

3 effective ways for entrepreneurs to combat stress and prevent burnout

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A number of studies and reports aired on popular media platforms continue to highlight the importance of issues such as workplace stress, the negative impact of long working hours and the prevalence of burnout amongst South African entrepreneurs.



Elon Musk once compared the journey of running a start-up to 'chewing glass and staring into the abyss'. Many can relate to the 'blood, sweat and tears' that goes into getting a business off the ground and the sheer amount of grit that it takes to succeed.

However, in addition to principles like determination and perseverance, becoming a successful entrepreneur also involves anticipating high levels of sustained stress and putting practical, preventative measures in place to mitigate the long-term effects of burnout on a business. This is especially relevant now, with a recent study by UC Berkely revealing that 72% of entrepreneurs suffer from mental health issues.

In light of these statistics, Kgomotso Ramoenyane, executive general manager of Human Resources at Business Partners Limited, provides insight into three practical ways in which entrepreneurs can mitigate the impact of burnout on themselves as well as their business operations.

1. Make a mental health vision board

'Vision boards,' or visual representations of your goals in the form of a collage or collection of images, words and other meaningful items, have been used in various contexts as practical tools for planning and goal setting. Experts featured in best-selling books like, *The Secret* have attested to the effectiveness of creating something tangible that represents what you want for your future both professionally and personally.

However, in many cases when people speak about vision boards, what comes to mind are material or 'external' wants and needs – cars, houses, financial security, travel opportunities and body goals. While this type of goal setting is important, meeting material objectives and sustaining success in the long run depends largely on the ability to maintain a state of internal wellbeing.

Creating a vision board dedicated solely to mental health goals such as better sleep hygiene, a self-care routine, reduced screen time, a healthier diet, learning a new skill and nurturing your passions is a practical way to visualise what you want and need as an entrepreneur. Revisit your vision board regularly to keep track of whether you are fulfilling your commitment to yourself and your inner wellbeing.

2. Diarise regular breaks and time off

In an interview with CHRO South Africa, a community for HR executives, Xero's country manager, Colin Timmis emphasised the importance of "resetting and rebooting". Metaphorically, many entrepreneurs live with 'their heads down', typing away furiously, completely immersed in the task at hand. But it's essential to lift your head up, take a breath, move, converse, take yourself on an adventure and reconnect with the things that make you happy.

You can get very practical about these regular 'reboots' by putting them in your calendar – schedule your time off at the beginning of every year and work towards those rest periods. Then get more granular by adding days off to your calendar at the beginning of every month and hours of relaxation at the start of each week. You'll be more inclined to stick to the commitment to rest if you add it to your calendar.

3. Find ways to give back

Burnout is often associated with feelings of being trapped, being physically and mentally exhausted, and gripped with feelings of fear, particularly in relation to the countless unknowns that lie ahead in the future.

Serial entrepreneur and investor, Kumar Arora found that a shift in perspective can be the panacea entrepreneurs need to get out of this vacuum of concentration and endless worrying. Arora suggests that giving back in the form of charitable acts can provide the perspective you need to step away from your immediate challenges and reconnect with feelings of gratitude for what you have.

Join an organisation that plants trees or cultivate a vegetable garden in a disadvantaged community, read books to children in under-resourced schools, take a young entrepreneur for lunch and share your knowledge – these are all some of the great ways of stepping back, gaining perspective and being of service.

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