

# Are You in a Professional Rut?

Bonnie Hui-Callahan, PharmD, CDE

## Are You in a Professional Rut?

If you are in a professional rut, you are not alone. According to Gallup's 2017 State of the American Workplace report, only 33% of U.S. employees are engaged in their job and more than half of employees report to be actively looking for a new job or watching for openings.<sup>(1)</sup>

Maslach and Jackson define burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people-work’ of some kind.”<sup>(2)</sup> Lack of resources, poor management, pressure to meet business targets, and feeling undervalued contribute to pharmacist burnout and job dissatisfaction. Furthermore, those who work in direct patient care and regularly experience negative patient interactions are more susceptible to frustration and loss of pride in the profession. Pharmacist burnout can lead to reduced quality of care, absenteeism, low organizational commitment, turnover, and job dissatisfaction, which in turn can severely impact one's career, workplace, and the profession.<sup>(5)</sup>

If you find yourself in a professional rut, here are some ways to respond to being at this stage in your career:

## Excel in your current role

During my time as a district clinical coordinator, I met a technician who was well known for actively billing MTM claims that enabled her store to be the highest-performing store in MTM month after month. She wasn't the lead technician, nor was she told she had to do it; she simply took her own initiative to learn how MTM worked and aimed to excel at it. When I later transitioned to pharmacy manager, there was an opening for a lead technician. When this technician's application came through, I knew that I wanted her in that position. Excelling in your role and expanding your current skillset may not always lead to a promotion but will add to your reputation as a highly competent individual no matter what job title you have.

## Find joy in the small things at work

If the day-to-day tasks of your job aren't too invigorating, find something within your workday that drives you internally. It can be as small as sharing a cup of coffee with a coworker first thing in the morning. If one of your patients shows up to the pharmacy counter, maybe take the time to catch up with him or her between verifying prescriptions. Building a relationship of trust with patients can help boost job satisfaction.<sup>(6)</sup> Or if there is an opportunity to precept student pharmacists, guide them into the benefits of your role. Whatever it may be, embrace it so you can get through your day with joy rather than angst.

## Foster a passion for something outside of work

Fostering an outside passion is important to help keep your work-life balance in check. You may not currently be in a season where your job is an integral part of your life. Fostering a passion or having a hobby outside of work is crucial to keeping you internally motivated. My family — my husband and my kids — keeps me not only busy outside of work but also motivates me to do my job well and in a timely fashion so I can be present with them afterwards. Interestingly, one study found that pharmacists with three or more children had lower depersonalization levels and were less susceptible to emotional exhaustion at work than those with no children.<sup>(7)</sup> For others, it may be participating in a sports league, couponing, writing, or starting a side hustle.

## Keep your options and eyes open in your career

Landing a job nowadays largely stems from being at the right place at the right time and knowing the right people. To that end, it is good practice to job search regularly and keep your resume/CV and LinkedIn profile current. Apply for positions that spark your interest, even if they may seem slightly beyond your experience level. Doing so on a regular basis will keep you abreast of outside opportunities and help you sharpen your interviewing and networking skills. Even if you don't meet all of the job requirements for a posting, employers may be willing to make exceptions if you are an otherwise highly qualified candidate.<sup>(8)</sup> Prior to my previous job, I did not have much experience in managed care; however, bolstering my application with my experiences as a student leader along with a strong referral from a colleague whom I knew through professional organizations helped land me that role.

## If you're in a toxic environment, make your exit plan

If you're in a position at your current employer that makes you question your integrity and your concerns go unheeded, it may be time to look for a job elsewhere. Likewise, if your boss has unrealistic expectations or you've lost trust or respect in the leadership of your institution, it may make sense to reassess your place of employment. Issues with management and the system, inadequate resources and services, and emotional constraints of the work setting are among the most common work-related problems for healthcare workers.<sup>(9)</sup>

Even so, leaving your job is a hard decision to make, but it starts with assessing your priorities to determine what job fits you best in your current season of life. Because I am a mother with young children, it's important to me that my job has regular workday hours so I can pick up my kids in the evenings and spend weekends with them. However, for others, priorities may involve the ability to travel, advancing your career within a certain time frame, minimal commute time, or in-depth clinical experience.

If you decide to stay where you're at, take a deep breath and embrace your job by making the most out of the experience while you're there. When we took the Oath of a Pharmacist upon graduation from pharmacy school, we vowed to not only uphold our ethical compass but also to apply our knowledge and skills to the best of our abilities, advocate for patient care, and foster the next generation of pharmacists.<sup>(10)</sup> To me, this means representing the profession wherever I go, whether it's within my day job or outside of it. To that end, will you join me in upholding this Oath as we work through any professional ruts we may encounter along the way?

## About the Author

Bonnie Hui-Callahan, PharmD, CDE is Assistant Director of Experiential Education at Chapman University School of Pharmacy in Irvine, CA. Her prior roles included Clinical Product Manager at OptumRx in Irvine, CA and pharmacy manager at Kroger Pharmacy in Dayton, OH. Dr. Hui-Callahan has no bias to report.

## References

1. Gallup. State of the American Workplace. Gallup, Inc. 2017.
2. Maslach C, Jackson SE. Maslach Burnout Inventory, 2nd ed. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1986.
3. Eden M, Schafheutle EI, Hassell K. Workload Pressure Among Recently Qualified Pharmacists: An Exploratory Study of Intentions to Leave the Profession. *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice*. 2009 Jun;17(3):181-7.
4. Rahim H, Shah B. Pharmacy Students' Perceptions and Emotional Responses to Aggressive Incidents in Pharmacy Practice. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*. 2010;74(4):61.
5. Gupchup GV, Singhal PK, Dole E, Lively BT. Burnout in a Sample of HMO Pharmacists Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. *Journal of Managed Care Pharmacy*. 1998 Sept/Oct;4(5):495-503.
6. Ross M. Voices of Pharmacy: Job Satisfaction Among Pharmacists. *Pharmacy Times*. [http://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/career/2015/pharmacycareers\\_august2015/voices-of-pharmacy-job-satisfaction-among-pharmacists](http://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/career/2015/pharmacycareers_august2015/voices-of-pharmacy-job-satisfaction-among-pharmacists). Published August 5, 2015. Accessed November 27, 2017.
7. Gupchup GV. A National Study of Burnout Among Health Maintenance Organization Pharmacists [thesis]. Toledo, OH: University of Toledo, 1993.
8. O'Shea T. 7 Job Search Tips for New Pharmacy School Graduates. *Pharmacy Times*. <http://www.pharmacytimes.com/contributor/timothy-o-shea/2016/07/7-job-search-tips-for-new-pharmacy-school-graduates?p=1>. Published July 12, 2016. Accessed November 30, 2017.
9. Taylor B, Barling J. Identifying Sources and Effects of Career Fatigue and Burnout for Mental Health Nurses: A Qualitative Approach. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*. 2004 Jun;13(2):117-25.
10. American Pharmacists Association. Oath of a Pharmacist. 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.pharmacist.com/oath-pharmacist>.