

# Frustrated, Burnt, Angry and Resentful: A-Z Tips for Activity Professionals Who Need a Boost!

By: Kimberly Grandal CTRS, ACC  
Executive Director  
Re-Creative Resources Inc.  
www.recreativeresources.com

"Hi Kim,

*It is good to be on your mailing list. I am going through some rough times right now and I need help finding a path! I am in a small assisted living coming off my 3<sup>rd</sup> year as the Activity Director and we are down in census right now, so everyone is getting things heaped onto their plates. I am feeling very burnt, angry, and resentful that I have to be everything for everybody. I have been looking for jobs but not sure that I want to stay in this field because this feels like the nature of the job all over. What I need the help in is standing up for myself and my department on what we can and won't do as part of our jobs. Right now we are the porters, the food service, the activities, the bus drivers, and marketing and I have little to no time or energy for my family and I am certainly not getting paid enough for all the extra hours I put in. I love the residents and when I can do a group, uninterrupted, and have some creativity (but that is rare) I feel as if I am responsible for making it all **happen!** It feels like there is no way to manage time because of the crisis factor and the end result is that I am stifled creatively and therefore shutting down. All of this is holding me back from getting my MEPAP 2 done and getting certified. I just don't think it is any better anywhere else!*

*Sincerely,  
Frustrated in XYX Assisted Living Facility"*

Does this sound familiar? Signs of burnout include: frustration, failure, despair, irritability, helplessness, exhaustion, isolation, and powerlessness. I recently received this email and found it to be so powerful and quite honestly, reminiscent of my own earlier experiences as an Activity Director. I worked in one facility in which I actually resigned three times! Luckily I had supportive administration who realized my resignations were related to burnout and that I needed support and guidance.

For this reason I had to address this issue further. Many Activity Directors go through times of such despair and burnout that they actually leave the profession that they used to LOVE! Sometimes we act out of impulse and resign out of sheer frustration and burnout. Please try some of these ideas BEFORE making decisions that could change your life or your career path.

**ASK** for help when you need it. It doesn't mean you are weak, it means you are smart!

Find a **BALANCE**. Try to balance all aspects of your work such as office time, resident time, staff time, you time, and so on. You must also find balance between work, family, friends, and so on.

**COMMUNICATE** your needs, issues, responsibilities, etc. to the appropriate individuals, especially your supervisor/boss. Don't assume he/she knows that you are feeling stressed or burnt out.

**DELEGATE** your responsibilities when appropriate. Even residents, family members and volunteers can help.

**EDUCATE** anyone and everyone about the importance of therapeutic activities and quality of life.

Make time for **FAMILY and FRIENDS**.

Set **GOALS** for yourself and your department as well as personally and professionally.

Have a **HEALTHY** lifestyle. Get enough rest, eat right and exercise.

Find the **INSPIRATION**. What inspire you? Is it the residents? A mentor? A religion or spirituality preference? Nature? Poetry? Music? Once you find what inspires you, then **MAKE** time to pursue your inspirational cues.

Review your **JOB DESCRIPTION**. It's important to know exactly what your responsibilities are.

**KNOWLEDGE** is power so educate yourself in all aspects of activities, therapeutic recreation, the regulations, policies, the population you serve, and so on.

Know your own **LIMITS**. Seriously consider what you can and cannot do in terms of time, skills and resources.

**MARKET, MARKET, MARKET**. When you let others know all about the various activities, special events and programs that you offer, you will receive more compliments, recognition and appreciation. This in turn, boosts your confidence and morale.

Say **NO**. Activity professionals are often afraid to say they cannot help with some special project or new responsibilities and the profession often becomes the dumping ground for all those unwanted tasks. With a positive demeanor and some negotiations, sometimes it's ok to politely decline.

Schedule **OFFICE** time. It's ok to close the door and get your managerial duties done.

**PRIORITIZE**. Setting priorities is often difficult for activity professionals, everything seems like a priority. But it's important to look at deadlines, schedules, and needs.

**QUIT** doing what you are doing if it continuously makes you feel this way. But before doing so, be sure to try this A-Z list. If there is no relief, then ask if you can be transferred, take a leave of absence or ask if there are other positions available.

Schedule **RESIDENT** time. Nothing reminds us more of why we started working in the activity profession, more than spending quality, uninterrupted time with the residents. Designate certain activities that only you facilitate like a support group, Activity Planning Committee, Leisure Education or activities that you enjoy the most. It will rejuvenate your spirit every time! The key is to let go of all other responsibilities during your resident time and just enjoy the interaction.

**SOCIALIZE** and network. Joining local, state and national professional organizations can provide you with much support, information, and inspiration. Many people love attending conferences and group meetings for the networking and sharing that is offered.

**TIME MANAGEMENT**. Time management is often an issue for Activity Directors who are trying to manage a department, facilitate activities, train and educate, market, attend meetings, write reports, recruit staff and volunteers, provide documentation, talk to family members, raise money, and so on. The list is endless. It's important to find a time management system that works for you. My favorite time management system comes from Steve McClatchy, President of Alleer Training and Consulting. You can read his article, "How to Save an Hour a Day" at [www.alleer.com/Article-Findanhour.htm](http://www.alleer.com/Article-Findanhour.htm).

**UNITE!** All for one and one for all! If you're a team player and you help out other departments and colleagues, chances are they will help you in return.

**VENT!** Don't let it ferment! But do so to the appropriate people. Don't vent to your staff, residents, volunteers, family members, etc. You must remain positive around those individuals. Vent to other AD's, certain co-workers or people you trust. Close your office door and vent if you need to.

**WRITE** it down. Studies show that writing is very therapeutic. When you feel that work and life are becoming overwhelming and stressful, write down your feelings. What is the cause of these feelings? How exactly do you feel? Are you sad, angry, bitter, frustrated, exhausted, etc.? What will help you feel better?

Remember that **XANADU** does not exist. It is a mythical, fabulous place that was allegedly situated in contemporary China thousands of years ago. This place was protected from external hazards by a special shield that created a "paradise" environment for its inhabitants. Each place you work will have its own issues and challenges.

**Schedule YOU** time! It's of utmost importance to get enough rest, relaxation, and leisure time for you. Activity Professionals are the worst at self-recreating!

Create a **ZEN** garden. Zen gardens are said to help heal and relax the mind, body, and soul. Mini Zen gardens are common in stressful business jobs. This consists of a small box of sand with miniature rocks and a miniature rake. When you get stressed, you can rake the sand in slow strokes while breathing deeply and feel the calming effect! To make your own, affordable desktop Zen garden visit <http://www.coachingyourcreativity.com/articles/26ways/mini-zen-garden-project.shtml>.

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