

UNSTUCK &
RENEWED

Healing Burnout and
Finding Lasting Balance

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Year of the Book
135 Glen Avenue
Glen Rock, PA 17327

ISBN: 978-1-64649-446-0 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-64649-xxx-x (ebook)

Library of Congress Control Number:

Cover art...

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1 Disengaged, Burnt Out and Stuck

When I left the traditional workforce a decade ago, I knew I was disengaged and stuck. What I didn't know was that I was burnt out. My business that was birthed at this same time, Leadership Arts Associates, was essentially a space holder for me to figure everything out. My husband had nudged me toward the entrepreneurial endeavor and genuinely wanted me to find happiness, but I felt so lost and numb and overwhelmed that this concept seemed elusive and impossible.

Recently an individual helped me find clarity about this time of my life. He suggested that if I could not articulate what was actually happening, then I would never truly be able to move forward. Amidst a busy evening reception filled with wine, appetizers, and small talk, this gentleman dove into a series of questions that he believed would illuminate the neurological pathway of clarity to solidify my healing and growth evolution.

The questions were intimate in nature, asking about my relationship at the time with my husband and my children. The conclusions included openly admitting that I had poured into my work while treating my family as secondary. He prodded at my definition of "success" and why I continually thought I never had it. In the end, there was one overwhelming call to action... for me to take ownership that *my employer did not burn me out*. I did it to myself.

The interaction left me bewildered. Looking back, I can't help but be proud of myself, not because of my responses, but because of how far I've come. I still stumble and definitely fall, yet getting back up is now easier and lighter. I no longer feel like there is a boulder on my back, which provided me justification to give up in the past. Things I once thought would haunt me for the rest of my life have been released and transformed into beautiful guideposts of growth.

When I was lost, numb, and overwhelmed, I was desperate for external intervention. I wanted someone to tell me what to do, and how to make it better. However, this survival tactic only caused me to become more lost,

numb, and overwhelmed. I began to take every person's feedback as truth... telling me who and how I should be. And I tried to be all those things.

When I opened the doors to Leadership Arts Associates in 2014, it was a business filled with what everyone else wanted from me. I had no idea who I actually was, what I wanted, or even what I needed. If I had met this gentleman back then, the same interaction would have driven me to tears and that boulder would have grown ten pounds heavier.

If you're here because you're disengaged, burnt out, and stuck, you need to know that I am not going to be your external intervention. I wrote this book as a guide to help you heal yourself and find connected momentum again. My hope is that it gives you the space that Leadership Arts Associates gave me – the space to recognize where you are in this moment and to know that it can be different.

This book is a roadmap for you, with landmarks, to help you know if you're heading in the right direction. My vision is that you will use it to tap into your own innate wisdom, and that when you are finished using it, you will feel that inner guidance pouring out of you, and you will be able to trust it with little or no doubt.

That is when you will discover your balance, your flow, your way, your Dao.

The Flamingo and The Phoenix

The cover of this book displays the animal teacher for this work, a fusion of a flamingo and a phoenix. Let's take a moment and explore what guidance this bird can share for the work that is ahead.

The Vibrant Color of the Flamingo

Flamingos are known as those bright pink birds. Their color is a result of their food sources. They metabolize pigments that generate the color you see. For us, the lesson is as simple as: *You are what you eat.*

Connected directly to our work, that "food" equates to your priorities.

Red/pink is the color of the Fire Phase and Element. You'll be introduced to this concept in greater depth later. It is this element at the source and root of burnout.

Fire is tied to passion, things we are excessively excited about – like work, or the role as a parent, or even a hobby. The more you pour into this, the brighter and more vibrant the color.

Our culture praises this as “success.” However, when this element becomes too vibrant, the Fire is too hot, and the flames burn you out like a phoenix meeting its death.

Noticing this vibrant color will allow you to reflect on your definitions of success, your priorities, and what pushes you too close to the flames.

The Fiery Death and Rebirth

The Phoenix is best known for its cycle of fiery deaths and rebirths. This is not much different than the cyclic evolution through healing and growth. Each fiery death should shed a layer that allows rebirth to a purer version of yourself.

However, these cycles also mimic what occurs when we get stuck. It feels as if we are reliving the same narrative over and over, only the character names and set change. The themes become repetitive. The fiery death is what happens when we simply can't do it anymore. Then we quit.

This cycle can only occur so many times until you find yourself exhausted and depleted, so much so that rebirth seems impossible.

The phoenix shows us the fine balance between what is and what could be. It's a shift that can be the difference between feeling trapped and flying free.

The Unseen Under the Wings

Underneath a flamingo's wings, you will find that they are black. You only get glimpses of this truth when the underpart of the wing is exposed. We all possess a darkness that we try to hide, or that we are afraid of. Avoiding this darkness could be what is perpetuating your current state of stagnation.

It is important to recognize that any aspect of yourself that you feel compelled to hide is still an essential piece of you. It holds the key to finding true balance in your life.

Balance is about recognizing and honoring your innermost self while also celebrating what has been cultivated. What you find lurking in that darkness is often you, in your truest, rawest form.

If that darkness feels scary, for known or unknown reasons, please seek additional support and guidance from a Mental Health professional to navigate that process. Choosing to ignore it, and moving forward with the work in this book, will deliver disingenuous results. Stagnant energy stops movement, and until the blockages are dissolved, it will continually cause obstructions.

Together vs. Alone

Flamingos are a community-based animal, whereas the Phoenix is typically a solo bird. I'd like to think that a hybrid of the two would create a bird that is strong on its own as well as in community.

The cycles of the Phoenix hint at a lonely and isolated path. Healing and growth can be accomplished on your own but are so much more powerful and sustainable when done together. You don't need accountability partners for a short-term challenge, but access to like-minded individuals will help you on an ongoing basis. This access is about seeking guidance, and more important, it's about cultivating strength and seeing that you are truly part of a greater collective.

We each have our own individual lives and unique circumstances, but there is a universal pulsating energy that connects us. Even though our challenges are not the same, there is a common thread that allows for understanding and support.

This is why I created the HRart Institute, a community focused solely on healing and growth. It is filled with like-minded individuals who resonate with this work at all different stages. I strongly encourage you to check it out. Simply be curious and engage only in the way you feel called. You'll feel the support merely by being in the space, but it also happens to be where you'll find the bulk of the resources referenced later in this book.

Go to www.HRartInstitute.com

Employer-Employee Accountability

Before we dive in, I feel it is important to address one more thing. In my introduction I mentioned my interactions with the gentleman who drilled into me that my burnout was my own doing.

The core of my work is with organizations. My mission is to reimagine the workplace so that it can become a nurturing environment for healing and growth. I believe this is a win for both employee and employer, allowing us to see possibilities on both sides.

That said, there is a level of accountability that only the employee possesses. As an individual who has the power of free will, you get to decide if you will be open to this possibility. Perhaps, you're not, and that's why you picked up this book... because you gave up all hope on the working world. If so, I wrote this book for you. There are those who feel like the corporate world has let them down in massive ways, that it is so cold and heartless that they abandoned their dreams.

When it comes to systems and the way we manage people, I do believe the working world is broken. I also believe the world is waking up to this fact. We must do things differently.

It is this combination of events that has created the opportunity for me to have a death and rebirthing cycle in my business – the death of Leadership Arts Associates and the rebirthing of The HRart Center. This is where we are doing the work, but if we are going to make massive shifts in this space, I need you to show up as well.

How to Read This Book

This book is divided into two main parts.

The first is about your current state, recognizing with as much clarity as possible where you are today. You'll be guided through a series of exercises and assessments. Please move through this section intentionally with grace. Depending on your current state, these assessments may be disheartening and the exercises might feel challenging. Simply go through the motions, if you must, to get the initial baseline read.

The second part of the book is your roadmap for healing and growth. It will provide guidance for an entire year, teaching you how to use the data from Part One to target your healing for maximum impact.

At the end the book, I discuss lessons from individuals I have encountered along the way who remained stuck and why that seemed to be the case. I'll also invite you to revisit a few of the earlier exercises and assessments to see how far you've come.

Are you ready to get unstuck and find balance? Let's get started.

2 Composition and Progression of Burnout

In 2019, the World Health Organization officially included burnout in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). It was classified as a non-medical condition, an occupational phenomenon. According to this document:

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- *Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;*
- *Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job;*
- *Reduced professional efficacy.*

The WHO went on to say, “burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.”

This definition should inspire a mixture of emotions. On one hand, it finally provides recognition to the very real impact that work can have on us, yet it encourages us to embrace a great divide of personal versus professional. The concept of “work-life balance” – *leaving work at work, and home at home* – is one of the primary drivers that accelerates the progression of burnout and exacerbates its symptoms. It is impossible to have feelings of depletion and exhaustion that are solely caused by work and not personal variables. Even if you were to create an extreme scenario of being isolated inside the work environment with no outside life, you are still a human being with personal needs; it is those needs that make this entire rationale unfeasible. You cannot and should not eliminate your humanity.

In the book *Five Element Constitutional Acupuncture*, authors Angela Hicks, John Hicks, and Peter Mole share that in Traditional Chinese Medicine, disease is viewed as the “breakdown of harmony within the

body.” The causes for this breakdown typically fall in three primary categories: internal, external, and miscellaneous factors.

- *Internal factors* are made up of what arises within us. They are how we process the world, our thoughts, and feelings.
- *External factors* are environmental and climatic conditions, like being too hot or too cold, shortened days in winter, and extra sunshine in summer.
- *Miscellaneous factors* include anything else, however they are predominantly comprised of your lifestyle. This includes everything from your current health, including diet and exercise, to your workload, and the toll that certain life experiences may have taken on you.

Burnout is a breakdown in the state of harmony within your body. From a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) perspective, this is a form of dis-ease. Throughout my work, I have come to believe that the primary cause and progression of this disease is internal rather than external or miscellaneous. It is the way that we process the world, which is created and influenced by our life path.

However, the emotions and thought patterns that we navigate daily make us more vulnerable, so much so that we can determine your current level of burnout by measuring your active emotional imbalances. These imbalances present themselves as physical, mental, and emotional symptoms that you are actively experiencing.

From an energetic perspective, physical symptoms are the manifestation of stagnated energy that has not been addressed. Typically the pathway begins as a thought form, then turns into an emotion attached to a thought pattern, which then turns into physical discomfort. The body is an amazing intuitive caretaker, using multiple avenues of communication to try to tell you that something is not right. Physical symptoms are its last resort – the body screaming for you to pay attention.

Before I introduce you to the five levels of burnout, let’s pause and assess your current state and the imbalances that are feeding the active progression of burnout. You will be invited to retake this assessment later to see how your healing work has impacted your levels and phase

imbalance composition. This will allow you to continue evolving your approach and restorative work.

A few things to note about this assessment:

- It includes a list of physical and psychological symptoms. We have been ingrained to associate burnout only with the professional environment, but please open your mind to release that separation, and instead see these symptoms as connected to your overall wellbeing. Keep in mind that you are the only one who will see your answers. Be honest with yourself, without any judgment, so you can cultivate the healing you most need right now.
- This assessment is quite extensive. My recommendation is to complete one section per day, to ensure you do not get assessment fatigue that will ultimately hinder your results. With that being said, the assessment is structured in a fashion that inquires first about the most pressing burnout symptoms.
- Each section has specific scoring directions to calculate totals and generate your results. However, if you check less than three boxes in any one section, the score for that section is automatically zero.

Let's begin.