



7 ANTIDOTES TO BURNOUT

(I could not bear to include yoga or meditation)

The following is a curated list of simple and easy ideas that may in fact lessen the load, cause you to pause, and remind you that there is a very good reason that flight attendants tell you to put your mask on first before helping your loved ones.

1) Read A Book – Non-Work Related (*Kinda*)

It's so heartening to me that nonprofit leaders do actually make time to read. But these suggestions are different.

a) [The Alchemist](#) - Paulo Coelho

Three different folks suggested this book to me. [Marea Chaveco](#) a member of my team, describes it this way: "a book that may help a leader re-establish a connection with the work they have chosen to do or alternatively gives them permission to move on. It is simply and beautifully written and a fast read. Don't let the simplicity of the writing fool you, I have friends that read it at the start of every year. The book takes you on a journey to your life's purpose, your "personal legend."

b) [Pippi Longstocking](#) - Astrid Lindgren

Nina Meehan, the Executive Artistic Director of [The Bay Area Children's Theatre](#), suggested this one and also suggests Alice in Wonderland, the original Wizard of Oz series, Harry Potter, and Inkheart.

"Read about magic and adventure and fantasy. Why? These flights of fancy remind us that PLAY and IMAGINATION are the lifeblood of empathy and we are all in the business of empathy."

c) [The Little Engine That Could](#) - Watty Piper

Carlos Lejnieks, CEO of [Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Essex County](#), keeps this old favorite close by. And who isn't inspired by a fictional steam engine?

2) Enjoy Your Family / Count Your Blessings

Several folks mentioned the impact of family. "Before we had our first kid, I worked well into every evening. Now when I come home, my kids are my priority. The work has to wait."

Think about what Nina Meehan said.

"play and imagination are the lifeblood of empathy."

When I was at GLAAD, I would take a red-eye home to NJ from the west coast. I was so exhausted, I slept the entire trip and was home in time for breakfast with my kids. Then I would take my kids to school and help out in their classrooms for the morning. Interestingly, I so loved doing it that I was not overtired. It was like a battery recharge.

So leave the office and go put on a puppet show for your kids.

And if the kid thing isn't your thing, Janet Weinberg from [The Education Alliance](#), offers a related suggestion: "I did not get wise until I was in my late 50's. the quality of my life greatly improved as did my enjoyment for my work when I got a puppy. Suddenly, I had to go home to feed and walk the dog. It became my 'excuse' for not working until 10 PM most nights."

The other fabulous thing about a dog is they don't slam doors and leave dishes in the sink.

3) Make Your Bed

There is something about a simple routine that helps things feel just a bit less chaotic. A most excellent antidote to burnout is a small activity that makes your own world just a bit less messy.

Trevor Graham, an intern at Joan Garry Consulting, starts his day by making his bed. He likes how it feels to do it and how it looks. Kind of centers him.

Lori Abrams, the Director of Development at [The Valerie Fund](#), recommends tidying a closet – she recommends [The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up](#), by Marie Kondo.

4) Ask Yourself This Tough Question:

Are You Really THAT Important?

A friend suggested that nonprofit leaders sometimes inflate their sense of importance and start to believe that the world (their organization) will fall apart without them. First off, it is disrespectful to the village you have assembled. Your team (board, volunteers, staff) are equally skilled and passionate.

- a) Respect your team, take a vacation and show them that you trust them to get it done.

b) Here's another idea – outside the box from [Howard Buford](#). Howard ran a media company and was a five star board member. I'm giving you this idea verbatim.

"Here's what changed my life years ago.

I would look at my calendar with its impossible week of things to do. Previous to this point I approached this task with the question, 'How am I going to get all this done?' Working my way through that process was miserable and created dread. So I changed the question. It sounds shady, but one day I looked at my calendar and just asked, 'How can I get out of having to do all this sh*t?'

From week to week I came up with all kind of solutions. Delegating. Getting things done by phone rather than having to write them out. Getting other things done with quick notes rather than being sucked into a conversation. More delegating. Launching projects with an initial meeting that didn't involve me. Selling clients on alternative solutions that didn't involve me. Letting go of some things not after they're perfect but after they're good enough. Still more delegating. And, yes, postponing.

For dutiful perfectionists, it changes your life. Virtually everything got done. And many of the things I opted to postpone ended up going away on their own."

5) Scheduling Tricks

a) [Schedule a Day In Which You are 100% Unreachable. Period.](#)

Kim Freedman, Head of [New Garden Friends School](#), recommends this Harvard Business Review technique. "The 100% Untouchable Day." One day a week in which you are 100% unreachable in any way by anyone.

b) [End Your Day Early](#)

Howard Buford (my friend who used procrastination as a plus) began to pretend that his day ended at 3:30. No meetings after 3:30. He encouraged his staff to do the same. They got more done and felt like they discovered two extra hours in their day.

6) Read A Book That IS Work Related

Quite a few excellent choices here.

a) [Switch](#) by Chip Heath

Erin Robinson, Executive Director of [ESIP](#), recommends this one. When she said “It’s about how to make change when change is hard,” she had me at hello.

The author shares methods about how to look for bright spots - places where things are already working. That’s so helpful when things seem dark. It also encourages the reader to work with the constituents in place and not come in as the outsider here to save the day. It’s an easy read.

b) [Performance Breakthrough](#) by Cathy Rose Salit

[Cindy Pereira](#), a member of the team at Joan Garry Consulting, recommended this one. It’s a leadership development book that uses theater and improv in daily relationships. (Note: I am now clearer why Cindy is so good at making things up.)

c) [Happy Healthy Nonprofit](#) by Beth Kanter

Last, but certainly not least, this one is a must-read for every nonprofit leader. Not to mention [Beth’s Blog](#).

7) Mindful Television

Vu Le of [Rainier Valley Corps](#) and Daryl Messinger, Board Chair of the [Union for Reform Judaism](#), both recommended watching mindless TV.

I myself suggest MINDFUL TV. My go to is [Survivor](#). I have not missed a single season (36 of them). I have never done a leadership team retreat or coached a CEO without a reference to ‘building alliances,’ “voting folks off the island,” and the social dynamics of tribes / teams. It is one of the best real experiments in organizational dynamics. Seriously.