

About Kori: I'm a life and career coach and the host of the Satisfied AF podcast. I help audiences, listeners, and clients achieve their goals and create lives that truly delight them, all without burning out along the way.

### **Beating burnout: how to do good work & feel good doing it**

First things first, this talk is going to be very helpful and give you skills and shifts you can use right away.

AND it's also essential to point out that some things will be beyond the scope of this talk.

Sometimes, when you're experiencing burnout, you're going to need personalized support to move through it.

That might be medical support, therapy, a leave of absence, working with a coach, or something else. But it's important to mention that there are many different kinds and degrees of burnout and they might require different kinds and levels of support.

That being said, let's take a look at the basics of burnout and what you can do to 1. Preferably prevent it or 2. Make your way through it if you're not able to avoid it completely.

#### **Here are the basics of burnout:**

According to research done by Christina Maslach of the University of California, Berkeley, Susan E. Jackson of Rutgers, and Michael Leiter of Deakin University, there are six factors that cause burnout:

1. Unsustainable workload
2. Perceived lack of control
3. Insufficient rewards for effort
4. Lack of a supportive community
5. Lack of fairness
6. Mismatched values and skills

To say this a different way:

Burnout happens when you try to give more than you have the capacity to give, over and over.

Burnout happens when there is no clear endpoint to your workload and you feel constantly under pressure to do more.

Burnout happens when you hold yourself personally accountable for solving big systemic problems and force yourself to overwork in order to compensate for issues that are beyond the scope of your work.

Burnout happens when what you get out of your work doesn't match what you put in.

Burnout happens when you feel alone in your work, your community, or the larger world.

Burnout happens when you work within organizations and cultures that aren't a good fit for you without any kind of buffers in place to protect yourself and your values.

And burnout happens when you witness on large and small scales all the many ways that our world and its systems are deeply unfair, often by design.

Who here has experienced one or more of these?

Living in our world at all puts you in contact with at least one of these, and chances are, you've encountered most if not all of them, possibly all within the last week.

And yet, not everyone is burned out. Some folks are surviving or even thriving, despite running into these factors on a regular basis.

Why is that? What do they know? What are they doing differently?

Looking back at the list of burnout factors, each one contains within it clues we can use to set ourselves up for preventing, handling, and recovering from burnout.

I'm going to take you through each of the factors one by one. And we're going to spend extra time on the first one, because in many ways, it's the basis for everything else.

The first factor was: Unsustainable workload.

This makes sense. By definition, an unsustainable workload is too much to keep up with.

And while you may have an unsustainable workload at your job, you may also face this issue in other areas of your life, too. Showing up fully for your partner or your effort to find one. Parenting and other family responsibilities. Keeping up with friendships. Health. Finances. Even hobbies can feel unsustainable.

So many people are facing unsustainable amounts of work in one or more areas of their personal lives in addition to in their careers. Or sometimes it's the collection overall that makes things feel unsustainable.

So what's the clue hidden within this factor? The clue is: workloads must be sustainable.

Now I get that this might sound impossible. If there's too much work, there's too much work.

Trying to do all the work may seem like the only option, but it's not. It can't be.

In order to beat burnout, you have to decline the unsustainable workload. Which means you have to prioritize. You have to pick things to do, and YES, you have to pick things to NOT do.

Everyone hates this part, but without this, there's no moving forward. If you're drowning in work in every area of your life, there's no way for you to find the time or energy to make the changes that so desperately need to be made.

So the first change is and has to be: you reclaim some of your time and energy. You pick things to delegate, do worse, or simply not do. You place limits on what can be done and you honor them.

The good news is, you already have limits. The bad news is, they're probably not in the right place yet. The limits you currently have are probably at the very edge of your capacity or maybe even past it. Which means you do as much as you can do (and then you do a little bit more than that).

This would be like spending every dollar in your budget and then putting an extra \$100 on a credit card. I get the temptation, but it will put you deeper and deeper into the red every month. In order to beat burnout, you need to come out of the red, which means you need to spend less of your time, energy, and attention.

You need to put some of that capacity into a "savings account" instead of spending it all.

You need to be mindful of what can be spent and what needs to be set aside for future needs.

You may wonder how to do this or what it looks like?

It looks like saying no or pushing back on requests and deadlines **before** you're overwhelmed and under water.

It looks like only allowing your calendar to book up 80% and saving the other 20% for emergencies. It looks like picking between two tasks that are both super important because you can actually **ONLY** do one and still have enough time and energy left over to not be completely wiped out.

Sometimes it looks like letting others be disappointed with you because they're used to you saving the day.

And the better you get at this, the more it looks like negotiating ahead of time and people getting used to the new boundaries and you doing great work without completely depleting yourself.

Then it looks like having energy for yourself after work and on the weekends.

Then it looks like resting while knowing that your sweetie is handling the laundry that needs to be done.

First you need to make a shift in how you show up and what you say yes to, but once you do that, you will reap so many rewards.

Which is to say, this is worth the discomfort of learning to do things differently.

It would be great if someone else would set these limits for you. In some places around the world, there are rules about how much can be asked of you and when people are or aren't allowed to contact you outside of work hours. These kinds of norms and regulations are important, and I hope to see more of them. But for most of the people I work with, these external limits don't exist yet, so it's an important skill to know how to create your own.

Is that fair and ok? Absolutely not. But I am not trying to wait for you to feel better until all of those things are in place.

Also, here's something I've seen again and again as a coach: many people have an internal drive to overwork. How many of you feel like that's you? I know for sure it used to be me.

Now, you probably weren't born with this drive. It was probably socialized into you as a child or young adult, maybe in the way you were parented around school or other kinds of achievement. But by the time you're a burnt out adult, the drive to always do more may feel like more of an inside pressure than an external pressure.

And if this is you, one thing to note is that you may need to be setting boundaries WITH YOURSELF as much as or maybe even more than with others. For a lot of people, this is the hardest part. They'll start out worried what others will think if they set limits, but it ultimately comes down to what they'll think of themselves.

And that is why it's essential to learn to solve this problem on the individual level as well as addressing it at the level of regulations or organizational cultures.

You have to be able to stop working before you've given every inch of energy and time you have available. You have to be able to not just create but TOLERATE a sustainable workload and protect it against all the demands and invitations to do more.

I do not recommend doing this in a cold turkey way. I think it's much easier to make little tiny baby shifts until you get to a place that feels sustainable.

If you're working more hours than feels sustainable, this might look like doing 15 minutes less work each day until you've scaled back to 8 hours.

If your calendar is frequently crammed to the gills, it might look like beginning to say no / not on that timeline to the least important requests and then expanding that behavior until you're calendar is gloriously prioritized with lots of space blocked for important heads-down work.

It's also going to come down to marketing. You need to market this shift to yourself and to those around you. You need to know that this is not you being lazy or you slacking off. This is you performing well in a sustainable way. If you think you have to give 150% to be doing enough, you'll never allow yourself to step away from that unsustainable workload. And if you never step away from the unsustainable workload, you will very likely burn out. That's a poor outcome in its own right. It feels terrible. And it's also worth pointing out that this is worse for others as well. Working sustainably is much better for you AND it's also much better for your stakeholders, colleagues, those you serve, and more.

Once you shift your workload from unsustainable to sustainable, you will feel a lot better. You will be able to do good work on the work you choose to prioritize. You will have more time and energy and headspace. And you'll be able to look at the other factors of burnout and make some additional shifts.

So now that we've covered factor one and the way it opens up space for all the other changes, let's move on to the other factors.

The next factor is perceived lack of control.

Now, here's the thing. A lot of stuff is out of your control! And it can be really good to admit that. If you're running around trying to control everything, that will be very exhausting in its own right.

The question here is: where do you have control and how can you exert it? And the next question is: how do you proceed with the things you don't have any control over?

The interesting thing about control is, it can be very easy to think everyone else has more than you. At every level, you have some control but there's some you don't have. So making peace with having limited control is a very useful thing.

As much control as you could gather, there will always be other humans and even if you have some kind of power over them, like institutional power, they have free will. You can't control them. And likewise, you have free will. Sometimes there may be consequences for certain choices, but that doesn't mean you don't have the option of making them.

The other piece of control that is always available to you is your perspective.

No matter what's going on in the outside world, you get to choose how to think about it. You get to choose whether to think "this workload is insane and will never get better" or "this is an opportunity to get really good at boundaries, even if I wish I didn't have to do that."

You get to choose whether to think “if I don’t do this work, someone will suffer” or “my job is to do what I can sustainably do & NO amount of work I do can eliminate all suffering.”

Perspective is free in that it won’t cost you money. Perspective is completely within your power because no one can control how you think about things. But it’s also important to note that most perspectives are habitual and choosing a new way of thinking about things may feel weird or require practice. That doesn’t mean it’s not worth it. It means that it is work like everything else.

It’s also VERY worth doing. And it will fuel everything else. Changing how you think will enable you to shift your workload like we talked about with factor one. It will help you use the control you do have and navigate the situations where your control is limited.

It will also support you as you address the other factors, which is to say, as you create more rewards for your effort, build a supportive community, build a fairer world, and create more balance between your skills and your values.

Do not sleep on this one, my friends!

In my experience in my own life and coaching literally HUNDREDS of people, this is the number one most impactful change you can make because it supports you in changing everything else that needs changing.

That leads us to the next factor: insufficient rewards for effort.

First of all, just existing in the world is a lot of effort. Trying to be a good person, do good work, etc. These things are a lot of work. And on top of that, I am inviting you to make some changes that may feel difficult to make.

And when you make changes and do hard things, do you know what you need?

**You need sufficient rewards for your efforts.**

Now by rewards, I don’t necessarily mean like cash prizes, although those are lovely.

Rewards can be anything. They can be things you ask for from others, such as requesting additional compensation from a work organization. They can also be things you give to yourself, to care for yourself or celebrate your achievements.

Don’t get me wrong - I love being praised and celebrated by others as much as the next person. But if others aren’t doing it, you can give this to yourself. And if you really want this from others, you can use your words and ask for it.

There are many ways to tap into reward energy. You can save up money and buy yourself something wonderful. You can start adding more micro moments of joy to your life, like a yummy hot drink or a cupcake or ten minutes of silent reading in a cozy chair.

Another way to create a sense of reward for yourself is to collect positive feedback and revisit it from time to time. Chances are, folks may already be sending you messages of gratitude. When we collect those in one place and review them periodically, it helps us feel more satisfied and appreciated.

If folks aren't sending you messages like that, you can also ask directly. Be mindful that if you ask for feedback, you may get positive or constructive feedback. If you want to know what you're doing well, you can also just ask that. You can say, hey, I'm working really hard at X. Can you tell me what I'm doing well in this area?

Take a moment to consider this and share your answers in the chat if you feel so inclined. What kinds of rewards do you like? What kinds of encouragement or celebration delight you? How can you add more of them to your life, both day to day and over the long haul?

Thinking this through may also inspire you to ask others what rewards feel good to them. You may decide you want to share with folks about what they are doing well and what you appreciate about them. You may find yourself buying a cup of coffee for a friend or throwing a party for your colleague's big achievement.

This kind of engagement with others will feel really good and it may also help you build a more supportive community, which is great, because that's the next topic on our list.

One of the factors of burnout is lack of a supportive community. Folks feel isolated and disconnected. But you're not stuck with your current situation. You can build a supportive community and have a good time doing it.

Sharing what you appreciate about others and asking what they appreciate about you is one way to kick this effort off.

That being said, it's not the only way. If connecting via appreciation doesn't suit you, there are lots of other ways.

Whatever way of connecting feels good to you, set aside time to do it. **And then actually do it.** It doesn't have to be huge. It could be five minutes a day. Tiny interactions build connectedness over time.

As social mammals this kind of connection is really important to your well being. But it does not have to be rocket science to build it. A little bit of talking and listening done consistently over time will create a bond and a sense of belonging.

The tool of perspective is really powerful here, too, especially if building community feels hard or vulnerable. When trying to build community, many people find themselves criticizing or talking down to themselves, saying things like “it’s so pathetic you don’t have friends, etc”.

That will make you feel bad and it will make it hard to keep going. Instead, try telling yourself how brave and impressive it is that you’re doing this work!

And just remember, depending on which stats you look at, 30-60% of people in North America feel lonely. So chances are, if you’re making bids for connection, the other person is craving community too. And even if not everyone you talk to is interested, you’ll probably find many who are.

Building community is like getting a new job. It might take multiple attempts to find a good fit, but if you keep going, you’ll find people and places that are a good match for you.

The next factor is kind of a doozy. Lack of fairness.

This is a big one, right? There is soooo much unfairness in the world. So much injustice. How do we handle this?

I think one question here is how do we cultivate more fairness? And the second question is how do we navigate existing unfairness in a way that feels good to us?

Because the world at large is deeply unfair, you will likely NOT be able to completely escape from unfairness, but you may be able to make changes that move you further away from particularly unfair environments. Or you may choose to stay in certain environments even though they are unfair and find ways to create joy and sustainability for yourself there because you’re not ready to leave yet.

For instance, if there is unfairness in the way household chores are handled in your family unit, how could you cultivate more fairness? Could there be a conversation leading to a new set of agreements about the division of labor? What could bring you closer to something that feels fair?

You get to decide what fairness looks like and what’s fair enough to work for you.

And there’s a lot you can change, when you are willing to have difficult conversations, share what’s real for you, and ask for what you need.

But also, given the whole of society, many things may not become fair in our lifetime. When engaging with larger social structures and organizational or institutional unfairness, then what? What do you need to move more towards fairness or to care for yourself in a world that is often deeply unfair?



As with the workload piece, it is not fair or ok that this often falls on the individual or on the marginalized group. I crave bigger changes that address fairness at a more fundamental level. But there are things that can be done individually and in small groups that can help us have better experiences even as we demand accountability on a larger scale.

Also as with the workload piece, it's important to not overload yourself with work or stress here. Overworking will not necessarily get you there faster and most of the time, will simply lead to burnout and needing to step away from the work instead.

For me and many of my clients, it's helpful here to remind ourselves that unfairness is not ok. It's not preferred. And yet, there are still ways to add value and live a good life, even with it.

The tool of perspective is powerful here, as well. How you think about the unfairness will determine whether it feels unwieldy and insurmountable or ultimately changeable if also deeply unfortunate.

This leads us to our final burnout factor: mismatched skills and values.

In a capitalist society, many of us may experience a mismatch between our values and the skills that we use to earn a living. You may feel upset about the way the world of work operates in some ways. You may be upset about the kinds of labor that are valued and rewarded with pay. You may find yourself doing work you don't prefer because that's what is available and pays the money you need in order to survive and care for yourself. Or you may find that you like your work but chafe against other elements of life in our current times. There is a lot you could feel mismatched about.

I think the question here, as with the unfairness factor, is how do you make the changes you'd like to see AND also navigate the day to day in a way that feels good to you?

Do you need to renegotiate your role within the organization to something that matches your values more?

Do you need to reskill?

Do you need to set limits and boundaries so that you can work and do well without overgiving?

What is needed in order to bring things more into balance and how do you care for yourself in the gap between what you want and what you have?

And what kind of perspectives will be the most useful to you? What will help you feel engaged, empowered, and satisfied, even in this imperfect world and our imperfect workplaces, families, relationships, etc?

Like the other factors, this is about both making changes and also finding ways to feel good in situations that are neither perfect nor entirely within our control.

But even in imperfect situations, we can find ways to leap or inch closer to our ideal and have fun along the way.

So, now that we've talked about each factor, let's review.

Unsustainable workload? Find ways to work less. You can still do plenty of good work this way. What could be done by someone else, done later, not done at all, or done to a lower standard?

Lack of control? Find and use the control you do have, including the control of choosing a powerful perspective.

Insufficient rewards for effort? Increase rewards and/or reduce effort. Ask for more from others and create more for yourself. Remember, rewards do not have to cost a lot. What feels the most rewarding to you?

Lack of supportive community? Build the community you crave. Bit by bit. Day by day. Connection by connection.

Lack of fairness? We seek, create, and access more fairness in whatever ways feel best to us. We care for ourselves and our communities in the unfairness knowing it won't all be solved in our lifetime.

Mismatched values and skills? We make whatever changes feel good to us to make. We market well to ourselves about the things we choose to keep doing, even if we're choosing to stay in unfair environments.

Now that we've covered the six factors, I want to talk about one more thing: satisfaction.

Satisfaction may seem like it's the furthest thing from burnout, but that's exactly the point.

Where we cultivate satisfaction, we find meaning, purpose, joy, and sense of well being. The factors we've just walked through are going to give you lots to think about as far as how to prevent and treat burnout as it shows up in your life and career. AND I also want to invite you to consider a satisfaction habit as an additional tool.

This will interlock with the six factors, as each is an area of your life and work where you could likely cultivate more satisfaction.

And here's the question I want you to take forward as you consider the six factors and literally everything else that will come up and demand your energy and attention.

What feels good to me about this?

How could it be more satisfying?

What's the most dissatisfying element of this?

What changes need to be made?

What perspective will create the most satisfaction in relation to this situation?

Satisfaction is a feeling, but it's also a habit. The more you practice satisfaction, the more you look for where it already exists and allow it to inform your decisions, the more it will show up in your life, career, relationships and more.

And the more you orient towards what would be satisfying, the more you'll be able to navigate your workload, the control you do and don't have, making sure you feel sufficiently rewarded, creating a supportive community, handling the unfairness of the world, and bringing your values and skills into alignment.

Am I saying this will be easy? No I am not. But is it doable? YES! And with the tools we talked about today, you can create this shift AND find a way to enjoy the journey of change.

In addition to everything we talked through today, I'm also sharing a workbook with y'all. It's called the Satisfied AF Audit and it will help you think through what's most satisfying and least satisfying in your life currently. People always say this workbook actually makes them feel much better, as it reveals what's already working well, which feels good to notice. And it will also help you create a map for what changes you'd like to make moving forward.

Now I'm going to answer questions, then I'll give you the prompts I have for you to work through.

**Prompts:**

Given the ideas we discussed, what are two changes you could make that would decrease your burnout and increase your satisfaction?

What obstacles need to be overcome?

What perspectives will be most useful in making these changes?