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hit the wall. Burned out workers will be less focused, more irritable, less healthy, more likely to exhibit negative attitudes and more prone to mistakes.

Paul McDonald • Feb. 12, 2020



It's crunch time for accounting professionals and tax pros. The arrival of tax season means accounting firms are facing their busiest time of the year. When preparing for this stretch of longer hours and higher stress, managers need to make sure their plan not only addresses production deadlines but also workers' mental fitness — a concerted effort to prevent burnout.

A resounding 91% of employees polled for an Accountemps survey reported being at

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it's also important to consider how you'll engineer a work setting that minimizes burnout during what is unavoidably a stressful period.

Here are some considerations and tips.

1. Pay attention to warning signs.

Throughout the year, it's important to gauge the level of satisfaction of your team, but during tax time it's especially crucial to watch for signs of frustration that can lead to burnout. Some employees will give unsolicited feedback, but others might fear that doing so will be perceived as a weakness. Check in with each member regularly to identify stress points and develop potential solutions. Whatever small setback there is in the time this takes will be worth it in the long run.

2. Give overworked staff some relief.

One of the top causes of burnout is an unmanageable workload and long hours, employees told us in the survey. The amount of work was also the top concern cited by managers in a companion survey. While heavier workloads and long hours simply come with the territory during this critical period, you can reduce their impact by bringing in temporary professionals to take some of the load off core staff. A staffing firm specializing in placing interim accounting and finance talent can help you keep your operations at peak efficiency with less of the stress.

3. Minimize distractions.

In the survey, workers cited interruptions as one of the primary causes of burnout. While client calls, email and messages can't be left unanswered even during busy periods like tax season, allow your team to set specific blocks of time during the day to focus on critical work uninterrupted. They can then use the alternate blocks for responding to these inquiries. If disruptions are coming from within the office, let them know that it's OK with you if they post a "Do Not Disturb" sign on their cubicle

or office door for part of the day. And there's something you can do yourself that will

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technology as one of the contributors to burnout. While this suggestion can't be implemented overnight, it could help in future tax seasons. And if you decide to invest in new tools, you may have a receptive audience: Forty-five percent of U.S. managers surveyed for our [Jobs and AI Anxiety](#) report said their teams are very eager to learn about new technologies.

5. Show your appreciation.

Some firms give bonuses or other rewards at the [end of tax season](#), but consider some smaller perks as your team negotiates the path. Ordering a group lunch on Fridays or offering snacks at a central office location are two examples. Throughout tax season, also be conscious of opportunities to verbally lift up your people, commending their work in both group and personal sessions.

Look out for the signs of burnout before it's too late. Take note of this year's challenges and solutions so you'll be even better prepared next tax season.

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Paul McDonald is senior executive director at [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of 35 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

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