

Fried

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Fried

Why You Burn Out
and How to Revive

JOAN BORYSENKO, PH.D.

(with her Facebook Friends)



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Editorial supervision: Jill Kramer • *Project editor:* Lisa Mitchell
Design: Jami Goddess

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Borysenko, Joan.

Fried : why you burn out and how to revive / Joan Borysenko, (with her Facebook Friends). -- 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4019-2550-5 (hbk. : alk. paper) 1. Burn out (Psychology) 2. Stress (Psychology) I. Title.

BF481.B67 2011

158.1--dc22

2010030782

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4019-2550-5

Digital ISBN: 978-1-4019-2951-0

14 13 12 11 4 3 2 1
1st edition, January 2011

Printed in the United States of America

For my Facebook friends,

Thank you for the conversation, the
inspiration, the information, the laughter . . .
and most heartwarming of all, for your
love, prayers, and support when SkyeDancer
returned to his home in the stars.

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Preface

Hell Is a Bad Place to Pitch a Tent

This is my 15th book, and perhaps it is the most important.

Fried may seem like an innocuous enough word since so many of us use it these days to describe our frenzied, speed-oriented, exhausted state of mind. But innocuous it is not. Feeling fried is an alarm that life has veered seriously off course. It's shorthand for losing our way individually and culturally in a world spinning so fast that it feels like we're about to be launched into outer space.

As a Harvard-trained biologist and psychologist, I've been described as a world expert on stress. However, that's not what this book is about. When you're stressed out, you keep chasing the same old carrot, whatever that may be for you. But when you're burned out, you eventually give up the chase. The hope that you can create a meaningful life fizzles out, and you find yourself sitting in the ashes of your dreams.

In a culture wedded to positive thinking, burnout and its first cousin, depression, are thought of as disorders to be fixed. But what if, borrowing a line from author and social commentator Judith Viorst, they are "necessary losses"? Perhaps they are losses of naïveté, false identities, and faulty assumptions that make way for a more authentic life.

Like many self-help authors, I write about what I need to learn. Flirting with burnout, and eventually allowing it to seduce me, is a pattern that I know all too well. When I burn out, my most loving, creative self goes missing; and I contract into a homely homunculus—the smallest, most negative version of myself. It is not a pretty picture.

I've burned out more than once—ironically, but predictably—trying to do and be my best. The pain is so great and the available help is so limited that I felt compelled to write a book that describes the inner world of burnout and how it can actually be used as a guide to inner freedom and an authentic life.

My intention is to create a map of burnout that makes the condition accessible and easily identifiable. William Styron, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, wrote a compelling memoir of his descent into severe depression titled *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*. Psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, likewise catapulted manic-depressive illness (bipolar disorder) into full visibility in *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*.

While *Fried* is not a memoir in the true sense of the word, my personal experience is central to what you'll read here. Like most of my other books, this one is braided from four strands: clinical experience, psychological and biological research, personal recollections, and a larger spiritual view. Unlike any of my other books, however, *Fried* has a fifth strand—real-time input from social networking.

Sitting alone in a hotel room one night (the fate of a traveling speaker), I logged on to Facebook and asked if

anyone had had experience with burnout. A landslide of responses followed. For the next year, our virtual salons deepened as one inquiry led to another and another. As many as 60 or 70 people would respond within a few hours to questions such as: *What does burnout feel like? What are its stages? Who is susceptible to it, and why? What are the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of feeling fried? How do you think those relate to depression? Do you have experience with antidepressants that you'd be willing to share?*

Once we had explored the anatomy of burnout together, our impromptu community turned its attention to recovering one's will and purpose, hope and wonder, faith, and the kind of "I can do it" attitude that creates what mythologist, sage, and social artist Jean Houston calls "a passion for the possible."

One evening I was thinking about the latter stages of burnout—depression and despair—and I posted this inquiry: *If you had a single sentence to share with a person in despair, what would it be?*

Facebook friend Richard Held responded with a wry one-liner: "Hell is a bad place to pitch a tent."

Richard's posting reminded me of a strange experience that occurred on the day I began writing this book. That odd happenstance turned out to foreshadow the book's structure and content.

I'd purchased a transcription program for my computer called MacSpeech Dictate, hoping that it might be more efficient to write the book by speaking it. (It wasn't.) The program does work quite well after it has learned to recognize your speech patterns, but every time I said "The Burnout Challenge," which was the working title at the time, it stubbornly typed "The Inferno Challenge" instead.

Intrigued by the computer's insistence, I spent a fascinating afternoon Googling Dante Alighieri and *The Divine Comedy*, his epic 14th-century poem. The three-part narrative is based on a series of compelling visions that Dante had during Holy Week in the year 1300, which culminated in a complete shift in his view of life. He went from feeling lost and absorbed in his own pride and apathy to feeling free and in touch with the wholeness—the holiness—of life.

In his extraordinary visions, Dante experienced a descent into the *Inferno* (the Italian word for “hell”), then a powerful self-reflective purification in the *Purgatorio* (purgatory), and a final rising up to *Paradiso* (paradise). His intention in writing this massive work was more than cataloging his experience; indeed, he was challenging his readers to make the same journey. The epic poem begins:

*Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.*

*Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.*

*So bitter is it, death is little more;
But of the good to treat, which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.*

*I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.¹*

When I read those opening lines, my eyes popped open and I stopped breathing for a moment. Was this written for *me*? Feeling fried—at least at its end stages—really does feel like going to hell. Getting to the point where I was working 10 or 12 hours a day for weeks or sometimes months without time off (and actually dreaming about shopkeepers and gardeners who had gentler, more spacious lives than mine) was my personal version of straying into a “forest dark.” And like Dante, I couldn’t really say how I had gotten so far off track. Apparently, I had fallen asleep at the wheel of my own life.

Through much of Dante’s journey, he is accompanied by the poet Virgil, who leads him through the nine allegorical circles of hell, which, although unique, share one commonality: Their denizens have lost touch with the mysterious Source of Life and Love that expresses itself newly as the aliveness of each moment. They have died to possibility and are in a state of constriction and stagnation. There are a lot of ways to lose heart, but the seven deadly sins at the core of *The Divine Comedy* are a good overview: *pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust*. These aren’t just for folks who went to Catholic school. We all have plenty of experience with these excruciating states.

As my friend Wayne Muller discusses in his book *A Life of Being, Having, and Doing Enough*, it’s not that these “sins” get you thrown into the fiery pit by some Divine Third Party—they *are* the fiery pit. They are love misdirected. You had hoped that they would restore you to happiness, but, in fact, they have separated you from the sweet flow of life unfolding.

In the grip of envy, for example, you miss the beauty that’s right under your nose. Convinced that someone

else has what you need in order to be happy, you cut yourself off from the infinite possibilities that life offers in *this* moment. Possessed by anger, you become a prisoner of the past, incapable of connecting with the gifts of the present. Tormented by greed, nothing you have is ever enough and you live with the pain of lack, unable to appreciate that life itself is a feast that has been laid out before you.

I would add another circle—another deadly sin—to Dante’s allegorical description of hell: *burning out*, a state of mind in which all possibility is eventually extinguished. When you’re in the latter stages of burn-out, Dante’s inscription over the gate of hell really hits home: “All hope abandon, ye who enter in!”

That’s the bad news.

The good news is that you’re free to leave the Inferno anytime you like.

The Divine Comedy, after all, is a three-part journey from hell to purgatory to heaven. In the Inferno, Dante witnesses how the various deadly sins create pain and suffering. Then, in the Purgatorio—and the root of that word means “to be purged or cleansed of”—he actively experiences how lust, rage, pride, envy, and the rest actually feel. He becomes an *active participant* in his transformation through heartfelt self-reflection. When the scales then fall from his eyes, he rises up through the spheres into paradise.

My husband, Gordon Dveirin, who has postgraduate training in literature and the history of ideas, explained to me (your basic literary ignoramus) why this mind-bending epic poem is a comedy (in classical literature, “comedy” simply means a story with a happy ending). It descends into hell, moves through the clarifying

atmosphere of purgatory, and finally rises to paradise. The shape of its structure—like this book—is a smile.

Let's begin the journey by tracing the 12 stages of descent into the "Burnout Inferno." Then—just as in Dante's *Purgatorio*—you'll have a chance to reflect on which of your personal beliefs and behaviors have led you into the fiery pit. By the book's end—and with a little willingness on your part to examine your life—you'll begin to get glimpses of heaven on Earth.



Notes from the Underworld

"I often wonder, Joan, when we choose a book to write about (topic wise) if we are also inviting ourselves to directly experience the nature of that topic in a most intimate way. After all, how can we give pertinent wisdom if we have not ourselves experienced the journey?"

— FACEBOOK FRIEND DAVID JON PECKINPAUGH

I am hardly Dante, but I have taken several unpleasant excursions through the Inferno. The experience of being fried is not attractive, nor is it a respecter of credentials. I'm taking a risk here, revealing a side of myself that may be shocking to those of you who believe that a positive person like myself is always insanely happy. The insane part is right on—it's the happy part that's nowhere to be found when you're fried.

I'm sitting at my polished cherrywood desk completely and utterly drained. Staring listlessly out the window at the multihued foothills of the Rocky Mountains, their misty beauty is all but wasted on me.

I've deleted all the e-mails that can justifiably be trashed and some that can't, but I just don't have

the juice to answer most of what's left. I pick off the easy ones first: the ones where a single sentence like "Yes, we can make it to the movies next Sunday," or "No, I can't review your manuscript" does the trick. But what about all those pesky ones that require a detailed or creative response? Forget it. They languish in the murky backwaters of cyberspace, waiting on those random moments when I temporarily return from the Land of the Living Dead.

When someone close enough to hear the truth asks, "How are you?" I compare myself to an appliance that has been unplugged. Not only can I no longer make toast, I am toast. My circuits are fried. Sleep is elusive; and my muscles ache, my back hurts, and I've had another string of migraines. Like Humpty Dumpty, I feel irretrievably broken. Something vital, perhaps my life force itself, seems to have gone missing. I'm emotionally exhausted and don't give a damn about work or most people. I have nothing left to give and very little interest in receiving. I just want to be left alone.

My thought process is a caricature of pessimistic cynicism worthy of an early Woody Allen film. Talk to me at your own risk because I bite. The former Queen of Compassion has morphed into the Wicked Witch of the West. Fortunately, I don't want to see anyone anyway unless it's unavoidable, which it often is since I make my living giving seminars on mind-body health and emotional wellness. What a strange absurdity.

Ah, sounds like depression, you say. Try more exercise or a smidge of Zoloft. Perhaps add some Abilify for good measure. . . .

Actually, I'm *not* in the throes of a bona fide clinical depression, either endogenous (meaning it mysteriously arises from within for no apparent reason) or exogenous (a reaction to overwhelming life circumstances). No one close to me has died recently or is even threatening to kick the bucket soon. In fact, I'm married to a loving, supportive, insightful, and fun guy. Our kids, despite being challenged by the economy, are managing well enough; our troop of beautifully parented grandkids are a delight; and substance abuse was never my thing (although I do love a glass of good red wine most evenings). And as final proof that the depression monster hasn't swallowed me whole, I can still take some pleasure in life. *I'm not dead yet.*

So What on Earth Is Wrong with Me?

Having a name for what ails you can be a relief. I remember a young mother with serious neurological symptoms who came to see me when I was running a mind-body clinic at one of the Harvard Medical School teaching hospitals. She arrived for an appointment one day unusually perky and bright. "I have MS!" she announced with enthusiasm.

She was, in fact, relieved to know what was wrong with her. Multiple sclerosis (MS) was something she could wrap her mind around—that is, she could learn more about the disease and deal with it. It wasn't a brain tumor, some previously undiscovered virus, or a

mysterious alien implant. Her symptoms were the result of a known malady. Even though she knew that the course of MS was inherently uncertain and possibly uncontrollable, the devil she could name felt less dangerous than the one that had no name.

I felt the same way about whatever was ailing me. I wanted to know precisely why I felt like a zombie. Was I stressed out of my mind, overloaded with information that was jamming my gray matter and making myself so crazy-busy that I was running on empty? Had I become a poster child for Prozac, or was I simply grieving for a world that's careening out of control?

Of all people, I thought that *I* should know the answer. I'm a medical scientist and psychologist, after all. But diagnosing yourself is dangerous business. Rationalization, denial, and wishful thinking fog the lens of whatever microscope—physical, psychological, behavioral, or spiritual—you may be using to examine yourself with.

So I did the reasonable thing, which was to consult the experts. One physician—alerted by my extreme fatigue—ordered a thyroid-function test. It came up normal . . . and so did all of my blood work. In the absence of any positive physical findings, she assigned me the default diagnosis: *STRESS*. That was embarrassing, since it meant that I had to read my own best-selling book on the subject (*Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*). Offering me some face-saving leeway, however, she added that perhaps I was suffering from a chronic viral infection with no known treatment. I read her frustration between the lines: *Please go away. I really wish I could help, but I can't.*

So, working on the assumption that acupuncturists know more about the human energy system than

physicians, I made an appointment to see one. This woman listened carefully to my history and then cocked her head, narrowed her eyes, and felt my pulses. I reclined on a massage table, and she inserted long needles in the appropriate meridians, twirling them expertly and talking to herself about my *chi*, or life-force energy. She sounded concerned.

The acupuncturist covered me with a light blanket and left for 10 or 15 minutes. After the needles were removed and I'd put my clothes back on, she came back into the treatment room with the lugubrious demeanor of a funeral director. "In 15 years of practice," she said, "I have *never* [and she leaned heavily on that word] seen someone whose life-force energy was so low." Clearly I had frightened her. So I left with a bottle of small red Chinese pills and a steely resolve never to return even if I lived out the week. The look on her face was just too depressing.

The bodyworkers I consulted were a diverse and interesting group of health-care practitioners. Massage therapists (odds-on the most pleasant variety of healers) all came to the consensus that extreme muscle tension from sitting in front of my computer, living on airplanes, and scrambling to make deadlines was the cause of my fatigue and apathy. They were spot-on about the tension, but was it the root of my profound exhaustion or just another symptom of an underlying problem?

A seasoned Rolfer (a bodyworker trained to recognize and release the tension and constriction in your *fascia*, the fibrous connective tissue that holds your muscles, bones, and organs in place) pointed out that poor posture was taking a toll on my energy. She was most helpful in raising awareness of how I sat, walked, and

held my body. Roling sessions (ten in a series) helped stretch tight connective tissue and ease physical tension. I was grateful for the good work and reemergence of something resembling proper posture. My energy level also started to increase as I became progressively more aware of my body.

My psychotherapist, a brilliant and compassionate man whom I deeply respect, listened to my problems with great patience. We both agreed that something had to change since my life felt out of control. But short of winning the lottery and retiring to the seashore, neither one of us could imagine how my life could be improved in any practical, immediate way.

What I discovered is that burnout—outside of corporate circles—is very poorly understood. None of the healers whom I consulted—either the traditional or the complementary—understood what the mechanics of burnout are and what is needed for recovery.

I realized that unless the condition is recognized and taken seriously, physicians will keep missing it and handing out antidepressants. While medication can afford temporary relief for some people, it may also short-circuit the process of self-reflection (the important work of the Purgatorio), which is ultimately where healing comes from.

How This Book Is Set Up

I've designed this book as a journey, beginning with a guided tour of the 12 stages that make up the "Burnout Inferno." The first chapter actually comprises 12 minichapters that provide an indispensable map of the

territory. You'll be able to tell exactly where you are—such as, “Yikes, I'm down at Stage 3 [putting your own needs last]. I really need to get my teeth cleaned, so, deadline or not, I'm going to make an appointment right now. Then I'm going out for a walk.” In addition, each of the 12 stages culminates with a self-reflection exercise meant to help you understand more clearly why you're fried and what you need to do to revive.

Exposing and understanding the hidden patterns that lead to burnout is what the Purgatorio part of the journey is all about. You'll notice what's making you miserable and why those patterns are so strong. Then you'll be able to gradually purge yourself of the need to repeat them.

As the book progresses, you'll learn more about the personal *and* work components of burnout. You'll consider questions such as: *Are burnout and depression the same thing, or are they different animals? In what ways do adverse experiences in childhood lead to learned helplessness that increases your chances of burning out as an adult? How can you learn to manage your energy and find a dynamic state of balance? Once you pinpoint your temperament, how can you match it to the right kind of work? How do you find your passion? How do you mobilize the courage so that you can let go and move on? What is it about living in the Now that is so enlivening?*

Your trip through the Purgatorio, like Dante's, will culminate in the Paradiso. By the last chapter—“Heaven on Earth”—my hope is that you'll have a revelation of the aliveness and freedom of your authentic self.



You can enter the Burnout Inferno from a wide assortment of venues, from your home or work life or even through your spiritual life. Scales that measure burnout (the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is the most popular) focus on three sets of symptoms: *emotional exhaustion*—deep fatigue and feelings of being emotionally drained and overwhelmed; *depersonalization*—a loss of self and a cynical disregard for the people you serve or live with; and *diminished personal accomplishment*—a progressive loss of confidence and competence.

Just because burnout hasn't made it into the lexicon of psychiatric diagnoses and treatment (the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or DSM-IV, is the bible of the craft) doesn't make it any less real. If burnout ever does make it into the DSM, we'll all know about it in a heartbeat. It will become the syndrome du jour—the last, best hope of Big Pharma (the gigantic pharmaceutical industry that invents extremely lucrative drugs for everything from cancer to restless legs syndrome to growing thicker eyelashes).

Burnout is a natural for Big Pharma. Imagine commercials for drugs that promise to rekindle your inner fire, conquer fatigue, or power your motivational engine. They could dominate the ad world.

They already have, in fact. They're just called antidepressants. One of the reasons multiple studies have shown that antidepressants are no better than placebos (except in very severe cases, as you'll read about a bit later) is because they're prescribed largely to people who aren't really depressed. These individuals are in the process of burnout, which *includes* a component of depression, but can only be ameliorated by understanding the

mechanics of the process and changing one's orientation to life and work.

With a Little Help from My Friends

The research on burnout comes alive through the comments of my Facebook friends (from now on, I'll abbreviate *Facebook friend* as FBF), which are laced through every chapter. Thanks to their contribution, the research findings (fascinating though they are) are grounded in a diversity of human experience.

Here's a little background info: 75 percent of my Facebook community is female, and 25 percent is male. The age range is predominantly from the mid-40s to what Facebook calls 55+, although 20 percent of my friends are between 25 and 45 years old. They are teachers, doctors, nurses, psychologists, students, corporate executives, parents, grandparents, folks who are out of work, and retirees. Every time I've asked them for support—either personal or professional—they have been there for me. I am both touched and very grateful.

Early on, a remarkable woman by the name of Beverly Potter joined the burnout conversation. Beverly has been writing books on burnout since 1980—not long after the syndrome was first named. A behavioral psychologist, corporate consultant, and author, she dropped into the conversations like a fairy godmother. One day as I sat contemplating how to organize this book and what the best contribution I could make might be, she sent me this message:

Chapter Four

Personality, Temperament, and Burnout

“The principle of all successful effort is to try to do not what is absolutely the best, but what is easily within our power, and suited for our temperament and condition.”

— JOHN RUSKIN

A company has downsized, and now all the work has to be done by 60 percent of the staff. Some employees thrive, or at least survive; while others become depressed, withdrawn, hostile, or physically ill. What’s the difference between the folks who burn out and the hardier ones who rise to the challenge?

In this chapter, I’ll provide you with an overview of some different ways to examine your personality, needs, and temperament; as well as how those factors affect your work situations. My hope is that by understanding yourself better, you’ll more often gravitate toward situations that fit your style and avoid ones that go against your grain.

Being a square peg in a round hole doesn’t bode well for feeling vital, competent, successful, and at peace with the world. A person who is conflict averse, for example, is much more likely to burn out as a manager than someone

who is willing to confront difficult people and situations. Likewise, an individual with an artistic temperament is much more likely to feel alive being a landscape architect than a bookkeeper.

The following pages are packed with fascinating information, so consume them slowly and pay attention to what you learn about yourself. Remember that the journey from the Burnout Inferno through the *Purgatorio* and ultimately to heaven on Earth is one of self-knowledge and inner reflection. When you know how you respond to challenges and have a clear understanding of your unique needs profile, inborn temperament, and personality, you'll bring your best to whatever you do.

The Stress-Hardy Personality

In 1979, psychologist Suzanne Kobasa defined *stress hardiness* based on her study in a corporate setting among Illinois Bell Telephone executives. In a situation of divestiture, when no one knew who would keep their job, who would be transferred, who would be fired, or what the system would look and function like on a daily basis, she discovered an essential difference between the executives who stayed functional and well versus those who stressed out and lost their health.

Kobasa hypothesized that people who were more self-reflective and disciplined in meeting life's challenges might fare better in stressful circumstances. This kind of person understands that change is a natural part of life, that the status quo can't be preserved, and that every life has its inevitable share of challenges and difficulties. They have matured beyond the childhood belief

that life is always fair. Thus, it's pointless to blame others and wish that things were different when fairness is nowhere on the horizon and never will be. Authentic control resides in one's own capacity for staying aware of the situation and making the most adaptive choices available with the most auspicious timing. This capacity can also be called *mindfulness*.

The mature individual that Kobasa describes as stress hardy has three essential characteristics. They all begin with the letter *C*, which makes them easy to recall:

1. **Control** is the inclination to believe and act as if you can influence the events of your life. That kind of personal power creates resilience, since even if things aren't going your way, you still believe that you can make things better. The opposite inclination, of course, is helplessness.

People high in the element of control have the capacity to dissect situations and determine *why* things aren't going well without blaming others or the system. *They take responsibility for their own part in whatever is happening* without neurotic self-criticism. A penchant for nonjudgmental self-reflection that optimizes adaptive choice is a good working definition of mindfulness and empowerment. *This capacity—which is damaged in situations that result in learned helplessness—needs to be developed in people prone to burnout.*

2. **Challenge** is based on the understanding that change is the only constant in life. It can, will, and is already and always happening. If you're hanging on to the way things used to be (or are "supposed" to be), you'll eventually have to let go no matter how painful

it is. The essential question regarding change is: *Is it a challenge to evolve or a threat to the status quo?*

Individuals who possess this trait are realists who anticipate stressful events and are therefore more prepared for their occurrence. They're also more likely to instigate change since they're attuned to their environment and know what resources are available (people, technologies, finances, systems, opportunities, and so forth) to create a more functional situation. People high in challenge are natural change navigators. They ride the current of possibility. *People prone to burnout, on the other hand, are more likely to cope through denial and fail to anticipate stressful events.*

3. **Commitment** is based on an inner sense of self-respect that shows up as the willingness to participate meaningfully in every aspect of life, adding value to work, personal relationships, and the community at large. If you're committed to what you do, you stay engaged rather than checking out and becoming alienated, isolated, apathetic, or cynical. This passionate involvement with life supports the deep meaning and solid values at the core of resilience.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl in the discussion on learned helplessness and its effects on mental and physical health. Frankl's ability to survive his imprisonment in various concentration camps also provides a perfect example of a committed individual who stayed engaged with life even in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Inspired by the words of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger," Frankl continually looked for deeper meaning

in the midst of the Holocaust. He was keenly aware of the mind-body connection, observing that those who became helpless and gave up hope died first.

In keeping with his personality, Frankl set his sights on surviving the horrific conditions so that he could teach others how to find meaning even in suffering. *Those of us prone to burnout are more likely to withdraw during challenging situations than stay engaged, and to be deficient in the vital skill of creating meaning.*

Thirty years of research on stress hardiness has confirmed its efficacy in preventing stress, burnout, and illness in groups as diverse as nurses and executives, and radiology technicians and students. *Furthermore, the stress-hardy personality is more than a gift of nature or nurture. It can be learned at any stage of life.*

Kobasa's colleague, psychologist Salvatore Maddi, is a professor at the University of California at Irvine and the founder of the Hardiness Institute, where he created courses to develop an individual's hardiness.¹

Examining Your Needs and Motivation

If we can learn to be helpless or hardy and make meaning of our experiences, what other types of learning might impact whether or not we're prone to burnout? The work of Dr. David McClelland, the late psychologist and onetime chairman of the Harvard University Department of Social Relations, is central to this question.

McClelland was my mentor for a Medical Foundation Fellowship that I was awarded in 1981 in what was then the nascent field of psychoneuroimmunology. He was in his 60s when I first met him—a strikingly tall and

affable man with a white goatee and mustache reminiscent of Colonel Sanders. Always dressed in a jacket and signature bow tie, he had a ready smile and an extremely bright, open, inquiring mind. I think he loved crunching data more than any other human being I've ever known. Learning and research were his passion, which made students like me extremely fortunate to work with him.

Co-founder of McBer (an organizational consulting group)—which is now the McClelland Center within the international consulting firm known as the Hay Group—Dr. McClelland was particularly interested in assessing competency in the workplace. It was a pleasure for him to witness a person with the appropriate abilities performing a job that utilized his or her intrinsic strengths—a win-win situation for all concerned. On the other hand, it was distressing when there was a poor job fit, which resulted not only in an individual's poor work performance, but also in psychological and physiological responses that we would now recognize as burnout.

Father of the field of job-competency assessment and training, McClelland discovered that hiring people based on their academic strengths simply didn't work. Intelligence turns out to matter far less than specific competency in doing a good job. For example, even though I have a high IQ and did well in academic course work, I'm a complete bust at sales. When I'm giving a workshop or lecture, I seem constitutionally unable to mention relevant resources: that I have a Website where future events and training programs are listed, in addition to helpful books and CDs. Were that different, I would have sold enough products by now to be independently

wealthy. More sales-savvy colleagues such as Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* fame have an innate competency in this regard.

McClelland's approach to figuring out what is required to do a job well is pretty simple. If you want to know what makes a good shoe salesperson, he explained on our first day together, study the best and worst ones and compare what they do. Maybe the best salesperson is extroverted and friendly, for instance, with a natural tendency to schmooze; while the washout is reserved and quiet. Or perhaps the really great salespeople are the ones who are motivated to excel at whatever they do and pursue their goals relentlessly, while the ineffective salespeople tend to be dreamers.

McClelland believed that our basic motivations stem from needs that are learned because they are rewarded by our family, culture, or social setting. For example, as a child I was rewarded for academic achievement by my family and the larger Jewish immigrant culture of the 1950s. Becoming a doctor, lawyer, dentist, or accountant translated into success in the New World. As a young assistant professor at Tufts Medical School, I was lauded for teaching, attaining funding for research grants, and mentoring medical and dental students. Over time I got better at inspiring my audiences, mastering skills that I'd need later for public speaking. In order to feel at home in my own skin, I still *need* to achieve, inspire, and care for people. These needs are what motivate the way I live and work.

McClelland relied on a psychological instrument called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) to determine what a person's "need structure" was like. What types of needs are strongest in comparison to others

(this is called a needs profile), and what kinds of careers are a good fit with that profile? Successful leaders, for example, have a high need for socialized power (they are inspiring visionaries) compared to their needs for affiliation (close personal relationships).

The TAT consists of a set of pictures (like a couple on a park bench or a scientist in a laboratory) that you write a story about. McClelland was particularly impressed by the TAT because it's free from the kind of bias that can skew the results of other psychological tests—for example, wanting to please (or mislead) the experimenter, hoping to be socially acceptable, or conforming to your own beliefs about yourself. You can't fool the TAT because you have no idea what the "right" answer is. McClelland compared it to taking a blood sample where different thought types are counted rather than different cell types. These thought types fall into three main categories that translate into the motivations that power behavior:

1. The Need for Achievement (nAch). If you have a high nAch, you're motivated to set challenging goals and will work hard to achieve them. I wanted to obtain a doctorate in biomedical sciences from Harvard, for example, and it took considerable focus and will to pull that off. People with a high nAch are problem solvers who like to excel and take moderate risks because they have the best chance of succeeding. Minimal-risk enterprises aren't very interesting because the payoff is too low; and high-risk goals aren't appealing either, since even if the desired outcome is achieved, the result can feel more like luck than skill.

Individuals high in nAch also require feedback on their performance in order to feel successful. So if your boss (or spouse or lover) doesn't comment on what an outstanding job you've done, you're likely to feel stress, disappointment, or resentment, which contributes to burnout. You do your best work alone or with other high achievers. Can you appreciate how working or living with people who are less interested in achievement than you are might increase your potential for burnout?

2. The Need for Affiliation (nAff). If you're high in the need for affiliation, you might have written a relationship story when presented with the TAT picture of the couple on the park bench. You're motivated to seek out and build loving relationships because fitting in well with other people makes you happy. Those of us high in the need for affiliation are likely to excel in customer-service positions or other venues where direct contact with people is important and valued. My own high nAff explains why I'm so fascinated and involved with giving workshops, running training programs, and building community through social networking.

But high nAff has some spectacular pitfalls, too. If you're overly concerned with maintaining good relations with everyone, you're more likely to conform rather than to question, innovate, or create waves at work or at home. That, of course, can and will come back to haunt you—especially if you know that a certain action is required, but you don't voice it for fear of upsetting or angering people. For a person high in nAff, the need to ensure good relations takes precedence over achievement needs.

The tendency is to make choices that increase popularity rather than doing what's necessary to make a

business more productive. That trait has always been true of me: for instance, I schedule clients far apart in case they might need more time than I have allotted; I have difficulty being clear with people who are troublesome in my programs; and, as you've already read, I once had to close a business because two people I loved and respected (who were also principals in the enterprise) didn't get along. When people asked, "How's the business going?" my knee-jerk response was, "It's killing me." And it really was. There was no way to maintain a good relationship among the three of us. The chronic stress of the triangulation fried me to a crisp, and I had to make the difficult choice to close the business.

What I ultimately learned from that burnout episode is that running a business involving other partners is a poor fit for my personality and needs profile.

3. The Need for Power (nPow). Power motivation cuts two ways. Some people have an exaggerated need for personal power over others. These individuals tend to be rude, consume a lot of alcohol, engage in sexual harassment, and collect symbols of power (such as expensive cars, boats, homes, offices, and dependent trophy wives if they are men). *Dependent* is the operative word, since people high in nPow dislike any encroachment upon their authority.

When I first met Dr. McClelland, he was fascinated with what he called the "inhibited power motive syndrome" and its effect on health. When people high in the need for personal power rein themselves in to appear more socially acceptable, their bodies respond negatively to the restraint. Their sympathetic nervous

system becomes activated (a stress response), and high blood pressure and heart disease can result.

Situations that require restraint are most likely to lead to burnout for this personality type. They aren't team players; however, as leaders, they are potentially damaging to organizations because they demand personal loyalty rather than creating allegiance to the corporate vision.

The socialized need for power, on the other hand, is the competency most often associated with effective leadership. Rather than being motivated by personal prestige and gain, social power is not an end in itself. It is a means to ensure a socially desirable result that benefits others. People high in social power seek advice from others and are team players who recognize that effective human beings need to have a sense of empowerment and influence over their own jobs, as well as input into the larger system. The socialized-power motive is inspirational and influential, enlisting others in the mission and vision of the organization and empowering them to offer their best.

Dr. McClelland believed that these three major needs are learned through experience and the process of coping with one's environment. Since behavior that gets rewarded increases, needs and motivations develop over time. Managers who are rewarded for achieving company goals, for instance, can learn to take the kind of moderate risks that people who are high in nAch prefer (and which are more likely to pan out). Similarly, a high need for affiliation or social power can be increased when an individual is rewarded for the appropriate behaviors.

For this reason, training programs have been designed to create needs profiles that correlate best with entrepreneurial, managerial, technical, or CEO success.

It turns out, however, that *a person's intrinsic motives can't be decreased; they can only be increased over time*. For me, this means that I'll always have a high need for affiliation, but I can learn how that impacts my work and peace of mind. I know that I have to be particularly mindful of the tendency to put the needs of others above the needs of my organization. Furthermore, someone else negotiates my speaking fees (or I'd probably starve). When a potential client says to my assistant Luzie, "Gee, Joan's fee is a bit high," Luzie has no problem at all explaining why I'm worth every cent.

"So why don't you just go to therapy or take a course in negotiation?" a pragmatic friend once suggested. "You're just too conflict averse, so you let people take advantage of you." That's true. I *am* conflict averse, and I've tried almost every form of therapy known to correct this problem—all to no avail. The zebra cannot change her stripes because they are part and parcel of who she is. Accepting this and honoring my strengths, as well as the limitations inherent in them, has definitely decreased my burnout potential. I'm simply not CEO or managerial material. I am, however, exquisitely attuned to people's inner lives, which makes me particularly competent to write books, such as the one you're reading.

With this short introduction to the theory of needs, even without being tested for your motive profile, you can probably get a sense of whether or not a particular need predisposes you to burnout as it does for me. For more information, go to www.haygroup.com. If you type "McClelland Center" into the search window,

you can watch videos of David McClelland, as well as Dr. Daniel Goleman, one of his most famous students, who popularized the understanding of Emotional Intelligence (which addresses the ways in which you handle yourself and your relationships).

Inborn Temperament

If you enter www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp into your Internet browser, you will land on a page called HumanMetrics, where you can take a Jung Typology Test designed by psychologist David Keirse, the best-selling co-author of *Please Understand Me* and an expert on the assessment of temperament. The test consists of 72 brief questions, which takes approximately ten minutes to complete. When you press the SCORE IT! button, your Myers-Briggs typology, which indicates how you perceive the world and make decisions, will come up in just a few seconds.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was adapted from the theories of psychiatrist Carl Jung as outlined in his book *Psychological Types*, published in the early 1920s. Years later, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, created the inventory hoping that it would help women entering the workforce during World War II find the positions best suited to their temperaments.

Today, the Myers-Briggs inventory is probably the most widely used and well-respected personality test available worldwide. It is based on four dichotomous traits that Jung believed were stable over time, which is the definition of temperament. It's an inborn, immutable way of being in relation to the world around

you. Research on twins suggests that these temperamental traits are, to a significant extent, genetically determined. I'll define them as simply as possible:

1. Extroversion versus Introversion (E-I). Extroverts get their juice from interacting with the outside world; introverts, on the other hand, prefer living in their own inner world. Too much external stimulation is exhausting for introverts, but extroverts are happiest when connecting with others.

2. Intuition versus Sensation (N-S). Intuitives (N) tend to see the big picture and get their information in a more right-brained way that recognizes patterns and intuits the flow of events. In past years, they might have been thought of as flaky, but today, intuition is a trait sought out by many corporations since "gut knowing" is central to success. Sensing persons, in contrast, use their five senses to appraise the world and gather information from what they see, hear, feel, touch, and taste. They are more concrete, black-and-white thinkers who perceive events and people as individual data points rather than interconnected energies.

3. Thinking versus Feeling (T-F). Thinking people make decisions based on data and observable facts. It's not very romantic, but it works quite well for engineers and scientists. There is definitely a gender sorting that takes place in this dimension. More men are thinking types, while more women are feeling types who make decisions based on those feelings.

4. Perception versus Judgment (P-J). This dichotomy wasn't originally posited by Jung, but was added

later by Meyers and Briggs. Perceiving people tend to be spontaneous and go with the flow. They're a lot of fun, but they don't always get things done in an orderly manner. On the other hand, judging people are more likely to be neat, timely, organized, responsible, practical, and good at meeting deadlines.

Those eight possible temperaments combine to form 16 personality profiles: ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ, ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP, ESTP, ESFP, ENFP, ENTP, ESTJ, ESFJ, ENFJ, and ENTJ. In my experience, these profiles are dead-on descriptors of how a person perceives reality and navigates the world. I, for example, am an ENFJ—the archetypal Teacher, which is a subset of the idealist temperament (we'll discuss those subsets next).

David Keirsey distills these 16 personality types into four basic temperament groupings—idealists, rationals, artisans, and guardians—that vary in patterns of communication, actions, values, talents, and attitudes. More than 40 million people have used his temperament assessment, which is employed by the U.S. Army, IBM, Yale University, the Fuller Theological Seminary, Pfizer, Shell, Motorola, Charles Schwab, and many other Fortune 500 companies. Here are brief descriptions of the four temperament groupings:²

1. Idealists (NFs), which make up 15 to 20 percent of the population, share the following core characteristics:

Idealists are enthusiastic, they trust their intuition, yearn for romance, seek their true self, prize meaningful relationships, and dream of attaining wisdom.

Idealists pride themselves on being loving, kind-hearted, and authentic.

Idealists tend to be giving, trusting, spiritual, and they are focused on personal journeys and human potentials.

Idealists make intense mates, nurturing parents, and inspirational leaders.³

These descriptions fit me to a T. Keirsey delineates four categories of idealists: the Teacher, Champion, Healer, and Counselor. As I mentioned, I'm a Teacher. This type excels in bringing forth the potential of their students, is warm and outgoing, and is, according to Keirsey—this specificity amazed me—"remarkably good with language, especially when communicating in speech, face to face." Teachers, Keirsey concludes, can become charismatic public speakers, which is probably my greatest talent and competency.

Being nailed with surgical precision is a fascinating experience. As you read about the other three temperament groups, which one do you resonate with? (Be sure to go to Keirsey's Website [www.keirsey.com] and take the test. When you know your type, read about how it affects everything from your love life to your career.)

2. Artisans (SPs), 30 to 35 percent of the population, are just what you might imagine. They enjoy working with their hands and creating things you can see and touch. Artisans are upbeat, fun loving, spontaneous, and often charming. Impulsive, unconventional, and freewheeling, they are extroverted and enthusiastic. They live for the joys of the day. Artisans fall into four

categories: Crafter, Performer, Promoter, and Composer. A career behind a desk crunching numbers would most likely create burnout in artisans—that is, if they stayed at such a job too long.

3. Guardians (SJs), 40 to 45 percent of the population, are the pillars of society. They're kind, loyal, dependable, practical, and hardworking. Highly responsible, concerned citizens, they abide by the rules, uphold traditions, support authority, and build community. They fall into four archetypal categories: Protector, Supervisor, Provider, and Inspector.

4. Rationals (NTs), 5 to 10 percent of the population, are autonomous, scientifically minded, pragmatic skeptics oriented toward problem solving. According to Keirse, they pride themselves on being “ingenious, independent, and strong willed.” Keirse further characterizes Rationals as even-tempered people who “trust logic, yearn for achievement, seek knowledge, prize technology, and dream of understanding how the world works.” Once they put their mind to a problem, they'll work tirelessly to achieve a solution. Rationals are made up of four categories: Architect, Field Marshal, Inventor, and Mastermind.

The “Big Five” Personality Factors

Just as Jung, Myers, and Briggs defined temperament in terms of dichotomous traits, so did several personality theorists who came after them. American psychologist Gordon Allport combed the dictionary for adjectives used to describe personality and then factored

them into clusters that were subsequently whittled down to extroversion versus introversion, emotional stability versus neuroticism, openness versus closed-mindedness, agreeableness versus hostility, and conscientiousness versus unreliability. These are known as the “Big Five” personality factors, and several of them have been linked either positively or negatively to burnout.

When I posted an inquiry on Facebook asking *why* people burn out, one woman cited enthusiasm as a prime contender. Burnout is a particular affliction of the enthusiastic, she reasoned. If there’s no fire to begin with, then there’s nothing to burn out.

Her hypothesis sounds reasonable, but research proves otherwise. Enthusiasm is negatively related to emotional exhaustion, a statistic that makes sense since extroverts are constitutionally self-confident, active, optimistic, and prone to seeking excitement. More emotionally positive than introverts, they tend to look for the benefits in problems and have a lot of enthusiasm, defined as a kind of innate “dispositional energy.”

Enthusiastic individuals are more resilient in the face of stress and even disaster. I asked Bob Stilger, a friend of mine who does community-building work in Africa, what enables so many African women—who have been raped, have witnessed family members die, or have lost everything—to pick themselves up and go on. Bob described a kind of energy and vigor that kept the women focused on creating a better future. Rather than folding up inside their misery, they reached out to one another and kept fanning the fires of the possible.

Although enthusiasm is a genetic endowment, researchers in resilience and mind-body medicine are interested in whether it can also be acquired through

learning. Hopefully so, as it has been linked to improved physical *and* mental health. Benjamin Chapman, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center, was the lead author of a 2009 study that linked the “dispositional energy” component of extroversion to dramatically lower levels of interleukin-6 (IL-6), a stress-related immune factor that causes the kind of “bad” inflammation that predisposes individuals to illness. Low levels of extroversion in aging women, the researchers discovered, may lead to an increase in IL-6, which has been linked to a doubling of the risk of death within five years. That data will encourage me to go to more parties and collaborate on new projects!

If extroversion and enthusiasm are good for you, the personality factor known as *neuroticism* is a disaster. Jenny Kim, associate professor at Washington State University School of Hospitality Business Management, linked neuroticism and burnout in people who worked in a fast-food chain. The neurotics among us are chronically and enduringly negative and easily overwhelmed by stress. They tend to have low self-esteem and be fearful, helpless, angry, guilty, and depressed. Neurotics (and I come from a long line of them) set unrealistically high goals, underestimate their performance, and then engage in merciless self-flagellation. Can this personality factor be changed? I’m sure of it, since I’m living proof. The key is to recognize it in yourself, identify it when it’s happening, and ask yourself if there is some other way to respond to the situation.

Here’s an example: Roger is the kind of person who gets elated over positive feedback and despondent over negative feedback or—and this is key—*no* feedback. No

feedback creates a vacuum in which his neurotic mind can spin imaginative scenarios of rejection, failure, and incompetence. Roger compares himself to others, beats himself up for being inferior, and then searches his past for the source of his failure: His school was lousy. His father was abusive. His mother worked. His younger sister got all the glory. What can a guy do when he's dealt such a lousy hand?

So what *is* Roger supposed to do?

— **Recognize his neurotic thinking pattern.** A neurotic thinking pattern is negative, self-critical, hopeless, helpless, and blaming. Getting stuck in it leads to the same stale place over and over again: depression and burnout. Since the recognition of this pattern is a step toward freedom, Roger can feel relief, hope, and a certain sense of heroism when he catches himself floating down the same old mental river: *Whew, I just caught my neurotic thinking . . . amazing how clear it is. Now I can work on changing it. That's awesome!*

— **Release tension.** Thinking patterns are also physical patterns, and if physical patterns aren't changed, they will hook you right back into the familiar thinking patterns with which they're associated. Try this experiment: Close your eyes and remember a time when you were trapped in negative thinking (like Roger's experience). Perhaps you were thinking about why you failed at love or work and what that might mean to your future.

Now notice how your body responded to those thoughts. Where is the tension? Are you holding your breath, or is your breathing shallow and ragged? Next,

blow out your breath with a big sigh, and relax your shoulders. On the next in-breath, imagine that you can take the air into your belly. When you exhale, let your belly flatten and feel your whole body relax, from head to toe. Take ten belly breaths, continuing to relax a little bit more on each exhalation. Physical release changes the brain and sets up the conditions for thinking differently.

— **Consider an alternative.** What kind of thoughts would support the spacious, relaxed feeling you got from belly breathing? The stress-hardy thinking of an emotionally mature person should do the trick. So Roger recalls the three *C*'s: *control*, *challenge*, and *commitment*. He is specific and thinks about how he can feel some control over the situation that he's obsessing about, what life challenge he's meeting, and how meaningful the process is that he's engaged with.

— **Engage in self-recognition.** Roger gives himself a thumbs-up, the kind of positive feedback he needs to change his thinking patterns.

Thinking patterns take time to change, but they are malleable. The brain and nervous system continue to make new connections throughout life, a process known as *neuroplasticity*. We can actually develop new neural pathways that modify our perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors.

Thoughts are like drops of water that coalesce into streams that deepen over time as more water carves the course. But even when the water starts to flow in a different direction and a new stream forms, the old channel still remains. It may be months or years before thoughts

start to flow automatically in the new channel. I still catch my own neurotic thinking from time to time.

Knowledge Is Power

There are an infinite number of ways to appreciate the differences that make us human. Some of us are enthusiastic optimists, and others are congenitally neurotic pessimists. There are people who need people and Svengalis who need power. There are high-achieving go-getters and laid-back philosophers.

You can study personality with a variety of systems that are fascinating windows on what shapes your unique personality, temperament, and worldview. But the bottom line is this: *If you know who you are and accept it, then you're less likely to waste energy trying to be something you're not.* It's the struggle that will burn you out. And it's the acceptance of who you are that lets you relax and soften your edges. The result is the natural joy of living comfortably in your own skin.

Once you get comfortable with who you are, the next challenge is to maintain your autonomy by being selective about the people you allow into your life (or keep out) and how you utilize your energy. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to cultivate the fine art of energy management by paying attention to your boundaries.



Acknowledgments

First and foremost, thank you to my Facebook friends whose engagement in a yearlong conversation about burnout and revival brought both me and this book to life.

Some of them wandered in and out of the conversation, leaving an occasional jewel in their wake. Others were a more constant presence, frequently posting wisdom and wisecracks, photos and videos. Even more held the space behind the scenes. When our beautiful canine companion Skye, a two-year-old standard poodle, suddenly took sick and died six weeks before this manuscript was due, the Facebook community showed up in force. The hundreds of messages of love and comfort that kept coming for weeks on FB, e-mail, and snail mail helped Gordon and me through one of life's more difficult passages.

David Jon Peckinpaugh is one of my most treasured FBFs. When I looked up one of his books (*Buddha & Shakespeare: Eastern Dharma, Western Drama*) on Amazon, the About the Author section resonated with my experience of him: "Inspired by the works of such American luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, David Jon Peckinpaugh continues to seek a return of the many blessings that he himself has received from the hands and hearts of others, by adding his voice to the symphony of a distinctly American brand of philosophy and discourse." When he wrote that description of himself, he may not have

been thinking of Facebook as a brand of philosophy and discourse. But it can be, and certainly is, in David's blogs and postings.

When it came time to name this book, David was the one who came up with the title, remarking, "I wonder if the word *Fried* happens to catch this moment, Joan: that there is this cultural milieu we are all immersed in—where so much information is coming at us, to the point that many of us feel overwhelmed by it . . . like we're about to blow a circuit or two!"

The final title decision was a three-day marathon that many of the FBFs participated in. It was so much fun—and so addictive—that it was hard to leave the computer. *Fried* went head-to-head with *Hell Is a Bad Place to Pitch a Tent* from FBF Richard Held. Thank you so much, Richard. Your fine line is immortalized in the Preface.

Many thanks to psychologist and author Beverly Potter, my virtual fairy godmother. Her tremendous generosity of spirit and willingness to share extensive knowledge about burnout got me off to a great start. That anyone would be so kind to a stranger is a testimony to who she is. In addition to posting in the public conversations, Beverly and I maintained a rich private conversation, also on FB, that spurred me on and helped me realize that I had something new to offer in this book.

Deb Somfay, Maria Petrova, Slim Chandra-Shekar, Denise Linn, Vickie Byard, Doris Goodill, Theresa Dakay, Margaret Lewis, Janise Rennie, Constance McClain, Thapkey Dolkar, Edie Weinstein, Lori Landau, Chuck E. Davis, Lauren Rosenfeld, Michele Lawson, Marilyn Joyce, Bonita Yoder, Oriah House, Steve Frazee, Toni

Venz, Mary-Lynne Monroe, Keith Bell (my YaYa Boi) . . . are just a *few* of the loyal Facebook gang I want to thank for their wisdom and their love. There were so many wonderful postings about burnout and revival that there wasn't enough room to include them all. They are in the book nonetheless, speaking from between the lines.

My colleague and friend Lee McCormick—shaman, rascal, and wise man—thanks for taking Gordon and me to Teotihuacán, introducing us to the work of Don Miguel Ruiz, and giving us a memorable experience of deconstructing our place in hell and moving on to find heaven on Earth. You're an inspiration to me and to the entire field of recovery and mental health. And thanks, too, to Maru Ahumada. You brought Don Miguel's teachings to life in my heart.

My husband, colleague, and best friend, Gordon Dveirin, knows about my penchant for burning out firsthand. He's swept up the ashes more times than I'd like to admit, always with gracious love and patience. To live with a person who sees and encourages you—with clarity but never criticism—is a gift I would wish for everyone. Gordie knows what it's like for me to write a book, since we've written two together (*Saying Yes to Change* and *Your Soul's Compass*). Now that *Fried* is done, it's time to pull out the cowboy boots and go dancing at the Grizzly Rose, darlin'!

Chris and David Hibbard—as always, your heartfelt support, meaningful conversation, great hospitality, and occasional road trips to get away from it all helped me through the writing process. Sarah Davidson, my friend and a truly great writer, thank you for your love

and encouragement. Karen Drucker, Cheryl Richardson, Debbie Ford, Robin Casarjian, Luzie and Bob Mason, Justin and Regina Borysenko, Andrei and Nadia Borysenko—thank you all for your support, insight, and love. And as always, a big thanks to my Hay House family: the inimitable Louise Hay, who was one of my first teachers; Reid Tracy, my publisher and friend who has let me speak my “peace” for 20 years; editorial director and brainstorming partner Jill Kramer; my fabulous editor Lisa Mitchell, who worked magic with the text; Christy Salinas, who designed the cover; Jami Goddess, who designed the interior; my publicist Richelle Zizian; Webmaster for **HealYourLife.com** Donna Abate; and all the people behind the scenes who make Hay House such a force for good in the world.



About the Author

Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., is a Harvard-trained medical scientist, licensed psychologist, and spiritual educator. A *New York Times* best-selling author and blogger for The Huffington Post, her work has appeared in newspapers ranging from *The Washington Post* to *The Wall Street Journal*. A warm and engaging teacher and speaker, she blends cutting-edge science and psychology with a profound and palpable sense of the sacred (and a world-class sense of humor). Founder and director of the SoulCare in HealthCare training program, her vision is to remind us all that the relationship is the medicine.

Joan lives in the mountains of Colorado with her husband, Gordon Dveirin, and their two dogs, Sophie and Milo. You can find out more about her work, watch videos, and read articles at www.joanborysenko.com. You are also welcome to join the lively conversation on Joan's Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/pages/Boulder-CO/Joan-Borysenko/211406562428.



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Published in India by: Hay House Publishers India, Muskaan
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