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Sustain Your Spark: Navigating Burnout in Grassroots Work

Colvin Hedgepeth

Senior Director of Client Services
Aperio Philanthropy



Gentle Reminders

Burnout is a sensitive topic –
here are some reminders to
keep in mind.

01

Let's make this a safe space together. Stories
stay in this room – share only lessons learned.

02

This is both an introspective and interactive
session – meet yourself where you are today.

03

Hold space for different experiences. Burnout
doesn't look the same for everyone in this room.



Pulse check

**Raise your hand
if you've ever
felt...**



**drained,
overwhelmed, or
depleted by the
demands placed on
you.**

**Raise your hand
if you've ever
felt...**



**disconnected from
your work, the
people you serve,
or your mission.**

**Raise your hand
if you've ever
felt...**



**...like your work
doesn't make a
difference, no
matter how hard
you try.**



Good & bad news...

you are not alone.

On our lineup for this session!

Here are the topics we will be discussing:

- Name and normalize burnout
- Gain understanding on burnout
- Identify values and energy drains
- Explore boundaries
- Apply learnings to grassroots activism
- Walk away with ideas on how to sustain your spark

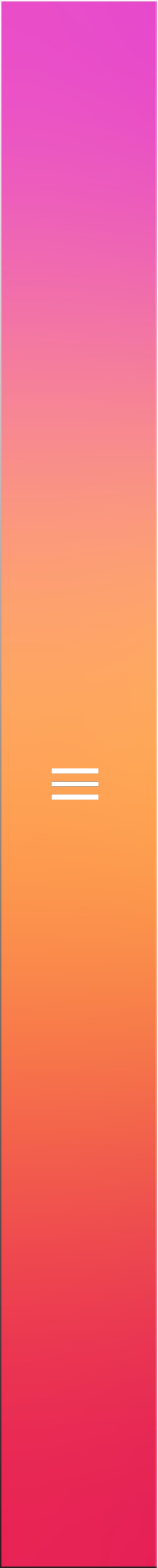




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Burnout is at historic levels

- Nearly 90% of nonprofit leaders are concerned about burnout in their organizations¹
- 74% of surveyed workers link political uncertainty with burnout²
- 55% of U.S. workers report burnout³
- 50% of nonprofits say burnout is impacting hiring and retention¹

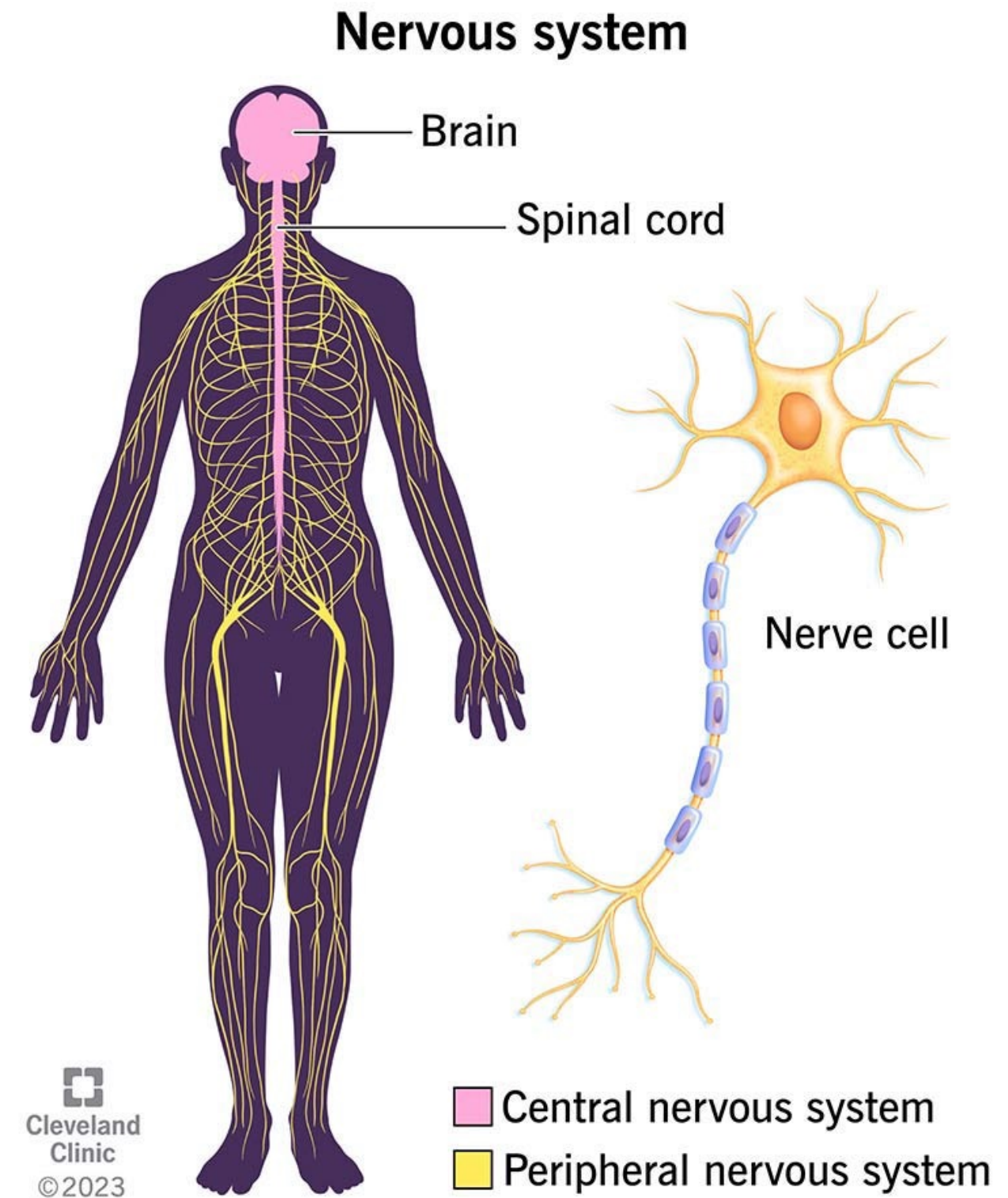
1. Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2024 State of Nonprofit Survey
2. Modern Health, 2025 survey
3. Eagle Hill Consulting, Workforce Burnout Survey 2025

IT'S FINE

EVERYTHING IS FINE



Understanding your nervous system



Stress cycle

The full biological process in which the body responds to a perceived threat (stressor), activates stress-response systems, and then returns to baseline through recovery mechanisms.

01: Alarm phase

Threat or stressor is perceived
Stress hormones released
Classic fight or flight response

02: Resistance phase

Body stays in heightened state
Marked by increased heart rate, alertness
Costly if prolonged

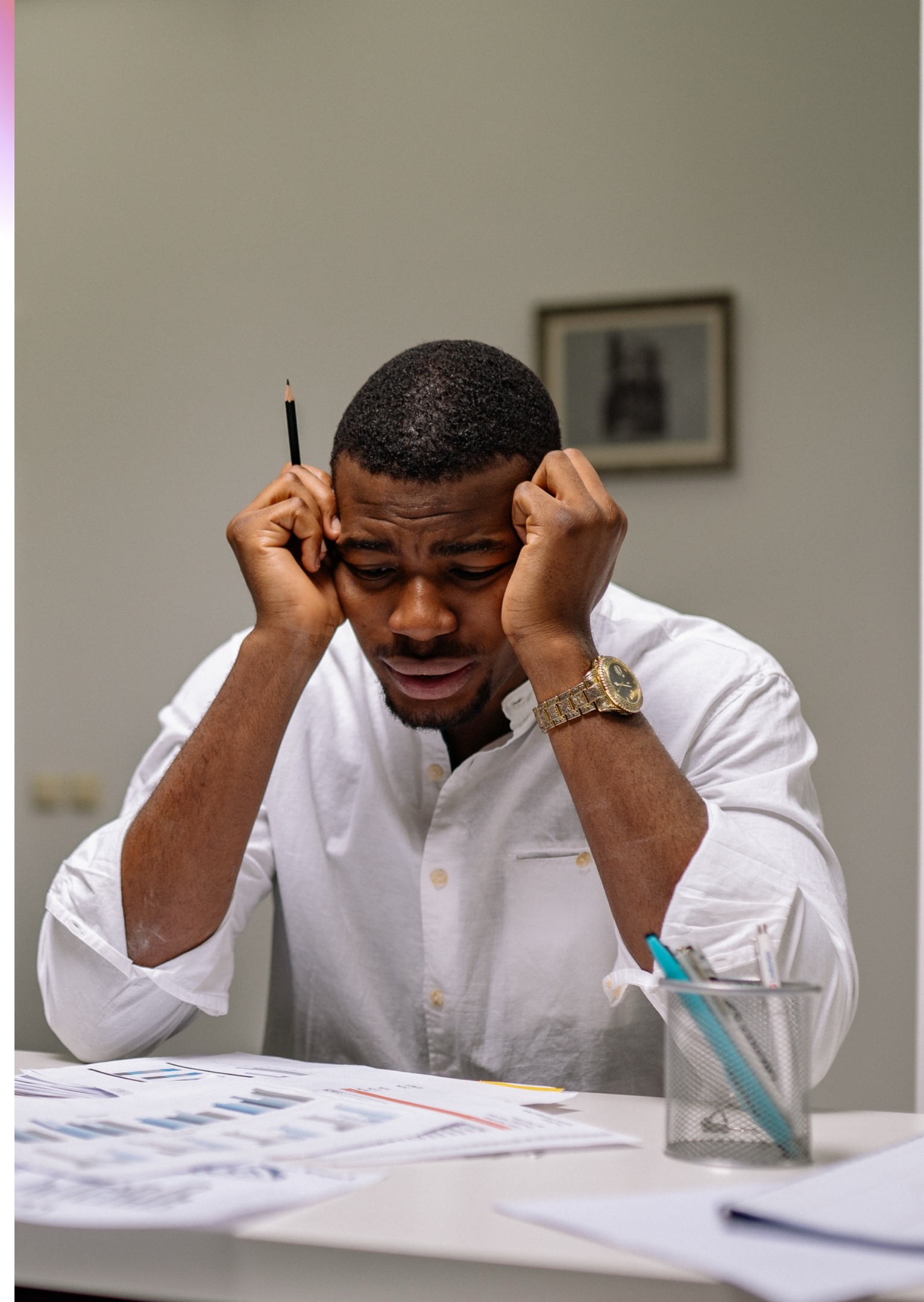
03: Resolution phase

Parasympathetic nervous system brings body back to baseline
Physiological symptoms normalize

What is Burnout?

Burnout is the result of chronic stress when the stress cycle is not completed.

- 1. Emotional exhaustion:** feeling depleted, overwhelmed, and unable to give more
- 2. Depersonalization:** feeling disconnected, cynical, numb, or detached from others and your work
- 3. Reduced sense of accomplishment:** feeling ineffective, inadequate, or like nothing you do matters



Movement burnout

Burnout caused not just by workload, but by sustained moral urgency + structural barriers to change.





**What are ways you might
complete the stress
cycle?**

Completing the cycle

If your body doesn't complete the cycle, you remain in a hyper-aware state which can exacerbate presence of additional stressors.



Positive coping mechanisms

- Practice self-compassion
- Exercise
- Body scan
- Call a friend or family member
- Take a nap
- Do a creative activity
- ***Others?***

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“To be “well” is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk, adventure, or excitement, back to safety and calm, and out again. Stress is not bad for you; being stuck is bad for you.”

– Amelia & Emily Nagoski, Burnout

Exercise 1:

Values Discovery

- Identify 5-7 values that are important to you
- Focus on 1-2 that feel most alive or urgent to you right now
- Reflect on your work – where do you feel most in alignment with those values? And where do you feel friction?

Sample values

Accountability
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Altruism
Ambition
Authenticity
Balance
Beauty
Being the best
Belonging
Career
Caring
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Contentment
Contribution
Cooperation
Courage

Creativity
Curiosity
Dignity
Diversity
Environment
Efficiency
Equality
Ethics
Excellence
Fairness
Faith
Family
Forgiveness
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Generosity
Giving back
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Harmony

Health
Home
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Impact
Inclusion
Independence
Initiative
Integrity
Intuition
Job security
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Love
Loyalty
Nature

Openness
Optimism
Order
Parenting
Patience
Patriotism
Peace
Perseverance
Power
Pride
Recognition
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Risk-taking
Safety
Security
Self-discipline
Self-expression
Self-respect
Serenity
Service

Service
Simplicity
Spirituality
Sportsmanship
Stewardship
Success
Teamwork
Thrift
Time
Tradition
Travel
Trust
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Usefulness
Vision
Vulnerability
Wealth
Well-being
Wisdom
Write your own!

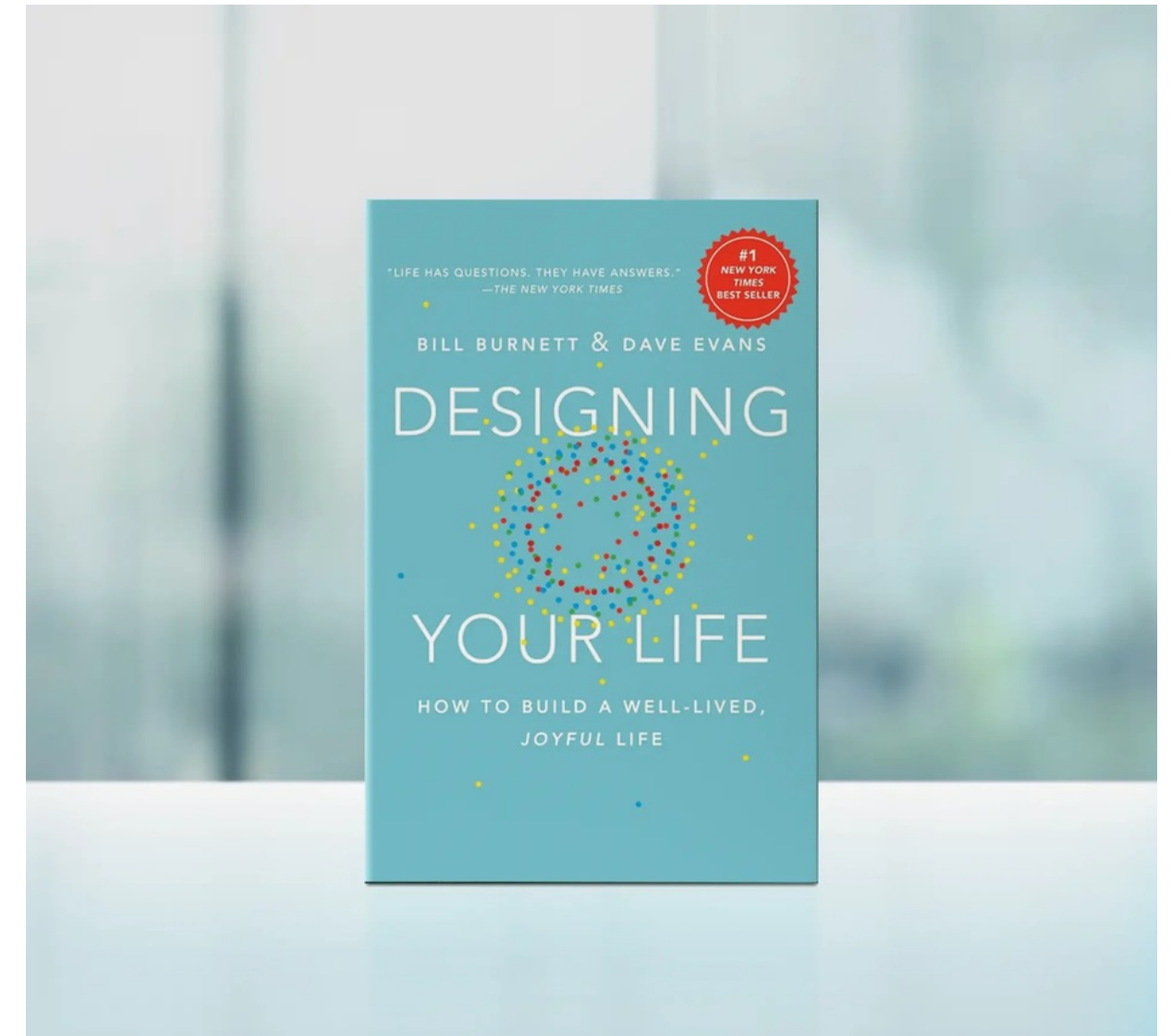


Any surprises?

Exercise 2:

Energy Audit

- Think about your typical workweek. List out your top 5–7 recurring tasks or meetings.
- Mark each task as energizing, neutral, or draining
- Reflect on which draining tasks could be reduced, reassigned, or restructured?



Check out **Designing Your Life** by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans for more exercises like this!



**What patterns
emerged from your
energy audit?**



Exercise 3:

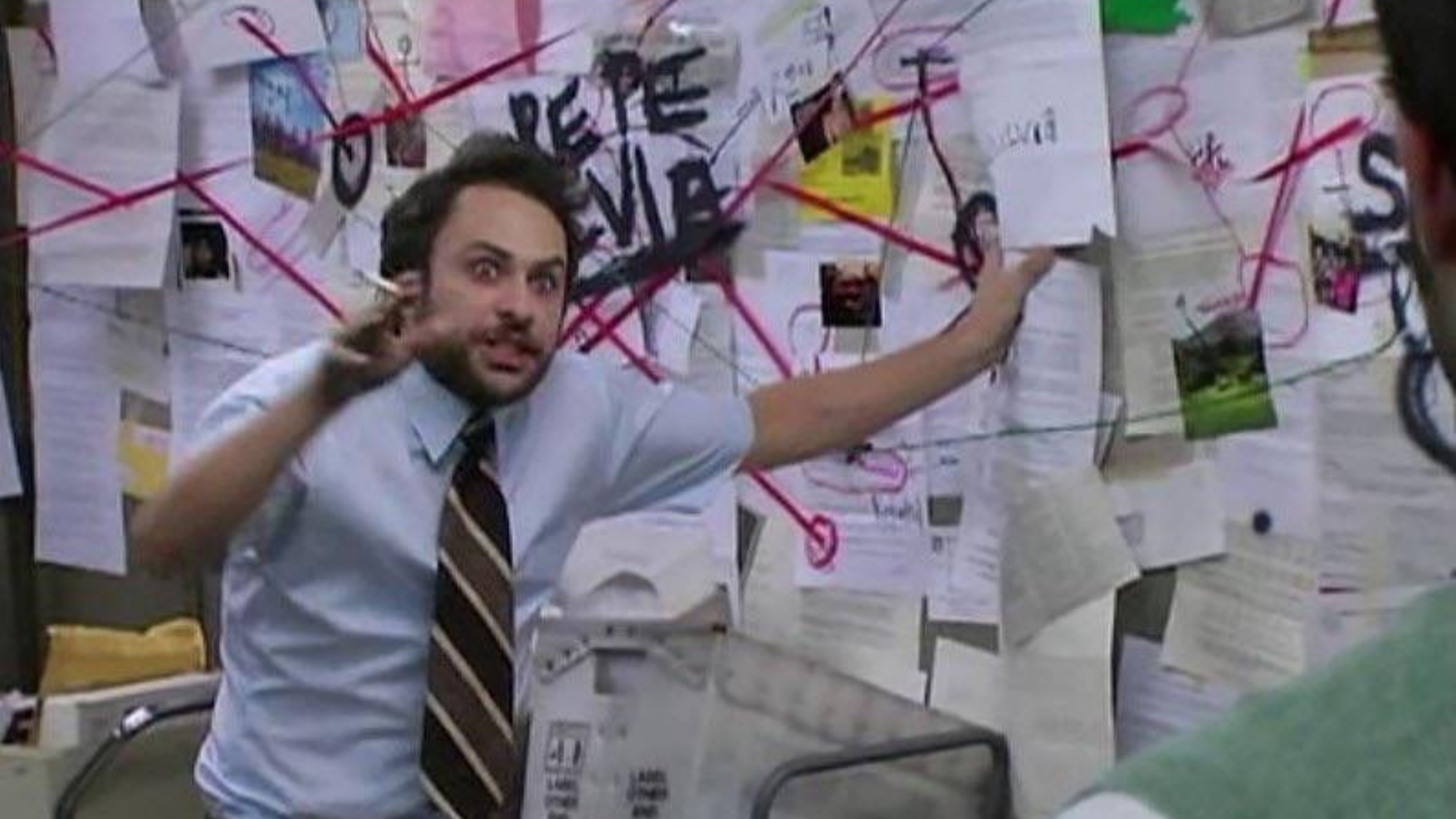
Boundary setting

- Look back at your values and energy audit: What is one boundary you want to set this week / month / year?
- Who do you need to communicate that boundary to, and how?



Any a-ha moments?





How do you sustain your spark in activism?

1. Find a clearing
2. Gather the tinder
3. Find a spark
4. Tend the flames

© Karen Waldron



Exercise 4: Build your campfire

Create a sustainable path
ahead for your activism, or
your community's efforts.

01: Find your clearing

What's my realistic capacity right now? What
boundaries do I need to protect my energy?

02: Gather the tinder

What skills, strengths, or ways of engaging
actually energize me?

03: Find a spark

What specific cause/issue sits at the intersection
of my gifts and what the world needs?

04: Tend the flames

What's ONE thing I'll protect (i.e. rest, community,
joy etc.) to stay in this for the long game?

Recap

01

Values are your north star.

If you feel out of alignment, start with your values. Where you out of alignment and what small actions can you take to change that.

02

Energy = currency. Use yours wisely!

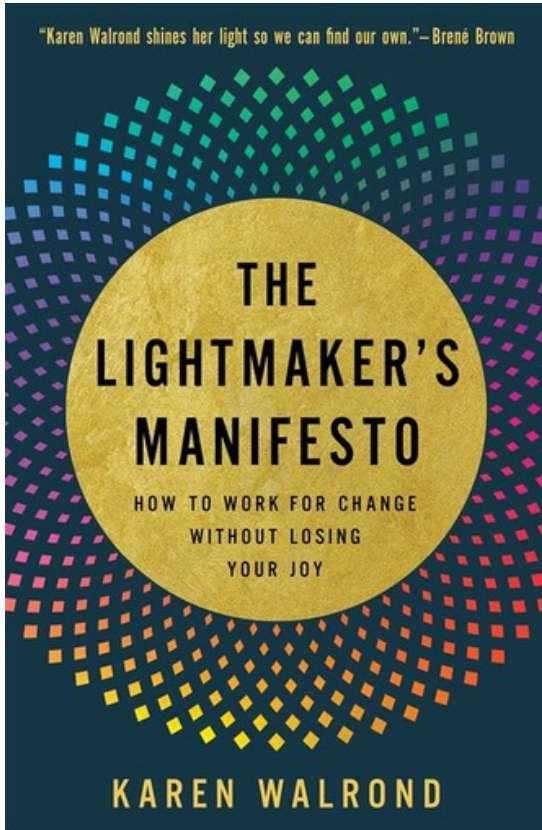
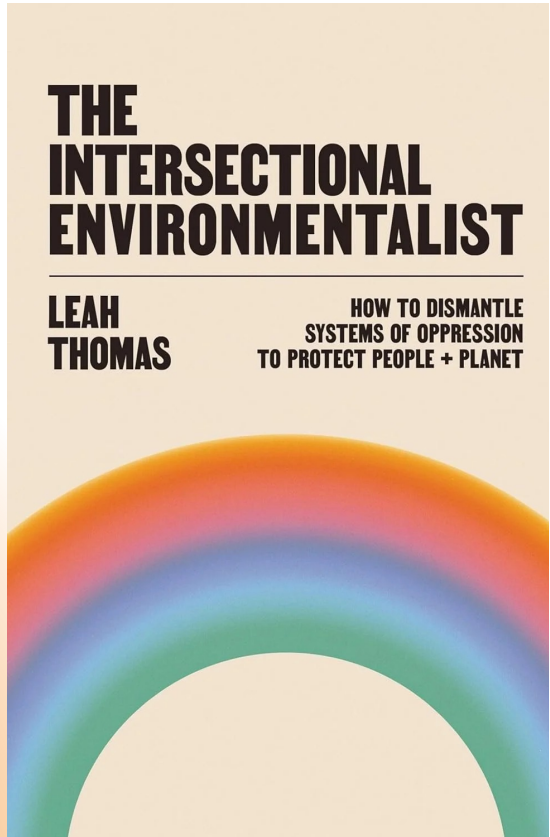
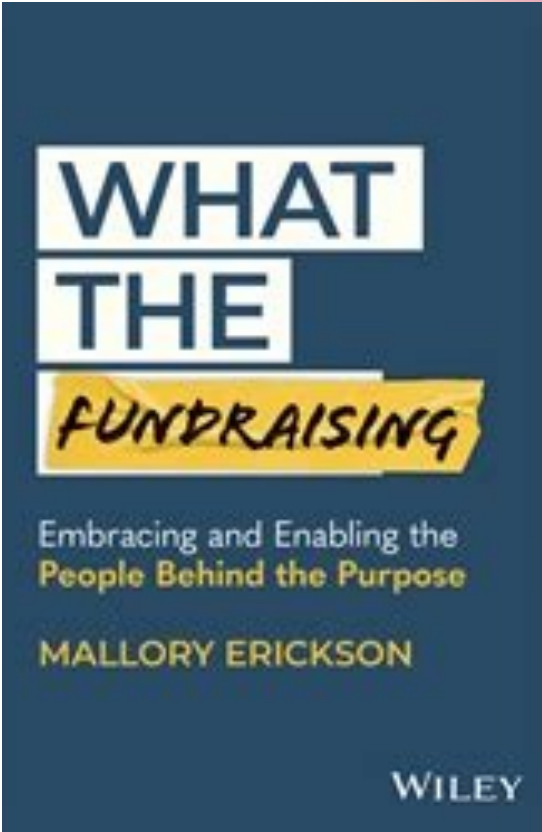
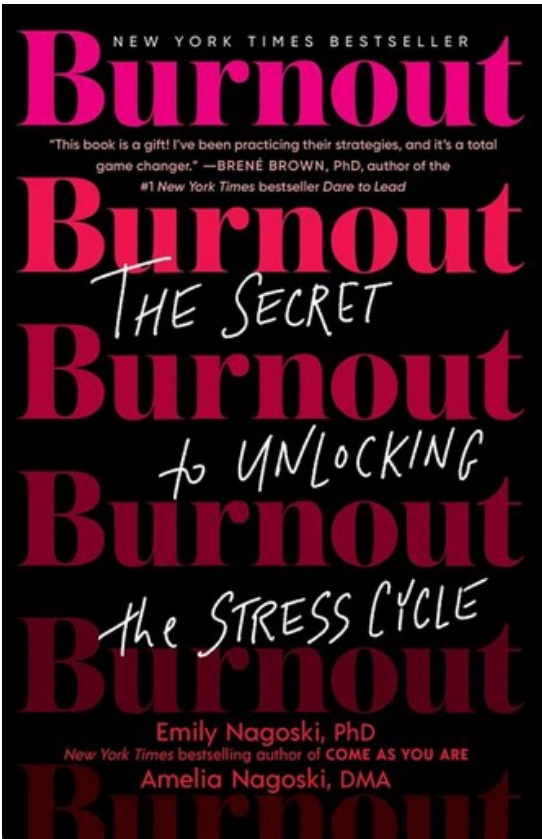
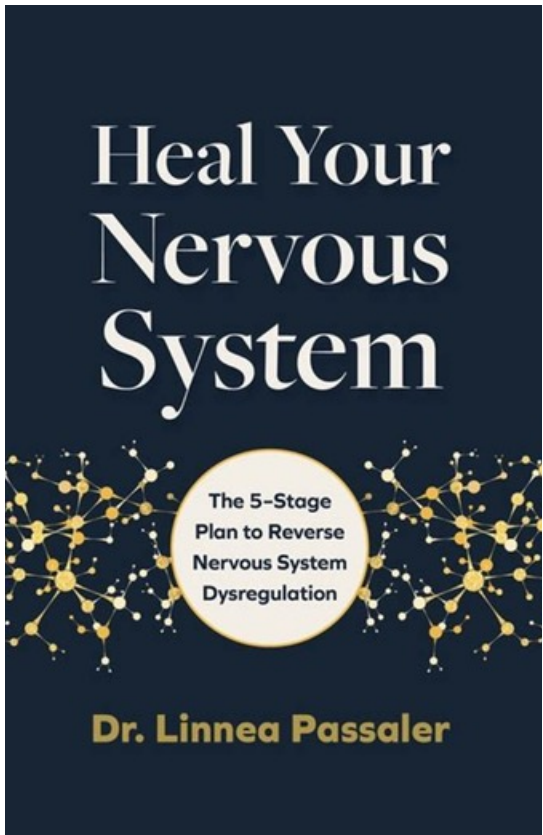
A majority of draining tasks will increase risk of burnout. The more energizing tasks that you can focus on, the greater chance you have to sustain your spark.

03

Boundaries turn awareness into action.

Set boundaries to take action toward the behaviors that will prevent and protect you from burnout.

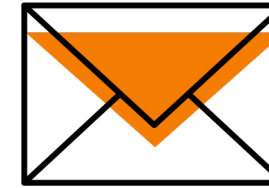
Resources



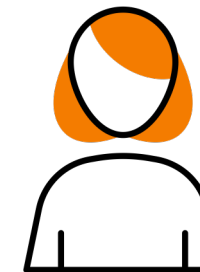


Thank you!

I would absolutely LOVE to connect and provide support on your burnout journey.



colvin@aperiophilanthropy.com



linkedin.com/colvworld



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