



## Wellbeing Insights

### Being Overwhelmed Is a Signal, Not a Sentence

In recent times, 'burn-out' has featured prominently in the media. Back in January, New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, resigned declaring she 'didn't have enough left in the tank', and now this week, Mark McGowan, stands down as West Australian Premier citing exhaustion as a key reason and that he is 'tired, extremely tired'. At the same time, this past fortnight has seen two experienced senior AFL coaches step away from the game. Alastair Clarkson has taken indefinite leave to 'focus on physical and emotional wellbeing' and Damien Hardwick made the decision to resign stating it just 'became too much'.

I think we can readily empathise with leaders (be it in politics, sport, religion, or business) feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of their jobs. The weight of responsibility, the constant levels of scrutiny, and the relentless mental and physical demands must at times feel like a long-term sentence that needs to be endured. I suggest, however, that feeling overwhelmed, or burnt-out, is not an experience for leaders alone. Unfortunately, it is a relatively common experience for people in all walks of life across a myriad of professional and personal roles. According to recent research, approximately 30% of workers will develop burnout at some stage of their work career, and similar rates are found in people who have demanding home care responsibilities. So, what can 'we' do?

For all of us, whether experiencing early signs of being overwhelmed or not, I recommend reading and researching the topic of burnout. A leading expert in this field is Australian psychiatrist, and founder of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker AO. A quick search will uncover a wide range of available resources from Gordon, including video clips, podcasts and his 2021 co-authored book titled 'Burnout: A guide to identifying burnout and pathways to recovery'. Hopefully, within your research you uncover advice and strategies for managing excessive work demands. A key goal here is to recognise early signs of burnout and to proactively respond to such signals.

Personally, I have found my manifesto – my expression of who I am, what I stand for, and the direction I wish to take in life – to be incredibly helpful in demanding and challenging times. My current, unique, personal manifesto has an opening stanza which reads: 'I actively seek to live a balanced life – where I am present, hands-on, supportive, and loving towards my wife, my children, my family, and my close friends.' The inclusion of the phrase 'balanced life' guides many of my daily decisions.

I hope that through your own research, through talking to a trusted colleague or professional, and through expressing your personal manifesto that you are able to 'see' your signals of overwhelm as temporary and not a long-term sentence. Our love, hope, and best wishes goes out to anyone currently experiencing excessive work and/or personal demands.