

8 guaranteed ways to burn yourself out as a mentor!

by Monika Kezaite - Jakniuniene and Mark E. Taylor



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INTRO

As two experienced mentors, we have searched for a long time to see if we could find a practical guide to help us fail completely in our work. We haven't found one yet! So in our last European training course, we organised a brainstorming session which gave the participants and us some really useful tips. We gather them here and hope that these ideas will give you starting points for great reflections!

(You may wonder - and you would be right to do so: are they serious, these two "experienced mentors"? Who knows? Have a read and you may come to the conclusion: yes, they are *seriously* funny. For you to judge!)

1. BE THE HERO!

When a young person turns to you for a conversation, this definitely means something - you're trustworthy and a very important person in this young person's life. Well, mainly a hero. And you should do everything to justify expectations and help them solve all their problems. Everything depends on you: the decisions they make; the way they approach their peers; complicated relationships with parents; and even the way they feel with you! It's all down to you to support *them*. And not because you have an inflated feeling of self-importance, but because you genuinely care. Your caring is your superpower and, obviously, without your constant care the person will be lost.

2. DON'T TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

You need to make absolutely sure not to take care of yourself! Especially physically! Exercise of all kinds should be avoided: long walks; jogging; swimming and gym workouts are particularly dangerous. If you haven't already, do allow yourself to be tempted to start experimenting with socially acceptable drugs like cigarettes and/or alcohol. Eat too much at every meal time; always keep at least one open pack of chocolate biscuits at your side and

strongly encourage your mentee to eat as many as you do. This will ensure you have high energy levels for your mentorship sessions..

3. SET NO LIMITS TO YOUR EMPATHY!

As you have probably read or heard in training, empathy is one of the strongest drives in your mentee relationship. It is through empathy that we can understand what the other person is feeling and that's the way to connect with them. But understanding and simply relating to the story is not enough. If you really want to help them, it's important to feel their situation completely, to overthink it from all possible angles and sharpen your emotions in order to fully feel what the other is going through. That's the best way to be helpful. It's especially advised to bring your thoughts and feelings home with you, because - if you look closely - feelings don't have any boundaries - you can feel them anywhere you want! And if you want to skyrocket to burn out - take all your thoughts to your good night's sleep. Replay your talks with the mentee in your head, try to empathise and let them keep you awake as long as possible.

4. BE A PERFECTIONIST!

The air in today's world is filled with messages praising self-development - there are plenty of blogs, books, and podcasts telling us how valuable it is to continuously learn and develop. And the "new you" is only 5 steps away - so easy to reach the heights of self-confidence, master your awareness, your communication skills and be emotionally intelligent. When the environment is so supportive, it's so easy to change!

And you, as a mentor, see it all very clearly - the desired change for your mentee is just around the corner - they simply need to act in a different way or change their attitude to the situation! It's very important to set this kind of motivating image for yourself and for the young person - the clearer and the more ambitious the image is, the better. You should definitely not consider their starting point - think only about the bright future.

Are you sincerely surprised when your mentee is not moving forwards as fast as you "both" wanted? Did they say that recently they felt even more confused? Did the young person seem not to be aware of their goals, even if you tried to explain, motivate them, and inspire them?

Well, if this is the situation you're facing, you should definitely blame yourself - you must be doing something wrong in your mentoring. The more blame you put on yourself, the closer to burn out you are. Here are some simple sentences to strengthen your self-blaming process (and do not forget also to blame your mentee):

- I must be an incompetent mentor if this person is not moving forward quickly;
- What's wrong with me?
- My mentees probably think they are wasting their time with me and will tell everyone how badly I work.
- If we are not moving anywhere, maybe we should quit the mentoring process?

Some people say it's the voice of the inner critic; we say it's the best companion to burn out.

5. BE AVAILABLE 24/7!

Make sure that your mentees know they can contact you at any time. This practice has proven to be very effective with potential mentees and can produce endless meaningless conversations. If you have the misfortune to have an office, keep the door open at all times and invite people to disturb you when you are working. Stand in the corridor and guide people into your office, especially if they have no reason to speak with you. Ignore all warnings about achieving a so-called "balance" between work and private life. Such thoughts are totally pointless and will not help you achieve your many goals. Keep rescheduling your meetings (also online) for late at night. Make sure that your mentor sessions have no fixed time limit; we all know that the best insights come after the third hour of conversation. As a burning-out mentor, you need to accept many extra tasks which - to be most effective - should be performed at the same time. Rejoice in extreme multi-tasking and brag about how massive your workload has become!

6. BE A FRIEND, GUIDE, TEACHER, PARENT WITH YOUR MENTEE - SIMULTANEOUSLY!

Your ability to maintain multiple roles is a wonder to the world! You never know which specific role you are in at a particular time. Do not give your mentees any indication of which role they are supposed to play either. This helps to confuse the hell out of your mentees, as they never know how to relate to you. Insist on continuing to be a mentor even when it is not needed anymore. This will ensure that any positive effects of the relationship on the mentee are erased within a relatively short period of time.

7. STOP THINKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE MEANING OF YOUR WORK!

If you really want to experience burnout, it's important that you look at mentoring as a selfless act of giving. It's all about you giving your competences to the mentee and it would be seriously unfair to consider your own development.

Actually it's them, who are changing, learning and developing and you should not look for any learning or development insights for yourself. That would be very selfish!

For example, if after a mentoring session you recognise any kind of particular emotions, that you think have risen from your interaction with the young person, pull yourself together and ignore these unnecessary emotions. They mean nothing and the less you look for meaning, the better. There are tried and tested ways to ignore your emotions - watch an episode (or five!) of your favourite TV series, read a useless magazine or scroll endlessly down your phone.

The search for personal meaning might also manifest in the form of questions like:

- What can I learn from this mentee?
- How do I relate myself with this person - do I want to provoke them? Or do I want to challenge them? Do I admire my mentee or do they irritate me?
- Does this young person remind me of myself when I was younger?
- What do those reactions say about me?

All those questions have an extremely strong potential to create meaning for your mentoring and work in general and it puts you in serious danger of delaying burn out.

8. NEVER ALLOW TIME FOR PROPER REFLECTION, ALSO FOR YOURSELF!

Usual reflection quality criteria stipulate the use of open questions. This is a total waste of time! You will find mentorship sessions can be much more efficient through cleverly-chosen closed questions as the mentee will feel encouraged not to think too much. That applies to you too, if you try to reflect on your mentoring sessions. Never take notes during or after sessions with your many long-term mentees - your perfect memory will remind you of the details.

As you already know everything, there is no need for you to reflect on your own practice (with or without closed questions!). Be very suspicious of any colleagues or other mentors who try to question you about your general well-being or on progress made with particular clients - through their evil interrogation they will just try to undermine you. They're probably full of good intentions, but they will only help you to know yourself better, will ask all those dangerous questions, give advice and even feedback! Many mentors, who have, unfortunately, fallen into this trap, have witnessed that they have grown as people! And that's not what you want to do if your quest is burn out.

If you manage to follow at least 50% of the above points - congratulations! - you should have no problem in becoming a totally burnt-out mentor in a few months!

OK! GAME'S UP! WHERE DOES THIS STUFF COME FROM?

We have been working as mentors, coaches, trainers, or facilitators for a long time. Directly with young people and people who work with young people. Face-to-face and, increasingly, online. A few years ago, together with our wonderful colleague Hazel Low, we devised a European-level training course for those who work directly with young people and want to improve their competences in "One2One - supporting learning face to face". As a result of our reflected experience we were asked by [SALTO Training & Cooperation](#) to write a [book for practitioners](#). During the most recent edition of the training course in Budapest we did indeed facilitate a brainstorm around the theme of the best ways to burn out in this work!

If you are willing to learn more about mentoring (and other forms of face-to-face work) and improving your practice, keep your eye on the European Training Calendar for announcements about coming One2One training courses. We'll be very happy to meet you! Or you can get inspired from these publications:

For mentoring in youth work there are a couple of new publications by [SEEYN](#) : "[Mentorship handbook](#)" and "[Mentorship journey step by step](#)", that together give a great and wide overview on mentoring for young people - starting from general aspects of mentoring to introducing you to specific methods.

For mentoring in volunteering activities - both of these publications were written in the framework of the European Voluntary Service programme, (recently replaced by the European Solidarity Corps), and they contain lots of wisdom which could still be useful if you are a mentor to a European volunteer.

The "[Meant to be a Mentor](#)" workbook is meant to serve as a practical guide for mentors through guiding its content and activities guide mentors step by step through the whole volunteering project cycle.

"Be a Hero. Be an EVS Mentor." intends to be a daily guide for a mentor in supporting the volunteer's personal development path. It offers theoretical insights, glimpses of background information and practical tools on a variety of topics related to mentoring.

ESTONIA AND ONE 2 ONE!

This article was commissioned originally by the Estonian National Agency for their magazine MiHUS and you can find it in Estonian [here](#) and many thanks to them and, in particular, to Laura Välik for allowing us to reproduce it here. It was a great honour to be asked to write it! And it is even more so now that we have been informed that the [One2One publication](#) is being translated into Estonian! Clearly this will enable the messages and methods outlined in the book to be used more easily by youth workers and trainers in Estonia. Look out for it appearing in 2020!

About the authors

Monika Kezaite - Jakniuniene is from Vilnius, Lithuania and works as a coach, supervisor and facilitator locally as well as internationally. Monika has been involved in youth work since 1999, mostly in the field of international volunteering, where she has gathered experience in building individual relationships with young people by preparing them for their voluntary service and consulting trainees and mentors along their educational path.

Monika also loves working with groups as a facilitator in the field of youth work and organisational development. Locally, you can meet her at [Kitokie projektai](#), internationally, you can meet her in such SALTO - YOUTH training courses as YOCOMO and "One 2 One". She is also a partner in the [Via Experientia](#) consortium.

Mark E. Taylor is a relatively friendly dinosaur trainer and writer and plays ukulele from his current base in Strasbourg, France. Empowering learners is his passion. Commitment to the recognition of non-formal learning led him to contribute to the development of the [European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Leaders](#) and to work on the development of [Youthpass](#) and be a member of its Advisory Group. He is a partner in the [Via Experientia](#) consortium which sets out to expand the contours of experiential learning and research. A founding member of the editorial team and now for several years editor of [Coyote](#) magazine.