

The Syndrome

Burnout is a term we use in the workplace for a kind of disenchantment with our work. "It seems to be a result of challenges of a job being met or the rewards are no longer satisfying or exciting," says Norm Pepmeyer, a Psychologist in North Eastern Wisconsin. "Sometimes it comes hot on the heels of exhaustion, criticisms, or confrontations."

In quilt guilds this is called the "exhausted officer burnout syndrome." Officer burnout certainly not uncommon, though not considered frequently common either. Guild officers are volunteers who commit hours of dedicated work. They have chosen to do this for a variety of reasons. For some it is a commitment to the guild or the quilters. For others it is a passion for quilting activities. Still others recognize a need and feel compelled to fill the void. And some accept under pressure when no one else will accept the job and they have exhausted their personal supply of "No's".

Whatever the motivation, the job is originally perceived of as being worthy of the person's time and energies. Having "chosen" to be involved as an officer, burnout should be rare. However, enthusiasms may wilt and rewards may dwindle even in a job freely undertaken.

Groups that function most smoothly are those that agree on explicit, common goals. Keeping an eye on those goals will help to avoid argument. When everyone is clear on the long range priorities, it is easier to be flexible about the immediate short range issues.

Every group encompasses varying ideas about priorities. That is what makes a group dynamic, vital and interesting. When differences occur, avoid criticizing or making judgments until you understand the other point of view. Merely being critical accomplishes little. It creates dissent without effecting change. Instead, attend board meetings, listen and ask questions. Discuss differences.

Women, as mothers, homemakers and at work spend a lot of time mediating and pacifying to keep interactions going smoothly. In larger groups there is an even greater potential for dissent and disagreement. These differences are a natural part of the democratic process. Keeping an even keel on these agitated waters can be stressful for officers of a guild.

When elections time arrives in your guild examine your nominations carefully to make sure they have the qualifications you expect them to have for this office. Those women nominated for these offices may or may not have the qualifications needed for the job. It is up to those doing the nominations to choose their nominees on the basis of their qualifications instead of popularity.

Once you have elected someone, she deserves your cooperation, help and support. Your officers don't need to hear that they are not performing their jobs inadequately or that someone is quitting the guild because they don't like what an officer have done. Instead, compliment them on things they have done that you enjoy and appreciate. They need to hear it.