What was the feedback from our pilot group?

"Thanks Tony, for your game changing workshop. After being challenged and through self-discovery I realised I was putting myself under more stress than I was aware. After your workshop I went home and had some confronting discussions with my family and 9 weeks later when I checked in with my teenage daughters I was told, "Mum you are more engaged with us at home and yes we have noticed that you are often home earlier and you know what is going on in our lives again" (confronting words to hear as a parent). It is the first time I have done PD where it has been all about me. Thank you, Tony, what a gift you have given me... my life back." --Sue Howard, Teacher years 5-6

"No more yoga, no more sleepless nights! What a life-change, an attitude readjustment and reframed thinking I now have after a day with you. It has been so useful to look at how to build a fence at the top of the cliff - rather than to keep calling the ambulance at the bottom. To be looking at and focusing on those stressors and burnout has made a such a difference to everything - my relationships, my work, and to my wellbeing. If people knew that looking at upstream pressures can transform thinking about hope, resilience, efficacy and optimism. Thank you, thank you, thank you... (I actually still do yoga but for enjoyment and peace, not for a 'cure' or a necessity!)" --Lynley Cummack, Team Leader years 1-2

"Your PD has opened my eyes to how important my wellbeing is! It is okay to say "no" and put myself and my family's needs first." --Kirsty Hay, Teacher years 1-2

"Tony your work has given me the belief that I will get there! You have raised my self-awareness. I don't own others actions or behaviours... I no longer feel I need to "fix" things. Thanks for your amazing PD. I have really enjoyed being given the opportunity to be a part of it." --Gregg Smith, Teacher years 4-3

"Tony you were fabulous. You really made me think about myself, my wellbeing and recognising what the stressors are in my life and now I have the goal of working towards eliminating them. Loved the day ... I loved how you made me think, challenged my thinking and made me question every decision I make. I have made changes since being with you... enough to make a difference." --Danielle Donehue, Teacher years 5-6

"Tony, the professional learning you provided has been so powerful and profound for our pilot group that we are seeking ways for you to work with our teachers who have not yet had the opportunity." --Mike Anderson, Principal

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Is it Stress Management you're after – or Stress Prevention?

Are you interested in investing in your own, your teachers' and your leaders' psychological capital to better fend off the threat of workplace pressure turning into stress?

Are you seeking long-term sustainable stress prevention 'top of the cliff' solutions to help teachers as opposed to short-term 'bottom of the cliff' managing stress solutions?

If your answers are 'yes' and you're thinking of your leadership team, your staff, or both, and you are interested in finding out more, please contact us. We'd be happy to answer your questions and support you in this developing area of interest.

Tony Burkin
021 729 008
t.burkin@interlead.co.nz

Judith Price
021 805 715
j.price@interlead.co.nz

Stephen Hensman
027 364 7094
s.hensman@interlead.co.nz

John McLellan
021 729 009
j.mclellan@interlead.co.nz

Andrew Ormsby
021 222 1700
a.ormsby@interlead.co.nz

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Preventing pressure at school from becoming anxiety, stress and burnout

Workplace pressure, anxiety, stress and burnout – the research

Stress and pressure are not the same things.

Workplace stress is the result of not managing workplace pressure, which if left unchecked, can become burnout.

An increasing body of evidence shows turning workplace pressure into stress is a choice and it's entirely preventable.

Stressors at school may include pushy parents; resourcing and budgeting constraints; tight deadlines; student poverty and neglect; non-routine learners; Ministry of Education demands; building and property; an Education Review Office visit; interpersonal conflict with or between colleagues; a dysfunctional team department or faculty; Kāhui Ako commitments; staff shortages and absences; acclimatisation to new flexible innovative learning spaces; new professional learning and development initiatives; a newly established Board of Trustees or problematic Board, and preparing for a challenging performance conversation with a colleague.

Research reveals only 9% of the population will remain stress free when confronted with these sorts of workplace stressors. 91% of the population will experience degrees of confusion, feelings of being overwhelmed, and stress.

What secrets do this 9% possess? How do they safeguard their mental health in the face of everyday workplace adversity? If 9% of people skilfully avoid converting workplace pressure into stress and have less need for relying on yoga, breathing routines, physical exercise, diet, meditation, mindfulness and aromatherapy as decompression strategies through which to release stress, what can we learn from them?"

Research (2017) shows those who manage workplace adversity without becoming stressed have developed a range of crucial meta-cognitive competencies enabling them to fend off multiple workplace threats. They understand how they choose to respond when confronted with potential stressors, they know the triggers they are especially sensitive to, and they subsequently make better choices and decisions at critical moments.

Over the last three-years we have explored workplace pressure, stress and burnout looking at research from the fields of human and organisational psychology and applied those findings within the workplace contexts of teachers and school leaders.

We have deliberately avoided 'bottom of the cliff' fixes designed to minimise the impact of stress. As a systems-thinking organisation we have explored how to help teachers avoid the mistake of turning work pressure into stress in the first place. Prevention always beats a cure. Resilience is not about enduring. Workplace commitment is not 'workaholism'. Exhaustion should not be 'normalised'. Generosity is not being a doormat.

Our pilot group – Waimairi School, Christchurch

Earlier this year we were invited to work with a pilot group of teachers and leaders at Waimairi School in Christchurch.

It gave us an opportunity to integrate much of our research and thinking into a single programme. The school's leadership team saw this as an opportunity to invest in their teachers' psychological capital. The aims were to:

1. Help participants reframe the relationships each had developed with their work;

2. Strengthen participants' meta-cognitive competencies to defend themselves against workplace pressures – to look specifically at professional resilience;

3. Create a shared understanding of stress and a shared language for it;

4. Help teachers take greater control over important aspects of their lives; and

5. Help teachers to perspective take and to make courageous choices without succumbing to the debilitating affects of guilt and shame or worrying about being compared with and judged against others.

In May 2019 the World Health Organisation (WHO) redefined burnout. As of January 2022, burnout will no longer be classified as a medical condition but an "occupational phenomenon", defined as "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

Implications:

• **Burnout is the result of long term exposure to workplace stress.**

• **Burnout is not an illness one picks up like the flu.**

• **Burnout differs from other mental health conditions like depression – burnout is specifically work related.**

• **Burnout defines how we choose to build a relationship to our work.**

• **Teacher and principal burnout is becoming the defining workplace issue.**

Research: Stress Prevention beats Stress Management and Stress Release

There is real power in helping teachers take important steps to move from the right-hand column to the left-hand column in the table opposite. And it's not too difficult...

	Stress Prevention	Stress Management
Workplace pressure	Workplace pressure is not converted into personal stress; "I do not become stressed because I do not let it control me."	Workplace pressure turns into personal stress; "I become stressed because I let it take control of me."
Response to pressure	"I have developed meta-cognitive competencies providing me with a highly effective defence system against workplace pressure. I generally don't convert workplace pressure into stress. Exercising and meditation are not crutches I rely on to decompress, release and to manage stress. I would remain stress free from my workplace pressure if I were to stop doing them."	"Yoga, breathing routines, meditation, aromatherapy, mindfulness, physical exercise and diet are some of the strategies I use to alleviate stresses I experience as a result of workplace pressures I am exposed to. It would be nice to be able to do these things not to decompress but simply because they are good for me."
Population breakdown	9% of the population	91% of the population
Predisposed to burnout	"My job fulfilment and satisfaction levels remain high – despite workplace stressors I don't let them get on top of me and I retain the passion and joy of my job."	"Workplace stressors are eroding the love and joy my job used to give me – all I see now are hurdles, problems, obstacles and challenges... I'm losing the will to continue."
Workplace contribution	Smarter decisions are made and higher levels of pragmatism are demonstrated – greater inclination to learn, change, adapt, collaborate, on-board new learning and improve. Less inclination to lie, cheat and experience lapses in ethical judgment. More creativity is brought to roles, and levels of self-efficacy are higher. Productivity at work and results are consistently better and professional relationships are superior.	Decision making powers waiver and wane as different drivers take control. Dogmatism is more prevalent – diminished openness to improving, collaborating, changing, on-boarding new learning and adapting as desire to retain status quo increases. More predisposed to lying, cheating and having lapses in ethical judgment in order to survive. Less creative and lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Less productive at work and more predisposed to strained professional relationships.
At home	Better personal relationships with important others. Less aggressive and better communicators. Raise more mature children with fewer issues.	More predisposed to strained relationships with important others. Increased sense of psychological separation and higher levels of actual physical separation. More likely to raise children with issues.
Health	Fewer mental and physical health issues. Sleep hygiene is good – uninterrupted sleep is prevalent. Healthily selfish routines are established and maintained. Less predisposed to heart disease and high blood pressure, eating fads, sudden weight loss/gain, and loss of executive function.	Tiredness, poor sleep hygiene, irregular sleeping patterns and interrupted sleep are prevalent. Changes in appetite – binging, digestive problems, rapid weight loss – gain more likely to occur. Higher potential for heart disease and high blood pressure. Deteriorating executive function - trouble concentrating and memory dysfunction. More predisposed to mental health issues.
Work-life satisfaction	Good – Improving – In control – Strong sense of worthiness.	Poor – Never seem to get on top of the job – Always feeling swamped with more to do – Never feeling worthy.
Perception of self	"I am comfortable and satisfied with who I am; the balance I have created and maintained allows me to walk what I truly value."	"I don't like the person I am becoming ...or have become."