Burnout in the Hospitality Industry: The Case of a Restaurant Manager[2]

Summary

This case study presents a scenario about Mark Moore, a supervisory level restaurant manager who has just earned a Master's Degree in Hospitality Management. Mark is showing various levels of job burnout and must make decisions on what to do in order to mitigate these symptoms. Being an optimist, Mark believed that when he received his Master's Degree, the hard work and skills learned would ensure him a more suitable position. Mark is finding it increasingly difficult to recover as the episodes of burnout are becoming more frequent. He considers himself amongst the 'working wounded' and he is beginning to loath going to his job even though the position is relatively easy, with many benefits, and a bearable work schedule. Since he is very good at hiding his feelings, he still excels in his job. However, under the surface, he knows that he needs a radical change. Considering his education, experience, and advanced job skills, Mark feels that job offers should be pouring in yet has not made it past the first interview for any of the positions he has applied for. The aims of this case study are to generate a discussion on Mark's (and others in this situation) situation and to develop solutions to help the 'working wounded' who are also suffering from burnout.

Target Audience

Students will be required to think critically about the situations that cause burnout, the signs and symptoms of burnout as well as strategies that can be applied to mitigate it. The case study is directed at senior undergraduate level students who are studying hospitality management, human resources management, strategic management, or leadership courses. The case study can also be used in a graduate level restaurant management, human resources management, organizational behavior and strategic management course.

Explanation of Teaching Objectives

This case study presents a scenario about a Restaurant Manager experiencing burnout. This case study aims to discuss factors relating to burnout; prevention, causes, and solutions. The study also aims to discuss factors that can be used to mitigate stress and to manage burnt-out employees.

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1 This is hypothetical scenario based case study that was written for the purposes of classroom discussions. It was not intended to show effective or ineffective handling of decisions or to interrogate a managerial situation. Published materials and academic sources were used in the preparation of this case study.

By the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Define burnout.
- Discuss what is meant by emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA).
- Identify and evaluate the signs and symptoms of burnout.
- Propose strategies to mitigate burnout.
- Develop a personal plan for an employee with burnout (refer to Table 1).

Teaching Approach

Prior to class, students should read this case study and at least one of the additional reading articles provided related to job burnout in the hospitality industry. Students should be ready to answer questions related to employee burnout and should be ready to answer and discuss the following concepts:

Theoretical concepts

- Burnout
- Work/life balance
- Job stressors
- Extended work hours
- Emotional exhaustion (EE)
- Depersonalization (DP)
- Personal accomplishments (PA)
- Personal plan

Questions related to this case study

1. What are the symptoms of and reasons for Mark's burnout?
2. If you were to design a personal plan for Mark, what five strategies would you suggest to him to work on in order to overcome his burnout?
3. Should Mark approach his management team and discuss his burnout situation?
4. How can his organization better help Mark with his burnout challenges?

Phase One: Introduction (75 minutes)

1. Greet and welcome students.
2. Ask students to describe when (if) they have experienced burnout in their academic career (10 min).
3. Open the discussion by asking students about their experience(s) working in the Hospitality Industry (10 min).
4. Ask students to relate stories of their own burnout issues in their working lives (10 min).
5. Ask students to describe situations where they have had to deal with burnout managers, co-workers or subordinates (10 min).

6. Lecture with participation on the following theoretical concepts: (20 min).
   - Burnout
   - Work/life balance
   - Job stressors
   - Extended work hours
   - Emotional exhaustion (EE)
   - Depersonalization (DP)
   - Personal accomplishments (PA)
   - Personal plan
7. Have students discuss burnout issues from their own perspective. This should include ways to prevent burnout, mitigate burnout, and solve burnout issues (10-15 min.).

Phase Two: Outline (75 minutes)

1. Ask students to form small groups (5 min).
2. Ask each group to discuss the following: (20 min).
   - Discuss the background of Mark Moore.
   - Discuss EE, DP, and PA.
3. Assign the following questions to each group (30min):
   - Discuss strategies for dealing effectively with a manager who is burnt-out.
   - Discuss strategies for dealing effectively with a co-worker who is burnt-out.
   - Discuss strategies for dealing effectively with a subordinate who is burnt-out.
4. Have each group describe solutions/alternatives to the above issues (20 min.).

Phase Three: Assignment (Optional Exercise)

Each student should interview a manager currently working in the Hospitality Industry about burnout (effects, prevention, mitigating factors and support provided by their organization). Students should try to find managers at various levels to see what responses they offer. Students may also try to interview managers outside of the Hospitality Industry and compare answers to develop a better understanding of employee stress and burnout in other industries.

Phase Four: Evaluation and Assessment (Optional Exercise)

- Students should write a report on the interview that they have completed in phase three. Their report should clearly identify:
   - Definition of burnout
   - Signs, symptoms and effects of burnout
   - Prevention of burnout
   - Mitigating actions for burnout
   - Support the organizations offered
   - Personal plan

Additional Readings

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