

# Practical work-related tasks may reduce burnout in new employees

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Managers hoping to avoid employee burnout and early turnover try to provide new employees with gentle assistance during their "easing in" period. But a new Tel Aviv University study published in the *Journal of*

*Applied Psychology* suggests that immediately charging new employees with simple, direct and meaningful tasks may be no less effective in preventing newcomer burnout.

"Our study has an immediate takeaway for managers," says lead author Prof. Peter Bamberger of TAU's Coller School of Management and Cornell University. "Instead of encouraging newcomers to seek help only when they feel that they are in need, managers should seek out opportunities for newcomers to provide practical, task-related assistance to one another as well as to their more senior colleagues.

"Our findings also warn against encouraging newcomers to provide emotional assistance to one another, for instance when newcomers try to help co-workers solve personal problems such as those involving others' relationship conflicts or problems at home or at work. These forms of help-giving appear to drain resources rather than restore them."

## **Instrumental vs. emotional help**

Research for the study, conducted by Dr. Dvora Geller of the College of Management and Dr. Etti Doveh of the Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, reviewed data collected from 314 customer service agents employed in the service centers of a large cellular phone company in Israel.

The research team surveyed newcomers during their first four weeks on the job, then for a second time five months later. The study participants were asked to indicate the degree to which, since starting their job, they had extended "instrumental help" to coworkers—giving advice or tangible assistance with regard to a technical or logistical work-related problem. Participants were also asked to indicate the degree to which they provided "emotional help," lending an ear or counselling a coworker with respect to some emotional or personal issue.

The participants were asked to assess this on a scale of one to seven, with 1 representing "very little help" and 7 representing help "to a great extent."

"For example, a portfolio manager may suggest to a team of financial analysts preparing a report on new market trends in a particular industry to consult with and get assistance from a newcomer who may have had hands-on experience in that industry," says Prof. Bamberger. "But managers should discourage those newcomers from positioning themselves as the 'in-house psychologist' for their work group.

"We know that support from others plays an important role in buffering individuals from job burnout. But our study demonstrates that newcomer burnout can be mitigated if new employees are actively involved in providing task-related, but not emotional, assistance to their work colleagues."

## **Mitigating the burnout process**

According to the study, the onboarding experience is a trying one for most organizational newcomers. New employees are torn between meeting task-related demands and socially integrating into the workplace. These conflicts tend to take a toll on [employee](#) well-being and productivity. "There's a need to identify ways by which management may mitigate this burnout-producing process," Prof. Bamberger says. "Instrumental helping involves the problem-focused provision of concrete, tangible or goal-oriented aid."

The researchers are currently researching other work-related risk factors for burnout, as well as interventions that may potentially mitigate the adverse effects of work on employee well-being.

"Responsibility for minimizing newcomer [burnout](#) falls on both

newcomers and their managers," Prof. Bamberger concludes.

"Newcomers should be proactive in trying to help their peers on task-related matters at work. Managers, for their part, should not prevent this from happening. Ideally, managers might want to look for opportunities to ask veteran employees to solicit task-related assistance from the newcomers."

**More information:** Peter A. Bamberger et al, Assisting upon entry: Helping type and approach as moderators of how role conflict affects newcomer resource drain., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000243](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000243)

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