

overcoming burnout in 30 days

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Colophon

Overcoming burnout in thirty days

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Introduction

Overcoming your burnout in thirty days, is that possible? And why not? Burnout can be a drawn out or lingering affair, but with a good programme you can succeed in overcoming your burnout in thirty days. The aim of this book is to put you on the right track.

The programme described in this book is called ACCESS protocol. I based this protocol on my practical experiences in applying and analysing the insights from my previous book *Omgaan met burnout (Coping with Burnout)*.

ACCESS stands for: Analysis of the work-related problems and the situation of the employee; getting your (physical and mental) Condition back in shape; changing your Concepts; functioning more Effectively at work; getting Social support; and Stabilising your results. The programme is aimed at individual recovery as well as getting back to work. The University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands has evaluated this method in March 2001, and the results show that it is very effective.

Not vague but practical

The results showed that 80% of the people involved in the study returned to work. The participants also had a better understanding of the process that leads to burnout: mainly hormonal deregulation caused by work stress. In that way, by being able to explain burnout to their employer and relatives, they were less trapped in the web of denial and isolation. They thought that the most effective parts of the programme were: getting positive attention, getting support, getting in shape, thinking rationally, eye-openers, planning their day, doing relaxation exercises, and making a list of forms of stressors and boosters. The participants liked that the programme was not vague but concrete and practical. People had treatment that lasted three and a half months. The treatment for people who kept on working took two and a half months, and for those who were on sick leave (on average ten months) four and a half months.

The method is innovative, and is aimed at a quick recovery. This book contains useful exercises and illustrative examples from therapeutic practice. If you take three days for each chapter of the book, build up your recovery and take the advice to heart, it may at least be possible to get back to work within three months and to build up your energy gradually.

Employers too can benefit from the approach that is described here. They become acquainted with the burnout process, the early warning signs, how it can be dealt with in a meaningful way so that employees can enjoy their work, and the way the employer's own behaviour can help or hinder the recovery of the worker.

What is burnout? Burnout is a cumulative process, it doesn't just happen overnight. You are at risk when there is no balance between the exigencies of the job and your personal ability to meet them.

Is burnout a disease? Yes and no. Yes, because people who are burnt out have physical complaints like insomnia, aches and pains, fatigue, stomach and intestinal problems, headaches, heart palpitations and high blood pressure. They may also suffer from psychological problems like depression, feelings of helplessness, worrying or fretting, anxiety, irritation and mental instability. Other complaints are forgetfulness, and concentration problems. At work, people are less productive, unsure of themselves and they make cutting remarks to others more quickly. They also feel alienated from their colleagues and their work. It seems as though they feel indifferent towards everything.

Burnout is not a disease in the sense that it is only an individual problem: it is also a social problem. Burnout is an occupational problem and it is related to how we deal with our job and our work situation. Burnout can happen to anyone. Everybody knows someone who is burnout or close to becoming burnt out. Approximately four to ten percent of all employees are affected. The longer you wait to deal with your burnout, the greater the risk that you will be unfit for work. For people who are ill for more than three months, there is 40% chance that they will not return to their job.

People who suffer from burnout are like the birds they used in the mines. The bird warns the miners that there is a shortage of oxygen in the air. The signals of burnout are clear: the present work pressure is too high for many people. You can contribute to a healthy work climate once you have recovered from your burnout.

I would like to thank those who shared their experiences of burnout with me, in particular clients, relatives of people who are burnout, colleagues, workshop participants, congress audiences, readers and email correspondents. Burnout is a terrible experience, and people who suffer from burnout feel very isolated. There is a lot of misunderstanding amongst employers, colleagues and people who are close to us. Many people feel lost and demoralised when they get the advice to stay at home and rest for a while. Most people don't realise either how insidious and damaging the process of burnout can be, and they were wondering desperately why they feel so miserable. Recently I received an email from a 65-year-old woman:

'Some time ago I read about the symptoms of burnout, and I discovered that I have been struggling with this problem for almost ten years! After a marriage of 25 years, I got divorced and started to work. At the age of 55 I was exhausted. I had to stop working. The well-known phenomenon: all by myself I had to raise a family of four children, and I had to work. The physician diagnosed burnout. He said that I was not up to raising a family and having a job at the same time. There was not enough energy left. His advice was to take care of myself. I accepted the situation, although I was totally exhausted, and that at my age I would need a long time to recover. About a month ago I discovered that my symptoms (particularly still feeling exhausted and being emotionally somewhat unstable; it could have been a lot worse!) but also my personality perfectly matched the profile of burnout patients. To recognise my situation was a revelation and a big comfort to me. I no longer felt an outsider in the company of friends and relatives. In short: a big part of my loneliness drifted away. Wonderful! I only realise now that I should have had professional help.'

In a clear and recognisable way, this book gives you practical and step-by-step insights into what you can do to stop the

process of burnout, and how to give – with renewed enthusiasm – direction to your life.

Amsterdam, 28 februari 2008

MR DR. CARIEN KARSTEN

Day 1

Burnout? Me?!

You are busy at work. The workload and the pressure at work are increasing; you allow yourself less and less time for a break. Sometimes you take your work home with you. During the week you hardly make any arrangements to see people, because you have enough on your plate already. What you would most like to do is to lie on the couch with a book for the whole weekend.

Holidays? Your heart is not in it; you only see them as extra effort. After the holidays you realise how quickly you feel drained again. You try to carry on by taking more time off, taking a step back, working fewer hours. But it doesn't help. And that cold you can't seem to shake off either.



What are the EXACT symptoms?

The last drop is when at night you wake up bathing in sweat with a pain in your chest. The doctor examines you and perhaps diagnoses high blood pressure, hyperventilation or anaemia. 'Probably caused by stress', he adds. 'Perhaps we should think in terms of burnout.' Burnout? Me?! This only happens to other people, you think. You apply for sick leave for a few days, and you want to go back to work on Monday.

But after a few days you have to admit that things are not going well. And things haven't been going well for some time already. You feel miserable. Harsh sounds, shrill voices, and a lot of talk – all of a sudden you can't stand it anymore. Shopping in a busy supermarket? Forget it – suddenly it is all too much. You have to make lists for everything otherwise you forget half of the things that need doing. Multitasking is no longer possible either; you can't even cook spaghetti and sauce at the same time. How does one do that again? You get very little done. Your administration is in a total mess, you can no longer manage to put things in order.

Is the doctor right? Am I burnt out?

Diagnosing Burnout

Burnout is a much-used label, but not an official diagnosis for psychologists or psychiatrists. It cannot be determined by physical examination either.

The GP or company physician is thinking of burnout when you have become extremely exhausted through long-term overload at your work, when you feel removed from your work and your surroundings, and when you seriously doubt your own competence. This overburdening can happen because you are not able to take on as much as before, for example because of a serious loss, an illness or a traumatic event. You may also have become overburdened because you had to take on too much in your job due to a heavier workload.

But what exactly is too much? There is not one objective yardstick for stress. Where stress is involved the only gauge is the individual person concerned. Everybody reacts differently to the pressure of work: one person might take work home and is kept awake at night because of it, whereas somebody else might think: tomorrow is another day.

What you can do is check with yourself what long-term

stress is doing to you. How do you sleep nowadays, compared to a year ago? Do you think that your mood changes far more often than it used to? Have you changed from being a happy or jolly person into somebody who is brooding and fretting? Are you at risk from burnout or are things not as bad as they seem? Fill out the questionnaire below, so that you will get some insight into your situation.

Questionnaire Am I burnout? (© Beverly A. Potter)

Rating scale: 1 = never or rarely; 2 = occasionally true; 3 = true 50% of the time; 4 = frequently true; 5 = almost always true.

- 1. I feel tired even though I have had adequate sleep.
- 2. I am dissatisfied with my work.
- 3. I feel sad for no apparent reason.
- 4. I am forgetful.
- 5. I am irritable and snap at people.
- 6. I avoid people at work and in my private life.
- 7. I have trouble sleeping, because I worry about work.
- 8. I get ill more often than I used to.
- 9. My attitude towards my job is 'why bother?' I feel indifferent about the work.
- 10. I get into conflicts more often than I used to.
- 11. My performance at work is suffering as a consequence.
- 12. I use more alcohol, drugs or sedatives, in order to feel better.
- 13. Communicating with other people is a source of strain.
- 14. I can't concentrate on my work as well as I used to.
- 15. I am bored with my work.
- 16. I work hard but accomplish little.
- 17. I feel frustrated in my job.
- 18. I dread going to work.
- 19. Social activities are exhausting.
- 20. Having sex demands too much energy.
- 21. Most of the time when I'm not working I watch TV.
- 22. I don't have much to look forward to in my work.
- 23. I worry about work in my time off.
- 24. My feelings about work interfere with my personal life.
- 25. My work seems pointless.

TOTAAL

SCORE

25 – 50: You're doing well, but keep an eye on items where your score is higher.

- 51 – 75: Take preventive action.
- 76 – 100: You are at risk from burnout, or – if you are burnt out – you haven't recovered.
- 101– 125: You are in the process of becoming burnout.

When your score indicates that there is overburdening, you should also ask yourself for how long this has been going on. When did a change occur in your workload? Was this after a reorganisation or merger? After the introduction of a new automated system? Have the customers become more demanding? Do you have to deal with more difficult cases than before? Did your position at work change, and are you pushed to your limits in your new function? Has something changed in your private situation, did you have children and are you combining work and raising a family? Are you on your own?

Ask yourself what has changed in the past years and how these changes affect how you function at work. Also check with yourself whether you have changed. Do people still find you as sociable as before? Or have you turned into somebody who keeps everyone and everything at bay, who flares up about the slightest thing, and who is often cranky and irritable?

What is the difference between burnout and being overworked?

Burnout is often lumped together with being overworked, hyper-aesthetic emotional syndrome, neurasthenia and chronic stress syndrome. In all these syndromes stress causes a disturbance in the equilibrium, a sudden breakdown. The most common diagnoses are: being overworked and burnout.

Being overworked has a short-term cause. The stress that is the direct cause for being overwrought lies in the not so distant past. As a rule of thumb it can be said that within three months after the stress factor occurred (moving house, changed work duties, breakdown of a relationship or friendship) someone gets overwrought. This goes hand in hand with many stress symptoms, like crying bouts, feeling rushed, not being able to sleep properly, neck pain and headaches. But the energy is not totally depleted yet: exhaustion is not the fore-

most complaint. Feeling unsettled, rushed or pushed are far more common.

In the case of burnout people have been crossing their boundaries for a long time already. The battery is totally flat. They are completely exhausted and cannot go on, nor do they wish to. They no longer see the sense in working, and already get nauseous when they enter the work environment, or even when they see the signpost for the town they work in. There is a strong physical reaction of nausea or fear to certain aspects of the job. People no longer want to have anything to do with their colleagues, they ask their wife to ring up, and they no longer answer the telephone themselves. It is as if they have been traumatised by their work. This is burnout.

Eliminate other causes

Your GP will first of all check whether your complaints might not have a different cause. Because you may also feel exhausted due to the menopause, a viral infection like glandular fever, or a nutritional disorder like the celiac condition. Therefore draw up a list of all the problems you suffer from, so that you won't forget them in the doctor's surgery. The more complete your own observations, the more accurate your GP's diagnosis will be.

Is burnout connected with RSI, the infamous mouse arm?

Yes, burnout can be connected to other physical problems and illnesses where your body is out of balance due to chronic stress. Sometimes the sick leave starts with RSI (*Repetitive Strain Injury*). Physiotherapists distinguish three stages of RSI. In the first phase you suffer light pains in your neck, between the shoulder blades, in your arms, wrists and hands at the end of a working day. You recover from this pain. In the second stage you have recurring pain earlier on in your working day. The pain does not go away but can be there for months. Recovery is usually still possible. In the third stage you suffer pain and fatigue continuously, your sleep is disturbed, you are less productive, and recovery is very difficult and sometimes

impossible. In the third stage there is a big overlap between burnout and RSI. In both syndromes the sleeping pattern is disturbed, you are tired, you continuously suffer from pain in sinews and joints, you feel down and sometimes depressed, and you fear that things will never be right again. If you have suffered a lot of stress at work, and if you are not recovering after the usual treatment for RSI, then you may benefit from a programme that is aimed at recovering from burnout.

RSI and burnout occur in people with the same personality traits: perfectionism, placing high demands on themselves, adapting to an extreme extent to the wishes and needs of others, and not looking after themselves. How do you stay in touch with yourself, and yet keep life manageable when you have those characteristics? In day 15 we will work with this.

Analyse your stress

Where does the stress come from? As regards burnout and RSI it is important to analyse what is causing stress in your life. Therefore, as from today keep a stress diary: in what situations do you experience stress? What do you feel at that time? Also note down how severe it is – on a scale from 10 (very bad, nearly unbearable) to 1 (no stressful feeling at all):

DAY + TIME	SITUATION	WHAT DO YOU FEEL	TO WHAT EXTENT

Day 2

Emergency Plan for Now

Previously you were never ill. Now you are getting one bout of flu after another. You're making jokes about it: *last week I had the summer flu, in a few weeks' time the autumn flu, and after that I'll probably get the winter flu.* You also suffer from bronchitis. And you are very, very tired. After a good night's sleep you don't wake up refreshed. How are things at work? Gradually you are given more things to do – and your duties are getting more complicated. You have many more appointments in one day, get a lot of telephone calls, and are behind in answering your emails; you rarely manage to have a sandwich at lunchtime without being disturbed. You see that some colleagues are not as busy. *How do they manage that?* you sometimes ask yourself. They are probably less concerned about their workload, and they do not worry about it at home. In your private life things are not going smoothly either. Because you are working so hard you find it difficult to maintain your social contacts. You want to keep an eye on your elderly aunt who lives in the same city as you, but you are never getting around to it. When you notice that you lose your grip on things, are flaring up at everybody, hardly sleep anymore, cannot remember anything, and are dropping cups to the floor, you go to the company physician. He or she diagnoses burnout.

Affected immune system

One of the symptoms of burnout is that you are much more likely to get sick, and that you recover less quickly. Why is that? Chronic mental stress influences the neurological and hormonal systems in our bodies. In the long term this seems to result in

overproduction of a substance called CGRP, a peptide. This peptide is produced by the nerve endings of the skin. CGRP gets deposited in the cells of Langerhans, which play a role in our immune system. The cells of Langerhans are responsible for intercepting pathogens and transferring them to the white blood cells, so that the immune system can render them harmless. When the cells of Langerhans are completely covered by the CGRP, they no longer function, and they can no longer offer us protection. Because one of the access routes into the body is less protected, we become more prone to infections.

Start with the body

Someone who is unwell due to burnout often feels responsible and guilty. He feels he is letting colleagues down and wants to get back to work as quickly as possible. This is not the way to recover, because you keep putting yourself under pressure. You will recover soonest by first recovering physically, and by learning to relax. Some people might object that they are marathon runners and physically in excellent shape. However, engaging in sport can become just as much a compulsive activity as work. Take the Dutch top skater Bart Veldkamp, for example, who stated, in the middle of the season: 'At the moment I am very relaxed when I'm on the ice.' You are enjoying yourself while achieving top results. It may help to structure your day in such a way that you have time and space to do something physical, like walking for a quarter of an hour and then taking a rest. This resting straight after the walk teaches you how to relax. Starting with a little effort, you slowly increase the exertion in your private life. Only when you succeed in keeping your energy levels up during moderate exertion, can you think about easing yourself back into work. Even then guidance is essential: to prevent you from falling back into your old behavioural patterns of ignoring yourself and not setting boundaries.

Emergency plan against burnout

1. Make sure you have a good and regular sleeping pattern. Don't go to bed too late. Take your time in the morning to get started, and don't do anything that requires exertion in

- the evenings. Just potter about. For some people it works well to go for a little stroll around the block. Do not drink too much alcohol (not more than four glasses a week).
2. Take meals regularly and eat healthy food. A diet rich in carbohydrates (pasta for example) improves your mood and memory. And pistachio nuts contain a substance that helps you to relax.
 3. Make time to go for walks, to swim or go to the gym. Take regular exercise, even when you are tired and feel you cannot do anything anymore. Moving about is important for the elimination of toxins from the body.
 4. When you find it difficult to relax or wind down, make an appointment with your GP and ask for a referral to a physiotherapist.
 5. Make a list of fifty things you enjoy doing, and do at least one of these each day. Make your goals small and attainable.
 6. Take an hour every day to rest and to get back to yourself. In that hour you don't need to do anything, you are allowed to do whatever you want, you can take a rest, read, take a bath, listen to music, do a relaxation exercise.
 7. Stop before your energy has run out. Give structure to your day, with very little variation. Do everything for a short while, take breaks, and keep your social contacts brief. When you get more energy, do not use it up straight away by going back to work, and having to do lots of things. Take care that your vital reserves increase by giving extra energy to things you like to do.
 8. Give some structure to your anxieties by drawing up a list in the morning of things that bother you. Set priorities, make an action plan, and destroy the worry list.
 9. In the early evening write down in a diary what provided you with energy that day and what demanded energy from you. For the next few days avoid doing things that consume energy, and do more of what gives you energy.
 10. Postpone all the important decisions until you feel more energetic.

Read these suggestions and draw up your own emergency plan. Which suggestions are specifically applicable to you? And later on you can always take out your own emergency plan when you are on the verge of burnout again. Do relaxation exercises every day. In this book several are mentioned.

One minute complete relaxation

You can do this short relaxation exercise while waiting at the traffic lights, in a queue at the check-out in the supermarket, on the train, or in the bathroom just before a challenging meeting. Make sure you have both feet planted firmly on the floor, slightly apart. Feel as if your body is pulled upright by imagining that your head is attached to a string at the end of a balloon. Your chin is lifted up a little bit; there is space in your chest. Fill your lungs with fresh air and imagine that you're breathing in the fragrance of pine trees or the salty sea air. Imagine that the breath enters you through a blowhole in your head (like the blowhole of a whale), and leaves your body through your toes. Try to relax the shoulders and the neck even more. Let go, let go of all tension in your body. Then call to mind an image that makes you laugh. This can be something one of your children said, something funny that happened at work or something you experienced while on holidays. Keep that image while saying to yourself: relax. A variation of this is counting your breath. You breathe in and count one. At the next in-breath you count two. The next in-breath you count as one again, and so on. This exercise comes from the book *Three Minute Meditations* by David Harp, and it can help to empty your mind and to stop incessant thoughts. The exercise seems very simple, but before you know it you have lost count and have started to worry. Bring yourself back and start counting one again on the in-breath.

Day 3

Energy Consumers and Energy Providers

For years you have demanded all kinds of things from yourself. In your job and in your life you are constantly adapting. You force and command yourself. Your social life has become a straitjacket from which you find it difficult to extricate yourself. Everything has to be done – and everything seems equally important. In your work it seems as if more and more things need to be done in less time. There are days where you hardly have a few minutes to spare to eat something or to go to the bathroom. In your social life and in your job there is a lot of outside pressure. By adapting yourself too much to this pressure, you have lost touch with your own needs and wishes, your inner compass.

Ben, a 40-year-old GP, is on holidays in a busy town in Belgium. A short while ago he applied for sick leave because he had burnout symptoms, but meanwhile things have improved somewhat, so the holidays went ahead as planned. But at soon as he is on holidays, he realises that he cannot really enjoy himself. In the busy squares and in cafés he experiences something that never happened before: there is a sense of panic, and the only thought he has is: *How do I get out of here?* He only gets back in touch with himself once he is in a quiet shop.

How did Ben get burnt out? Even though after the first year he realised that the work did not suit him, he has remained in the GP practice for fifteen years. And he is even proud of it. After turbulent years in secondary school, not giving up became his motto in life. Even against his better judgement.

Can I still enjoy myself?

Ben was shocked to discover that he could no longer enjoy the things he enjoyed so much before, like being on holiday or cooking for his family. What had previously given him energy now took energy away from him. He could no longer enjoy anything! Nothing at all? Ben drew up a list of things that provide him with energy and things that demand energy. Only in this way could he discover where he could make changes. Ben's list looked like this:

Energy Consuming Factors (stressors)		Energy Providing Factors (boosters)	
Work	Private	Work	Private
Administration	Shopping	Computer	Going to pub
Difficult patients	Teenage children	Making a correct diagnosis	Out for dinner
Feeling isolated	Cooking	Collegues	Weekend trip
Registering paptents for hospital	Visiting mother in nursing home	Grateful patient	Visiting family and friends
Being on call at weekends	Doing odd jobs around house		Playing the guitar
Not enough time for patients	Noisy neighbours		Reading a good book

He changed his activities in such a way that over time the list with energy providing or nourishing activities grew more extensive. He started to read professional literature again, and decided to specialise more. He applied for a job as physician in a nursing home, with a three-day working week – and without being on duty at weekends. In this way he had more time for his hobbies, like making or restoring furniture at home. He hadn't had time for that in years!

Count your blessings!

1. Make a list of fifty things you enjoy. They do not need to be 'big' things that cost a lot of money or effort. Think of things like: roller-skating, pampering yourself with a bubble bath, putting photographs in an album, buying an enormous bunch of flowers, selecting and participating in an interesting course, going to a museum, going out for lunch or dinner with friends, buying a special kind of tea, tidying up and throwing out a lot of stuff, sending a card to someone who is ill, painting the house. Is there nothing that you enjoy at the moment? Then think back to what you used to enjoy. You could pick up an old hobby again – not in order to achieve anything, but to enjoy it.
2. *Internal Compass* is another exercise (devised by burnout specialist Sonja van Zweden) to get in touch with your own needs and wishes. Go and sit quietly somewhere and feel your breathing in the belly. Close your eyes and say to yourself: 'Now I am going to enjoy ...' Fill in an activity you used to enjoy, like photography, water colour painting or a sport. Check with yourself: how does that feel? Is it pleasant or unpleasant? How is that feeling affecting you? The important thing is to get in touch with your inner feelings, which enables you to learn to make choices that are beneficial for you. You get close to yourself again.
3. Make your own list of activities that are energy consuming and draining, and activities that are energy providing and nourishing, and use the following framework for this:

Energy Consuming/ Draining		Energy Providing/ Nourishing	
Work	Private	Work	Private

Day 4

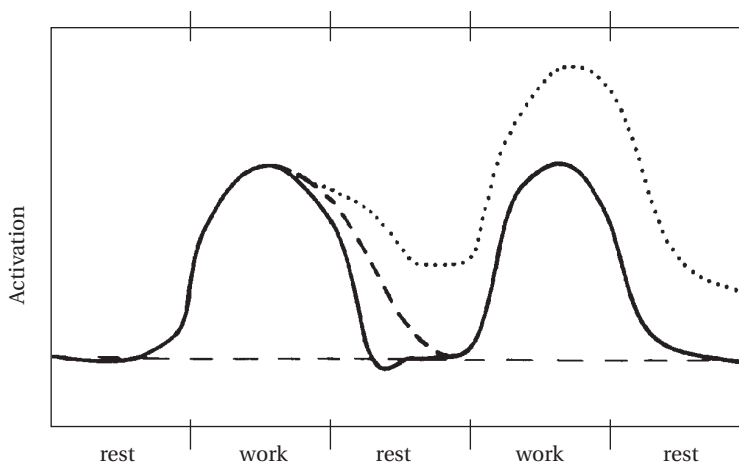
Hormones Going Crazy

You are running from one appointment to the next. All day long you're watching the clock, as if it is a thief who steals away the minutes. Time for yourself? That was long ago. When you were on holidays, yes. Just doing nothing, just staring into space? Enjoying the sunshine on a terrace? You're not allowing yourself time to do all this.

When from one day to the next you are at home with a burnout, then suddenly you do have the time. But for many people it is already too late, they can no longer enjoy their leisure time.

It is impossible to relax, because the stress hormones no longer drop down to the level of rest by themselves. In times of rest the level of adrenaline is low. When you are working, the level increases, and when you relax it drops again. When you do not recover sufficiently from the effort, the adrenaline level does not drop down enough. For instance you might notice, when you have been working overtime, that it is difficult to fall asleep at night. Your head is not empty, you are still thinking and worrying. You might also notice this in particular during the first week of a holiday: you cannot yet let go of the tension from work, you're on edge and you still feel under pressure. You are also susceptible to physical complaints, sinus problems, the flu, arthritic conditions, or back and neck problems. And now when you're finally on holidays you fall ill!

Your body and mind have to get accustomed to relaxation, they have been continuously under too much pressure. It is no longer possible to let go of the tense and hurried everyday patterns. The graph below illustrates how the levels of adrenaline find a new balance when there is insufficient rest, an increase in the workload, and depletion of energy because you find it increasingly more difficult to cope with the pressure.



Graph of adrenaline excretion. The level of activation as a function of working and resting (uninterrupted line). When you find it difficult to relax in the evenings, the level doesn't drop as much (interrupted line). The dotted line indicates the level when there is insufficient recovery, so that there is a good chance that even when you are at rest the level of activation (excretion of adrenaline) stays high.

How do stress hormones work?

Adrenaline is the *flight-or-fight* hormone. The body produces adrenaline when you are preparing for action. Primitive man was in situations where it was necessary to fight or to flee. When a threat is perceived, part of the nervous system (the sympathetic nervous system) ensures that more blood flows to the skeletal muscles (in order to run) and less to the skin. The heartbeat quickens, the respiratory system opens up, transpiration increases and blood sugar levels go up. Sugar is the source of energy for a quick reaction. The digestive system comes to a standstill; stomach and digestive tract movements are stopped. You are on alert and extremely creative. Adrenaline is produced in the adrenal glands.

Another part of the nervous system, the parasympathetic system, has an inhibiting effect; it slows down the heartbeat and accelerates the digestion. This is a state where you can grow, or produce energy.

Mark has developed a fantastic project for students. He shows it to the local authorities in the hope to be able to introduce the project in an urban area with a lot of unemployment. The councillor in charge encourages him to start the project; the grants will be allocated later. But this takes time and Mark is funding the project himself. After a few months he is in deep financial trouble. He approaches the bank, is given some respite, but the stress is taking its toll. During a congress he collapses.

Sometimes burnout patients suffer sudden loss of consciousness. They literally fall down. This feeling of loss of control can also happen just before falling asleep. For a very short moment you feel as if you fall into a deep well. All your muscles contract. Then you fall asleep.

It is not always possible to prevent stressful situations. But you can try to deal with them in such a way that at least you do not literally fall down. When, for instance, you find it difficult to enter a large space or a busy shopping centre, take your time with this. Enter the space and then stand still for a while, look around. Place both feet firmly on the ground and feel how the soles of your feet are in contact with the earth. Only then proceed. When you are feeling stressed you can also do this exercise before driving away in the car.

Another stress hormone that enters our bloodstream in stressful situations is cortisone, produced by the adrenal cortex. Cortisone has an inhibiting effect on the immune system and on the stress hormone adrenaline. It ensures that adrenaline does not poison our organs.

In simple terms it can be said that adrenaline gets activated in acute stress, and works immediately, whereas cortisone is more active in the long term, and when there is long-term stress. A side effect of cortisone is that it stimulates thoughts of despair or powerlessness. If cortisone is given directly to people, negative thoughts appear automatically. People who are depressed suffer from an increased level of cortisone. Long-term high levels of cortisone lead to brain damage, which results in illness, mood swings and cognitive disorders (problems with concentration and with memory). It is not yet known whether this brain damage is permanent or reversible.

In some burnout patients it has been found that the phase of having increased levels of cortisone has actually passed and

that they now have become depleted. This leads to decreased cortisone levels. When the depletion is too much, it is impossible to mobilise energy. In a small group of burnout patients it is obvious that the stress mechanism remains disturbed; these people continue to react too strongly to impulses; it seems as if the stimuli enter without any filtering. They have become less stress resistant and this often means that they can no longer cope with the workload in their current job.

Time for recovery

Not only when you are burnout, but also when you notice that you're on the edge, is it essential to plan recovery moments in your work and in your life. This prevents disruption of your stress hormones. But how does one do this? Find out about time management and create order in your life, your home and your work.

Experts say that managing our time better gives us an hour extra each day. The advice is simple. Set priorities. Look critically at each activity and judge whether it is necessary or not. Plan in such a way that you give priority to important matters – and don't let yourself be interrupted by telephone calls and emails. Force yourself to finish the important tasks and say no more often. An important obstacle in a well-organised planning is dealing with mail. Time managers suggest that you should finish sorting and dealing with mail in one go. Don't think: *I should do something with or about this* – and then put it aside. *Do it now!* Read your mail at a fixed time during the day, determine your actions while reading, file what is important and make sure you throw away a lot. *Professional organisers* give the advice to make piles at home of clothes, photographs, newspapers and magazines, and to throw away what you don't use anymore.

Use the time you've gained to do nothing! Boredom is fine, it's a sign you are getting rested. You are literally *unwinding* ...

Plan your day and always include moments of recovery. For the next 25 days note down in a general way in the diagram below your activities and the 'lazy times'.

Diagram of daily activities and recovery time

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
7.00-8.30							
8.30-10.00							
10.00-11.30							
11.30-13.00							
13.00-14.30							
14.30-15.00							
15.00-16.30							

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
16.30-18.00							
18.00-19.30							
19.30-20.00							
20.00-21.30							
21.30-22.00							
22.00-23.30							

Day 5

Food for the Brain

After a career of twenty years at the university, Geraldine has not worked for more than a year now due to burnout, and yet she hasn't recovered. She has physical problems that are seemingly without cause. Eventually it turns out that she is suffering from *irritable bowel* syndrome, a contraction in the colon: she has pains in the left side of the abdomen, and suffers from cramps and constipation, alternating with periods of diarrhoea. This syndrome can manifest due to mental strain, and results in less energy because fewer nutrients from the food are absorbed.



Extremely healthy, this low fat cheesecake. I think I'll take two slices ...

Stress often results in stomachache. Just think of the expressions: 'this job is hard to stomach', 'this colleague is hard to stomach', 'my stomach turns when I think of the pile of documents on my desk', or 'all these things are indigestible'. Eventually it can weigh you down like a stone in your stomach. On the other hand, stomach disorders also give rise to a negative outlook. In this way we end up in a vicious circle of powerlessness.

Stress can have a strong influence on the digestive system. For instance, when we get a fright, blood leaves the digestive tract and flows towards the skeletal muscles, so that the body can flee or fight. Chronic stress may lead to disrupted digestion. Stress inhibits the wavelike, contracting movements (peristalsis) of the intestines so that the food can travel down.

Stress influences digestion in another way in that it decreases or increases the production of gastric juices, which eventually results in damage to the mucous membrane of the stomach.

Developing allergies

When chronic stress has resulted in a burnout, the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisone have become imbalanced. When the level of cortisone is too high, damage to the digestive tract may lead to a so-called 'leaking stomach syndrome': the stomach is leaking like a sieve. This means that microscopic, partly digested food particles directly enter the blood stream, which in turn may lead to allergies. You become sensitive to food that you consume daily, like dairy or grain products.

The symptoms that point to a leaking stomach wall do not always develop immediately, but sometimes hours or even a day after you have eaten the food that you are now sensitive or allergic to. So it is difficult to make the connection between the food you've eaten and complaints like bloating, indigestion, wind, constipation, diarrhoea, headache, migraine, eczema, psoriasis and hives.

Addicted to sugar

When the adrenaline level is too high this can lead to problems in the blood sugar balance. Adrenaline releases the glucose stored in the liver and muscles into the blood stream. Later on

this may lead to a drop in energy, because insulin clears the extra and unused blood sugar and turns it into fat. When this happens often, during a long period of time, you increasingly need stimulants like coffee, chocolate or other foods that quickly offer more energy. This actually results in a vicious circle: in no time you're back to square one and you need another cup of coffee again. And once you've become caught in this vicious circle you have another problem: the bacterium that causes the leaking stomach wall is also fed by all these stimulants. And if you start to drink alcohol to get rid of your unpleasant feelings, or you take painkillers to get rid of headaches, things only get worse, because they too impede the recovery of the mucous membrane of the stomach.

Healthy fuel

Less stress is the only remedy, but eating a healthier diet is also necessary. Look critically at what you eat. The composition of the fats and sugars is extremely important. It turns out that fat from fish is many times healthier for the human body than other types of animal fats. Eating fatty fish stimulates our brain! Eating a lot of fish also diminishes the risk of cardiovascular disease, depression and burnout. Particularly the fatty types of fish are beneficial: salmon, tuna, herring, sardines, mackerel, trout and anchovies. The healthier types of fats also occur in vegetarian food like walnuts, soya products, linseed, rapeseed, pumpkin seed and hemp seed.

Think of your daily meals. Do you eat regularly, and are they healthy meals? A few important things to look out for are:

- Stop smoking gradually, experiment with a smoke free day now and again, and determine for yourself the date you will give up smoking altogether. Ask your doctor for advice, read something about giving up smoking or follow a workshop in how to stop smoking.
- Limit your alcohol intake to four glasses per week.
- For one month give up drinking coffee and see how that feels.
- Avoid working breakfasts or working lunches. They are not conducive to good digestion, because you are more stressed. The digestion will not get going properly, and you

leave the table feeling bloated. With the nasty result that your energy has also gone out the window for the rest of the day. At least once a week have lunch on your own.

- Try out foods you are not yet familiar with; buy a new cookery book and prepare a new dish every week.
- Don't eat refined sugar, but choose honey or pureed fruits when you want something sweet.

Do you already suffer from stomach complaints? Try this:

- Replace white flour, pasta and white bread with wholegrain products.
- Make yourself some vegetable juices. For instance, mix three parts of carrot juice with one part of cabbage juice (it tastes better than it sounds).
- Aloe Vera juice helps to heal the mucous membrane of the stomach. Dilute the juice (you need 99% pure juice for this) with as much water as juice.
- Drink a few cups of mint tea after your meals.
- Sprinkle milled seeds over your muesli or food, like sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, linseed or hemp seed. Add some oat flakes to the muesli; this too helps to heal the stomach lining.
- Test yourself for allergies to dairy products, and to products containing wheat or gluten by not eating these for a few weeks. Good alternatives can be found in health food shops. How does your body react when you take dairy and wheat or gluten products again one by one? When it does not feel right, omit them from your diet. (Source: *The Times Energy Plan 2001*.)

Day 6

Sleeping to Rest

Finding it hard to fall asleep? Are you counting each hour of the night the striking of the church clock? Do you wake up in the middle of the night and then you cannot get back to sleep? Or do you wake up very early, like five o'clock in the morning?

Sleep disorders are common with depression, RSI, chronic pain and burnout. Insomnia often leads to tossing and turning in bed, and to worrying and fretting. Some people complain that they can't seem to stop their thoughts.

When you don't sleep well at night you may worry about this during the day. You fear that through lack of sleep you won't be able to work so well and are more likely to make mistakes. Some people feel tired when they wake up. Below some recommendations are given, partly taken from *The Times Energy Plan (2001)*.

Rest and order

The preparation for a good night's sleep already starts in the morning. Don't stay in bed longer because you did not sleep well that night, but get up at your usual time. Preferable five or ten minutes earlier, so that you have time to do a short meditation or relaxation exercise. Do a relaxation exercise three to five times during the day, and once just before going to bed.

Have some physically strenuous activity three times a week: sport, fitness, jogging, roller-skating or swimming. Try to do that during the day, not in the evening, otherwise you will be wide-awake from the exertion when it's time to go to bed. You need to relax at least one and a half hour before going to bed, so watching a thriller just before bedtime is not such a good

idea either. There will be tension in your body, and it will be impossible to fall asleep quietly.

Watch out for light in your bedroom, because light influences your biological clock. Make sure you have good curtains that block out the light. Bright light in the morning or in the middle of the night upsets your biological clock. Are you suffering more from insomnia in winter – and do you always feel somewhat down in January? Perhaps you are sensitive to winter depressions. A little bit of light works wonders. Make sure you have bright fluorescent lights over your workstation, and regularly going for sessions on a sun bed also helps.

Is your bedroom comfortable and not too hot? Do you have a good mattress less than ten years old? Are you turning the mattress once in a while? Can you open a window at night? And even though you might be able to sleep anywhere, in any position – for instance on an aeroplane – a good climate and atmosphere in the bedroom is important. How are the noise levels in your bedroom? The rhythmic sound of raindrops falling on the tent, or the murmurs of a waterfall, can help you to fall asleep. Accelerating lorries, low flying aircraft, rows or loud music from the neighbours can prevent you from falling asleep, and make you feel vulnerable when these sounds suddenly wake you up. Try to sleep in a quiet room in the house.

Heavy food can disturb your sleep. On the other hand some foods can make you tired, for instance a meal that is rich in fats and low in carbohydrates.

People who suffer from 'restless legs' at night can take some extra magnesium in their food. For instance you could eat dried figs, which are extremely rich in magnesium, before going to bed. Rye bread, nuts and seeds, broccoli and kale are good sources of magnesium. Doing some stretches before going to bed can also help against the nervous twitching of the legs.

A hot bath

Take a hot bath two hours before you go to bed. You could add some chamomile. Stir two spoons of chamomile in boiling water and let it stand for ten minutes. Pour this through a sieve into the bath. Try a footbath for a change. Put down two big bowls or buckets, one with hot water, the other with cold water. Put your feet for three or four minutes in the hot water and then

for thirty seconds in the cold water. Repeat four times.

The smell of lavender is also relaxing. Burn some lavender oil in an oil burner in your bedroom before going to bed. Or sleep with a lavender bag under your pillow.

Empty your mind

A lot of people worry. The problems at work stay with them when they get home. By doing a meditation exercise early in the evening you will prevent worrying. Do a short relaxation exercise (see day 12), keep your eyes lightly closed and bring your attention to the breathing. Breathe in and out three times. Notice what is going on in your mind. Don't suppress it, but just notice it: it is allowed to be there. Afterwards write down everything you noticed. All the thoughts that are running riot: your plans, snippets of thoughts, memories. You will notice that it is much easier now to let go of everything.

Herbal nightcap

There are various herbal teas available that promote sleep. You could also mix a relaxing or sleep-inducing tea yourself. Take three types of tea from the following list: hops, valerian, chamomile flowers, green mint, hawthorn berries, St. John's Wort, kava kava, passion flower, lemon balm.

Try to avoid sleeping pills as much as possible. Two American studies involving a million patients showed that taking sleeping tablets on a daily basis is as detrimental to our health as smoking one to two packets of cigarettes a day. The risk of dying from damaged respiratory organs is six to eight times higher. Other nasty side effects of sleeping pills can be that you enter into a kind of coma, from which you wake when the effect of the tablets has worn off. So there is no natural sleep, and often it becomes impossible to fall asleep without these pills. Or you wake up with some kind of hangover, because the sleep was not natural.

Counting sheep new style

When you are really lying awake, try to focus on something else. Do not keep thinking: *I can't sleep!* When we were young we were told to count sheep; now you can do a meditation exercise. Bring your breathing down into your belly, and on an in-breath count one, and breathe out. At the next in-breath count two, and breathe out. When breathing in again count one, and breathe out, and on the next in-breath count two, and breathe out, and so on.

Don't reward yourself for being awake. Don't read interesting books, or make cups of tea for yourself with a treat. You will notice that when you do something nice you will only wake up more often and stay awake longer. When, on the contrary, you do something boring like copying the telephone directory, your sleeplessness will soon vanish.

Even if you are lying awake for hours: don't get up. In this way your body will still get a chance to rest. It won't do you any harm not to sleep; perhaps you won't sleep well for several nights. But you will notice that eventually you will sleep very deeply for a few nights in a row. Usually the balance restores by itself. Trust in that.

Day 7

Positive Thinking

When management consultant John Jaakke was in the process of splitting up one of the largest solicitors' firms in the Netherlands, he described in 'Dutch Diary', his column in one of the leading Dutch newspapers, how he handled his emotions. He needed to get all parties concerned to agree on a course of action and he often felt like 'the only lamppost in a street with seventy dogs'. In order to be able to deal with that John applies three strategies. One evening a week he practises yoga, where he can completely relax. 'I must admit it does look rather comical, five men on a yoga mat.' Secondly he takes a foreign colleague, Raj Raitheta of Versatel, as an example. According to Raitheta, Versatel's strength lies in *positive thinking*. The third



Ik denk altijd alleen maar REDELIJK.

strategy is to present the new office management with a survival package, which consists of rose-tinted spectacles, a box of pep pills, a boxing ball to work off stress, and a cuddly toy animal for lonely moments.

Rational Emotive Therapy

Putting on rose-coloured spectacles happens when you think positively. You can achieve this by practising extensively in the Rational Emotive Therapy (RET). The premise of this method is that people are not troubled by actual experiences but by the way they interpret these experiences. The American RET psychologist Richard Ellis says: 'We often suffer unnecessarily because our heads are full of wrong ideas about life. When one counteracts these rationally, all negative emotions will disappear.'

But beware: thinking positively cannot solve all problems. It is not a way to make right what is wrong. RET does not offer a real solution for a political prisoner who has been tortured, or for someone with a life-threatening illness. RET is an extremely beneficial remedy in situations that can be looked at from a different angle. It deals with the subtle distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. Ask yourself the question: would everyone else who has these experiences also suffer from them? If the answer is yes, then RET is only of limited value. But if you think that it is not fair that something is happening to you, then RET can help to challenge this thought. Ask yourself the question: is it fairer when this would happen to someone else? Why is it not allowed to happen to you specifically? In this way you could gradually analyse and invalidate your own (negative) thought patterns.

When do the rose-tinted glasses work?

How do you know whether RET is a suitable approach to your problems? As a rule you can go from the premise that you can view the problem from a different perspective.

Take for instance Peter, a teacher of German in a grammar school, who got burnt out because of the reorganisation of the educational system for secondary schools. Is it more benefi-

cial for him to continue to dismiss the innovations in the education system and to wage a political battle? Or would he be better off to take a closer look at his feelings in order to change them? RET could be helpful here: for there are also teachers who feel happy with the new system. They see it as a challenge and they enjoy their new role as coach and guide. How to use those rose-tinted spectacles can be illustrated with the following example.

The rose-tinted spectacles: the ABCDE model

The ABCDE model consists of five steps. First of all you describe the situation that gives you an unpleasant feeling. That situation is A; the negative feeling is C. The negative feeling arises because of how you look at the situation. This is B. The thoughts in B can be challenged by asking yourself the following four questions:

1. Is this true; what are the facts?
2. Will I, by thinking in this way, reach my goal?
3. Do I not get unnecessarily into conflict with myself?
4. Or with someone else?

A = Activating event or problematic situation.

B = Belief or irrational thought.

C = Consequence: the unpleasant feeling or unhelpful behaviour.

D = Discussion with yourself: challenging the irrational thoughts.

E = Effect, the description of how you want to feel in the situation.

An example of putting on rose-tinted spectacles

Activating event that makes Peter feel unpleasant

The introduction of new educational policies.

Belief about these policies, the irrational thoughts

1. I don't do justice to my students, because I can no longer teach them in appropriate ways. Therefore they will fail their exams.
2. I can't deal with this, I no longer have any control, and I am powerless.
3. It would be better if I pulled out and let go of my engagement and involvement.
4. I notice that students lose their way. If I could have taught them in the old way, I would have been able to save them.
5. I don't do justice to myself by forcing myself to teach in this new way.

Consequence, the unpleasant feeling

Irritation, fear and sadness.

Discussion: challenging irrational thoughts (see B): what can be said against them?

1. It is not true that everyone is a victim. One category of students is not doing so well, but I have talked this through with the school principal and he will take appropriate measures.
2. Is that so? I see that my colleague, who has been coached, is well able to deal with the new system. Perhaps I should go and get some coaching too.
3. Would I reach my goal – teaching in a pleasant manner – by doing so? No, not at all. It would be better if I set my own goals and try to achieve them with the help of a coach. Even at my age there is still a lot that can be learned. Although I regret that I can no longer work in the old way.
4. I am not sure if I could have saved them, and by presuming I could have I take on a lot of responsibility. I also have colleagues here. However, it is my responsibility to give it my best in class. I am not responsible if a student falls by the wayside.
5. Is it true that I do myself an injustice? I only do so if I insist on sticking to my old methods of teaching while nowadays a new skill is being asked of me. Others have found joy in that, why would that not be possible for me?

Effect, how I want to feel

Calm, in control of my own feelings.

Practising positive thinking

Peter has decided to go for coaching and to adapt his style of teaching to the demands of the new educational system. He feels a lot more at ease and is better able to sleep. The feelings of being powerless have disappeared. He has shared his feelings of powerlessness with his colleagues and they now offer more support. For they definitely do not want to lose him; they appreciate him greatly as a colleague and as a teacher.

Now look at your own stress diary. Which situation would benefit from a RET? From now on make a daily RET analysis of such a situation according to the diagram below.

ABCDE diagram of the RET

A = Activating event. The immediate cause, situation or happenings, the behaviour of others, sensory perceptions of the body, but also memories, imaginings or dreams.

B = Belief. The thoughts or inner dialogues (things you say to yourself). These thoughts sometimes happen automatically, without you being aware of them.

C = Consequence. Feelings, for example feeling angry, fearful, happy, sad, stressed, anxious.

D = Discuss B by asking yourself four questions:

- is it true?
- will I reach my goal in this way?
- will I not get unnecessarily into conflict with myself?
- or with someone else?

E = Effect of the challenge (a different, desired feeling at A).

Day 8

Keeping Your Goal in Sight

In most mental trainings the participants are asked to set goals for themselves. When you feel down or depressed, this is very difficult. You feel helpless and are inclined to throw in the towel. You begin to have tunnel vision; you only take notice of the things that are not going well. Body and mind work together, so when you think like this, you will also feel heavy and tired physically. You cannot be bothered to continue.

We have already seen that it may be helpful to learn to think in a different way. And you can use the ABCDE model to do this. But you can also learn to listen better to yourself. Make use of the knowledge you have about what is good for you. What do you think would benefit you most? In what situations do you feel most comfortable and are you at your best?

Trust your intuition

Use your self-knowledge for a conscious thinking strategy.

Professor Damasio, an expert in neurobiology, shows with an example taken from worker bees how body and mind collaborate. In a field with flowers in many different colours worker bees know exactly on which flowers to land in order to obtain the much-desired honey. In doing so they make use of knowledge, the theory of probabilities and a conscious thinking strategy:

- flowers from which they expect a good yield get preferential treatment over flowers from which they expect less profit (a lot of honey over little honey);
- flowers that are low risk are preferred over flowers that are high risk (no bee-eaters present on the flower).

The simple, automatic brain of the worker bee can in this way carry out the complicated task of gathering food. Damasio compares this to human intuition, which sometimes works in a similar way, bypassing the conscious brain. Intuitively you make choices. Intuition is made up of knowledge, the theory of probabilities and a conscious thinking strategy, just as with the worker bees. What Damasio means is that intuitively we know what is good for us. And also that intuition follows indeed a rationale that we ourselves are not aware of.

Repair the contact

When we arrive in the tunnel that leads to burnout our vision becomes extremely narrow. The contact between body and mind has been lost or disturbed. Often this has been going on for a long time already, and that is also the reason why, for example, you keep on working in a job that is not good for you. You have disconnected from your own intuition through long-term habituation to an unpleasant situation.

Knowing what is right for you is a process. When you are feeling well you crave food that is right for you. When you are engaged in sports, you feel like taking vitamin C and eating grain products such as pasta. Pregnant women often have a craving for herring; the fatty oil in this fish is extremely beneficial for the formation of the brain of their baby.

So we begin by becoming aware of the interaction between body and mind. When you imagine going for a bicycle trip, does that feel right? Or do you already feel nauseous when you are just thinking about it? When you imagine your colleagues coming to visit you, do you feel energetic or does it make you feel heavy-hearted and anxious?

Become aware of what your own preferences are and trust that these preferences will serve you well in your survival, in your looking after yourself.

Keep your goals in sight

At the finals of the Olympic hockey championships that one penalty was decisive ... When Stephan Veen had to take this penalty, he was tortured by negative thoughts. Everything

depended on him, even though he was the best hockey player in the world: 'I have just scored three goals, this is my last competition game, it is a matter of gold or silver; this won't work. Two seconds later all these thoughts were gone. I knew again what I had to do: focus on one successful penalty and keep that in mind; and try to imagine the feeling that goes with it. But that is not always possible.'

Stephen Veen used an excellent aid: visualisation. The hockey team had had a mental training, where the psychologist had asked them to imagine a successful experience from their past. The feeling one gets together with that successful image is crucial.

In a mental training you always have to set goals for yourself and then formulate them. The mind thinks in images and you can use them to strongly influence your feelings. When you have to go for a job interview, you preferably imagine a previous successful job interview. When you have to negotiate with your boss, imagine how you managed to get a 10% pay rise the last time.

Stephen Veen admits that it is difficult to visualise the positive feeling together with the successful image. Initially he also had a negative feeling. But the more you practise, the better you will be able to visualise a positive image. Stephan Veen imagined a successful penalty. This is how he succeeded to utilise the last and decisive penalty cold-bloodedly, so that the Dutch team went home with a gold medal.

If you want to apply his experience in your situation it means that you have to set goals for yourself. You can support this by remembering the times you succeeded in reaching another goal; an experience of having been successful. It does not matter what the goal was, whether it was getting your swimming diploma or your driving licence; what is important is that you succeeded. When you can imagine a successful experience, setting yourself goals will be your next step.

The inner source

This exercise may help you to discover or access your own goals. It is a visualisation exercise. Ask somebody else to read the practice to you slowly. It begins with a short relaxation

exercise. Do some stretches to relax the body. Concentrate on your breathing. Then on the in-breath you expand your belly and on the out-breath you pull your belly in a little bit. Put a hand on your belly and feel how your hand rises up when the belly expands and how it falls back again on the out-breath. Close your eyes. Let go of all worries and thoughts. Imagine you are in a place where you feel totally safe and secure. This can be at home, on a walk in the woods or in the sun on the beach.

Then you start your journey.

You walk on a long road leading to a gate. When you get to the gate you really look at it. You take in the shape and the colour; you smell the material the gate is made from. You look for the handle and you find it. Very carefully you open the gate. Slowly you step through it and you close the gate behind you.

You have ended up in an unkempt garden, with tall grasses. You see poppies in flower, and big, mature fruit trees. Full of curiosity you keep going and you discover a flight of stairs going down. At every step that you go down on those stairs you feel more and more relaxed. Say to yourself with every step going down: 'deeper and deeper.' After the last step you get to a meadow. You walk for ten steps and then you arrive at the edge of a forest. You walk on the soft earth underneath the trees, and breathe in the fresh air of the greenery and the moss. You hear birdsong.

Eventually you feel it takes too long. Is there no end to this forest? You no longer recognise sounds; the crunching of the twigs under foot and the flashing shadows make you anxious. You start to walk faster and you give a sigh of relief when you arrive at a clearing.

You are totally amazed. You are standing in front of a heavenly oasis of peace and calm like you have never seen before. Slowly you walk into the centre of this place. There you discover a bubbling spring. You sit down next to the spring and look at it for a long time. You feel attracted to the glistening water. It seems as if the spring has something to tell you about your innermost wishes. Full of concentration you listen for the spring's message and you understand what it wants to say to you. You carefully take in this message. After a while you get up and you start on your return journey. The path through the forest now seems quite short. You arrive at the meadow and walk in the direction of the stone staircase. Before you climb

the stone steps you turn around and once more you look back in the direction of the spring. Again you think of what it said to you. Slowly you ascend the steps and finally you arrive back at the gate. You open it, walk through it and you lock it from the outside – in such a way that nobody else will be able to open it.

The path in front of the gate brings you back to the space you are now. Take as much time as you need to become fully present. Open your eyes and get used to your surroundings again. You can stretch if you want.

Then think back to the journey and try to answer the following questions:

- What did the spring look like? Was it a powerful gushing of water or just a trickle?
- What was the message? What does the spring say about your needs, your wishes and your desires? What is really a necessity, and what is more like a wish?

When you have charted your needs, wishes and desires, try to set three goals that match your inner needs, wishes and desires.

What are your goals?

Spend five minutes every day for the mental training to reach your goals. Bring one successful experience in reaching your goal to mind, and keep focusing on it. Arouse the accompanying feeling. What positive thought about yourself goes along with that image and that feeling? *I can do it* or *I am successful*? Then imagine the new goal together with the feeling of the positive experience and the positive thought.

Make a mantra out of this positive evaluation of yourself, and say this mantra in your mind. In difficult situations or perhaps specifically at a peaceful moment, think of yourself while you say: *I am happy or the sun is shining again*. The mantra can also consist of naming your core quality (see day 18).

Day 9

Grow! Change!



Got lost? Follow your nature ...

There is more in me than what is showing itself now, people with burnout often say. They feel as if in their job they cannot really express themselves well. Others say that they have come to a dead end. Many people with burnout know for sure that they do not want to return to their old job, and they are frantically looking for what they should do next. Some of them have given so much of themselves in their work that they have become alienated from whom they are – and therefore from what they can do. In all these cases the energy is directed inward. It is the start of a journey of discovery of their true self. In doing so you go from the premise that when you get more of a grip on who you are, the problems will get solved by themselves. The right job will present itself in its own time.

Trying to get a grip on yourself often increases the pressure and thereby the stress. The sense of failing and the feeling of powerlessness increase, because you notice that in one moment you think one thing about yourself – and the next

moment something else. For example, you suddenly know for sure that you have to leave the educational system and should get a job in IT. The next moment you doubt this again, because in the supermarket you met a mother who told you what a wonderful teacher you are. You feel as though you are moving back and forth between many possibilities.

How does an acorn turn into an oak tree?

An acorn is not yet an oak tree, but it has everything inside it to become a fully-grown oak tree. However, many acorns are left in the yard to become fodder for pigs. There are two conditions that need to be fulfilled for the acorn to become an oak: it needs to end up in fertile soil – and it needs to get the right nutrients and the appropriate amount of water. Then the dark protective hull breaks open and something totally new appears: a surprising product coming from both content and environment. This interaction between content and environment is crucial.

Translated to your situation: in order to become who you are, a nourishing interaction between you and your surroundings is vital. Therefore searching for your roots by delving into the past is of limited benefit in being able to find out what you want to do. Of course you can analyse what your strong and weak points are by looking at your past. You can name your core qualities and your blind spots (see also day 18 for an analysis of core qualities). However, it does not give you a perspective on your possibilities for the future.

It is essential to crack the hard nut, to break through the hull of the acorn, so that the acorn can turn into an oak tree. This is a process of transformation, where an amazing potential can be released. Transforming is not the same as changing. Changing is more like shedding your old skin, and then a new skin replaces the old skin, as in the case of caterpillars. As they are growing they break out of their skin several times, and that skin is replaced by a new skin. The transformation from caterpillar to butterfly through the pupal stage, however, is far more profound. It is of a totally different order; it does not involve change but is the release of potential.

The breakthrough

Two things are needed for the breakthrough: fertile soil and nutrients. The *fertile soil* is symbolic for the right environment. This greatly influences the way you function. Carmen, a 30-year-old woman who works within a bureaucratic organisation, and who scores very high on the qualities of independence, flexibility and capacity for innovation, is not working in the right place, and therefore she is running the risk of becoming burnout. And more so if she is putting all her energy into adapting to what she thinks others want from her. She is depleting herself, because she gets acknowledged for something she is not, namely an adapter. She is not appreciated for her innovative capabilities and the wealth of ideas she has. Her self-confidence is visibly declining, because she is not proud of her adaptability. This arouses aggression in her; she hates and despises the person she has become.

Her breakthrough lies in accepting her strength and in finding an environment that suits her strength. The transformation consists of the switch to another work situation, where she is able to show her qualities and capabilities. She needs to break with the habit of adapting to others, and to want approval for qualities that are not showing her strongest side. Part of this breakthrough is that she no longer speaks about herself in *static* terms, ('this is how I am, I can't help it') but in *dynamic* terms ('I don't know if I can do this, but I would like to try'). A static image of yourself is based on knowledge of how you reacted in the past, on habits. A dynamic perspective is focused on your opportunities. You do not know if you will succeed, but you are accepting the challenge. A static self-image is often based on clinging to habits and on the fear of change. A dynamic self-image is based on spunk and on the courage to run risks.

The *nutrients* have to do with enthusiasm, energy and creativity. The energy can be suppressed or leak out by our inability to grieve and to face reality as it is. When you get stuck at work, you experience sadness, and you get bitter because of the missed opportunities. You often blame others. But usually there is sadness behind the blame because your expectations were not met, or because your illusions were shattered. It is extremely important to process these experiences.

Getting completely involved in something

The interaction with the environment is at its best in a process called *flow*. Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi, professor in psychology at the University of Chicago, introduced this term. It describes an optimum state of being. Being in *flow* is the opposite of depleting oneself. You experience *flow* when you can transcend the person you think you are. People engaged in sports experience flow when they are completely absorbed in their experience and when they are being lifted above themselves as it were. You are no longer in the way, and you can be completely open to what is happening. You are opening up to the stream of life and remain in contact with what you are feeling in those moments; your consciousness is attentive. Your creativity is unfolding. In your job *flow* is the distinction between working hard and being satisfied with that, and wearing yourself out day after day. So *flow* is totally different from depleting yourself.

Two attitudes to work (based on Sonja van Zweden's work)

	FLOW	DEPLETING YOURSELF
Orientation	Quality, the work is going well	Quantity and result are foremost, the work needs to be finished
Result	Process	Product
Compass	Internal Personal tempo Personal rhythm Personal organisation Variety	External Pressure Commands/control Adapting/forcing oneself Continuing for too long
Energy	Providing	Demanding
Concentration	Fully	Disturbed
Motivation	Willingness, enjoying, appreciating. It comes from yourself	Feeling forced or compelled, doing because others want you to; recognition from others
Experience	Creative	Monotonous
Recovery	Completely	Partly
Limits	Own happiness and well-being	It needs to be finished; continuing until you drop

Signposts

There are no cut and dried recipes for your growth, change and transformation. However, there are some signposts. The first one is the internal compass: coming into contact with the things you like and which give you satisfaction. Learning to use your intuition (see day 8 and the exercise described there).

The second signpost is an exercise in *flow*. Sit comfortably; relax by giving attention to your in-breath and out breath. Take a few deep breaths, and then let your thoughts go back to a moment when you felt extremely pleasant. You were engaged in doing something and had a feeling of *flow*. You felt good and strong, you could tackle the whole world. See if such a moment comes to mind. Once you have remembered a moment like that, keep it in mind for a while. What were the sense impressions you had, what did you smell, what did you taste, hear, feel?

The third signpost offers the *miracle question* (devised by Marianne van der Pool). Answer the miracle question for yourself: while you are asleep tonight, a miracle will happen. The situation that you are worried about at present is resolved. What is the first little sign that something has changed for you? What would your partner notice, your children, your dog? Set the day that everything was unchanged to 0. Set the day after the miracle to 10. Imagine that right now you are at 5. What makes it 5 now? What do you envisage having reached at the end of this process?

Choose one of these three signposts and determine three goals on the basis of this signpost. Set the goals at 10 – and your situation right now at 0. Make a step-by-step plan to reach your goals.

Be open to the unexpected

One of the best ways to break out of being stuck in old patterns is to focus your attention on activities that are not routine. For your career this means activities you would not usually undertake. You read magazines you would normally never read. You participate in conferences you would previously never consider going to because you think you have nothing to gain from them. You find yourself surfing the internet while you keep

alternative career opportunities at the back of your mind. You could also give yourself new ideas by opening up any book at random and blindly pick out a word. Your brain will discover new opportunities by itself when it ponders on that word and makes new associations or connections. At a later time, when you do not think about it at all, suddenly a brilliant idea will present itself.

Day 10

Switching Off is Possible

Working is sometimes like a drug: you can become completely addicted to it. When working has become an addiction, you are at greater risk of getting a job-related illness such as burnout or RSI. People who are addicted to their work are called workaholics. Not such a nice word: it seems to imply that people themselves are to blame for their burnout or RSI. This blame is not justified, because the work pressure is always of more significance than personal characteristics. Without blaming yourself it is useful, however, to ask yourself why you continue to work so hard, why you cannot stop working. Why, for example, can you not take sick leave in time? And why do you never take all the holidays you are entitled to?

When you answer full of despair that you just can't stop working, it is useful to check whether there is work addiction at play. This is particularly important because addiction is a mechanism that is operating in its own right, and that does not go away once you stop working. The addiction would just shift: you could end up sitting at your computer for hours surfing the internet, go on a shopping spree, become addicted to alcohol or get obsessed by going to the gym. In short, you end up doing something with the same drive as when you were working.

This is not the way to get better at all, because your whole day is now characterised by achieving another goal. People who are recovering from burnout and who go to the gym, often report how they keep an eye on what the person next to them is doing: Am I faster? Am I sweating more? They are fixated on rowing, cycling or walking even faster. Whether they enjoy these activities is of secondary importance; for them what matters is the targets and the achievements.

You need to flick that switch. And this is only possible by changing your attitude.

Not being able to do without your job

One of the attractive sides of addiction is that it provides a kick or a high, which dulls unpleasant feelings and reduces tension. This goes for all kinds of addictions. Whether you are using drugs or alcohol, or are gambling at the slot machines, the pattern is the same. It means that you are away from this world for a while, you are released from yourself, and you can get totally involved in something that feels passionate and compelling. You are one with your experience. Freud described this as an oceanic feeling: for a little while just being one with the world. You can also have this experience when you are in love. The feeling lifts you above the dreary, sad, everyday experiences of rain, rubbish on the streets and noisy neighbours. As such there is nothing wrong with this feeling. We would all like to have that feeling. It comes close to the feeling that people who are engaged in sport describe as flow: being totally involved in a match and being lifted out of yourself for a moment. It is no longer so much a matter of winning, but you are absorbed in the process, in what you are achieving in that moment. It only becomes an addiction when you can no longer do without that experience, when you feel anxious, confused and full of despair without that experience. You have no other choice, you have to work, because otherwise you feel as if you no longer count, no longer exist, and you are afraid that out of despair you will end your life. When you say to yourself or to others that you cannot do without your work, then you have already crossed the addiction boundary. Then you will get withdrawal symptoms when you need to stop working because you are burnt out or have RSI. You may become restless and also depressed. And on some rare occasions people lose all contact with reality and may even become psychotic.

Why are you addicted?

Addiction is a way of dealing with problems. You take refuge in your work; your job is a way of survival. People say how they

have thrown themselves into their work after one of their loved ones died, or after a divorce. When this survival behaviour is temporary, it is not really a problem. But when you notice that you have become fully addicted to this adrenaline kick, then there is a problem. Henry, who is an interior designer, had already been burnt out for nearly two years when he started to get treatment. He no longer worked, but was addicted to surfing the internet and to buying things. Before the therapy session he was sitting in the waiting room, looking through the magazines in a strange manner. He devoured the pictures; his gaze was totally fixated on them, his face and posture tense, and he frantically turned the pages as quickly as he could. It seemed as if he wanted to take in everything, and was angry because there were so many illustrations in the magazines. He displayed this obsessed attitude in all aspects of his life.

When he started to note down all activities of the day, he noticed this, and it became possible to talk about it. He then began to change: he still did the same activities, but for shorter periods of time and often with less intensity. Not going shopping three times a day but only once; no longer at the computer in the evenings, but one hour during the day. In this way he had time left to do activities he really enjoyed. The enjoyment did not start immediately, because first of all he had to get out of these habits. Eventually he managed to relax. His attitude changed from obsessive to attentive. He reflected on what he had liked to do previously. That was painting, taking photographs, listening to music and reading books. By making space for these activities in his day he calmed down and got more relaxed. Bit by bit he was able to enjoy things again.

During the treatment for burnout Henry also found out the reason behind his addiction. He was the only member of his family who had chosen a career outside the family business. He chose a difficult, individual path instead of a golden future. His father considered him a spoilsport and put him under a lot of pressure to come and work in the family business. His brothers sneered at the car Henry was able to afford, while they themselves drove expensive BMWs. Therefore Henry felt compelled to prove himself in the interior design world: he wanted to show his father that he had made the right choice; he really wanted to persuade his father of this. He literally exhausted himself to convince his father and his brothers at any cost that he was not a *loser*. He deflected the unpleasant

feeling that his father disowned him, by becoming the black sheep in the family. In fact he had not yet released himself from the parental approval. In this way the treatment was also a stepping stone to standing on his own two feet, to give direction to his life with his own compass.

How do you get rid of your addiction?

The following three steps are needed:

1. Become aware that addiction is nothing more (but also nothing less!) than an attitude with which you do all everyday activities.
2. Reduce the activities you do as an addict (in other words, as a madman). Do them less intensively. In the time that you free up in this way, go and do things you previously enjoyed. Plan your day, keep to that structure every day and keep a record of what you do in the day. Do not forget to be lazy.
3. What feelings arise when you are not rushing around? Do you feel sad, angry or fearful? Give space to these feelings, investigate them, and see if they are justified. On your own, or with the help of somebody else, try to process these feelings, so that you can let go of your past (see day 11). Only when you let go, can you yourself determine the direction of your life again.

Day 11

Letting Go of the Past

Everybody sooner or later will have an unpleasant experience in his or her life. An experience you remember with sadness. A much-loved relative died. You have been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. You have survived a natural disaster. You had a relationship with a jealous partner. You are the victim of a *stalker*. One in seven women have experienced sexual abuse in their youth. This also happens to boys. Some adults were bullied as children and are overly sensitive to and almost suspicious of remarks made by their boss or colleagues.

Most people have processed unpleasant experiences and get on with their lives. When they think back to these experiences, for example on the birthday of somebody who died, they feel sad. They express their sorrow by visiting the grave and putting flowers there. Or they devise another comforting ritual.

Posttraumatic stress disorders

Sometimes this process of coming to terms with difficulties gets stuck. When you think back to that awful experience, you feel just as bad as you did then. A man whose child was still-born, perhaps cannot visit the grave because it makes him nauseous and miserable. He avoids thinking about the death of his child, and makes sure he keeps away from the graveyard.

People who have not processed a bad experience from the past, can begin to suffer from posttraumatic stress disorders. This is the case when two or three months after the event you still suffer regularly from re-experiencing the event, find it difficult to express your feelings and are in a high state of alertness or suffer from increased irritability:

Re-experiencing

- The painful memories continue to come back.
- The event keeps playing out before your eyes.
- You feel just like you did then.
- You keep having nightmares about it.
- You are totally off-balance when something reminds you of that event.

Difficulties in expressing feelings (avoidance behaviour)

- You avoid thinking about the unpleasant event.
- You begin to work very hard so that you are not reminded of it.
- You are less interested in your surroundings.
- You feel emotionally numbed.
- You have the sense that there is no longer a future for you.
- You feel alienated from your surroundings.
- It seems as if everything passes you by as in a film.

Higher state of alertness and/or increased irritability

- You get a fright even if it is only something insignificant, like a door slamming.
- You have problems falling asleep and staying asleep.
- You can lash out in anger about the slightest things.
- You find it difficult to concentrate.
- Your muscles are constantly tense, particularly when you are confronted with something that reminds you of the trauma.

The past as energy depleting factor

A traumatic event that you have not yet come to terms with makes you vulnerable. If your authoritarian stepfather has emotionally abused you, you will look differently to other men who are in a position of authority over you. You have conflicts with every boss, because you perceive him in the same way as you do your stepfather. You are suspicious of every boss from the very start, because you feel he is going to betray you.

When in your job an aspect of a previous traumatic event gets re-stimulated all the time, you suffer from chronic stress, with the result that your hormones will become totally unbalanced. Too many stress hormones will be produced, or – if the

situation lasts for too long – stress hormones will no longer be produced at all because they have become depleted. This means your energy is depleted as well. In this way you will develop complaints that are the same as those in burnout: sleep disorders, nightmares, difficulty in concentrating, problems with memory, being upset about nothing, being irritable and getting ill more often, hyperventilation, no longer wanting to have sex, and in general suffering from a sense of emotional dullness.

An example: Recovering from the bank raid

Monica (41) works in a bank. Because of burnout symptoms she is on sick leave. She is extremely tired, has difficulty sleeping and feels fearful. She cannot concentrate, cries a lot, and has headaches and palpitations. She has little self-confidence, and in her work she was not very productive lately. She scores high on the list *Am I burnout?*

At work she finally broke down after she got a new boss who knew less than she did, and whom she had to familiarise with the job. After four weeks she got the feeling that he was continually looking over her shoulder and criticising her for the smallest things. She felt totally humiliated when this boss questioned her why she was going to the bathroom so frequently. Did she not have the right to withdraw now and then?

What did she feel in the conflict with her boss? Powerlessness; and a lot of fear. That fear, by the way, did not only have to do with the boss, she slowly began to realise. A few months ago something nasty had happened. In the lunch break she was alone at the counter of the small branch. In front of the bank she saw a man walking to and fro. When no other customers were at the counter, the man entered the bank with a balaclava over his head. A bank raid! In spite of thorough training in preparation for these kinds of eventualities, Monica panicked. She could not find the alarm button and fainted. When she came to the bank robber had disappeared. Nobody had seen him. She obviously had pressed the alarm because the police had arrived. She was well taken care of, and after a week went back to work. Shortly after this the new boss arrived, and things started to go wrong for Monica.

On recommendation of the company welfare officer Moni-

ca ended up going to a burnout specialist. Although her complaints seemed related to burnout, it was also very likely that the fright she got at the bank robbery attempt was still affecting her. Therefore it was important to first of all come to terms with this frightening experience. Monica was asked to go back to the moment when the bank robber in the balaclava was standing right in front of her. At that moment, did she have a negative thought about herself? And if yes, what was it?

I am a stupid cow, Monica thought. She hated herself because she panicked, even though she had been thoroughly trained. She started to hyperventilate and consequently fainted. What would she like to think of herself? That she is okay, of course.

By way of the method of EMDR (*Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing*, a therapeutic method that works with rapid eye movements), she succeeded in reacting with much less stress to the event. And she no longer had negative thoughts about herself. She managed to combine the positive thought *I survived* with the image of the bank robber. Quite soon she started to sleep better, and she no longer felt so tired.

Finally her feelings about the relationship with her boss were successfully dealt with through EMDR, and soon Monica could go back to work. She talked things through with her boss. She managed to concentrate on her work again. She followed a financial training for which she had to sit an exam shortly – and she had confidence in herself that she would pass. However she did ask for a transfer to a larger branch. After a month had passed, she got 9 out of 10 for the exam, and was enjoying her work at another branch of the bank. With her old boss she could now have a normal conversation.

Long-term depletion

Monica's experience is a typical example of how blocked energy caused by trauma can lead to burnout symptoms. In this particular situation you may recover reasonably quickly. When the blockage is removed, the energy will start to flow again by itself.

The other variant of burnout through posttraumatic stress is that the suppression of a shocking event in one's life leads to severe physical and mental exhaustion. You need so much energy to keep going and to survive, that you become totally depleted:

John, a 45-year old policy maker in a ministerial department, had an unpredictable stepfather who, when he had been drinking, would beat John's mother. Once he came after John and his mother with a knife. They had to lock themselves into the bathroom. John broke off all contact with his parents when he turned 21, and he has not been in touch since. In the meantime he got married and has two children. His wife suffers from severe pelvic instability since the birth of the last child. She can no longer lift things, so that for the past few years most of the household duties have fallen to John. He was working four days a week, but often he goes to the department on the fifth day to attend a meeting. Late in the evenings, when finally everything that needed doing has been done, he relaxes with a bottle of beer. But often he drinks three or four bottles. In the past two years he has become more and more exhausted. At work John's relationship with his boss is not going well. According to John he is a real slave driver. Whatever John does, it is never good enough. After a reorganisation, when the jobs John liked doing best, have gone to somebody else, he collapses. At that stage he has been exhausted for a number of years, sleeping badly and needing every holiday and weekend to recover.

In John's case recovery takes a long time. First of all he has to work on his physical recovery, and to find a balance between his job and his home life. Only then can he begin to deal with the traumatic events from the past. He does so under the guidance of a professional therapist.

Professional help

Do you recognise yourself in the examples? Or in one or more of the posttraumatic stress complaints? Do not hesitate to seek professional help. Such events are often too dramatic to cope with on your own. Ask your GP to refer you to a psychologist or a psychotherapist. Then ask yourself if you get on with the therapist. Ask whether he or she has experience with the treatment of people with posttraumatic complaints.

For a referral to an EMDR therapist, it is best to get in touch with an association of EMDR therapists.

Day 12

Fearing Nobody

Fear devours energy. When you get burnout, your neuro-hormonal system is disturbed. Some people feel continually rushed; others feel powerless. Nearly everybody worries a lot. You could say that worrying is a form of mental overheating. The feelings of fear that accompany worrying very often have no real basis, but even though you know and understand this, these fearful thoughts don't go away. Strong feelings of anxiety that are bordering on suspicion: you are afraid to leave the house, because you fear that everybody knows that you are



Take some time for a turbo-relaxation exercise.

burnout. You see a group of people talking at the street corner and you are sure that they are laughing about you. Sometimes the fear prevents you from seeking the help you need so badly.

Richard is only 22 and already burnt out. Is that possible? Yes, even when you are that young you can have been under pressure for years. Richard worked in his parents' business. In fact he was already doing more than he could handle for three years. He frequently indicated this to his parents. They thought that something would change by itself, but eventually nothing happened. The straw that broke the camel's back was an unreasonable customer. Every year this client managed to hand in the necessary information too late, so that the deadline could not be met. With great difficulty Richard had always succeeded in getting the job done in time. However, this year he was ill and the deadline was not met. The customer said that it was absolutely unacceptable that Richard was off sick, and that he could not understand why. This lack of appreciation was too much for Richard: 'I am always at everybody's beck and call, and it is never good enough ...'

His GP referred him to a psychologist, but Richard is afraid to go. The psychologist's practice is situated right between the premises of businesses that are customers of Richard's parents. This made Richard anxious: 'All kinds of questions came up for me: what if somebody sees me, it might be someone who knows me.' Fortunately the doctor had an alternative: she referred Richard to the local mental health clinic. But if he is really honest, he also dreads going there ...

Richard's fear has to do with his parents, in whose business he works. They let him soldier on with a workload that is too heavy. This situation often happens: a child that is tied to its parents with golden threads and therefore gets stuck. A situation like this also involves the fear of acquaintances, and shame. On the surface it seems to be about fear, but underneath it are rage and resentment.

How do you deal with strong fears?

- Tell your GP that you are afraid. That you think that everyone is rejecting you. Or that you are afraid that things will

never work out. Tell him or her how you feel, your feelings of fear. That you break out in a cold sweat, that your heartbeat increases, that your mouth gets dry and that you breathe very fast. Ask if he can help you. Sometimes it is possible to reduce the fear through medication. It is not a long-term solution, but in the short term it is effective. It prevents you from lying awake at night because you are worrying or thinking fearful thoughts. It also prevents you from becoming so desperate that you think the world would be better off without you.

- Do relaxation exercises (see day 2 and 22). Do these exercises not at the peak of your fear, but at times when you feel grounded. Do them regularly, for example an exercise in the morning, one in the afternoon and another one before going to sleep.

A turbo-relaxation exercise

Sit on a chair, leaning against the backrest of the chair, both feet on the ground. Have your eyes closed lightly. Concentrate on your breathing and bring to mind a situation where you felt quite safe: at home, in the woods or on the beach. Then extend both arms in front of you, make fists, press hard and feel the tension increase in your muscles. Hold that tension for about thirty seconds, and release again. Then go back to breathing in a calm and relaxed way. Next, hunch your shoulders, as if to say: I don't know either, and let go again. Repeat this once more. Then let go of all tension, and concentrate on your breathing, calmly breathing in and out. Then tense all the muscles in your face by crunching up your face, frowning, shutting your eyes tightly, wriggling your nose, putting your tongue against the palate, pressing your lips together. Hold this for quite a while and then relax again. Then bring your breath down into your belly. On an in-breath tighten your belly by pushing it out against the waistband of your trousers or skirt, continue to breathe calmly, while you keep your belly tense for half a minute, and then let go again. Relax completely. Now pull in your belly as far as you can, keep breathing, and then let go again. Next go with your attention to your buttocks. Squeeze them together tightly, keep them tensed and then let go again. Stretch both legs in front of you, toes pointing

towards you. Feel the tension increasing in your calf muscles, your upper legs, and then let go again completely. You can end this relaxation exercise by concentrating on your breathing. When you get troubled by distracting thoughts, imagine that the thoughts are coloured balloons, and one by one you send them up into the air; watch them until they are out of sight and then concentrate on your breathing again. When you want to finish this exercise, count from five to one and tell yourself that you will wake up totally refreshed.

- Distract yourself with activities. Engage in a sport, do fitness training, ring someone you trust and go to a movie. Avoid spending a lot of time on your own worrying about things.
- Concentrate on things you enjoy. Look up the energy providers you wrote down on day 3, and expand the list with more things you like doing.
- Do not at any cost try to avoid situations that make you fearful. Try to train yourself step by step – and do short relaxation exercises. Do not let your fear become so great that you cannot leave the house anymore. By giving in to the fear you deprive yourself of a lot of fun in your life. Keep facing the challenge! Draw up a Rational Self Analysis (RSA) about the fearful situation again and again. Do this before and after you have put yourself through that ‘fearful’ event. To stay with the example of Richard:

Situation

Monday at 15.00 I have an appointment at the mental health clinic.

Irrational thought

I might meet a customer of my parents’ business. This person will think I am mad.

Unwanted feeling

Fear and panic.

Challenging the irrational thought

1. How do I know what somebody else thinks? Perhaps he too has an appointment at this clinic. After all two out of three people have some kind of mental problem. Every year 2.7% of the workforce experiences burnout. I am not the only one.

2. Will I reach my goal of feeling pleasant and calm by thinking irrationally like this? No, but I am torturing myself, I am frightening myself. What do I gain from that? I can stop this and do something interesting. Make a date with a friend to see a movie.
3. Do I get into conflict with myself by thinking irrationally? Yes, absolutely. I do not improve myself by making myself fearful. With this inner conflict I mainly aim the aggression at myself instead of at those stupid clients who make my life miserable at work. I can use my energy more wisely by speaking up for myself, also to my parents.
4. By thinking irrationally do I bring myself unnecessarily in conflict with others? When I feel so fearful I avoid facing the necessary challenges. I prefer to make myself ill rather than pointing out to my parents their responsibilities as regards my working situation. It would be better if I made an appointment with them and tell them that it is imperative that something changes. If nothing will change, it would be better if I went to work somewhere else, where the circumstances are more favourable.

Wanted feeling

Self-control, and a bit cross with parents and difficult customers.

Action

Pointing out to parents their behaviour and the workload that is too heavy. In future set boundaries and do not entertain an impossible demand from the client.

Day 13

Beyond Shame

Feelings of guilt and shame are closely connected, and are sometimes confused. In a newspaper interview the illustrator Peter Pontiac talks about his 'guilt complex': 'Yes, I really suffer from that. When I send in a drawing to a client and I don't get a response, I am always sure that the drawing was not good enough, while usually that is not the case. There are, by the way, very few drawings I would stand next to with pride.' In this case there is shame rather than guilt, and it is very recognisable. Who does not think that when there is no response, the other will disapprove or reject? It is the shame because of the judgement of the other. You feel useless and you think that the other will be of the same opinion. The opposite feeling is pride: you feel that you are of value. Even to such an extent that, as Peter Pontiac puts it, you would want to stand next to your drawing.

Guilt and shame

You feel guilty when you have transgressed a rule or a norm, morally or legally. You have done something wrong. It was not right what you did, and if somebody were to reproach you, it would be justified. Feeling guilty can have a positive effect; it urges you to approach matters differently the next time. Feelings of guilt can also be inappropriate, for example when you are making life difficult for yourself with unrealistic blame: *I am not a good partner; I am not a good employee; I am not a good mother or father. I always do something wrong. I never spend enough time with or money on others.* This is being aggressive against yourself. Nobody benefits from this kind of

guilty feeling. Always check whether your feelings of guilt are justified. Ask yourself whether you would think the same way if it concerned somebody else. If somebody else had done or left undone what you did, or when someone else transgresses a norm or rule, what would you advise the other person to do?

Shame is a painful feeling that arises from lack of self-acceptance. When you are ashamed, you think you are a bad person. Unfortunately children are often encouraged to feel shame: *Are you not ashamed of yourself?* When they arrive home with dirty clothes, knock over a glass of milk, throw a piece of Lego at their younger sister. Parents seldom distinguish between bad children and bad actions. In this way children identify themselves with their naughty behaviour and begin to see themselves as a child that is not okay. Some children have been exposed to shameful experiences in an extreme way. Sexual abuse may lead to a permanent feeling of – often unconscious – inner shame, and the expectation to be shamed by others. Sometimes this results in the delusion that you are constantly being watched.

Shame is something that everybody experiences and it usually causes painful feelings. In the case of the illustrator Peter Pontiac we see that two parties are involved in shame: the ‘me’ that is no good – and the rejecting party, which is modelled on the ‘good’ parent from our childhood. The good parent who rejects you is in Peter Pontiac’s case the client: the not good enough self is Peter who sends in the drawing and who, when there is no response from the client, thinks: ‘See, I am no good.’ A train of thought like this is a well-known pitfall. You feel swept aside. You feel confirmed in your suspicion that it is you who is no good. The other – previously: your parent – is always good. Your parents are your models. You idealise the other person and invest him or her with a lot of power.

Shame is often deflected with anger. Many people who are sensitive to humiliation may not even have fully heard yet what kind of hurtful or insulting things the other says, but as soon as they hear the first sentence, they already react with anger. This anger is caused by shame.

Avoiding shame is damaging

Pontiac says that previously he never dared leave anything out of his drawings for fear of the empty spaces. But also because of his extreme sense of vulnerability and lack of self-confidence, he admits: 'I thought that if I draw enough things, sooner or later there will be something brilliant amongst them, and then they perhaps won't notice the mistakes.' The result was that he took a long time to finish his drawings. When you are so susceptible to shame you have to do everything ten times as good as somebody else. You are always busy and you hardly enjoy your success, because shame is always lurking in the background. You feel rejected from the outset, although nobody has even tried to hurt or insult you. But to prevent that something like that will happen, you quickly need to start on the next project, and achieve even more than before. In this way you undermine yourself. This is particularly so because you are continually achieving for the eyes of the other person. The inner self shrivels up through malnourishment. And one day it is empty, and then you experience everything you do as meaningless and you no longer believe it makes any difference what you are doing. You are a danger to yourself and to others, because there is a desperate rage hiding in you: the rage of the child that has always been short-changed.

Be gentle for yourself

In April 1944 Loden Vogel, a pseudonym for psychiatrist Louis Tas, was transported to the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, where he was kept prisoner until the end of World War 2. He kept a diary that was published shortly after the war and republished in 2000. In *Dagboek uit een kamp* (Diary from a Camp) he makes a distinction between feelings of guilt and feelings of shame. He was in the camp together with his parents. He felt guilty when he accepted the bread his mother gave him, because she did not have enough either. He also felt guilty when he bragged about himself. His behaviour was against his own norms and values. He gained a valuable insight into shame when he and his father asked themselves why the German Jews who had escaped concentration camps in 1938 and had fled to the Netherlands, did not speak about

their experiences once they got there. The worldly uncle Hans says: ‘They are ashamed because they were treated to badly.’

Loden Vogel continues: ‘The knowledge that we belonged to a group of people that could be humiliated and tortured with impunity, was shame-inducing, of course.’ According to Vogel shame arises because you identify – against your own feelings and even though you know better – with the people you despise and humiliate. You direct the hatred that is created in you because of this situation at yourself. The psychiatrist Louis Tas – alias Loden Vogel – says that somebody who is ashamed, has lost the empathy – a feeling of compassion – with themselves. To win back that empathy with yourself, you have to go through the fear that others will despise or reject you. Empathy with yourself means that you begin to feel for yourself again – and that you understand and sympathise with the despised I in yourself. It is akin to recovering the trust in your own intuition (day 8).

Cherish yourself

Looking after yourself well is a kind of empathy, a special involvement with yourself. It does not necessarily mean that you have to spoil yourself, but it is important to take your own needs and wishes seriously. If you do that, often a lot of sadness arises, you grieve for the lack of warmth, security and safety. You grieve for the sorrow of the small child in you. Take your time with this, and give space to your feelings. Some people literally need warmth and find this in a hot bath. Don’t condemn yourself for these needs. Try to have a balanced view of yourself in daily life and in your job. You don’t need to be the perfect employee in order to be okay for others. If you are criticised, this doesn’t mean that you are immediately the worst colleague in the world. Try to see yourself as a human being of flesh and blood, with good qualities and qualities that are not so strong. Make a Rational Self Analysis every time you feel hurt and rejected.

Day 14

Overcoming Fear of Failure

If only I would succeed. If only it doesn't go wrong. Many people suffer from fear of failure. It has to go well ...! Fear of failure is accompanied by a racing heart, shaking hands, pressure on the bladder, a constricted throat, a dry mouth, a runny nose, red blotches around your throat and sweating. Most people who have to give a speech are suffering from this at times. Actors and musicians suffer from stage fright before they start. Often the fear disappears as soon as they are on stage, or even before, as soon as they have been made up.

A slight of fear of failure is part of it all – and it even ensures a good achievement. You are fully focussed. In this state you are putting your best foot forward. You need the adrenaline, the stress hormone, in order to achieve. It helps you to concentrate well, and your senses are on high alert. Usually the physical symptoms disappear after a while when you are fully absorbed in what you are doing (*flow*).

Fear of failure is the fear to be judged negatively by others. If this tension becomes too great it can be detrimental to your achievement. Or you achieve well but afterwards you feel empty and exhausted. Totally worn out. You have the feeling that making a speech, for example, demands too much energy. Some people can easily get out of giving a talk. For others it is part of their job – and every time it is a torture again that they dread for weeks beforehand.

Sometimes fear of failure is destructive. The Dutch actor Guus Hermus became paralysed with fear during the performance of a play. He could no longer say anything, could not take a single step. The curtains came down halfway through the performance. He gave up acting as a result of this experience.

Towards burnout

Because of the fear of failure hormones like noradrenaline and serotonin are produced. Some people with fear of failure have become dependent on beta-blockers: research has shown that they reduce fear of failure in musicians (*The Lancet*, 1977) It is true that beta-blockers slow down the heart rate and reduce the shaking. But whether they are affecting the brain has not been determined.

Fear of failure can eventually result in burnout. Suppose you have just finished your training and you start your first job. You are not being shown the ins and outs of the work adequately. You do not yet have a clear picture of what your abilities are and of what is expected of you. During that initial period you are detached to a client by your organisation, for a lot of money. If you did not have fear of failure yet, chances are that you will develop it in this situation. The insecurity in itself requires a lot of effort already. Day after day you make demands on your energy reserves because you are not sure what your limits or boundaries are. After a while you will be at great risk of burnout. You are asking yourself if you can cope with this job: *Am I incompetent or am I burnout?*

Cognitive therapy

Fear of failure can be overcome by cognitive therapy. In this type of therapy you learn to take your attention deliberately away from the tension and thereby turn it to something else. With your therapist you check step by step which thoughts were involved in building up that excess of tension. In this way you will discover where you can intervene. In cognitive therapy you also learn to put your fears into perspective by continually asking yourself: What is it really that I am afraid of?

An actor, for example, no longer sees his audience as a monster with 600 heads, but as 600 individuals. Every evening he picks out a piece of text that he wants to improve on. Someone else who is at the microphone with trembling knees uses aggression to prevent his fear. He says to himself: *I don't care about the audience. I am the one here who is in charge of the microphone, and all of you have to listen to me.* An extremely nervous PhD student who had to defend her thesis, helped

herself by thinking up a fantasy. She imagined in great detail an experience where she had felt very strong and self-confident. She was riding a galloping horse and firmly held the reins in her hands.

Steps to counter fear of failure

- Make a Rational Self Analysis of the situation where you experience fear of failure (day 7). What is the worst that could happen to you? That you faint, become paralysed, or make a slip of the tongue so that everybody laughs at you? That you forget your lines? That people see you are suffering from stress, that they might see how there is sweat on your brow and that your knees are trembling? How do you view others to whom this is happening? Do you laugh at them or do you empathise? What do you think of somebody who ridicules a nervous speaker or jeers at him or her? Suppose the worst was to happen to you, then what? Will you die from it? No; it may happen that as a speaker you lose face once in a while, but that doesn't mean that you are a *loser*. Reflect that when people see you are coping well – in spite of your feelings of fear – they will often admire your achievement. You managed to do it! You achieve more than somebody who does not suffer from nervousness.
- Do relaxation exercises every day. An example of a relaxing exercise can be found at day 2.
- Do you sometimes stammer? Carl, who had a stammer, took the following action: He always broke out in a cold sweat when he saw an advertising spot on TV of a child that stammered. As soon as he saw this advertisement, he felt constricted. He entered the skin of the child as it were. As a therapy he taped the ad on video. Before watching the advertisement he always did a relaxation exercise. While watching he thought of himself: *I am ridiculous*. He let the tension increase and then tried to relax more. In order to get relaxed he said to himself: *How brave of that young boy to do this. And then: How brave of me to talk with my colleagues and with customers despite my stammer*. He finished the exercise with another relaxation exercise, while saying to himself: *I fully and completely accept myself. Even though I stammer, I am okay*.

- You can also do the exercise described above in your imagination. Visualise something terrible: you are giving a lecture that is illustrated with sheets on a flip chart, and you have forgotten the sheets. These sheets were the framework for your lecture. You are afraid that you will be at a loss for words. Play a situation like this as a videotape in your head and then think a stereotype negative thought. For example: *Of course this had to happen to me again, I am always down on my luck.* Next you replay the video film in your head and you say to yourself: *Great that I am standing here; I am an expert in my field and have a lot to offer. I accept myself as I am, even though the lecture is not going as perfect as it could be.*

Day 15

From Perfectionism to Easy-going

Sigmund, psychiatrist and cartoonist, is a master in bitchy yet striking remarks. In one of his cartoons he has a character give an extraordinary and catching reply. A lady with a big shoulder bag says to Sigmund: *I have five children, a busy household, a full-time job and can manage to combine all that quite well.* Sigmund asks: *How do you do that?* The lady answers: *I am messy.*



I'm not messy; I'm creative.

To be less tidy is the answer to all those high demands you make on yourself. Do you have problems with that attitude? Ask yourself why. For it can be quite beneficial to take a more balanced view and ask yourself why it is so terrible that your desk is a mess, or that the house is untidy. Do you think you are letting yourself go completely if you do less than your utmost best? Try to put yourself in somebody else's shoes: does he or she think that you are letting yourself go when now you care better for yourself and for those around you? Are you criticised? And if so, by whom? Does this person gain from you stretching yourself to your limits? Do you consider your best friend messy when he or she lets things be untidy once in a while? Perhaps you suggest to others what you are not allowing yourself!

Perfectionism – *the* pitfall

More than 25 years ago the American psychiatrist Dr. Freudenberger drew up a profile of people who run a great risk of becoming burnout. According to Freudenberger they have the following qualities and habits:

- being a perfectionist
- conscientious
- working hard
- dedicated and idealistic
- ambitious
- having the need to prove themselves
- goal-oriented
- finding it difficult to say no
- finding it difficult to set boundaries
- doing more than they can
- doing more than they are asked to
- not being able to delegate
- sacrificing themselves

The higher the demands on yourself, the greater the stress

Sam is a sales manager who is recovering from burnout. One Sunday evening he is sitting on the sofa watching TV. At the

dining table nearby his wife is sewing a dress for their two-year-old daughter. He looks at her and feels inadequate. He should really be busy as well, he thinks. Right now he is less productive than his wife.

He really wants to do something. So he decides to frame the photographs that they want to give to friends. He gets everything he needs – but then what? It turns out that he had the pictures printed in the wrong size. They don't fit in the mounts. Sam is extremely angry. Now he can't do what he wants, and he has to try to find those negatives again, go to the photo shop again to order new prints – and then having to wait for another week. He feels he has to do this himself, for it was he who messed up. With envy he watches his perfect wife who is always so active. She does have energy. He still feels tired from the training he did this morning; he cycled 60 kilometres. His goal, to cycle around the IJsselmeer – a big lake in the Netherlands – in one day, gets a little bit closer. But why can't he make himself get up and find those negatives now? *What is wrong with me?* Sam worries. His wife holds up the dress: 'Beautiful, isn't it?'

'Yes, you are wonderful', he answers full of cynicism. His wife looks at him. 'Is something the matter?'

Sam himself is the cause of his frustration. He doesn't get stressed from the lack of understanding for his burnout from those around him, but because of his own lack of empathy with himself. He is cross with himself because he keeps postponing trying to find those negatives. He curses himself and calls himself a gutless slob. And he adds insult to injury by linking this situation to his childhood: you see, it is just like then, you did not finish a single school, in the end you had to sit the state exams. That he passed those exams is irrelevant for now.

The result of all this grumbling is that he is spoiling a quiet Sunday evening. Sam and his wife go to bed full of tension, and do not wake up refreshed. The stress hormones have not really subsided during the night. Sam gets up the next morning with a pounding heart, and he thinks to himself: *I am not at all fully recovered yet; perhaps I never will get better again ...*

Follow your thoughts with RET

Sam's situation is a perfect example for the application of the Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) from day 7. How would you apply this method in this case?

First of all write down the situation:

I am sitting on the couch and am of the opinion that I should do something. (A).

Then write down the feeling you had in that moment about your situation (C): *I am angry, because I actually don't feel like it.*

Next you write down the thoughts that cause that feeling – anger in this example: *I am tired, I don't feel like it. I feel like doing nothing at all.*

And also the thoughts that are countering this:

I have to be just as perfect as my wife... I am a gutless slob... I am never doing anything ... What will my wife think of me ...

This makes for a good internal argument.

And that makes you very tired.

It is an art to challenge yourself.

This you do by reflecting first of all: what is the desired feeling? What feelings would you prefer to have right now? (E).

Do you want to sit on the couch feeling lousy? Or with a worse feeling start on those photographs?

Of course not, you want to feel pleasant and relaxed!

This needs a very thorough interrogation of your thoughts (D):

Does it have to be like this? Do you need to be as perfect as your wife?

Perhaps she also makes too many demands on herself; it would be better if she were less productive.

You challenge the next thought by asking yourself: *Am I a gutless slob just because I don't feel like looking for those negatives?*

You give yourself an answer.

No, of course not! It is ridiculous rejecting myself like that, just because I feel like sitting on the couch. I can look for those negatives tomorrow.

You have actually challenged the situation enough already.

Use the fixed order of the ABCDE model (see day 7) to unravel your own train of thoughts. Then you will discover the vicious

circle of negative thinking – and be able to break it.

In case you don't make any headway with this challenge, the following two questions may also help:

- Am I reaching my goal – feeling well and relaxed for example – in this way?
- Do I not get into unnecessary conflict with myself?
- Or into unnecessary conflict with others?

Actually Sam found the negatives quite quickly the next day. This probably would not have happened had he still been so tired. If you continue longer than is really possible, you make a lot more mistakes.

Adjusting the demands

Every day do 25% less of what you had originally intended. Use the time that is freed up to do more things from the list with fifty interesting or enjoyable things to do (days 2 and 3).

Day 16

Your Own Worst Enemy

Sylvie resumes work as a communications manager after a period of burnout. The arrangement is that she will slowly re-enter the work process. She starts with working for two hours twice a week. After a few weeks she breaks down again. She says: I am willing, but my body is not. It turns out that she has demanded too much of herself, has worked more hours than was agreed, and also participated in difficult meetings.

She had been ill for six months. From the beginning she found it difficult to accept being ill. Every time it became obvious that she could not cope. When she had taken care of her mother for too long, she got bronchitis. After helping a friend move house, she could not get out of bed for a few days. She mentioned how bad things were for her, and at the same time she insisted on returning to work. The company physician did not think that a good idea; first of all she needed to rest. Sylvie protested, but at the same time was happy and relieved that she did not have to go back to work yet. The recovery did not go well, because Sylvie either asked too much of herself, or too little.

Looking for illness

What Sylvie did not manage to do was to slowly build up her strength again, and to take responsibility for her own health. Sylvie always could present the situation in such a way that the people around her took the responsibility and that she herself could remain the victim. She repeatedly did too much when she had to do less, and subsequently she always had to start all over again.

Ultimately she herself was the victim of this, because when it was time for a disability check up, the medical officer refused to give her the all clear and advised her to check into a mental hospital in order to get more in touch with her feelings. As such this was a correct diagnosis, but admitting her to a psychiatric hospital seemed rather drastic. Sylvie herself was in total despair and began to worry more and more about what was wrong with her. Was it a burnout? Or was it another illness? Chronic fatigue, perhaps? A virus? Did she have nutritional deficiencies, or candida? By behaving in this way she still did not accept her being ill, but persisted in being the victim and being powerless. She took her body to the doctors and complementary practitioners as if it was a broken alarm clock, and she begged them to repair it. She went to an aura healer and a fortuneteller, and became increasingly despairing because nobody could help her. Her power consisted of making the carers powerless. She was such a difficult patient; nobody could help her.

Behaviour is always perpetuated because it is rewarded. What was her reward in this case? It seemed that it was not there, she felt completely miserable and this was extremely upsetting. In the short term there were many negative sides to her behaviour. However, in the long term there were gains. She did not have to take on the responsibility for herself, nor for the stress of her job. Because she was willing, it was her body that was unwilling.

Do not be a victim

How do you prevent yourself from becoming a victim and being full of self-pity?

- The first step is to really investigate what is the problem. Take on this responsibility. Insist that you get a clear diagnosis and that other physical illnesses are totally ruled out, because sometimes a diagnosis of burnout is given too quickly. And then it turns out that it is 'just' glandular fever because you shared somebody's can of coke. If you yourself are saying that your workload is too much, then often burnout is thought of first. A 45-year-old woman came to her GP complaining of coughs. Her husband had died a few

months previously, and before that her mother had passed away. She had a difficult job. Stress, the doctor said, and he advised her to stay at home for a few weeks. The next day she died from pulmonary embolism. It turned out there had been a blood clot in her leg. She had not mentioned to her doctor that she suffered from pain in her legs, and he had not asked further questions. Therefore mention all your (real) complaints to the doctor. Make out a list before your visit, so that you don't forget anything once you are in the surgery. You can also become burnt out because of a physical disease that is not recognised or diagnosed by the doctors. It was years before Claire was diagnosed with the celiac condition, a digestive disorder that gets healed through a gluten free diet. You have problems defecating, menstruation disorders, loss of hair and stomachache. Claire was always tired. She went to see one specialist after the other, but it took quite a number of years before she got the correct diagnosis. It was just as well she had not resigned herself to the diagnosis of 'stress-related complaints' but had kept going until she got the right diagnosis.

- The second step you can take once your GP or the company physician has made the diagnosis of burnout, and another physical illness or mental disorders like depression or post-traumatic stress disorder have been ruled out. You get the diagnosis of burnout when you have been depleted physically and emotionally, when you feel alienated from people, from your work or from yourself, and when you have lost your feeling of self-worth in your job or in your own capabilities. You notice that your personality has changed; from having been happy and joyful before, now you are always worrying. You also notice that for a long time you have asked much more of yourself than you were capable of doing. You have transgressed your own boundaries. Try to accept that you are burnt out, do not fight it, but fight for your recovery. Draw up a programme, a structure for the day, incorporating periods of times that you have to make an effort, and times that you have to relax: recovery time.
- The third step is saying to yourself that from this moment on you will look after yourself. Reflect on what good care of yourself consists of. What are your needs? More social contacts, visiting relatives you have lost track of for a long time, friends you have lost touch with? Try to find a course or

training you have always wanted to do: creative writing, acting, painting or singing.

- The fourth step is – once you begin to enjoy life more – to introduce a bit more stress into your life gradually. This does not mean going back to work immediately. It could also be a meal out: this can be tiring as well. Slowly extend the stressful actions and also make sure you have positive stress! This means doing something you dread, but of which you will be proud after you have accomplished it!
- The fifth step is to correct yourself when you feel self-pity. Pity because you are willing but you are not able to do so much yet. Because you do not yet have so much energy. Say to yourself: even though I am tired, I still feel okay about myself. Go and stand in front of the mirror and repeat that phrase a few times. You can also write it down and stick it on the inside of your cupboard.

Powerful phrases

Buy a wallet for business cards or *credit cards*. Write down on small cards inspirational sayings that help you, that give you courage when you feel down. Put these cards in that wallet and always carry it with you. Read a saying or a phrase when you have a quiet moment, for example when you are on a train or need to wait somewhere. Claire's favourite saying is: 'When feelings are given a free rein, emptiness becomes spaciousness.' Sylvie wrote down: 'I will get better.'

Day 17

Taming Lions and Tigers

Jack, a 46-year-old nurse in a community psychiatric hospital, is considering changing his job and to start working in the industrial sector. Six months ago he collapsed and called in sick. Burnout. Now he is nearly recovered, but is still scoring quite high on the questionnaire *Am I burnout?* His score is 65, and that means that he needs to take measures to prevent a relapse.



Further analysis of his answers to the questions on the list shows that he is extremely dissatisfied with his work. He finds it boring. He works hard, but achieves little and he sees his work as of no benefit to anybody. He does not enjoy his job and he actually dreads going back to work. Mentally and physically he feels fine. He has lots of energy, he sleeps well and the relationship with his wife is going well again. But the road back to the old job seems almost impassable.

Jack only sees potholes and bumps on the road. He is looking into getting an IT position, working with computers is his favourite pastime, but he actually does not feel ready for such a job. He is kept back by the thought that he is not commercially minded enough and that therefore he will be of no use to the business world, that his colleagues will all be cock-sure and think that he is a softie. It would be better to cling to the security of his old job. But the thought that he has to go back to his old position devours energy! This mountain of negative thoughts prevents him from using his full potential. And they perpetuate that aspect of his burnout that involves his job in psychiatry. He has a 'situational inability to work'. This leads to conflicts with medical officer who checks his ability to work, because this doctor is of the opinion that Jack is fit for work, at least for two hours a week.

Mistaken thoughts that limit you

If you are stressed you often have standard mistaken thought patterns. Below you will find in the left-hand column twelve standard mistaken thoughts, and in the right-hand column the challenging and helpful thoughts.

<p><i>Focussing on the negative sides of a situation</i>, for example when you are applying for a job, ruminating over the reasons why somebody does not hire you, and ignoring the positive side, the opportunities and the challenge.</p>	<p>Accepting that whatever you do is good enough and that it does not need to be perfect. Draw up a list of your positive qualities.</p>
<p><i>Undermining the positive</i>, thinking</p>	<p>Draw up an overview of all the suc-</p>

that what you are good at is not important. When you are asked to work in an interesting job this means that they cannot find another soul to do that work.

cesses of your career: what are you really proud of? Your competence, your interactions with others, or a quality like perseverance?

Thinking in terms of all or nothing. At one time you were dismissed from a job and you think that this will happen to you again in every job. You are sabotaging yourself with this fear.

Think more in relative terms and stop thinking in black and white. Consider what is your own influence on a situation. And do not get upset over things you cannot control.

Labelling: bringing yourself down by thinking when something new presents itself: I'll never be able to do this.

De-programme yourself by asking yourself every time why you cannot learn new things, like driving a car, skiing, deep-sea diving, a new language, and so on. If somebody else can do this, why can't you?

Mind reading: because your boss does not greet you in the corridor, you are certain that he dislikes your report intensely.

Stop thinking for others. Consider what you do yourself: do you always say hello to your boss or are you sometimes lost in thought?

Predicting the future: you are a man and you get a female boss, and you know for sure that things will not work out between you, because five years ago you could not get on with a female boss either. You thought she was a bitch.

Just as with thinking in terms of all or nothing, you also have to stop yourself from predicting the future. You do not know how, for instance, your new boss will be, and you will need to live with that uncertainty.

Making a mountain out of a molehill: your colleague criticises you and immediately you think that your co-worker does not like you. At home you have a good cry, because you feel rejected.

What really happened? Even though somebody might criticise you, this does not mean that you are a worthless person and that nobody likes you.

Trivialising: you have a pain in your arm, but you keep working hard at the computer because, so what, it is only a little bit painful. You are being complimented and actually you feel disqualified as a result because really,

The medication – that is you yourself. Take your feelings seriously. And also take somebody else seriously, and receive compliments graciously!

it was nothing special what you did, anybody could have done it.

Keeping stuck in the *description* of an event in emotional terms, and thereby only describe what is the matter on an emotional level. For example, there is no response to your job application and in your own mind you have already been rejected. You make a big deal out of it. Nothing is ever going right for you.

Describing the event as if it is being registered by a video camera. You have responded to a job offer and you have not yet heard back from them. That's all.

Personalising: an appointment goes wrong and you take all the blame for why that appointment went wrong, while it was just a misunderstanding. You make a decision that backfires, and you put all the blame on yourself. You have made a terrible mistake.

Be aware of your own part in situations, without exaggerating it or (when you are successful) belittling it. Inappropriate humility can be very irritating, as is unnecessarily blaming yourself. Either you are fishing for compliments or you are putting pressure on the other person to say that you did quite well.

Blaming: making another person responsible for a situation that is only partly his fault. For example reproaching your manager that he was not able to prevent people being laid off against their wishes in a reorganisation, even though her room for manoeuvring was limited.

By blaming someone else you make that other person extremely powerful and yourself powerless. It looks a bit like a parent-child relationship. It is important that you also ascribe some power to yourself, and that in every situation you reflect on what you have contributed yourself.

Intolerance of frustration: every appeal that is made on you, you experience as an enormous pressure. You think you cannot do any more, and you are afraid you might fail. Everything is too much for you, and you think: I can barely manage now. You panic, get angry, and scatter-brained. Or you explode.

Is it true that you can no longer cope with anything? How does that show itself? Do you totally collapse when you start to reintegrate in your work and resume working for one hour a week? Do not make a mountain out of a molehill, do your tasks one by one, and reward yourself for your efforts!

Tolerating frustrations

Of course in daily life there is sometimes ample cause for frustration: a meeting exceeds the agreed time limit, so that you cannot get your shopping done. You are too late for the crèche, you still have an appointment in the evening, there are three messages on your voicemail and your email inbox is overflowing with messages that still need answering.

In spite of all this, try to prevent that your thoughts end up in a downward spiral. Don't let yourself be dragged along by your negative thoughts. Below I give a few more examples of prevalent negative thought patterns. Become aware of the thoughts! And then challenge them with the method of the rational thought analysis.

- *Everybody should like me.* In fact you are a love junkie. On the one hand you would like to offer criticism in a meeting, but on the other hand you want everybody to like you. It is impossible for everyone to like you, so there really is no point in trying to achieve this.
- *I am only of value if everything I do is flawless and if I make no mistakes.* In order to value yourself you always have to be competent. When you cannot manage something immediately, you quickly think that somebody else is much better at it, and you consider yourself a complete disaster. You think: See, I can't get anything right. This irrational opinion results in fear of failure. You don't allow yourself any time for adjustment in a new job; you have to be perfect right from the start. You can challenge this notion by saying to yourself that you are a human being with strong points and weak points, just like everybody else.
- *When other people do things that are not right, when they make mistakes or are dishonest, I have to really pull them up on that, because they are evil people. This is also how I think about myself: when I do something that is not ethically correct, I consider myself an evil person.* This irrational opinion often lies behind conflicts at work. You are of the opinion that other people cannot be like that, and should not act in that way. Of course it is good when you point out to others, and to yourself, mistakes that are made, but a mistaken action does not turn somebody into a bad person. It doesn't make sense to expect of others that they never make mis-

takes, or that they are always reasonable or honest.

- *It is disastrous when things do not turn out the way I like.* This irrational thought comes into play when you get extremely upset about meetings that do not finish on time, deadlines that are not met, people who do not keep their promises. You think, for example, that you are always being thwarted, and you decide to throw in the towel. You can challenge this opinion by saying to yourself that of course it is inconvenient when things do not work out the way you would like them to, but it is not a disaster. Things definitely will not improve by you getting agitated or upset about it. You only cause more frustration in yourself, because it's in you that your stress hormones are going crazy. Things or events often just go the way they go. It takes less energy to accept this than to want to change things all the time. You are better off investing your energy in goals that are attainable.
- *Sadness and misery are caused by outside circumstances and I have no control over them.* Very recognisable: when your boss is in a bad mood, you don't feel good; but when he is in a good mood, it is pleasant to do your work. You can challenge this opinion by saying to yourself that how you feel is determined by your own interpretation. When, for instance, you think that your boss' bad mood is caused by you having done something wrong, you feel ill at ease. When you do not relate it to yourself but think: his moods are his problem, you will feel a lot more relaxed. It is helpful to stop thinking for others.
- *I am worried all the time about things that could happen.* Yes, imagine: the business will go bankrupt, you are made redundant or an important customer decides to go elsewhere. You can challenge this notion by saying to yourself that in any case it does not help to get upset over difficulties that may lie ahead but have not happened yet. This is only torturing yourself. Besides, thinking in this way also means that, when something does happen, you will not be able to act appropriately. Because then you will get totally paralysed by panic. So stop making yourself scared.
- *It is much simpler to evade problems than to face them. I always want to feel pleasant and never want to suffer pain, whatever the cost.* This is short-term thinking. It is true that in the short term you will feel better when, for example, you

avoid a difficult conversation at work, but in the long term this is not satisfactory. On the contrary, postponing difficult decisions or conversations often leads to piling up of problems, which makes it even more difficult to deal with them. Solving problems is good for your self-confidence!

- *I need somebody who is stronger than me, somebody I can trust. Other people have to look after me; I do not want to face things on my own.* This opinion makes you unnecessarily dependent on the recognition of others, on the pat on the back from your boss. Of course it is pleasant to get that recognition, but it is not true that you cannot do without it. The more dependent you are, the more you adapt to the wishes of others.
- *My past is determining my present behaviour to a large extent. Something that in my younger years had a big influence on me must still do that now.* Because you were the black sheep in your family, you will also be an outcast at work. Because in a previous job you had conflicts with those in authority, you will be in the same situation now. You can challenge this irrational thought by pointing out that you sometimes use your past so that you don't have to deal with problems that are occurring in the here and now. In this way you keep going round in a vicious circle. You don't even know anymore whether it will be of benefit to approach things differently now. Therefore stop blaming the past. Say to yourself that today is tomorrow's past!
- *I always need to be concerned about the well-being of others.* You notice that sometimes you find it difficult to let go of other people's problems, and that you keep thinking about them. Sometimes this keeps you awake at night. Why is this notion not correct? By being so concerned about other people, it seems as if it is within your power to make things right for others. By doing so you do not get around to benefiting yourself. What good is it to somebody else when two people are unhappy instead of one? You would be better off focussing on your own problems and solving them.

These ten irrational thoughts or opinions are based on the writings of Albert Ellis.

Day 18

Learning from Troublemakers

You are completely stressed out, things are hectic at home, and at work deadlines are looming. You are looking for some distraction by surfing the internet to a holiday site, and just at that moment your boss sticks his head around the corner. 'So, you have time for that?' Of course not, but there's nothing wrong with relaxing for a few minutes. A colleague asks if you could take over her work for a while. She has to collect her children from the crèche. Really! This is already the third time in the past week. It means that you will have to stay on for an extra fifteen minutes. Yet you do not want to be mean to her, and you say yes. Some time later, a customer notices that you are looking tired and asks full of concern: 'Are you all right?' Extremely annoying, because when somebody asks such direct questions, you feel your lips starting to tremble.

As an employee you cannot choose your colleagues. Neither can you choose your boss. Even though during your application and job interview you tried to find out as much as you could about the atmosphere at work and amongst your colleagues, this may change with a new colleague or a new boss. Your best attitude is to think: what can I learn from the people I find so difficult? The method of the so-called core quadrants is a tool to help us deal with irritations at work. In the core quadrant your good qualities are represented, as well as the distortions of these (too much of a good thing), your challenges and those people and situations you are allergic to. There is not one 'right' core quality, but there are very many of them, because people differ in their core qualities. Some peo-

ple are enthusiastic, full of initiative, spontaneous and lively. Others are mild, have a sense of humour, are alert and goal-oriented, or they may be dedicated, reliable, thorough and clear. The distortions, the so-called pitfalls or blind spots, also vary. Some people are interfering, prejudiced and moody. Others are indifferent, pragmatic and arrogant. And others again may be hypocritical, aggressive and wasteful.

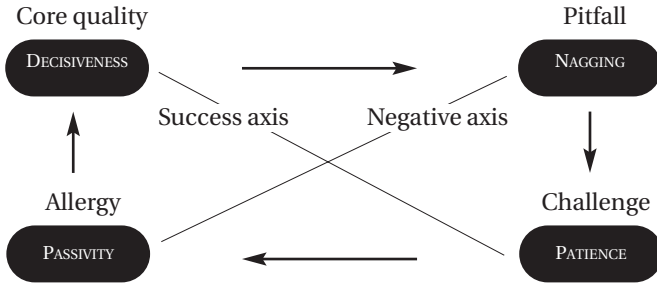
Draw up a core quadrant

If you want to learn from difficult people it is advisable to take a good look in the mirror. What kind of person are you yourself, what are your difficult aspects? Draw up a core quadrant by asking yourself the following questions:

- What do others say I am good at? This can be something you take for granted yourself, something you don't need to put effort into. This is your core quality.
- What do others find fault with in you? This is your pitfall or blind spot.
- Of which quality would you like to have more? What do you admire in others, what are you jealous of? Is that a quality that can prevent the negative effects of your pitfalls? This is your challenge.
- What do you dislike in others, what irritates you enormously? This is your allergy.

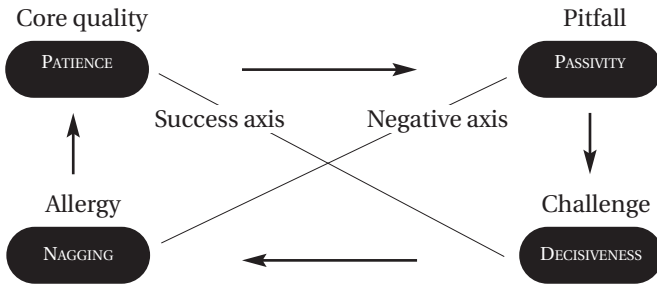
Draw up a quadrant. In the left upper corner you put down your core quality, in the right upper corner your pitfall, right lower corner your challenge and left lower corner your allergy. Your success axis is your connection between your core quality and your challenge. Your negative axis is the connection between your pitfall and your allergy.

Imagine you are a decisive and energetic person. That is your core quality. Your decisiveness can result in being pushy. This is your pitfall or blind spot. Your challenge is patience and you are allergic to passivity.



The colleague you are in conflict with, or your boss whom you don't like very much, will usually fall under the heading 'allergy': passive people, who are not very pro-active. The quality that irritates you in the other, you will begin to see as their shortcoming or blind spot. A shortcoming that arises from what is actually a good quality of the other. This is the crux of the matter. This is exactly what you need yourself.

The core quality of the other is patience. And he is rather precise. This is of benefit to you.



You can learn a lot from the other when you recognise his core quality. In this way it is also possible to get a breakthrough in long-running conflicts. If you draw up a quadrant of yourself and the other, then in fact you will have a double quadrant. The quadrant of the other is the mirror image of yours.

Therefore when there is a conflict, always draw up a quadrant of yourself and of the person you have difficulties with. Look for the core quality of the other, and pay this person a compliment.

Example of a core conflict

Maureen, a 34-year-old librarian in Sydney, Australia, is fed up with working in the library. Her deepest wish is to become the editor of a newspaper, a dynamic job, but she dreads the stress of the deadlines. She applies for the function of editor in a small educational publishing house, and she is accepted. Her boss, Wayne, a real Aussie in his fifties, is proud to have established this publishing house himself. He has reached his goal and now no longer puts so much energy into the business; he prefers to go surfing. Maureen is full of energy and enthusiasm and she wants to use her knowledge of the new media to achieve a bigger market share for the publishing company. She knows everything about designing websites. Her boss' reaction surprises her. He hardly responds, postpones things, does not want to invest in software and seems to be avoiding her. Maureen gets frustrated by his passivity and her initial enthusiasm soon cools. What is the unspoken core conflict here?

Maureen's core quality is decisiveness. But her boss sees her as pushy and nagging.

Wayne's core quality is being relaxed, but Maureen perceives this as passivity (see table). Their allergy to one another is increasing day by day. The allergy is the negative side of the core quality the other person possesses. How are they going to solve this? If Maureen was to go surfing with him and relate to him in a relaxed way, Wayne would feel less threatened and would open up to the innovative ideas Maureen has to offer.

Tabel

Person/Quality	+	-
Maureen	decisiveness	being pushy, nagging
Wayne	being relaxed	passive

Day 19

Reviving Your Relationship

It becomes increasingly more difficult for you to find the right balance between your work and your private life. When you are under time pressure at work, you take documents home with you and you spend evenings on end at the computer. Not that you really get a whole lot done, but at least you have the idea that you are working. You often have meetings in the evenings until around ten o'clock, and when you get home all you want to do is rest: watching TV for a while, glancing at the paper, have a beer or a glass of wine; this is your idea of unwinding. You hardly pay attention to your partner. No problem if he or she has already gone to bed. Of late your sex life has not been great anyway; you mainly have sex out of habit and to help you fall asleep. *We'll make up for it during the holidays*, you think. Usually you go on holidays or go out with other couples; in this way you keep in touch with others. Actually it has been quite a long time since you went away together. *Are we growing apart? you ask yourself. Of course not; after a weekend in Paris or a week in Ibiza everything is as it used to be.*



Darling, from NOW on we'll do things differently!

Until, much to your surprise, your partner packs his or her bags and leaves. Rather a bed-sit than that gloomy house where all the laughter has disappeared.

Keep your enthusiasm

For many people breaking up with a partner or a lover is an emotional crisis, which – if they cannot handle it wisely – leads to burnout. Why did you work so hard all that time? Wasn't it so that you could have a good life with your partner, go on holidays together, make that three-month-long trip? Now that your partner has gone, your whole reason for being has disappeared too.

Do you recognise this scenario? Do you notice that your relationship is shrivelling up because both of you are so involved with your work? Free up some time and energy to be together:

- Look at your list of energy depleting and energy providing activities in your private life (see day 3). Discuss with your partner how you can deal with some draining or energy demanding activities, for example how you could divide the household tasks better. Are the days of cooking the meals divided equally? Change tasks regularly.
- At the start of the year, draw up an action plan with and for the whole family. What are the goals that each family member individually definitely wants to achieve; what are the common goals? This may vary from becoming football champion to a new extension to the kitchen. As the end of the year approaches look at which goals were met and which were not. Also investigate how this happened – and how non-achieved goals could be met. In this way you prevent that there is only one person in the house who sets the goals and achieves them (possibly at the expense of the priorities of others).
- Surprise each other! Make an agreement with your partner that each of you plans something nice for what you could do together every month. For the other it is a surprise what is going to happen that evening or that weekend.
- Make sure that in any case you have some time together every week. Which is not the same as watching a TV pro-

gramme together every evening. Take at least one day and two evenings a week to spend together. Switch on the answering machine, and make things homely and cosy.

- During the holidays, everybody can make a wish every day. One person may want to eat an ice cream; another may want to play volleyball and another go out for something to eat. Try to arrange it so that everybody's wish gets fulfilled.
- Speak out. Look for a good moment to talk with each other and become skilful in the art of listening to others. Your partner often already feels understood to a large extent when you can summarise well what he or she has said. Put your own ideas aside and do not interpret for the other.
- When there is something you do not agree on, don't dig up old conflicts and don't say in the middle of a discussion that your partner is just like his father. Stick to the subject and try to come to an agreement together.
- Negotiate. A well-known example is: two people want a lemon and they are fighting over the lemon. But why? It turns out that one person wants the lemon for its zest, because she needs it to make an apple tart. The other wants the juice of the lemon, because it goes so well with orange juice. Therefore get to know the other person's needs and interests, and find out if they can be compatible with yours.
- Think in terms of solutions, not in terms of problems.
- What are you always arguing about, or what do you avoid arguing about? If, for example, you always argue about money, draw up a plan of action together. What is the income, what are the expenses? You can also turn to a self-help book on the subject.
- Because of stress you may develop a life style as a couple that does not consist of much more than eating, working and sleeping. Break this routine and invite friends during the week to join you for a meal. Order a meal from a take-away restaurant, which means that it won't cost you any extra energy, but it does break the everyday routine.
- Do something physical together. Slouching on the sofa in the evenings may be tempting, but is not really so good for your body, and toxins will accumulate. You can undertake some physical activities so that your body produces endorphins: hormones that contribute to your sense of well-being. Go play football with the children, do some gardening or go for a walk. Take tango or salsa lessons. You will get

to know your partner in a totally different way. Dancing is exciting. Go to the sauna together.

- Pay each other compliments, and express your affection in physical ways by giving the other a cuddle or massage tired shoulders. This does not mean that you automatically need to make love. Although after making love you may feel great!
- Are you always making love on set evenings? Experiment with other times, not always just before falling asleep, but sometimes earlier in the evening, with a glass of champagne and romantic music. Or early in the morning. Do it differently. Not that you have to work your way through the complete Kama Sutra. Change the situation. Did you ever do it in the car? Are you still kissing? Is there a secret fantasy that you might like to share? Try out some new things together!

Day 20

The Warmth of Friendship

In order to survive physically, social connections were necessary for our ancestors. If people in ancient times had not lived in groups, human beings would probably have become extinct. Living communally is in our genes. That is why even now we have a great need for social contact, although we might not need it specifically to survive.

What makes a person happy? In 2001 the BBC made a documentary, *Looking for the secret of happiness*, about somebody who won the lottery and who is not happy with all his money. He lost his friends, because they did not understand why they should not share in his riches. Research has shown that it is not money that makes us happy. Four percent at most of all the changes in our well-being can be attributed to having more or less money. So what does make us happy? If we want to feel happy, good social contacts and having a job remain the most important factors. Happiness is sometimes defined as the degree to which somebody enjoys life. Happiness is a judgement of your life in general, your work, your friendships, your relationship and other matters, like religion. Many people have the idea that friendship comes about spontaneously and that it is nonsense to think about friendship and to consciously try to make friends. If you don't have any friends, you're a nerd, a loser. But notions like these deny the importance of social connections and social support for our well-being.

Hormones and friendship

Political sociologist Robert Lane points out in his book *The loss of happiness in market democracies* that our loss of happiness

may be caused by loss of friendship. Friendship is defined in evolutionary terms; our chemistry prepares us for a relationship with another person. There is a war going on between two hormonal systems. One system, which produces the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisone, prepares us for the fight or flight impulse (see day 4); the other system, on the contrary, promotes bonding and in women it produces the hormone oxytocine – a peptide that is produced by the hypothalamus – which contracts muscles and can be found particularly in women who are breastfeeding. Oxytocine is a hormone that is beneficial in all types of bonding: between children and parents, brothers and sisters, and between friends. This hormone contributes to the development of social behaviour, promotes the quality of life, and extends life expectancy. Oxytocine has played a significant role in individual survival and reproduction. Lane adds that in western market economies, where the population is not reproducing itself much, the low level of serotonin, caused by too much stress, may hinder reproduction. Young women who are unable to conceive, often ask themselves too if this might not be caused by stress in the workplace.

Nowadays paid work takes up a lot of our energy. Due to the division of labour and because of technological developments, we have become extremely productive. This implies that for our social contacts we have become much more dependent on our work. This of course is detrimental when you become ill and fall outside the work context, because if you can no longer work, you not only lose your job, but your friends as well. When you become burnout, you often end up being socially isolated. You no longer count at work. You don't get any acknowledgement for all the energy you have put into your job in the past. A few get-well cards, a visit from a colleague now and again, and after three months everybody seems to have forgotten about you.

How do you revive your social contacts? Can you ring friends you have not seen in years? The advice of the social worker sounds so easy: let go of your work, don't think about it, and go and do pleasant things, devote your energy to your social contacts.

Making new friends

An advice that seems obvious is to enrol in courses or attend classes that interest you. Theresa, manager of a welfare organisation, picked up her hobby again: singing. She participated in a series of singing lessons and at the end of the course she invited a woman to go for a bite to eat before the class started. She found it extremely scary to do so. This anxiety surprised her because in her job as manager she had daily taken the initiative and built up a complete network. But now, as a private person, to take the plunge and just ask somebody to do something pleasant together! Her negative self-image got in the way: who was she now without a job and on disability benefit? She was a nobody; and why would anybody find it interesting to do something together with her? And would she be able to take a rejection? She suffered from irrational thoughts (see day 17) that she had to challenge first. This she managed to do, and she got herself together to take this difficult step. The meal out was a great success and the start of a close friendship.

Friendship in all shapes and sizes

Some people are limiting themselves because they make demands on a friendship that are too high. For example, they presume that all their colleagues can be 100% trustworthy, and that their colleagues have the exact same opinion about things as they themselves. If you notice this in yourself, try to distinguish between different types of friendship. You can expect more from some friends than from others.

According to Aristotle (340 B.C.) there are three types of friendships: friendships of advantage, of pleasure, and of character. The basis of friendships of advantage is whether we are directly or indirectly benefit from the friendship. Relationships at work, and relationships with colleagues, fall in this category. In friendships of pleasure it is simply the pleasure and amusement that matters. With some colleagues you go to the pub, with some friends you engage in sports, and you invite some people from work to your birthday party. In friendships of character the values and norms you share are the most important factor. You have the same 'stable smell' – and you accept one another almost unconditionally. This is

the kind of friendship Elie Wiesel (1964) commented on: 'What is a friend? This is the person who makes you aware for the first time of your and his loneliness, and who subsequently helps you to overcome your loneliness, so that you in turn can help him to overcome his. Because of him you can be quiet without feeling ashamed; you can be spontaneous without fear of humiliation.'

Nowadays the friendships of *advantage* and the friendships of *pleasure and amusement* are often called 'networks'. A network is a loosely structured group of people who know each other or do something together. The foundations of these networks can be religious beliefs, business, sports activities or political affiliations. But parents of children in a crèche, too, constitute some kind of network, in so far as they are in touch with each other. 'Networking' is also used as a verb in the sense of 'establishing and maintaining contacts'. You do this during the lunch break, in the gym, in your leisure activities, during conferences and via the internet. When you are burnout, these networks usually fall apart because the contacts are mostly based on the work you do. You will have to establish new networks that are not directly related to your job.

Apply for a course, and invest energy in developing friendships of *advantage* and *pleasure and amusement*. Invite somebody from the course to go out for a drink or a meal. Maintain the friendships of character, and do something pleasant together, like having a meal out, going to a play in the theatre, or taking a walk together.

Focused complaining

Friendships of *character* often survive, even if you are burnout. But in every kind of friendship there needs to be a balance between giving and receiving. Therefore don't burden the other too much. Make sure that the friendship does not become too one-sided by your excessive complaining about your job and about feeling exhausted.

Yet sometimes it is nice to complain and whine. This is right too, because in spite of all positive thinking – when you are burnout you really do feel awful. Therefore take a holiday once in a while from all the positive exercises in this book. Be totally despondent for five minutes at a stretch. Curse, moan or com-



I feel EXTREMELY relaxed.

plain as much as you want. Not just a little bit, but go to extremes. Look at everything, but then literally everything, from the darkest side. Exaggerate! Then try to change your feelings. Try to feel better about things. Remember what you did or thought previously to get a good feeling. Look again at the list you drew up of fifty things that make you feel well (see day 3). Can you add things to it?

Christina has devised her own unique way of getting rid of her miserable feelings. When she feels bad at work because of a critical remark made by her boss, she imagines she is in a beautiful place, on a sunny beach with palm trees, together with her best friend. She feels the sun on her skin, and a light sea breeze touches her hair. She pours out her woes to her friend, she complains as much as she likes. The friend is listening attentively and full of understanding. While she is complaining, Christina looks out over the sea and her gaze follows the surfers on the water. One by one she places her unpleasant thoughts on a surfboard and slowly they fade from view. In such a beautiful setting she finds it impossible to continue complaining. A burden drops from her shoulders: why worry? This fantasy is based on a real experience she had. She was on holidays in Andalusia with her friend Patty. They had rented a beautiful apartment overlooking the sea. They settled themselves with a cup of tea in the garden, and Christina voiced her anger at the nonsense her boss was up to. Within a few minutes she stopped; it did not feel right to talk about such trivial

things in such a beautiful setting. Since then she often applies this trick: when trivial things bother her she imagines that she is telling them to her friend, in beautiful surroundings. Her good mood returns almost automatically.

Day 21

Dreading Resumption of Work

Tom has been burnt out since September. 'Some letters disappeared from the advertising billboards, and I could no longer drive the car', he says. His company physician told him that this was 'the red light' for him. Tom describes very precisely what he feels: 'I don't feel depressed, but I am quite emotional and I cry over the slightest thing. Even trying to get away from it all by going on pleasant weekend trips, did not make any difference. Since November I can read again. At first only a few lines at a time, but now I manage to read a whole newspaper article. I can also speak again. Just after I fell ill, I had to construct the sentences beforehand in my mind. I think I am on the right road, because the periods of feeling well between the bad patches are getting longer.'

However, among all these enthusiastic thoughts there is one obstacle for Tom: going back to work. The company physician and Tom have put the date for returning to work at some time in February or March. Now that this date is getting nearer Tom is getting anxious: 'It is crazy, but when I think of that date, I break out in a cold sweat, and then I immediately start to feel ill, even though in general things are getting better.'

Wendy became burnout in her profession as an anaesthetist. After four months, with the consent of her company physician, she resumes work. She arranges with her team that she will start by giving lectures for four hours a week. She likes lecturing and it causes her little stress. On the first day she is to resume her job, it turns out that the head of anaesthetics has prepared the lecture. He is not agreeable to Wendy taking over his lectures and he sends her away.

Problems with the employer

Most people dread resuming work after a long period of absence. Research shows that only a few people manage to go back to work with their old employer after a three months' illness. Sometimes the employer is not looking forward to the return of an employee either. A managing director of an organisation in the healthcare sector, voices his concerns about Edwin, a financial manager who is going back to work after a burnout. 'I have heard rumours that Edwin is planning to come back to work immediately after the New Year. I don't think that is wise. And it is not desirable either that Edwin returns to his old job in the current situation, without discussions about how he will function in the future. At the moment there is an interim manager in that position – and moreover that position is currently under review. If Edwin were to return now to where and how he used to work, without having learned to cope with changes, he will fall back into his old patterns. He will be out sick again in *no time*.'

The managing director wanted to arrange things neatly, not based on rumours. In Edwin's interest and that of the organisation, he first of all wanted consensus on reintegration, and then clear agreements on how to resume the work. This was not all he did. He proposed that E would get coaching, with the emphasis on changing his attitude to his work. And so it happened. During the coaching Edwin applied the Rational Emotive Therapy, and he also got on-the-job coaching for some time.

Recommendations for employer and employee

1. Before work can be resumed, it is important that the manager, the employee and perhaps the company physician or someone from the personnel department discuss the work resumption. It is advisable to view the return of an employee as a communal project – and therefore there should be an agreed approach.
2. It is absolutely necessary that the activities at work are built up gradually. The choice of what type of work will be done is extremely important. But also the place where the work will be done. First of all start at home with an hour of work. Take

the mail home from work, read recent trade or professional publications. Perhaps it would be better to start with lighter types of work in a different department – and then to return to your own work place later. This was how an employee from the personnel department started with light administrative tasks in the wages department. A company physician started to work for a few months in the policy department, before he saw patients again.

3. The time spent working should also be built up gradually. Usually one would start again with two hours work a week. If that goes well, you extend to four hours, and so on.
4. Then there is the work place or workstation. It may happen that somebody else has now taken over the spot where you used to work. Perhaps your tidy workspace has become totally messy. When a psychologist returned to work, the person standing in for her had filled the room with black folders. She solved this by speaking to him about it, and the folders were divided over two rooms, so that now there was space for her things again.
5. Do things need to be talked over between parties? Before you became burnout numerous conflicts may have arisen. You can carry anger and resentment around with you, and have the feeling that it was the job that caused your illness. Perhaps managers and colleagues did not contact you much while you were ill. Draw up an inventory of what is bothering you, of what remains of 'old wounds', and resolve these issues. You can do this by talking about things, but also via RET (Rational Emotive Therapy). Ask yourself, for example, what you dread most about resuming your work. Some people say that they are particularly concerned about not being able to cope, that they fear they might collapse again. They do not want to experience that horrible feeling of burnout again

The RET exercise will go as follows:

Describing the situation

In a week's (or month's) time I will go back to work.

Irrational thoughts

1. This is much too soon; I won't be able to manage; I will relapse.

2. It will demand too much from me, I get so tired from doing an hour's work.
3. I don't like the work; I would really prefer to have another job.
4. I am afraid to face my colleagues.
5. I am much less able to deal with frustrations, I have to cry already when I notice that once again I did not get all the shopping, and that I need to go back to the supermarket.

Feeling

Fear. Physical reactions: nauseous, dizzy, increased transpiration.

Challenging irrational thoughts

1. How do I know it is too soon? This is only a thought. What is important is that I will gradually increase, and only work longer hours when things are going well. If I make sure there is enough 'recovery time' there is no reason why I should relapse, although it is important that besides work I plan to do pleasant things. What were my energy providers again? What was on that list of fifty pleasant things to do?
2. It is true that working for an hour takes a lot out of me. It would be better if I take that into account, and that after a day at work I plan to have a day of rest.
3. My attitude towards my work is strongly influenced by the period before I became burnout. Now I am not looking at it objectively. If after three months I still feel the same about it, I will talk to my employer to see if I can get some career coaching.
4. Why should I feel ashamed towards my colleagues? Moreover, how do I know what they think? I am not clairvoyant. In any case some of them will be very happy to I see me back. I am not the first person in the organisation to become burnout. And even if I were to be the first: I am not judging others for getting ill, am I? It is important that I can accept of myself that I have become ill and that I am in the process of recovering. If I accept myself, the negative judgements of others will be like water off a duck's back.
5. It is true that I am more aware of what is bothering me, and that I become upset more quickly. If I do more of this kind of RET exercises, I will be able to control my emotions better. And in order to do this I will need to face the challenge.

Desired feeling

Relaxed, calm and controlled because I accept myself, and I am less anxious about the judgements of others.

Thinking ahead

Being in control of your actions also involves looking ahead. This is difficult if you are really burnt out. But as you recover more and more, give it a thought now and again. Of course without worrying about it. The next exercise might offer some structure to your return, even if you are dreading it:

1. Imagine that you resume work in four weeks' time. What do you find most difficult, what is your biggest fear? What do you think others will feel about you? How will your boss view you? What can help you to deal better with this? What is the first step?
2. Determine to do at least one thing totally different at work. If that goes well, you can change something else. For example: set yourself the goal of learning from difficult people. Another example: set boundaries by saying no more often.
3. Draw up a list of conditions that will give you a better chance of reintegrating successfully.
4. Once you have gone back to work, keep a diary. What went well when you resumed work? What could have been improved on? How did you feel? What pitfalls or weak points did you meet in yourself? How were you dealing with boundaries? Make a list on a regular basis of situations at work that demand energy and that boost your energy. If after six months the list of energy consumers exceeds the list of energy providers, find out about other jobs, and ask your employer to arrange career coaching for you.
5. It may be that your job requires a lot of energy because you are not really up to the demands the work makes on you. Discuss this with your boss and ask for coaching.

Day 22

Let That Phone Ring

What are the signals for stress? Nurses on a kidney dialysis ward and physicians came up with the following stress-related complaints during a workshop: stomachache, backache, muscle ache, headache, insomnia, hair loss, tight neck muscles, excessive transpiration, emotional instability, eczema, lack of concentration, confusion, fatigue, listlessness, being withdrawn, wanting to be alone, 'binge eating', increased alcohol intake, smoking more, lack of appetite, eating the wrong kinds of food (too much fat), and being ill quite often. The workload turned out to be the biggest source of stress. But what is workload or pressure at work? It means different things to different people. For one person a heavier workload is a decrease in salary, for another is it sexual intimidation at work. For a bailiff violence is extra pressure; for a teacher innovations in the educational system. The dialysis nurses mentioned that not having a lunch break was increasing the workload for them. They had to work eight hours at a stretch without being able to take a break. This in particular is extremely stress inducing. The theory on stress states that working for eight hours at a stretch without a break means that the stress hormones are over-activated. Working eight hours without a break is irresponsible. You need recovery time. And the serious symptoms of the nurses indicated that much.

Relaxing amidst the routine

Yet there are several ways of reducing your work stress considerably – even in your given work situation. Saki Santorelli, the director of an American stress reduction clinic, gives all kinds

of recommendations in an article that appeared in the Engaged Buddhist Reader in 1996. You can give a whole new meaning to your job, for instance. Santorelli describes how receptionists learned to reduce their stress levels. They were instructed to view the ringing of the telephone as a signal to take a deep breath and to let go of the tension in their shoulders. Only when they had succeeded in doing so were they allowed to answer the phone. In this way you cut through the routine, everyday activities by becoming aware for a few moments of the here and now, of how you feel and of how you can reduce the tension and stress. This is a kind of mindfulness training.

Mindfulness training against stress

In mindfulness training you learn to focus your attention on what is happening in your body, in your mind and in your heart, and in the work place. You become more aware of what is happening in you, and you will begin to notice the stress in your environment better. Then you try not to react with fear, but with awareness of your own potential for dealing with stress. Mindfulness training is not the same as relaxation training, which is a technique that is particularly aimed at reducing muscular tension and agitation. Relaxation training focuses on letting go of tension and on reaching a state of low *arousal* of the autonomous nervous system.

In the mindfulness training you will learn to be so relaxed that you can afford to be tense. It is a way of life rather than a technique. It also involves cultivating an attitude of investigation and curiosity towards yourself; you also gain insight into yourself – and into yourself in relation to your surroundings.

In another example Santorelli describes how a colleague felt he was slowly turning into a slave of the clock. He was no longer focused on his patients, but was continually looking at his watch to see how much time he had left for all the things he still had to do. How could he overcome this habit?

The colleague glued green circles on his watch and considered the green dots as a signal to take a deep breath and to let go of the tension in shoulders and neck. In a very short space of time his whole surgery had changed into a jungle of green

dots and he was aware a hundred times a day of how he felt and how he could let go of the tension. It worked extremely well. He felt a lot more rested, and his patients too noticed that he was feeling much better.

Ten recommendations to reduce stress

These ten recommendations are skilful methods to reduce stress at work, and they are based on Santorelli's work.

1. Take at least five minutes every morning to calmly prepare for the day ahead. Just sit down, notice your breathing, look out the window, listen to the sounds around you, or go for a quiet walk.
2. If on your way to work you have to stop at traffic lights, or need to wait for a train, don't see this as time wasted but use this time to pay attention to your breath, to look at the sky, or to turn your attention inward.
3. When you are on a break, get out of your normal break routine such as drinking a cup of coffee or smoking a cigarette. Instead go for a short walk, walk up and down the stairs, or do a few stretching exercises at your desk.
4. If there is time for lunch during your break, have a change of scenery. Take a longer lunch break from time to time, and have lunch in a restaurant with some nice colleagues. Find out if there is a lunch concert somewhere near your work place, or visit a museum if one is nearby. During your lunch hour go for a walk and pause at a street musician and listen to the end of the tune he's playing.
5. Decide to have a break for two or three minutes every hour. Become aware of your breathing and the tension in your neck and shoulders. Bring some order in your thoughts.
6. Use everyday signals, like the ringing of the telephone, seeing a client out, or sitting behind the computer, as a sign to come back to yourself, to concentrate and not to react on automatic pilot.
7. Eat your lunch in silence once or twice a week. Use that time to eat slowly, to taste the food properly and to be in touch with yourself.
8. At the end of your working day reflect on all the things you

have done. Give yourself a compliment for what you have achieved, and draw up a list of things to do tomorrow. Say to yourself: enough for today!

9. Go home calmly. Take your time to enjoy the light, the temperature, and the fact that you are outside again. Hear the sounds around you; take note of the colours, the flowers or the white frost on the branches of the trees.
10. Take a shower or a bath when you get home, or put on different clothes. Make sure you have a ritual to mark the end of the working day, and the fact that you are now at home. Take time for making contact with your housemates or family members. Look at them when you greet them on arriving home. But also take the time to come home to yourself.

Body scan

The following exercise (based on the exercise in *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn) will help you to stay in touch with yourself and at the same time have attention for your surroundings.

1. Sit down in a way that is as comfortable as possible. Feet on the floor; you can take off your shoes if they feel tight. Make yourself at ease.
2. Close your eyes if you want.
3. Feel how the belly rises and falls when breathing in and breathing out. In and out.
4. Take your time to experience your body as a whole, delimited on all sides by your skin. Become aware of the places where your body is making contact with the floor or with what you're sitting on.
5. Move your attention slowly to the toes of your left foot. Try on an in-breath to breathe TO the toes, and imagine that the breath reaches your toes via the nose, chest, belly and your left leg. On an OUT-breath the breath leaves the toes and goes up again and then leaves the body through the nose. Breathe in, to your toes, and breathe out away from your toes through your nose. It is as if your breath is making a journey through your body: you breathe in to your toes and you breathe out away from your toes.

6. Allow yourself to feel everything there is to be felt in your toes: itching, heat, or tingling. Even if you don't feel anything that's fine, because 'feeling nothing' is an experience too.
7. Then change your attention from the toes to the sole of your left foot. Take your time to experience the sole of your foot as a whole, enclosed on all sides by your skin. Become aware of where your foot rests on the floor.
8. When breathing IN, try to breathe to the foot sole, when breathing OUT breathe away from the sole of your foot. Repeat this a few times.
9. Now move your attention to the toes of your right foot. On an in-breath try to breathe TO your toes and imagine the breath reaching your toes via the nose, the chest, the belly and the right leg. On the OUT-breath the breath goes away from the toes, travelling upwards and leaving the body through the nose. Breathe in to your toes, and breathe out away from your toes through your nose.
10. Bring your attention from your toes to the sole of your right foot. Take your time to experience the sole of your foot as a whole, enclosed on all sides by your skin. Become aware of the place where the foot rests on the floor.
11. Breathe IN to the sole of your foot, and breathe OUT away from there, through your nose. Follow the flow of your breath to the sole of the foot, and from there back up to your nose.
12. When you notice that your mind has wandered: bring your attention back to your breathing and to the part of your body you were concentrating on.
13. Now breathe three times to both your feet and breathe out away from your feet.
14. And every time you say to yourself *Relax*, this feeling of relaxation returns.
15. When you count from five to one, you slowly return with your attention to this space. At one you stretch out, blink your eyes and come back with your attention. Five, four, three, two, one.

You can expand this exercise and give attention to every part of your body. The long version takes about forty-five minutes.

Day 23

Throw Out That Rubbish

Being at home, having space for yourself. This becomes vital when you are burnout. Therefore make sure first of all that at home there is at least one space where you can spend time without being disturbed by all kinds of untidiness, or by jobs that are visibly waiting to be done. A tidy room – but it can also be the kitchen, the tool shed or a cosy space in the hall. Do you not have a space like that? Take a walk through your home. Which space is most ‘yours’? Make this space totally yours, tidy it up and organise it in such a way that you feel completely at home there. Where you can be yourself without having to do anything.

Start somewhere

It is not easy to organise or tidy up your daily life. This often is quite a task already when you feel totally well and healthy, but becomes even more difficult when you have become burnt out. At work the desk is piled up with mail, but also at home your desk is full with all kinds of stuff you have to read at some stage. In some homes even the removal boxes are still in a corner. Burnout is accompanied by cognitive problems and that means you have trouble concentrating, you often forget more than you used to, and you are unable to do two things at once. You cannot recall names as quickly as before, you cannot focus your attention so well. It is more difficult to decide things and to make plans. You are easily distracted, and planned activities often go wrong half-way, because you get distracted or have lost sight of the goal.

If there is a mess around you, it becomes a problem of the

chicken or the egg: is it such a mess because you cannot concentrate to well? Or can't you concentrate because there is such a mess around you? Whatever answer you may give, there comes a moment when it is better just to start tidying up.

Once you have decided to deal with your surroundings, you actually have already taken that first difficult step. But when subsequently you consider all that has to be done, you will probably get discouraged very quickly. But look at it from another angle:

Imagine yourself in the future. It is, say, three months later. Take an imaginary date in the future. At that date your house is tidy, and rearranged with furniture and things you really want to and need around you. What does that look like? And how do you feel? A pleasant feeling? A tidy feeling? What were the steps you took to achieve this? Where exactly did you start? What was difficult for you and how did you solve that? Did you do all this alone, or with a friend who motivated you? Who else did you need to call on for more difficult jobs? What did you need to let go of? What did you do differently from before? What old habits did you change?

You will notice that 'space' is great. You get used to feeling good that things can easily be found. And that you can enjoy the beautiful desk that reappeared from underneath all your stuff.

Make use of your hormones

Stress hormones influence your attention. If the *arousal* is too great – feeling rushed and agitated because too much adrenaline is produced – this will result in narrowing the scope of attention. If the *arousal* is too little or too low – when the neurotransmitter dopamine is out of balance – this will lead to reacting with less alertness, and to reaction mistakes. When your *arousal* is too low, you feel like a zombie. You are reacting or responding, but often after a delay. Your *arousal* may increase during the course of the day and this usually makes you feel better. What may also be helpful is to go to the gym for an hour, so that more adrenaline and endorphins are produced. Mopping the stairs can also be a form of fitness training. Cleaning can give a lot of satisfaction. Make use of the impulse you feel, and when you feel like cleaning – the just do it!

Many women have a time in their monthly cycle – or even in spring – when they feel an almost uncontrollable cleaning or nesting urge. Make use of it, but don't exaggerate.

Don't plan to do the more difficult tasks at the end of the day, but do them when you feel relatively fit. Do routine jobs when you don't have so much energy. Do not make demands on yourself that are too high. For example, start with a job and do it for fifteen minutes; don't start to clear out the whole attic, because then you will feel the detrimental effects the next day. In any case make sure that you stop before your energy is depleted. And after the exertion do something relaxing.

And last but not least: don't be a perfectionist! Make sure that your own space is cosy and liveable – and that your working space is liveable. According to your own standards. If you are someone who is untidy, then just accept of yourself that you will never have things as perfect as your sister-in-law or your meticulous brother. And don't let others push you, not even your mother. It is your home.

Nice and tidy!

Saskia Zonderland is a *professional organiser*. Her job involves tidying and clearing, in other people's homes and at their workplace. She offers various recommendations to tidy up at home – and later on when you are back at work. And recommendations on how to keep it that way.

She goes from the premise that you have to feel good and at ease in your own home. You create peace at home by getting rid of disturbing distractions and feelings of guilt (things you 'really should do'). In this way you make it easier for yourself and you are not disturbed by things or objects lying around that you no longer like.

How do I tidy up my house?

- First of all (again) get used to putting everything away that you have picked up or used. Also go round the house and rearrange things the way you like them to be. Every time you do this set yourself a concrete goal: tidy up one shelf or one cupboard or one room. Doing more or doing less is allowed of course. Keep things in perspective and do not turn everything upside down at once!

- Change over your summer and winter clothes, so that your wardrobe and hallstand are not overflowing. Check things at the same time: when did you wear this last? More than a year ago? Does it still fit you? Don't fool yourself, it will never get fashionable again! Check your kitchen supplies. What about the best before date? Is your worktop cluttered? Tidy it up. Create order in your kitchen implements by putting them in see-through plastic storage boxes. Put your beautiful porcelain in a dust-proof glass case. Inspect your bookshelves: what books are worth keeping, and which ones can you do without (to create space for new books)? Put a basket in your hall, where unwanted brochures and advertisements can go, or put a sticker on your letterbox to indicate you don't want to receive any unsolicited mail. Repair things that are broken, or throw them away once and for all. Tidy up holiday gear (suitcases or rucksacks, and stuff for walking, cycling, camping or skiing holidays) and store it together in the same space: in the attic or in the basement. Put things away systematically and put stickers on boxes so that you know what is inside.
- Sometimes you really have to throw things away, but you can also sell things or give it to a charity or recycling shop. Particularly (children's) clothes and books can have a second life. Perhaps you could make somebody else happy with them, or you could have a car boot sale.

Clean desk policy

Back at work? There too you will need a space for yourself where you can work joyfully and efficiently, and where you can receive people. In offices with flexible workspaces, where you can plug in your PC anywhere, there is nothing for it but: you must have emptied your desk completely at the end of your working day. This clean desk policy is perhaps a bit far-fetched, but you might start for example by tidying your desk once a week. Preferably before the cleaning team comes by: at least then you know that your workspace will also get cleaned.

Make sure that there is space on and around your desk. Organise your desk in a different way once in a while – and make sure there is something personal on your desk. A management consultant, who is single, had a big picture of his cat

on his desk. Once a week go through your piles. What has been dealt with? What can be thrown away? Have the priorities changed – and is this reflected in the way you have your next jobs lined up? Go through the following checklist:

- What do I need to keep (for example for the revenue department, the order files, the correspondence files)?
- Are these documents really still relevant or up to date?
- Is it useful to read through them once more?
- Will I ever read this again? And if so, where and when? At home, in the train or here at the office? And after I have read it can it be thrown away or handed on to a colleague?
- Has this information been stored somewhere else in the organisation already? Is what I have here double?
- Does this have to be within reach (on my desk)? So only if you use it daily!

Recommendations for organising your drawers

Most desks have drawers – or else you will have the use of (part of) a filing cabinet at work. A few recommendations to organise this space efficiently:

- Keep the top drawer empty, so that when you leave work you can store everything you worked on during the day in that drawer. If you need to leave work in a hurry, for example, you just sweep everything in that top drawer. The next day you will find everything back: your diary, notepad and the complete file you are working on at the moment.
- The second drawer is usually suitable for a tiered letter tray where every next compartment is just under the previous one at such an angle that the contents are clearly visible. You can put empty forms in there or notepaper you use regularly. Or a see-through plastic folder with all documents needed for a meeting, discussion session or everything that is part of one project.
- Use the third drawer for the rest of the documents you use regularly. This drawer is usually deep enough for suspended folders. Make a suspended folder for each project or task you are working on. Filing things away is so easy with sus-

pending folders – and once the job is finished and the file is closed, you can lift out the whole folder and send or take it to the records department.

The art of diary management

Take out your diary out and open it. Look at what is inside. Imagine that this is not your diary but that of somebody else, for example that of a friend or a colleague. Just notice what is written inside that diary. Are there shopping lists and is it mainly a ‘to do-list’, or is it a collection of reminders to return telephone calls? Are there notes in it, and does it look more like a notepad or a journal? Is it clear at all what will take place when, or what has to be done? Use your diary to plan:

- Write down the starting time and ending time for an appointment, and calculate for travel time as well if necessary.
- Also note down other things apart from appointments, for example making a few phone calls, finding a solution for a difficult problem, or writing a document. Jot down the amount of hours set aside for these tasks, and keep to this ‘agreement with yourself’.
- Use a pencil, so that it is easier and neater to make changes, and consequently your diary will remain neat and orderly. Or use an electronic diary.
- If you need to coordinate your diary with those of your team members, pick a set moment every day to write up the latest changes in the team diary of the internal network. In this case an electronic diary is really efficient!

Ask for help!

Are you dreading to start clearing up? You don’t need to do this on your own. Ask somebody in your surroundings to help you, even if it was only to overcome your fear or resistance. You can also enlist the help from a *professional organiser*. This is a professional ‘tidy upper’! A *professional organiser* can help you:

- When you have a lot of stuff to sort out.

- When you really want to change structurally.
- When it is good to have a neutral person present (when dividing the home contents after a death or divorce).

The *professional organiser* has a lot of experience in sorting things out and putting things away, and will help you make choices.

Reward yourself

Decide how much time per week you want to spend on tidying up and beautifying your living space. Plan in your daily activities roster one tidying up activity, and make sure you build it up gradually. Reflect on how you carry out these tasks, with attention and with pleasure. Enjoy the results. Reward yourself for the results with a bunch of flowers or a magazine.

Day 24

Boss Burnout?

During the lunch break it is out in the open at last. The team is at their wits' end about the manager, Paul, who has taken the day off, to everybody's relief. Maria, the department secretary, puts the problem in a nutshell: 'Paul has changed completely in the past few weeks. He is extremely irritable. The other day



And whoever says I'm burnout IS DISMISSED!!

he said: you have put a spanner in the works – and: I have no use for you anymore. All this puts us in a very negative light.’ On January 1st next, Paul will leave the department, and a new manager has already been appointed. Maria: ‘And now he has decided it is better for him to leave on a bad note. So that the new manager is in a better position when he is starting off. Dear me...’ Paul’s behaviour is extremely difficult for all the team members; the atmosphere at work is not getting any better. At first everybody could get on with him as a boss, but now this has completely changed.

It is true that Paul’s negative remarks are not very encouraging. It seems as if he is totally disheartened and no longer shows his best sides. He is no longer even trying to do so, because he knows that he is leaving. In this case it is good that Maria and her colleagues discuss this negative attitude – and that they agree that it is Paul’s problem. Although they suffer from the worsening atmosphere at work, they do not take on his problems. They have every right to get angry at his remarks, because as long as he is still in this managerial position, he is responsible.

Turning negative criticisms around

When your boss is making a lot of negative remarks, it is extremely important that your sense of self-worth is not too dependent on his or her appreciation or recognition of you. But you also want a good atmosphere at work. In the case of Paul everybody knew that within a short space of time a new manager would take over. But what to do if that is not the case – without it becoming your problem? You can influence your own behaviour, but not the behaviour of others; at least not directly. Particularly when there is an imbalance of power between boss and employee. If you really want to help your manager and improve the atmosphere at work, try the following strategy: make an agreement with the members of your team that you will only respond or react positively to him. Pay him compliments; say that it is fantastic how he has managed to stay with you for so long. Of course that was not easy because of your incompetence. But despite all your limitations he has had great successes. And he has also made it pos-

sible that all of you have begun to appreciate him as manager. Also tell him what successes he has achieved; mention them to him. In short, give him an abundance of appreciation. This strategy might seem the long way around, but it offers him a way out of his negative behaviour as manager – and without him losing face.

If the atmosphere at work was not at its best – and a new manager arrives, you can make a fresh start with him or her as a team. That start would even be better if you, together with the new manager, do a training in dealing with stress at work. During that training you will already become familiar with each others' reactions in a non-work situation.

Difficult bosses (m/f)

In many workplace cultures burnout is still considered a sign of weakness (while in fact it is not). So it will not be easy to approach your boss to ask her whether she might be burnt out. What you can do is mention it in a roundabout way. In any case you can change your own behaviour, because burnout is often caused by a lack of mutual respect and appreciation. If you follow the strategy of paying compliments, as was described above, you and your colleagues will also appreciate each other and yourselves. By choosing the royal road of acknowledging and respecting your boss. And in this way you are indirectly no longer dependent on her appreciation of you. Because the boss is getting appreciation, you give her the space to approach things in a more positive way. Fair is fair: some bosses are difficult to work with. It is an art to survive in such a situation, to keep sight of your own goals, and not to get burnt out or overworked.

Ray was working as a social worker within a company. He was obsessed by his boss. At night he even dreamed about her, and then he would wake up drenched in sweat and in a panic. He thought of his boss as some kind of mother hen who would constantly get too close to him. When she, with the best of intentions, put her arm around him, he became paralysed. At the same time she treated him like a spoiled little boy and she did not take his wishes to do some other types of work seriously. Ray withdrew more and more; he became lazy at work, because he wanted to escape the control of his boss as much

as he could. But this had the opposite effect: his boss' controlling remarks (*Why are you getting to work so late? Why can't your wife bring your child to the crèche?*) only increased.

What is a difficult boss for one person does not need to be so for another. Some of Ray's colleagues really got on well with her. They saw her as a warm and friendly woman. They liked the fact that she always brought cakes to the meetings, and that she gave a lot of attention to team outings. So his disgust was not shared.

Bosses in all shapes and sizes

In their book *Leven met je baas* (Living with Your Boss) Tineke Aarts and Carien Verhoeff distinguish six types of bosses. The *efficient* boss is professional and can delegate well. You recognise this boss from the saying: 'What is preventing you?'

Some people see the efficient boss as unconcerned or uncaring. The *collaborating* boss has this caring aspect, but is the type of patronising busybody that is driving Ray mad. She is right on top of you, but is also celebrating the successes exuberantly. Characteristic saying: 'We are going to get this job done together.' The *unpredictable* boss creates an atmosphere of anxiety, because he is changeable and cannot be predicted. He can blow off the handle for no reason and say: 'I am disappointed in you.' The *uptight* boss is the perfectionist boss. Nothing is ever good enough; everything could always be done better. She cannot enjoy achievements, but has already a new project lined up. Her characteristic remark: 'I thought you were going to do that job?' Finally there is the *indifferent* boss, the well-dressed type who likes to go out for lunch and to the gym. Characteristic remark: 'One cannot always work on full tilt.' You would often come across him with a drink in hand at receptions. A lazy boss, but a good networker.

Each one of these bosses has their positive and their negative qualities. Things go wrong when you are allergic to the negative aspects of your boss. Because of your own irritation you will also show your negative qualities. Ray's collaborating boss thought he was lazy and indifferent, and she began to pull even more at him.

Analyse the collaboration

How are things in your working situation? Answer the following questions:

What is your boss good at? What do you blame him for? What would help him not to have to make demands on his weak sides? What is your boss allergic to?

If you have answered these questions, you can draw up a core quadrant of your boss (see day 18). Put the core quadrant of your boss next to your own core quadrant and draw your conflict axis. Which of your qualities do you need to call on in order to be on better terms with your boss? Realise that you have a choice in this. Perhaps you could change jobs within the organisation, or you could look elsewhere for another job. Or become your own boss.

Suggestion: have the sensitivity to burnout of your company measured

More than half of the risk of burnout is caused by the enterprise or organisation your work for. It may be because of failing management, too much work pressure, bad atmosphere at work, lack of autonomy, few career perspectives, inadequate terms of employment or fringe benefits, not a good work space, or lack of being able to arrange or change things.

Set in motion the process of becoming aware of stress management in general, and of the specific risk factors of your organisation. In order to do so you can discuss with your boss, with the personnel department, the company physician or the employees' council, to investigate with the help of a questionnaire, the burnout sensitivity of the company or the organisation. Using this you can explore personal efficiency, the style of leadership, the work context, the organisation context, personnel and mobility, culture and meaning in a social context. The results of this investigation offer a concrete window for interventions. The burnout barometer has been developed by 'Prometheus'.

Day 25

Dare to Argue

Conflicts are often not fought publicly, but are happening below the surface. Perhaps there are tensions between you and your boss; there may be angry faces of colleagues when you always have to leave work early to collect your child from the crèche. Or when you say no to extra work. Or when you have an unpopular opinion at a meeting. Or when your boss decreases your salary, while others who lunch with him on a regular basis, get a pay rise. Perhaps you do not voice your criticism of your boss because you are afraid, or because you do not want to hurt him. This will gnaw at you; it is better to find ways to express your dissatisfaction. Otherwise you might literally become sick. This happened, for example, to a social worker who was having a lot of problems with the waiting list of the organisation she worked for. She found it unacceptable that families with serious problems, with sexual abuse for instance, had to wait for months before they could get an appointment. Actually she was of the opinion that the managing director was not working hard enough to get extra money from the local authorities so that the waiting list could be reduced. She felt unsupported, and at the same time extremely responsible for the people she, as she saw it, abandoned. Because she was constantly feeling powerless, this worker became burnout and had to take sick leave.

Arguing as a social skill

Tensions may ruin the atmosphere at work. Too many people are ending up on disability benefit through conflicts at work. They have never learned how to argue. This you will have to do

in plenty of time before you are nearly burnout. Being good at arguing is a social skill that can be learned. It is a form of communication. Being good at quarrelling is also of benefit to the organisation. Research shows that organisations or businesses where there is room for arguments are doing better than organisations where people avoid having rows. The condition is, however, that it should also be possible to laugh together, and that the arguments are about matters and not about people. Often conflicts are necessary for all parties to remain alert. In organisations where it is not possible to argue, there usually is no room for harmony either. Instead, there is an atmosphere of apathy: confrontations are avoided, people think the same about everything, or run away from their responsibilities. For those who want to respond quickly to the market place, this is disastrous. Where there are few arguments, bad decisions will be made.

Preconditions for arguments

Businesses or organisations where arguments are happening in the right way, fulfil a number of conditions: the arguing parties are usually very familiar with the topic of discussion, and develop various alternatives which they are putting forward during the discussions. Furthermore the power structure is in balance. Problems are solved without striving for consensus. And strikingly: where there are arguments there is also much laughter. In workplaces where no one argues there is often a veil of vagueness or uncertainty. An example is an enterprise where there are too few parking spaces for the workers. This has become a long-running theme for the business. The management could only give a parking space to some of the employees. It escalates, even before it is clear according to which criteria it should be decided who of the workers would need to have a car for carrying out their work. If a discussion about this topic is to be successful, it first of all needs to be clear what is really at stake, and what is in all the workers' interest. In this particular example it is in the interest of the management that no extra parking space should be rented. It also needs to be convenient for the workers to reach their place of work. When management and the employees discuss this theme, it is important that all have a similar opinion on the analysis and the type of problem. Then the alternatives,

how the problem can be solved, can be discussed. Can employees who car pool be rewarded, or should an additional covered area be created for parking bicycles? Have the possibilities for working at home been fully exhausted? It is essential that the management does not just make a choice that is supported by many people, but that the quality of the decision is also taken into consideration, and that the management is dedicated to this. It should be able to stand fully behind the decision, and not come to an arrangement out of fear. Then employees will be able to respect a decision, even if they have a different opinion. Respect can arise when the procedures and communication are good. If the decision making process is open and honest, the employees who do not completely agree with the decision can still be loyal to it.

Learning from arguments

No matter how much say people have, and how democratic the decision making process is, not everybody can always be heard for every decision. This particularly is the case in all areas of employment where many employees work part-time. If a manager takes a one-sided decision, it is important that that decision is explained properly. As a manager show your concern or commitment, and explain and be clear about your expectations. Commitment means, for example, that everybody's interests are respected, and that the employees are encouraged to be critical, to be engaged. Clarify every decision; even the changes that are well-received need explanation. Being clear about the expectations means that the employees know what is expected of them.

People often avoid rows because they stir up too many emotions. But try to see arguments in a different light. See them as a confrontation of different styles of thinking. Try to reduce the difference in opinion to a difference in the style of thinking, and not to see it as a difference in personality. If somebody does not agree with you, it does not mean that that person is bad, stupid or arrogant.

Psychological models distinguish different styles of thinking. A well-known distinction is the different ways of thinking of the left and the right brain. The right brain is synonymous with creative, holistic and conceptual thought; the left brain

with analytical, technical and logical thought. An analytical thinker does not persuade a visionary with figures and graphs, and vice versa the broad outlines of the visionary will not convince the analytic person. Without having to change either way of thinking, both parties can learn to communicate differently about their way of thinking. If this does not happen there is every possibility that the one person will be branded a dreamer and the other a figure fetishist. However, this means that the confrontation has become personal, so that the potential for a common solution disappears from view.

No reward without struggle

Do not in any way stick to the golden rule that you have to treat the other person as you wish to be treated yourself. Acknowledge the differences, go for the confrontation and choose that which is most beneficial. Every business or enterprise should put people with different styles of thinking together in a team, and then let the confrontations happen. Get rid of misplaced politeness, do not shirk away from emotions, discuss what is taboo, shine a light on preconceptions, and especially don't forget to enter the arena well-prepared. Only in this way will you get to the best solutions within an organisation.

Draw up an inventory of the current conflicts at work. Where do you feel disadvantaged? Are your holidays in order, the wages, do you have enough opportunities to develop yourself? Are you critical of the way meetings are conducted, are they more like monologues than discussions? Place the sources of conflicts in order of least serious to most serious, and then decide to tackle them, starting with the least serious.

Begin with a Rational Self Analysis. Suppose you discuss with your boss that you want career coaching. Paid for by the business. What do you feel about this? What are your thoughts? Are they in agreement with the facts or do you make yourself unnecessarily fearful or angry? What is your goal? Are you not getting in unnecessary conflict with yourself or with your boss? You are unnecessarily getting into conflict when you do not keep it businesslike but make it personal. When you see a rejection as something personal, as proof that the boss does not think highly of you. Once you have made an appropriate RSA, put it into practice.

Day 26

Successful Reintegration

Ultimately the goal is to go back to work in your old job: reintegration. Once you are back there you can still evaluate whether you are in the right place. But why is reintegration successful for some people and not for others? Can you prepare for reintegration? And how? What lessons can you learn from failed attempts? Is relapse part of the process?

Harry, who is 34, is single. He is studying IT at a school for Higher Vocational Education. He has worked for a number of years as a system analyst in various enterprises. His last job was at a placement organisation. He was working in a bureaucratic culture, and he experienced the bureaucratic way of working in this enterprise as extremely difficult. He felt the workload was too heavy: a lot of things needed to be finished by the end of the year. He was not up to it; he also had neck and shoulder complaints, and he went with these to the company physician, whose diagnosis was RSI. He was advised to rest. Harry did not recover; he indicated that he could not relax, and the doctor suspected burnout. After having been treated for burnout and RSI complaints for more than six months, he resumed work at his old employer. Shortly after he had gotten back on his feet, Harry transferred to another employer, a small organisation with a playful and less bureaucratic working culture.

Andrew is, just like Harry, 34 years old. He lives together with his partner Annette and they have a four-month-old baby boy. Until recently Andrew worked as the managing director of a small organisation in the non-profit sector. It was difficult for the organisation to survive financially – Andrew was working day and night to keep going. After working like this for more than a year he became completely burnt out; it nearly took

him eighteen months to recover. He reintegrated with his old boss, where his tasks had been taken over by an interim manager. Soon after he resumed work he transferred to an IT function in the profit sector.

Resuming work

Both Harry and Andrew did not really want to go back to their old employer. Nevertheless they slowly took on their tasks again in the old work place. A gradual increase in the workload is important, because you need to learn how to deal with stress and an increasing workload slowly. For the first month they worked eight hours per week, divided over two or three days. The second month this increased to twelve hours, divided over three days. Subsequently in the third month sixteen hours divided over four days, and in the fourth month twenty hours per week. They did not immediately resume their old tasks; then they would be too tempted to try to get rid of the backlog, which is not a very encouraging start. They focused on little jobs that could be finished within a certain limited time frame, without deadlines.

Diverse development

For Harry the reintegration did not work out well. Soon after completing his probationary period he called in sick. He was not sleeping well, the RSI complaints had returned, and he already panicked at the thought of going to work. Andrew was extremely pleased, he was on the right course with the extension of his working hours, he noticed how his self-confidence increased and he had fun with his colleagues. What are the similarities and what are the differences between their methods of reintegration?

Harry and Andrew both received the same kind of burnout treatment, with the emphasis on relaxation, improving their physical condition, learning to think more effectively, and increasing their assertiveness at work. For both of them the treatment took about a year, and both resumed work six months after the start of the treatment. After he called in sick at work, Harry's treatment began straight away. Andrew first

tried to recover by himself. For both of them there were also psychological problems involved. Harry's sister died suddenly from a disease of the blood, and he finds it difficult to come to terms with that. Now and again he suffers a panic attack, and he thinks he's going to die too. Andrew has sociophobic complaints: he finds it difficult to look people straight in the eye; he thinks they ridicule him. When he was younger he was bullied because of his protruding ears. In the burnout treatment these psychosocial problems have also been given attention, because feelings of anxiety demand a lot of energy.

Protect your boundaries

Harry made a deal with his old employer before he fully resumed his old job: he found a new job. In this way the employer would be rid of him, but the deal was that if his probation period in the new job would not work out, Harry could come back to his old job. He also stipulated to have a month off before starting the new job. In the new job he immediately started to work full-time. Nobody knew of his previous history of burnout and RSI complaints. He liked his new job enormously. There was always something to do with his colleagues after work: a housewarming party, going to the cinema, relaxing in a trendy pub. There was also a marvellous espresso machine, and a coffee grinder. Amazing, this coffee. No, he did not know how many cups he drank in a day, but probably around ten. Breaks during the day? This was part of the relapse prevention plan, but he found it impossible to stick to it. At the new workplace it is expected of him that he should adapt to the work rhythm of others. He does not even get around to organising things for himself, like getting out disability insurance, paying into a pension plan, organising a public transport travel pass. Once every two weeks he does get a chair massage, which he enjoys, but after the massage he feels completely exhausted. He would like to have one every week, but this is expensive, and he does not have a lot of money because this new job pays less than the previous one. There is no time for going to the gym either, and he only sees his friends once in a while for a night out. He had to let go of further training and the voluntary work he used to do, because he wants to prove himself in this new job. His love life is at a dead end as well. He

really fancied one of his colleagues at work, but when he indicated that much, she reacted extremely cool and distant. He does not get any feedback about his work achievements; it seems as if his boss is avoiding him. His work place has one disadvantage: he works with seven other people in one space and that means there is a lot of noise. As a result he finds it more difficult to take in the new things he has to learn. He would like to do more work at home, but when he proposed this it was rejected. He had the feeling that they did not completely trust him.

Andrew's new employer was aware of his burnout and knew that he was still partly on disability benefit. Andrew had been deemed unfit for work for 50%. The personnel manager had looked into the advantages for the employer of taking on a worker who was still on sick benefit. It involved quite a number of advantages: money, and in case of relapse going back to full disability benefit. At his new job Andrew started to work eight hours a week, and they agreed to extend these hours gradually: another four hours every month. He starts with simple tasks, like checking old laptops, making files, and is also doing some courses. As he begins to feel better, the tasks become more demanding. He notices differences in the work culture. In the non-profit sector you shared more with the other colleagues, there was more enthusiasm and less macho behaviour. The men were cooking meals too. Some colleagues in the profit sector have never touched a cooking utensil in forty years. The conversations are mainly about work and the IT problems. Andrew notices that he has to set his boundaries very clearly: not being available after work hours, because otherwise the mechanics or engineers will ring at seven in the evening when they have finished their job to discuss the problems at work, and this might take up the whole evening. One of Andrew's colleagues, who is coaching him, pointed this out to him. In this way Andrew has time in the evenings for leisure activities: he is in a band, goes to the swimming pool on a regular basis, and he also wants to spend time with his family. He is satisfied with the way the personnel department organises his fringe benefits. He is earning somewhat less than in his previous job, but if everything goes well he will be promoted in a year's time. From the very beginning he has had good contacts with his boss, the financial manager. There is time to talk with him, and sometimes this might even take two hours.

Andrew notices that from time to time he suffers from pressure in his head, and behind the eyes. Then he applies the recommendations from his relapse prevention plan, namely to concentrate on the breathing, and relax.

Factors promoting successful reintegration

- Try to estimate if it makes sense to be open and honest about your illness towards your new boss. It will be to your advantage if that is possible.
- Discuss with your colleagues and manager what you plan to do. Also let them know that in the beginning they won't see much of you, because you are still recovering.
- Insist on good fringe benefits and support from the personnel department.
- Gradually extend your hours, also in your new job.
- Gradually build up the intensity, and also the degree of difficulty of your work.
- Make sure that you get a mentor or coach, who is a fixed point of contact and who guards your workload.
- Use your relapse prevention plan.
- Live healthily at work: take sufficient breaks, don't drink too much coffee; go outside during your lunch break.
- Make sure there is the right balance between work and private life, so that in the evening there is time for energy providers such as going to the gym or going out.
- Ask your manager for feedback on your achievements at work.
- Stipulate that you can plan your own time, for example start a bit earlier, or finish up a bit later – or that you might work at home.

Day 27

Colleagues Make the Job

After having been the main focus of her family for years, Lara wants to go back to work. Her three children are in secondary school, and she definitely does not want to be faced with a black hole once they leave the house altogether. What she wants is a nice job; it is not so important that she will earn lots of money or have a career. She spots an advertisement for a job vacancy in the newspaper: the cultural centre is looking for an assistant manager. She applies for the part-time job and can start work. The salary is not great, and within four years she will be paid the maximum she will be entitled to. But she will worry about that when the time comes. For now it is some extra money on top of her husband's income.

Lara is really enjoying herself. Her children are fascinated by her stories about famous artists she meets at work. Once again she is the pivot, but now in the local world of culture. She works with a small team. The tasks and responsibilities have been divided, but everybody knows of each other what he or she needs to do. When the managing director of the centre is off sick for a day, Lara will be able to stand in for her, but sometimes she also is on a ladder to help the stage manager with lights and sound equipment. And vice versa Lara can make an appeal to her colleagues. And suddenly this becomes absolutely necessary. Lara discovers a lump in her breast: cancer. Everything goes extremely quickly: surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. In between she tries to go to work once in a while during those months. Her colleagues understand. They keep in touch and invite her when there is a good show. Nine months later she is back at work full-time, work she never really was without. For Lara her job and her relationship with her colleagues were things that helped her through her illness.

Employees who get little support from their colleagues are three and a half times more at risk to get burnt out than people who receive a lot of support from their colleagues. Support from your colleagues provides energy – just like independence and the ability to grow in your work. A good atmosphere at work and a sense of fellowship with colleagues therefore are important working conditions. Yet in advertisements for jobs this is only mentioned as the second or third aspect. Income, bonuses and lease cars are seen as more important. You hardly read anything about good collaboration between colleagues, let alone friendship. People who apply for jobs are more interested, it seems, in what they can earn than in who their colleagues might be. But when people judge their existing job and their motivation for staying with their current employer, they mostly mention how much pleasure they get from the collaboration with their colleagues.

When you are applying for a job, you are often motivated by the wish to earn more money. At that moment you do not realise that leaving a job where you worked with good colleagues to get a higher salary, does not necessarily increase your satisfaction in life. Being satisfied with what you earn is usually not determined by the salary you now get.

The message is clear: choose a job where you feel happy with your colleagues. If you have such a job – then think twice before changing to another job just because you will earn more. On the other hand: get out as quickly as you can if your colleagues are your enemies, or even worse, if they bully or sexually harass you. When you are applying for a job, make sure you always meet more people than just your future boss. Try to meet your future colleagues too. Trust your own intuition. Be alert to physical feelings: do you feel at ease? Or do you experience them as rejecting, and do you have the feeling you need to work hard at being liked? During the initial interview, discuss topics that are important to you, such as loyalty, how you are going to be trained in, whether there is a quick turnover of staff, how multicultural is the business, how macho? Do colleagues meet up outside working hours; can you make an appeal on them?

Healthy atmosphere at work

The kind of relationship we have with others clearly determines the atmosphere at work and loyalty amongst colleagues. We might feel more at ease with one group of people than with another. Having an understanding of the nature and the quality of the social network can help you and the business you work for to improve the atmosphere at work.

Is it the people who are at fault, or is the system to blame? This is a recurring dilemma when we are looking for an explanation for an unpleasant atmosphere at work. Those who are putting the blame on the people, quickly point to the lack of responsibility, bad management or ruthless power struggles. Those who prefer to put the blame on the 'system', are looking at the bureaucratic structures or the lack thereof. Some people see the 'rotten apples' as the cause, others the 'rotten basket'.

Create strong tie

Everybody experiences on a daily basis that the people you deal with in your day determine to a large extent the degree of satisfaction or pleasure you get from your job. But what is the reason that in one situation you are going under because of the group culture, while in another group situation you can achieve top results because the team is so good?

First of all it is the degree of mutuality, intimacy and emotional intensity of a relationship that influences the ties between colleagues. The stronger those ties, the less you are inclined to treat the other person with contempt. Your basic principle is that you will not harm somebody whom you do not want to harm you. There is an atmosphere where you can be honest with each other without hurting each other. A condition for such strong ties to come about is the degree to which you feel close to the others. In this way it is understandable that managers feel closer to other managers than to the people working under them, and therefore they look out more for one another than for their subordinates. And it also makes a difference if you have various forms of relationships with each other: I would prefer not to break with somebody who is, apart from being a colleague, also a friend and a club mate – that would be too high a price to pay.

Asymmetrical relationships can cause disloyalty towards colleagues much easier. If the emotional involvement of one person with another is not reciprocated, then the person who is placing his trust in the other is running a high risk of being harmed. Asymmetrical power relationships also ask for a disproportionate emotional investment in colleagues: the powerless person is forced to behave well and the powerful person can do what he likes with impunity.

Forming of cliques

The structure of the mutual relationships also influences the loyalty towards colleagues. If Jake gets on well with Anthony and with Patricia, but Anthony and Patricia do not have a relationship with each other, then Jake can manipulate Anthony and Patricia, or pit them against each other, without any consequences for himself. Jake can do this because amongst themselves Anthony and Patricia cannot check his behaviour. This is called a 'structural gap'. Take for example the stockbroker who has a relationship with an investor and with a bank, but these last two don't have a relationship with each other. Such a stockbroker could easily use money from an investor or from the bank to cover his own shortfalls without being found out, because there is no supervision.

On the other hand, a triangle where Jake has strong ties with Anthony and Patricia, and the last two also have strong mutual ties, will be a strong collegial front, a 'clique'. Jake, Anthony and Patricia set high collegial standards for one another. Whether they also do this with people outside their group depends on the extent to which their relationships with others show structural gaps. In organisations where 'blocks' are pitted against each other, there is too much 'cliquism'. This may be the case in hospitals where specialists (in a partnership) are up against the management. You even see the division in the canteen: who is eating at the same table? In a culture of cliques, where there are structural gaps in the supervision, mistakes may be covered with the mantle of love and of loyalty to colleagues.

The larger the organisation, the more difficult it becomes to have strong ties with everybody, and the more people are inclined to form cliques. In this way islands develop, where

amongst the members of the group there is the inclination to a strong ethical code of conduct. Between these islands of a group of colleagues, a no man's land amongst colleagues comes into being, where the rule of the strongest applies.

Invest in your colleagues

A labour consultant or management consultant who wants to improve the working climate in the organisation as a whole, should first of all chart the informal networks and structural gaps. He then has to organise activities where people of different networks are involved, who recognise themselves in each other, and based on the ability to create close ties. This takes time. Organisations that keep expanding and that will need to employ flexiworkers, are facing difficult times, in terms of the atmosphere amongst colleagues. Who wants to invest in temporary relationships? The lack of *commitment* does not only apply to the organisation, but also to each other.

Work out for yourself: How is the reciprocity between you and your colleagues? What negative thoughts do you have about your colleagues that are preventing you from approaching them? Keep track of how much you do for your colleagues and how much they do for you. Is this in balance? How much of an interest are you showing in your colleagues? Are you infatuated with colleagues who make life difficult for you? Are you avoiding colleagues, are you avoiding them during the lunch break, and are you not participating in the communal coffee break when it is somebody's birthday? Reflect on what you can do to improve the atmosphere at work; perhaps you need to overcome your aversion to a staff party or a New Year's reception, because from the perspective of friendship it will have much to offer you. It is short-sighted to always think: what a waste of time. Or to say: I am making a clear distinction between my work and my private life.

Day 28

About Money and Happiness

In a coaching group for women who are burnout, or who are in danger of becoming burnout, money is an important theme. Maria has been declared fit to work, and is not entitled to a disability allowance, but she definitely does not want to go back to her job. Soon the year she was out on sick leave will come to



Darling! The doctor says I suffer from MORTGAGE DISEASE! So now we know. But I've got to get on with work now. DEADLINE!!! Kisses!

an end, and she is busy looking for another job. Betty only wants to work part-time, and so she will lose half of her income. Nellie is partly entitled to a disability allowance and partly to unemployment benefit, so that overall she will have a much smaller income. Lorna has found another job that she really likes. She is sacrificing a well-paying job for a job that pays only slightly more than the minimum wage. Wendy is handing in her notice at the steady job she had and will start up her own business.

How does one manage to survive on less income after a burnout? This is a question that bothers many people. The new income situation brings up all kinds of fears: you already see yourself as homeless and living rough. Yet you can motivate yourself to live a life with less income, for example by asking yourself whether you are happier with more money. Is a high income worth all those sacrifices – like a burnout?

More than happy?

Once the primary needs have been fulfilled more money does not make one happier. In the Netherlands the prosperity has doubled since 1950, but the happiness of the Dutch people has hardly increased over the past fifty years. So it seems that running after yet more prosperity, which costs us so much time and energy, does not bring us any personal gain.

And what happens if all that extra effort or exertion does not provide any results? According to Robert Lane in his book *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*, it makes us depressed. In the affluent western economies we become unhappy because we set the wrong priorities. Working hard and earning money is more important for us than social contacts. Lane shows that once you are earning just a little more than the average minimum wage, more money does not make any difference. You do not become happier because you have a mobile home, a second home, three holidays in a year and an expensive car. In market democracies there is a high psychological need. In the Netherlands, for example, with 15 million inhabitants, 2.3 million people suffer from a mental disorder every year; 600.000 people are depressed. And of those only 15% get psychiatric or psychotherapeutic treatment.

Lane offers a macabre illustration of his thesis: the more

affluent a society is, the unhappier its people. In some affluent societies the number of successful suicides under young people is increasing dramatically. According to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) the amount of suicides in the Netherlands of people aged between 15 and 24 rose from 38 in 1995 to 55 in 1997.

More prosperity is a threat to our youngsters. A quarter of Dutch fathers is spending at most half an hour with his children on weekdays. As many fathers do not have more than an hour available for their *children* in the weekend. The more a father earns, the less time he has for his children. Mental neglect in combination with material surplus may create demanding monsters and unhappy children.

More economic growth, more burnout

You won't die from working hard. But working hard has its limits. In Japan there are instances of death caused by overwork (*karoshi*). In the Netherlands, too, the workload demands its toll: 4% of the workers are burnout, and 16.1% runs an increased risk of becoming burnt out. On a total workforce of 6.8 million people this means 270.000 exhausted workers and 1.3 million workers who are in danger of getting burnt out. It's not that they will all get totally burnt out; fortunately many take preventative measures and start to work less, or look for another job. This and other research shows a number of interesting results, from which can be concluded that the focus should not be on working harder, but on measures that prevent burnout.

Money does not provide energy

When there are a lot of factors that consume or deplete our energy in our job, and few factors that provide energy or nourish us, burnout is the result. Energy consumers are: a lot of pressure at work, heavy emotional load, and worrying about work in your time off. The lack of important energy providers is caused by: too little social support, no feedback at work, no coaching opportunities, little autonomy, and few opportunities for development or growth. Research is quite clear about the causes of burnout: it is not so much related to age, being

male or female, having children or not. What matters is the balance between what your job demands from you and what you are getting from it in return; and whether your capabilities are in line with the demands your job makes on you. There is only one demographic variable that is relevant: a single person is one and a half to two and a half times more at risk of becoming burnout than an employee who lives with a partner or is married. This is grist for the mill of political scientist Robert Lane, who exposes our obsession with economic growth and money. He argues that pleasure cannot be bought. A computer does not give cuddles.

Once the bare necessities for life have been met, more money does not make us happier. On the contrary: working harder happens at the expense of taking care of ourselves and our children. Neglecting yourself and your children can result in burnout, depression and suicide.

Plan your finances

If you are worried about money, then start from the other end. What do you need the money for? What do you really want in life? What are your goals? When do you want to have achieved them? How much do you want to work? Do you want to save up for a sabbatical, a period of unpaid leave? Or do you want to stop working when you turn 55?

First draw up your goals and then see how you can achieve them financially. To do this it is good to have some knowledge about budgeting and personal finance planning. There are plenty of books on planning your finances available tailored to different situations.

You can start planning your finances by first of all drawing up a financial balance sheet. Keep track of what you spend in a month. Keep all receipts and check what you spend your money on. Take everything into account, even the snacks you buy when you are going into town. Draw up an overview of all your income. Try to calculate expenditure and income on a monthly basis by dividing the yearly expenditure by twelve, for example. Once you have this overview, you are also in a much better position to decide whether you can save money somewhere – and subsequently you can plan how in future you want to spend your money differently.

Day 29

Is This Still Your Place?

Everybody asks themselves once in a while: am I still in the right work place? Does this job still suit me? Perhaps you even wonder whether you are still getting something out of 'that job'. At the same time you cannot imagine what other work you could do. 'I only know one trick,' said a medical specialist during a workshop on burnout. In saying this he resigned himself to his fate: he was doing his job, which he no longer liked doing, and which he mentally had left behind a long time ago already.

Resigning yourself makes you feel powerless, and gives you a sense of lacking energy. You feel less and less engaged with your own work – and you become less and less aware of your own capabilities. You do not acknowledge your own potential and through lack of engagement you also get less positive feedback from others. You are floating along on the demands of the organisation you work for. You see no perspective. You get tunnel vision. You are only interested in persevering and surviving. Eventually this will have a paralysing effect on your work. You deflect every uncertainty and refuse every possibility for change by clinging to the (ideal) image of your job. You make high demands on yourself and you stay obsessively engaged with your job. Even at home it becomes more and more difficult to let go of your work.

Patrick is forty years old and divorced. For part of the week he cares for his 15-year-old daughter. He has a well-paid job as a solicitor in a medium sized town, where he is head of the legal department of the town council. A short time ago he fell ill, and now he is on sick leave. He is completely exhausted, and feels that he has been used by the alderman of his department;

he has always done his job with the best of intentions, but never got the appreciation he deserved. He feels abandoned, and actually never wants to return to work for the town council. His feelings are contradictory, because at the same time he also wants to return to work immediately to finish his projects, to dismiss some of the co-workers who, in his opinion, are unfit for their job, and to confront the politicians 'with their own shit'. One doesn't need to tell him about the diagnosis of 'burnout'. He feels this as hurtful; he doesn't want to accept it. But he does want to find a new direction in his career, and he agrees that his physical condition needs improving.

Strategy for personal development

Burnout is the symptom of being stuck in your development in your job. The challenge has gone. You feel as if your job only offers more of the same. You are bored in your job, and experience hopelessness and lack of prospects or possibilities.

You can prevent this situation by regularly paying attention to your career opportunities and by keeping up your own employability and mobility in the labour market. Draw up an image of how you see yourself in five years' time. The employer also needs to do this: what employees are necessary in the business in five years' time? Alignment of the personal development of the employee to the needs of the employer and the labour market is called employability.

Employability is the capacity:

- to adjust to changes in the internal and/or external labour markets.
- to develop yourself so that you can continue to contribute to the changing goals of an organisation.

In short: employability is optimising your mobility and flexibility.

Fill out the following questionnaire. This is not a scientific test but it can give you some insights into your flexibility and employability. By filling out this form you will get a better idea of your own potential.

Personal Employability Index

(based on a questionnaire devised by Iet van Slageren, Prometheus)

Lijst A

	totally disagree	disagree to a large extent	somewhat disagree	somewhat agree	agree to a large extent	fully agree
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. I am not clear about the most important aspects that I want to see in my (future) position at work.						
2. Once I have started to work in this department of the organisation, it is difficult to get a position in a different department within the organisation I now work for.						
3. It would disturb my life too much if I were to accept a position in another organisation now.						
4. I feel irritable on a regular basis.						
5. A change of position involves a lot of risks.						
6. I quite often feel powerless.						
7. I think a lot about my career, but I feel I am not really progressing.						
8. I find it difficult to put my finger on what type of person I really am.						
9. Outside of my expertise there are few jobs available to me.						
10. I quite often feel that my work is getting too much for me.						
11. I feel as if there is very little I can personally do to find another job, even if I would want to.						
12. I feel disappointed in my job.						
13. My capabilities are so specific that it will be quite difficult to apply them in a different position elsewhere within the organisation I now work for.						

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
	totally disagree	disagree to a large extent	somewhat disagree	somewhat agree	agree to a large extent	fully agree
14. If things don't get better I will surely have a breakdown because of my job.						
15. There are more disadvantages than advantages to changing work places often.						
16. I am afraid that I will not be able to satisfy fully the demands that the (impending) changes in the organisation entail.						
17. Of course I play a part myself, but ultimately my organisation is responsible for the progress of my career.						
18. I feel I do not have enough alternatives to be able to change my job.						
Subtotal	+	+	+	+	+	+
Total:						

Lijst B

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
	totally disagree	disagree to a large extent	somewhat disagree	somewhat agree	agree to a large extent	fully agree
1. I am aware of my potential on the external labour market.						
2. I am well aware of my strong points.						
3. In general I feel satisfied in my job.						
4. I regularly discuss with my immediate manager how I want to develop myself further in or outside the organisation I now work for.						
5. I know how to tackle the rest of my career.						
6. Within my field of expertise I can see sufficient possibilities to change jobs.						
7. I know what motivates me in my work.						

Subtotal + + + + + +
Total:

Total list A:

Total list B: +

Total score:

The highest score is $108 + 42 = 150$. The lowest score is $18 + 7 = 25$. The lower your score, the more it is necessary for you to increase your employability or mobility in the labour market. The average is a score of $62/63$. If you score less than 40, it is quite possible that you are stuck in your job and that it is important for you to investigate your possibilities. If your score is higher than 135, you know that you can plot the course of your career yourself.

The ideal job

1. Just let your imagination run free. For now don't think 'yes, but'. If you were able to have any job at all, what kind of job would you choose, where would you work, what would be the 'ideal job' for you? What would your life and that of your partner or your family look like? What would your working environment look like?
2. Suppose you could have a career break for six months. What would you do in those six months? How would you organise or spend your time? What would you miss? What would you enjoy?
3. If you now compare the answers to the first two questions, what are the similarities? What are the differences?
4. Then look at your current working situation and compare this with your ideal job. What are the similarities? What are the difficulties? What conclusions can you draw from this?

Day 30

New Opportunities

Martina is 53, and for the first time in her life she is teaching physics at a Montessori school. As a fourth year student of physics she does her work experience at this school. She is standing in for a teacher who is on leave. Martina is a psychologist by profession and she used to work in a coaching function for a school counselling service. She advised schools without ever having taught herself. She could do this advisory work well, but it had lost its challenge. When her three children had finished their secondary education, she started to study again, just for the *fun* of it.

Once in front of the class she realised that the image she had of a teacher had become totally obsolete. It was impossible to teach in the traditional way: the teacher speaks and the pupil listens. The noise level in the classroom reminded her of a busy pub. As a teacher she had to try to make herself heard over the din, and to stimulate the pupils to work. When, for instance, she asked two pupils who were talking animatedly to do some sums, the reaction was: 'But I am explaining how to do these sums to her.' And indeed, it is part of the Montessori system to explain sums to one another.

Within a few months Martina managed to get the pupils to do some work, and she did this in particular by negotiating with them. For example her pupils were anxious to know whether they would not get a warning triangle or a stop sign in their school report, but a square. In the Montessori system a square means that you can continue. Martina made a deal: she would give a square, but that meant that the pupils would have to do more work. To her surprise this was what happened. They worked harder than before, and they made sure they deserved that square. From the very beginning she

insisted on one thing: having written tests, without copying from others.

Normally the desks are arranged in small groups, but for a test she dispersed all desks. Pupils would enter the classroom and be surprised: 'is there a test today? I didn't know that, my book is at my father's and I'm staying with my mother this week.' Or: 'my book is in the locker, and I lost the key to the locker.' Martina did not give in one inch; she was implacable. A test is a test, and no cheating was allowed. In other areas she was very lenient, however, and she did not even begin to forbid pupils to talk together during the class. She did suggest to pupils who were interested to have a *science quiz* for an hour. She would ask all kinds of difficult scientific questions to a group of pupils who were eager to learn. Those who did not want to join in could do some work for themselves in another part of the classroom. Martina got a lot of joy out of a very intelligent boy who was working by himself and who had already gone through more of the workbook than the others in his class. He did not participate in the quiz hour, but sat nearby, because there it was quiet. At a difficult question his eyes sparkled. He knew the answer. And when a classmate asked him, he would whisper the answer. That classmate let the other pupils muddle along for a while, and when nobody could come up with the answer, he would give the right answer.

At the Montessori school Martina not only got involved in different work, but she also met with different norms and values that she had to become familiar with. Montessori pupils are very good at waiting, for example. When the door of the classroom is locked and if they have to wait until the key has been found, they don't go home sulking, like in traditional schools. No, they are sitting down on the floor and talk or mess around for a bit. Martina is surprised that even when they are horsing around they always know when they have gone too far. She does not have to reprimand them. Just when she wants to admonish them to be quiet, they shut up. In a school that is so chaotic, seemingly without structure or norms, where pupils in the breaks move to the coffee shop en masse, she is surprised at their good manners and how they take others into consideration. A discipline that comes from within and is not imposed from the outside. She does see, however, that this type of school is not suitable for every student. In order to hold one's own, social skills and a certain amount of self-discipline are absolutely essential.

Martines lessen

What lessons can be learned from Martina's example?

1. She started to do what she likes. Besides working in her well-paid job as a psychologist she began to study physics. And the only consideration was that she liked studying. Purely for the *fun* of it!
2. In a safe way she tries out whether teaching physics is something she might like to do. She is posted to the school, and retains the right to return to her old job. At the same time she makes it possible for others to enjoy their leave as much as possible.
3. She puts her own norms and values on hold. She is flexible wherever that is possible. She does not demand of the pupils that they listen to her story and that they should be totally quiet in the classroom when she is speaking. She goes easy on the grades, and gives a better impression than it really is, with the beneficial result that eventually this is encouraging the pupils to work harder. The results are actually improving.
4. She sets her boundaries where she finds it necessary. She chooses for indispensable aspects, like a written test.
5. She considers teaching as an experiment she herself can learn from. She has a detached attitude and evaluates what works and what doesn't. She initiates a *quiz hour* and realises that it works well. There is no lack of attention. She makes a choice in favour of the bright pupil; she does not burden herself with the impossible task of capturing the attention of the pupil that does not show an interest. She won't enter that arena. When the time comes for the reports, the less interested pupils will approach her anyway. Then she has the power to give a good or bad evaluation. Because she negotiates and uses her position of power to stimulate and coach, her power is accepted. Accepted power is authority.
6. She is open to the idea that things might be different to what they seem. Her first impression at the school was that everything was a chaotic mess, like an untidy but cosy café. By paying attention to how the pupils behave when they have to wait, she discovers that they will not cross boundaries by themselves, and that they show a certain discipline. In giving them space, Martina appeals to their inner potential to create structure and decency.

7. Five skills of Martina can be seen as pointers for the question of how to deal with the other demands an organisation makes on you. She is far-sighted, flexible, shows adaptability, and is self-confident and independent. *Far-sighted*: she started to study another subject when her job no longer challenged her. *Flexible*: she succeeded in familiarising herself with a totally different subject. *Adaptability*: she finds a way to deal with the fact that the pupils are not listening to her, and at the same time she finds satisfaction in how she manages to attract their attention. *Self-confident*: the way she deals with boundaries and insists on the test. The demands she makes are achievable. *Independent*: she presents herself to her pupils as a researcher who experiments, but who is never dependent on the approval of parents, pupils or other teachers. Her attitude is characterised by pragmatism, an interest in what is happening, without holding on to what should be happening.

Seek the flow

Are you still experiencing *flow* in your work? You can discover if this is the case by doing the following exercise. Take a quiet hour, when you won't be disturbed. Make sure you relax, by concentrating on your breathing. Let go of all tension, in your neck, your shoulders and your belly. Relax and let your eyes be gently closed. Imagine that you are in a lift, at the top of a high building. The lift is going down and at every floor it stops, you become five years younger. You go back to when you were around eight years old – or to another year from your childhood when you felt happy. How did your surroundings look, the street you lived in, the path to the front door or the stairwell in the apartment building? How did your front door look? How did it smell when you entered the house? The living room, the kitchen, your own bedroom – what do you remember? How did your clothes feel, your pyjamas, your coat? What did you do before or after school in those years? What did you find exciting? What did you become totally absorbed in? If you have an image of your experience – and that can be anything: roller-skating, the road to school through a field, burning pages from your workbook or drawings after school; stealing apples from the neighbour's garden – keep that image in mind

for a while. Then open your eyes and ask yourself if that feeling is also present in your work. A tingling, excited sensation. What conditions does your work need to fulfil in order for you to feel like that, or should you perhaps go and look for another job? On the basis of this flow exercise, can you indicate five criteria your job or new position needs to meet? Suppose you want a new job: for a month cut out all the vacancies in the paper that interest you, without paying attention to whether you have the right qualifications. After a month make piles of the adverts that fall in the same categories and rate them from the most interesting (5) to the least interesting (1). Then reflect if on the basis of your preference you should invest in a new training or education. Do not apply for a job when you are burnt out, but wait until you have recovered. Look at Martina – always start with the fun!

A stress-free future?

Hopefully you are better able to cope with stress after reading this book and by applying the recommendations and exercises. Ideally, you should have become more energetic and relaxed. To protect yourself against the detrimental influences of stress in the future, it would be good to reflect on the events that may cause stress. You could lose your job, become seriously ill, lose your parents, see less of your children once they leave home, miss your partner, be forced to move house and to adjust to a less congenial neighbourhood. Think about the stress these events could cause, and also about what you would do to reduce that stress. Choose exercises from this book that suit you best.

To see if your stress levels have reduced, it would be good to fill out the questionnaire *Am I Burnout?* of day 1 again. What scores have changed? Which ones are at the same high level? Study the list carefully and reflect on what you can still do to overcome your own stress. In this way you become your own ‘stress manager’.

To protect yourself against the negative physical effects of stress it is advisable to have some physical exertion for half an hour three times a week. Do different activities: swimming, jogging, going to the gym, playing tennis or cycling and try to

fit them into your daily routine as best as you can. Don't panic when some weeks you are too busy to fit in these activities, but do keep an eye on it. If for weeks on end you don't have time for the gym or anything else outside your job, you will run the risk of relapse.

Notice what you eat; make sure you have a varied menu and avoid white flour products, white bread and other 'lifeless' foods. Sugar too is depleting your energy levels. Consider a healthy lifestyle, with limited amounts of alcohol, coffee and pills; make sure you are physically active and have a good night's sleep.

Will your life be stress-free? No, because without stress life is not possible. Sometimes you need to make life-changing decisions to really reduce the factors that deplete your energy. However, it feels good to know that you have your life in your own hands, even though now and again things might not be so rosy, and you are not doing your exercises so religiously, or you are not paying attention to what you eat. Being idle or lazy ... that too is looking after yourself.

