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On Preventing, or Dealing With, Burnout

by **Phyllis McCracken**
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When I had worked at the same library thirty years and felt a need for change, the city graciously granted a six-month unpaid leave of absence. During that time I helped in the library of a small college in the Midwest. It was an opportunity to develop new friendships, expand my horizons, and refresh my perspective.

In a hive full of bees, each has work assigned,
Not just “if you please,” but a real daily grind.
Of course, one sees beauty in flowers that thrive,
But there’s also a duty to return to the hive.
Back and forth, day after day,
No time to take the scenic way.
Now, people differ from the bee,
And shouldn’t take problems too seriously.
We have eyes—not one, but two,
To lend perspective to our view.
A little differently, each eye sees;
With both they’re focusing with ease.
At times, the work’s so in our faces,
We need to step back several paces,
Quit being overly selective,
Back off to get a new perspective.
On company time we must not shirk,
But DO have a life outside of work!
In addition to sticking to our stations,
We need to plan some fun vacations.
Time off needn’t be too spendy or frilly.
It could be an evening of just being silly.
Develop new interests, make a friend,
Sign up for a class (and then attend).
Dig dirt, make a garden, draw a plan for a house,
Take a hike, ride a bike, build a trap for a mouse.
Provide for your spirit—it is the REAL you;
Nourish it, exercise, rest and renew.
Oh, yes—and take care of your physical, too.
At times, one cannot get away,
So make the working into play,
Collecting titles and authors that match,
Such as *The Byrds of Virginia* by Hatch.
We’re asked the same questions again and again.
Our patience, when stretched, wears mighty thin.
The counterbalance to the stress,
Is a sense of humor in the midst of the mess.
Humor is valuable, do not doubt it;
Never, ever, leave home without it.

Postscript

In short:

Maintain perspective.
Have a life outside the workplace.
Don’t take the problems too seriously.
Care for your spirit and your body.
Make work into a game.
Be creative, use your sense of humor.
Hang in there.

