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APRIL 2026

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HOW UPROOTING ISOLATION LEADS TO EMPATHY, INCLUSION AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

By **Georgia Rittenberg**

Hustle culture has left little room for connection and compassion. That lack of connection and compassion is what creates burnout: a sense of isolation when managing a load too big for one person. We're starting to rebel against the idea that we should be striving as individuals, but changing our actions is very different. I'm still working on making that change. As the CEO of a tech company, everything is telling me to move faster and do more. I'll be honest, it's hard to resist the impulse and there are times when I don't.

Putting Corporate Values to Work

For those times, I have a set of reminders (aka company values) that bring me, and our entire organization back to the idea of empathy and compassion. Our brand promise is that we are the human side of hardware. To make sure we're fulfilling our promise, we created a set of values that articulate that humanity. Our first value is "*we instead of me*", followed by our second value, "*act with empathy*." I know as soon as a CEO starts talking about values, people tune out because most organizations' values take a back seat to profits. However, our team has engrained the values into the core decision making process at a business level. The executive staff and our team are evaluated based on the adherence to our values and we are constantly evolving our processes to be more aligned with our values. When we center our business around being empathetic to others, we regain our humanity, community becomes the norm and burnout becomes increasingly rare.

Isolation: The Hidden Cause of Burnout

We don't talk about the isolation of the workplace enough, and it's a core element of burnout. It's not enough to schedule a few happy hours and holiday parties. Isolation relates to the desire people have for feeling valued. When people are worried about their value, they hold onto their expertise, and don't share their workload with others because they think they will be less valuable to an organization and, therefore, replaceable. To relieve this isolation within ComputerCare, we are now asking everyone if they are the only person who can do their work. When the answer is yes, we work on a process to spread that work out among others.

Rather than diffusing an individual's value, it increases the skillset of multiple people and folks get to see more parts of the business. People want to help others, and by encouraging sharing expertise and workload, people reduce their isolation and improve their outlook.

Engaged Minds Lead to Sustainability

Sustainability is often shorthand for environmental activities. For ComputerCare, sustainability is part of our value proposition. We repair laptops for enterprise organizations, extending their lifecycle and reducing waste. ComputerCare also has a commitment to our local communities and we offer paid time off for volunteering. We work with non-profit organizations, offering our services at reduced rates. We also have a scholarship program that awards our current employees with a cash bonus to pursue their education in whatever way they wish to. These efforts may not directly impact the environment, but they create a community leading to more care and more action on everyone's part to improve our surroundings, whether that's a neighborhood, an organization or the planet.

We've experienced a growing sense of isolation in our culture and we've all felt the burnout that results. If leaders encourage the natural desire for connection and community rather than resist it, burnout can be reduced, or if we all work together, eliminated.

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