



GRIT WITH GRACE

Under Pressure: Why We Get Burned Out (And How To Manage It)

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A New York Minute

Cruising down the FDR Drive, I felt ten pounds lighter. That unmistakable feeling hovered: The ceaseless churn, the infinitude of events and minds and souls, the millions of stories flaring up and dying away under lights that never burned out.

After fifteen years of isolation in Boston, I was back in New York City. Back where I belonged. Back where I could breathe.

It was 2011. I had turned 50 two years before, and I was acutely aware of having spent the better part of my 40s wishing I had more to do. You see, I had spent my formative professional years in New York City, and I'd grown used to its all-you-can-eat buffet of people and places and things.

In my late 30s, I pursued a professional challenge in Boston. Despite enjoying my work (after switching to wealth management) and forging some lifetime friendships, I always felt a gaping absence where New York had been.

By 2011, a lot had changed. The financial crisis pushed me to sell my wealth advisory business. My marriage was showing signs of trouble. When an opportunity opened up at Evercore Wealth Management — an opportunity to start fresh in the city I loved — I eagerly jumped in.

In a minute, I was back to my old habits. Going out every night. Networking at all hours, until all hours. Texting friends new and old at 10:00 p.m. looking for the last nightcap of the evening. Getting up at 5:00 a.m. for my hour-plus workout. Feasting on everything the city had to offer.

Was it a lot? Of course — but it felt normal to me. In many respects, stress and pressure was (and is) my comfort zone.

Then one night, I was at the Armani bar, enjoying drinks with a younger friend, checking my phone, anxious to get to my second or third event of the evening. I told her about the pace of my new life. She took a deep breath, looked me in the eye, and said, “Randy, you’re going to burn out.”

What did she know? I was 20 years older. I'd lived in the city before. I'd been a fun-loving professional for decades — I could and I would handle myself in the city.

Fast forward ten months. The wisdom of youth prevailed. I was toast.

The truth is, I've been straddling that line between “engaged” and “overextended” for most of my adult life. I'm someone who loves life, who believes in making the most of all it has to offer, and who rarely resists a challenge — all of which makes it very hard to turn down compelling invitations.



And like a lot of people — especially those of us who thrive in New York — I've overcommitted myself into burnout more than once. I still wrestle with that balance. But the older I get, the better I get at separating what's truly valuable from what's merely fun (not that the two are mutually exclusive). Here, I share some wisdom below on what I've learned about avoiding burnout — and if it happens, how to manage it.



My Top 4 Tips for Managing Burnout

1. Just say no. There are a lot of reasons why people struggle to say “No.” It’s especially true in a city like New York, where you never know who you’re going to bump into, where there’s a promise that every event might be the one that changes your life by meeting your next amazing client, lover, or friend.

Steve Jobs is known for much, including this quote: “You’ve got to say, ‘No, no, no,’ and when

you say ‘no,’ you piss people off.” Saying “No” seems difficult, if not irresponsible, and therefore almost impossible to many people-pleasers, like me.

I’ve learned that if you don’t say, “No,” you give up much. On a basic level, you give up time — time which you could use to recharge. Time, which is our most precious commodity. No one is at their best 24 hours a day. Few can really thrive on 5 hours of sleep a night. The more you commit, the more you sacrifice the best of yourself, and the less you bring to each engagement.

Training yourself to say “No” means training yourself to make difficult decisions with little data. You won’t choose correctly every time; you’ll miss out on things that you might have enjoyed. And, you’ll have to live with the uncertainty of never knowing what you missed. But you’ll retain something much more important: your vitality.

2. Respect yourself. One unexamined bit of wisdom suggests that we should always sacrifice ourselves to serve our clients. The client’s needs come first — every time.

But how well can you serve your clients if you overwork yourself and end up in the hospital? Guilty. How well can you serve your clients if you never get a proper mental break, or that Peloton ride that seemingly keeps you sane? Guilty. Is losing three more hours of sleep to serve your client *right now* really that much better than respecting your health and getting a good night’s sleep? Guilty again.

A lot of work is about self-sacrifice. But there are limits. It’s imperative that we reserve some of that respect for ourselves — for our health, our time, our needs, our wellbeing.

3. Humility Helps. Particularly when we’re young, we tend to operate on the belief that we have no limits. Sure, I could work on closing mergers from 9 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., party with colleagues downtown until 4:00 a.m., get up the next day, and do it all over. Sure, I can go to three events a night, five nights a week (that one was a little more recent).

But none of us is anything other than flesh and blood (for now). We have limits. Whether you acknowledge them or not, they’re waiting for you.

4. Honesty pays. Because burnout is an internal phenomenon, it can often feel like you're the only one going through it. Everyone else seems to be functioning well and at a high level. Everyone looks shiny and happy. So, you just have to be strong. Just buck up and deal with it.

Let me tell you: Everyone deals with some kind of burnout. Whether it's the physical burnout of overcommitment, the mental burnout of overwork, the emotional burnout of excess stress, or some combination therein, *everyone* has some experience with what you're going through.

Talk to people about it. When someone asks you how you're doing, don't emptily say, "Good," tell them you've been a little stretched lately. Ask them what they do when they feel burned out — what strategies help them get through it. It's incredibly comforting to know that you're not alone, and you'll learn some methods for keeping burnout at bay.

Run, Randy, Run

When we commit to everything and everyone else, we give others the power to shape our lives. It's easy to go through life letting others determine what we do, and along the way, becoming incapable of running our own lives.

Burnout comes from believing that opportunities are scarce. That we'll never have the chance to have this much fun, to meet this many people, to go this way again. Avoiding burnout requires an abundance mindset: understanding that you don't need more and more — you need "enough." Understanding that there's always another party, another concert, another date, another job, and that you have to be the healthiest version of yourself to make the most of it all. Saying no — with grit and grace of course — is a superpower.

If you enjoyed this blog, please feel free to share it, and to let me know. For more professional advice, consider consulting with a real professional! And, you may want to [read this recent article from NPR](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Randy Kaufman, formerly a corporate tax attorney and investment banker, is now a wealth advisor who prides herself on focusing on what matters most: clients' peace of mind, family dynamics, and getting *enough*, not *more*. Randy is a passionate student of impact investing, strategic philanthropy, and behavioral psychology (while not a psychologist, she occasionally plays one in the boardroom). She is dedicated to helping the underprivileged, and is a proud member of global venture fund Acumen's advisory board. A thinker, learner, and pursuer of overarching truths, she is always eager to discuss big ideas about money, and its off-and-on associate, happiness.