

**SIX-MONTH CHECKUP
EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF
JUDICIAL BURNOUT
BY
ISAAH M. ZIMMERMAN, PhD**

DATE: _____

TRUE FALSE

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. I feel tired after hearing three or four cases in a row. |
| T | F | 2. I often daydream of earning a good living in some other way. |
| T | F | 3. I am easily irritated, and generally feel impatient. |
| T | F | 4. Despite my efforts, I find that my attention wanders a lot. |
| T | F | 5. I delay in picking up the ringing telephone, or in asking my secretary for messages. |
| T | F | 6. I feel isolated from the mainstream of current legal thought and administrative innovation in the judiciary. |
| T | F | 7. I consistently delay returning troublesome calls. I search out the pleasant calls among messages and return them right away. |
| T | F | 8. I care little about the outcome of most trials. |
| T | F | 9. I believe that the concerns of most litigants are banal and exaggerated. |
| T | F | 10. I allow myself to tolerate boredom, without trying to initiate some relevant and stimulating dialogue. |
| T | F | 11. I let others ramble on excessively while I rationalize that they ought to be allowed to get to the point in their own way. |
| T | F | 12. I cannot wait for the day's work to end. I terminate proceedings a little early. |
| T | F | 13. I realize I am too heavily burdened with committee and other commitments. |
| T | F | 14. I cringe at the prospect of night or weekend calls. |
| T | F | 15. I am reluctant to be socially identified as a judge. |
| T | F | 17. I neglect record-keeping. |
| T | F | 18. I feel impotent when colleagues are procrastinators. |
| T | F | 19. I have let office correspondence and memos lay about. Some are never even answered, but not deliberately. |
| T | F | 20. I sometimes think I behave inappropriately without much concern about being challenged or censured. |
| T | F | 21. I am impatient at meetings. Instead of attempting to facilitate or enliven discussion, I tend to be either too directive or too withdrawn. |
| T | F | 22. I have largely given up explaining or speaking up about the nature of my work. |
| T | F | 23. I feel cynical about the motives of my colleagues. |
| T | F | 24. I increasingly feel supremely confident about my own motives and reasoning. |
| T | F | 25. I never ask a respected colleague to critique my work. |
| T | F | 26. My social isolation has increased to the point where I cannot recall who among my old friends is still alive. |

- T F 27. I have an answer or approach for most questions.
- T F 28. I find that 15 minutes are usually more than enough for a 30 minute hearing.
- T F 29. I seem to glance at my watch a lot.
- T F 30. I feel that basically people do not change and that the human condition is rather hopeless.
- T F 31. I have no desire to write anything about my work as a judge.
- T F 32. My day-dreams are increasingly concerned with money/security, sex and peace.
- T F 33. After verbally making an appointment or promise, I often forget to write it down.
- T F 34. Shortly after my work day begins, I think about what I will have for lunch, or about the little chores I will squeeze in.
- T F 35. I often feel physically exhausted or "wiped out".
- T F 36. I have diminished interest or curiosity about the fate of my former colleagues.
- T F 37. Holiday greetings, Christmas cards, etc., have become a nuisance.
- T F 38. It's not funny any more. At work, I seldom seem to laugh when others do.
- T F 39. Every case in a particular category starts to sound the same. I've heard it all before.
- T F 40. I seldom have time to see my friends.
- T F 41. My reaction to pleas of urgency is increasingly numb.
- T F 42. I feel little empathy for others.
- T F 43. I keep people waiting while I finish reading a magazine.
- T F 44. While others are talking, I stare at and admire my collection of framed degrees and awards.
- T F 45. My notes are perfunctory: I largely rely upon my memory and my clerk's memoranda.
- T F 46. I have difficulty recalling details in cases. I wait for others to start the discussion and fill me in.
- T F 47. When meeting lawyers and court staff outside of the court, I often fail to recognize them.
- T F 48. I have stopped fighting administrative battles. Let them do it their way; it's not worth the struggle.
- T F 49. I feel that my present appointment holds my last chance to advance professionally or socially.
- T F 50. I find that only cases involving the wealthy, the powerful, or the big corporations command my full attention.

SUGGESTED SELF-SCORING GUIDE

If Total Marked T (True) is: Above 35: Probably experiencing burnout. Between 26-34 In danger of burnout. Below 26: Coping satisfactorily.

DATE OF NEXT CHECKUP: SIX MONTHS _____

PERSONAL BURNOUT PREVENTION PLAN

BY ISAJAH M. ZIMMERMAN, Ph.D.

SELECT ONLY ONE ACTION FROM EACH TRACK

THEN UNDERTAKE ALL FOUR ACTIONS TOGETHER OVER A TWO-WEEK PERIOD.

I. PREVENTIVE ACTION TRACKS

A. Professional Track (Choose only one)

1. Discuss your thoughts and feelings about your work with your closest friend and spouse.
2. Resign from one committee or board.
3. Read one book in a totally unfamiliar field or topic.
4. Ask a respected law professor or colleague to critique a sample of your recent writing.
5. Tell several close colleagues that you are going through a period of important personal reassessment. Do not be apologetic, defensive or humorous about it.

B. Personal Track (Choose only one)

1. Meditate, pray or simply relax, with eyes shut, for a brief period twice each day.
2. At home, finish one house-repair or gardening project.
3. By telephone, "visit" and chat with three friends you have not seen for a long time.
4. Ask your spouse to be the initiating and active partner in sex and affection for two weeks.
5. Go through your family photo albums. Think about the course of your life, and discuss it with your family.

C. Physical Track (Choose only one)

1. Do an alternating tensing and relaxing exercise for three minutes, twice each day.
2. After medical consultation, start light jogging, walking, or swimming daily.
3. Arrange not to be disturbed, and take a short nap daily in the office or as soon as you come home.
4. Cut out all sugar and salt in your diet. Limit coffee, tea and liquor to two drinks a day.

D. Administrative Track (Choose only one)

1. Exchange your briefcase for a larger in-basket, and take no work home.
2. Take an hour off each week to visit around your courthouse and get acquainted with the people who work there. Show an active interest in their job and its problems.

3. **At the end of each day, take fifteen minutes to talk the day over with your whole staff, and go over plans for the next day.**
4. **Find funds and time for a course or workshop not directly related to your work a “mini-sabbatical.”**
5. **Invite your administrative staff to two “brainstorming” sessions (one week apart) where no ideas will be criticized during the sessions.**

II. RESULTS (Write in brief comments at the end of the two week period)

- A. **What I Learned About My PROFESSIONAL Self.**

- B. **What I learned About My PERSONAL Self.**

- C. **What I learned About My PHYSICAL Self**

- D. **What I learned About My ADMINISTRATIVE Self.**

Put your insights into action.

Repeat the Plan by choosing other actions for two-week periods throughout the year. Be sure to write down the results.

**USED BY PERMISSION FROM ISAIAH M. ZIMMERMAN, Ph.D.
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