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**PROGRAM MATERIALS**

**Program #3692**

**March 23, 2026**

## **Boundaries and Burnout: The Hidden Crisis in Law**

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# Boundaries and Burnout: The Hidden Crisis in Law

**Marlo Lyons**

J.D., Executive, Career, and Team Coach

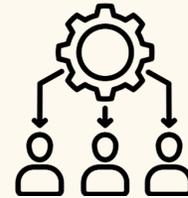
# A little about me



Journalist



Entertainment  
Lawyer



HR Executive

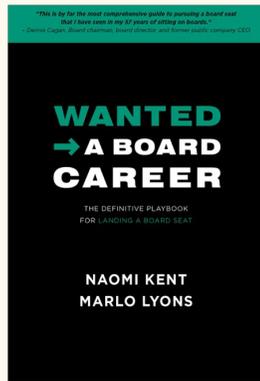


Certified Executive,  
Career, and  
Team Coach  
Workshop Facilitator

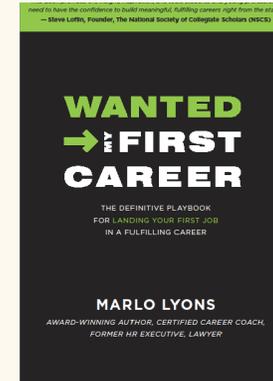
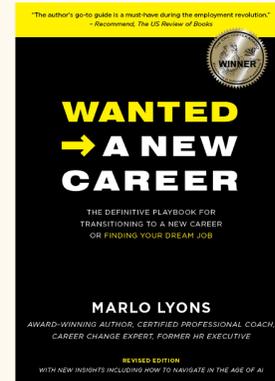
# A little more about me



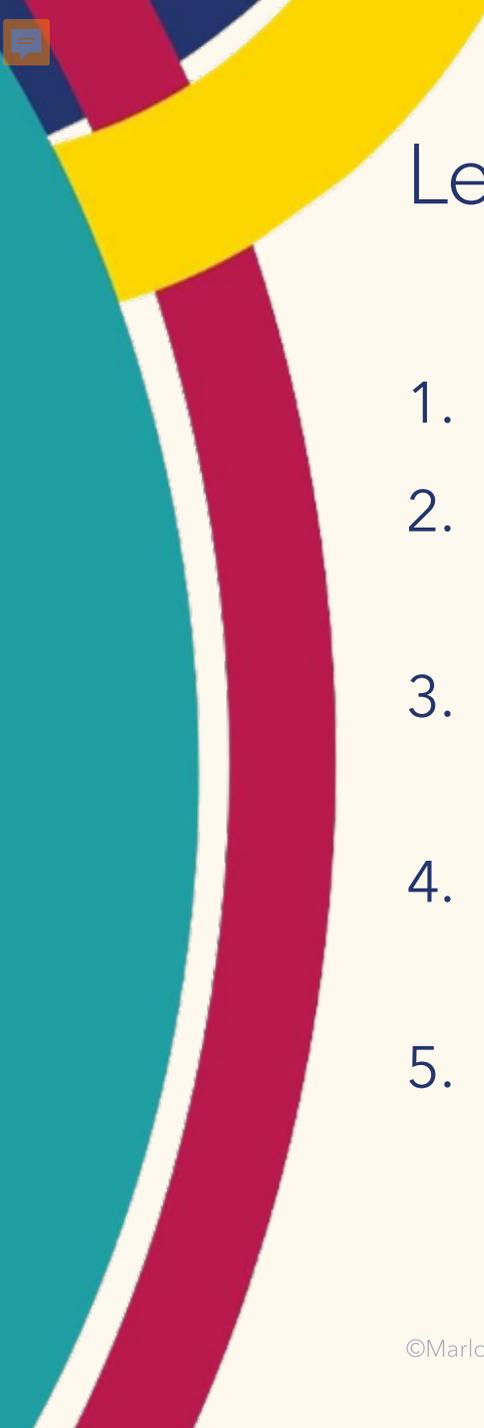
Podcast  
*Work Unscripted*



Award-Winning and Best-Selling Author



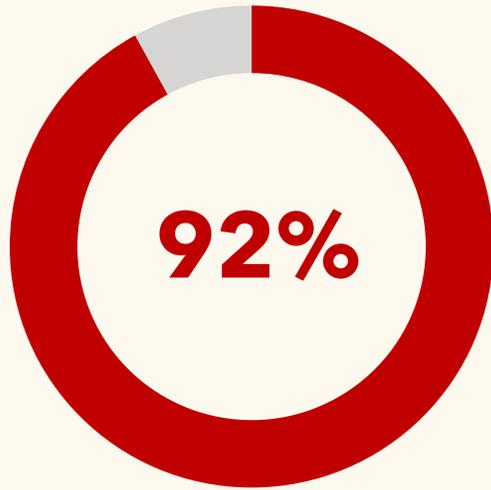
HBR Contributor



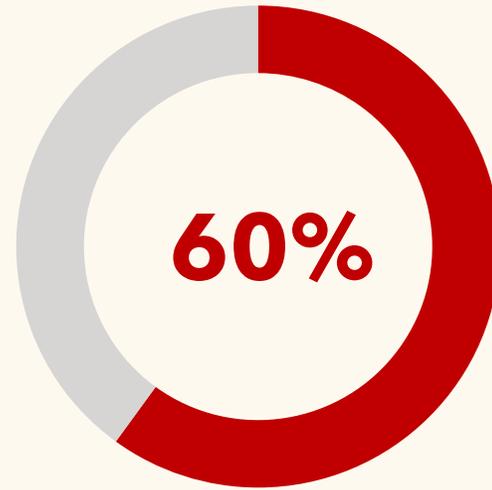
# Learning objectives

1. Define and recognize emotional labor in legal practice
2. Identify early signs of burnout, fatigue, and trauma exposure in yourself and peers
3. Understand the neurobiology and psychology of stress accumulation in high-pressure environments
4. Discover practical boundary-setting techniques for clients, colleagues, and personal workload
5. Learn energy recovery and wellness strategies tailored for legal professionals

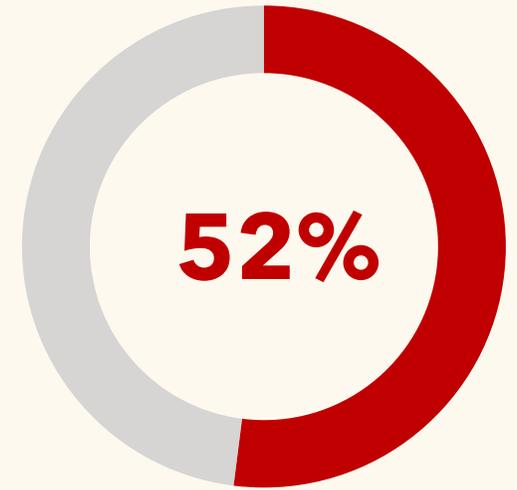
# Landscape of legal burnout



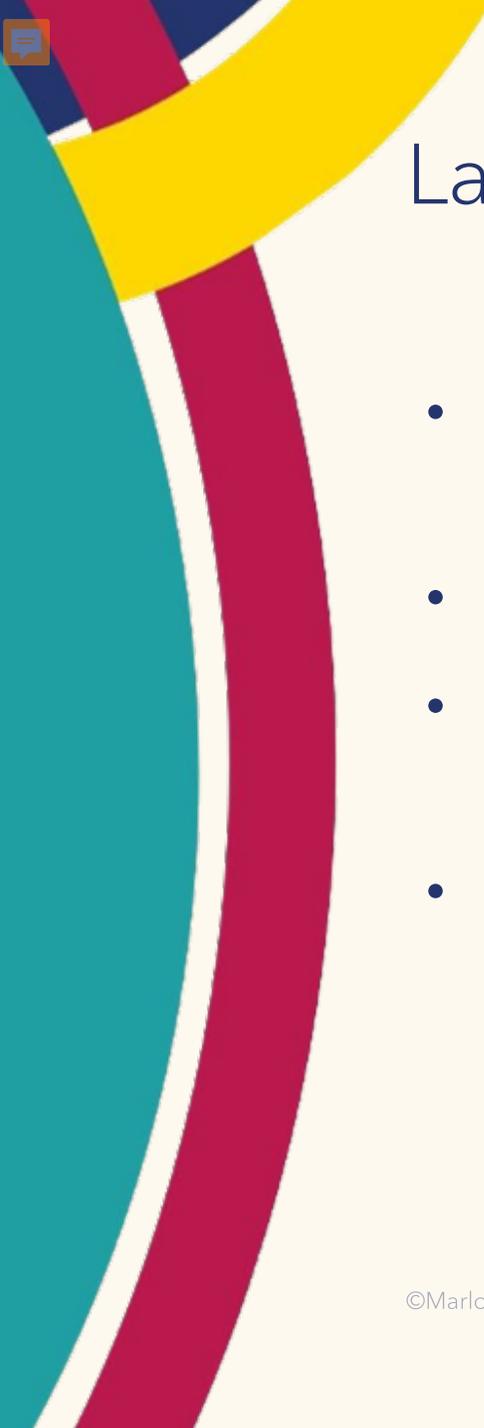
**of lawyers  
experience stress  
or burnout**



**of lawyers  
meet the clinical  
threshold for burnout**



**of lawyers  
report feeling emotionally  
exhausted at work**



# Landscape of legal burnout: the why

- Hyper-competitive environment driven by perfectionism and long hours
- Billable hours and client demands that prevent downtime
- Culture that stigmatizes vulnerability and/or frowns upon those who seek help
- Continual emotional suppression and relentless intellectual demand

# What is Emotional Labor?



The effort involved  
in managing (suppressing)  
emotions to fulfill the  
emotional requirements of a job.

# Emotional labor in action

- Remaining calm when a client is in distress
- Delivering bad news to clients
- Suppressing personal feelings
- Staying composed during conflict
- Keeping personal matters to yourself



# Emotional labor in action

- Carefully wording emails to avoid misinterpretation
- Managing relationships with partners
- Knowing when to speak up in meetings
- Navigating the unspoken hierarchy
- Regulating tone, reactions



# The cost of emotional suppression

## **Burnout**

Emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion due to prolonged stress and overwork.

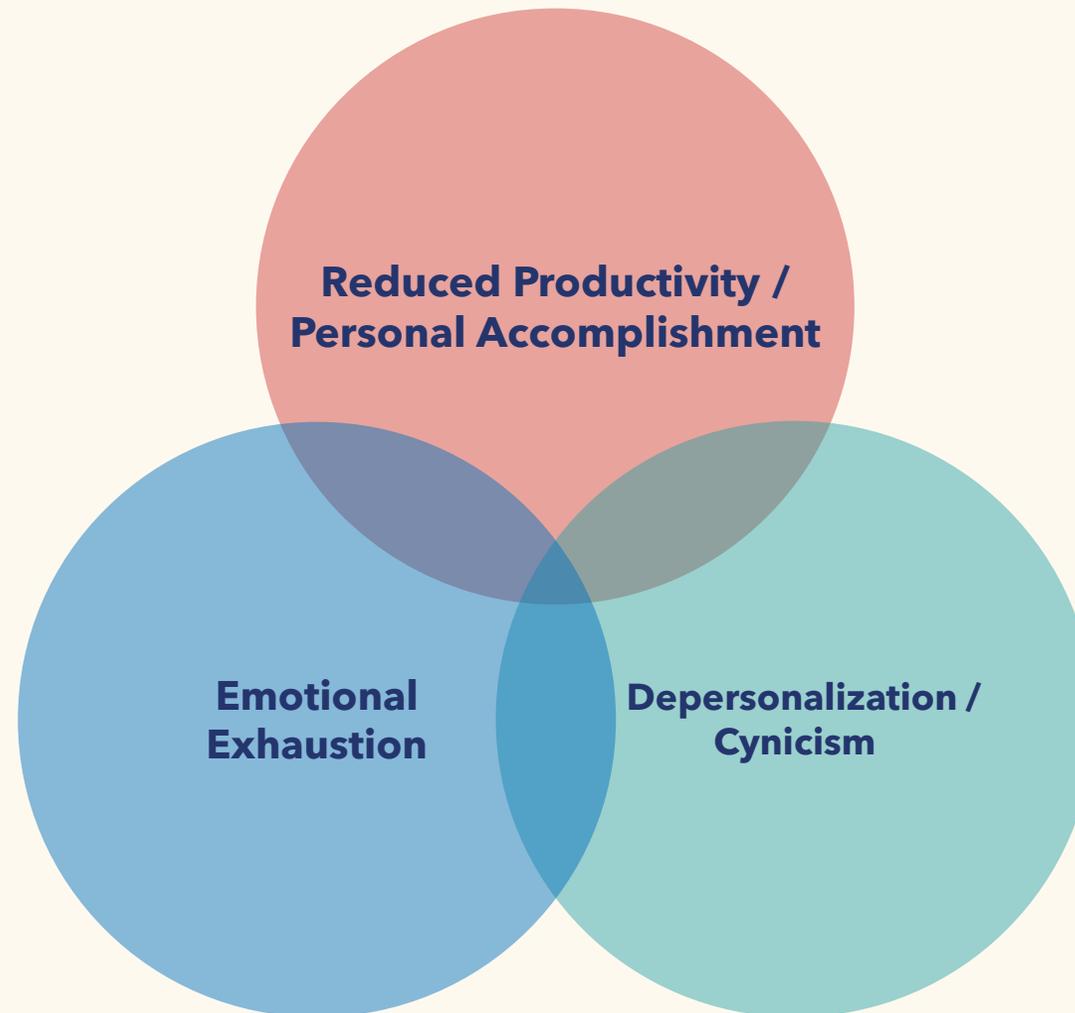


# How burnout is measured

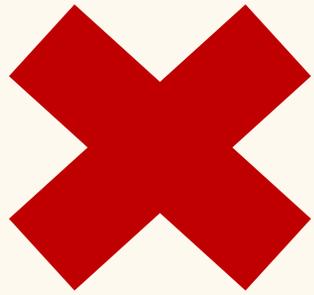
## Maslach Burnout Inventory

- I feel emotionally exhausted because of my work
- I feel worn out at the end of a working day
- I feel tired as soon as I get up in the morning and see a new working day stretched out in front of me
- I can easily understand the actions of my colleagues/supervisors
- I get the feeling that I treat some of my clients/colleagues impersonally, as if they were objects
- Working with people the whole day is stressful for me
- I deal with other people's problems successfully
- I feel burned out because of my work

# The cost of emotional suppression



# Signs and symptoms of burnout



**Behavioral**  
recurring mistakes,  
procrastination,  
absenteeism, errors  
in judgment



**Physical**  
fatigue, headaches,  
insomnia



**Emotional**  
irritability,  
detachment, sadness

# Burnout vs. depression vs. compassion fatigue



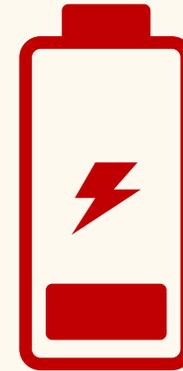
## **Burnout**

Work-related exhaustion and detachment



## **Depression**

Clinical mood disorder affecting all areas of life



## **Compassion Fatigue**

Emotional depletion from exposure to others' trauma

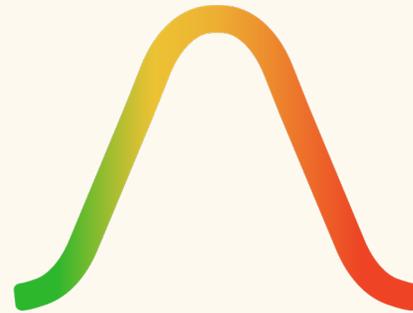
# Biological impacts of chronic emotional strain

## Silent Career Killers



### High Cortisol

- Memory problems
- Weakened immunity
- Sleep Disruption



### Allostatic Load

- High blood pressure
- Weight gain
- Hormone imbalances
- Brain shrinkage



### Trauma Exposure

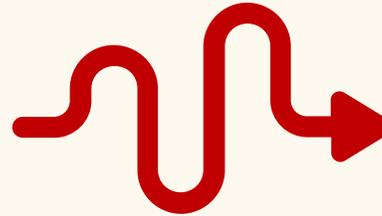
- Secondary PTSD Symptoms
- Emotional Detachment
- Judgment Errors

# Trauma and the law



## **Direct Trauma**

Firsthand exposure  
to traumatic events  
or environments



## **Vicarious Trauma**

Indirect exposure to  
trauma through clients



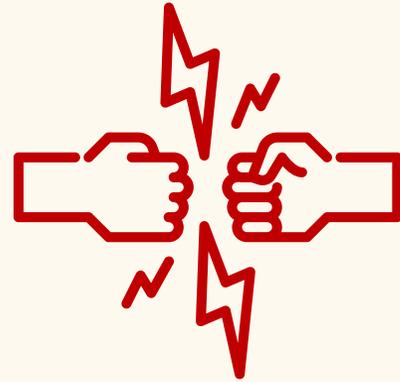
## **Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Emotional duress  
when hearing about  
others' trauma.

# Lawyers are uniquely vulnerable to burnout



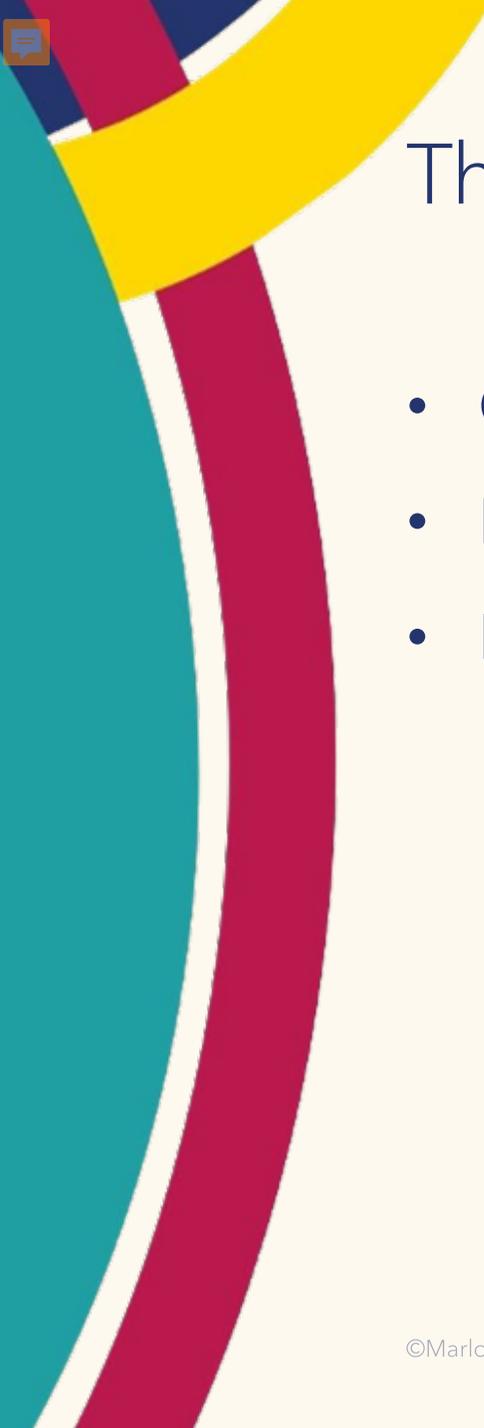
**Perfectionism**  
and fear of failure



**Adversarial**  
nature of legal work

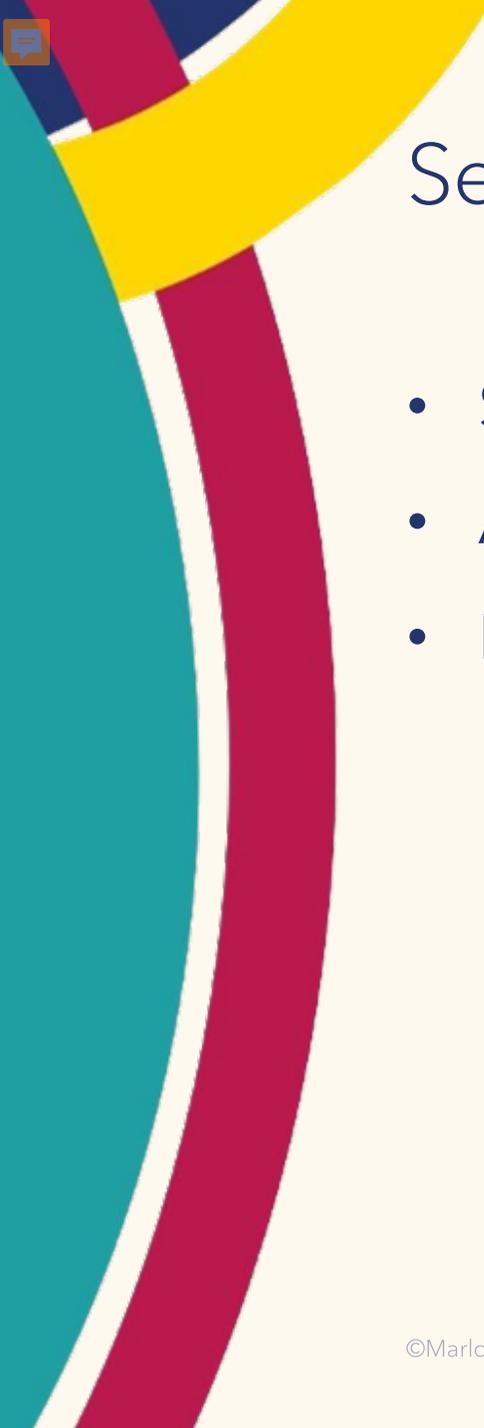


**Long hours**  
and billable pressure



# The boundary deficit

- Over-identifying with clients
- Difficulty saying no
- Emotional leakage into personal life



# Setting boundaries with clients

- Set clear expectations on availability
- Avoid emotional enmeshment
- Maintain professional distance

# Setting boundaries with yourself

- Challenge the inner critic
- Release guilt around rest
- Address impostor syndrome

- ✓ Name the inner critic
- ✓ Replace guilt with gratitude
- ✓ Set internal benchmarks
- ✓ Practice cognitive flexibility
- ✓ Affirm boundary-focused success



# Boundary setting model (CLEAR)

## **Framework 1**

**C**ommunicate the boundary clearly

**L**imit the problematic behavior with language that is firm but respectful

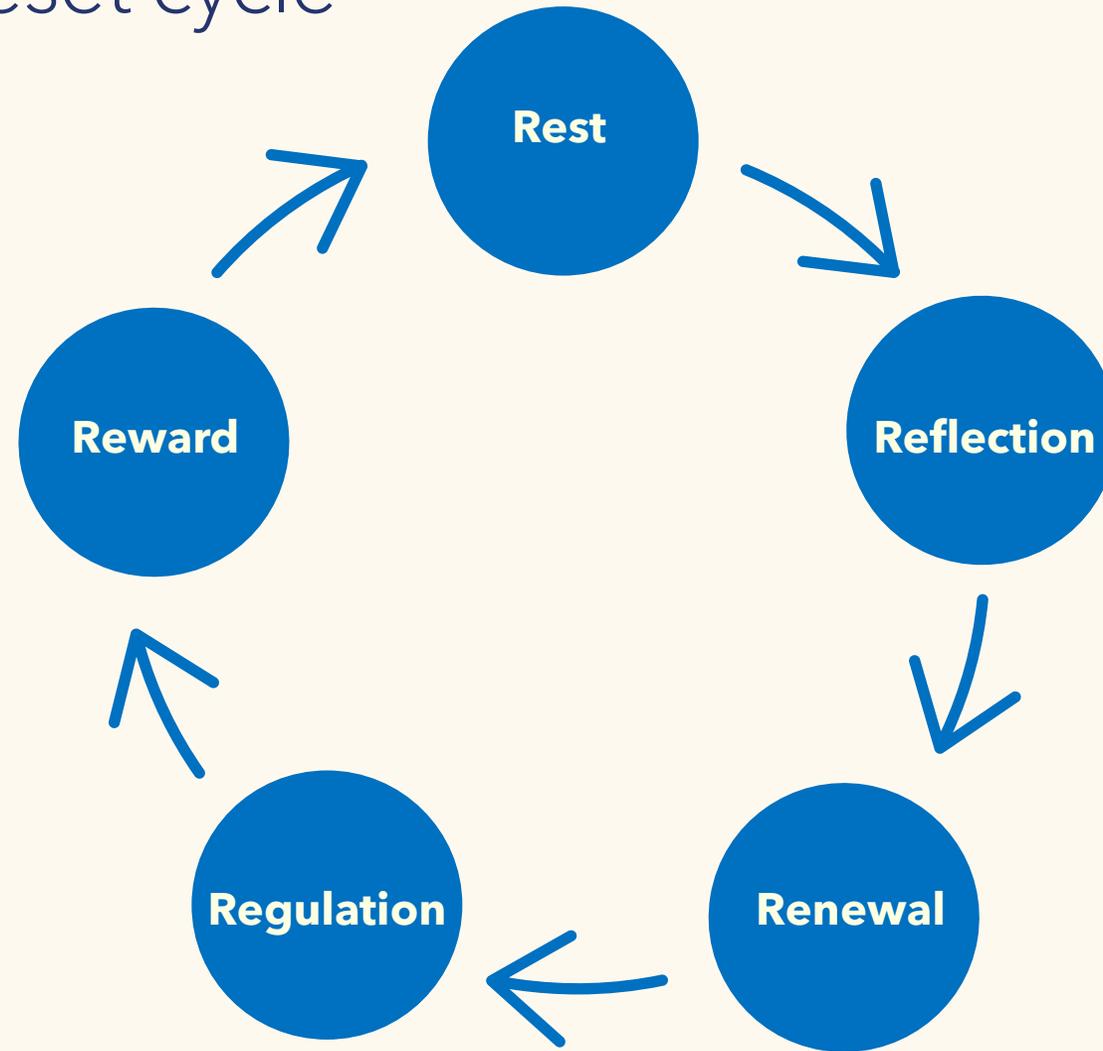
**E**mpathize that you understand the other's needs

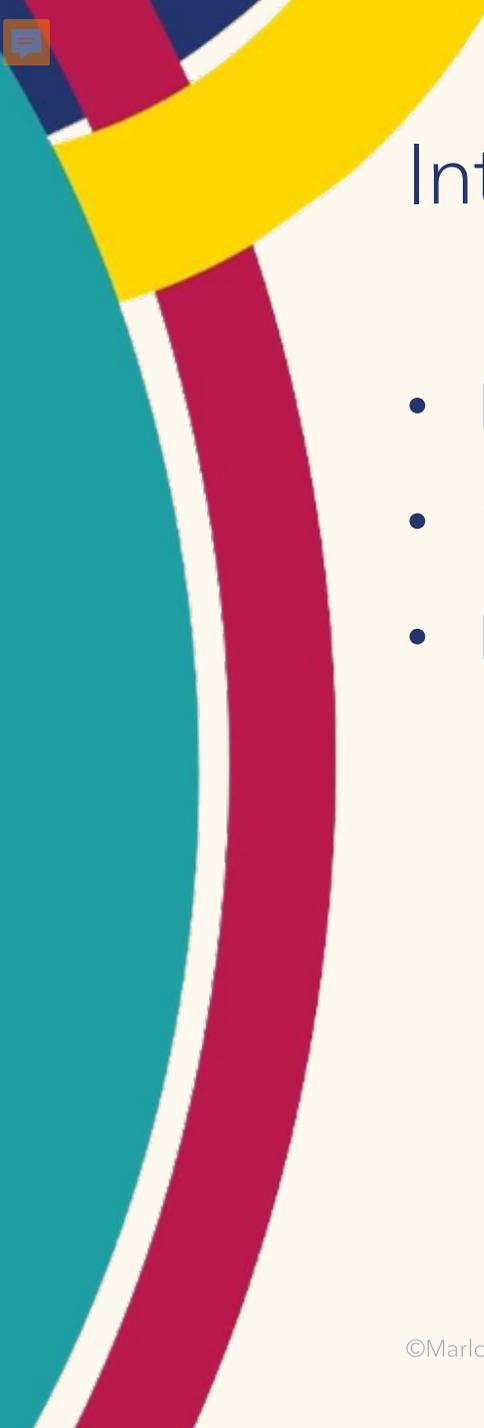
**A**ssert your need confidently, without apology

**R**einforce boundaries by upholding them consistently and call out when boundaries are crossed

# Recovery reset cycle

## Framework 2





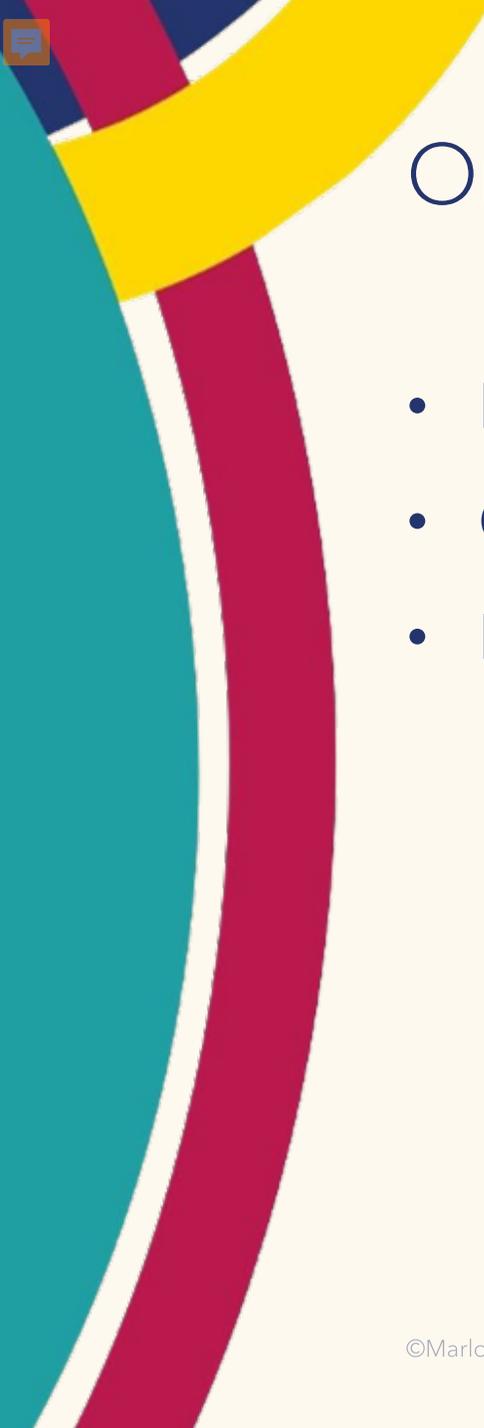
# Integration daily resets

- Deep breathing
- 10-minute walks
- Pomodoro breaks

## Case study: Jane



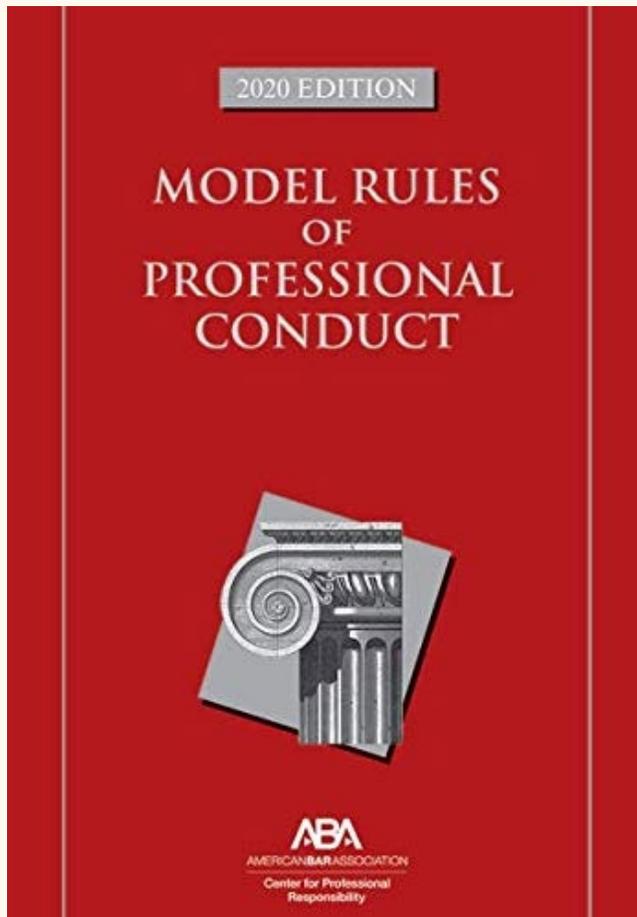
- Overwhelmed solo practitioner
- Ignored burnout symptoms
- Poor boundaries and emotional leakage



# Organizational solutions

- Normalize mental health days
- Offer trauma informed training
- Reduce the stigma around seeking help

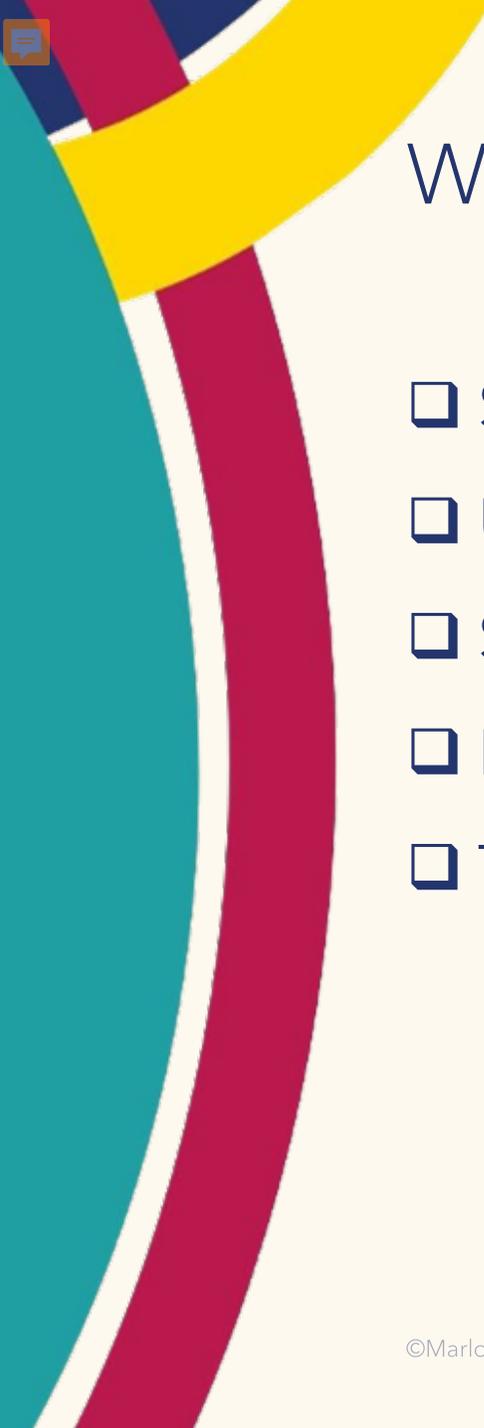
# Legal ethics and wellness



## **ABA Model Rule 1.1 (Competence)**

Comment 8:

“Maintain mental, emotional and physical well being.”



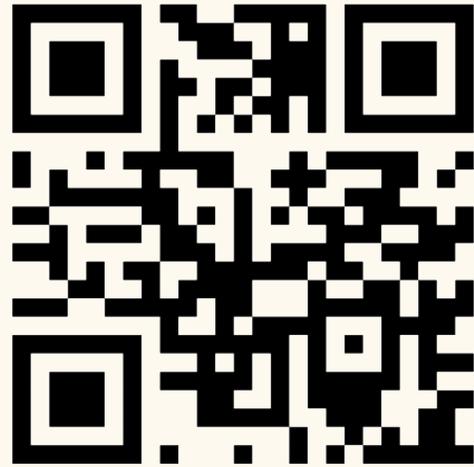
# What you can do tomorrow

- Set one *new* boundary
- Use **CLEAR** model to communicate boundaries
- Schedule recovery time
- Practice one recovery reset
- Talk about burnout



# The Ripple Effect

# Boundaries and Burnout



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