



## *Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):*

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

*Let me tell your story!*

### **Welcome Mid-July, 2019!**

*"Summertime, and the livin' is easy"*

--Heyward and Gershwin

With warm temperatures (near 30 C) now with us, and blessed by rain in the last few weeks, summer time is officially here! Saskatoon's parks and gardens have "greened up" nicely and are now a delight to our eyes!

Farmers also have taken heart in the recent reprieve from three past years of drought.

And festival season is in high swing in downtown Saskatoon. On schedule this week is the Taste of Saskatchewan!

In this month's issue, I reopen the "entrepreneurial wellness" file, visiting thoughts on workplace and professional "burnout" from American psychiatrist Richard Friedman. Most of us have suffered burnout at some point in our careers. But if you're feeling "burned out" by hearing so much about "burnout," Friedman has some words you'll want to read.

And in "Storytellers' Corner," I share some (groaners') jokes on writers and writing--ready for you to consume, alongside that ice cream or gelato!

Happy summer to you! Whether you travel far or stay close to home, I hope you have time to relax and recover from the last program year--to enjoy the easier "livin" that we all wish for from this long awaited season.

Sincerely,  
*Elizabeth*

Principal  
Storytelling Communications

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### **Article One: Summer's here, but are you burned out by burnout? Entrepreneurial wellness with psychiatrist Dr. Richard Friedman**

In a recent editorial in the *New York Times*, clinical psychiatrist Richard Friedman (professor of clinical psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College) penned an insightful article on the topic of burnout. He argues that while burnout is real, the term tends to be used too easily to describe normal (workaday) feelings of overwhelm and stress.

In reality, burnout is emotional exhaustion that persists and impairs the patient, and which comes from the pressure of having too many demands placed on them and too little control and support to meet those demands.

Friedman notes that the World Health Organization (WHO) upgraded its definition of “burnout” from a “state” of exhaustion to a full “syndrome” that results from exhaustion combined with “chronic workplace stress.” At the end of May (2019), the WHO then added the concept to its “official compendium of diseases.”

Friedman says that children, adults and employees can all suffer from burnout if they feel more than just exhaustion from working too much for too long periods of time, while also feeling that they have no control over the context and setting of the work.

Another symptom of "burnout" is when people lack passion about the work they are doing or reasons to continue doing it. One article cited by Friedman cites evidence of **children's burnout** in falling grades; reduced conversations with family and friends; falling asleep in class or after supper; being late to school by oversleeping; reporting more physical ailments, like sore stomachs or throats; and abandoning extra-curricular activities.

Signs of **parental burnout** may be similar, but include emotional detachment from their children due to overwhelming exhaustion.

**Employee burnout** is evident when they lose productivity and suffer a generalized inability to enjoy any aspect of life at work—often “living for the weekend,” and dreading Mondays.

Friedman refers to a 2017 survey that showed that employers are so anxious over burnout that virtually all Human Resource executives these days believe it will impair their ability to retain employees.

Underlying burnout is cognitive distortions, particularly perfectionism, whereby people feel that they must knock every project "out of the park," instead of recognizing that sometimes

it's better to complete a task and move on.

What interests me, however, is Friedman's observation that "burnout" is a label too easily put on routine stress and overwhelm. Heavy use of the term has developed in 21st century life more than in any earlier period—not least, due to technological developments and the breakneck pace they bring to our lives.

Friedman says when we are under pressure, we "medicalize everyday distress." He cautions that "if almost everyone suffers from burnout, then no one does, and the concept loses all credibility." The theory that explains everything, explains nothing.

The other side of this coin, he adds, is that everybody today has created and bought into the unrealistic and distracting belief that we should be happy and stress-free all the time. The only alternative to this "is a problem that needs to be fixed."

So we are burning ourselves out with the very concept of burnout (i.e. we brood about it). It is becoming an obsession of contemporary life—i.e. thinking persistently, quietly and anxiously about the stress we're under. Psychoanalysts remind us that obsession "involves an effort . . . to solve an emotional conflict by thinking, but the conclusion or solution is avoided, and the person starts the process over again repeatedly" (Moore and Fine, 132). Such futility!

Medical school, graduate school, law, other professions and high stakes businesses are just a few contexts where people may unthinkingly hit the "burnout" button, when we may be experiencing routine stress and anxiety.

The bottom line is that there are reasonable solutions for genuine burnout. It is treatable. Friedman says that solutions can involve simply learning to set realistic goals for one's work; learning to balance work with stress-relieving and pleasurable activities; learning how to make time for self-care; and at bottom, reminding oneself that perfection isn't possible (or necessary) and that learning can come even from what we view as "failures."

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) can often be helpful for "talking back to" these cognitive distortions and so getting some relief from them. Sometimes deeper therapy or psychoanalysis may be needed, if the burnout has persisted over longer periods of time.

But Friedman notes that we need to avoid and, when possible, correct, circumstances where there are "too many demands –and too little control and support" for our efforts. When it does occur, institutionalized abuse without any opportunities for redress remains *abuse* and should be dealt with accordingly.

*And now it's your turn: Have you ever suffered "burnout" professionally? How have you dealt with it? Do you agree with Friedman that part of the problem is that we over-medicalize daily stress?*

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## STORYTELLER's CORNER . . . .

### STORYTELLER'S CORNER: Words, Stories, Riddles and Jokes on Writing and Editing . . .

Overheard in a grammarians' bar: "I'll never date another apostrophe! The last one was way too possessive."

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The past, present and future walked into that bar. It was tense!

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When comforting a grammarian, always say softly, "There, their, they're!"

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I avoid cliches like the plague.

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Irony is when someone writes you to say, "Your an idiot!"

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How do you irritate a writer?

The list is to long too here.

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*Do you have a story, riddle or joke on any aspect of writing or communications? Please share it with me; I'd be delighted to use it in an upcoming issue.*

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