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SPEAKER: Welcome to season 6 of the Prodcast, Google's podcast about site-reliability engineering and production software. Earlier this year, The Prodcast team recorded short sessions with participants at SREcon Americas 2026. Here's what we learned talking with people at the conference ...

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MATT SIEGLER: Welcome back to the *Prodcast*. We're going to try something a little unorthodox today, from a workshop's-- was it, what, a discussion? What was it, a workshop?

SAM ANDERSON: Yeah, it was a discussion track here at SREcon.

MATT SIEGLER: I'm Matt here with--

SAM ANDERSON: Sam Anderson.

MATT SIEGLER: --Sam, great. And the workshop was on burnout.

SAM ANDERSON: Yes.

MATT SIEGLER: Ooh, a topic not near and dear to anyone, but definitely, unfortunately, very close to us in operations-type work. And SREs are, of course near that all the time. So we're going to try this. so I'm going to read these prompts.

SAM ANDERSON: Yep.

MATT SIEGLER: And you're going to respond.

SAM ANDERSON: Yeah. And specifically, in this context, I mean, I think it's important for most SREs or people that live in production to be very, very cognizant of burnout. And so, yeah.

MATT SIEGLER: All right. Let's go. Let's roll with it.

SAM ANDERSON: Sure.

MATT SIEGLER: All right. All right, Sam, what does burnout mean to you?

SAM ANDERSON: Burnout, to me, and signs that are there-- so you have lowered motivation in a role. Burnout is more akin to PTSD. You stop taking care of yourself. You potentially get a short temper. You have failure to launch syndrome, even the big D word, depression and despair.

You need to rest. The tunnel becomes dark. It's not light like you normally want to be, especially in our line of industry. You feel trapped, and it's hard to accept help.

MATT SIEGLER: That last one really grabbed me. So a lot of introverted behavior in our industry as it is.

SAM ANDERSON: Yep.

MATT SIEGLER: Managers might not be able to even spot what's going on. Say a little bit more about the last two there, especially the last one.

SAM ANDERSON: So the feeling trapped and hard to accept help, right? So let me give you some context about maybe how I personally like to operate. And specifically, I prefer to lean into the positivity of things in general.

And so what I want to do, by way of this, is help shine a light to the tunnel for folks. Whoever this reaches, please make sure that you reach out for help, et cetera. But in the hard to accept help, be willing, maybe, even to accept help in that context.

And the feeling trapped-- if you're in a system from the SRE space, what do you do in a major incident? You look and you diagnose. And you look, typically, outside the system. You understand some of the architecture that's involved. And so, yeah, I mean, does that maybe help answer that question?

MATT SIEGLER: Yeah, I think so. And I think the alone part really grabbed me because what this conference is all about is about ecosystems. And sometimes, you're in an organization that is just fledgling with SRE, and ecosystem hasn't even been created.

I was receiving help from my wife., and so you could be doing that alone. I mean, you have peers, but they might not be signing on for what's necessary to support you and your function. Let's try this next one. Have you ever recovered from burnout? What are some strategies?

SAM ANDERSON: Yeah, so in general, the recovery from burnout, so think of it by way of SRE space. So you first need to stop the bleeding, right? You need to mitigate the incident, OK? So in this context, you need to potentially horizontally scale, right? And so what that looks like is maybe adding additional people to your team by talking to your manager or something along those lines.

Then once you've fixed the DDoS impact or whatever in this context, then you need to move on to the PRB space. You need to try to understand the root cause, and then deploy mitigation actions.

So what that looks specifically is go to the gym. Take care of your body better. Build a system to prevent.

Create another reliable system to where, that way, you can easier detect the signs of burnout before you go down that dark tunnel. You need to have peace. I mean, you may even need to change your job, or just environment, or even overall career, right?

One thing that I've considered, at certain points-- I've been in the industry for quite a while-- is what does it look like whenever I'm, ultimately, going to retire from tech, right? And so what that looks like for me is spending more time with my family, specifically my lovely wife-- hello, Kelsey-- and just changing your environment.

And so, get a hobby, socialize, so going to events like SREcon. And then, ultimately, if you're incapable of actually seeking those help or building that strategy, go to therapy. Therapy is very, very helpful.

Maybe even-- back to SRE space-- create a severity matrix. Understand what levels of intake that you're receiving and go from there, right? And on the other side of as far as whenever you are experiencing burnout, try to detect that better.

And what I mean here is whenever it's hard to accept help, be open to receiving help. And so I think that those are strategies, really, to be capable of recovery of burnout.

MATT SIEGLER: Something you said that really caught my attention is treating yourself like a system, that you are measuring signals, taking actions on, triaging, and taking yourself seriously as a system rather than-- and that burnout is when you aren't, perhaps.

SAM ANDERSON: Exactly. And I think what that really does-- I think from the psychology perspective, I mean, I'm no expert here but, basically, I think what that means is you have to compartmentalize the burnout to be capable of looking outside the system, so yeah.

MATT SIEGLER: Yeah. You mentioned-- how about some signs you're getting close, though?

SAM ANDERSON: Sure. So I mean, it's back to you being able to compartmentalize, and then being capable better, actually-- that's a good topic. So are people not engaging with you? Do you feel alone? Really take inventory, maybe, of your own personal self.

How to detect-- I mean, really, maybe just create an SLI, right? Understanding from the SRE space, what are the indicators? Take an inventory and do the whole inventory of making SLI to SLO.

MATT SIEGLER: Interesting. All right. What unmet needs do you have? How does that manifest as stress in your life?

SAM ANDERSON: So I think instead of answering that question, what I'm going to do is maybe just tell a personal story of how I experienced burnout. And my hope here is that whoever is listening here, that they really hear it and are more capable of identification of overall burnout out, and really, really maybe even use this as a runbook.

And so, for myself, I've been in the industry for a while. I've worked for many different

companies, et cetera. So this is not specific to my current lived experience whatsoever. So with that, there was a period of time where I became very unhealthy. And that was maybe one of my SLIs or that was one of my indicators of an issue here. And so, finally, I got to a point where I was just actually completely burnt out and completely done. Didn't want to get out of bed, the whole nine yards. So this was multiple signals that I had to synthesize to really understand and identify that I was actually experiencing burnout in this perspective.

I was receiving help from my wife. She was capable of detecting it. And so she's like, OK, well, how can we fix this? And so I use a systems engineering approach. I was like, OK, well, what does good look like for me?

And what that meant to me is I started accepting help, asking for help, and getting more physically fit, changing my environment, employed the help of a personal trainer-- thanks, Victoria and Mark-- and set a whole process to where-- so whether I was remote or in office, at the time, I enforced myself to create a commute.

So what that looks like for me, now that I've actually recovered from that really deep pit, is I make sure that I go to the gym every morning. I drive. It's a 15 minute drive back and forth, and go to the gym, connect with people, be in a different environment, maybe even get some work done there, too. That's fine.

You have to. Obviously, if you're in a working profession, you have to. And so, yeah, basically creating a system to where that way, you can actually prevent an incident.

And so instead of in burnout-- and back in context, in SRE, right-- you're leaning more into the proactive side and fixing your own system at a level to where you're no longer responding to the next incident. You're no longer getting paged in your brain or even concerned about the next page. And so, yeah.

MATT SIEGLER: Fascinating. Well, we're going to have to wrap here.

SAM ANDERSON: Sure.

MATT SIEGLER: This is incredible. I never thought that you're always on call for the system that is you.

SAM ANDERSON: Yes.

MATT SIEGLER: So please, be careful out there. Thank you.

SAM ANDERSON: Thank you.

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SPEAKER: You've been listening to the *Prodcast*, Google's podcast on site reliability engineering. Visit us on the web at [SRE.Google](https://sre.google), where you can find books, papers, workshops, videos, and more about SRE.

This season is brought to you by our hosts Jordan Greenberg, Steve McGhee, Florian Rathgeber, and Matt Siegler, with contributions from many SREs behind the scenes. The *Prodcast* is produced by Paul Guglielmino and Salim Verji. The *Prodcast* theme is "Telebot" by Javi Beltran and Jordan Greenberg.

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