



*This post originally appeared on [Bridge3.com](https://www.bridge3.com) and was written for a corporate audience, however the topic and the advice offered has equal application for military leaders.*

By [Jonathan Silk](#)

How does a star performer turn into a loose cannon, or experience complete and total burnout on the job? In most cases there are telltale signs that can be identified in time to turn things around.

Consider this scenario.

Pat, a star performer, has been crushing it at work, a real force multiplier who raises the bar for everyone she works with. She has been a key driver in her department's performance and has been identified to supervise a new project, which comes with new levels of responsibility. Rather than prepare her for her new responsibilities by giving her with some management training, her boss decides she should start her new role immediately. And so she does.

What happens next is critical. And if unnoticed can lead to the end of stardom. A wise manager will pay attention to the signs.

3 signs that a star performer is on the path to burnout

### 1. They are overwhelmed

Before her promotion, Pat was a strong contributor as an individual. Now she has to supervise 16 others. It is safe to say Pat is **overwhelmed**. She exhibits all the behaviors of someone who is completely stressed out. She is transforming, from a high performer to a [loose cannon](#).

### 2. Loss of productivity

From a leadership perspective, Pat is becoming **less productive**, because she simply doesn't have the resources, experience, or time to give her attention to things that need it. So she defaults to micromanagement, using directive, not outcome-based leadership to assert control, instead of allowing her team to work through its challenges.

### 3. Not open to developmental feedback

As Pat's constituents become less productive and more disengaged, the new supervisor decides to ask for feedback, a 360 because Pat heard it was a good thing to do, not because of a growth mindset that feedback is valuable. After Pat receives the feedback and is not painted in a favorable light, but full of opportunities for growth, learning, and change, it is rejected because *Pat was not developed to view constructive feedback* as an opportunity to get better, and views it as a threat to authority. So the death spiral of performance and conflict continues until Pat hits burnout.

Why burnout happens.

As human beings, we do not have unlimited psychological resources to commit to leadership

and supervision. Every day those resources are depleted and need to be replenished. Unlike a car, which will run out of gas and will simply stop, humans if they are not refueled, keep going right through to burnout in the workplace, and as research shows into the realm of unethical decision making. And there you have it – Pat went from star performer with potential to a burnt-out, unethical leader.

Star performers hold value for any organization. This type of behavior can cost the organization value as productivity drops, workers become disengaged, and it has to deal with the decisions the burnt-out leader has made. Good news is this can all be prevented with an investment in the development of people before promotion or other taking on a new responsibility.

If they learn anything in business school about leadership, much of what students learn is about leading from the top of the organization. That is not the true nature of organizational leadership. Great organizations have leaders at all levels. They understand that in today's fast-paced landscape they cannot rely simply on hierarchy as they move into action. They have to develop leadership throughout their organizations.

How to prevent it, or turn it around.

Upon being identified for leading the new project, the company has several options to invest in the development of their new leader:

**Coaching:** Coaching is vital to learning and development. In her new role, Pat needs to identify what areas she needs development to be successful in leading the project. A senior leader in the organization could coach Pat to help her gain awareness of her strengths and developmental needs, and a plan for development. Coaching is a learning and change process. The person being coached learns from experience. At the end of the session, they should develop action strategies to implement and during the next session the coach could better learn how their client reflects and learns. Coaches help the individual being coached

do their best thinking and come up with a solution for themselves, not the solution the coach thinks is best. The coach establishes a safe but challenging environment for development to occur. Within this environment, Pat can develop her talents and make a bigger impact on the project and in her relationships with others.

**Mentorship:** In addition to coaching, mentoring is a powerful way of developing future leaders. The company could help Pat find a mentor. Mentoring relationships are focused on the learning and development of the Protégé, in this case, Pat. She plays an active role in the learning with her mentor who will share their experiences with Pat, help her develop priorities, new knowledge, and find resources to continue her growth, learning, and development.

**Leader Development Program:** Formal leader development programs are designed to progressively develop the leadership competencies needed for performance at higher levels of responsibility. In this case, to equip Pat with the skills she needs to be successful in her new role leading the project team. If the organization does not have a program, a quick search in your area will reveal what is available. We offer an example of a leadership development program here at [Bridge 3](#) as well as coaching and mentoring resources.

Elevate your star performers.

Organizations can boost or obstruct their star performers development. If they invest in their development, specifically behaviors, mindsets, and reinforcement of learning, they can elevate the individual and the organization. If they don't then there is a risk of the star performer flaming out and the organization losing a high potential employee.

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