

Preventing Job Burnout



Tips from WING Service Members

Keeping stress low, when pressure is high

SMSgt Nathan Silvers is the WI CRTC Security Forces Manager at Volk Field. He has 22 years of military experience and has been an active leader in the Air National Guard for more than 16 years.

What preventative things do you do to keep from feeling burnt out by work stressors?

I have a 45-minute drive home, which usually provides enough alone time to decompress and switch from work mode into dad/husband mode. I listen to a lot of podcasts, which helps with that transition and breaks my mind out of thinking about work. That time is key, as I tend to dive in 100% when I am at work and switching that off is tough. When I get home, I want to be able to give that same energy to my family. I keep my mind off work stress by concentrating on my wife and children. We hunt, snowboard, play basketball, and wrestle among other things. If I need more of a personal break, I tend to golf or isolate myself in a tree stand if the time of year is right. When I am at work, I will go for a walk, and I use that time to concentrate on my breathing to help relax. Once I regain my composure, I use the remainder of my walk to reprioritize my tasks and get real with myself on deadlines and expectations.

How do you know your prevention efforts are working?

Understanding and being real with yourself is key. Unfortunately, I have been broken before. I was lucky to learn a lot about my mind and limitations. When things get bad for me, my mind starts to slip almost like a lapse in memory; however, I keep from getting there by noticing that my work takes longer to complete than it should, or the length of time I can remain focused on details decreases. The best indicator is my wife and kids. They have learned to quickly remind me that I am at home and should put work away.

What strategies do you use to empower your employees to manage work stressors?

I force myself to talk about it and set an example that may not be the social norm. I believe that is even more important as a first responder. First responders are a constant during the chaos, we are expected to see tragedy and remain calm while helping others through tough times. There is this idea within the culture of the profession that we are too “tough” to struggle. I talk about how I manage stress and the help I get to manage my own struggles and I encourage the team to do the same. If my team understands that I have stress to work through and I seek help to manage that stress while maintaining my job, then they also see it is okay for them. I treat stress and mental health the same as I would any other injury or illness – if we get hurt, we need time to recover. My employees have a right to heal from any injury whether it is physical or mental. If everyone is stronger both physically and mentally the team is going to be stronger physically and mentally.