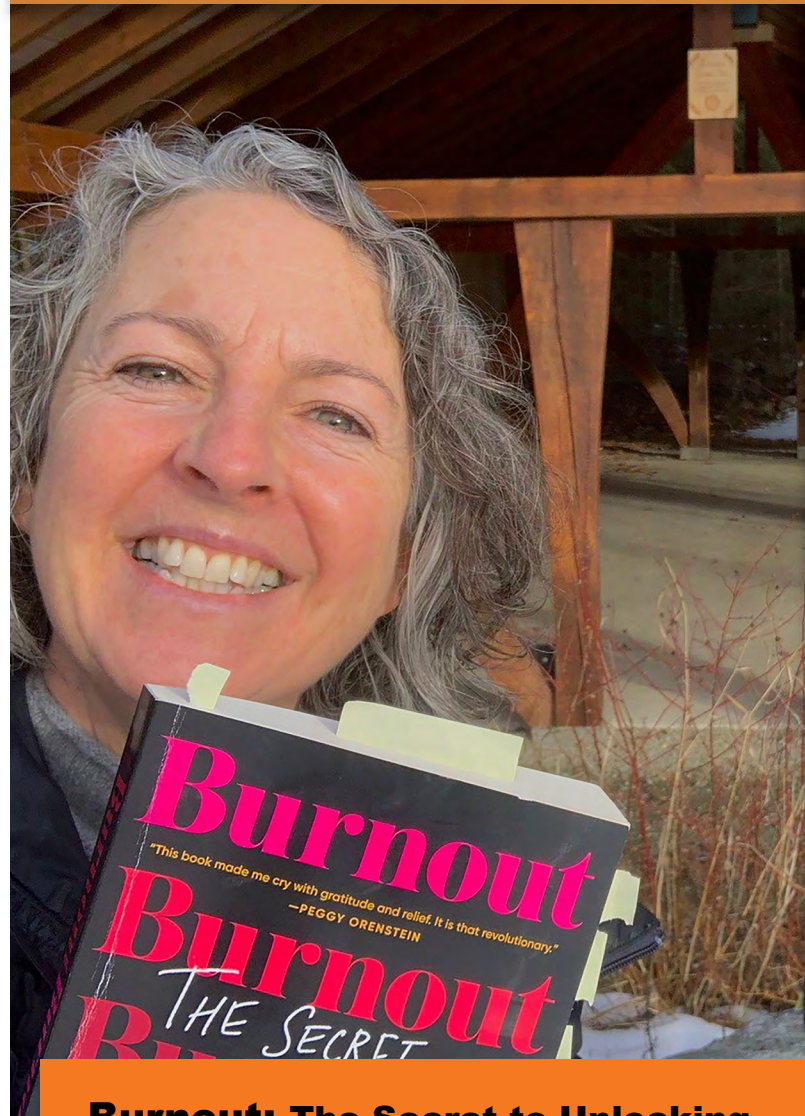


Twins Emily and Amelia Nagoski published *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* in 2019. Emily is a health educator and counsellor, and Amelia is a music conductor. Amelia suffered two extensive bouts of stress-induced medical incidents, and Emily published a book about woman's sexuality where most of the feedback was about the chapter on stress reduction. Between Emily's feedback and Amelia's health scare, this book was born.

Our modern age is exceptional in that the stressors we are exposed to do not naturally work through the critical 'stress response cycle' mammals experience. Instead, humans are left in a chronic state where we must take deliberate steps to work through the missing final aspects of the cycle so we can rest and recuperate.

From their example: A lion is chasing you. Your response is to flee. Your body systems do everything they can to give you the necessary power so you run as fast and as far as you can to remove yourself from this stressor. This means your biological systems shut down processes that are – at the time – unnecessary, including your endocrine, digestive, circulatory, and hormonal functions. Every single body system is focused on getting you out of danger. There are only two outcomes – you will die, or you will live. If you live, you return to your village and celebrate with

Victoria McAllister SD #8



Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle

your community. You tell your story with great fanfare: you act it out, others tell you how brave you were, you may sing or dance or draw a picture of your victory, you may advise others about how to keep safe in this situation, and then you're able

Contribute your book review to the next issue of **Princip(ed)**:
you could even collaborate on your review with a friend,
as Victoria and Janene have done!
Contact sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca to book your spot

Janene Stein SD #8



by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski

to sleep soundly assured you are safe. Your brain understands the danger is over; your body systems begin again to support your good health.

Now, our stressors are not wild predators – instead, they occur via phone calls, from meetings with emotionally elevated others, from deadlines, or from the need for clear, calm, and accurate responses in a high-stakes situation. Often, we cannot respond by fight/ flight/ freeze because the moment requires us to acknowledge the stressor calmly and clearly, and then defer the stress responses until later. Our ancient body systems are programmed to have us complete the cycle completely, but we simply cannot at the time. Additionally, due to the nature of our profession, we have wave after wave of stressors accumulated over the course of a day. This is our work.

Accompanying these aspects is our professional commitment to put the needs of others above our own. As implied in the “A Day in Life of ...” series in this magazine, our days are long and necessitate us to be considering multiple aspects continuously. The authors liken this to a theory put forth by Kate Mann. The theory is that there are two types of humans in the world: ‘Human Beings’, who are obligated to express humanity at its highest form, and ‘Human Givers’ who are compelled to serve ‘Human Beings’ using their brains, bodies, actions, and emotions. Their needs are subordinate to the ‘Human Beings’ and therefore they may not easily put effort into completing the stress cycle. Guess which kind of

people flock to the helping professions? Guess which gender?

The authors have explicitly advised how we can work through the stress response cycle so we can feel safe and be rested. Consider this: if your body does not receive this signal, the chemical, biological, and hormonal systems do not shift out of overdrive and may not return to a healthy state.

Actions to help you complete the stress response cycle include:

- Physical activity: run, swim, dance, sing, jump up and down – do something to make you breathe deeply
- Tense your muscles and shake them out
- Breathe – deep slow belly breaths
- Have a casual, positive social interaction
- Laugh – especially belly laughs
- Hug, kiss, cuddle
- Participate in a spiritual practice
- Engage yourself in a creative outlet

Remember that being stuck in an incomplete cycle is more damaging than the original stressor. The authors use a feminist perspective to discuss the harm to humans due to our society and the constraints placed on women, on people of colour, and on people who identify as LGBTQ. These micro- and macro-aggressions are persistent stressors.

Right now, those of us in the helping professions are being asked to do more than ever. To help ourselves through this time of increased stressors, the authors ask us to turn to each other and engage with your community. They call this your 'Love Bubble'. Those

you trust to support you will help sustain you. If we consider ourselves as 'Human Givers', we in the helping professions – and women in general – are being asked to sacrifice our health. Right now, it does not seem as if self-preservation is the imperative of our society and culture. The authors remind us, "You don't have to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm." Recognizing that the research shows that a resting period helps us more than staying in the constant state of alertness, the authors advise us to get enough sleep. Feeling guilty about sleeping is as unreasonable as feeling guilty about breathing.

Lastly, the authors discuss gratitude. Research into gratitude shows the impact of being grateful not for what you have, but instead for who you have and for your circumstances. They give advice for practicing gratitude in this manner.

Trust your body. Be kind to yourself. Rest. You are enough. Your joy matters. Small changes are victories.

Synopsis

or – as the authors call it – **tl;dr** (too long; didn't read):

The stress completion cycle leads to the moment when our bodies realize that after facing danger, we are safe. Our modern work means we often need to wait to complete the stress cycle. There are things we can do to give our body the signal that it is safe. If you do not give your body this signal, it will remain in the state of chronic, constant activation that leads to burn out. You can help your body through movement, laughter, breathing and creative play. The secret to living in our modern world is to seek out and connect with others in community. Finding the bigger meaning for our lives helps us live through this time of incredible stressors.

Victoria's Takeaways

from this book (and Brené Brown's podcast with the authors)

Walking home one evening after another long day, I was contemplating incongruous thoughts: I revel in the gift of this work (being a K-12 school Principal), and there is always so much more to do. It can feel demoralizing. Using a strategy from Burnout called 'The Monitor', (discrepancy-reducing / increasing feedback loop) helped me examine where I have control, what I could let go of and how I could reframe some common conundrums. This has made a change in how I more joyfully engage with this work. The entreaty to focus on meaning fits this profession like a glove.

"Emotions are tunnels, if you go all the way through them, you get to the light at the end." I have been sharing this invitation to complete the stress cycle with staff and students. Giving the people we work with more tools to experience and resolve some of their strong feelings helps them feel heard, more in control and empowered. I have posted lists of ways to complete the stress cycle in a few places in our school.

I find myself returning to Burnout as inspiration in our trauma aware school – we need to talk honestly about hard experiences and feelings to stay healthy and connected. The authors recommend "just do a thing" – anything; action as forward momentum is a powerful tool for students to unlearn helplessness and develop agency.

Janene's Takeaways

from this beautiful book

The messages in the book are both affirming and practical. Last June, I found myself existing without emotions as the Spring was so incredibly stressful. It was only during the Summer I was able to return to a state where I could experience joy again. This Fall, I returned to my school knowing I needed to engage each day with the 'Something Larger' described by the authors. This whole experience of successfully leading a school during the pandemic is my 'Something Larger', and I expect it is the same for you. This book helped me affirm those ways that I work through the stress response cycle: time in the garden, time with family and time creating art.

From Both of Us

There are helpful tools throughout the book – great stories and science – and because this book is anchored in our current social structures, it moves the message from the personal to the political.

We love that!

We hope you will enjoy the additional quote highlighted by Brené Brown on the following page.

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is the Principal of
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Jewett Elementary School in
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Janene Stein

is the Principal of
Hume Elementary School
Nelson BC, SD 8

Victoria and Janene work and live on the traditional territories of the Sinixt and Ktunaxa people

"We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal — other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. What we have been forced to leave behind we needed to leave behind. What is getting us through is what we will need to take forward, all the rest is up to us. DREAM. While we have so much time. DREAM of the life you want. DREAM of the world you desire to exist in. Look for the places in your new dreams that have parts of the old world and remove them. What is the dream then? From there we can add to the collective weaving of whatever it is that is next. If we are gonna heal, let it be glorious."

Sonya Renee Taylor



HOOKED on a BOOK

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