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**Brian:** Welcome to the One Advantage Podcast, exploring the intersections of pure power, culture, and agility. Your host, Jason Richmond, Mike Richardson and Leo Bottary, co-founders of the One Advantage Community of Practice and Advantage Peer Groups. For more information, please visit us at idealoutcomesinc.com.

**Leo:** Hey, welcome everyone to the One Advantage podcast. Joining me today, Leo Bottary is Jason Richmond, and of course, Mike Richardson is as we'll say, on assignment today, not able to join us. Couple things though. First of all, today's program is gonna be about burnout. It's something that people talked a whole lot about during Covid, but to suggest it isn't just as ever present today as it's ever been, is something that I think.

Is not the case, of course, and we wanna make sure that we talk about it and figure out how we handle that along with a lot of the associated difficulties that are taking place in today's workplace. But before we get into that, as we usually do so Jason, tell us a little bit about where you've been and what's going on.

How's your past week or two been?

**Jason:** Oh, it's been fantastic, Leo. Today I'm in Denver, Colorado in our in our production studios. Getting some work done, working on some online programs, and to be honest with you, working on finalizing the content and the the actual recordings and the curriculum design for the One Advantage ebook that's gonna be released here in a couple weeks.

**Leo:** How about that?

**Jason:** Yeah. Done. Done by myself, Leo Bttary and Mike Richardson.

**Leo:** Yeah that's good. That's good stuff. And very much looking forward to that being released. And I think when people start really diving into, and I think the best thing about the ebook, if I don't mind saying it, is that we were able to really distill it down, not into several hundred pages, but really took the time to get it down and from what I recall, like under 50 pages basically.

**Jason:** Correct.

**Leo:** So you can really get through it easily. It's not overwhelming. It's not something that is too much of a task. I think it's straightforward and I think it's easy to see, and I think everyone will be able to connect with what's going on today with the one advantage.

That seems to prevail over whatever is happening in your company, which is having that peer powered culture of agility. Yeah, look forward to continuing to talk about that and promote what that book is all about as well.

From my standpoint I was off the road for a little while and now I was back on.

And in the past 24 hours I basically was in Rochester, New York, delivered a three hour workshop to a group in Canada, and then drove up to Dana Point and did another three hour workshop yesterday afternoon. I have a little bit of time today, but I'll be back on the road in both from for Atlanta and Salt Lake City next week, and then Fort Wayne, Indiana, and, other places between now and the end of the month.

It is back full tilt on it, it is always great. It's always a learning experience, I think. You, Mike and I always talk about the fact that we are students of our work first. Sure. And that the more time we spend out in the field and the more time we spend, with people, the more we learn and I think the more valuable we can be to others.

So that's why I think it's always so nice to just get on this podcast and be able to share a little bit about what we're seeing. And I know Jason, one of the things that, and you had really first brought this up in terms of a subject of conversation today, and that's burnout. And so kind tell us a little bit about what you're seeing out there and maybe signs that CEOs can be looking for ways that they can combat it.

Just maybe get us started there would be great.

**Jason:** Yeah. And, you hit it on the head, Leo. We, we learned from our own personal experiences and our reflections and our opportunity to observe. And, thinking about today, and I could create a list. 50 things that I could contribute to the start of, or the enhancement of employee burnout.

But, a couple things that coming out of pandemic, coming out of any business crisis, you got coming into any new year, coming to the end of a first quarter, right? You have new strategies, you got new disciplines, you got some big pushes. One of the things I've seen is successes, drive a level of burnout amongst contributors, and lemme explain why I say that, right?

They're pushing so hard. They got a major project, they got major milestones. They're a hundred percent focused. They're probably putting extra hours. They're overly committed, right? They take such pride in ownership in what they're doing.

They get this boulder to the top of the mountain. They get. This project or this milestone completed with that level of quality and the pride that they put into it, they don't realize the level of exhaustion they're creating, and they get to that pinnacle and we celebrate that success and we go through a phase of a little bit of exhaustion and burnout and they're like, boy, I'm not ready to start the next one.

And I've, I, I've been seeing that because there's been. There's been a big push across, organizations I'm working with every day, to start this fiscal year strong, to end this first quarter strong to to get into the second quarter, which started a couple weeks ago. And I'm seeing that level of exhaustion amongst individual contributors that aren't allowing them to find that energy to revamp for that next big success.

Does that make.

**Leo:** So here's a classic example, right? So you've got teams right now competing for an N B A title, okay? Yep. At some point in the next month or two, someone's gonna win that title. What happens is they take a few months off and then they get gear up for the next regular season. They don't.

The first game of the regular season, the following day after the win, it would be like really, like there's no way you physically, emotionally, mentally can do that. Yeah. I mean there's not a chance, and by the way, you mentioned this idea of after we celebrate the win I'm not sure that enough companies even do that.

Yeah. In other, which makes it more difficult, right? Because now we get that win and it's okay, what's next now? Yeah. And it's oh, it's just absolutely exhausting and there's no question. But I think what's difficult for employees, and this is where I think there's a real responsibility and a real opportunity for leaders today, is to create an environment where people can have honest dialogue about these kinds of issues.

Because. They don't want to be that person who says I'm just exhausted. They don't want to be that person who says, I'm burned out. No. And because they don't communicate it then all of a sudden what happens? Either that person becomes super unhappy and decides they're gonna leave or their performance goes down, because they are so burned out.

Or any number of things start happening at that point that, make it almost, IM. To sustain, right? Is what we're talking about. A healthy environment. We can't be full tilt all the time. We can't just be winning one minute and saying, okay, we're not even gonna, we're not even gonna sit, we're just onto the next thing now.

And it's huh. It's just mind blowing.

**Jason:** And that, that level of burnout is just creates a toxic culture and a toxic environment because I, when I'm working with organizations legal, I always talk about influencers and you don't have to be in management or in leadership or an executive or a director, to be an influencer within your organization and at that individual contributor level.

If you get if you if you're fine from an organizational standpoint, if you find that some of. Influencers in your individual computers or ranks are facing burnout. They're influencing others on the same thing. And it can create, a toxic work environment. It can decrease their level of engagement.

It can decrease your level of participation. Matter of fact, I was working with a small company just last week and we even, we got into the level of talking about how. The amount and the lack of communication over the last couple months has been observ. The number of emails went down the lack of contribution in meetings.

The tentative or decline, zoom, project updates and things like that. And as I was in this discovery, I was listening I pinpointed right away and I just listen. I says, you've got a culture of burnout right now. You've got employees, disengaging. Let's talk about what their experience has been the last three months, the first three months of this year.

And that's where our conversation went and we're, we'll go down that path now. But there are some very observable behaviors that give you lead indicators or even sometimes lag indicators that, that you might have an organization with key influencers and key performers that are at a level of burnout and feel like.

Feel like they're struggling with balance of life and so forth..

**Leo:** Yeah, this this is what I meant too. When, when you may be reluctant to go to your supervisor and talk about this. This is, I wrote a piece for a C E O world that just ran a few days ago that talked about the value and importance of creating peer groups, working alongside teams.

Because they have to have a place to go. They have to have a place with other people who are experiencing the same challenge they are, and be able to share and talk about what that looks like and how they can help each other. It's not about complaining, it's not about these kinds of things. It's about how do we support one another so that we aren't experiencing and feeling that burnout.

And by the way, I think some of the associated things that feed into the burnout, especially nowadays too, whether it's remote employees or actually people who are coming into the office, but not many other people are coming into the office, right? So that, so they feel really. They feel obscure, right? Yeah.

Hard enough to no get noticed about how hard I'm working when everybody's there all the time and all that. Now all of a sudden I'm either working from home or I show up one or two days a week and hardly anyone's there anyway. And so I'm feeling that obscurity. I'm feeling all of these other things which contribute to this lack of social reward that we can get, which I think fuels burnout in a really big way..

**Jason:** Yeah and, and from a leadership standpoint, we, again, I was working with a chief operating officer of a, of an insurance company and he was, we were talking about this very topic, burnout. Our employees are burned out, they're their performances dropping, they're just not, it doesn't feel like the same place that we're working with.

And, the employees are all about new ways of working in new ways of change. And, and where we pinpointed down from if you're a C E O or c o or you're looking at that middle level leadership, and the way of work has changed, has your managers and your leaders gotten behind that change?

So sometimes it's a roadblock for a mid-level management position. They, the organization expects individual contributors in the workplace to change that leadership team has to. Their, sometimes their failure or inability to really adjust to change or adapt it and drive it creates, creates a level of burnout for people below 'em.

Does that, you know what I'm saying?

**Leo:** No question.

**Jason:** So as, or because there's no question that every organization out there has changed in the last six months, 12 months. A year, two years in the way they do things that, that mid-level leadership ranks in your organization, you gotta have to make sure they're on board with that change.

Otherwise, otherwise their leadership styles are not changing. What they're doing is not changing and it's having a negative impact on the workplace culture in r in regards to the individual contributor level.

**Leo:** And let's face it too. The more challenges we have in the economy, the more things that are turning up, the heat on business and performance and results only drives the possibility that burnout's gonna be greater.

You're not creating those conditions. There's a wonderful book that a friend of mine, Robert H. Thompson, wrote a number of years ago called The Offsite. And the offsite of the course is, as you imagined it, it's an offsite meeting and it's all of these people there and what they do and how they do it. The interesting part though is the person who represents the metaphor for leadership has nothing to do with the people attending the offsite.

It's actually the groundskeeper of the resort they're staying at. And what, you get a sense of this, right? All of a sudden, this guy you recognize that he doesn't scream at the plants to make them grow faster. He doesn't, when he sees that a plant's getting too much sun somewhere, he puts it in an area where it gets a little more shade.

He congregates the conditions in the world for them to flourish. Yeah. And that's why the garden looks, that's why the whole grounds look as beautiful as they do. As leaders, I think we have to. More in fact, the character's name is Sam Arthur. How it came to me. And if we could have a little more Sam Arthur in us, if we could look at our companies and think of how are we creating the conditions for people to flourish, especially to do so over time.

I think becomes a really important question that leaders need to ask themselves.

**Jason:** Yeah. I agree. And it goes with, from a leadership standpoint, that level of recognition you're giving employees, setting them up to, to feel accomplished, setting them, giving them projects that stretches them, giving them new opportunities to focus on all these things help in burnout, avoidance, pers make sure you're personalizing thing in the. Personalize your recognition, personalize your efforts, make sure people have, 1, 1, 1 rule of thumb at ideal outcomes, Leo, we have is we have several employees working on in projects independently and everything else and one question I ask every one of our team members before.

Before a project, before a, a product of work goes out into a customer or out into the marketplace is I ask them if they're personally proud of that work.

Right now you'd be surprised, you'd think everyone every time. The answer would be, yep, I'm proud of that. That's great. Get it off my plate.

But that doesn't happen. And because we have the right psychologically safe environment to work, sometimes we'll get the answer is no. Not really. I'm gonna put something else into this. And that is personalizing your work and everything we do, because it's their name.

It's personalized too, that individual. And we give them the opportunity to be proud of the work that they. Now that has a big impact on our ability to stay motivated, committed, not burn out, and those types of things.

**Leo:** I think this kind of comes down to the difference between creating a culture of accountability and creating a culture where people accept personal respons, personal responsibility for being at their best.

Yeah. That means everything from their best work to make sure they're not burned out, to make sure that they have a healthy outlook about themselves and others. That there's clarity about expectations. There are all these kinds of things that seem to be crucial, especially right now that employees have that comfort and have that feel.

There's a great story. When I was doing my doctoral work at Northeastern, I was writing a paper on the secondary school system in Finland. And the gentleman, Pasi Salberg, who was basically in charge of the school system at the time, was being interviewed. He was being asked all these questions about accountability and teachers and metrics and test scores and students and all this other stuff, and it was like he went time out.

He said, you know that the way you talk about accountability, we don't even have a direct translation for it in the finish language. He said, for us, accountability is what you're stuck with. When someone's sense of personal responsibility fails them.

So it's this idea if you can create a culture that isn't about playing defense, it isn't about just constantly feeling like you're being hammered for this, that, and the other, but you're coming to work with that sense of, I am gonna bring my personal best today.

And I, my expectation is that others will do the same, and that when we're asked questions like you talk about asking for your. Is this your best? Is this something you're personally proud of? It's a great question and I think people. You'd love for them to answer it more often, but you're actually happy when they answer no.

Yeah. When they're really honest about, you know what, I, this can be better and here's how I can turn this up. And then you make decisions about what's it gonna take to make that possible? And is it worth saying to the client, tell you what, we're gonna take another day with this. Yeah. Because of something, or, and be upfront about that as well.

**Jason:** That's right. You're absolutely correct. The other thing, creating it from a leadership standpoint, creating an environment where people can raise their. And raise their hand and say, I need help without fear of having negative impact. I I make it a point, I'm really deliberate about creating space and creating one-on-one conversations with every team member I have.

And I was just on a call last week with one and we were talking about the last six weeks and the workload's been pretty high, and about a month ago, she raised her hand and said I'm to my breaking point I'm to a point now where I am saturated and cannot take any more. I need some help.

And, in our conversation I unless she did that, I would've never. But they've got an they got the right culture and the right atmosphere, the work environment to raise their hand and say, you need to get me support. You need to get me additional resources.

You need to shift something here in order for this to be the quality that we expect. And I just, I smiled when I got the email raising her hand, right? Because that's exactly the type of work environment I want. With that transparency to say, if we don't do something different. I'm gonna burn out.

**Leo:** It's interesting and it's great that you create the conditions to make that possible. And I obviously applaud that person for raising their hand. My guess is though, it took them a lot, even recognizing the environment was safe to raise their hand and they probably should have done it a week or two or a month earlier for probably, right?

Yep. And what's fascinating about it is if there's anything that has been a big aha learning moment for me over the past I've done this program called the Courage to Ask for Help. And it's about an hour long webinar a thing. And what's fascinating is I will ask the people on the webinar I use mentee meter and I have them, we create this word cloud and I ask them a simple question in one word, how does asking for help make you feel?

And you can't believe too, it's, I feel stupid. I feel helpless, I feel incompetent. The words are unbelievable that, that are across the board come from this because they see asking for help as a sign of weakness. Instead of being the act of resourcefulness that it really is. And if you can ever get your folks to really regard asking for help from their supervisor, from one another, from whomever, we, we can't and don't do anything, or shouldn't be at least doing anything entirely by ourselves, good.

**Jason:** Which takes me into the next point. As I was thinking and prepping, you know what really some of the fundamental drivers of burnout and I wrote down the word on, on, on this piece of paper, it says isolation, right? Sometimes we find ourselves, every business finds themselves out there, every employee at some point in their career or in their work, Feels like they're on an island or feel like they might be in isolation.

And that isolation will turn into burnout pretty quick, right? Absolutely. And whether it's a remote workforce or a hybrid workforce, organizations and leaders have to find a way for people to feel included, feel important and provide opportunities to get people off that island and not get in an isolated state..

**Leo:** Well, this is br brings me back a little bit to this suggestion about how do we create more opportunities for that? How do we create a mechanism for people to be able to reach out to one another and talk about some of the things that are really critical and really important to how they do their work and how they feel.

And and obviously an in fact. It impacts the way people engage one another. If I'm really feeling burned out, chances are I have a shorter fuse than if I'm feeling right. There, there's that, and now all of a sudden it creates, all kinds of issues. I think among, in between employees that are unnecessary.

But it's these things that are unspoken and this inability, I think, to create. A mechanism inside your organization for PPA able to come together. And you know what's interesting about this is everyone feels like they don't have time to do this. And the reality is, you don't have time not to do this. You can't not do this.

You, you have to make the time. And the false narrative on this is that somehow, if you're taking time to do that, you're taking your time away from something else. And the reality is that no, you're going back to a situation that's gonna continue to be as unproductive as you are right now. And unless you have a mechanism for dealing with it and working with it, that's what's gonna drive overall productivity, not the other way.

**Jason:** Yeah. And I I work with a lot of organizations and I tell you this topic and what we're doing in relationship to culture has become more and more popular. And I've been talking a lot about individual contributors, but leaders burn out too. And when they do their emotional, it impacts their emotional control.

And when a when you have a leader, In your ranks, in your organization that is at a burnout stage. That level of emotional control is having a major impact on the entire organization. And I even in our one-on-one coaching and our work with leadership, that ability to.

Walk away from it. Take a deep breath, maybe take some reflection time, maybe go for a walk, do some exercising, doing some personal habit or hobby that you're passionate about. You play a lot of golf, go play around to golf. You've got to have separation. A little bit of separation from your work to avoid this level of burnout that we're talking about.

And I think working from home has he. That burnout level, because it is sometimes harder to separate from your work if your office or your desk is, right there, three steps away. So it's Oh yeah. New discipline from a leadership standpoint to separate. I can't tell you how many meetings I've been on in the last three months, That had participants participating in a meeting, they're on vacation. They might even be out of the country, but they're participating in these because of fear. And they are going, if they can't go on their week vacation without detaching right Now, sometimes I do the same thing. It, you can't always do it.

But you've gotta have from a leadership rank, the ability to also. And separate, yourself, your personal health, your wellbeing to the work you have to do.

**Leo:** One of the things that I did here and I hope at some level it's continuing, at least for a lot of organizations, is that during Covid when people were at home and more leaders were beginning meetings, not with what are you doing, but how.

And really were caring a lot about the human beings, in the room. And people were feeling that sense. They were, they wanted to connect on that human level. The other example I think was that leaders who were very intentional about sharing with people that it is okay. To take breaks and to do things and go take your dog for a walk, go to the gym, go play, play nine holes if you can get it.

Yeah. You remind me I should be playing more golf. I'm gonna take note of that when we're done. But the reality, right? Is that those leaders, I think were really smart in being able to say, recognizing that, everyone knows what they've got to do. And everyone, and not everyone works the same way.

My wife and I were just having an interesting conversation. She is very disciplined about how she goes about her work in a way that I applaud in such a huge way. I'm much streaker about that. I'll get up at four o'clock in the morning and blow through six hours of stuff, and then I don't feel like doing anything for two or three hours.

And then I'm maybe back at it in the afternoon on something else that I might do. But it's just kinda. I operate. Yeah. In, in a way. And I think when as leaders we can try to let people tap into the best of themselves in order to deliver value the way that they uniquely can in the organization, then that can create those conditions in the world where burnout at least can be managed more effectively.

**Jason:** Yep. You Leo I think this conversation's been great and I, I wanna leave our, my audience with, I, I think one word of it, one, one statement of advice is don't underestimate the impact that employee burnout has on the entire organization and the business results of that organization.

It's not a fad. It is real. It happens. And there are specific deliberate things that an organization and a leader can do to lessen that or to eliminate that level of burnout within their organization. But make it a priority. Make it a discipline and keep your eyes and ears and be aware that it probably does exist right now in your organization at some point.

**Leo:** Well, you bet. And I'm not sure I could, add much to that. What a great, summation of what we talked about today. I hope everyone's enjoyed listening to the podcast. I hope that you grab a copy of the One Advantage book ebook that will be coming out and available very soon, which covers a lot of these topics that we've Talked about today but also much more.

And I just wish you all, really well take that break. Take your dog for a walk. We know you're working hard. We know you care about your work and your family and yourself and a little bit of self-care will go a long way. So with that enjoyed having you today and we will see you soon.

**Jason:** Thank you.

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