

You can't always control your workload,
but you can control how you care for yourself. ♡



CTRL + ALT + REST

Understanding Stress, Preventing Burnout,
and Practicing **Self-Care** in the **Virtual Workplace** ♡

A WEBINAR FOR VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS



UNDERSTAND YOUR STRESS

Know what's
happening and why.



PREVENT BURNOUT

Spot the signs.
Set healthy limits.



PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Simple habits.
Lasting impact.



THRIVE IN YOUR VIRTUAL ROLE

Work smart.
Deliver with balance.



SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Wellness today,
better tomorrow.



Take care
OF YOUR **MIND**,
YOUR **BODY**,
AND YOUR **FUTURE**.
♡

Progress,
not
Perfection.
♡

- ✓ Breathe
 - ✓ Hydrate
 - ✓ Move
 - ✓ Rest
 - ✓ You!
- ♡

Small
steps.
Big
change.
♡

Your
well-being
is your
superpower.
♡



When you hit **REST**, you come back stronger.
Let's build a healthier you—inside and out.



By the end of the webinar, participants will be able to:

-  **Differentiate** stress, chronic stress, and occupational burnout.
-  **Identify** their personal stress signals and burnout warning signs.
-  **Understand**, in simple terms, how stress affects the brain, body, and autonomic nervous system.
-  **Recognize** VA-specific stressors such as digital overload, isolation, client demands, and blurred boundaries.
-  **Practice** simple somatic regulation strategies, including slow breathing, grounding, movement, and humming.
-  **Develop** a realistic self-care and burnout-prevention plan that can be integrated into the virtual workday.



Reset
your mind.



Restore
your energy.



Reclaim
your you. ♥



Your Wi-Fi may be fully connected, but

when was the last time 

**you checked your
connection**
with yourself?



Understand
your stress.



Prevent
burnout.



Practice
self-care.



Thrive in your
virtual role.

UNDERSTAND: STRESS — WHEN YOUR SYSTEM GOES ON ALERT

What Is Stress?



Stress is the body's **psychological** and **physiological** response to demands, pressures, or perceived threats.



**Stress itself is
not always harmful.**



Stress is your body's alarm system.
It's there to protect you, not to break you.



THE STRESS CONTINUUM

HELPFUL STRESS

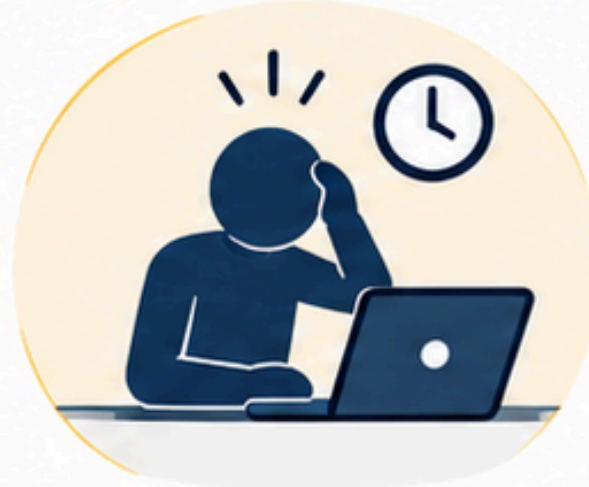


BOOSTS

Motivation, focus,
performance

*Good stress that
motivates and
supports you.* 

ACUTE STRESS



TEMPORARY

Short-term pressure
or challenge

*It's a normal response
to temporary demands.*

CHRONIC STRESS



OVERLOAD

Ongoing demands
with little recovery

*Activation stays high
for too long.*

BURNOUT RISK



DEPLETION

Exhaustion, cynicism,
reduced effectiveness

*Risk of emotional,
physical, and mental
exhaustion.* 



Short-term stress can sometimes sharpen attention and mobilize energy.

The problem emerges when activation becomes **frequent, intense, and prolonged** without enough recovery. 



Stress is **normal**. Staying in high stress is **not**.

Awareness, balance, and recovery make the difference. 

NOTICE: YOUR BODY HAS A STRESS RESPONSE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FEEL STRESSED?



This response is natural.

It's your body's way of protecting you.



NOTICE: YOUR BODY HAS A STRESS RESPONSE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FEEL STRESSED?

When stress hits, your body may respond in 4 different ways:

1



FIGHT:

“Why does this client keep messaging me?!”

2



FLIGHT:

“I don’t want to open my inbox.”

3



FREEZE:

“I have 20 things to do... pero hindi ko alam kung saan magsisimula.”

4



FAWN:

“Okay lang po, I’ll do the extra work tonight.”
Even when you’re already exhausted.



This response is natural.

It’s your body’s way of protecting you.





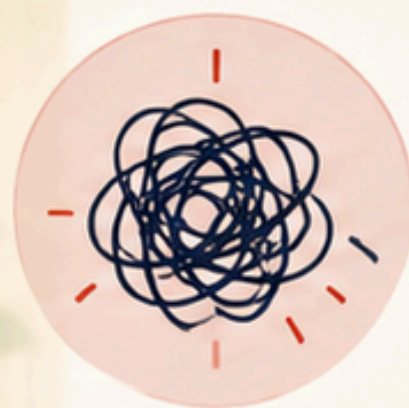
The goal is to
help your
nervous system
recognize:



“

“There is **pressure**
right now
but I am **safe enough**
to respond
rather than **react.**”

”



PRESSURE

Life happens.
Stress shows up.



RECOGNIZE

Your nervous system
notices the pressure.



FEEL SAFE

You remind yourself:
I'm safe enough
right now.



RESPOND

You choose wise
action, not a
knee-jerk reaction.



Awareness brings choice.

Safety brings clarity.

Clarity brings better responses.



RECOGNIZE: WHEN STRESS BECOMES BURNOUT

Stress and Burnout Are Related but Not Identical



- The World Health Organization defines burnout in **ICD-11** as an **occupational phenomenon**, rather than a medical condition, resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

- It describes **three dimensions**:



- 1. EXHAUSTION**
- Feeling emotionally and physically drained.



- 2. INCREASED MENTAL DISTANCE OR CYNICISM TOWARD ONE'S JOB**
- Feeling detached, negative, or uninterested.



- 3. REDUCED PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY**
- Feeling less competent and accomplished at work.

- (World Health Organization, 2019).



 RECOGNIZE:

STRESS VS. BURNOUT



STRESS

“I have too much to do.”

Over engaged

Urgency

Worry about work

“I need to work harder.”

Energy is depleted



BURNOUT

“I don’t know if I can keep doing this.”

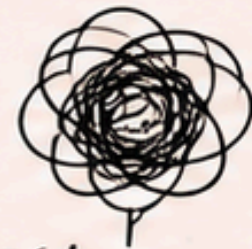
Increasingly disengaged

Exhaustion

Detachment or cynicism

“What’s the point?”

Motivation and efficacy may also decline



Not all stress is bad. But unmanaged stress can lead to burnout.
The key is to recognize the difference—and take action early.





SELF-CARE

is valuable, but
BURNOUT PREVENTION
cannot be reduced to:

*"You just need
to relax more."*



Sometimes
the problem
ISN'T
that you need
a better breathing
exercise.



UNREALISTIC
WORKLOAD



UNCLEAR
PRIORITIES



LACK OF
CONTROL



TOXIC
ENVIRONMENT



INSUFFICIENT
RECOVERY
TIME

*It may be that the system, expectations, and environment
are not sustainable.* ♥

SELF-REGULATION

What I do for myself ♡



Regulate my body

Breathe. Move.
Rest. Nourish.



Manage my mind

Name my emotions.
Challenge negative
thinking. Practice
gratitude.



Care for my heart

Connect. Pray.
Reflect. Rest.



Protect my energy

Set boundaries.
Say no. Take breaks.



We need both: SELF-REGULATION + SYSTEMIC/ WORKPLACE CHANGES



♡
Sustainable well-being
happens when we care for
ourselves and change the
conditions around us.

SYSTEMIC/ WORKPLACE CHANGES

What we build together ♡



Healthy workload

Realistic expectations.
Enough time and
resources.



Psychological safety

Safe to speak up.
Respected. Heard.
Supported.



Fair policies

Boundaries respected.
Flexible options.
Equitable treatment.



Supportive culture

We look out for each
other and celebrate
small wins.



When we regulate within and change what's around us,
we don't just survive— **we thrive.**



⚡ **RESET:** ⚡ FROM **STRESS MODE** TO **RECOVERY MODE**

Meet Your Autonomic Nervous System

Think of your nervous system as having an accelerator and a brake.



Sympathetic activation
= **Accelerator**

Mobilizes energy for action.



Increases heart rate



Speeds up breathing



Releases stress hormones



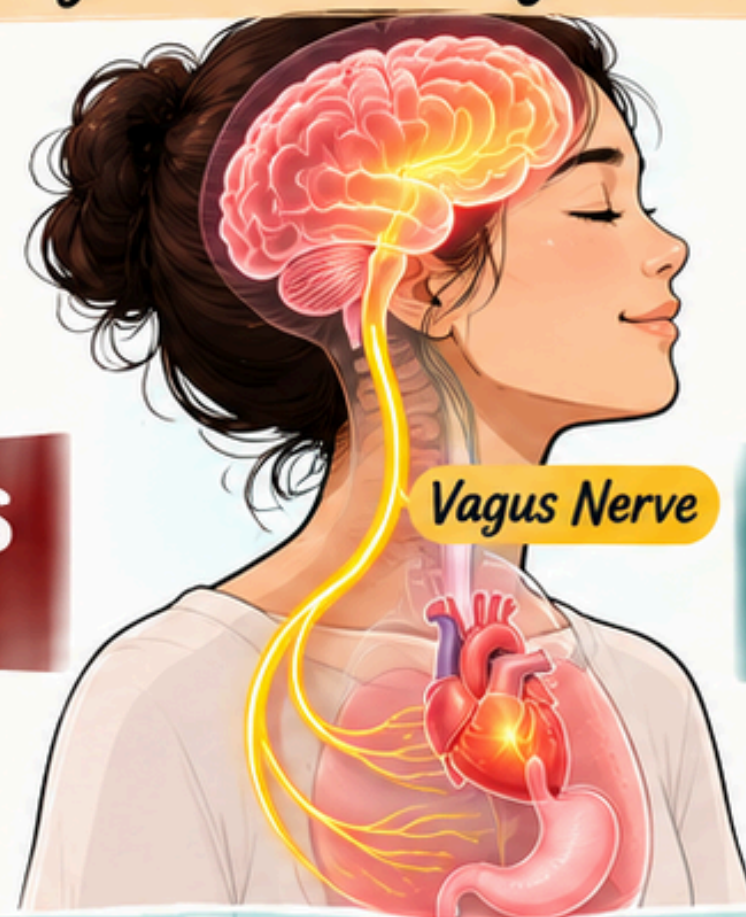
Heightens alertness



Prepares the body for
"fight or flight"



**STRESS
MODE**



Vagus Nerve



**RECOVERY
MODE**



The **vagus nerve** is a major pathway of **parasympathetic regulation** connecting the brain with several organs, including the heart and digestive system.



Parasympathetic activity
= **Brake / Recovery System**

*Supports rest, digestion,
restoration, and recovery.*



Slows down heart rate



Deepens breathing



Activates digestion



Calms the mind and body



Promotes rest and healing



*A well-regulated nervous system helps us move from **survival** to **restoration**.*



SOMATIC PRACTICE:

THE 3-MINUTE NERVOUS SYSTEM RESET



1

ORIENT – 30 SECONDS



“Slowly look around the room.
Don’t search for anything.
Just notice.”

3

Name silently:
3 things you see.



Then notice:
“Where am I right now? What in this
environment tells me I am safe enough
in this moment?”



You don’t have to feel calm to do this.
Just noticing is enough.



SOMATIC PRACTICE:

THE 3-MINUTE NERVOUS SYSTEM RESET



2

GROUND – 30 SECONDS



“Feel your feet touching the floor.”
Gently press down.



Notice:

- The floor supporting you.
- The chair holding you.
- The weight of your body.



“You don’t have to hold yourself
up all by yourself.

Right now, something is supporting you. ♥



Grounding reminds your body:

You are here. You are supported. You are safe.



3

BREATHE – 60 SECONDS

Practice gentle slow breathing:



♥ Repeat comfortably without forcing the breath. ♥

Breathe slowly.
Live fully.



OPTION 1: HAND PATTERN INHALE UP, EXHALE DOWN BREATHING



- 1 Place your hand in front of you.
- 2 Inhale slowly as you trace your finger up.
- 3 Exhale slowly as you trace your finger down.

Your hand is your guide.
Rise as you inhale. Soften as you exhale.

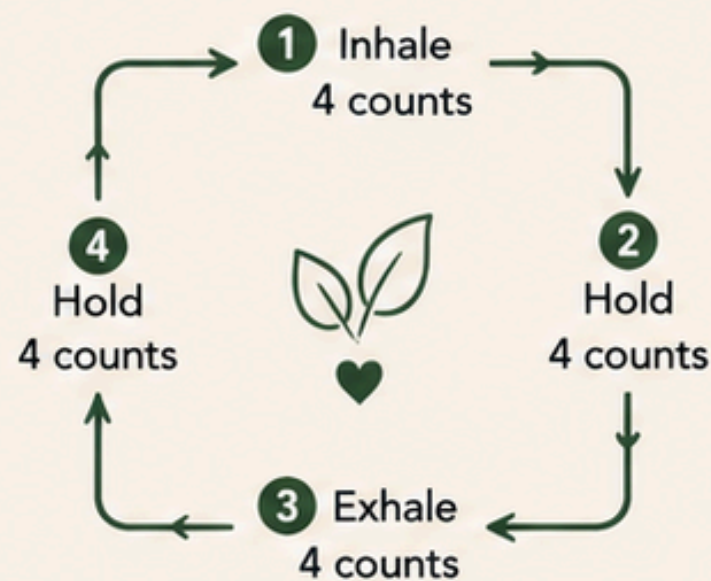
OPTION 2: DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING



- 1 Inhale through your nose.
- 2 Feel your belly rise.
- 3 Exhale slowly through your mouth.

Belly rises on inhale.
Belly falls on exhale.

OPTION 3: BOX BREATHING



Breathe in – Hold – Breathe out – Hold.
Repeat the box.



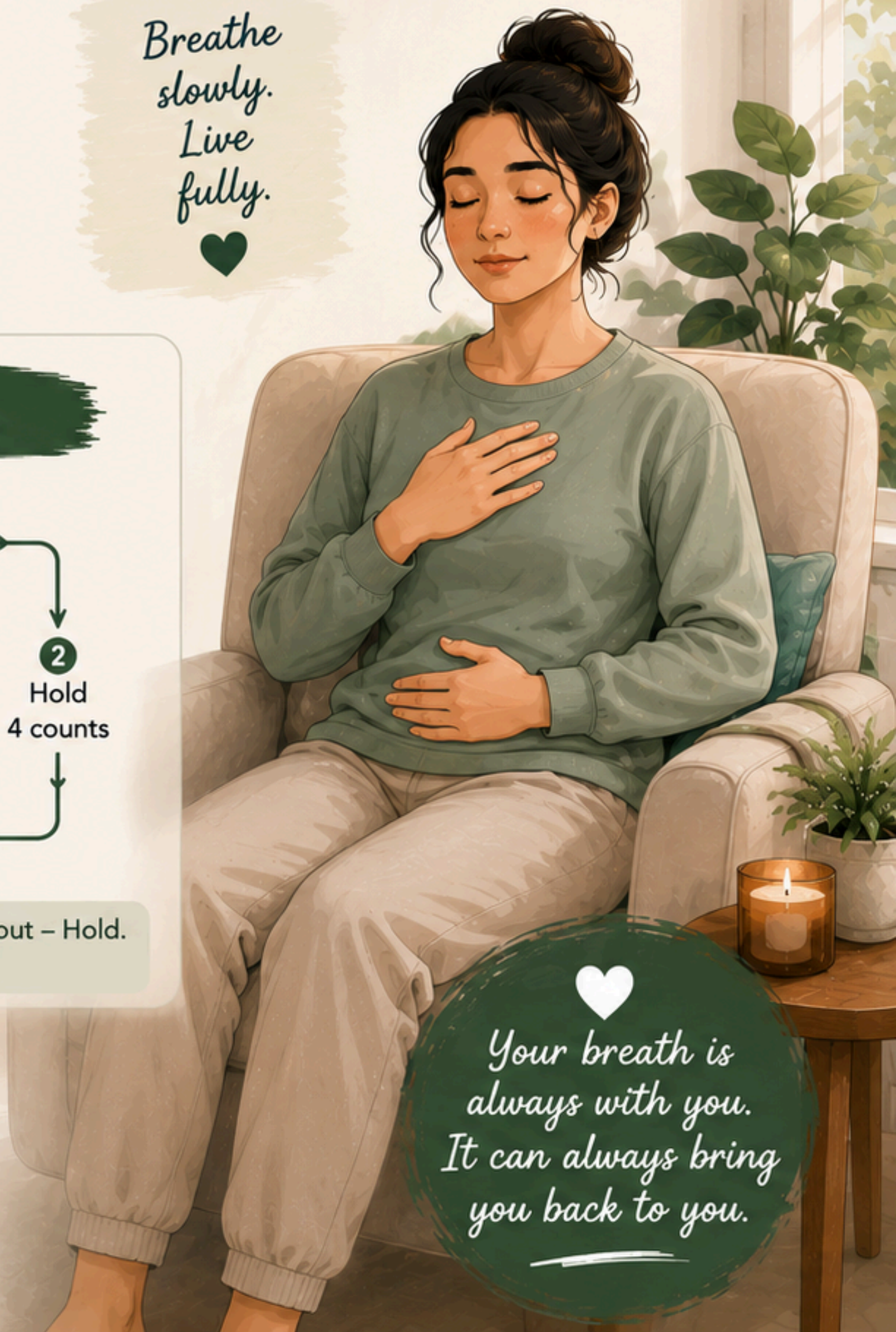
Repeat comfortably without forcing the breath.



Slow-paced breathing has been associated with increases in vagally mediated heart-rate variability, a physiological marker related to parasympathetic regulation (Laborde et al., 2022).



♥
Your breath is
always with you.
It can always bring
you back to you.





2 Exhale with a soft:
“Hnnnnnnnn...”



Humming stimulates the vagus nerve, promotes relaxation, and supports a sense of calm and safety.

Hmmm-
mmmmm...))

IT'S OKAY
TO PAUSE.
YOU ARE
SAFE.



Activates the parasympathetic (rest & digest) response



Reduces stress
and quiets
racing thoughts



Supports heart health through vagal tone



Brings you back
to the present
moment

♥ Be kind to yourself. There is no rush. ♥

5 RELEASE – 30 SECONDS

Let go of tension. Make space for calm. 

1 Raise shoulders gently toward ears.



 Feel the tension come up.

2 Hold briefly.



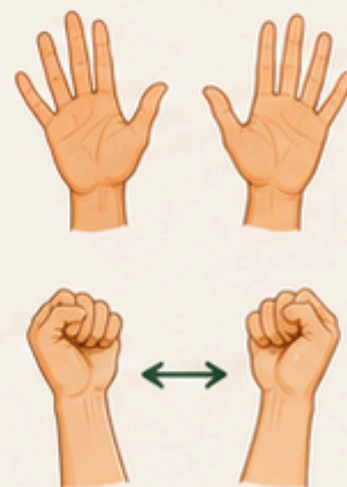
 Pause and notice.

3 Release.



 Let it go.

4 Open and close hands.



 Release. Then relax.

5 Stretch fingers.



 Lengthen and relax.

6 Gently shake out arms.



 Shake it out. Reset.



“

Regulation doesn't always mean going from stressed to completely calm.

Sometimes success is moving from an 8 to a 7. 



YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING GOOD FOR YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM.

Small steps. Big difference. 

 **BENEFITS OF RELEASING PHYSICAL TENSION**

-  Reduces muscle tension
-  Signals safety to your brain
-  Supports nervous system balance
-  Helps you feel more light and clear

RECHARGE:

SELF-CARE THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Self-Care Is More Than “Treat Yourself”



Self-care is often marketed as:
Spa days. Vacations. Shopping. Netflix.



These can be enjoyable,
but sustainable self-care is broader.



THE 5 Rs OF SELF-CARE

Small, intentional choices. Big impact on your well-being. ♡

1 REST

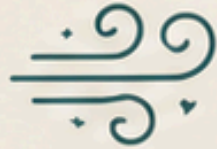


Sleep and genuine downtime.



Rest is productive.

2 REGULATE



Breathing, grounding, movement, stretching, and other nervous-system-supportive practices.



A regulated nervous system is your superpower.

3 REPLENISH



Nutrition, hydration, sunlight, and physical activity.



Fuel your body. Nourish your future.

4 RELATE



Meaningful relationships and social connection.



Connection is care.

5 RESTRICT



Setting limits on what drains you.



Boundaries protect your well-being.

♡ You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of you, so you can show up for life. ♡



SOMETIMES SELF-CARE SOUNDS LIKE:



Self-care is
not only what you
add to your life.



Sometimes it's
what you *stop*
allowing
to consume
your life.

"I'm
unavailable
after 6 PM."



**PROTECT
YOUR TIME.**

Your time is limited
and valuable.

"I can
complete this
tomorrow."



**PRACTICE
REALISTIC
BOUNDARIES.**

Not everything is
urgent.

"This request is
outside our
agreed scope."



**HONOR
AGREEMENTS.**

You are not
responsible for
everything.

"I need
clarification
before
proceeding."



**CHOOSE
CLARITY OVER
ASSUMPTIONS.**

Clarity now prevents
problems later.

"I cannot take
another client
right now."



**RESPECT YOUR
CAPACITY.**

You can't pour from
an empty cup.



SAYING **"NO"** TO WHAT DRAINS YOU
IS SAYING **"YES"** TO WHAT MATTERS.

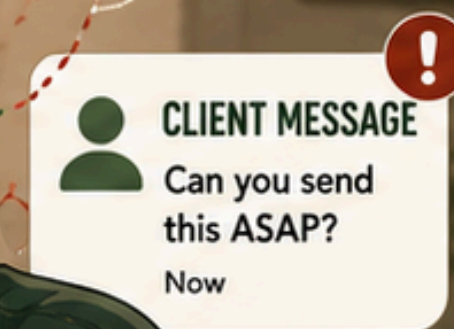
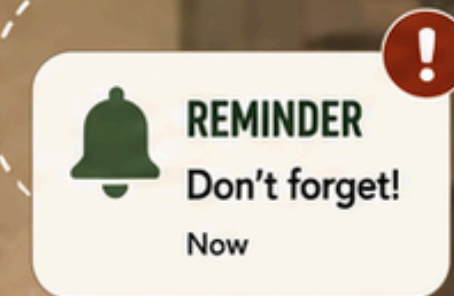
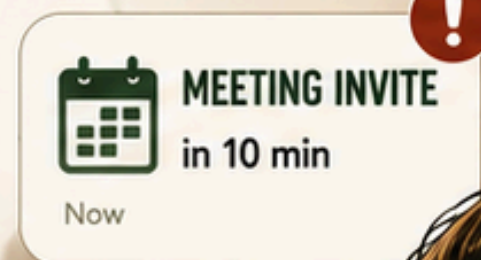
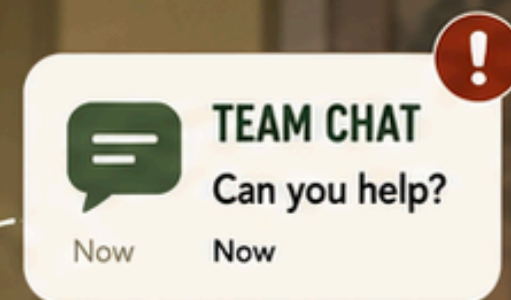
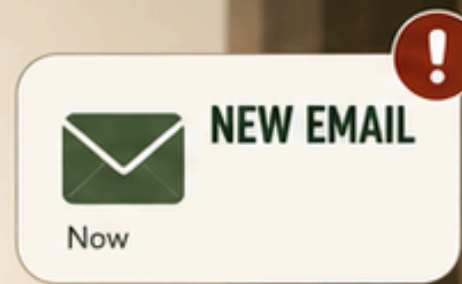
- ✓ Less overwhelm.
- ✓ More energy.
- ✓ Better focus.

- ✓ Healthier relationships.
- ✓ More room for what truly matters.





RECLAIM: BOUNDARIES IN THE VIRTUAL WORKPLACE



The Problem With Working From Home

WHEN YOU WORK IN AN OFFICE:

You leave work.



Clear start. Clear finish.
Space to rest and recharge.

WHEN YOU WORK FROM HOME:

Work may never leave you.



Your bedroom
becomes your office.



Your phone
becomes your
workstation.



Your home becomes
a place where
your nervous system
associates every
notification with:



*"Someone needs
something from me."*



TO-DO LIST

- ☒ Reply
- ☒ Report
- ☒ Revision
- ☒ Meeting
- ☒ Client call
- ☒ Follow up

“

Boundaries are not walls that prevent us from caring about our work.

Think of them as

⚡ *the office door* ⚡
in a virtual workplace.

They tell your brain:



Work *begins* here—
and work also *ends* here.

”





THE VIRTUAL COMMUTE:

≡ *A 5–10 minute transition ritual* ≡

BEFORE WORK:

1



WATER

Hydrate and refresh.

2



STRETCH

Wake up your body.

3



SET INTENTION

Choose how you want to show up.

4



BEGIN

Start your deep work.



Start with intention. Show up on purpose.



AFTER WORK:

1



CLOSE TABS

Clear your digital space.

2



WRITE TOMORROW'S PRIORITIES

Offload your mind.

3



LOG OUT

End your work session on purpose.

4



STRETCH / WALK

Move your body.
Reset your mind.

5



CHANGE ENVIRONMENT

Step into your life.
Fully.



THIS BECOMES A
PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNAL:

*"My workday
is finished."*





WHEN THE CLIENT OR BOSS IS THE STRESSOR

Dealing with Demanding, Toxic, or Micromanaging Clients

1. CLARIFY WHAT IS EXPECTED



"What exactly needs to be done, and by when?"

Ask for clear priorities, deadlines, and expected outcomes. When everything seems urgent, clarify what should come first.

Example:



*"I currently have Tasks A, B, and C.
Which would you like me to prioritize first?"*



2. COMMUNICATE BEFORE PROBLEMS GROW



"Don't wait until the deadline to raise a concern."

Give your client or boss an early heads-up when:

-  A deadline may be difficult to meet.
-  Instructions are unclear.
-  Two priorities are conflicting.
-  You need additional information.
-  Your workload is becoming unmanageable.

Example:



"I can complete this by Friday. If you need it by Wednesday, I'll need to move Task B to next week. Which would you prefer?"

I want to keep you updated early so we can find the best solution together.



3. CREATE HEALTHY BOUNDARIES



"Being available for work doesn't mean being available 24/7."

Clarify:



Your working hours.



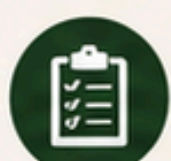
Expected response times.



What counts as an emergency.



Preferred communication channels.



Tasks that are within your agreed scope of work.

Example:



"I'm available from 9 AM to 6 PM. Messages received after working hours will be addressed the following workday."



4. CALM YOURSELF BEFORE RESPONDING



"Regulate first. Respond second."

When you receive a rude, demanding, or frustrating message:



STOP



BREATHE



READ AGAIN



RESPOND



Give yourself a moment before typing your response.



Respond to the issue, not the emotional intensity of the message.



Remember: Someone else's urgency doesn't automatically have to become your emergency.



5.

CAPTURE IMPORTANT AGREEMENTS IN WRITING

"If it's important, document it."

Keep records of:



Agreed deadlines.



Changes in instructions.



Additional tasks.



Requested revisions.



Scope-of-work changes.



Important or problematic interactions.



After a verbal conversation, send a short written confirmation:

"Just to confirm our discussion, I'll prioritize Task A today and complete Task B tomorrow."



6. CONSIDER SUPPORT OR AN EXIT

"Know when the situation has gone beyond ordinary workplace stress."

If you repeatedly experience:



Humiliation or verbal abuse.



Intimidation or threats.



Harassment.



Impossible or constantly changing expectations.



Persistent boundary violations.



Excessive monitoring that interferes with your ability to work.



A significant negative impact on your well-being.



Consider seeking support from your VA agency, supervisor, HR department, freelance platform, or trusted professional, depending on your work arrangement.

— “ —

**YOUR WELL-BEING
MATTERS.**

*You deserve respect,
safety, and peace.*

— ” — ♥ —



WHERE TO SEEK SUPPORT

-  VA Agency / Supervisor
-  HR Department
-  Freelance Platform
-  Trusted Professional

*You have options.
You are not alone.*

- ☒ Ask for help
- ☒ Document everything
- ☒ Protect your peace
- ☒ Take care of you



SOMETIMES,
DESPITE YOUR BEST EFFORTS
TO COMMUNICATE AND SET BOUNDARIES,

the environment may remain unhealthy.



SELF-CARE

can help you manage
the stress of your work.



But self-care should
not become a strategy
for endlessly tolerating
harmful treatment.



CREATE: MY CTRL + ALT + REST PLAN

CTRL – What Do I Need to CONTROL?

One stressor I can influence is _____.

Examples:



Notifications.



Schedule.



Number of meetings.



Workspace.



Communication expectations.



ALT – What Do I Need to ALTER?

One habit or boundary I need to change is _____.

Examples:



No emails in bed.



Take an actual lunch break.



Set client response hours.



Stop accepting last-minute unpaid work.



REST – How Will I RECOVER?

One small recovery practice I will begin this week is _____.

Examples:



Three-minute breathing reset.



Five-minute stretch between clients.



Ten-minute walk after work.



Phone-free lunch.



Earlier bedtime.

