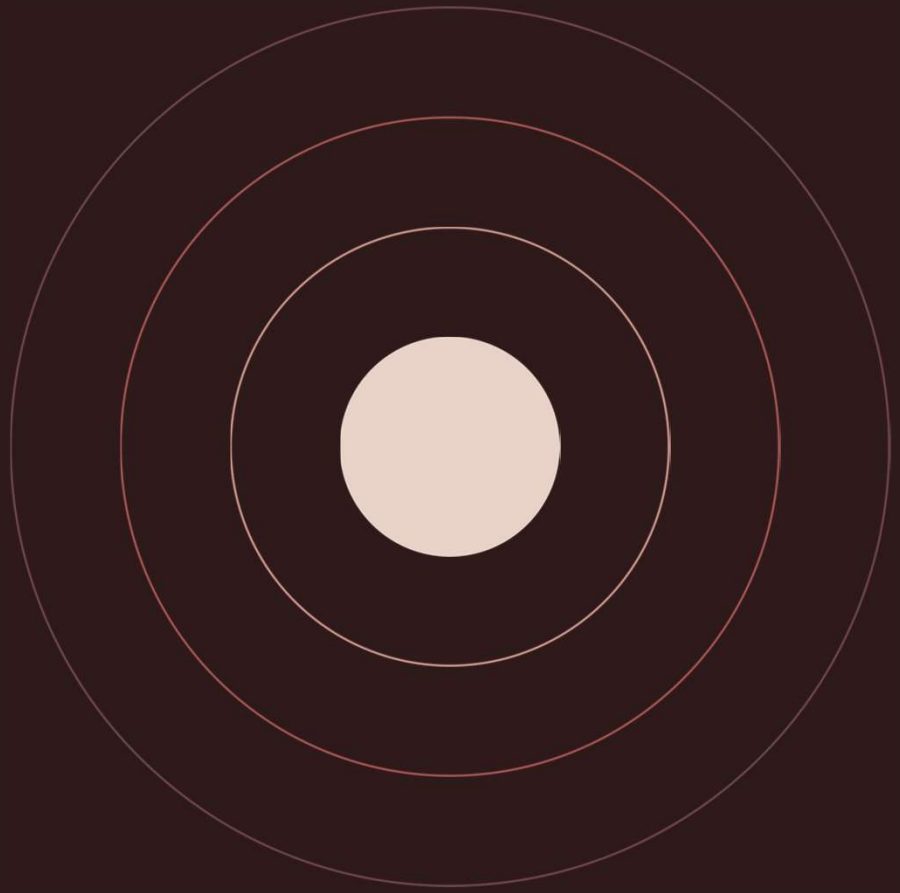
LEAGUE OF OREGON CITIES · 101ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Eye of the Storm

Leading Without Burnout

DR. ZARYA RUBIN, MD

PHYSICIAN | SPEAKER | COACH



LET'S START WITH A SHOW OF HANDS

Raise your hand if, in the past year, you've led through...

- budget gap
- staffing shortage
- heated public meeting
- crisis nobody saw coming

Sometimes, crisis mode becomes the default, the "new normal"

THE CURRENT CRISIS

We are living through a crisis moment right now...

In our own backyard...Bend, OR this week

WHO AM I?

Dr. Zarya Rubin, MD

- Harvard-educated (ex)Physician
- TEDx Speaker
- Burnout Expert
- Transformational Coach
- Author
- Podcaster
- Might run for office someday...



Why burnout? Because I've lived it...

WHO AM I?

The Burnout Doctor - Who burned out in medicine

I’ve lived burnout, then I transformed my experience into knowledge and action

Harvard MD

Succeeding at the speed of light, burnout was insidious

Suicida
1

Finally, a warning sign I couldn’t ignore

EMPOWERED

Now I help others overcome and outsmart burnout

MY STORM

Burnout ended my medical career.

So I learned everything I could about it

@outsmartburnout - Dr. Zarya Rubin

WHAT BURNOUT ACTUALLY IS

The WHO calls it an occupational phenomenon.

Chronic workplace stress that hasn't been successfully managed, with three signature features:

Exhaustion

Running on empty, even after a weekend off

Cynicism

Pulling away from the work and the people in it; feeling like nothing matters

Decreased Efficacy

You’re not performing the way you used to

Source: World Health Organization, ICD-11 definition of burnout

YOU ARE NOT IMAGINING IT

Public servants burn out more.

52%
of government employees say they are burned out

46%
of private-sector workers say the same

Top drivers for government workers: workload (48%) and staffing shortages (43%).

Source: Eagle Hill Consulting survey of U.S. workers, as reported by PSHRA

WHAT IT COSTS

Burnout is costly for people and for cities

Employees who frequently feel burned out are:

63%
more likely to take a sick day

2.6×
as likely to be looking for a new job

23%
more likely to visit the emergency room

In state and local government, 52% of employees were inclined to leave their jobs.

Sources: Gallup, Employee Burnout: Causes and Cures; MissionSquare Research Institute (survey fielded Nov–Dec 2021)

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS MODE

What makes a good leader?

Lead from Values

Aligned words, actions; culture of psychological safety, trust and respect

Lead by Example

Accountability, clear communication, EQ - self and others, influence and vision

Lead by Empowerment

Delegate, recognize talent, share the load, proactive rather than reactive, collaborative and forward-thinking, constructive feedback

12 Essential Qualities of Effective Leadership, The Center for Creative Leadership; published July 2026

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

“Manage Your Own Emotional State: Practice deliberate calm and self-care so emotional turmoil does not impair your decision-making”

McKinsey Series on Leadership In Crisis - April, 2020

@outsmartburnout - Dr. Zarya Rubin

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS MODE

What makes a not-so-good leader?

Lead from Ego

Take credit for work, blameshifting, hogging the spotlight, tell rather than listen, not open to new ideas

Lead by Example

Poor tone, poor management of temper and moods, lash out,

Lead by Micromanaging

Lack of trust, constant checkins, constant updates, vague direction, poor communication

6 Qualities and Traits of a Bad Leader (And How to Be Better)
,David Grossman, The Grossman Group, July 2025

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

““When I talk to a manager, I get the feeling they are important. When I talk to a leader, I get the feeling I am important.”

Alexander Van Heijer, Speaker/Author

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM IN A LONG STORM

What chronic stress does to a leader's brain

Stress up

The brain's threat system stays on high alert, so everything feels urgent.

Judgment down

The prefrontal cortex, home of planning and perspective, works less well under sustained stress.

Body pays the price

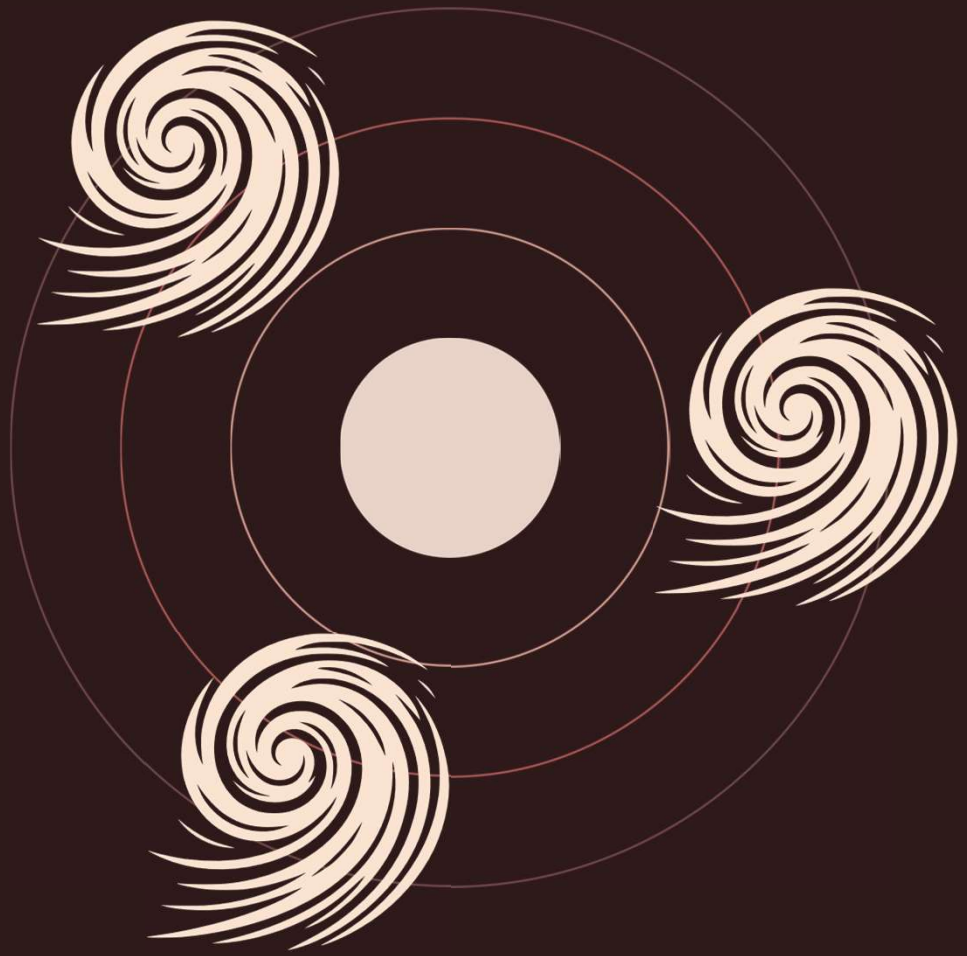
Sleep, immunity, metabolic and heart health take the hit.

CALM AMIDST CHAOS

The eye of the hurricane doesn’t mean there isn’t a storm

It's the steady center inside it.

Your job isn't to control the weather; it's to remain steady enough to lead through it.



@outsmartburnout - Dr. Zarya Rubin

LEADING FROM THE EYE

Three time horizons:

Opportunities for regulation and values-based action

In the Moment

Seconds to minutes. Settle your body - put your own oxyen mask on first.

Daily

Hours to days. Protect your peace with habits that help foster calm and vagal tone.

Long-Term

Weeks to months. Build steadiness into how you and your team operate.

HORIZON 1 · IN THE MOMENT

Settle your body before you solve the problem

Get out of fight or flight mode to make better decisions

1 · Long exhale

Breathe out longer than you breathe in. It signals safety to your body.

2 · Feet down

Feel your feet on the floor. It pulls attention back to the present.

3 · Name it

Say what you feel in one word. Labeling an emotion helps quiet the alarm.

TRY IT WITH ME

In, in, out.

Two sips of air in through the nose. One long sigh out through the mouth.

Three rounds. Notice what shifts.

HORIZON 2 · EVERY DAY

Recovery is part of the job

Don’t let chronic stress sneak up on you and your team

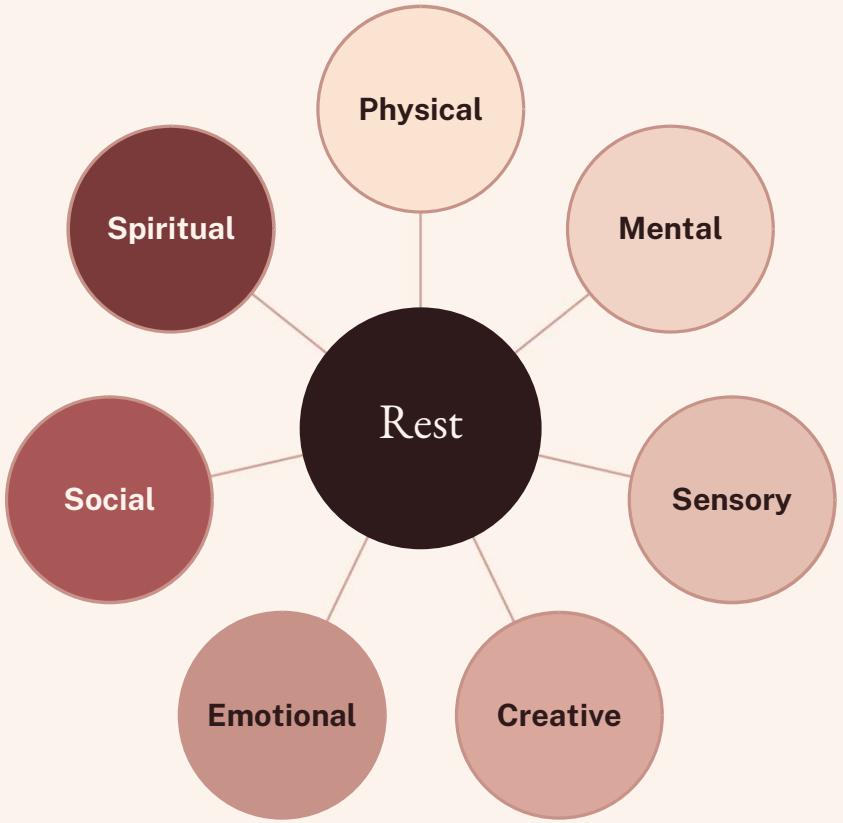
- Set a real stop time, even in a bad week
- Defend your sleep like a council meeting
- Take a ten-minute reset between back-to-back sessions
- Find the kind of rest you're shortest on

HORIZON 2 · EVERY DAY

Seven Types of Rest

Sleep is only one. Which of these are you shortest on?

Framework: Adapted from Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith



HORIZON 3 · ACROSS THE SEASON

Weather it together

Normalize discussions about stress and burnout - watch your team for warning signs, lead by example

- Talk about load openly, in staff meetings and at the dais
- Plan the recovery before the crisis ends
- Share the weight: backups and handoffs, no heroes
- Notice who is quietly carrying the most

YOUR TURN · PAIR UP FOR THREE MINUTES

Remember Day Three of the 2024 January Ice Storm?

Think back to the hardest moment: the calls, the lost sleep, the decisions that couldn't wait.

Notic

What did you feel in your body? Describe the feelings and how they can drive decisions.

Regulate

What steadied you? What would you try now? What were the smart decisions you made?

Share

Who helped carry the load? What could you have handed off? What could you have done differently?

PAY ATTENTION

Early warning signs of burnout

- Dread on Sunday night
- A short fuse with colleagues or staffers
- Going numb or cynical about the work
- Insomnia, Nagging Headaches or GI Upset
- Doing more while it seems to matter less

Burnout is information, not failure

THE REFRAME

“Burnout is not your destiny. It's your wake-up call.”

- Dr. Zarya Rubin

TAKE IT BACK TO CITY HALL

Three things to remember

1 · Reframe

Burnout is a signal, not a personal failing.

2 · Skill

Settle your body before you solve the problem.

3 · Habit

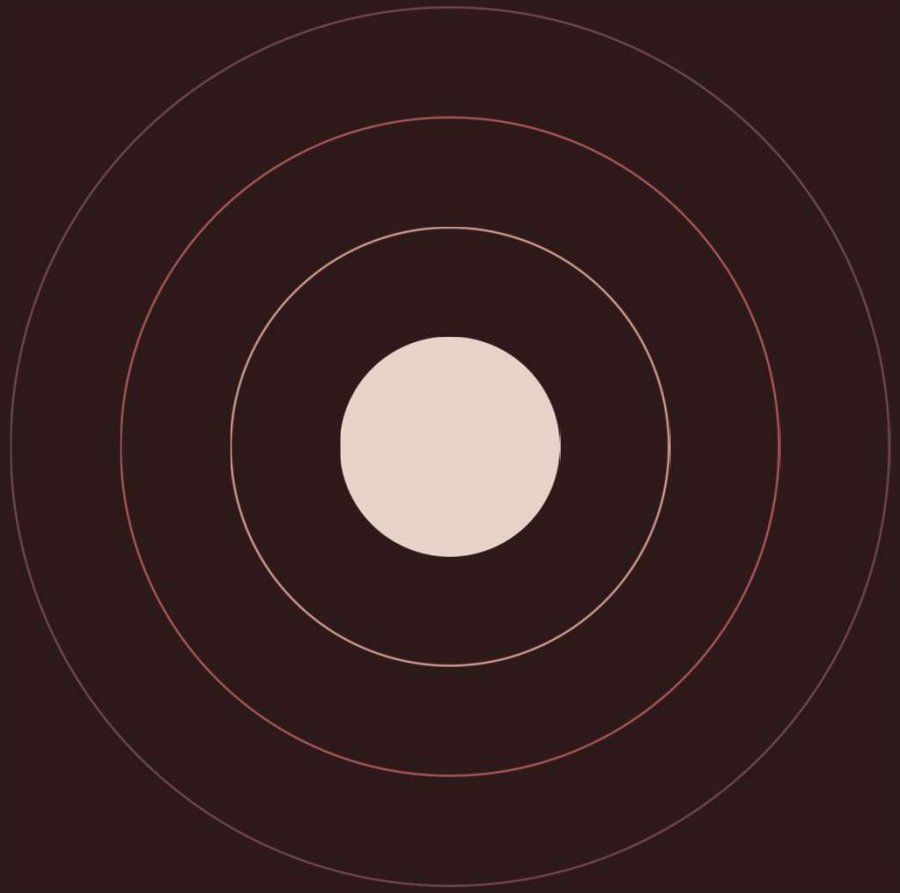
Build recovery in before the crash, and share the load.

Write down one practice you'll try this week.

Questions?

Dr. Zarya Rubin, MD

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Do
One
Thing
Less



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