

# Finding Balance And Keeping Burnout At Bay

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Dean Higbee, owner, South Branch Nursery, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Landscape business owners are hardworking, tough-minded, and they aren't usually intimidated by the demands or challenges that come with responsibility. While these characteristics fuel an owner's success, constant determination and perseverance can tire even the strongest person.

Dean Higbee, owner, [South Branch Nursery](#), Murfreesboro, Tennessee, recognizes

this.

"I'm not perfect," he says, describing the many challenges of constantly trying to keep up. "I broke my ankle and had surgery and had to sit on my butt for six to eight weeks. I've had guys get hurt on the job and dealt with worker's compensation or had guys cause damage on the job and had insurance cover it. I've had vehicles stolen from my shop and break-ins. I've had weather destroy some of our green houses. I've lost more than \$80,000 of inventory that wasn't insured in a flood. During the recession, I doubled down when new construction work went away.

"When you get burnt out, you stop wanting to answer the phone or see people," Higbee adds. "I have felt that way. I fell into a little bit of a depression."

Today, the company is just shy of \$7 million in revenue and employs 90 people. Back in 2006, the company had 115 to 120 employees and similar revenue but the recession forced a focus on efficiency. Higbee says the result is a more profitable company.

Battling the daily grind without a break or some form of recovery is just not sustainable without experiencing some measure of burnout, says Glenn Smith, owner and CEO, [Glenn Smith Executive Coaching](#).

"You're human," he explains. "You're not immune. As humans, we must develop routines that will enable us to replenish ourselves. We must renew our minds, our emotions and our bodies. We must recharge."

The best ways *Turf* readers deal with burnout include embracing activities they find interesting and restorative, such as hunting and fishing (51 percent), taking three-day weekends or short vacations to reduce stress (42 percent); taking regular breaks, such as lunch away from work or afternoon walks, etc. (31 percent); reducing exposure to regular job stressors (28 percent); and limiting the use of smartphones/devices after work hours (26 percent).

Unfortunately, 22 percent of survey respondents don't know how to deal with burnout.

"When there's so many things going on at the same time, you get to a point where your head can't function the way it's supposed to," Baldi shares. "Solving problem after problem and putting out fires and dealing with employees and customers and money – all of that doesn't leave you time to think about how to get out of the hole you're in and move on."

✖ Avery Augustine, a tech company manager and contributor to The Muse career advice website, agrees. "After eight or more hours at work every day, it'd be nice to go home, lounge on the couch and fall asleep by 9 p.m., but let's face it: That's not always possible," she says. "And when you don't get that proper downtime, your stress level never has the chance to return to normal before morning rolls around again – creating a never-ending cycle of anxiety. So, it's important to evaluate how you spend your time outside of work and

make sure it's not adding to your feelings of frustration."

Higbee finds balance by taking his kids to school every morning. "And I make sure my nightly conversations with family aren't work involved," he adds. "I don't bring problems home. I don't verbalize my problems to my family. I also have a hobby, and that brings balance into my life – I enjoy playing golf."

Business coach Smith says, "you must break the cycle that is leading to exhaustion. Change your schedule. Change your routine. But, most importantly, begin changing your mindset. Without a change in your thinking, there will be no change in your habits, particularly those that are leading to burnout."

Start with 30 minutes for lunch, Augustine suggests. "When you can't get away from work long enough to scarf down a sandwich, it's not surprising that you'll start to feel the effects of burnout," she says. "To fight that feeling of fatigue, I've made it more of a priority to at least take some sort of break during the day. Even if it's only 30 minutes, that half hour of peace and quiet helps me get back on track to finish the day feeling re-energized. As a bonus, it helps me encourage my employees to make decisions on their own."

Feeling a lack of work-life balance? Isele recommends shifting some business responsibilities to others to make more time for loved ones, friends and favorite leisure activities. "A key to keeping your energy up is methodically delegating or outsourcing routine tasks so you can enjoy other aspects of life," she says.

For landscape professionals who need a longer break, Smith suggests taking a personal strategic retreat every 90 days to refocus and recharge. "This is a powerful tool for developing the right mindset and the right habits for long-term health, joy and success," he says.

When all else fails, Higbee looks to faith and stops for a minute to assess the true situation he's in, realizing that others have it much worse. "When I start to feel sorry for myself, I look around and I almost kick myself because I realize there are people facing worse situations than me and it amazes me how positive they are," he says. "I realize I am truly very blessed. And that usually snaps me out of it."