# Using time tracking to prevent burnout on your team.

Learn how timesheet data gives you insight into who's working too much, so you can catch burnout before it becomes an issue.

HARVEST

# Introduction

As a manager, you want what's best for the people on your team. You want to empower them to do great work while leaving them room to have a life outside the office. You understand that in order to be successful, a business needs to respect the time and well-being of its employees—not just because it's good for business, but because it's the right thing to do.

One of the biggest threats to employee well-being is burnout—feelings of chronic work-related stress, exhaustion, and disillusionment that leave people unable to be totally present and engaged either at work or at home. Burnout can come with some pretty severe health costs for individuals, and it can disrupt the smooth functioning of a team, leading to reduced productivity and high turnover.

Many factors contribute to burnout, but one of the big ones is overwork. When someone on your team is consistently logging long hours, it can be a sign they're in danger of burning out. That's where time tracking comes in. It can help give you insight into who's working too much and help you address the problem. It's even a useful tool for proactively preventing burnout.

This guide will cover how time tracking can help you

- Spot team members in danger of burning out
- Work with them to fix the problem
- Encourage your team to be proactive about preventing burnout
- Improve estimates to stop burnout before it happens

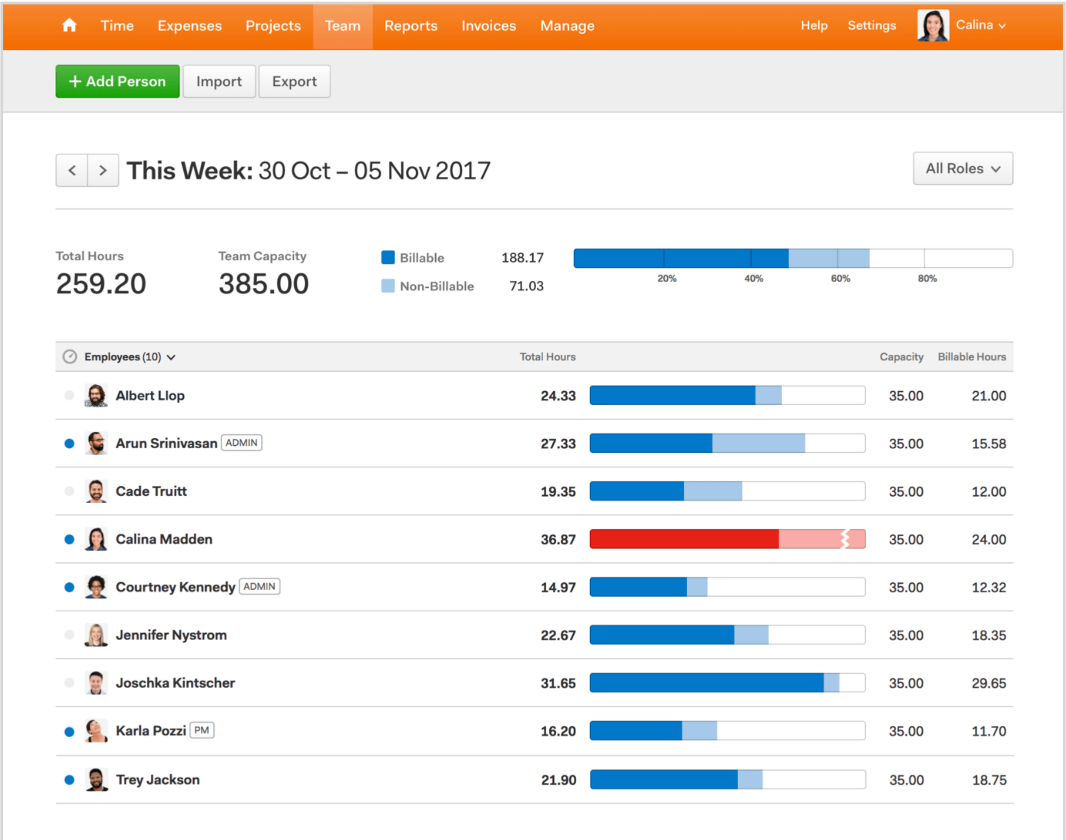
# Spotting burnout

The first step to combat burnout is to think about your team's weekly capacity, or how much people should be working every week. There will always be bad days and busy weeks, but many businesses never stop to contemplate what a healthy number of hours looks like in an ideal situation. What this number is will depend on the nature of your business. However, there's research that suggests that productivity falls off sharply after fifty hours, and that anything over thirty-nine may be a risk to personal well-being.

Here at Harvest we set our team's capacity at thirty-five hours per week. That's the amount of time we think allows our team to be most productive, while also allowing them to live healthy, fulfilling lives away from work.

At first blush this might not seem like a lot, but keep in mind that your team's capacity should be the amount of time that people actually spend working. It doesn't include things like lunch or extended coffee breaks or walks around the block. If someone's putting in forty hours of actual work, it means they're spending way more time 'at work' than they would in a typical nine-to-five, forty-hour work week.

We feel so strongly about this number that we even built it into Harvest itself. In the Team section, you can review how much time your team has tracked, and see how it compares to their capacity. The default capacity for every new account is thirty-five hours per week. Even though you can change this number, our hope in making thirty-five hours the default is that every team that uses Harvest will stop and think about what capacity is truly reasonable for their team.




*Harvest makes it easy to see how much your team is working and compare this number to their capacity. Learn more*

Once you've settled on a weekly capacity number, you'll want to see how much of this capacity your team is regularly using up. If someone's coming in right at their capacity, or a little under, things are probably okay. If someone's over capacity by more than a few hours, look back at previous weeks. If it's a one-off, this week was likely just busy. But if they've been over capacity for several weeks in a row, that means it's time to have a conversation about what's going on.

# Talking to your team

Once you've spotted someone who's working over their capacity, take a deeper dive into their timesheets to see what's taking up the most time. Timesheet data can give you a lot of good clues about what's going on, but ultimately the problem isn't going to be solved until you sit down with that person. Only by talking to them can you get to the root of the problem.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you look at their timesheets that can help guide your conversation:

**Is there a particular project that's sucking up more of their time than it should?** Has it run off the rails in some way? If the client keeps expanding the scope, maybe you can jump in and push back. If there's a certain task that's taking longer than expected—like a programming problem that's proven thornier than anticipated—see if you can shift someone else to the project for a few weeks.

**Is internal process cutting into their most important projects?** They might be working late to make up the difference. Are there meetings or email chains that not everyone needs to be on? Are there weekly updates that can be streamlined? Is there an internal project that can be delayed until other work has hit a lull?

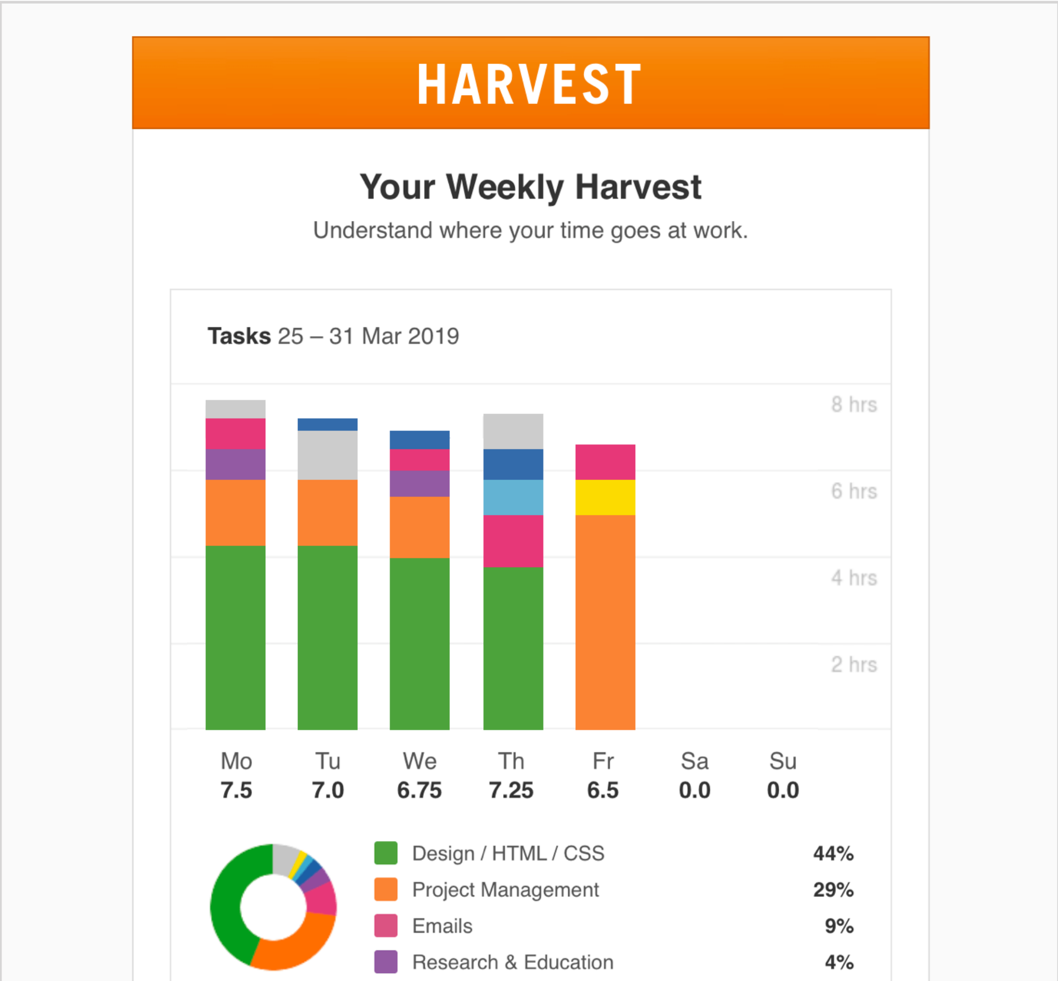
**Is there some work that can be shifted to other people?** Are there things on their plate that can be re-prioritized? Time tracking, paired with a team scheduling tool like Forecast, can be a great help in making these types of decisions. You can easily see who has extra time in the coming weeks to take on a little more work.

**Is it time to hire someone else?** If several people on your team are chronically over their capacity, that might mean it's time to start the hiring process.

# Empowering individuals

Let the people on your team know that they don't have to wait for you to notice that they're getting burned out. Encourage them to take accountability for their own well-being and work with you to help make sure they don't get burned out.

Many people dread time tracking. They think it's a burden that doesn't help them in any way. Make it clear to your team that their tracked time can help them understand how they work. It can let them know if they're devoting large blocks of time to their most important work, or if their day is broken up by interruptions and less significant tasks.




*Harvest makes it easy to analyze your tracked time with a weekly digest of where you spent your time. [Learn more]*

All of this information can be a great resource when they talk to their managers about how they're feeling at work. If someone's actual workload is leading to burnout, having the hard numbers can make it easier to talk about shifting projects around or re-prioritizing work. The data helps elevate the conversation to a more productive space by taking assumptions out of it.

Perhaps the biggest change that individual team members can make, though, is using time tracking to hold themselves accountable to their biggest priorities. Each person should take some time at the beginning of the week to identify the two or three main things they want to accomplish. They can then look back at their timesheets to see how good of a job they did at holding themselves to those priorities.

Encourage your team to ask questions about how they spent their time: Did they devote long stretches of focused work to their main priorities? Did they tackle them at the beginning of the week or procrastinate until the last minute? Were they constantly distracted by meetings and pings?

Create a culture where it's okay for people to reach out to a meeting organizer to ask if their presence is really necessary. Encourage people to schedule blocks of focused work time on their calendars, and to defend this time from meetings. Depending on your line of work, it may be possible for team members to close their email for a few hours or snooze notifications on Slack.

This can help people make sure they have enough time for the work that really creates value and the work that's meaningful to them. It can help them make sure they have time for the things that will help them achieve their goals and grow as a professional. This sense of fulfillment and growth can go a long way toward heading off burnout.

# Improving estimates

One of the biggest causes of burnout is when there's misalignment between expectations and reality, especially when it comes to time. This often manifests itself as the difference between how long you estimated a project would take, and how long it actually takes to complete.

For example, if you estimated that a project would only take twenty hours to design, but it ends up taking over forty hours, that designer is going to be stretched really thin, especially if they're on a deadline.

Estimates are not an exact science—they're bound to be a little off—but if it regularly takes your team longer to complete a project than you anticipate, that can create trouble. Projects start to pile up on top of each other, deadlines become tight, and people end up working longer hours to make it work. If you never manage to improve your estimates, you'll never really be able to solve the burnout problem, because people will always be stretched too thin.

Time tracking can help you come up with more realistic estimates, because it gives you the ability to look back at similar projects you completed in the past, and see exactly how long each element of that project took. Then, when a new project rolls in, you can create an estimate for each individual element of the project based on actual historical data.

When you finish a project, make a habit of comparing how much you estimated each person on that project would work with how many hours they actually tracked. This will allow you to refine your estimates moving forward, so they get better over time. More realistic estimates mean that you'll have a better handle on your team's workload, and there will be fewer surprises for them.

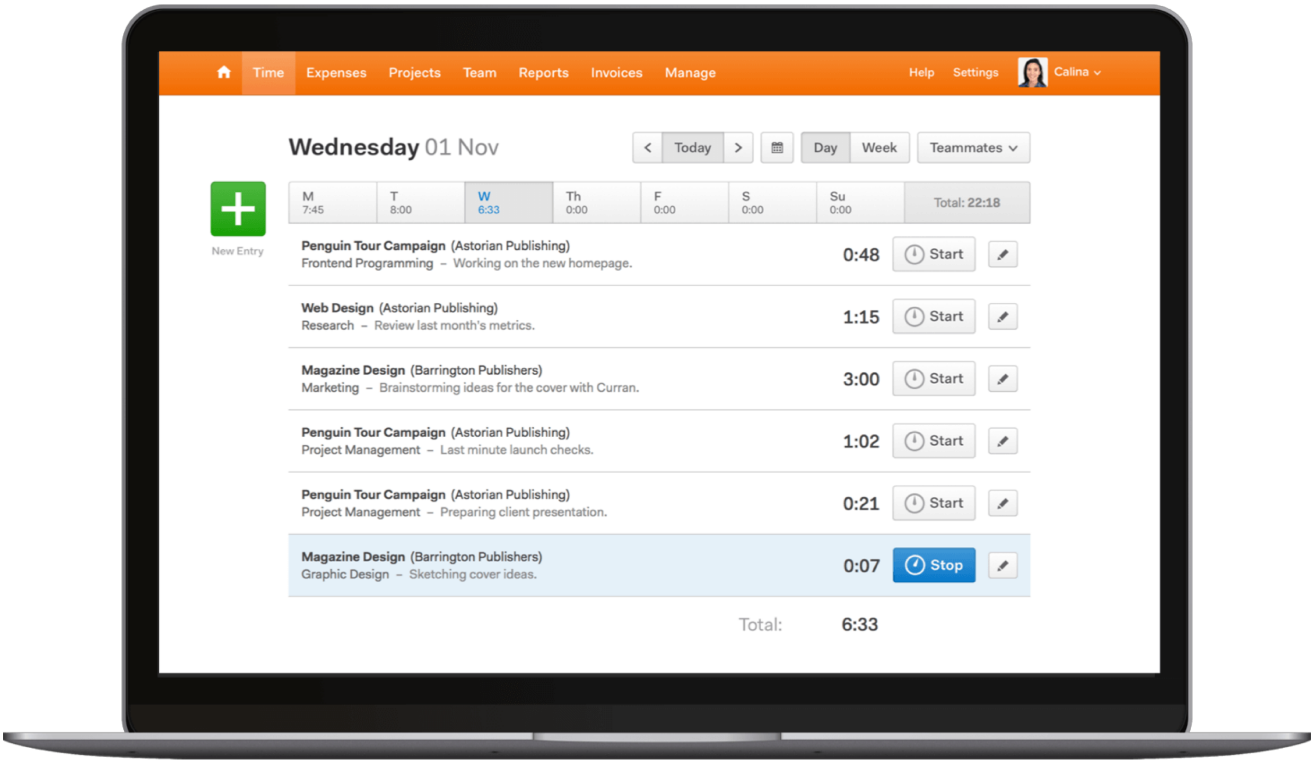
For more information about using time tracking to improve your estimates, check out our guide.
**Read now**

# Conclusion

Burnout is a complicated phenomenon. At the end of the day, it takes a human connection—honest conversations and empathy—to help people in danger of burning out. But time tracking is an important tool that can help you pinpoint the problem. The data you gather from time tracking helps surface important questions and gives you insight into elements of your team's work that you didn't have before. It also gives individuals the tools they need to take the initiative.

Preventing burnout is only one of many reasons to track time. Time tracking can help you bill your clients, keep your projects profitable, and improve your pricing. Plus it provides data that can change the way you manage your team.

Harvest makes time tracking painless, so you get the data you need without driving your team crazy. Plus, it turns timesheet data into intuitive visual reports that make it easy to dive into the details of your business. Learn more about Harvest or start a free, thirty-day trial to test it out for yourself.




# Team-approved time tracking.

Getting your team to track time shouldn't be a battle. Harvest makes it easy, so you get the insight you need without driving them crazy.

## Track time

Flexible time tracking options that work for your workflow.

## Get info about your business

Intuitive reports that shed light on your team and projects.

## Invoice clients and get paid online

Easy online invoices that help you get paid faster.