

2024

THE YEAR OF THE
EMPLOYEE



Burned Out & Checked Out

WHAT EMPLOYEES AND
MANAGERS NEED TO THRIVE

THE
GROSSMAN
GROUP

WHITE PAPER

Intro



We recently conducted comprehensive research in partnership with The Harris Poll on the state of employee well-being, looking to uncover the main drivers of burnout and thriving among employees and managers. After all, organizations can only thrive when their

employees thrive—and signs are everywhere today that employees are far from thriving. In our work advising leaders inside a variety of top companies, we've seen this issue become increasingly urgent for leaders to address. As the economy rebounds and employee mobility grows, burnout

is a double-edged sword that's wreaking havoc for organizations. In some cases, burnout is the top motivator for employees to look for other jobs. When those employees leave, that only exacerbates burnout felt by those staying behind as they then have to take on the extra work.



OUR RESEARCH

identifies the key barriers to overall well-being and helps organizations understand the critical steps needed to change course, steering employees from burnout to thriving.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

 **1115**
EMPLOYEES

 **971**
MANAGERS

The Grossman Group/The Harris Poll research survey of 2,086 employees and managers was conducted over two waves in late January 2024. After employees and managers took the survey, both groups were further divided into three categorical groups:

 **THRIVING**  **BURNED OUT**  **AMBIVALENT**

The Thriving group includes those who selected “strongly agree” to “I feel I am thriving.” The Burned Out group selected “strongly agree” to “I feel I am burned out.” Finally, the Ambivalent group is made up of those who remained from the study population, feeling neither burned out nor thriving—essentially stuck in the middle.

RAMPANT BURNOUT AND AMBIVALENCE IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE

Our research underscores widespread burnout and ambivalence inside countless organizations today. Constant change, coupled with the rapid adoption of AI and other new technologies, makes the challenge even more acute.

All of this results in a pressing problem for organizations, and yet one not fully recognized by leadership. Many companies continue to prioritize productivity and profit over the well-being of their people, not understanding just how connected the two are or how serious the consequences can be.



THE COST OF BURNOUT

Recent research¹ highlights the fallout from burnout and ambivalence. **Thirty-three percent of U.S. hiring managers predict employee turnover will increase** at their company in 2024. Multiple studies find turnover often costs companies **50-200% of an employee's annual salary** in lost productivity and rehiring costs.

In contrast, the ripple effects from a focus on well-being are profound and far greater than just about anything else leadership can do to build a thriving culture. When well-being is prioritized, employees are simply happier and just about everyone who encounters the organization—customers, business partners, prospective employees—feel that.

THE DRIVE TO THRIVE

The good news for leaders is that the path to thriving is clearer than they might realize. Our research outlines not only what gets in the way of fostering a thriving culture, but also what's essential to building it today. The most important takeaway is that **EVERYONE** has a role to play in helping build a stronger culture.

- ✓ FRONT-LINE MANAGERS
- ✓ SENIOR LEADERS
- ✓ COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS
- ✓ POLICY ADVISORS
- ✓ HUMAN RESOURCES

Building a thriving culture doesn't just happen because an organization recruits and hires great people. No matter how genuine the intentions may be for all involved, thriving simply can't be left to chance.

THRIVING EMPLOYEES STRONGLY AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING TOP FACTORS:



I FEEL PROUD OF THE WORK I'M DOING



I FEEL RESPECTED AT WORK



I FEEL MOTIVATED TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY



I FEEL SUPPORTED BY SENIOR LEADERSHIP

LET'S DIG INTO THE DATA ▶

Top Findings

FROM OUR RESEARCH

KEY FINDING #1

Widespread burnout is real and managers don't recognize it in their own employees

KEY FINDING #2

Constant change is a primary reason for burnout, with high costs for organizations

KEY FINDING #3

Managers and senior leaders have a big impact on employees' ability to thrive



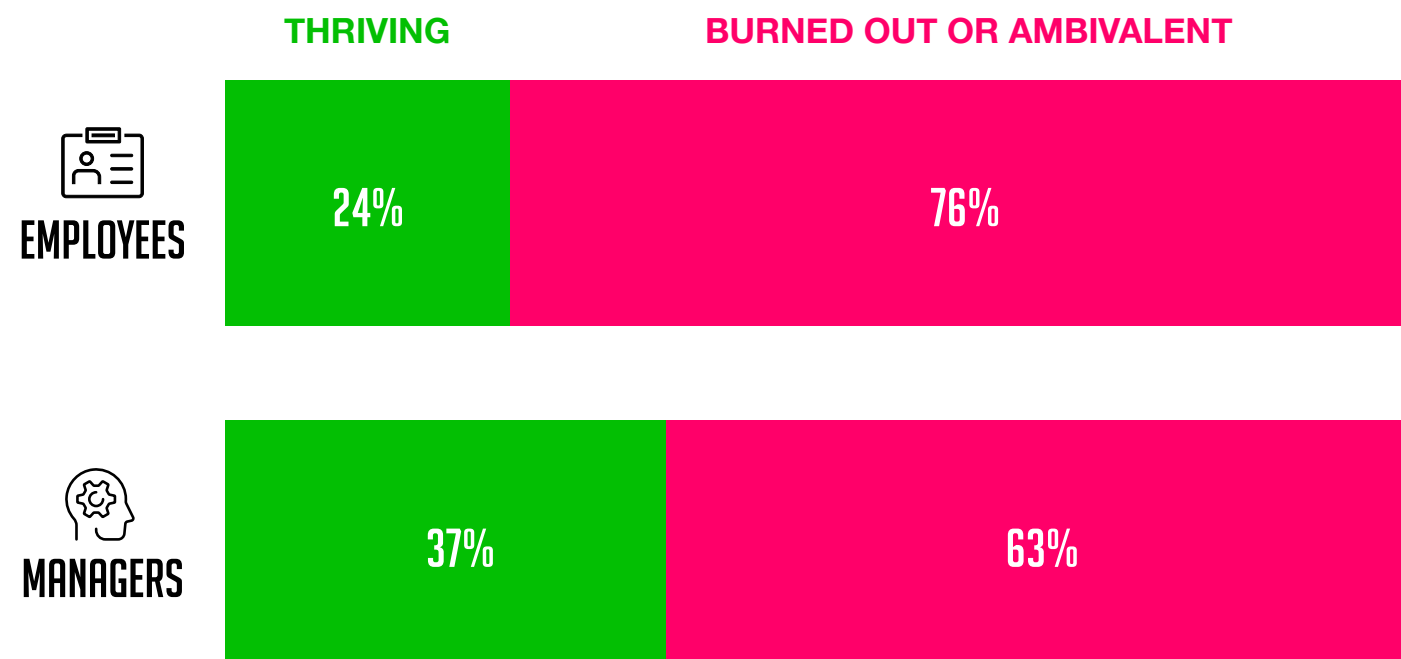
KEY FINDING 1

Widespread burnout is real and managers don't recognize it in their own employees

CASE IN POINT

The numbers tell a compelling story about the level of burnout and ambivalence among today's employees. **Seventy-six percent of employees and 63% of managers feel burned out or ambivalent in their current position.**

Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on your experience in your current position at your primary employer.



KEY FINDING #1

Widespread burnout is real and managers don't recognize it in their own employees

SIGN OF THE TIMES

Managers and employees are inundated with work, with 58% feeling mentally exhausted and 54% feeling overwhelmed in their current role. Even while managers report their own high level of burnout and ambivalence, they're doing a very poor job of recognizing burnout in their own employees. The numbers are striking: **89% of managers say their employees are thriving, and just 24% of employees actually feel a sense of thriving.**



89%

OF TOTAL MANAGERS SAY THEIR EMPLOYEES ARE THRIVING IN THEIR CURRENT POSITION

VS



24%

OF TOTAL EMPLOYEES SAY THEY ARE THRIVING IN THEIR CURRENT POSITION

PERSPECTIVE ON THIS FINDING

Managers need better tools for listening to their teams and what's on their minds so they can know where employees stand. Clearly, employees aren't feeling they have an opportunity to share just how burned out they feel and may be putting on a face for managers that doesn't reflect true feelings.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When managers wrongly assume all is okay, it has serious impacts for organizations and can inevitably lead to more burnout, higher turnover, and less profitable and successful organizations. **Manager education on the importance of employee well-being, along with specific listening tactics and techniques, needs to be prioritized at the highest levels of the organization.**



KEY FINDING #1

Widespread burnout is real and managers don't recognize it in their own employees



TIPS FOR MANAGERS AND SENIOR LEADERS TO LISTEN BETTER

Listening is a skill ALL of us can work on. Remember, communication is a two-way street. Leaders need to nurture open lines of communication and dialogue—that involves taking time to seek out and closely listen to people's feedback at every level of the organization.

1
Be open to new ideas and feedback. Try:

"I want to hear fresh perspectives—positive and/or negative—on this proposal/idea."

2
Purposefully solicit views from the quietest people in the room—in person or virtual.

3
Use multiple vehicles to solicit opinions: Face-to-face, focus groups, emails, employee surveys.

4
Approach each dialogue with the goal to learn something. Think: *"This person can teach me something."*

5
Stop talking and focus clearly on the speaker. Suppress the urge to multitask or think about what you are going to say next.

6
Open and guide the conversation with broad, open-ended questions, such as: *"Help me understand how you're thinking about this."*

7
Ask questions aimed not just at how the employee might feel, but also the team. In this way, the employee might feel invited to share general concerns. For example: *"What challenges might we face with the team, from your perspective?"*

8
Pay attention to your body language. The way you respond to a question will either facilitate further dialogue or possibly shut someone down. Let employees know you want to hear more through positive body language and verbal cues, even in virtual settings.

9
Summarize what you're hearing and ask questions to confirm understanding, such as: *"Here's what I hear you're saying."*

10
Listen for total meaning. Recognize that in addition to what's being said, the real message may be non-verbal.

TAKE OUR
MANAGER
LISTENING QUIZ



Ask one of your direct reports, your boss, or anyone with whom you communicate with, to honestly respond yes or no to these 10 questions. Be open to the feedback you get.





KEY FINDING 2

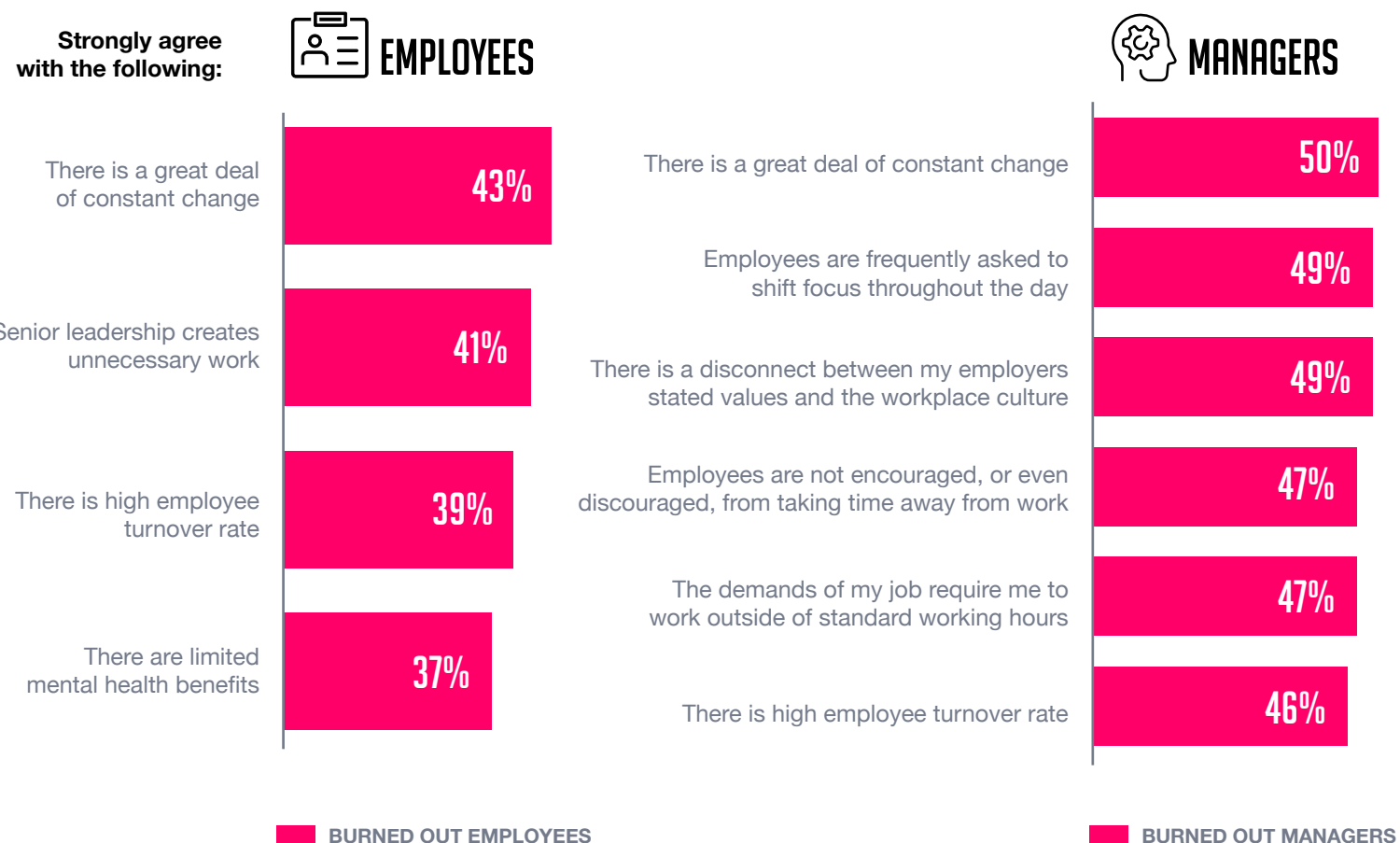
Constant change is a primary reason for burnout, with high costs for organizations

CASE IN POINT

Employees and managers are reporting constant change as the top indicator for burnout, along with unnecessary work and shifts in focus, respectively.

The cost: decreased engagement and high employee turnover rates.

Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on your experience in your current position at your primary employer.



KEY FINDING #2

Constant change is a primary reason for burnout, with high costs for organizations

PERSPECTIVE ON THIS FINDING

There is a lot of change in business today and not enough focus on streamlining, simplifying, and focusing. Our research shows that's what employees need to thrive.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Leaders need to recognize that employees are burned out and looking for them to make sense of all that's being thrown at them today. That means **managing constant change by prioritizing what's most important to focus on.** Leaders should create more engaging experiences for employees to **build the kinds of connection and meaningful work that employees desire.**



THERE'S HEIGHTENED BURNOUT INDICATORS FOR YOUNGER GENERATIONS, WHO ARE:



3X

MORE LIKELY THAN OLDER GENERATIONS

TO SAY INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT HINDERS WORKING CONDITIONS AND DRIVES FEELINGS OF BURNOUT.

2X

AS LIKELY THAN OLDER GENERATIONS

TO CITE A TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENT, AND COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD AS CONTRIBUTING TO BURNOUT.

Leaders need to be aware of this changing dynamic with waves of young people entering the workplace—looking for a stronger culture—one that feels more supportive and less “toxic.” Leaders need to help Younger Generations navigate the dynamics of the workforce, and look to break down the toxic behaviors to create a more seamless way of working.

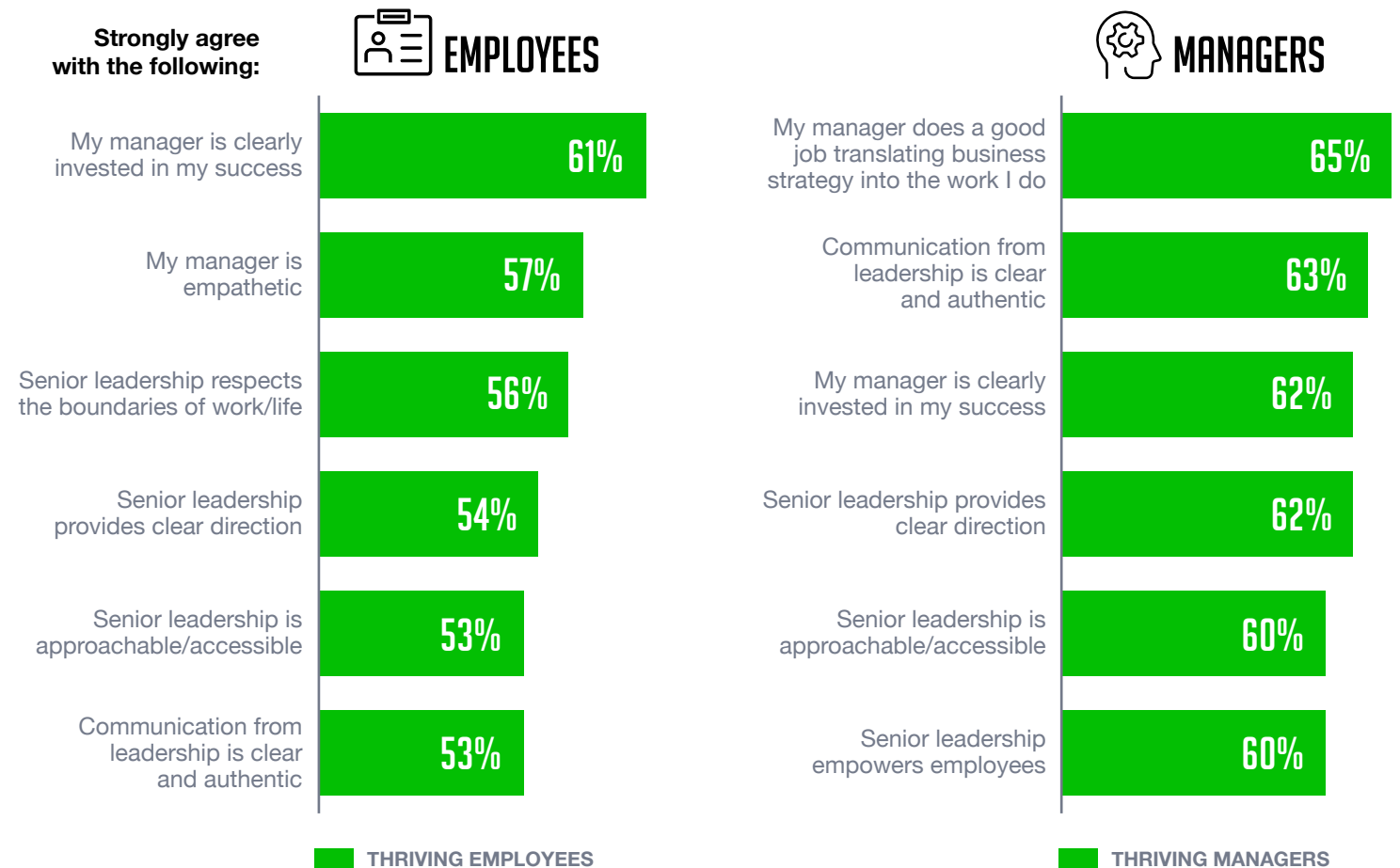
KEY FINDING 3

Managers and senior leaders have a big impact on employees' ability to thrive

CASE IN POINT

A manager **“invested in their success”** is a top driver for Thriving Employees. While this driver is also important to managers, thriving is driven even more so by leaders that do a **“good job translating business strategy into the work they do.”**

Q: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on your experience in your current position at your primary employer.



KEY FINDING #3

Managers and senior leaders have a big impact on employees' ability to thrive



PERSPECTIVE ON THIS FINDING

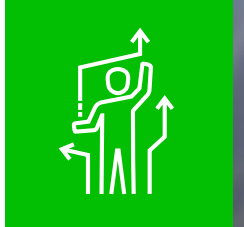
Employees and managers are clearly communicating what they need to thrive. It's all about personal investment from leaders, empathy, and authentic communication.

There's also a clear signal that managers want their senior leaders to better translate how they fit in and help them feel they are part of something bigger. Given we're living in a "permacrisis" in business and in the world, managers face increasing demands for productivity and results—often with fewer resources and smaller teams—and they need more support.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Employees and managers simply need more from leaders, who need to recognize that well-being is critical to organizational success. **It can't be taken for granted, now more than ever.**

WHEN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IS DONE RIGHT, IT SOUNDS LIKE THIS:



EMPLOYEES WILL SAY:

"My manager is invested in my success. They care about me, and they provide what I need to do my job well."



MANAGERS WILL SAY:

"Senior leadership gives me what I need to do my job well and they are invested in my success."

Putting it all Together



HOW TO BUILD A
CULTURE THAT THRIVES



Building A THRIVING CULTURE

WHAT DRIVES BURNOUT






-  Constant change
-  Asked to shift focus throughout the day
-  High turnover
-  Not being encouraged to take time off
-  Unnecessary work from leadership

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

- Mentally exhausted
- Overwhelmed in current role
- Less productive than normal
- Challenged to maintain a work-life balance
- Micromanaged

BURNOUT

KEY ACTIONS THAT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE:

-  Improved benefits
-  Offering flexible schedules
-  A workplace culture that supports emotional and physical well-being
-  More consistent and clear communication from senior leadership/managers
-  Senior leadership empowering employees
-  Senior leadership displaying concern and empathy for employees

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WHAT DRIVES THRIVING

-  Managers care about employees' success
-  Managers translate business strategy to employees' goals
-  Clear direction from leadership
-  Empathetic managers
-  Clear and authentic leadership communication
-  Approachable and accessible senior leadership

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

- Proud of the work one does
- Respected at work
- Motivated
- Supported by senior leadership

THRIVING

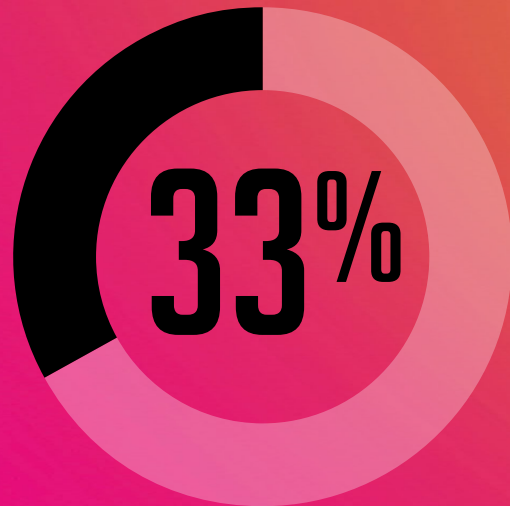
A blurred photograph of a diverse group of people walking through a modern office hallway. The motion blur conveys a sense of constant activity and movement. The background is a clean, light-colored wall with a dark baseboard.

What's Next...

IMPLICATIONS FOR
ORGANIZATIONS ABOUT
EMPLOYEE & MANAGER
WELL-BEING AND WHAT
YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Burnout is a Blind Spot...With a Significant Cost

HIGH TURNOVER



Percent of U.S. hiring managers who predict employee turnover will increase in 2024.¹ Studies show turnover often costs companies 50-200% of an employee's annual salary.

¹The Harris Poll, 2023

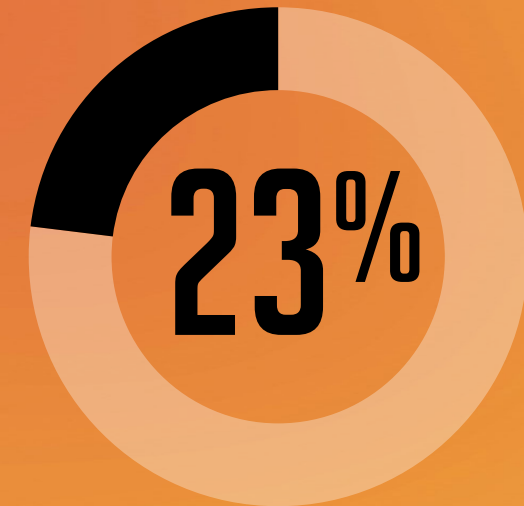
LOW ENGAGEMENT AND LOST PRODUCTIVITY

\$8.8
TRILLION

The amount of \$ that employees who are not engaged cost the world in lost productivity, which is 9% of global GDP.²

²Gallup, 2023

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE IS AT RISK



MORE PROFITABILITY was seen in top-quartile business units than those in the bottom-quartile when comparing employee engagement levels.³

³Gallup, 2023

What Organizations Can Do to Address Burnout

1

ADDRESS THE PERCEPTION GAP BETWEEN MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES:

The research showed a significant gap between how managers perceive the well-being of their employees and their actual sentiments. This perception gap can lead to a lack of adequate support and resources for those who are struggling.



2

DEVELOP ROBUST STRATEGIES TO MANAGE CONSTANT CHANGE:

One of the top drivers of burnout is constant change, which can lead to change fatigue, putting your business at risk.



3

REVISIT YOUR DNA AND CULTURE, UPDATING AS NEEDED:

The research showed that employees want a deeper connection between the stated values and actual workplace culture. It is critical that words match actions and actions match the words.



4

INVEST IN BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE:

A key driver of thriving is feeling supported by senior leadership and ensuring that employees feel as though their manager is invested in their success.



5

ADAPT TO THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S WORKFORCE:

The younger generation reports higher instances of burnout driven by interpersonal conflict, toxic work environments, and communication overload.





Actions You Can Take

COMMS PROFESSIONALS

- **Make it a priority to communicate about well-being** as part of the business strategy and as a stand-alone component.
- **Create community and clarify purpose** across all communication opportunities.
- **Amplify senior leadership communication** so employees feel connected to the direction and purpose of the business.
- **Ensure employees feel heard and feel valued by doing regular listening sessions** in your organizations, and so you can determine how big the burnout/ambivalence is.

HR PROFESSIONALS

- **Have a plan to equip managers** at the individual level by providing proper training, encouraging open communication, and promoting a culture of work-life balance.
- **In partnership with senior leadership, revisit your DNA to ensure it reflects the culture you want** and assess your culture to ensure it's bringing to life the DNA. Build a plan to close the disconnects, which may include refining core behaviors, co-creating solutions, or re-contracting ways of working across teams.
- **Create mentorship circles for younger employees**, enhance conflict resolution training, and set clear expectations about communication practices.

SENIOR LEADERS

- **Actively demonstrate your commitment to employees' success and well-being.** This could include clear communication around values, regular well-being check-ins, and an active focus on prioritization. Ask your leaders to do the same.
- **Develop more thoughtful change management strategies** to manage resistance and build resilience in your business plan. These include clear communication about the reasons for changes, adequate training so leaders at all levels are engaged, and systems that allow for feedback and smart adjustments.
- **Be diligent in prioritizing work** across your teams.



Closing Thoughts

ON THE STATE
OF EMPLOYEE
WELL-BEING TODAY

The Grossman Group/The Harris Poll research provides important insights into the widespread nature of employee burnout today. Employees and managers need a lot more from leadership to thrive, and this research should be a wake-up call for any organization seeking to promote a positive culture.

What's especially encouraging is that there's a clear path to improving the state of well-being in the workplace, and many actions that employees and managers will respond to when organizations pay more attention to helping them thrive. Top leaders need to ensure that well-being isn't just left to chance. Purposeful plans should be in place, recognizing that everyone has a role to play in building a thriving culture.

And like most positive change movements, leaders need to understand that it all comes down to something quite personal: demonstrating to employees a genuine investment in each individual's success. ■

CONTACT US

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ABOUT US

The Grossman Group is an award-winning communications consulting firm that specializes in internal, leadership, culture, and change communications. Led by founder and CEO David Grossman, The Grossman Group is celebrating more than 20 years of engaging employees and helping leaders lead with heart to drive performance.

Its team of senior **thoughtpartner**[™] consultants work with companies of diverse sizes and industries to accelerate business through employee engagement and internal and leadership communication. The Grossman Group is a Certified Diverse Supplier through the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce since 2008.

See what sets
The Grossman Group
apart from other
communications
agencies.

THE GROSSMAN GROUP DIFFERENCE

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TRANSFORM YOUR CULTURE TO DRIVE PERFORMANCE

- ✓ Increase Employee Engagement
- ✓ Improve Productivity
- ✓ Drive Profitability

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