

# MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF BURNOUT



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## PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

**Proceedings of the 2025 Public Lecture**

### **Meeting the Challenge of Burnout**

by Professor Christina Maslach

April 15, 2025

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THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
2025 PUBLIC LECTURE

# MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF BURNOUT



SPEAKER:

**Professor Christina Maslach**

Professor of Psychology, Emerita. Professor  
of the Graduate School, University of  
California, Berkeley

**Tuesday, 15 April 2025 | 5:00 PM (AST) | Virtual via Zoom**

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# Professor Christina Maslach

## Biography



Christina Maslach pioneered research on the definition, predictors, and measurement of job burnout, an experience of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy caused by chronic job stressors. She also has focused on finding interventions for burnout. A professor of psychology (Emerita) and a core researcher at the Healthy Workplaces Center at the University of California, Berkeley, she created the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the most widely used instrument for measuring job burnout. Her groundbreaking work is the

basis for the World Health Organization's

2019 decision to include burnout as an occupational detriment, with negative health effects, in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). Her research has garnered widespread recognition. Her longitudinal research on early burnout predictors was honored in 2012 as one of the 50 most outstanding articles published by the world's 300 top management journals. In 2021, *Business Insider* named her one of the top 100 people transforming business. Maslach's indispensable work cuts across health, personality, social, industrial/organisational, and clinical psychology. Her research has spurred countless scholars to investigate burnout and organisations to take steps to alleviate it.

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# Introductory Remarks

Dr Rinnelle Lee-Piggott, Lecturer, School of Education, UWI, St Augustine

Good evening, everyone, Director of the School of Education, Dr. Rawatee Maharaj-Sharma; our esteemed Featured Speaker, Professor Christina Maslach; colleagues at the School of Education here at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus; attendees from both the education and non-education sectors both locally and internationally – Welcome!

I can tell you from our registration information that we have quite a diverse audience here this evening! Again, a warm welcome to everyone. I am Dr. Rinnelle Lee-Piggott, Lecturer in Educational Administration at the School of Education, and a member of the Publishing and Outreach Lectures Committee, which is responsible for this event. I will be your Moderator this evening. Permit me to begin with a few housekeeping guidelines.

Be reminded that the session is being recorded. We ask you to please keep your microphones muted during the presentations. And because the session is intended to be an hour, we ask you to place your questions and comments in the chat from where we will retrieve them for Prof. Maslach's attention during the Q&A segment. The chat icon can be found at the bottom left of your Zoom window. Thank you so much for cooperating.

Many of us live quite busy lives, which seem to have only become more demanding with the accessibility to modern-day technologies, such as social media and virtual conferencing. We spend long hours working and juggling the many competing commitments for our time on a daily basis. In the midst of it all, some of us forget to pay attention to self-care, while others ignore the subtle and not-so-subtle signs that may be pointing to burnout; telling ourselves that we just need a little rest.

By your presence this evening, I can see that the topic of burnout is one of great interest. Maybe you know people who might be stressed out at work, wondering if their job is the right fit for them or maybe you are that person who is looking for answers and solutions to return to a path of wellness. Whatever the reason, the School of Education's third public lecture, this evening, is invested in joining the conversation on 'Meeting the Challenge of Burnout'.

Presenting this evening is distinguished Professor Emerita of Psychology, Professor Christina Maslach, who is also a core researcher at the Healthy Workplaces Center at the University of California, Berkeley; and developer of the widely used Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). We are so pleased to have Prof. Maslach here with us this evening.

Before we move on to the reason that we are here this evening, the programme will continue as follows: We will have welcoming remarks and the introduction of our featured speaker by the Director of the School of Education, Dr. Rawatee Maharaj-Sharma. Following, will be the public lecture by Prof. Maslach and then we will move into the Question and Answer segment. This will be followed by the vote of thanks and closing remarks.

I now invite the Director of the School of Education, Dr. Rawatee Maharaj-Sharma to bring her remarks and to introduce our speaker.. Dr. Maharaj-Sharma.

# Greetings and Introduction of Presenter

Dr Rawatee Maharaj-Sharma, Director, School of Education, UWI, St Augustine

A pleasant good evening to all those joining us to participate in this the third public lecture hosted by the School of Education of the Faculty of Humanities and Education at The UWI, St Augustine. I'm noting the presence of Professor Frank Worrell on the call, and I especially welcome you Prof. Worrell this evening. Some of you may remember that Professor Worrell was the presenter for our 2<sup>nd</sup> public lecture last year.

This evening, I bring greetings and a very warm welcome to you all, from myself and on behalf of the Dean of the faculty, Prof. Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw.

As indicated in our earlier lectures in this series, the main aim of our public lectures is to engage with the public on trending and topical issues in education affecting contemporary society. Our major objectives are to contribute to solutions, raise awareness and improve our understanding about these issues.

We have embarked on this initiative to foster collaboration with stakeholders at every level within the education sector. We want to engage thinkers, facilitate knowledge sharing and provoke discussions. It is our hope that our offerings through this medium will be received, in the collegial and collaborative spirit, in which it is intended.

The title of today's public lecture is Meeting the Challenge of Burnout.

There is no arguing that teachers confront significant challenges in their classrooms and in their schools arising from interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, hiring bodies and other stakeholders in education. In the first instance perhaps, teachers are called upon to deliver (and possibly adapt) curricula to cater to a wide range of learning styles in their classrooms, to manage shifting education policies, to attend to students with special needs, and in many cases to juggle administrative responsibilities as well.

With such a multifaceted heavy workload, the long hours and the many social ills that present in classrooms, it is common for teachers to experience high levels of stress and to easily fall prey to teacher burnout. When this happens, it is very important for teachers to feel confident that they have a reliable and comforting support system to turn to. Without a proper support system, teachers are in danger of succumbing to the overwork demands, ignoring their mental and physical well-being and compromising the quality of their personal and professional lives.

Our presenter this evening, esteemed Professor Christina Maslach will discuss with us the nature of this reality called teacher burnout, and she will share with us her thoughts and insights on how we may navigate our way when we experience teacher burnout.

Professor Christina Maslach is an Emerita Professor of Psychology and a core researcher at the Healthy Workplaces Center at the University of California, Berkeley. Her pioneering research focused on definition, predictors, and measurement of job place burnout with explorations of consequences such as exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy caused by chronic job stressors. She is well known for the creation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the most widely used instrument for measuring job burnout.

Her ground-breaking work is the basis for the World Health Organization's 2019 decision to include burnout as an occupational detriment, with negative health effects, in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). Her longitudinal research on early burnout predictors was honoured in 2012 as one of the 50 most outstanding articles published by the world's 300 top management journals. In 2021, Business Insider named her as one of the top 100 people transforming business.

Professor Maslach's indispensable work cuts across health, personality, social, industrial, organisational, and clinical psychology. Her research has spurred countless scholars to investigate burnout and has prompted organisations to take proactive steps to alleviate it.

I hereby introduce Professor Christina Maslach as the esteemed presenter for our 3<sup>rd</sup> Public Lecture. Professor Maslach over to you!

# Public Lecture

## *Meeting the Challenge of Burnout*

Professor Christina Maslach

Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Berkeley

I am pleased and honoured to be here, and what I will try to do is share with you some slides that summarise what not only I, but also many researchers around the world, have been saying for many, many years. I hope to give you a comprehensive overview of what we know about job burnout, but I also want to talk about how to apply what we know.

### **Meeting the Challenge of Burnout**

'Meeting the challenge of burnout' is not only understanding what it is, but what it is not. Unfortunately, people use the term to mean lots of different things. We can sometimes have a problem with the 'are we talking about the same phenomenon?' It leads people in different directions sometimes as to what to do. Let me give you a better perspective on it.

### **Job Burnout is not Well Understood**

Interestingly enough, there has been research done on job burnout for several decades, forty years or more. It's not always well understood. You get different kinds of assumptions and definitions, and I'm sure you have probably heard versions of the following: That it is an individual health problem, that it can be diagnosed, as though it is a disease of some kind or an illness. People say that the burnt-out person is overworked and somehow not able to handle it, or that they are not doing a good job and are not really the right people to do the job. That the problem lies in the person to take better care of themselves, and if they just did that, they would become more resilient, strong and wouldn't be burnt-out. These are common statements that we hear all the time, but it's actually not correct in terms of what we have learned from the research.

### **Impact of a Person-Only Focus**

Basically, by only focusing on the person who is experiencing job burnout, it frames how you think about it to just ask the question 'WHO is burning out?'. Who are the people? What's wrong with them? What is the problem that they are having? It leads you down a different path than what the research has actually been showing, as I'll discuss later. If the key question

is WHO, the answers then come back as, 'What about that individual person?'. Maybe they need to sleep more. Maybe they should be meditating. Maybe they should take a vacation from work, not work so hard or for so many hours. The assumption underlying all of this is that if you can fix the person or enable that person to fix themselves by doing a better job of coping with the stressors, then burnout will disappear and go away. People will be fine because they have done a better job of taking care of themselves. Now I'm not arguing against self-care, but that's only a part of the issue here. One last point: coping focuses on the effects and not the causes. It's not just how you respond to something, but what is that thing to which you are responding.

### **Need to Change the Question**

So, we need to change the question. It should not be WHO, but 'WHY' are people experiencing burnout? What is going on in their situation (in this case, the workplace), and what are the conditions of the job they have to do? What is leading to this problem, or the kind of stresses they are experiencing, to the point that we call it burnout? When you frame the question as a WHY instead of just WHO, then what this means is that you are going to start focusing on the causes. What's going on? What is the source? What is the thing that is happening to which people are responding? And here the approach is not just to tell people what they should do for themselves, but figure out how we can get rid of, or reduce, or change the impact of those stressors that are causing the problem in the first place.

So, what we have to do is not only help people cope, but we actually have to be looking at the causes and improving things there. What we are aiming for is a better fit, or match, between the individual and his or her job. If we're doing that then we're not just coping, we're actually doing things to prevent burnout from occurring in the first place. If we can make a better environment in which people could thrive and blossom and do good work, as opposed to having to struggle and get beaten down, wouldn't that be a better situation, rather than blaming them for everything? Prevention strategies focus more on changing the causal stressors, rather than simply coping with them. So, both of those things, not just one or the other, need to be operational. Unfortunately, the way people often come up with solutions to burnout, is that they only focus on the coping, what do we do about the person, rather than saying why is this happening? What can we do about the causes? How can we change things?

### **World Health Organisation Statement on Burnout**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) made a statement about burnout in 2019. Later that same year, WHO made a statement about COVID-19, so

COVID and burnout became linked together in some people's minds. Actually, burnout had appeared many years before COVID. My research started back in the 1970's so it has been many decades that we've been looking at, investigating, studying, and talking about burnout. WHO reviewed all of those research studies over those four or five decades, and that is how they came up with their definitional statement: Burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stressors that have not been successfully managed. I want to emphasise two points here. One is "chronic workplace stressors." That's really important because if the stressors, the source of the problem, are "chronic," it means they are there all the time or most of the time. And what we have learned from the stress and coping research literature, is that people have a much harder time coping with chronic stressors. No matter what you do, these chronic stressors are back the next morning, the next day, the next week. And that makes it particularly difficult to be really successful at coping.

The second point I want to emphasise is that WHO stated that these chronic stressors "have not been successfully managed." There is an optimistic tone there: These stressors could be successfully managed. They are not things that people just have to deal with and say "the job is what it is". These job stressors could be made better, and that's really the thing that I want to emphasise again. It's how do we improve job conditions so that the fit between the job and the employees is better. We could manage this in a more successful way. And not just only by "managers." Chronic job stressors can also be improved by the workers, by occupational groups, by various leaders of different teams, or groups that are running the organization.

The experience of job burnout is categorised by three dimensions, which we have discovered in the research for many years. It's not just a single dimension; it's really the integration of these three.

Feelings of '*energy depletion or exhaustion*.' This is the basic stress response. Exhaustion: I can't do it anymore, can't talk to another student, can't deal with another crisis, can't handle another parent coming in. That stress response is just like, I've got to get rest, I've got to recover from all of this. I want to point out that a stress response is actually a normal reaction, and not a pathology. A stress response is what gets us to fight or flight, to do different types of coping. It's the recovery that is really where the problem lies, not the fact that we are stressed by this. If we can't recover well from the chronic job stressors, then there is that issue.

The second dimension of the burnout response is '*increased mental distance from one's job, feelings of negativity, cynicism related to one's job*'. There is an American country-western song, 'Take this job and shove it'. That's kind of the reaction that we're seeing with burnout. You can do the job, you

can keep going if you have to, but you really don't want to. You don't believe in the job, you don't think it's a great place to work, nobody knows what they are doing well, it could be better. When this begins to happen, there is this kind of withdrawal from the job; you do the bare minimum, instead of trying to do your very best. For me, the burnout experience is much more of the cynicism, the distancing, and doing the bare minimum. That's more than just a stress response. This is really a key component.

The third dimension is that, in addition to being negative about your job, you are also '*negative about yourself.*' So people begin to say, why am I doing this? Maybe I made a mistake, maybe I'm not good enough, this is the wrong place for me. And that negative evaluation of your own professional efficacy can have a negative effect on other aspects of your well-being. As we already know, chronic stress can lead to all kinds of physical health problems, such as cardiovascular and muscular-skeletal problems, as well as mental health ones, such as depression and anxiety. So, it's those three dimensions together, not just one of them.

WHO has defined burnout as an occupational phenomenon and has made clear that it is not classified as a medical condition. It can have health outcomes just like any other forms of stress responses. But in and of itself it's not considered a disease. It's important to emphasise that point, because people often talk about burnout in medical terms-- "Can we diagnose it, what are the symptoms of burnout, should we see a doctor, get treated so that this goes away." I just want to emphasize that burnout has not ever been defined or validated as a medical condition, but it is an occupational experience that can lead to subsequent health issues.

### **Research Measure of Job Burnout - Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)**

The research measure of job burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, has been translated into many languages for research around the world. It measures all three dimensions in terms of frequency. So, we are asking people, how often do you feel stressed and exhausted? How often are you feeling cynical and doing the bare minimum? How often is it that you are feeling negative about your own ability to do the job well? This is important because instead of asking yes/no or agree/disagree, the frequency gives us a better sense of the extent to which this is a continuous, or chronic experience.

With the MBI, we can actually not only identify *burnout*, with its high frequencies on all three dimensions and negative scores, but also some other experiences that people can have. They can be *disengaged* in the sense of only being very cynical and negative about the job. They are not exhausted and they feel good about what they can accomplish -- but they don't like their job.

*Overextended:* This is the experience that often gets mislabelled as burnout because people are exhausted and tired --but they still love their job, they think it's a great place, and they feel good about what they are doing. But just being exhausted is not "burnout."

*Ineffective:* People in this work experience are only feeling negative about themselves. Why don't I get good feedback? Am I really doing a good job? I love the place where I am working and I'm not stressed but something is not working. *Engagement* is the opposite of burnout. On all three of dimensions, people are scoring low frequency, meaning it's a more positive kind of experience. In our research we are able to compare all of these five groups in terms of their well-being, motivation, productivity, and other outcomes.

### **Management Mantras for Mismatches**

When we get to the challenge of managing these chronic job stressors, in some ways it seems to be a management issue. Chronic job stressors are not being managed successfully, but here are the things that we often hear from the management, "If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen." That's basically saying, if you can't do the job, it's your problem, you have to leave, we are not going to change what the kitchen is like. Or more recently, the leadership mantra is: "You're going to have to do more with less." When I speak to live audiences, this is where all the hands go up and everyone is saying, "Yes, we're hearing that all the time. You are not going to get more money, we are not going to hire more people, in fact we may have fewer people and less money, but you are just going to have to keep it up and do the work anyway." The problem here is that if these chronic job stressors aren't managed successfully, there are going to be mismatches, bad fits between people and the job conditions. Extensive research on occupational health and well-being has shown that bad job-person fits lead to negative work outcomes: people don't do a good job, they are skipping work assignments, they are doing the bare minimum, they are absent, they quit, and then the organisation has to go through the whole process of trying to hire somebody again. In addition to negative work outcomes, job burnout also has negative health outcomes, so this is another reason why we want to find good solutions to this challenging problem.

The last point that I wanted to mention is something that came out of research on people working in health care: doctors, nurses, lab techs, all kinds of people. They talked about these chronic mismatches as "pebbles in your shoe." I like that phrase because it gives a better sense of the scale of the challenge. It's not a total redesign of health care for the 21<sup>st</sup> century with billions of dollars and having to change everything. It's the chronic everyday

little things that are making your daily job difficult, challenging in a negative way, you can't get it done, you have to spend extra time, it's unpleasant, you have to skip it. All those kinds of things. It's often the little stuff, those "chronic pebbles" that are the causes, and if we can make changes in some of those and improve them, we can actually begin to create a better job environment.

### **Fix the Job, not the Person**

The goal should be to fix the job and not simply the person. How can we do more than say, "Oh dear, you're feeling stressed, you're feeling burnt-out. But it's your problem -- so you need to take care of this, not anyone else." The burnout research has really been pointing to a very different response that needs to be part of what we do: "Help the workplace modify its sources of stress." What are the chronic 'pebbles in the shoe' that we can begin to identify and intervene to do something better? Can we eliminate these chronic job stressors, can we make them less frequent, or can we help people recover more effectively? There are lots of different strategies. I don't mean to give a silver lining to the COVID pandemic, but that did force us to recognise that jobs can indeed be changed and redesigned. Of necessity, we had to come up with different ways to get the jobs done. How are we going to teach if we are not going to be in the classroom with the students? How are we going to be able to treat people who are ill? Some of those new ideas worked well, when we were able to use virtual meetings, but there were other things that were tried and were disastrous. We can learn from all that and then say, how do we experiment with better strategies of getting the work done in the best possible way without having the collateral damage that happens to the people that have to provide that work? So that's really been the focus of a lot of the research that I've been doing, and the consulting I do with different groups. We really have to be thinking about shared responsibility for any solutions. It's not just one person who comes up with an idea, but we have to work it out so that we are all on the same page -- whether it is redesigning the workflow, or having hybrid schedules, etc. -- what are different ways that we could come up with to make things better? Asking the people who are doing the work and making them part of designing that and thinking it through, is critical.

### **Job-Person Match in Six Areas of Work Life**

What we have found in looking at those matches, those good fits between the job and people, is that they happen in six different areas of work life that researchers have been able to identify so far. These six areas are:

- Workload
- Control

- Reward
- Community
- Fairness
- Values

The one area that everybody thinks about first is **workload**. The mismatch/bad-fit is where there are '*high demands, but low resources*'. You have to do a lot but do not have enough time, don't have enough people, don't have the resources, don't have the things that are necessary to get the job done. What is the match that we are aiming for? We are aiming for a more '*sustainable workload*'. There may be highs and lows but there is a way to keep going, recover well, and be there the next day, the next week, etc. and doing it well.

The second area has to do with how much **control** we have over the job we do. If you '*lack control*', you don't have a say in what you do, you can't course-correct and make modifications if you need to, given the situation. You are locked in, in terms of what you do, or say, or have to deliver, etc. But if there are appropriate levels of '*choice and control*' you can use your skills, your knowledge, and your training to actually figure out how to do the best work, and you have some say in what you do. That's a much better fit.

The third area has to do with the positive feedback and **reward** that you get. The negative is '*insufficient reward*'. You do a great job, you work very hard, and nobody is patting you on the back, saying thank you, giving you a raise, giving you better conditions, giving you the things you need. So, what we have found is that it's not just about salary and benefits (although they do play a role) but more importantly the match is all about '*recognition and social reward*'. People notice what you do, they care about what you do and let you know periodically, and you in turn notice what other people do and let them know and give them that kind of recognition and reward. That kind of social feedback is critical.

The fourth area is the **community** in which you work, in the workplace with your co-workers, assistants, managers, the people you supervise, the principal, that's the community: The people whose paths you cross on a regular basis. The mismatch is when there is a real '*community breakdown*'. You don't trust people, you don't know them, you don't know who to go to if you need help or advice, there are people who are out to undermine your efforts so they can get ahead. The positive match is the '*supportive work community*' where people help each other out, give advice, make sure the new person is understanding what needs to be done, and so forth. What we were hearing a lot during the pandemic (but even before that) were complaints about a socially toxic work environment: "I love my job but I can't stand the

people in this particular school or office, they are difficult to work with, and we just don't get along."

The fifth area has to do with a basic notion that we want to be treated with **fairness**. Whatever the rules or policies, or practices in the workplace, they should be applied fairly so that people are not being discriminated against. 'Fairness' brings along 'respect' and a sense of 'social justice'. The mismatch here is when there is an 'Absence of fairness' in how the workplace operates. If people are being overlooked, or they are hitting glass ceilings and not getting new opportunities or promotions, this will drive the rise in cynicism sky-high.

Finally, the sixth area involves **values**, which can also be described in terms of "purpose." What's important to people is doing something that is 'meaningful', that is worthwhile, that is creating some benefits. The mismatch is 'value conflicts', where the job requires you to do things that you think are wrong, like having to lie or cheat or do other unethical actions. In health care, they talk about moral injury, that the job forces you to do things that you think are not good.

So basically, these six areas point to six paths to a healthier workplace. Some of these things may be more difficult to make improvements than others, but all of them help move people forward toward a better match with their jobs.

### **Matching people to the job**

Matching people to the job is the standard strategy that we do now: we train people, we educate people, they develop skills, they get internships, and they learn how to do the job well until they are a good match with the job and are ready to be hired. We also may provide coping strategies to people when they are experiencing any type of job stress. Interestingly, one of the major sets of coping strategies for workplace stress is "don't work" (take a day off, take a leave, go on vacation, arrive late and leave early, etc.) This begs the question, what is it about "the work" that the best thing you can do is "not work"? This does not help get people to do the job well, thriving and growing, and staying on the job and being loyal to the organisation. These individual coping strategies may make people feel better, but they do not make the job less stressful.

### **Matching the job to people**

This is not an entirely new strategy, but we have a new take on it. How do we modify work conditions that create these negative outcomes? How can we redesign the job to be a little bit better? How can we eliminate and modify some of the stressors or build in more of the resources? This is usually framed

in more ergonomic, environmental terms as the “fit” between workers and their physical environment. For example, we have re-designed computer workstations so that people are less likely to develop carpal-tunnel syndrome. We have developed better chairs or different kinds of assembly lines or equipment which people can wear to support their back and reduce the risk of injury. We have a history of changing or modifying the job in some way so that it provides better physical support when people do their work.

Now what we are saying is: Take that same model of matching the job to people but apply it to the social and psychological aspects of that job. In other words, what makes people tick, what makes them motivated to do well, to put in that extra time and effort to really make things wonderful in terms of the outcomes?

### **A better ‘match’ is achieved by satisfying core social and psychological needs**

Research has found that there are seven core social psychological needs that are critical for everyone in all walks of life for growing, developing, becoming better at what we do, and enjoying our life. These are:

1. *Autonomy* - this is your sense of control, knowing what you can do, and having the discretion to do it well.
2. *Belongingness* - feeling that you are part of something better and bigger and important, and that you are recognised as being there, and being part of that.
3. *Competence* - feeling that you have learned to do things well and have opportunities to get even better.
4. *Psychological safety* - it’s not just physical safety from things that will make you sick or will injure you, but that you feel safe enough to raise comments and criticisms, to be free to be who you are.
5. *Fairness* - feeling that there is no discrimination against you and that you are being treated fairly.
6. *Meaning* - taking pride in the work you do and feeling proud of yourself.
7. *Positive emotions* - that you want to experience in your life, such as joy, happiness, pride, and humour.

We can get a better match between the job and people if we find ways in which we support these core needs that all human beings need to do well in life. Obviously, we are thinking about it in terms of the workplace environment, but it’s just as true for our family, our neighbours, and all kinds of places in which we live.

### **Helpful points to keep in mind**

There are three things we have learned about the process of making changes to get a better fit between people and their job. First, you must '*collaborate*', you must get social feedback and buy-in, you must reach out to people and really listen to what they are saying about those pebbles in the shoe: what are the things that are working, and what's not working. How can we make it better here? Let's not just assume that only the boss knows best and can tell people what to do, and everything will be fine. It may not work out well if the boss hasn't listened to what employees have said and understand what they need.

Second, you have to '*customise*'. You have to adapt to a local culture. People keep saying, "Just tell us the best practice and we'll do it." But the best practice in education and teaching is not necessarily the same best practice in a tech firm or in a social work office or in a hospital clinic. It is critical to focus on what is it that we need in terms of where we are and the kind of work we are doing.

Third, you have to '*commit*' -- and that means to sustain continuous efforts to achieve the new change and its positive gains. Any time you make a change, it takes a while to modify and customise until you get it right. For example, we may decide not to do X or Y because it's too expensive or it doesn't make sense for us. We are going to do Z -- but we may make some helpful modifications along the way, as long as we are making good progress toward our goal. Are we getting there? Are we getting better? Is this helping? These three strategies -- collaborate, customise, and commit -- can help people to work together to improve the job environment so that there is a better match.

### **Bottom Line**

In conclusion, there are a lot of possibilities within all six areas of this job-person fit that will make a better match. There is not just one solution. There may be some generic solutions, but then they have to be customised to work for us here in our particular job situation. The big question for any possible change is always: How would that make a difference in getting rid of, or modifying or reducing, the chronic stressor that's driving everyone crazy. We have found that these changes can be small; they don't have to be big. They are customizable, and sometimes they can be inexpensive. But there are a lot of things that can actually be done on a continuing basis to "make things a little better around here." The goal is to create a healthier job environment that will take care of both the workers and the workplace, the schools, the community, so that the former will thrive and the latter will succeed. It is a regular "check-up" like we do for our own health. We check in to find out how well everything is going, and what steps we might take (e.g., better diet,

exercise, medications) to make our overall well-being even better. And those steps might change over time, depending on the problem that needs to be addressed.

An organisational “check-up” should be a permanent agenda item at least once a year, if not quarterly. And the agenda question is not “how do we eliminate burnout,” but “how do we make things a little better around here.” The focus is not on who is having a problem, but what is causing the problem and how could we better manage those causal stressors. As the world continues to change, so will jobs and workplaces, and so we have to keep monitoring the match between people and their jobs, so that everything continues to go well.

### **The Burnout Challenge (Book)**

My talk has been a relatively quick summary of a book that I wrote recently with one of my colleagues, Michael Leiter, ‘The Burnout Challenge’ and everything that I’ve just discussed appears in much more detail in that book. We have seen how people can achieve better job-person matches, by collaborating with each other to change it from a “me” problem to a “we” problem, so that we can work together to make things better in our jobs. I wish you all the best in figuring out what would be the best things for you as you move forward in your educational career.

## **Question and Answer Segment**

Moderated by Dr Rinnelle Lee-Piggott

Thank you so very much, Professor Maslach. Wow! Wonderful! Wonderful! Such food for thought. I have about two pages of notes here, but of course I don't have the time to go through all of the notes, but I will highlight a couple of things. You began by saying that burnout is not well understood and based on everything that you mentioned, everything that you highlighted to us, it is really definitely clear that burnout is not well understood amongst employees, not well understood amongst management, and we should be asking different questions about burnout is another thing that you said. It shouldn't be person-only focused but really about looking at the job, and that job-to-person fit. Asking questions such as, 'How can we make things better around here?' and continuing to ask those key questions. And I think that is just so powerful. So, you said that we should really be aiming for that fit between people and their jobs in order to address burnout seeing that persons are dealing with so

many chronic workplace stressors and that these can be successfully managed. You mentioned six areas of work life to focus on: sustainable workload; choice and control; recognition and rewards; supportive work community; fairness, respect and social justice; and clear values and meaningful work. You also gave us six paths to a healthier workplace so that we can in fact focus on managing burnout, but you felt that we needed to really focus on emphasising the social and the psychological aspects of persons, and making that environment one that is socially and psychologically safe and conducive to persons working there. There's so much more that I can highlight but of course, again, I don't have the time. Thank you so very much again. So, I'm going to open the floor now because I know persons have their questions. Please, again put your questions in the chat so that we can have Professor Maslach address your questions or your comments.

Professor Maslach: If I might, I can give an example of one organisation that I worked with, that had a lot of educational components to it. We were doing a longitudinal research study, following employees over time to see what was getting better and what was getting worse. We assessed the six areas of work life to find out where employees reported a good match or not. To the CEO's great shock and surprise, one of the big negative mismatches was fairness. "What? How could that be?" But lots of employees, across a wide range of jobs (educators, administrators, maintenance staff) wrote many comments about what they considered to be unfair, and there was a huge consensus about a distinguished service award in particular. It was intended to be given to an employee who did something special and extraordinary, and it included a monetary reward. The fairness issue was that everyone complained that the award was always given to the wrong people, and not to the ones who really deserved it for their exceptional work. After hearing about all this, the CEO set up a group with employees from the different units, and they worked on designing a better system to reward people who did something special. They had to think carefully about how to ensure a fair process, and they finally came up with a proposal that everybody voted on and accepted. It has been very successful, because finally the award is being given to the people who truly deserve it.

When we returned a year later, to collect the next set of longitudinal data, we discovered that the fairness issue was no longer viewed as a negative problem. More importantly, when we interviewed employees, a lot of them said, "If we could change an unfair award system and make it better, we could change some other things here, so let's do it!" They instituted an annual process, where people nominated potential projects to make things better in that year, and then chose one of them to implement. It gave everyone hope,

it gave them optimism, and the sense that “we can actually do something together and come up with a better alternative and try it out.” It illustrates for me, a lot of what that combination of collaboration, customising and committing can truly achieve, in terms of making the match between workers and the workplace a better one, so that everyone can actually do a better job and take pride in their accomplishments.

**Q 1:** Could you repeat the three C’s?

The first one that I had was ‘collaborate’, and that means to reach out and ask people what they need. This is an important step. We usually call it walk around leadership. The leaders were not just in their office, and you never saw them; they were out there checking in, ‘how is the class going, what do you need etc.’. Collaborating means it’s not just me that makes the decision but really listen to people’s voice. So often people say its demoralising to have gone through all my training to get this job, working hard and I never get asked, what do you think might make it a little bit better. I’m just told what to do and sometimes it doesn’t work and I could have said that ahead of time. It’s collaborate, which means you don’t take something off a shelf and apply it and it works that way. I remember there was research from when they tried with health care workers. When they tried having lunches together or dinners together, after work they got to know each other better because they no longer saw each other during the work day. They needed to get a better sense of bonding of trusting of knowing if we need help from each other. So, there was a hospital where they said ok, we are going to set up a system, go out, get people, have dinner, go to a restaurant, bring the receipt back in and you will get reimbursed. A number of the physicians went crazy, particularly the women saying dinner is not an option, I have a family at home. So, the thing is, it may be a good idea but how do you take the idea which is, where are the opportunities where people can actually get to socialise, not by wasting time but getting to really know their colleagues and getting a better sense of how we can do better work, enjoy our time together etcetera. If it’s not having dinner, you can take that same principle and apply it to something else. So ‘customise’, you sort of say, “What’s good about this idea, would it work here and how would it look if it could work well?” Again, collaborating and asking for input on that. The third ‘c’ is ‘committing’, meaning you are not going to try something, and it doesn’t work and then you toss your hands and say it’s not going to work. We actually figure out what did we not do right here. What did we not anticipate? There is something that was a problem that we could make better than what we tried to do. The commitment is not just to try

something, there is a positive goal that you need to articulate. What will success look like? Will you be whistling while you work, Will you be less likely to quit, what is it that you are looking for that says this will make it better and people will be able to do that. If we start saying, well it will be better if there was more flexible scheduling but then you run into a problem where if I take time off and you need me to be there because of what you are doing, we need to be working collaboratively to kind of figure out how we do that. That's the course correction, that's the oh we forgot about that point, that certain things have to happen simultaneously. That's just normal trying things out, regrouping, getting it better. Then people can say thank you for taking that little pebble from out of the shoe, not having to bother with that anymore. Those are the three: collaborate, customise and commit.

**Q 2:** While I understand the principles of changing the job to create a better fit, what strategies should one employ, or how does one identify when an employee is not the right fit for the job.

That's a good question. If you say that an employee is not a good fit, what are the criteria that you are using for 'not a good fit'? Is it that the person doesn't come in on time, doesn't give feedback to the students, what is happening that is not a good fit in terms of what they are not accomplishing on the job. You want to be clear on that so that there is not an argument about, this is what the job entails, this is what you are responsible for doing, but we are not seeing that you are finishing it. Other things like I don't like how you talk to your boss, getting complaints about how you are treating the kids in the class, then again, it's kind of like having a way to work with the person, another kind of resource to say how can we understand what's happening here and how could this be better. Having resources and mentoring, I think that's one of the things that is critical so that you are kind of making clear what the person needs to do or needs to get training in or needs to be supervised or get advised from somebody on how to do it better. One thing that I often hear from interviews I do in a lot of different occupations, is that I ask if you can think of one thing that would help you in terms of dealing with the stressors that can lead to burnout, what would it be? More often than not people say, a safe person, a mentor, somebody I can go to when things are going wrong or I don't know what to do. I used to have a mentor when I was in graduate training or I used to have a mentor and now I don't and don't know who to go to because there is often those toxic work environments where these people are not your good friends, they are your competition. So the idea is that you can get to somebody who is older, more experienced, who is not going to blab your name and your problems all over the place and make it public knowledge,

but is willing to sit down and talk with you and say okay what's happening, what's the problem, let's see what we can do. Try this when you get a student that you don't know how to deal with right here or maybe you can talk to so and so who seems to have a better handle on it. That safe harbour, that safe person or persons and to be one to other persons, that when people need advice or help, that you can actually step in and say you know maybe you can try this. That's how we learn, we have questions, we learn from failures as well as successes, also our mistakes. To be in an environment where you know where you can go to find the guidance or a different accommodation in some way to work these things out is then a supportive environment. It doesn't say you didn't make a mistake but it's like how do we learn and get better and move forward so you can trust some other person. In a lot of places people feel like 'I don't know where to go'. Sometimes when there has been mental health resources, they are done in such a way that you have to self-identify that I have a problem and I have to go to a specific office to a particular person who I don't know necessarily, I don't know if I can trust them. To give you an extreme example, I once was doing research with people who worked as police officers and in one of the stations, the office of the psychiatrist stationed there to deal with anything was right next to the police chief who ran the station. It was crystal clear that if you went into that door, you had a problem. It was blaming the victim. I remember during the interviews, police officers would say to me, I would rather swallow my gun and kill myself than be seen. It's not a safe process for them to actually get some help with whatever issue they were having.

**Q3:** Are there any studies that speak to gender differences in effects of coping mechanisms with respect to burnout?

**Q4:** Do you think that women experience burnout earlier, faster, and more intense than men do?

**Q5:** Is there a relationship between burnout in women and home duties, perimenopause and menopause, other constraints that may prevent women from admitting, announcing and addressing burnout?

### **Answers to questions 3, 4 and 5**

In general, there are not major sex differences between men and women in this regard. I say that because people often frame it as men vs women and thinking about different things that are happening with men and women. The problem is that biological sex of people is confounded in many ways with other differences in jobs and the kind of work they are doing, the kinds of things

that are going on in their personal life. Things that are going on in terms of aging etcetera. When you begin to untangle some of these things and see male and female groups who are about the same level, age and entry level and job. You begin to see more that is shared than is different, but I don't want to say that there are no differences in gender when we refer to the kind of gender role, not the biological sex. We did this in a national study, people entering a certain type of job, this was in Social Security, and we saw huge difference between what the men were saying about the job and what the women were saying about the job. What is it about men and women that may be different? What was different was the path that led them to that job. The women had been hired at a lower level, sort of basic entry secretarial, administrative stuff. They had worked themselves up and had gotten the training so that they could then become a service rep working with clients. This was huge; this was like you've made it. The men were more likely to be getting this as an entry level. They were being hired in other kinds of jobs working themselves up. This was their first job. They had a different reaction like yeah, I'm not going to stay I've got to find my path, my glory and all that kind of stuff. The different reactions they had in evaluating the job were clearly tied into the path that they had been on. What was different was that women at that time weren't being hired as entry level services reps, men were. So, there was a biased that was going on and was sort of part of people thinking that men could handle it and women nah. That has changed a lot. I'm trying to use it as an example to say this whole thing. So, it's like in health care the difference between men and women, you see the physicians were men the nurses were women. When you are comparing the men and women what are you comparing? - Their sex or gender role? They actually did different work; they got different salaries. You are comparing two jobs that are confounded with whether people are male or female. You really have to be careful about assuming this sort of implicit, kind of bias thinking that men and women are like, men are from Mars and women are from Venus, like they are two creatures that are so different in so many ways. Do they have some differences? Yes, they do. Are they relevant in how they are responding to stress? You have to take into account what are those chronic stressors. Physicians are not necessary the same as Lab Techs or the Nurses etcetera. The different roles people play at home in terms of family; people talk about work-family balance. It's a different issue often for women and men because still even today there are difference in who is supposed to be taking care of the children. By the way, it's the women having the children and later having the menopause, which is not really well recognised. With men that stuff doesn't stop, for women it does. It's good to raise the question but you really have to break it down into what might be going on in the lives of men and

women doing the same work. Try to get rid of the confounding so that you have a clearer picture of what might be happening with one group rather than another. The Mars and Venus kind of thing makes it look like two normal curves, men are here, women are there and they don't meet, when in fact most of what we talked about, people's basic psychological, social values is that it's overlapping curves. There is more that's shared between men and women than more men are taller than women are tall. We ignore too often what is shared or what is common on the one hand and on the second hand we often don't actually reframe the question into a series of questions about what could be going on. Sex is a marker for that but it's not the question itself. Sounds complicated but I think that applies when people bring in other kinds of issues that might not be about sex and gender but about people's ethnic background. There is so much going on that is linked to those things like what jobs people are hired for, what kind of training and education they get, how they are treated on the job. All of the other things that you have to take into account where there could be something that's triggered by the fact that you've got the first Asian woman who is teaching in the school. So, you think, What is it about her and her background? Realising that she has also gone through the same hurdles and done things to get to be effective in teaching what needs to be taught. In short, it's an important question but we all can stop assuming that over-simplified question, what's the difference between men and women when you really need to dig deeper and see we are kind of attached as we go into a situation being a male or a female. It may be more important for us to understand in terms of the stressors. Polls that have been done globally, not just in this country, within the last year or so, they are showing that in terms of looking at how engaged people are in their job. That number has shrunk to less than 20% of employees worldwide who said that they are engaged positively with their work. That's huge, that's 80% saying this is less than wonderful. At that point trying to break it down to who are the people who are doing better or worse on that. 80% is proving that any improvement you can make will actually make the job more doable or more effective in what it accomplishes. A rising tide is going to raise all boats. Who cares if it's the most burnt out or the least burnt out? Its 80%. There are a lot of people for whom it's less than wonderful. It could be improved, it could be better if we focus not on who is having more problems and what's wrong with those people that are having problems, but actually focusing on that question which doesn't focus on who but on why, how can we make it a little better. Let's just keep trying to make things a little bit better so that we can get our things done, get home on time, enjoy the rest of our lives, feel proud of what we've done.

# Vote of Thanks

Dr Rinnelle Lee-Piggott

Firstly, on behalf of the School of Education, I extend a special thanks to Professor Christina Maslach for spending some of her time here with us and for an enlightening and engaging discourse, which has helped us to better understand the occupational phenomenon of burnout that results from chronic workplace stressors. You've given us a sense of the different ways in which it has been addressed and you have provided invaluable keys to improving the match between people and their jobs, so as to enable us to work smarter and to maintain our well-being. Thank you very much, Professor Maslach!

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And to all attendees – a great big thank you for spending your time with us this evening and for participating. I trust that you were enlightened and that you enjoyed the session. It was great having you.

Do look out for the published proceedings of this public lecture, which will be sent to all registered participants and posted on the UWISpace platform and the School of Education's website. We do hope that you will join us for our next public lecture. Until then, bye everyone! Take care.

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