

# YOUR BURNOUT

## #GamePlan

Unlock your Business Wellbeing: How to identify burnout and the tactics to overcome it.



***“It’s more important than ever before to bring discussions around mental health and wellbeing into the equation as we all learn to adapt to a rapidly changing world and an uncertain future.”***

***Erin Louw, Retail Capital Chief Brand Officer***



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Finding your business balance

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## 01 / Introduction

It's the buzz-word we hear time and again, but what does 'burnout' really mean? How do you know if you're heading towards it? What are the long term ramifications? How can you avoid or overcome it? As part of our devotion to the wellbeing of Small Business Owners across SA, let's take a closer look at burnout and why it's more than just another b-word.



**IN A NUTSHELL:**  
*Burnout is the result  
of excessive and  
prolonged stress*



## 02 / What Exactly is Burnout?

It goes without saying that running a business comes with a great deal of stress and anxiety, but how does burnout differ from traditional entrepreneurial pressures? ***Burnout is the result of excessive and prolonged stress, occurring when the levels of stress are so high that they overflow into lethargy, demotivation and eventually poor performance.*** It is often accompanied by feelings of loneliness, lack of self-belief and depression - and can ultimately leave you feeling like you simply have nothing more to give no matter how many breaks you take.



## The Difference Between Stress & Burnout

Stress often feels like we have too much to do at once causing heightened emotions, hyperactivity, anxiety and loss of control. Burnout, in comparison, is in many ways an opposing reaction to pressure. While stress drives us into a state of overactivity, burnout leaves us feeling helpless, disengaged, demotivated and detached.

**DID YOU KNOW:** Coined by Daniel Goleman, an **amygdala hijack** is an **emotional response that's sudden and intense** and out of proportion with the actual stimulus, triggering a so-called fight or flight response that is irrational, primal and highly reactive.

*“For those gripped with fear, anxiety, panic and rage (the known triggers for amygdala hijack and ultimately burnout) the only way to re-engage the levels of cognitive functioning and creative initiative required to effectively deal with the adverse circumstances, involves de-escalating the stress response in the body.” - Candice Cohen, Life and Business Coach*



## 03 / Are You Suffering From Burnout?

Although similar to general feelings of stress and anxiety, burnout often also causes:

- **Constant Exhaustion**

We're not talking about "I need a nap" exhausted. Burnout is characterised by feeling completely drained physically, mentally and emotionally no matter how much you may try to take breaks and relax, very similar to the symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS).

- **Loss of Enthusiasm, Vision and Inspiration**

The overwhelming feeling of despair and the inability to regain control eventually makes you want to burrow yourself into a hole and never come out. You simply cannot see beyond the stress, anxiety and exhaustion that have begun to define your life.

- **Lack of Confidence**

Everything seems to be too much to handle for what you have to give. You start to question yourself and why you cannot seem to function how you used to or how those around you do.

- **Feelings of Irritability and Frustration**

You feel like you have no control over your own reactions and emotions. As much as you try to return to 'normal', nothing seems to work and this eventually can manifest into lashing out at those closest to you.







- **Insomnia**

Further compounding your exhaustion is your off-kilter sleeping pattern or even outright inability to fall asleep. While sleep feels like the only thing that could help, you simply can't get it and eventually fall into a cycle of poor sleep, anxiety, over sleeping and prolonged insomnia.

- **A Cynical or Pessimistic Outlook**

Paired with the lack of confidence, you begin to grow increasingly negative, detached and disinterested. You have lost faith in those you used to trust and lean on and you can no longer meet even your own expectation of yourself.

- **Inability to Disconnect**

Even when not in work mode, you can't let go of how you feel or disconnect from the tasks on your plate. You feel like you're in a rapidly sinking boat and no matter how much water you scoop out, you simply cannot stop.

- **Panic Attacks**

Panic attacks are caused by excessive stress that manifests itself as a physical episode of shortness of breath, tingling nerves and chest pain. The fear induced by such an attack often leads to further mental deterioration.

- **Physical Pain**

The stress associated with burnout often leads to changes in our physical demeanour. Stress often causes muscles to tense subconsciously, such as raised shoulders, a clenched jaw, poor posture, back pain and clenched fists. These physical reactions can lead to chronic muscle pain, joint stiffness, headaches, numbness and shooting nerve pain.



## 04 / You're Burnt Out - Now What?

The truth is that burnout can have much more far reaching and serious consequences. If the symptoms continue or even worsen, you may need to take some serious timeout and seek professional treatment. This could mean months away from work - burnout is simply not something that can be cured by a weekend or even a couple of days off.

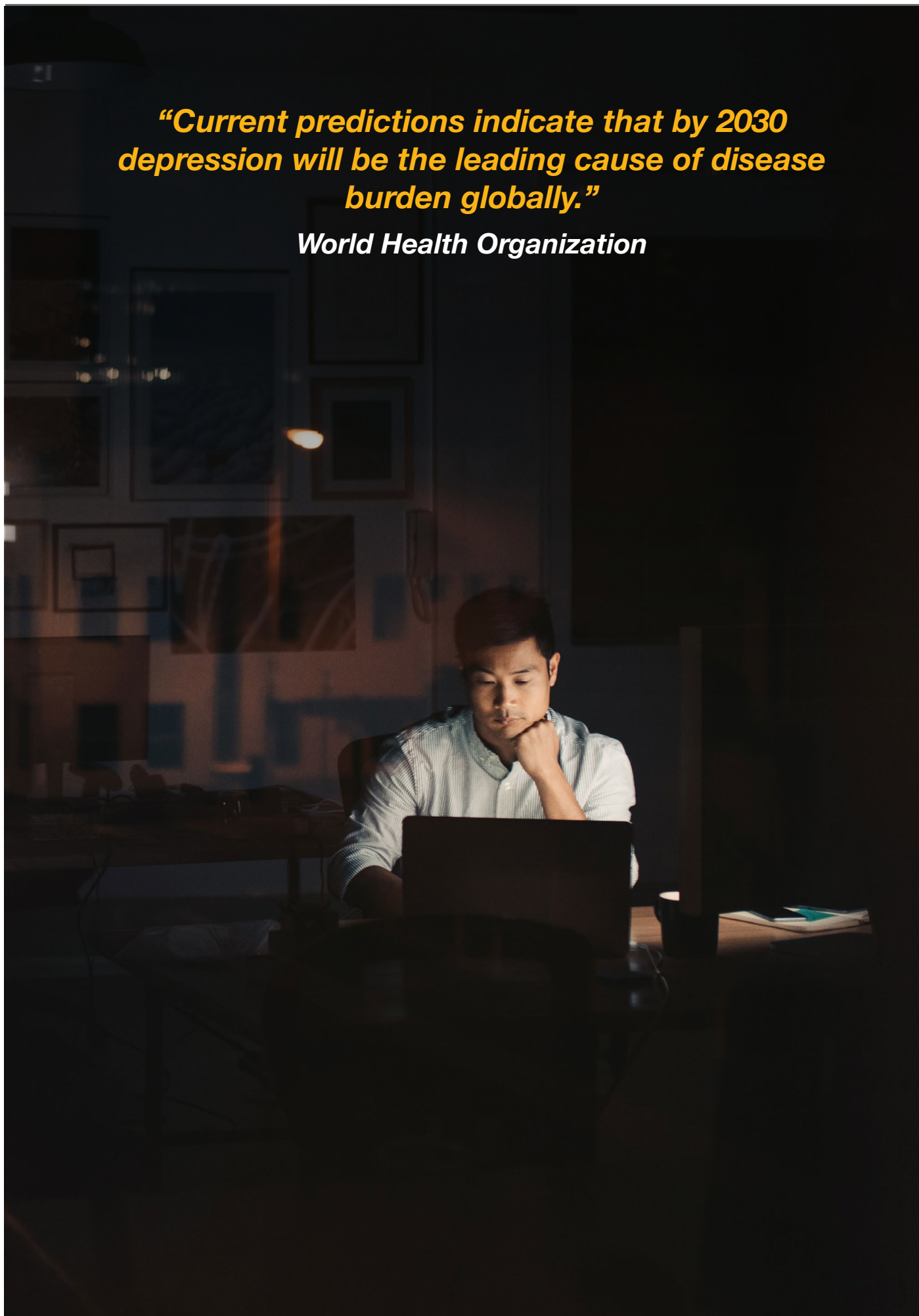
You may need to consider medication to help you cope with anxiety and depression until your stress is under control. This makes it even more important to recognise the symptoms of burnout and change your lifestyle long before you reach the point of no return.

***“The better ‘maintained’ we are, the better equipped we are to respond to change as it happens - and it most certainly happens! Self-care is the one area that we can control (which helps reduce anxiety), but keeping yourself in an optimal fighting-fit state is going to be key in facing adversity.”***

**Candice Cohen, Life and Business Couch**

***“Current predictions indicate that by 2030 depression will be the leading cause of disease burden globally.”***

***World Health Organization***



## 05 / Tips for Avoiding & Reversing a Burnout

Whether you think you may be at risk of experiencing burnout or you're already in the sinking boat, taking action against it is vital. Simply pushing on is not a realistic or viable course of action. Working against burnout requires an immediate change of direction with what is known as the **\*'Three R' approach: *Recognise the signs and symptoms of burnout, Reverse the damage already caused through support and treatment and cultivate Resilience to avoid future episodes.***

Prioritising your mental health and wellbeing is the first course of action in cultivating resistance and resilience. A balanced mind is not the result of an untroubled environment, but instead acts as a sound conscience and guide when troubles arise, recognising problems and actively working to overcome them instead of succumbing to stress. Here are some ways to prioritise your wellbeing and practice cultivating a resilient and balanced mental state.

- **Find the Balance**

As much as your business can feel like your baby, pursuing passions outside of your 9 to 5 commitments is crucial. This can be taking time to read or listen to podcasts, exercising, meditation, getting creative or simply spending time with loved ones. ***Doing things for your own happiness will soon reignite your spark and bring the passion back to your work.***

- **Prioritise Your Health**

From exercise to eating right, taking care of your body can indeed help you take care of your mind. Exercise, be it running, yoga, weights or swimming, releases endorphins, lifting your spirits, energising your body, sharpening your mind and creating an overall sense of accomplishment. Ideally, try to get 30 minutes of activity into your day, whether that's all at once or at various intervals throughout the day.



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- **Fuel Your Body**

Your diet can also have a huge impact on your mood and energy levels. Avoid foods that make you sluggish, such as refined carbs and excess sugar, as well as things that affect function, such as caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. Up your intake of healthy fats, such as omegas, from foods like chia seeds, salmon, avocado, flaxseed and seaweed.

- **Get Organised**

Coping with stress can often be aided by a little extra organisation. **Make your calendar, physical or digital, your best friend.** Fill it with all your meetings and deadlines and then block out time daily to ensure you get through the required workload. Block scheduling can also help you not hyperfocus on one task and neglect your inbox. Once the time you've set aside is up, move on to the next priority. Not having a game plan can lead to less discipline and a backlog that only adds to the already mounting pressures.



## • Push Back

We're all pretty much in the swing of working from home and Zoom meetings, but the digital revolution unfortunately hasn't been all good. Many Business Owners have found themselves putting in more hours than ever before, blurring the line between home and work, and meetings seem to have increased as they replace face-to-face interaction.

***It's important to carefully consider your working hours in the day and stick to them, as well as weigh up the necessity of each meeting to avoid wasted time.*** Can it be an email after all? Get a full agenda beforehand and push back if you think your attendance can be excused.

## • Lean on Your Team

Business Owners are notorious for the 'my way or the highway' approach, and it's not surprising that the person who does your way best is you! So instead of delegating tasks based on the strengths of your team, you wind up taking on much more than you are equipped to handle, despite employees perhaps having the know-how.

***Take time out to figure out the strengths of each of your employees, mentor them and build on their skill sets, then make them accountable so that you can rest easy once you delegate a task.***

You can also grow your team through incentivisation rather than clinging to profits. After all, it's all an investment into your business. Offer them a bonus for reaching targets, bump up their salary if they are able to efficiently and effectively execute a growing list of tasks, or even treat them to lunch if they've managed to pull off a project with less of your input.





## • Manage Company Cash Flow

Without a doubt one of the biggest stressors a Business Owner will face throughout their journey is access to cash flow. Be it having the ability to act on an opportunity or being able to pay salaries at the end of a slow month. A means to mitigate this pressure would be to partner with a Business Fundrr such as Retail Capital to ensure that your business never has to worry about cash flow again. ***Apply for Stress-Free Business Funding today.***

## • Learn How to Say No


Turning away business may seem like taboo in today's climate, but overpromising and under delivering could be much more harmful to your business than simply saying no (for now) once you've reached your capacity. At the end of the day, you didn't start your business to see how many clients you could get - you started it with a passion for what you do and doing it well, so stick to it.

## • Meditate

Meditation has proven to be highly effective at reducing stress as well as practicing mindfulness. The key is to visualise meditation as a practice, something you do regularly in order to help in other areas of your life, rather than an end goal in and of itself. Daily meditation can help you cultivate a more relaxed mindset increasing positivity, productivity and tolerance, and can even make you less inclined to revert to unhealthy habits such as poor diet and sleep.

Meditation also promotes focus and concentration by improving your ability to ignore distractions, leading to better prioritising and decision making skills. What's even greater is that it's free and open to anyone! If you're trying meditation for the first time, then apps like [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#) are designed to help you switch off, relax and make the most of your practice. ***Spending time each day to express gratitude can also be a form of meditation - a time to step back, out of the hustle to appreciate what you have in your life and business to be grateful for.***





***“I see very quick and effective results by encouraging clients to do breathing exercises for even 5 minutes a day. Within days, they start automatically wanting to do deep breathing when they feel their adrenalin rising and it has an immediate (and clinically proven) affect, not only on their heart rate and BP, but on their ruminating mind.” - Candice Cohen, Life and Business Coach***

### • **Journal & Reassess Goals**

Logging and reflecting on one’s progress is a go-to when aiming for a particular goal, and perceiving optimum mental health as a goal is no different. Journaling is a constructive way to keep track of your moods, feelings, behaviours and more, and acts as a release when certain emotions are difficult to vocalise.

Journaling can also be a very constructive activity and has come a long way in recent years as discussions surrounding mental health have been brought to the fore. Setting specific goals, asking daily questions, holding oneself accountable, logging video diaries and practicing self care have all been recommended as methods of constructive journaling and goal logging.

You can even buy pre-laid out gratitude or goal tracking journals, and for those who prefer to go paperless, there are a number of journaling apps available for both desktop and mobile.

### • **Look After Yourself**

At the end of the day, the only absolute control you have is over yourself and your actions, so use this power to make sure your own needs are being met. Get enough sleep, eat right, be active, unplug when you can and do your best to separate the personal from the professional. All behaviour can be changed by actively enforcing new habits, so although it may seem impossible at first, you’ll soon find that self-care can slot into even the most frantic of schedules.

## 06 / Developing a Mental Health Plan For Your Business

You may be thinking that prioritising your mental health as a Business Owner may be great in theory, but how realistic is it to take time out of an already taxing role? It is important to get buy-in from all stakeholders within your business and develop a workplace mental health & wellbeing strategy. As the captain of your ship it is important that you are at peak mental performance, but it is just as important that your employees work in a mentally healthy environment - which means that there is a shared positive commitment to mental wellbeing. A mentally healthy workplace is also an environment where all team members feel comfortable talking about their challenges and voicing their concerns - without fear or risk of discrimination.

As a Business Owner it is important to check-in with staff on a regular basis to ensure that they are not heading towards a Burnout. By developing a Workplace Mental Health Strategy, that all employees are exposed to during onboarding, will ensure that the team is aware of the organisation's stance when it comes to addressing and coping with mental health issues.

**Below are a few sections which could be included in your Business Wellbeing Strategy:**

### **Section 1: What is Mental Health?**

Developing a Business Wellbeing Strategy is a great opportunity to begin the conversation around mental health in the workplace. The first section of your Mental Health Plan should include a brief outline of what your business means when discussing corporate wellbeing, the difference between traditional stress and burnout, as well as signs and symptoms for recognising burnout in oneself and others.



## Section 2: Stressors

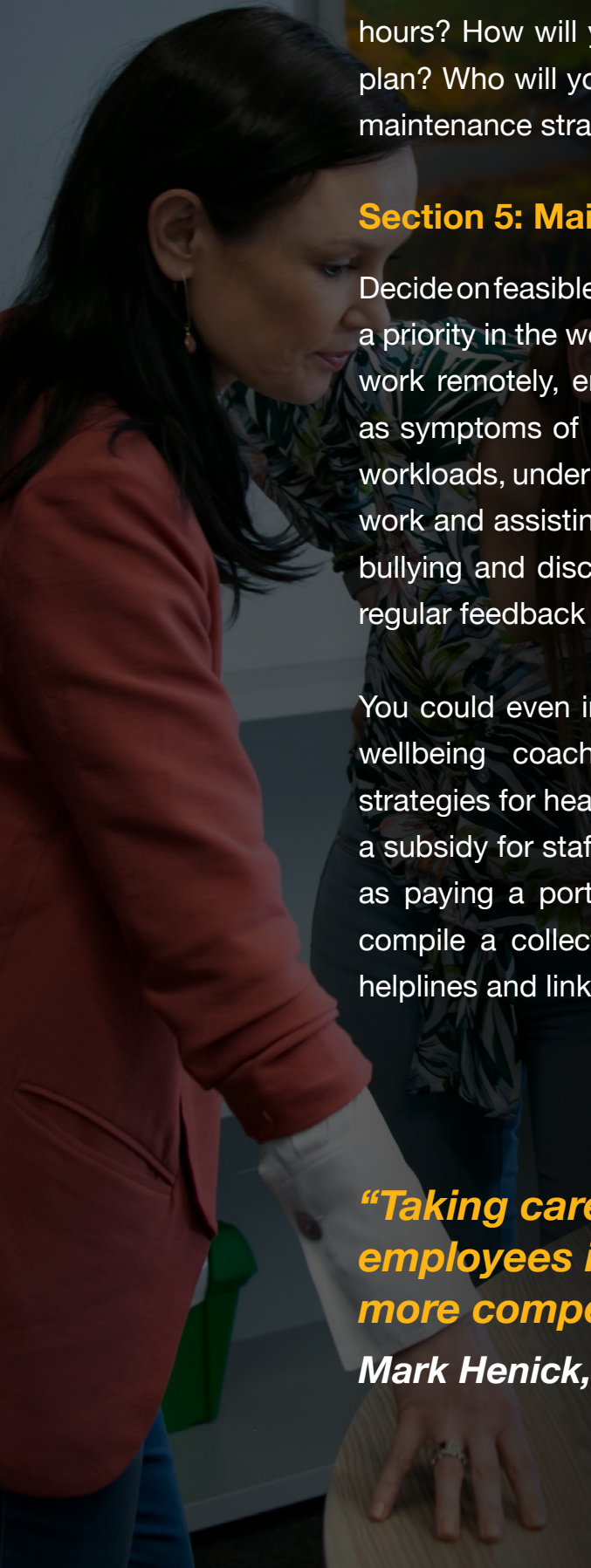
Address what factors are causing stress to you and your staff members, both personally, such as meeting one's personal financial needs, and in the workspace, such as managing client expectations? Clearly outline possible stressors, both particular to your business and industry, as well as more general factors, such as the overall state of the economy, Lockdown restrictions, stock backlogs, and how your business plans to overcome these setbacks, for example, hiring more staff, investigating new suppliers or working from home to reduce overheads.

The more prepared you are, the less stress unexpected obstacles will induce, thereby reducing pressure on both you and your team.

## Section 3: Taking Time Off

Strategise how you would cope should you or a staff member need to take time off. This can include additional training to cover various roles, outsourcing, explaining the situation to clients and finding out about eligibility for relevant grants and support networks.

Also provide a checklist for staff to help determine their stress levels, how many days they may need to recuperate, and the steps needed to implement their leave, such as a diagnosis from a mental health professional.



## **Section 4: Returning to Work**

Discuss how you or your staff plan on returning to work, after mental wellbeing leave, in a way that is supportive and that avoids future occurrences. Will you reduce your in-office hours? How will you maintain your mental health treatment plan? Who will you need to inform about your recovery and maintenance strategy?

## **Section 5: Maintenance**

Decide on feasible and effective ways to keep mental wellbeing a priority in the workspace. This can include allowing staff to work remotely, encouraging staff to seek support as soon as symptoms of burnout appear, monitoring and managing workloads, understanding how staff members approach their work and assisting and advising where possible, preventing bullying and discrimination in the workplace and providing regular feedback to staff.

You could even include quarterly workshops with business wellbeing coaches that provide practical advice and strategies for healthy stress-coping mechanisms, or provide a subsidy for staff to take care of their physical health, such as paying a portion of a gym membership. You can also compile a collection of resources, such as apps, guides, helplines and links, that employees can access on demand.

***“Taking care of the mental health of your employees is going to make your business more competitive.”***

***Mark Henick, Mental Health Strategist***

## Section 6: Implementation

Distributing your Mental Health Plan should be a company-wide procedure, possibly accompanied by a meeting or workshop to convey the importance of mental wellbeing in the workplace. Give employees the opportunity to give their suggestions for protocols and practices that ease their mental health stresses and give them access to the relevant support channels, such as the HR department/assigned Business Wellbeing Ambassador, should they have any questions or concerns.





## 07 / Conclusion

Although a movement brought dramatically into the light in recent years, mental health awareness continues to be an ongoing fight against stigma, bureaucracy and isolation, and one never as crucial as the times we face now, rife with uncertainty, exclusionism and anxiety. Our motto, “We’re In Your Corner,” stands truer now than ever before.

If you’re experiencing symptoms of stress and burnout, reaching out for help is the first step in overcoming and reversing the side effects, be that speaking to a loved one, taking time out to recalibrate, or simply making notes from this e-book to serve as reminders and courses of action.

Consider making a Mental Health Plan part of your annual company-wide strategy to not only alleviate pressure on you as the Commander-in-chief, but to cultivate a safe, harmonious and flexible working environment for your employees.

Remember to regularly take stock of your mental health, review your behaviour and interpersonal relationships, spend time exploring hobbies that encourage your physical health and creative needs and reflect on your progress as you embark on your Business Wellbeing journey.

Most importantly, we must all do our utmost to continue keeping corporate wellbeing and mental health discussions firmly on the table. Burnout should not be an inevitability. Putting yourself first should not be a final act of desperation. Join us in taking a stand against stigma and bias in the workplace.

**We’re In Your Corner**

**#EndTheStigma #BusinessWellbeing**

***We must all do our utmost to continue keeping corporate wellbeing and mental health discussions firmly on the table.***





## 08 / Sources & Recommendations

### Business Wellbeing Contributor

**Candice Cohen** is a life and business coach and has been in private practice since 2005. She is passionate about assisting both individuals and businesses to identify and achieve their purpose, with a particular interest in mental wellbeing and the impact of company culture on both the attainment of its objectives and its employee potential. You can contact Candice via email at [candicecohen@mweb.co.za](mailto:candicecohen@mweb.co.za).



### **Candice's Book Recommendations for Business Owners Struggling with Mental Health & Anxiety:**

- ***Dare to Lead*** - Brene Brown, 2018
- ***The Science of Emotional Resilience*** - Peter Hollins, 2017
- ***Why We Sleep: The New Science of Sleep and Dreams*** - Matthew Walker, 2018
- ***The Body Keeps the Score*** - Bessel van der Kolk, 2014
- ***The Energy Code – Mastering Energy in the Age of Burnout*** - Dr Ela Manga, 2017



## Support & Helplines

- [The South African Federation for Mental Health](#)
- [Lifeline South Africa](#) 0861 322 322
- [The South African Depressions & Anxiety Group](#) 011 262 6396
- [Mental Health Care Act](#)
- [Cape Mental Health](#)
- [Suicide Crisis Line](#) 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393
- [Depression & Mental Health Helpline](#) 0800 567 567 (8am to 8pm daily)
- [Mental Health Line](#) 011 783 1474

## Sources used in the development of this guide:

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- [Entrepreneur.com](#)
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