

Manage Post Holiday Burnout Risk With These Simple Steps



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Last month our team received a handful of out of the office auto-replies referring to the recipient taking time off to refresh and recharge. In our experience, returning from time away can feel like a perfect storm with pressure to quickly catch up on missed emails and jump on the demands of a new operating plan. The race to reach—and recover from—December 31 can include hectic fundraising deadlines, increased community needs, and personal financial or family pressures. As a risk management professional, you can help your organization manage the risks associated with post-holiday stress by taking these steps.

Support Realistic Workloads. Suggest supervisors help staff prioritize tasks and work with them to rethink deadlines. Encourage managers to conduct check-ins to identify where team members are overloaded and be ready to shift resources. To better understand what an employee needs, recommend simple discussion prompts like:

- Which projects are causing you the most stress right now? What aspects or expectations of those projects could we adjust to make them less stressful? (e.g., deadlines, project scope, administrative burden)
- Are there any “nice-to-have” projects or administrative tasks we can postpone until next month—without serious downside impacts—to give you more breathing room?
- If a member of our team could help you this week, what type of assistance would you most appreciate? What project on your plate today is probably better suited to a colleague who has a different set of skills?
- Are you experiencing any bottlenecks in the workflow that we can address together?

Promote Healthy Habits. Promote opportunities to recharge at work by recommending activities like “micro-breaks” to walk around the office or screen-free lunches, to combat the emotional and physical fatigue that can come with returning to work. Limit non-urgent communication and after-hours emails to help employees decompress and regain focus.

Lean into Understanding. For mission-driven employees, the emotional toll of the holidays coupled with coming back to a mountain of work can lead to burnout, fatigue, and sometimes untimely departures. Embrace active listening. Fully focus on and try to truly understand what an employee is saying (verbally and nonverbally) before you respond. Your goal is to make your team member feel heard and valued, which helps prevent post-holiday burnout, and deepens connections and trust. When you address stress before it escalates,

you are providing the support your team needs to bring their best selves to your mission.

These risk-aware activities create and sustain a culture of care, demonstrate that you value your team, and help alleviate the causes of post-holiday stress. Burnout is real. With consistent, intentional steps to address its causes, you can lead and support a team that will bring the energy, commitment and skills your mission requires and deserves.

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