

RESILIENCE RESET

# THE BURNOUT RESET GUIDE

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*What to Do When You're Running on Empty but Life  
Still Has to Continue*

By Kerri Douglas

BURNOUT • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

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*What to Do When You're Running on Empty but Life Still Has to Continue*

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**By Kerri Douglas**

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## A quick but important note

This guide is an educational and self reflection resource. It is designed to help you think more clearly about your current capacity, the demands on your energy and the practical changes that may make day to day life feel more manageable.

It is not a diagnostic tool and it is not a substitute for medical, psychological or other professional advice. Ongoing exhaustion, changes in mood, concentration, sleep, appetite or physical wellbeing can have many causes. If you are experiencing persistent, severe or worrying changes, it is sensible to speak with an appropriate healthcare professional.

Nothing in this guide is intended to tell you to start, stop or change medication or treatment, and it does not promise that burnout or exhaustion can be resolved within a particular period of time.

### WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL DO

It will help you notice where your energy is going, reduce avoidable demand, plan for low capacity days, communicate clearer boundaries and build a personal framework you can return to when life starts becoming too much again.

You do not have to complete every exercise. Use what helps, leave what does not, and come back to the rest when you have more capacity.

# Guide navigation

|                   |                                                             |    |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Start here</b> | A Note From Kerri                                           | 06 |
| <b>Chapter 1</b>  | Am I Tired, Stressed or Running on Empty?                   | 07 |
| <b>Chapter 2</b>  | Where Is Your Energy Actually Going?                        | 12 |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>  | What to Do When You Have Almost Nothing Left                | 18 |
| <b>Chapter 4</b>  | What Can I Stop Doing?                                      | 24 |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>  | Boundaries When You Don't Have Energy for a Confrontation   | 30 |
| <b>Chapter 6</b>  | It's Not Just What You're Doing. It's What You're Carrying. | 36 |

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Read it in order, dip into the chapter you need, or go straight to the printable toolkit. There is no correct way to use a guide designed for days when your capacity is limited.

# Practical tools & final sections

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|                          |                                                     |    |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Chapter 7</b>         | I Still Have to Go to Work                          | 42 |
| <b>Chapter 8</b>         | Why Doesn't Rest Feel Like It's Working?            | 49 |
| <b>Chapter 9</b>         | Please Don't Turn Recovery Into Another Job         | 55 |
| <b>Chapter 10</b>        | Feeling Better Doesn't Mean Filling the Diary Again | 60 |
| <b>Chapter 11</b>        | Build Your Personal Burnout Reset                   | 65 |
| <b>Printable Toolkit</b> | Reusable worksheets and quick reference pages       | 71 |
| <b>Final page</b>        | When You're Running on Empty                        | 83 |

You do not need to work out how to keep doing everything. Your first job is to work out what genuinely needs your energy.

# I didn't create this to give you another list

*If you have picked up a burnout guide, there is a fair chance you already know you are tired. What you may not know is what to do when life still expects you to carry on.*

That is the bit I wanted this book to deal with. Advice about rest, routines and boundaries can be useful, but it can also feel completely disconnected from real life when you still have work in the morning, people depending on you, bills to pay, washing in the basket and a phone that apparently believes every notification deserves immediate attention.

I wanted to create something that respects that reality. Not a book that asks an exhausted person to become excellent at recovering. Not another programme that quietly turns feeling better into a new performance target. Something practical enough to use when your concentration is poor and honest enough to admit that sometimes the problem is not that you need to cope better. Sometimes there is simply too much being asked of you.

Throughout these pages I will ask you to notice what is taking your energy, question what really needs doing, lower the standard where the standard does not matter, and give yourself permission to make different decisions when your capacity changes.

## **Kerri's note**

Resilience is not about proving how much you can endure. There are times when strength means carrying on, and there are times when it means deciding that something has to change.

You do not need to finish this quickly. You do not need perfect answers. Start where you are.

# 01

CHAPTER ONE

## AM I TIRED, STRESSED OR RUNNING ON EMPTY?

---

*When being tired stops feeling temporary and starts becoming  
your normal.*

*Most of us know what ordinary tiredness feels like. You have had a busy week, stayed up too late, had a few bad nights with the kids or simply tried to fit too much into too little time. You are tired, you rest, and eventually you start to feel more like yourself again.*

What can be harder to recognise is when tiredness has stopped being something you recover from and has started becoming the way you live. You may still be going to work, looking after people, paying bills and keeping life moving, but everything seems to take more effort than it used to.

Sometimes it shows up in very ordinary moments. You read the same email three times because none of it is going in. You walk upstairs and forget why you went. Somebody asks what you want for dinner and one more decision feels strangely irritating. A small piece of admin that would normally take ten minutes sits untouched for weeks because you cannot quite bring yourself to start it.

None of those things on their own tells you that you have burnout. They are simply reasons to pay attention rather than automatically assuming you will feel better after the next weekend.

**A MORE USEFUL QUESTION**

**How much of my available energy is ordinary functioning costing me now?**



# You can look fine and still be depleted

We tend to think struggling should be obvious. Sometimes it is, but plenty of people become very good at functioning while depleted. You can be exhausted and still meet a deadline. You can be overwhelmed and still make dinner. You can spend the day being cheerful and helpful and then arrive home with almost nothing left.

That can make it surprisingly easy to dismiss what you are experiencing. You tell yourself you are still managing, so it cannot be that bad. You compare yourself with somebody who appears to have more going on. You decide you just need an early night, a quieter weekend or to become more organised.

Then another week passes, and the effort of appearing normal quietly gets more expensive.

## Kerri's note

Functioning is not the same as having capacity. Sometimes the outside world keeps rewarding you for getting everything done while you are the only person who can see what it is costing.

## Things worth noticing

- ☐ Rest no longer leaves you feeling properly restored.
- ☐ Your patience or concentration has noticeably changed.
- ☐ Simple decisions feel bigger than they used to.
- ☐ You need most of your free time simply to recover from the rest of the week.
- ☐ You are doing what is necessary but have little energy left for what you enjoy.

# The Running on Empty Check In

This is not a diagnostic scale. It is a quick way of noticing your current capacity.

## **GREEN, I still have some capacity**

You may be busy or tired, but rest generally helps. You can concentrate reasonably well, enjoy things and recover after demanding periods.

## **AMBER, My capacity is shrinking**

You are still getting things done, but it takes more effort. You may be more irritable, forgetful or indecisive. Weekends are increasingly about recovery and ordinary tasks are beginning to pile up.

## **RED, I am struggling to function as I normally would**

Basic responsibilities may feel very difficult. Concentration, motivation or decision making may be significantly affected, or rest may no longer be restoring you.

### **IF YOU ARE IN RED**

This is a good point to reduce expectations where possible and consider appropriate professional support, particularly if changes are significant, persistent or affecting your physical or mental wellbeing.

# WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE

The difficult thing about running on empty is that life rarely stops long enough for you to notice it properly. You may have become so used to pushing through that exhaustion feels normal. You get up because you have to. You answer the message because it is there. You keep the appointment, finish the work, sort the washing and tell yourself you will slow down when things calm down. The trouble is that things do not always calm down on their own. One busy week becomes a busy month, then you realise you cannot remember the last time you felt properly rested rather than temporarily relieved that the day was over.

It can also change the way you experience yourself. You may wonder why you are less patient, less sociable or less enthusiastic than you used to be. Things you normally enjoy can start to feel like another demand. Even choosing what to watch on television can feel like too much decision making. That does not mean you have suddenly become lazy, difficult or ungrateful. It may simply mean that your available capacity is being used faster than it is being restored. Instead of judging the change, get curious about it. What has increased? What has become harder? What are you doing now that you were not doing six months ago? What are you carrying that nobody else can see?

Pay attention to patterns rather than one bad day. Everyone has days when they are tired, distracted or fed up. What matters here is whether the same experience keeps returning and whether your usual ways of recovering are still enough. If Saturday is spent recovering from the week and Sunday is spent worrying about Monday, the weekend is not really functioning as a break. If you need more and more effort to produce the same result, that is useful information. You do not have to wait until you cannot function at all before taking your own exhaustion seriously.

There is also no prize for being the person who copes the longest without changing anything. Many capable people are excellent at adapting to pressure. They become quicker, more organised and more efficient, then use that efficiency to fit even more in. Eventually the skill that helped them cope can become part of the problem. The aim of this guide is not to make you less capable. It is to help you use that capability in a way that does not require you to spend yourself completely every day.

TRY THIS

## What has actually changed?

Think about the last few weeks or months. You do not need to answer every question.

**I have less energy for:**

---

**Something that feels harder than it used to is:**

---

**I notice I am becoming more irritated by:**

---

**Something I keep putting off because I cannot face it is:**

---

**When I get some downtime, I usually feel:**

---

### RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Choose one: **GREEN / AMBER / RED.**

Then write down the one thing that feels noticeably harder than it used to. That is enough for today.

# 02

## CHAPTER TWO

# WHERE IS YOUR ENERGY ACTUALLY GOING?

---

*Because the things exhausting you are not always the things  
that appear on your to do list.*

*Before we talk about getting more energy, it helps to look at what is using the energy you already have.*

Most of us are good at counting visible tasks. Work counts. Cooking counts. Cleaning counts. Taking the children somewhere counts. The invisible parts often disappear from the calculation even though they still take something from you.

Remembering that somebody needs something for Tuesday. Replaying a difficult conversation. Checking the bank balance. Keeping track of a parent's appointment. Knowing what needs buying, who needs reminding and what will go wrong if nobody notices it in time. None of that necessarily appears on a traditional list, but your brain is still carrying it.

**A life can look manageable on paper and still  
be far too expensive in practice.**

The aim of this chapter is not to turn energy into another thing you have to measure perfectly. It is simply to make the load more visible.

# Imagine you start the day with £100

The amount is imaginary; the limit is not. Picture £100 as the usable energy you have available today, then think about what starts spending it.

| DEMAND                               | EXAMPLE COST |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Getting everybody ready              | £10          |
| Travel or commute                    | £8           |
| Work                                 | £40          |
| Difficult conversation               | £10          |
| Dinner, washing and tidying          | £15          |
| Helping somebody else with a problem | £10          |

That is £93 before you have counted the worrying, remembering, checking, messages, admin or lying in bed mentally preparing for tomorrow.

## THE POINT

If your life regularly costs £140 when you only have £100 available, the long term answer cannot simply be learning to squeeze £140 out of £100.

# Not everything on the list is the same

## Essential

Really must happen.

## Important

Matters, but may have flexibility around when or how.

## Expected

Things other people have come to expect from you.

## Inherited

Things you do because you have always done them.

## Invisible

Planning, remembering, anticipating, checking, worrying and emotional labour.

## Optional

Things that could potentially stop, at least for now.

A task can sit in more than one category. The point is not to create a perfect system. It is to stop treating every demand as equally fixed.

### Kerri's note

The category that often surprises people is inherited. There can be a huge difference between "this genuinely needs doing" and "this is what I have always done".



TRY THIS

# The £100 Energy Exercise

Work £\_\_\_\_

Admin £\_\_\_\_

Family/caring £\_\_\_\_

Digital demands £\_\_\_\_

Household £\_\_\_\_

Worrying/mental load £\_\_\_\_

Travel £\_\_\_\_

Other £\_\_\_\_

Relationships £\_\_\_\_

Total £\_\_\_\_

## PAUSE HERE

Which three things currently cost you the most?

---

---

---

Which one has even a little flexibility?

---

## RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Forget the £100. Write down your three biggest drains. We can work with those.

# THE LOAD IS NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS

Energy is not only spent on activity. It is spent on attention. Every time your mind has to switch from one thing to another, remember something, make a decision, manage somebody else's reaction or keep an unfinished task in the background, a little more of your attention is occupied. That is why a day with very few visible tasks can still leave you shattered. You may not have run around all day, but your mind may have been open for business from the moment you woke up.

Think about the difference between doing the food shop and being responsible for the food shop. Doing it might take an hour. Being responsible for it can include noticing what is running out, remembering what everybody eats, checking the budget, deciding when to go, working out what meals are needed and noticing that the milk will not last until morning. The visible task is only one part of the job. This same pattern appears at work, at home and in relationships. The person who coordinates, anticipates and remembers often carries more than anyone realises.

Your energy budget will also change from day to day. A task that costs you £5 on a good day might cost £20 after a poor night's sleep, an argument or a difficult week. That is why rigid productivity advice can feel so unhelpful when you are depleted. It assumes that the person completing the task has the same resources available every day. Real people do not work like that. Capacity moves. The useful skill is learning to notice the movement and adjust before you have spent everything.

As you use the energy exercise, resist the urge to prove that every item is unavoidable. For now, you are not being asked to fix the list. You are simply telling the truth about it. If work takes half of what you have, write that down. If worrying about somebody takes more energy than you think it should, write that down too. There is no moral value attached to the numbers. They are there to help you see why you might be exhausted even when part of you keeps insisting that you should be able to manage.

# The drains that do not look like work

One of the reasons burnout can be so confusing is that you can look at your day and think, *I haven't even done that much, so why am I this tired?* The answer may be that effort is not only measured in jobs completed. It is also used in switching attention, anticipating problems, managing other people's emotions, keeping yourself composed, making decisions and holding information in your head so that nothing gets forgotten.

Think about a day where you have been interrupted repeatedly. You may finish with very little to show for it, yet your brain has spent hours stopping, starting, remembering where it was, responding and trying to refocus. Or perhaps you have spent the day waiting for difficult news, worrying about money or trying to keep the peace between other people. None of that produces a neat tick on a list, but it can leave you completely wrung out.

This is why I do not want you to judge your tiredness by how impressive your diary looks. Two people can have almost identical schedules and experience them very differently. A task that costs you £5 on a good week may cost £20 when you have slept badly, have something difficult happening at home or have been operating at full capacity for months.

## Kerri's note

Energy is contextual. You are not failing because something feels harder today than it did six months ago. The useful information is that it *does* feel harder. That tells you your current budget has changed.

## Look for the repeat spend

Pay particular attention to things that charge you several times. A difficult meeting may cost energy beforehand because you are thinking about it, during the meeting because you are managing it, and afterwards because you replay it. A family responsibility may take ten minutes to complete but sit in your head for three days before it happens. Those repeat costs are often where the real drain is hiding.

When you can see that, the question changes from, "Why can't I cope with my normal life?" to, "Which parts of my normal life are currently costing more than I realised?" That is a much kinder question, but it is also a much more practical one because it gives you something you can actually work with.

# 03

## CHAPTER THREE

# WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE ALMOST NOTHING LEFT

---

*A realistic plan for the days when ordinary life feels much  
harder than it should.*

*Some days are not normal capacity days, and pretending they are usually makes them harder.*

The mistake many of us make is noticing that we have far less energy than usual and then expecting ourselves to complete exactly the same day anyway. We make the same list, expect the same standard and become frustrated when our body or brain does not cooperate.

A Minimum Viable Day gives you another option. It is the version of the day that protects what genuinely matters while allowing the rest to wait.

This is not about giving up on responsibilities. It is about refusing to spend scarce energy pretending your capacity has not changed.

**THE QUESTION**

**If I only had enough energy for the essentials today, what would actually make the cut?**

# Your day can change when your capacity changes

## Level 1, Survival Day

Food, hydration, prescribed medication where applicable, essential caring responsibilities, genuinely urgent work or life admin, and whatever helps you get safely through the day.

The kitchen does not need transforming. Your inbox does not need reaching zero. Today is about getting through today.

## Level 2, Maintenance Day

Essentials plus one or two things that reduce tomorrow's pressure, such as putting a wash on, answering one important message or preparing something simple for the morning.

The trap is feeling slightly better at 3pm and suddenly trying to catch up on everything.

## Level 3, Normal Capacity Day

Your usual responsibilities plus some flexibility for less urgent tasks, plans or things you enjoy.

Normal capacity is still not unlimited capacity.

TRY THIS

# Build your Minimum Viable Day

The easiest realistic way I can eat and drink enough today is:

---

Any medication or health essentials I need to remember:

---

People or animals who genuinely depend on me today:

---

The work or admin that truly cannot wait:

---

The one thing at home that actually needs doing:

---

One important message or call:

---

What I am deliberately leaving for another day:

---

# The Bad Day Menu

Low capacity days become harder when every small choice has to be made from scratch. A Bad Day Menu is simply a list of easy options you decide in advance.

| AREA             | MY LOW EFFORT OPTION |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Food             |                      |
| Clothes          |                      |
| Household        |                      |
| Work preparation |                      |
| Communication    |                      |
| Entertainment    |                      |
| Downtime         |                      |

**RUNNING ON EMPTY?**

Pick one easy meal, one household job you are not doing, and one person who genuinely needs a reply. Leave the rest.



# WHEN THE DAY NEEDS TO GET SMALLER

A Minimum Viable Day works because it removes negotiation when your brain is already tired. On a difficult day, even deciding what to leave undone can become another exhausting task. You look at ten things, feel guilty about all ten and then spend an hour doing none of them because you cannot work out where to start. A pre decided version of enough gives you a simpler route through. It says that on low capacity days, the goal changes. You are not trying to win the day. You are trying to move through it without making tomorrow unnecessarily harder.

This can feel strange if your self respect has become tangled up with productivity. You may know intellectually that rest matters while still feeling uncomfortable when the house is untidy or an email remains unanswered. Notice that discomfort without automatically obeying it. Feeling guilty does not always mean you are doing something wrong. Sometimes it simply means you are doing something differently from the way you have trained yourself to operate.

Keep the practical bar genuinely low. A simple meal is still a meal. A quick shower is still looking after yourself. Sending one necessary email is still dealing with something important. If you have children or caring responsibilities, enough may look different from somebody who lives alone, but the principle remains the same: protect what is essential and stop pretending everything is essential. The aim is not neglect. It is proportion.

You can also create shortcuts before you need them. Keep a few easy meals available. Write down the names of people you can ask for practical help. Decide which household jobs can wait. Save a short message you can send when you need to cancel something. None of this is dramatic, but that is exactly the point. When you are exhausted, small reductions in friction matter. You are making the difficult day easier to navigate rather than expecting your most depleted self to suddenly become exceptionally organised.

# Make the day smaller before you make yourself push harder

There is a particular kind of panic that can arrive when you wake up already exhausted and immediately remember everything that still needs doing. Before your feet have touched the floor, your brain is trying to solve the entire day. That is usually the moment we start bargaining with ourselves: *Come on. Get moving. You just need to be more disciplined.*

But discipline is not always the missing ingredient. Sometimes the day you planned simply does not match the capacity you woke up with. On those days, reducing the size of the day can be far more useful than spending the little energy you have arguing with yourself about why you should be able to do more.

A Minimum Viable Day is not a permanent lifestyle and it is not permission to ignore things that genuinely matter. It is a temporary way of protecting the essentials when your resources are low. If you had £25 left in your bank account, you would not spend it as though you had £250. You would become more selective. Your energy deserves the same basic respect.

## Decide before everything feels urgent

The best time to decide what counts as essential is not necessarily when you are at your most depleted. Use a better day to create a rough low capacity plan. What food is easy when cooking feels impossible? Which responsibilities really cannot move? Who could you contact if you needed help? What work could be renegotiated? Which standards can drop without creating a genuine problem?

### A USEFUL SENTENCE

**"Today I am protecting the essentials, not proving what I can push through."**

You may still dislike leaving things undone. That discomfort is real, especially if being dependable is important to you. But an unfinished non urgent task is not a moral failure. Sometimes leaving something until tomorrow is exactly what prevents tomorrow from becoming another day where you have nothing left.

And if your low capacity days are becoming frequent, severe or difficult to recover from, treat that as information rather than something to hide from yourself. A Minimum Viable Day can help you through a difficult patch, but it is not meant to make an unsustainable situation sustainable forever.

# 04

## CHAPTER FOUR

# WHAT CAN I STOP DOING?

---

*Before adding another habit, let's see what can come off the list.*

*If your life already contains too much demand, the first useful move may be subtraction rather than improvement.*

This can feel uncomfortable if you are used to being reliable. You may treat every task as something that should be done properly and promptly, even when nobody has actually asked for that standard.

Rather than asking whether something matters, ask a more practical question: **what does this particular thing require from me right now?**

---

### **Kerri's note**

There is a strange relief in realising that "important" does not always mean "today", and "I usually do this" does not automatically mean "I still have to".

# Do, Delay, Delegate, Reduce or Drop

## DO

It genuinely needs doing now and there is a meaningful consequence if it does not happen.

## DELAY

It matters, but nothing terrible happens if it waits.

## DELEGATE

Somebody else could reasonably take responsibility for it.

## REDUCE

It still needs doing, but your current version is costing more energy than necessary.

## DROP

It does not currently justify the energy it consumes.

## What could this look like?

| DEMAND              | AUTOMATIC RESPONSE               | A LOWER DEMAND OPTION                   |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Family dinner       | Cook properly every night        | Use something easy twice this week      |
| Work report         | Polish it until it is perfect    | Meet the actual brief and stop          |
| Friend's invitation | Go because cancelling feels rude | Rearrange without a long explanation    |
| Housework           | Clean the whole room             | Do the one job that makes it functional |
| Messages            | Reply as soon as you see them    | Answer in a set window later            |

### PAUSE HERE

Where are you spending excellent level energy on something that only requires adequate?

# Not every task deserves your best

## Excellent

This genuinely deserves my best work.

## Good

It needs care, but not perfection.

## Adequate

It needs to meet the requirement.

## Simply completed

Done matters more than how.

## Not done at all

The consequences of not doing this are smaller than the energy cost of doing it.

**Pick one task you have been overdoing:**

---

**What level does it actually require?**

---

### RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Choose one thing to delay, reduce or drop today.

# STOP TREATING EVERYTHING AS EQUALLY IMPORTANT

One reason overloaded people struggle to reduce their list is that everything begins to feel urgent. When you are carrying too much, your mind can start responding to a minor unfinished task with the same sense of pressure as something genuinely important. The unanswered message, the messy drawer, the work deadline and the appointment all sit together in one mental pile marked must deal with. Triage separates them again. It gives each demand the amount of seriousness it actually deserves.

This is where consequences are useful. Ask what really happens if a task waits. Not what your inner critic says will happen, but what actually happens. Does somebody experience a serious problem, or do you simply feel uncomfortable because you prefer to be prompt? Does the house become unsafe, or does it just look less tidy than you like? Does the piece of work fail, or is it merely less polished? When energy is limited, the difference matters.

Reducing a standard can be especially powerful. Many people do not need to stop doing everything. They need to stop doing everything at the highest possible level. A birthday meal can be bought rather than cooked from scratch. A presentation can be clear without having perfect formatting. A family gathering can be smaller. You can send the short reply instead of composing the perfect one. Good enough is not a character flaw. It is a way of matching effort to importance.

Dropping something may be the hardest category because it asks you to accept that a commitment, habit or expectation no longer earns its place. Start small. You do not need to resign from your job and cancel your entire social life. Perhaps there is one group chat you stop keeping up with, one recurring task somebody else can own, one optional commitment you pause or one standard you quietly lower. The question is not whether you could continue carrying it. The question is whether continuing to carry it is worth the cost.



# Stopping something can feel harder than doing it

For a lot of people, the practical part of reducing a workload is easier than the emotional part. You can identify perfectly well that something is optional and still feel guilty about dropping it. You can know another adult is capable of taking responsibility and still find yourself stepping in because it feels quicker, easier or safer than watching them do it differently.

This matters because burnout is not always maintained by a lack of knowledge. Sometimes we already know what needs to change, but the change brings discomfort. Somebody might be disappointed. A standard might slip. You may have to admit that you cannot keep doing what you have always done. If you are used to being the capable one, that can feel surprisingly exposing.

So when you use the triage matrix, notice the story that appears beside each decision. "If I don't do this, people will think I am lazy." "It is easier if I just do it myself." "A good parent/partner/manager/friend should be able to handle this." Those thoughts can turn an optional task into something that feels compulsory even when it is not.

## Ask about consequence, not discomfort

Try separating two questions: **What is the actual consequence if this changes?** and **How uncomfortable will I feel if this changes?** They are not the same thing. The house being less tidy may make you uncomfortable without causing a meaningful problem. Sending a shorter email may feel abrupt without actually being rude. Letting somebody else organise something may feel risky because they will not do it your way, but different does not automatically mean wrong.

### Kerri's note

Sometimes "good enough" is not lowering your standards. It is finally matching the standard to what the situation actually requires.

Start small if you need to. Drop one thing nobody will remember next week. Delay one task that has been sitting under a false sense of urgency. Let one person solve one problem without you taking it back. The aim is not to become careless. It is to stop spending premium energy on things that do not require a premium response.

# 05

## CHAPTER FIVE

# BOUNDARIES WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ENERGY FOR A CONFRONTATION

---

*Knowing you need a boundary is one thing. Knowing what to  
actually say is another.*

*"Set better boundaries" is wonderfully simple advice until you are standing in front of the person whose expectations you are about to change.*

Boundaries can feel uncomfortable because they may involve disappointing somebody, changing an established pattern or tolerating the possibility that another person does not agree with you. If you are already exhausted, even imagining that conversation can make saying yes feel easier.

So this chapter is not going to spend pages convincing you that boundaries are important. You probably know that. What you may need are words that are calm, ordinary and usable.

#### A USEFUL PLACE TO START

*"Let me check what I've got on and come back to you."*

That small pause creates space between being asked and committing yourself.

## At work

*"I can do that, but I can't complete both that and X today. Which would you like me to prioritise?"*

*"My capacity is full today. I can look at this on Thursday."*

*"I need some clarity around priorities because the current workload isn't achievable within the time available."*

*"I'm happy to help with this, but something else will need to move."*

These phrases do not require an apology filled explanation of your entire life. They make the limit visible and, where appropriate, return the decision about priority to the person setting the work.

### BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

Know what you can do, what you cannot do, and what change you are actually asking for. "I am overwhelmed" explains the problem. "I need us to agree which two deadlines take priority" gives the conversation somewhere useful to go.

## At home and with people you care about

*"I can do X, but I can't take responsibility for Y as well."*

*"I don't have the capacity for that today. Can we work out another option?"*

*"I need you to take responsibility for this rather than waiting for me to organise it."*

*"I'm keeping things quiet this week because I'm exhausted. It's not personal."*

*"I'd love to see you, but I don't have the capacity this week. Can we look at another time?"*

*"I care about what's happening, but I don't have the headspace for a long conversation tonight."*

A boundary can be kind and still be a boundary. You do not have to make the other person agree with it before you are allowed to have one.

# Receiving something does not automatically make it urgent

Phones have made other people's access to us almost frictionless. That does not mean your attention has to be frictionless too.

- ☐ Mute a group that creates noise without adding anything useful.
- ☐ Choose one or two times to deal with non urgent messages.
- ☐ Remove work notifications from your personal phone if that is realistic for your role.
- ☐ Stop treating read receipts as a response deadline.
- ☐ Use an out of hours message or status when appropriate.

## TRY THIS

Finish this sentence:

**When someone asks me for something, I usually say yes because...**

---

**The sentence I want to practise instead is...**

---

# BOUNDARIES DO NOT NEED A SPEECH

A boundary is often much smaller than the conversation we imagine having. We picture confrontation, disappointment and a long explanation in which we have to persuade another person that our needs are reasonable. That expectation alone can make saying yes feel easier. But a useful boundary is usually information followed by action. You say what you can do, what you cannot do or what needs to change, then you behave consistently with what you have said.

You also do not need to wait until you feel completely confident. Confidence often arrives after you have practised the behaviour, not before. The first few times you say that you cannot take something on, you may feel awkward. You may replay the conversation afterwards. You may be tempted to send another message explaining yourself more fully. Try not to confuse discomfort with failure. A new boundary can feel uncomfortable simply because it is new.

Some people will respond well and some may push back, particularly if they benefited from you having very few limits before. Their disappointment is information, but it is not automatically an instruction. You can listen, be kind and still keep the boundary. There is a difference between being inconsiderate and being unavailable for every request. There is also a difference between helping because you genuinely want to and helping because you are frightened of what somebody will think if you do not.

If you are depleted, choose the shortest truthful sentence you can manage. You do not need a detailed defence. 'I cannot do that today' is a complete piece of information. At work, it may be more appropriate to explain the impact on priorities. At home, it may mean asking somebody to take full ownership rather than waiting for instructions. With friends, it may simply mean being honest that you are tired. The goal is not to become rigid. It is to stop making your capacity available by default.

# You do not need to sound fearless for a boundary to count

People often imagine a boundary as a confident declaration delivered by somebody who feels completely certain and does not care what anyone thinks. Real boundaries are usually much less polished. Your voice may wobble. You may overthink the message after you send it. You may feel guilty even when the request you refused was unreasonable. None of that means the boundary was wrong.

A boundary is simply information about what you can do, what you cannot do, or what needs to happen for something to work. It does not require the other person to agree. Of course, relationships and workplaces involve negotiation, and there are situations where you have limited control. But even then, clarity is useful. "I can complete A today or I can switch to B, but I cannot realistically complete both" is clearer than silently trying to do both and paying for it later.

## Watch the explanation trap

When we are uncomfortable saying no, we often try to make the other person approve of our no by giving them a very long explanation. The problem is that explanations can accidentally turn into negotiations. You give six reasons, they solve three of them, and suddenly you are defending the remaining three as though you are in court.

You are allowed to be warm without presenting a case. "I can't make that work this week" is a complete piece of information. "I don't have capacity for a call tonight, but I can message you tomorrow" is both caring and clear. The aim is not to become abrupt. It is to stop believing that protecting your energy only becomes legitimate once everybody else understands and agrees with your reasons.

### TRY THE SHORTER VERSION

Before sending a boundary message, read it once and remove any sentence that is only there because you are frightened the other person might think badly of you.

Some boundaries will need repeating. That does not mean they failed. If a pattern has been in place for years, one sentence may not immediately rewrite it. Consistency is often what teaches people that your availability has genuinely changed. You can be kind, you can be flexible where you choose to be, and you can still stop treating unlimited access to your time and energy as the price of being a good person.



# 06

## CHAPTER SIX

# IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU'RE DOING. IT'S WHAT YOU'RE CARRYING.

---

*The remembering, planning, anticipating and worrying that  
nobody sees.*

*There are jobs you do with your hands and jobs you do entirely inside your head. The second kind is much easier for everybody, including you, to overlook.*

You might not physically book the family appointment today, but you have remembered it needs booking six times. You have checked diaries, thought about transport, worked out who needs to know and reminded yourself not to forget. By the time you actually make the call, part of the work has already been happening for days.

The same applies to noticing the toothpaste is nearly finished, remembering a birthday, checking on a parent, keeping track of school dates, anticipating a difficult conversation, worrying about money, planning meals and being the person everybody contacts when something goes wrong.

**Invisible work still uses visible energy.**

# When being the reliable one becomes a full time mental job

Maybe you are the person who knows where everything is. You remember the appointment, notice the form, keep track of the deadline and make sure everybody else is prepared. Because you are good at it, people naturally keep coming back to you.

Over time, competence can quietly turn into ownership. Nobody formally decides that you are responsible for everything. It just happens because you notice, you remember and you sort it out.

The important distinction is this: **being capable of carrying something does not automatically mean it belongs to you.**

## Kerri's note

Sometimes the question is not "How do I get better at managing all of this?" but "Which parts of this were never actually mine to manage?"

TRY THIS

# The Invisible Load Inventory

☐ Who remembers?

☐ Who plans?

☐ Who notices?

☐ Who reminds?

☐ Who follows up?

☐ Who checks?

☐ Who worries?

☐ Who gets contacted when something goes wrong?

**Which of these jobs were never officially assigned to you?**

---

**Which one could be shared, transferred, simplified or stopped?**

---

## RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Pick one invisible job you are tired of carrying. Do not solve the whole system today. Just name the one.

# Handing over the whole job, not just the final task

There is a difference between asking someone to do one action and transferring responsibility. If you still have to notice, remind, explain, check and follow up, much of the mental load has stayed with you.

| INSTEAD OF                                | TRY                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Can you help me by taking the bins out?" | "Can you take responsibility for bins and recycling, including remembering collection day?" |
| "Can you remind me to book that?"         | "Can you own the appointment and let me know when it is booked?"                            |
| "Can you help with dinner?"               | "Can you plan and sort dinner on Tuesdays and Thursdays?"                                   |

This will not fit every household or relationship, but the principle is useful: shared responsibility should reduce the number of things you have to keep carrying in your head.

# THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT LIVES IN YOUR HEAD

Mental load is tiring partly because it rarely feels finished. You can complete a physical task and see the result. The washing is folded. The form is submitted. The shopping is put away. Mental responsibility often stays open. You remember what needs doing next, what might go wrong and what somebody else may forget. Even when you are technically resting, part of your mind is still supervising life.

This can create resentment that is difficult to explain. From the outside, another person may genuinely be doing plenty. The problem is that you are still the one holding the map. You are assigning, reminding, checking and noticing. Being told 'you should have asked me' can be frustrating because asking is another task. What you may need is not occasional help but shared ownership, where somebody else notices the job, remembers it and follows it through without you managing the process.

The same thing happens professionally. You may become the person who remembers deadlines, smooths over tension, checks on colleagues or notices what has been missed. Because these behaviours are useful, they can quietly become expected. Ask yourself which parts of your role are actually yours and which you have absorbed because you are conscientious. You do not have to stop caring. You may simply need to stop acting as the unofficial backup system for everything around you.

Try transferring one responsibility completely. Be specific about what ownership means. If somebody else is taking over an appointment, for example, that can include remembering the date, arranging transport and following up, rather than waiting for you to prompt each step. At first, it may feel easier to do it yourself. That is often how invisible load becomes permanent. Sharing responsibility sometimes requires tolerating the fact that another person may do it differently from you. Different does not automatically mean wrong.

# The job is not finished just because nobody can see you doing it

Invisible load becomes particularly exhausting when you are responsible not only for doing things but for making sure they happen. There is a difference between being asked to buy milk and being the person who notices the milk is low, remembers when the shop closes, adds it to the list and makes sure somebody actually buys it. The physical task may be tiny. The ownership of the task is much bigger.

The same thing happens at work. You may be the person who remembers the deadline nobody else has written down, notices that a colleague is struggling, anticipates what a client will ask, keeps track of unfinished actions and quietly prevents problems before anyone else knows there was a problem to prevent. Being competent can gradually turn you into the storage system for everybody else's loose ends.

That role often develops without a conversation. Nobody officially appoints you Head of Remembering Everything. You simply notice, then handle, then become the person everyone assumes will notice and handle next time. Eventually you are carrying dozens of tiny responsibilities that each look too small to complain about.

## Share ownership, not just tasks

If you want to reduce invisible load, asking somebody to "help" can sometimes leave you as the manager of the help. You still have to notice, ask, remind and check. Where it is appropriate, try transferring ownership instead. That might sound like, "Can you take responsibility for sorting the school forms from now on?" rather than, "Can you fill this form in for me?" At work it might mean agreeing who owns the follow up rather than assuming you will chase it.

### Kerri's note

Relief often comes when you no longer have to keep the task alive in your head, not simply when somebody else performs the final five minute action.

You may not be able to redistribute everything, and not every responsibility is negotiable. But making the invisible visible changes the conversation. Instead of wondering why you are exhausted when your task list "doesn't look that bad", you can finally account for the planning, remembering, anticipating and emotional work that has been happening in the background all along.

# 07

CHAPTER SEVEN

## I STILL HAVE TO GO TO WORK

---

*What you can actually do when taking weeks off simply is not an option.*



*For many people, work is one of the biggest sources of demand and one of the least flexible.*

"Take some time off" can be appropriate advice in some situations, but it is not a universal answer. People have rent, mortgages, families, careers, businesses and financial responsibilities. Some are self employed and do not get paid if they do not work.

So if work still has to happen, the useful question becomes: **where is avoidable demand hiding inside it?**

Sometimes the problem is not one enormous task. It is six meetings, constant notifications, twenty interruptions, unclear priorities and the assumption that every request becomes urgent the moment it reaches you.

**START HERE**

Your aim is not to become more efficient at absorbing unlimited work. It is to make the real workload visible enough to prioritise, renegotiate and reduce what can be reduced.

# The work around the work

A job description rarely captures the full amount of attention a working day consumes. Context switching, interruptions and uncertainty can make a day feel much heavier than the number of completed tasks suggests.

- ☐ Meetings with no clear purpose or decision.
- ☐ Repeated switching between unrelated tasks.
- ☐ Notifications that break concentration all day.
- ☐ Unclear ownership, so you end up checking and chasing.
- ☐ Multiple people assigning work without one agreed priority order.
- ☐ Out of hours messages that keep work mentally present even when you are technically finished.

Not all of these can be removed, but naming them helps you stop assuming the only problem is that you are not working fast enough.

## THE ENERGY RETURN QUESTION

**What will this task cost me?**

**What will it give me?**

**Is that exchange worth it right now?**

TRY THIS

# The Workload Reality Check

| TASK | DEADLINE | TIME | PRIORITY |
|------|----------|------|----------|
|      |          |      |          |
|      |          |      |          |
|      |          |      |          |
|      |          |      |          |

What happens if one of these waits?

Which deadline or scope could be renegotiated?

A list of ten urgent tasks is not a priority system. It is ten competing demands.

# Prepare around facts, not the perfect speech

What is happening?

---

What examples can I give?

---

What is making the workload difficult?

---

What needs clarifying?

---

What specific change am I asking for?

---

## WORDS YOU CAN USE

*"I can complete A or B by Friday, but not both to a good standard. Which is the priority?"*

*"The current workload isn't achievable within the time available. I need us to agree what moves."*

## Look for friction, not perfection

You may not be able to transform your workplace, but there may still be ways to reduce unnecessary demand: a protected focus window, fewer notifications, clearer priorities, a shorter meeting, a more realistic deadline or a conversation about what actually needs to be done.

For self employed people, the same principle applies differently. It might mean narrowing the day's priorities, batching admin, creating communication windows, setting a latest response time or deciding what "good enough" looks like when perfection is costing hours you cannot afford.

### SUNDAY NIGHT CHECK

**What is already demanding my energy this week?**

**Where is the likely pressure point?**

**What could I remove now rather than waiting until I am overwhelmed?**

### RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Choose the one work task that matters most tomorrow. Everything else can be prioritised around it.

# MAKE WORK MORE CONCRETE

When work is overwhelming, vague pressure makes everything harder. 'I have too much to do' may be completely true, but it leaves your brain trying to hold the whole workload at once. Turning the pressure into specific tasks, deadlines and trade offs makes it easier to see what can actually change. It also gives you something concrete to take into a conversation with a manager, colleague or client.

Start with time. If five tasks each require three hours and all five are due tomorrow, the problem is not that you need a better planner. The workload exceeds the time available. Writing that down matters because exhausted people often turn impossible maths into a personal criticism. They think they should be faster, more focused or more resilient. Sometimes the honest answer is simply that the work does not fit.

Look at interruptions too. A day can contain seven hours of working time but very little uninterrupted attention. Meetings, calls, notifications and quick questions can break concentration into pieces. If your role allows it, protect blocks of time for focused work, batch smaller tasks and reduce unnecessary notifications. If it does not allow much control, at least include those interruptions when estimating what is realistically achievable. They are part of the workload, not empty space between the workload.

If you need to raise concerns, try to avoid presenting yourself as the problem that needs fixing. Bring examples and ask for decisions. Which deadline takes priority? What can move? What can be reduced? Who else can support this? If the situation is affecting your health or ability to work safely, seek appropriate professional or workplace support. You do not need to wait until you are completely unable to continue before saying that the current arrangement is not sustainable for you.

# Being professional does not mean pretending the workload is unlimited

When work is busy, the instinct can be to quietly absorb the pressure and hope you can catch up later. The trouble is that “later” often arrives with a fresh set of demands. You work through lunch, answer messages at night, start earlier and become more efficient, but the saved space is immediately filled with something else. What began as a short term push slowly becomes the normal operating model.

That is why workload conversations are often more useful when they focus on capacity and priorities rather than personal toughness. You do not need to prove that you are exhausted enough to deserve a conversation. If five pieces of work cannot realistically be completed in the available time, that is a planning issue worth making visible.

## Bring the trade off into the room

One of the most useful workplace habits is to stop accepting new work as though it exists separately from everything already on your list. A new priority usually means an old priority moves. Saying, “Yes, I can pick this up. Which of these existing deadlines would you like me to move?” turns an invisible trade off into an explicit decision.

This is not always easy, and not every workplace responds well. If you are employed, use the support available to you where appropriate, which may include your manager, HR, occupational health, a union or another relevant workplace route. The point of this guide is not to give legal or medical advice; it is to help you describe the practical reality more clearly.

### REMEMBER

Efficiency can improve a reasonable workload. It cannot make an unreasonable volume of work endlessly reasonable.

If you are self employed, the same principle still matters even though the conversation may be with yourself. Every “quick” extra job still occupies time. Every client promise creates a future claim on your capacity. Protecting your ability to work tomorrow sometimes means resisting the temptation to sell every available hour today.

# 08

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# WHY DOESN'T REST FEEL LIKE IT'S WORKING?

---

*Why doing nothing does not always leave you feeling rested.*



## *Have you ever spent most of Sunday doing very little and still arrived at Monday feeling as though you have not rested?*

One reason may simply be that "doing nothing" and "feeling restored" are not always the same thing. You can be physically sitting on the sofa while mentally running through Monday's workload. You can spend an evening scrolling and finish it more overstimulated than when you started. You can enjoy seeing people and still find the social effort tiring.

Rather than treating rest as one single activity, it can be more useful to ask what kind of demand you have had too much of.

### **TWO QUESTIONS**

**What kind of tired am I?**

**What kind of lower demand activity actually matches it?**

# Match the rest to the demand

## Physical

Sitting or lying down, an earlier night where possible, warmth, reducing unnecessary physical jobs.

## Mental

Fewer decisions, less information, a simple repetitive activity, quiet.

## Social

Time without having to talk, reassure, host, perform or respond.

## Digital

A period without notifications, messages, news or endless incoming information.

## Emotional

Time where nobody needs you to fix, advise or carry their feelings.

## Sensory

Less noise, fewer screens, softer lighting or a calmer physical environment.

## Enjoyable is not always restorative

A night out can be enjoyable and still take energy. A television series can be entertaining and still keep you up too late. Scrolling can feel like switching off while quietly feeding your brain hundreds of new pieces of information.

None of that means those things are bad. It simply means enjoyment and restoration are not identical.

There is another trap too: making rest productive. You decide your walk has to hit a step target, your hobby has to become a side hustle, your reading needs to be educational, or your quiet morning needs to include five habits.

Something can be restful without being useful  
to anybody else.

# What actually helps you come down a gear?

| WHEN I FEEL...       | A LOWER DEMAND OPTION I CAN TRY |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Physically tired     |                                 |
| Mentally full        |                                 |
| Socially drained     |                                 |
| Digitally overloaded |                                 |
| Emotionally spent    |                                 |
| Overstimulated       |                                 |

**RUNNING ON EMPTY?**

Do not build a full menu. Ask: **What do I need less of for the next hour?**

# REST THAT ACTUALLY MATCHES THE DRAIN

Rest can fail to feel restorative when it keeps exposing you to the same type of demand that exhausted you. If you have spent all day making decisions, an evening that requires more choices may not feel restful even if the choices are pleasant. If you have spent the week listening to people, supporting them and being socially available, a busy dinner with friends might be enjoyable but still use more social energy. This is why copying somebody else's idea of relaxation does not always work.

There is also a difference between distraction and restoration. Scrolling can distract you from work, but it can still give your brain hundreds of new pieces of information to process. Television can be relaxing, but searching through options for forty minutes might not be. Exercise can feel restorative for one person and like another demand for somebody else on that particular day. Instead of asking what should count as rest, notice what leaves you with slightly more space afterwards.

Sometimes rest needs to be boring. A quiet cup of tea. Sitting in the car for ten minutes before going inside. A walk without a podcast. Going to bed without trying to make the evening productive first. These things are easy to dismiss because they do not look impressive, but recovery does not need to look impressive. If your system has had too much input, less input may be exactly what helps.

Do not turn this into another area where you have to perform correctly. You do not need a perfect rest routine. You need permission to experiment. Notice what kind of tired you are, choose something that asks less of that part of you and see how you feel afterwards. Over time, you will build your own menu. The best option is not the one that sounds healthiest on paper. It is the one that genuinely reduces demand and is realistic in the life you actually have.

## Sometimes you are resting your body while your brain is still at work

It can be frustrating to make time for rest and discover that you still feel tired afterwards. That does not automatically mean you are resting badly. Recovery is affected by many things, and persistent fatigue can have causes that deserve professional attention. But in everyday life, one useful thing to notice is whether the rest you are choosing actually reduces the type of demand that has been exhausting you.

If your day has involved constant decisions, an evening spent choosing what to watch, answering messages, scrolling through hundreds of tiny pieces of information and planning tomorrow may involve very little physical movement while still asking a lot from your attention. If you have spent all day listening to people, supporting them and responding to their needs, a busy social evening may be enjoyable but not especially restorative.

This is why I like the idea of a rest menu rather than one perfect rest routine. What helps can change from day to day. Sometimes you need sleep. Sometimes you need silence. Sometimes you need to move your body after hours at a desk. Sometimes you need to laugh with somebody who asks nothing from you. Sometimes you need to stop consuming information for an hour.

### Do not grade the rest

Rest also stops feeling restful when you turn it into a performance. You finally sit down, then spend the whole time thinking you should be meditating, reading something useful, doing a “better” form of self care or feeling more grateful for the break. Now even your downtime has a standard attached to it.

#### **Kerri's note**

You do not have to optimise every quiet moment. Sometimes the most restorative thing about an hour is that nobody, including you, is demanding a result from it.

Experiment rather than prescribe. Ask, “What kind of tired am I?” and choose one lower demand response that seems to match. Afterwards, notice whether you feel even five per cent different. You are learning your own patterns, not trying to win at resting.

# 09

CHAPTER NINE

## PLEASE DON'T TURN RECOVERY INTO ANOTHER JOB

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*You do not need seventeen new habits. You may need one less demand.*

*There is a slightly ridiculous thing many of us do when life becomes overwhelming: we respond by creating an ambitious new plan.*

From Monday we are going to get up earlier, meditate, exercise, meal prep, journal, drink two litres of water, reduce screen time, walk ten thousand steps and finally become the organised person we have apparently been failing to become.

By Wednesday the new routine has become another list we are behind on.

If your life already contains too much demand, adding a complicated recovery programme may simply create a nicer looking form of demand.

#### A DIFFERENT QUESTION

Instead of asking **"What should I add?"**, ask **"What could I remove?"**



# Experiment with carrying slightly less

Choose one thing at a time to stop, reduce, delegate, simplify or postpone. Then leave the change in place long enough to notice what happens.

## Week one

What became easier?

## Week two

What became easier?

## Week three

What became easier?

## Week four

What became easier?

*This is not a four week recovery promise. It is simply four opportunities to test what happens when you stop automatically adding more.*

# Good recovery does not need to look impressive

A useful change might be eating the same easy breakfast every day for a while because it removes a decision. It might be cancelling one social plan, using a simpler dinner, saying no to one extra piece of work or leaving a room untidy until tomorrow.

None of those choices will look particularly transformational on social media. That is partly the point. Recovery has to work in your actual kitchen, diary, bank account and working week, not just look good in theory.

## Kerri's note

You do not need to become better at recovery. You need enough room for recovery to be possible.

## RUNNING ON EMPTY?

What is one thing you can make easier today?

# RECOVERY DOES NOT NEED PERFECT HABITS

When you are exhausted, self improvement can become very seductive because it offers a sense of control. If you can just find the right morning routine, supplement, planner, podcast or productivity system, perhaps everything will feel manageable again. The problem is that the search itself can become work. You end up researching how to recover instead of reducing what is draining you, then feel behind because you are not following the plan properly.

Try measuring a change by whether it makes life lighter, not whether it looks disciplined. Preparing clothes the night before might help because it removes a morning decision. Going to a 6am exercise class might be excellent for somebody else and completely wrong for you right now. Ordering groceries might cost a little more but save enough energy to be worthwhile. Recovery is not a competition in doing healthy looking things. It is about creating conditions in which your available capacity is no longer being constantly exceeded.

This is also why small changes deserve time. If you remove one commitment and immediately fill the space with another improvement project, you never discover what the extra space feels like. Leave it alone for a while. Notice whether your patience changes, whether mornings feel easier or whether you have more energy at the end of the day. Empty space can feel unfamiliar when you are used to operating at full capacity, but unfamiliar does not mean wasteful.

There may be periods when the most useful thing you do is maintain rather than progress. You keep life moving, protect the basics and avoid adding more. That can feel unimpressive in a culture that celebrates constant growth, but maintenance is real work. You are allowed to have seasons where the goal is not becoming a better version of yourself. The goal can simply be creating enough room to feel like yourself again.

# If the plan only works when you have loads of energy, it is the wrong plan for burnout

There is a reason ambitious reset plans feel so attractive. They give us the comforting sense that we are taking control. New notebook, new routine, new rules, new version of us. For a few days it can feel brilliant. Then real life interrupts, the routine slips, and the plan that was supposed to help becomes fresh evidence that we are apparently failing again.

I would rather you build something less impressive and more usable. A recovery habit that survives a difficult Tuesday is more valuable than a beautiful routine you can only maintain during a quiet week. If five minutes outside helps, it counts. If the easiest dinner prevents you skipping food, it counts. If turning off one notification reduces one source of irritation, it counts.

Burnout can make us desperate for a dramatic fix because we want to feel different quickly. But the conditions that drained you may have developed over months or years. Some will be changeable; some will need negotiation; some may be outside your control for now. You do not have to pretend a bath, a journal or a morning routine can solve structural problems they were never designed to solve.

## Choose relief before improvement

When capacity is low, ask what would make life slightly easier before asking what would make you a better version of yourself. Could you automate a bill? Cancel one non essential plan? Buy the easier food? Ask somebody else to make the phone call? Move one deadline? Put the laundry away unfolded? These are not glamorous interventions. That is partly why they work: they remove demand instead of creating a new project.

### THE TEST

If your "recovery" plan makes you feel behind, guilty or constantly monitored by yourself, simplify it.

You are allowed to recover in an ordinary looking way. Nobody needs to be impressed. The aim is not to perform wellness. It is to create enough breathing room for your capacity to begin returning and enough honesty to notice which parts of your life will need to change if you want that capacity to stay.

# 10

## CHAPTER TEN

# FEELING BETTER DOESN'T MEAN FILLING THE DIARY AGAIN

---

*A little more energy does not automatically mean it is available  
for somebody else to claim.*

*One of the easiest ways to lose newly available capacity is to immediately spend it.*

You have a better week, so you agree to another commitment. Work settles down, so you volunteer for something. You finally get a free Saturday and decide it is the perfect opportunity to catch up on everything you postponed.

Before long, the space disappears.

This is why capacity is not the same as availability. Having two free hours does not mean those hours need filling. Having enough energy to do something does not automatically mean doing it is the best use of that energy.

**Some capacity can simply remain unused.**

## Protect some empty space on purpose

A buffer is the bit you do not plan to spend. It gives you somewhere to absorb the unexpected without immediately pushing the whole week over its limit.

In practice, that might mean not booking every evening, not filling both weekend days, leaving space between demanding meetings, keeping one lunch break clear, or resisting the urge to use every better day to catch up on every neglected job.

### ASK YOURSELF

What helped me feel a little better?

What did I stop doing?

Which boundaries need to remain even when I have more energy?

What tells me I am starting to take too much on again?

TRY THIS

# My Capacity Buffer Plan

**Things I stopped or reduced that helped:**

---

**Boundaries I want to keep even when I feel better:**

---

**My early signs that I am filling the space again:**

---

**Where I deliberately want some empty space:**

---

**What "enough" looks like for me:**

---



# DO NOT SPEND THE FIRST BIT OF SPACE

When energy starts returning, it can be tempting to treat it as proof that the problem has gone. You feel more like yourself, so you catch up. You say yes to the plans you postponed, take on the extra work and use the quiet weekend to clear the backlog. Within a few weeks, you have recreated the conditions that left you depleted in the first place. This does not mean recovery has failed. It means your old pattern is familiar and easy to return to.

A capacity buffer protects you from ordinary life being ordinary. Plans change. Children get ill. Trains are cancelled. Work suddenly becomes busy. Appliances break. Somebody needs help. If every hour and every ounce of energy is already allocated, any unexpected demand pushes you beyond what you have available. Leaving some space is not inefficient. It is what makes a life more able to absorb the things you cannot plan for.

The buffer can be practical as well as emotional. It might mean one evening a week without plans, fewer back to back meetings, not booking every weekend or keeping some money aside where possible. It may mean resisting the urge to answer every message immediately. Your version will depend on your circumstances. The principle is simply that available space does not have to be converted into output.

Pay particular attention to the boundaries that helped when you were struggling. If turning off work notifications made evenings calmer, there is no reason to switch them back on just because you feel better. If simpler meals reduced pressure, they can remain part of normal life. If saying no to one recurring commitment created breathing room, you do not owe that space back to anybody. Feeling better is an opportunity to build differently, not an instruction to return to maximum capacity.

# Feeling better can make you forget what made you exhausted

One of the strange things about recovering some energy is how quickly we can reinterpret it as spare capacity. You have a couple of better days and suddenly the jobs you postponed start calling your name. You agree to the plan you previously said no to. You take on the extra piece of work because, technically, you could fit it in. Within a few weeks the buffer you fought so hard to create has disappeared.

This is especially easy if you are used to measuring a good day by how much you got done. Empty space can feel wasteful. A free evening looks like an opportunity to catch up. A quiet week looks like proof you could take on more. But if every improvement in capacity is immediately converted into output, your life never gets a margin.

A capacity buffer is that margin. It is the bit you do not pre spend. It is what allows a delayed train, a sick child, a difficult meeting, a poor night's sleep or an unexpected bill to happen without immediately tipping the whole week over. It also gives you room for things that are not responsibilities at all: curiosity, enjoyment, spontaneity, doing absolutely nothing useful.

## Keep some of the changes that helped

When you start feeling better, look back before you start adding. Which boundaries created relief? Which tasks turned out not to matter? What did somebody else successfully take over? Which invitations were you glad you declined? Which standards did you lower without the world ending? Those are not temporary emergency measures by default. Some may be better ways of living.

### **Kerri's note**

Do not make exhaustion the entry requirement for rest. You do not have to use yourself up before you are allowed to leave something in reserve.

Of course, life will become busy again. The goal is not to create a permanently empty diary. It is to notice the point where "I have room for this" quietly becomes "I can probably squeeze this in". That sentence is often the beginning of giving away the buffer. Protecting some unclaimed capacity is not laziness. It is part of making your life more resilient to real life.

# 11

CHAPTER ELEVEN

## BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BURNOUT RESET

---

*Bring the useful pieces together into something you can  
actually return to.*

*You do not need to remember every page of this book. You need a small number of decisions you can return to when life starts becoming too much again.*

You have looked at your capacity, where your energy goes, what happens on low energy days, what can be removed, how to communicate boundaries, the invisible load you carry, workplace demand, different kinds of rest and the importance of leaving some capacity unclaimed.

Your plan is not supposed to create a perfectly balanced life. Real life changes. Work gets busy. Children need more from you. Money becomes tighter. Relationships change. Unexpected things happen.

The point is to recognise your own patterns sooner and have a realistic response ready.

**YOUR RESET IS NOT A ROUTINE**

It is a decision making system for what happens when your capacity and your demands stop matching.

# What I am changing now

**My biggest energy drains are:**

---

**For now, I am reducing:**

---

**I am stopping:**

---

**I am delaying:**

---

**I am delegating or sharing:**

---

**I am asking for help with:**

---

---

# What I want to protect

**When I am running on empty, my Minimum Viable Day is:**

---

**The work boundaries I need are:**

---

**The home or relationship boundaries I need are:**

---

**The early signs I am becoming overloaded again are:**

---

---

**When that happens, I will:**

---

**People I can contact for practical or professional support are:**

---

---

# What deserves my energy?

There will still be responsibilities, difficult weeks, unexpected problems, deadlines, washing, bills and people who want things from you. The aim was never to build a life in which nothing is demanding. It was to stop treating every demand as equally deserving of you.

You may not be able to change everything that is draining you right now. Some circumstances take time to change and some are not easily changed at all. But knowing what is happening gives you somewhere to begin.

Perhaps one thing gets postponed. One responsibility gets shared. One boundary stays in place. One evening remains empty. One task becomes good enough instead of perfect. One automatic yes becomes, "Let me check and come back to you."

---

## **Kerri's note**

This was never about dramatically reinventing your life. It was about making enough room inside it for you to live there too.

# MAKE THE RESET YOURS

A useful plan should still make sense on a bad Tuesday. If it only works when you are motivated, well rested and completely in control of your diary, it is not much of a plan. Keep yours simple enough that you can remember the important parts when your head is full. Know your early warning signs, your biggest drains, the people you can ask for help and the few boundaries that make the biggest difference. Everything else can be adjusted as life changes.

Your warning signs may be surprisingly ordinary. Perhaps you stop replying to friends, live on takeaways, become irritated by noise or start staying up late because the evening is the only time nobody wants anything from you. Maybe you become more controlling because you are frightened that one forgotten detail will make everything collapse. Maybe you procrastinate on simple jobs because there is no mental space left to begin them. These signs are not there for you to judge. They are there to tell you that your capacity needs attention.

Decide what you will do when those signs appear. Not a huge rescue plan. A first response. You might cancel one non essential commitment, speak to somebody about workload, return to your Minimum Viable Day for a short period or ask another person to take over something practical. The earlier the response, the less dramatic it may need to be. You are building a way of noticing and adjusting rather than waiting until you have nothing left.

Most importantly, make room for your actual circumstances. Advice that ignores money, caring responsibilities, disability, work demands or the realities of family life is not very useful. You may not be able to remove the biggest pressure immediately. That does not make smaller changes pointless. Reducing one demand, protecting one evening or asking for one piece of help can still matter. Your reset is not a promise that life will become easy. It is a commitment to stop automatically sacrificing all of your capacity to keep everything else running.



# A reset plan should help you decide, not tell you how to live

The most useful thing you can take from this guide is not a perfect routine. It is a clearer way of making decisions when life starts becoming too expensive again. Your warning signs, responsibilities and pressure points will not look exactly like anybody else's, which means your reset needs to be personal enough to survive your actual life.

Think of your plan as something you can return to before you reach the point where everything feels impossible. Maybe your first sign is becoming unusually impatient. Maybe you stop replying to people, start waking at 3am thinking about work, live on convenience food because decisions feel exhausting, or find yourself saying, "I just need to get through this week" every single week. Those patterns are useful information. Write down the ones that belong to you.

## Decide what you will do when the signs appear

An early warning sign becomes more useful when it has an action attached to it. If you notice yourself working later and later, perhaps your action is to review priorities before accepting anything new. If weekends have become pure recovery, perhaps you protect one commitment free block. If you are carrying everybody else's problems, perhaps you ask, "Is this mine to solve?" before automatically stepping in.

Your actions do not need to be dramatic. In fact, smaller actions are often easier to repeat. The purpose is to interrupt the pattern earlier, while you still have enough capacity to make choices.

### Kerri's note

Do not build a plan for the imaginary version of you who has endless motivation. Build it for the tired version of you who needs the next decision to be obvious.

Keep your reset somewhere you can actually find it. Revisit it when circumstances change. Remove anything that becomes another obligation. Add the words, people and practical shortcuts that genuinely help. This is not a contract with yourself; it is a support system.

And remember the question running underneath this whole book: **what deserves my energy?** Not what can you technically squeeze in, not what would impress other people, and not what you have always carried. What matters enough to receive the limited, valuable energy you have today?

# PRINTABLE TOOLKIT

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*Standalone worksheets and quick reference pages to keep beside your laptop, on the fridge or saved on your phone.*

Print only the pages you need. These tools are designed to work independently of the main guide.

# My Energy Budget

*Use this to make the demands on your energy visible.*

| DEMAND AREA       | ESTIMATED COST | COULD ANYTHING CHANGE? |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Work              | £              |                        |
| Family/caring     | £              |                        |
| Household         | £              |                        |
| Travel            | £              |                        |
| Relationships     | £              |                        |
| Admin             | £              |                        |
| Digital demands   | £              |                        |
| Mental load/worry | £              |                        |

**Total estimated cost: £\_\_\_\_\_ / £100**

Which area deserves the first conversation, reduction or boundary?

# The £100 Energy Exercise

*A quick way to compare available energy with the cost of real life.*

|                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Essential</b> | <b>Inherited</b> |
| <hr/>            | <hr/>            |
| <b>Important</b> | <b>Invisible</b> |
| <hr/>            | <hr/>            |
| <b>Expected</b>  | <b>Optional</b>  |
| <hr/>            | <hr/>            |
| <hr/>            | <hr/>            |

**What happens when your life regularly costs more than you have available?**

Which cost could come down first?

# My Minimum Viable Day

*Pre decide the basics so you have fewer decisions to make on a bad day.*

**The easiest realistic food and drink for me today:**

---

**Medication/health essentials where relevant:**

---

**People or animals depending on me:**

---

**Work/admin that truly cannot wait:**

---

**The one household essential:**

---

**What I am deliberately leaving:**

---

# The Burnout Triage Matrix

*Sort what is on your plate before you automatically do all of it.*

**DO**

---

---

**DELAY**

---

---

**DELEGATE**

---

---

**REDUCE**

---

---

**DROP**

---

---

*Keep "Do" smaller than you instinctively want to.*

## Boundary Scripts, Quick Reference

*Use the words. You do not need to invent the perfect response while tired.*

### BUYING TIME

*"Let me check what I've got on and come back to you."*

### WORK

*"I can do that, but I can't complete both that and X today. Which would you like me to prioritise?"*

*"My capacity is full today. I can look at this on Thursday."*

### HOME / SOCIAL

*"I don't have the capacity for that today. Can we work out another option?"*

*"I'm keeping things quiet this week because I'm exhausted. It's not personal."*

# The Bad Day Menu

*Choose easy options before you are too tired to choose.*

| AREA             | MY EASIEST REALISTIC OPTION |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Food             |                             |
| Clothes          |                             |
| Household        |                             |
| Work preparation |                             |
| Communication    |                             |
| Entertainment    |                             |
| Downtime         |                             |

**The point is not to create a perfect low energy routine. It is to reduce decisions.**



# The Not Today List

*A place to deliberately stop carrying things for the next few hours.*

Today I am deliberately NOT solving:

---

Today I am NOT checking:

---

Today I am NOT attending:

---

Today I am NOT answering:

---

Today I am NOT worrying about:

---

Today I am NOT doing:

---

Leaving something for later is a decision, not a failure.

# The Sunday Night Check

*Spot the likely pressure point before the week is already on top of you.*

**What is already demanding my energy this week?**

---

**Where is the likely pressure point?**

---

**What could I remove now?**

---

**Where might I need help or clarity?**

---

**What am I saying no to this week?**

---

**What space am I protecting?**

---

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# My Invisible Load Audit

*Make the work in your head visible enough to share.*

| I CURRENTLY... | KEEP | SHARE / TRANSFER / STOP |
|----------------|------|-------------------------|
| Remember       |      |                         |
| Plan           |      |                         |
| Notice         |      |                         |
| Remind         |      |                         |
| Follow up      |      |                         |
| Check          |      |                         |
| Worry about    |      |                         |

**One whole responsibility I would like somebody else to own is:**

---

# My Capacity Buffer

*Protect the space that helped instead of immediately filling it.*

**Things I stopped or reduced that helped:**

---

**Boundaries I want to keep:**

---

**My warning signs that the space is disappearing:**

---

**Where I want some deliberate empty space:**

---

**What "enough" looks like:**

---

# My Personal Burnout Reset Plan

**My biggest energy drains**

---

**I am reducing**

---

**I am stopping**

---

**I am delaying**

---

**I am delegating/sharing**

---

**My Minimum Viable Day**

---

**Boundaries I am protecting**

---

**My warning signs**

---

**When they show up, I will**

---

**People I can contact**

---

**One thing I want to protect going forward is:**

---

QUICK REFERENCE

# WHEN YOU'RE RUNNING ON EMPTY

*If you come back to nothing else in this book, come back here.  
You do not need to solve the whole week today.*

1. What genuinely has to happen today?

2. What can wait?

3. What can somebody else do?

4. Who actually needs a reply?

5. What can be adequate rather than excellent?

6. What am I carrying because I have always carried it?

7. What can I remove from today?

**Then choose one next step. Not ten. One.**

Resilience isn't about learning to tolerate more. Sometimes it begins with deciding what genuinely deserves your energy now.