Jim is the kind of veterinarian who prides himself on going to the “nth degree,” but lately, he just isn’t himself. Jim used to be an enthusiastic team member, arriving early and working late. Clients loved his energy and conversation.

Over the past few months, however, things have changed. Jim has become negative about his work, his family, and his life. He is tired of constantly working at breakneck speed for clients who take advantage of his willingness to be available to them, and colleagues who don’t work as hard as he does. Jim has been coming in late to work and calling in sick more often. He complains that his family just doesn’t understand what he does for a living. He stays in his office and rarely speaks to anyone.
Burned Out
If you've worked in veterinary medicine for any length of time, you may recognize that Jim is experiencing burnout, defined as exhaustion of physical or emotional strength as a result of prolonged stress or frustration. Burnout can happen to virtually anyone whose work is demanding, but health care professionals, who must put the care of patients and clients before themselves, are especially vulnerable. Burnout is not stress; stressed people tend to be frantic and irritable, but still get the job done. Those experiencing burnout feel empty, hopeless, and emotionally detached.

By restoring balance between his personal and professional lives, Jim can rebuild his resilience and be able to restore his physical and emotional health.

The Life Wheel
Many factors can contribute to burnout in the veterinary workplace, including excessive employee conflict, perceived lack of control over work schedule, and lack of positive feedback from colleagues and clients for a job well done. Frankly, it is often difficult to make an immediate change in these job-related difficulties, which can be a contributing factor to feeling burned out.

Are you at the mercy of what is happening at your hospital? No! The Life Wheel (Figure 1) is a tool that can teach you to draw energy and enthusiasm from other areas of life to achieve a better balance. In a perfect life, there will be a perfect balance in all the areas of life that are important, but life is never perfect. Becoming overfocused on work can become a real danger, throwing the rest of your life off balance and leading to burnout.

Figure 1: Life Wheel

Life Wheel Instructions
1. Consider how much time and energy you are devoting to each of the categories surrounding the Life Wheel.
2. On a scale of 0–5, rate how invested you are in that area with 0 (the center of the wheel) being little or no investment and 5 (the outermost spoke), representing a full investment.
3. Plot the level of devotion in each area on its respective spoke.
4. Connect the marks around the wheel.
5. Does the wheel look balanced, or do you show extreme variations from category to category?
6. As you review your Life Wheel, what are areas that are neglected? Are there actions that you can take immediately to regain balance? With the areas that are receiving too much of your energy, is there anything you can stop, cut back, or delegate to someone else?
7. Use the Life Wheel as a preventative care tool. If you use it regularly, at least every 6 months, your self-awareness and sense of self-mastery will grow.

You can create an individualized Life Wheel using your own categories. The key is to focus on areas that have most likely have been neglected because of an overfocus on one aspect of the wheel, such as career.

Download a customizable Life Wheel at myEVT.com
Take Action
Once areas in your life that need more attention are identified through the Life Wheel, write an action plan for each one. Actions that fight burnout and build up the areas of your life outside of work might include simple steps such as these:

- Commit to take at least one lunch hour away from work each week.
- Leave on time at least once a week.
- Enroll in an after-work exercise class or walk with a friend.
- Get up early enough to read an inspirational book while enjoying your favorite cup of tea.
- Take time to stay informed and vote.
- Give blood or volunteer for a brief commitment.
- Take regular vacations.
- Get together with a friend or plan a “date” with a friend or significant other.

Commit to one new action item every 30 days—and stick with it. Finding balance is a continual process. This slow and steady progress will serve you well as you begin to train yourself to focus on other important aspects of your life. Each new commitment, no matter how small, is a step away from burnout.

Recommended Reading

Related, but not Twins
When self-help measures have no effect on your symptoms, it may be because you are depressed, not burned out. Depression is a pervasive disorder that affects almost every aspect one’s life, while burnout is restricted to your professional environment. When depressive symptoms—eg, loss of interest in life, weight changes, guilt feelings, sleep problems—become more extreme or last for at least 2 weeks without interruption, it’s time to consult your physician.

Source: www.leburnoutsesoigne.com/burn-out/burnout-or-depression.html

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