# The Work **We Carry**

Restoring Energy and Purpose Through the Science of Burnout, Recovery, and Flow



FIVE TO FLOW

**o4a Annual Conference**

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# **Hidden** in plain sight


When
burnout
became
dangerous



# Who I am & why this matters

Dr. Alexis Yamokoski, PhD
Co-Founder & Chief Humanologist

Burnout is not weakness.

**It’s a warning sign.**



# 63 million

Americans are family caregivers.

**And 99% of Area Agencies on Aging serve them.**

AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving, Caregiving in the U.S. 2025. USAging, 2025 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging.

# 71%

of Area Agencies on Aging report waitlists for Older Americans Act **services.**

USAging, 2025 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging

# 79%

of Area Agencies on Aging report staff feeling **overwhelmed or burnt out due to workload.**

USAging, Caregiver Needed, 2022

# The people who **care the most** often carry the most.

Purpose fuels us. Without recovery, it can also drain us.

Purpose cannot compensate indefinitely for **unsustainable demands.**



BURNOUT REFLECTS

**how work is designed,**

not how much

people care


The people who make
care possible
**deserve care, too.**

Leaders + Teams
+ Individuals

Small,
intentional shifts

Create healthier
conditions





# Burnout vs Flow

# Which end of the stick **are we carrying?**



## Burnout Zone

Threat. Depletion. Constant pressure.

## Flow Zone

Safety. Clarity. Forward progress.



# The Burnout Drivers

**Unmanageable workload**



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**Unmanageable workload**

**Perceived unfairness**



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**Breakdown of community**



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**Insufficient recognition**

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**Values conflict**



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**Unmanageable workload**

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**Breakdown of community**

**Values conflict**

**Loss of control**

# The Flow Conditions

**Sustainable capacity**



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**Sustainable capacity**

**Trust & equity**

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**Sustainable capacity**

**Trust & equity**

**Meaningful acknowledgment**





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**Sustainable capacity**

**Trust & equity**

**Meaningful acknowledgment**

**Psychological safety**



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**Trust & equity**

**Meaningful acknowledgment**

**Psychological safety**

**Values alignment**



# The Flow Conditions

**Sustainable capacity**

**Trust & equity**

**Meaningful acknowledgment**

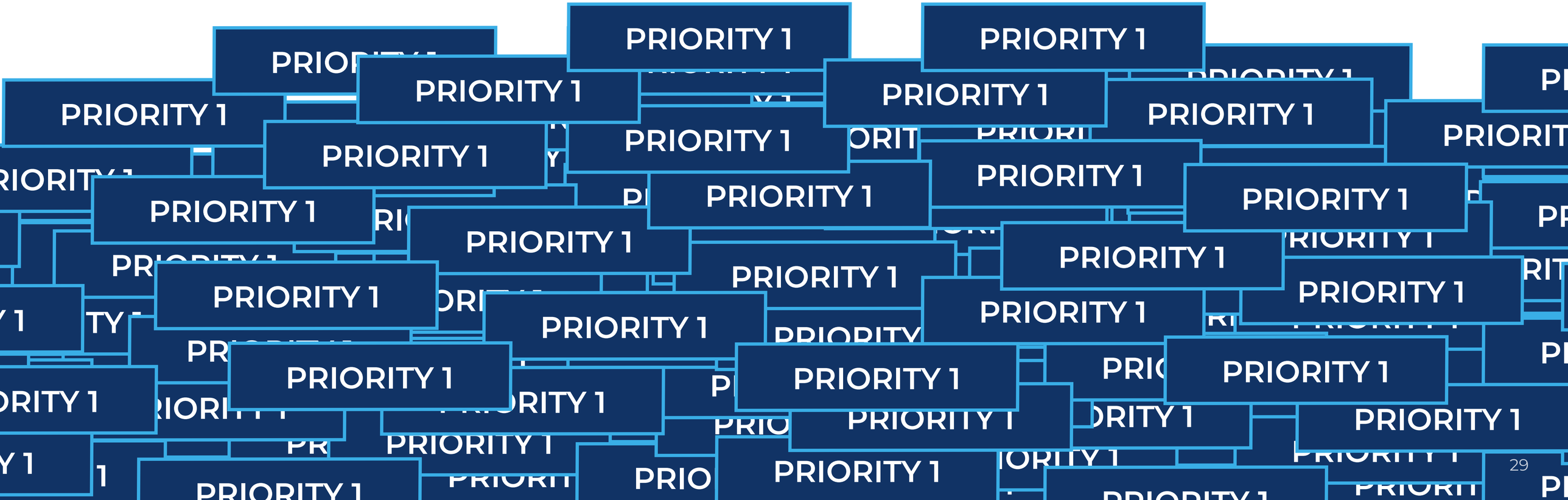
**Psychological safety**

**Values alignment**

**Autonomy**

| | |
|---|---|
| Unmanageable workload | Sustainable capacity |
| Perceived unfairness | Trust & equity |
| Insufficient recognition | Meaningful acknowledgment |
| Breakdown of community | Psychological safety |
| Values conflict | Values alignment |
| Loss of control | Autonomy |

# When everything is a priority, **nothing is**






Your brain doesn’t multitask.

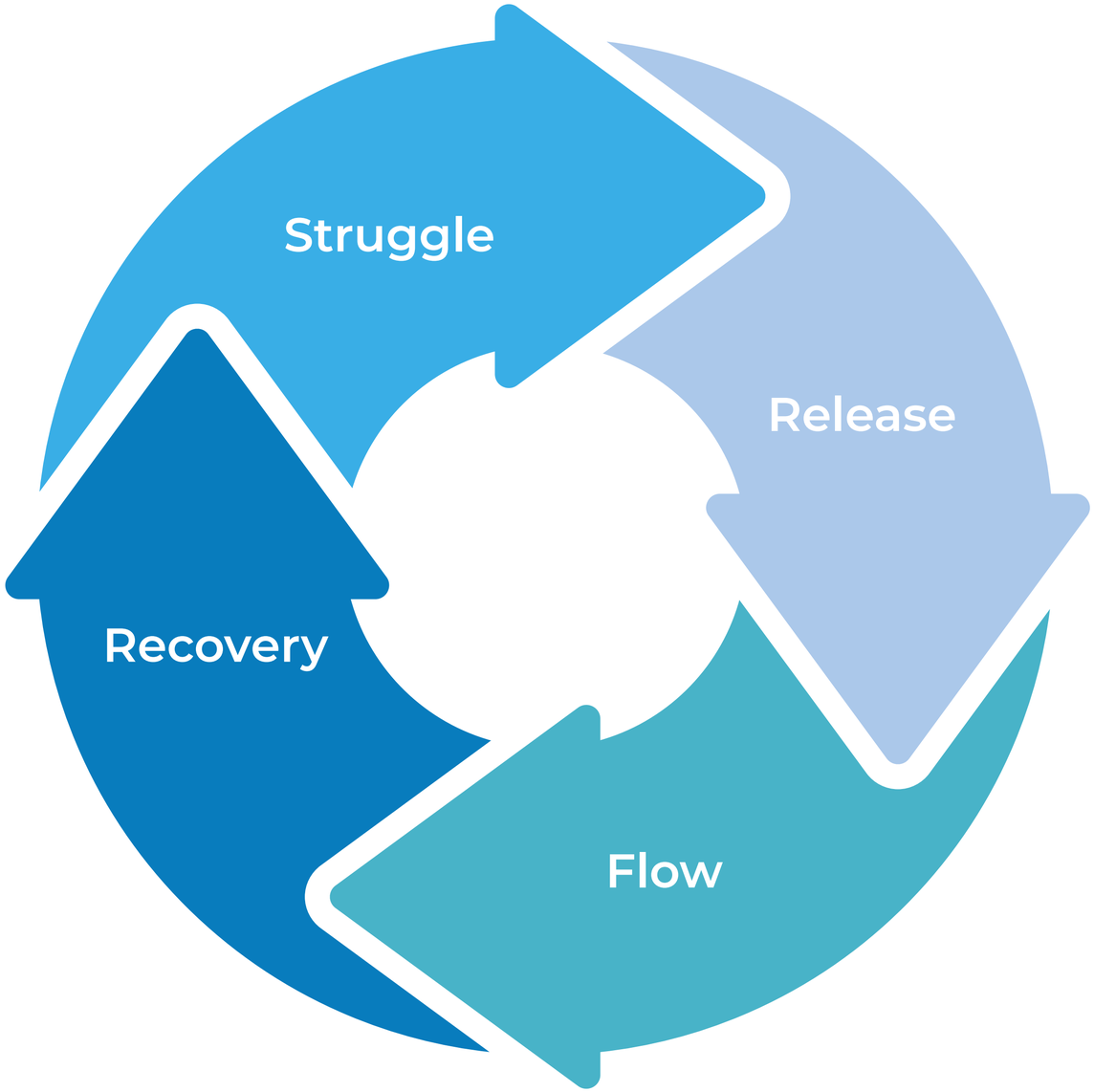
**It switches.**

Every switch has a cost.




# **23** minutes

to get back on track
after an interruption.




# The Four-Phase Flow Cycle



# Struggle

Healthy stress that supports learning

Not failure

# Release

Neurological necessity

Signals safety to let go





# Flow

Deep focus, clarity, meaningful engagement

Work feels fulfilling, not draining

# Recovery

Restores energy

Makes the next cycle possible

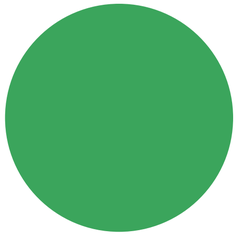


Recovery is not the reward for finishing.

**It is what makes continuing possible.**

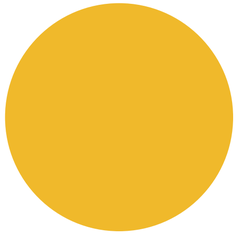
# Where is your energy **today?**

**What would help move you one step toward green?**



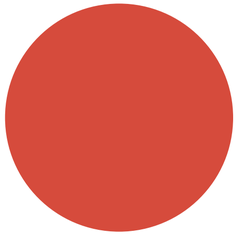
**Green**

I feel energized and balanced.



**Yellow**

I’m managing, but feeling strain.



**Red**

I feel depleted and need support.



Creating conditions that allow us to **keep caring**



# Awareness **without blame**

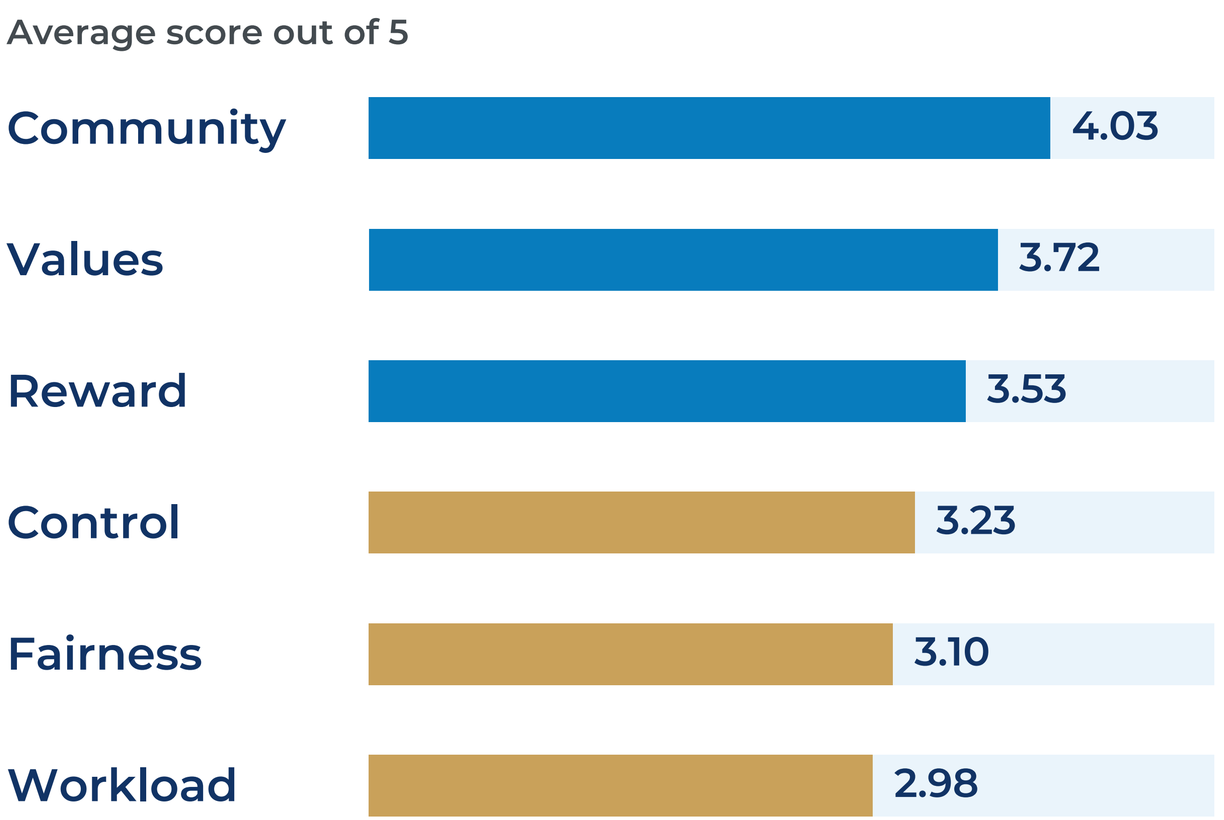
# What stands out?
# What surprised you?
# What is one recommendation you will try?

Start with your lowest score, not your overall score.

BURNOUTIQ™ RESULTS

# What you **told us**

**142** of you completed the BurnoutIQ assessment




BurnoutIQ, o4a attendees, n = 142, October 2026. Mean of the two questions in each area.

BURNOUTIQ™ RESULTS

# It is rarely **just one thing**

**82%** gave at least one low score across the 12 questions

**49%** gave low scores on three or more questions

**22%** gave low scores on five or more, feeling strain across many parts of their work at once

BurnoutIQ, o4a attendees, n = 142, October 2026. Low score = 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale.

BURNOUTIQ™ RESULTS

# What we are carrying **together**

**44%** say they cannot finish their workload without consistently working beyond normal hours

**38%** postpone or cancel personal commitments to meet work deadlines

**38%** feel the need to document their work to protect themselves from unfair treatment

BurnoutIQ, o4a attendees, n = 142, October 2026. Percent who disagree (1 or 2 on a 5-point scale).

BURNOUTIQ™ RESULTS

# Belief and **reality**

## VOICE

**68%**

WHAT YOU BELIEVE

I have meaningful input into decisions about how my work is done.

**34%**

WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE

I rarely have to implement work processes or solutions that I had no role in developing.

## PURPOSE

**88%**

WHAT YOU BELIEVE

The purpose of my work is consistent with my personal values.

**44%**

WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE

I love discussing my work with friends and family because I feel very aligned with what I do.

BurnoutIQ, o4a attendees, n = 142, October 2026. Percent who agree (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale).

BURNOUTIQ™ RESULTS

# Strength and strain can exist **together**

**88%** say the purpose of their work is consistent with their personal values

**87%** solve work challenges collaboratively with colleagues

**82%** experience positive, supportive relationships with colleagues

BurnoutIQ, o4a attendees, n = 142, October 2026. Percent who agree (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale).

THE COST OF CARRYING TOO MUCH

# $30,000 to $120,000

the estimated cost to replace one social worker who leaves

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**52%** of people who leave a job say their manager or organization could have done something to keep them.

Gallup estimates replacement at one-half to two times annual salary. Based on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics median pay for social workers, $61,330 (May 2024). Gallup, exiting employee research.

NO NEW MONEY REQUIRED

# What is **within reach**

## Capacity

When something new starts, decide out loud what stops or slows down.

## Voice

Close the loop. When you ask for input, come back and show what changed because of it, or explain why it could not.

## Fairness

Make the reasons visible. Explain how caseloads, assignments, and decisions are made.

# Shared Responsibility

Leaders + Teams + Individuals

Small, meaningful choices

Everyday actions



# 74%

**lower odds of burnout** when health workers had a supervisor who helped.

CDC, Vital Signs, MMWR, 2023



QUESTION ONE

# What do I need?

01

Recognize your capacity and identify what would support your well-being.



QUESTION TWO

# What do I need to ask for?

02

Identify the people, resources, conversations, or practical help that could make a difference.



QUESTION THREE

# What needs to change around me?

03

Some problems call for changes in workload, staffing, leadership, team practices, or organizational systems.

# Three questions for **sustainable care**

01

## What do I need?

Recognize your capacity and what would support you.

02

## What do I need to ask for?

The people, resources, or conversations that could help.

03

## What needs to change around me?

What is not yours alone to fix.

The answer isn’t to care less. It’s to create conditions that allow us to keep caring without losing ourselves in the process.

FIVE TO FLOW



TURN TO SOMEONE NEAR YOU

# What would make it easier for people in your organization **to ask for and receive help?**

# What will I **carry forward?**

## START

One thing I want to begin doing to support my well-being

## STOP

One habit, expectation, or behavior that is no longer serving me

## CONTINUE

What is already helping me care for myself and others

**Jot these in your phone or notebook, or simply hold them in mind.**

# The work we carry


Sometimes we need
someone else to help us
see what we cannot.





# My burnout became the gift that **changed my life**

The answer isn’t
**to care less.**

It’s to create conditions
that allow us to keep caring
**without losing ourselves.**



FIVE TO FLOW

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TAKE BURNOUTIQ™

**Didn't take it?**
Scan to take
it right now.

ON YOUR INDEX CARD

**What resonated?**
**What action will you take?**
**Anything else?**