



Top 10 Tips to Avoid Workplace Burnout, and Other Tips from the 2019 Historic House Summit: Sustainability, Governance and Relevance in the Environment

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The leadership at Morven Park has always been supportive of professional development opportunities for our team, particularly when we can learn, network and present relevant topics to a broader professional organization on Morven Park's behalf. When I learned of an opportunity to travel to Miami, Florida to discuss ways that historic house museums like ours could be more sustainable cultural institutions for the future, you had better believe I volunteered!

The 2019 Historic House Summit: *Sustainability, Governance and Relevance in the Environment*, hosted by Vizcaya Museum and Gardens and the American Alliance of Museums, brought together approximately 50 participants from around the world who all felt that our institutions have a responsibility to be responsible stewards of not just the land and constituents we work with directly, but to respond to climate change and remain relevant, trusted educational organizations for our communities and beyond.

I immediately thought of the many ways that Morven Park staff are already responsible stewards of our 1,000-acre estate. We compost and create our own soil that is used in the historic boxwood gardens and in planters around the Park, reducing yard waste and putting it to good use. We turn fallen trees into uniquely carved cross country jumps to be used for equestrian events at the Park. We encourage recycling at our sporting events on the athletic fields. We plant new trees (thanks to generous donors) to support wildlife habitat and eventually create shade for visitors to the Park. There are many ways for us to improve, but I know our staff is committed to taking great care of this special place for generations to come.

Speaking of staff, we can't discuss the long-term sustainability of museums and historic sites without exploring the threats facing one of our most precious resources-- our dedicated staff and volunteers. Burn out is real, and it can deeply impact a museum's ability to remain solvent or effective in fulfilling its mission and serving its community in a meaningful way. Alongside Kelsey Brow, Curator at King Manor Museum, Rebecca Gavin, Director of Education Programs at Connecticut Historical Society, and Bethany Hawkins, COO of AASLH, I facilitated an important session entitled "Avoiding Staff Burnout."



We spoke of our own 'burnout experiences' and encouraged a lively dialogue about the important steps we can all take to better take care of ourselves, our colleagues, and our fabulous volunteers. In a world where a healthy work/life balance is a commodity, we focused not on the challenges, but several necessary solutions to make careers in historic house museums a little bit healthier and more supportive of individual needs.

Below is the handout we used to guide the presentation and spark discussion. I hope you'll find it useful too. I invite you to use this list as a launching point for considering best practices in your workplace and in your own life. I have found that making small, incremental changes to my practice has made all the difference.

Top 10 Tips to Avoid Workplace Burnout

As a Staff Member

1. **Make a "master" to-do list** to stay organized when wearing many hats, but make smaller lists for each week to help break down tasks and accomplish discrete goals instead of feeling overwhelmed. Don't be afraid to address your workload with your supervisor!
2. **Sit down** on Friday in the late afternoon to plan your week ahead (with contingency!) so you can start off productively on Monday and set a positive tone for the week.
3. **Respect your work-life balance** and make it a principle not to check your work email off the clock.
4. **Actually take a lunch break!** This helps establish a boundary between a job that's a passion and letting that job take over your life, no matter how much you love it. This promotes a healthy work environment for yourself and encourages those around you to do likewise.
5. **Make time to recharge outside of work.** Having something fun to look forward to, with or without others, can reduce stress and increase positivity.

As a Supervisor

6. **Find out** how someone likes to be appreciated and do your best to honor it. Some people like to be given awards or affirmations in public, but others might instead appreciate a coffee or a hand-written note of thanks.
7. **Encourage** open communication about personal commitments that affect the overall employee. Stress can come from many places outside of work, so remember that and create a place for conversation about how to best support each member of your team.
8. **Schedule** regular one on one meetings with your direct reports to assess their workload and priorities. They may be stressing out over a project that you feel could wait a few weeks (or months).
9. **Figure out** what brings you and those you supervise joy at work and find ways to celebrate that. Being a cheerleader for others can also help maintain staff morale!
10. **Model good behavior.** Employees follow the lead of their supervisor. Keep your work/life balance in check to show your direct reports the importance of avoiding burnout.

