

FREE GUIDE
FOR MANAGERS, LEADERS & HIGH-ACHIEVERS

THE 8 SIGNS YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE IS HEADING FOR BURNOUT

Most leaders who burn out never saw it coming.
Not because they weren't self-aware.

Because burnout in high-achievers doesn't look like burnout.
It looks like dedication.
It looks like high standards.
It looks like being the person everyone can count on.

These are 8 signs it's heading in that direction.
Not a clinical checklist. A mirror.
Read them honestly.

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1

You've stopped recovering.

You take time off — but you don't come back restored. Weekends take the edge off but never fully recharge you. You are sleeping, but you are not recovering. The tiredness has become background noise — always there, no longer remarkable.

What it sounds like: *"I'm always tired. I just assumed that's how it is at this level."*

2

Decisions feel heavier than they used to.

Small choices that would once have taken seconds now take minutes. Important calls get delayed or avoided. You find yourself second-guessing more. Overthinking more. Trusting your own judgement less. Decision fatigue is one of the earliest and most overlooked signs of burnout — and one of the most dangerous for leaders.

What it sounds like: *"I used to be so decisive. I don't know what's happened to me."*

3

You've become the bottleneck.

Everything flows through you — decisions, approvals, direction. Not because your team isn't capable. Because letting go feels riskier than holding on. This isn't a delegation problem. It's a nervous system problem. When we're running on empty, control feels like safety. And the tighter we hold on, the more we limit the people around us.

What it sounds like: *"If I want it done right, I have to do it myself."*

4

The things that used to restore you have disappeared.

The hobby you haven't done in a year. The friends you keep meaning to see. When high-achievers begin burning out, the first things to go are the things that recharge them. One day you realise — there is nothing in your life that isn't in some way connected to work.

What it sounds like: *"I don't even know what I enjoy anymore."*

5

You're present in every room and absent from all of it.

Work that used to energise you has become a sequence of tasks to get through. You deliver. You show up. You tick the boxes. But somewhere along the way, you stopped caring how it lands. And the hardest part? It feels like a failure of character rather than a symptom of overload. It isn't.

What it sounds like: *"I'm just ticking boxes, wondering why it all feels so flat."*

6

Your irritability is increasing and your patience is shrinking.

Small things are landing harder than they should. You respond in a way that surprises even you — and then feel guilty — and then work harder to compensate. Chronic stress narrows the emotional window. When the nervous system is overloaded, the first thing to go is the buffer between feeling something and expressing it.

What it sounds like: *"I react and then think. That's not who I want to be."*

7

You can't switch off. Your mind just won't shut off.

11pm. You're in bed. And you're running through tomorrow's agenda, yesterday's meeting, the email you haven't replied to. The mental loop runs without your permission. This is not a time management problem. It is a nervous system problem. And it gets worse the longer it goes unaddressed.

What it sounds like: *"I end most days with unfinished loops. I can't remember the last time I switched off."*

8

You've stopped knowing who you are outside the role.

This is the deepest sign — and the one that almost always comes last. The hobbies are gone. The friendships have faded. Your confidence moves entirely with your performance. Your identity and your role have blurred so completely that separating them — even for a weekend — feels uncomfortable.

What it sounds like: *"I don't know who I am when I'm not achieving."*

WHAT TO DO IF YOU RECOGNISED YOURSELF

If three or more of these signs felt uncomfortably familiar — you are not failing. You are seeing clearly, probably for the first time in a while. Here is where to start:

1

Pause

Find one moment of full presence in your day. Your morning coffee. The walk between meetings. One breath before you open your laptop. Build the habit of stopping — even briefly — before the day takes over completely.

2

Run an energy audit

For one week, notice what drains your energy and what restores it. Write it down. The picture becomes clear faster than you expect.

3

Name your pattern

Are you the Controller who can't let go? The People Pleaser who absorbs everyone's stress? The Hyper-Achiever who is never truly satisfied — no matter what they deliver? Naming the patterns is the beginning of changing them.

4

Find your support

You are trying to carry this alone. The leaders who sustain high performance over the long term are not tougher than everyone else. They are better supported.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I know these signs from the inside.

I spent 20 years in pharmaceutical marketing — at Novartis, Merck, Danone. Senior roles. High pressure. Full delivery. And burnout — while looking absolutely fine from the outside.

In 2022 I sat in a conference keynote on burnout and had a quiet, uncomfortable realisation: this was about me.

So I stopped. And I did the work to recover.

I was lucky. I caught it in time. Not everyone does.

That experience is not my backstory. It is my expertise.

Today I help leaders and high-performing teams build sustainable high performance — before it costs them what it cost me.

If this guide raised questions you want to explore further — let's talk.



1

Download a free Burnout Self-Assessment

5-minute assessment · agatakalinowska.com

2

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