



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

September 2024



Chaired by

EVERSHEDS
SUTHERLAND

Speakers:



Sally Isaacs
Partner
Eversheds Sutherland

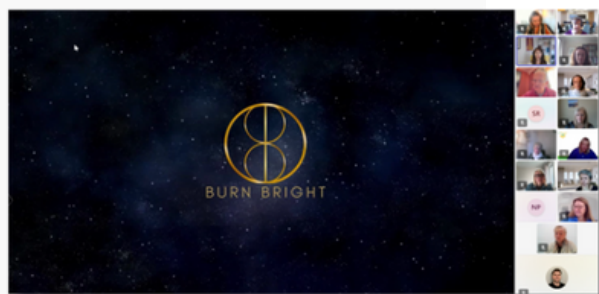


Wendy Macartney
Senior People Partner
Nedbank Private Wealth

Discussing the topic:
'Burn Bright, Not Out'

The recent HR Director Boardroom event, chaired by employment law expert Sally Isaacs and led by burnout specialist Wendy Macartney, focused on understanding and preventing burnout in the workplace. Attendees explored the science behind burnout, its causes, and strategies to manage and prevent it, alongside the benefits of applying behavioural science to shift mindsets.

Wendy Macartney, a Senior HR Professional at Nedbank Private Wealth International and a leading expert in burnout and sleep, shared insights from her extensive research and HR experience to help attendees navigate the complexities of burnout and create healthier workplace cultures. Sally Isaacs, a Partner at Eversheds Sutherland, is renowned for her expertise in employment tribunal litigation and discrimination law, making her well-suited to chair the session.



Wendy began the session by addressing the common misunderstanding of burnout, emphasising that we need to approach it from a broader perspective. While 80% of people are not experiencing burnout, the 20% who are affected may include the most influential individuals in an organisation, making early intervention crucial. Wendy provided a roadmap for burnout prevention, focusing on the science behind burnout, how it's perceived, and strategies to tackle it early, especially among high performers and management.

She explained that burnout often occurs in stages:

- Level 1: Signs include working harder, sleeping less, and becoming hyper-focused on tasks, pushing oneself too far under the assumption they can handle it.
- Level 2: Symptoms escalate to reduced patience, lack of trust in colleagues, and mental distance which is often referred to as “quiet quitting.”
- Level 3: Employees may experience exhaustion, cynicism, and complete disengagement, losing all motivation and care for their work.

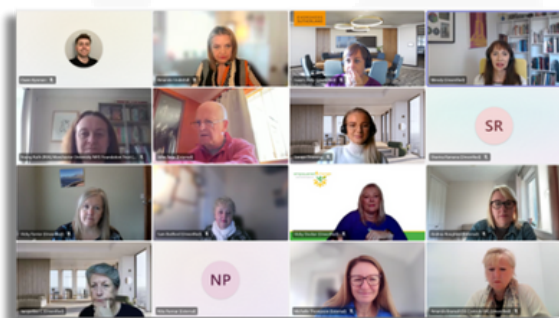
Wendy stressed that recognising these signs early can help prevent full burnout.

She underscored that if managers notice changes in an employee's behaviour, it's essential to have a conversation right away, before the situation worsens.

Sally offered valuable legal insights, reminding attendees that organisations have a duty of care to employees who may be struggling with burnout. This includes

making reasonable adjustments, such as phased returns or lighter workloads, and being mindful of performance management processes.

Sally highlighted that ignoring burnout can lead to legal risks, especially in terms of discrimination claims, which are uncapped. She highlighted the importance of applying these considerations to employees at all levels, from junior staff to senior leadership, in order to maintain a productive and satisfied workforce.



During the session, Wendy led an interactive exercise to illustrate how easy it is to miss important details when we're too focused on a single aspect of a situation. Participants were shown a video of people skipping and asked to count how many times people in green t-shirts jumped. While most people correctly counted the jumps, many failed to notice other significant changes in the video, such as the appearance of a chicken or people swapping places.



This exercise demonstrated how tunnel vision, both in everyday tasks and in how we perceive burnout, can cause us to miss critical cues. Wendy urged managers to step back and see the bigger picture, encouraging open conversations and actively listening to employees to catch early signs of burnout.

To prevent burnout, Wendy shared several practical strategies, focusing on building healthy habits:

- **Sleep:** Regular, high-quality sleep is essential. Even a 15-minute increase in sleep can significantly boost performance and improve judgment.
- **Exercise and Nutrition:** Consistent routines for exercise and diet are equally important. Regular movement and balanced meals help maintain physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Mind Management:** Wendy encouraged attendees to reprogram their minds by blocking unhelpful thoughts and engaging with positive, informative content, such as uplifting podcasts.

One of the key points Wendy made was the critical role that managers play in preventing burnout. She noted that HR departments are often stepping in to handle burnout discussions, when in fact, this responsibility should lie with managers. She stressed that managers need to lead by example, setting a tone of optimism and resilience: "We can manage this, we can navigate this."

If an organisation allows burnout to become widespread, Wendy warned, it can lead to a cultural shift where employees begin to internalise beliefs like "I'm not good enough" or "I can't do this." These negative messages can grind employees down over time and contribute to feelings of imposter syndrome.

Wendy also pointed out the financial implications of ignoring burnout. When managers avoid difficult discussions about employee wellbeing, it leads to financial losses for the organisation, as employees underperform, grievances increase, and productivity declines. Thus, addressing burnout is not just about supporting employees but also about protecting the organisation's bottom line.

Wendy closed the session by empowering the attendees: "You have the power to prevent burnout." By setting clear working and performance behaviours, engaging in open conversations, and promoting healthy habits, both employees and organisations can thrive.



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