

THE ADULTING VAULT

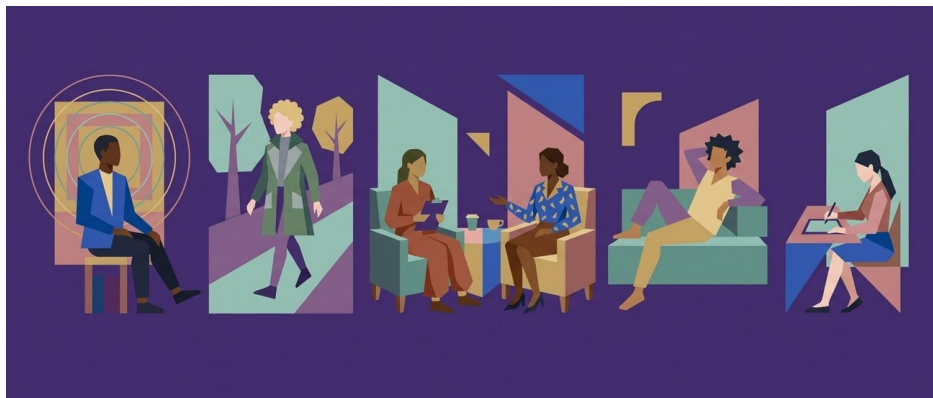
Burnout Recovery Workbook

Locating the Mismatch, and Building the Way Back

EVERYTHING THEY FORGOT TO TEACH YOU

◆ COMPANION WORKBOOK TO **BURNOUT RECOVERY**

Burnout is a mismatch between what a job demands and what a person can sustain — which means the useful question is not "how do I cope better" but "which part of this is actually wrong." This workbook finds that. You will score the six areas where the fit between you and your work either holds or fails, identify your own early warning signs, and build a recovery plan that includes the part most people skip: changing the condition rather than just resting from it.



If You Need Help Right Now

Skip the rest of this guide. Use this page.

You do not need to be suicidal to use any of these. They are for anyone in distress, and they are free.

Resource	How to reach it
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24/7. Interpretation available in over 240 languages; ASL via videophone.
Veterans Crisis Line	Dial 988 then press 1, or text 838255. For veterans, service members, Guard and Reserve, and their families.
Crisis Text Line	Text HOME to 741741 to reach a trained volunteer crisis counselor.
SAMHSA National Helpline	Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357), TTY 1-800-487-4889, or text your ZIP code to 435748. Free, confidential, 24/7, English and Spanish. Treatment referrals for mental health and substance use.
Find a provider	findtreatment.gov lists state-licensed providers and lets you filter by payment type, including sliding scale and free options.
Immediate danger	Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

Resources listed are United States services, verified against published federal guidance as of mid-2026. Outside the US, search for your country's crisis line.

Please Read This First

This guide is general educational information, not medical or psychological advice, and not therapy. It cannot diagnose you and it is not a substitute for care from a licensed clinician who knows your situation. If you are in crisis, use the resources on the facing page rather than working through this guide.

CURRENCY OF THIS GUIDE

This is a self-assessment and planning tool, not a diagnosis. Burnout and depression share symptoms and frequently occur together, and nothing here can tell them apart in your case. If you have lost pleasure in everything rather than only work, if you feel worthless rather than ineffective, or if you have any thoughts of not wanting to be here, treat that as depression until a clinician tells you otherwise.

Where You Are Right Now

A baseline. You will compare against this in ninety days.

DATE	ROLE	TIME IN THIS JOB
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The three dimensions

Burnout has three parts. Most people recognise the first and miss the other two, which is why they treat it as a sleep problem.

EXHAUSTION — depleted in a way sleep does not touch

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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CYNICISM — distance from the work and the people in it

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

INEFFECTIVENESS — nothing I do seems to make a difference

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

WHICH OF THESE ARE TRUE THIS MONTH?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Empty before the day starts | ☐ Dread on Sunday evening | ☐ Irritated by ordinary requests |
| ☐ Caring less on purpose | ☐ Cannot concentrate | ☐ Physically unwell more often |
| ☐ Sleeping badly | ☐ Sleeping constantly | ☐ Drinking more |
| ☐ Avoiding colleagues | ☐ Making mistakes I would not normally | ☐ Cannot remember the last good day |

Locate the Mismatch

The most important pages here. Six areas — your lowest two are the intervention.

Occupational research consistently finds a small set of areas where the fit between a person and their job either holds or fails. Score each out of ten, where ten is a good fit. Be honest rather than fair to your employer.

WORKLOAD — the demand is sustainable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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CONTROL — I have authority matching my responsibility

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

REWARD — my effort is compensated and acknowledged

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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COMMUNITY — I have people here who have my back

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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FAIRNESS — decisions are consistent and transparent

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

VALUES — the work does not conflict with what I think is right

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Your lowest two

Write them here. Everything that follows is about these, not about the others.

Area	Score	What specifically is wrong	What would have to change

A NOTE ON THE VALUES MISMATCH

If VALUES scored lowest, be aware that it is the hardest of the six to fix from inside a role, and the one most strongly associated with people eventually leaving.

That is not a reason to act rashly. It is a reason to be honest with yourself about what the realistic path is, rather than spending two more years trying to cope with something that is not a coping problem.

IS THIS FIXABLE WHERE I AM? WHAT WOULD THAT REQUIRE, AND FROM WHOM?

Burnout or Something Else?

They overlap, they co-occur, and the distinction changes what helps.

TICK ANYTHING THAT IS TRUE

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Meaningfully better on holiday | ☐ Comes with me on holiday |
| ☐ Non-work things still enjoyable | ☐ Nothing is enjoyable |
| ☐ "I am no good at this job" | ☐ "I am worthless as a person" |
| ☐ Fine in a different job | ☐ Nothing would help |
| ☐ Mostly attached to work | ☐ Pervasive across everything |

READ THIS BEFORE YOU INTERPRET YOUR TICKS

The left-hand column of each pair leans toward burnout, the right toward depression. This is orientation, not diagnosis, and it cannot rule anything out.

If you ticked several on the right — or if you have any thoughts of not wanting to be here — please use the resources at the front of this workbook, and talk to a clinician. Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org.

The Recovery Plan

Three parts, in order. Skipping the third guarantees a repeat.

One: Actual recovery time

Not a long weekend. Enough consecutive time genuinely off — not checking messages — for the exhaustion to lift. This comes first because you cannot make good decisions about the other two from inside depletion.

Leave I have available	Dates I will take it	What I need to hand over first

WHAT I WILL ACTUALLY DO WITH IT

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ☐ Notifications off | ☐ Email off my phone | ☐ Out-of-office set |
| ☐ Handover written | ☐ Nothing scheduled | ☐ Sleep first |
| ☐ Time outdoors | ☐ See people I like | ☐ No work-adjacent reading |

Two: Restore something you control

Burnout is fed by a sense that nothing you do changes anything. The counter is small, real control reclaimed somewhere — not a grand plan.

ONE THING ON MY CALENDAR I DECIDE, NOT
REACT TO

ONE BOUNDARY THAT WILL ACTUALLY HOLD

ONE PIECE OF WORK I TAKE START TO
FINISH

ONE THING OUTSIDE WORK I AM
COMPETENT AT

Three: Change the condition

This is the part people skip, and it is why burnout recurs. If the mismatch you scored is still there when you come back, the clock simply restarts.

Which of my two lowest areas can I actually negotiate? Workload, scope, hours, reporting line, the specific project?

THE CONVERSATION

Frame around workload and sustainability, not feelings. Come with a proposal, not a problem.

THE TWO SENTENCES I WILL OPEN WITH

BEFORE YOU HAVE IT

How safe this conversation is depends entirely on your workplace. In some it prompts real support. In others, disclosure gets used against you.

You know your organisation. If you have reason to be cautious, keep it to capacity and workload and leave your health out of it.

If Leaving Is Not an Option

Most burnout advice assumes options that many people do not have.

REDUCE THE LOAD WHERE I ACTUALLY CAN

- ☐ Identify the 2-3 things that truly matter
- ☐ Stop volunteering for extras
- ☐ Take every break I am entitled to
- ☐ Decline one recurring meeting
- ☐ Let the rest be adequate
- ☐ Batch communication
- ☐ Use all my leave
- ☐ Hand one thing back

BUILD THE EXIT SLOWLY

If leaving is right but not yet possible, treat it as a project with a timeline rather than a fantasy. Having a direction is itself protective, even before anything material changes.

This month	This quarter	This year

Twelve-Week Check-In

Two minutes a week. Recovery is non-linear and you will not notice it without a record.

Expect a good fortnight followed by a bad one. That pattern is normal and is not evidence the plan failed.

WEEK 1

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 2

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 3

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 4

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 5

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 6

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 7

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 8

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 9

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 10

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 11

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

WEEK 12

WEEK OF	EXHAUSTION /10	CYNICISM /10	EFFECTIVENESS /10

Ninety-Day Review

Read back through the check-ins before you answer.

DATE OF REVIEW	WEEKS COMPLETED
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RE-SCORE THE THREE DIMENSIONS

EXHAUSTION now

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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CYNICISM now

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

INEFFECTIVENESS now

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

SIGNS IT IS MOVING

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Something at work is mildly interesting again | ☐ I have capacity for people outside work |
| ☐ Sunday evening is less dreadful | ☐ I can imagine a version of this job that would be fine |
| ☐ I noticed I did something well | ☐ I slept properly for a stretch |

Did I actually change the condition, or only rest from it? Be honest.

What are my own early warning signs? For most people cynicism arrives before exhaustion.

IF NOTHING HAS SHIFTED AFTER REAL REST AND REAL CHANGE, WHAT DOES THAT TELL ME?

Before You Close This

Burnout is a description of a mismatch, not a verdict on your capability. People who burn out are disproportionately the ones who cared, took responsibility, and kept absorbing what the system handed them. That is not a flaw to be corrected.

And if you completed this and nothing improved — that is information, not failure. Sometimes the honest answer is that the situation will not change and the realistic path is leaving. Knowing that clearly is worth more than another twelve weeks of coping.

KEEP THESE SOMEWHERE YOU CAN FIND THEM

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Veterans press 1, or text 838255.

Crisis Text Line — text HOME to 741741.

SAMHSA National Helpline — 1-800-662-HELP (4357), TTY 1-800-487-4889, or text your ZIP code to 435748.

The companion guide, *Burnout Recovery*, covers the six areas in more depth.