of what triggers our workplace stress, what makes us more sensitive to stress, what puts us over the tipping point from good stress to bad stress, and our risk level for burning out. It means having the ability to regulate our emotions, thoughts and behaviors in service of our highest level of well-being. It involves staying focused on things and people that provide us with a sense of meaningful connections. It includes cultivating a mindset that looks for the positive impact we can make in stressful situations, allows us to see stress as enhancing, enables us to tune into a servant leader mindset, and pushes us to be aware and care. And finally, it helps us recover, reconnect, and reimagine a better, less-stressed version of ourselves when we are in an active state of burnout.

4. Many of us view burnout as a necessary part of success. How can we reframe the way we talk about success?

My study participants who have achieved a high degree of burnout immunity often don't define their success by extrinsic rewards alone, but rather as the ability to authentically live and lead a values-driven life – one where the decisions they make and the actions they take are very closely aligned to what's most important to them, professionally and personally. It's easy to say "I live a life centered around my values", but not as easy to put it into practice, especially when our jobs demand more from us than we have capacity to give. But people with burnout immunity are very clear on their values, they define and often even write down what each value looks like, they create conditions that enable them to stay within the boundaries of their values, and they hold themselves accountable when their actions don't align with their values.

5. How can we identify our unique stress thresholds and determine what makes us more vulnerable to burnout?

Examining your unique stress threshold, and the triggers and conditions that put you over your threshold is a crucial step in preventing burnout. *Burnout Immunity* offers several powerful strategies that can help you with this. First, identify what triggers your stress and seek to understand the underlying reasons for those triggers. Second, make a list of the conditions that keep you in your sweet spot of stress – that zone of stress where you feel alert, engaged, and challenged but not to the point where you're starting to feel overwhelmed and anxious. Finally,

learn as much as you can about how you can regulate your nervous system so that you can begin to create greater capacity to take on additional challenges while staying within your sweet spot of stress.

6. What is the connection between toxic coworkers and burnout? Why do they pose such a threat to their colleagues?

Hanging around toxic coworkers is like hanging around secondhand smoke. And seriously, why would we want to do that when we know it's bad for us?! Emotional contagion, and even burnout contagion, are real things. Exposing ourselves to anything, or anyone, that creates emotional toxicity puts us at high risk of burning out. If a toxic coworker is draining your energy, put some serious thought into how much you want to continue exposing yourself to them.

7. How can loneliness and social isolation lead to a higher risk of burnout?

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that loneliness and social isolation have been linked with a number of negative health outcomes, many of them due to the deleterious effects of chronic stress – that consistent sense of feeling overwhelmed and pressured for a long period of time. And, as we burnout experts agree, burnout is caused by chronic stress. For example, people

who experience lower connection in the workplace have 73 percent less engagement, 77 percent more stress, 109 percent more burnout, and 153 percent more loneliness than their highly connected peers.

8. Not all stress is bad. What are some ways to respond to stress so we can use it to our advantage?

Most of us are familiar with the common stress responses we call fight, flight or freeze. But what most of us don't know is that there are two other very powerful, and much more productive ways, to respond to stress – they're called the *challenge response* and the *tend-and-befriend response*.

The *challenge response* to stress kicks in when you feel called on to perform or to achieve something. While this response triggers some of the same physiological responses as fight-or-flight—heart rate escalates and you get a boost of adrenaline, for instance—you feel focused, excited, and confident, instead of fearful, angry, or overwhelmed. This provides the motivation you want when you have to give a presentation, take an exam, get a project over the finish line, negotiate for better compensation, or perform under pressure, for example.

The *tend-and-befriend response* occurs when we seek closeness and connection with others in order to reduce stress and help us overcome challenging, difficult situations. The hormones and neurotransmitters that are released during the tend-and-befriend response play a central role in mediating its stress-lowering effects.

9. Some of us have a hard time saying ‘no.’ How can you identify and prioritize aspects of your work that are most meaningful to you, without over-engaging and sacrificing your personal well-being?

Over-engagement is a thinking trap that can quickly turn our love for our work to all-out dread. I can personally relate to a number of my research participants who are prone to the over-engagement thinking trap that creates or amplifies our stress, and they’ve shared several strategies for keeping their over-engagement in check. They are really good at communicating and maintaining their boundaries regarding work hours and often experiment with intensity boundaries. They release nonessential commitments, find ways to frequently recharge outside of work. They don’t allow their whole identity to get wrapped up in their work role, and they allow for and normalize varying “seasons” in their career.

10. What are the four vital mindsets for acquiring burnout immunity?

There are four mindsets that not only seem to make people exceptionally good at managing work-related stress, but they also enable these workers to use stress as an advantage. I call these the four vital mindsets for acquiring burnout immunity: the **positive outlook mindset** helps us

see the upside in stressful experiences, the **stress-is-enhancing mindset** helps us see stress as helpful rather than harmful, and to see what we can learn from stressful experiences and how that can be put to use, the **servant leader mindset** helps us focus on why our work matters and to whom, and the **aware and care mindset** helps us realize it’s not enough just to be aware of how stress is affecting us; we also need to care for and about ourselves.

11. What are some strategies for recovering from burnout?

One of the most powerful things I heard from an Emergency Medicine physician who was extremely burned out during the first big wave of COVID was that you can’t heal in the place that is making you sick. Whether you have to take more frequent recovery breaks throughout the day, shift your work schedule to allow for more recovery time, take an extended vacation, or leave your job altogether, the key here is to create a big amount of space and distance between you and the psychologically hazardous conditions you’re experiencing so you can regain some perspective and get yourself back to a state of psychological equilibrium.

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