

Wired to Burn Out — Free Preview

A Neuroscience-Based Workbook to Recognize, Understand, and Recover from Burnout

By Lana Wray

This is a free preview of the full workbook. It includes the author's note, the complete Burnout Self-Assessment (Chapter 1), and the beginning of Chapter 2.

A Note Before We Begin

You picked up this book for a reason.

Maybe you wake up exhausted no matter how much you sleep. Maybe you sit at your desk and feel... nothing. Maybe you used to love your work, your life, your people — and now everything feels like sandpaper on raw skin.

I want you to know something: **you are not broken**. Your brain is doing exactly what it was designed to do under chronic, unrelenting stress. The problem isn't you. The problem is that modern life demands more from our nervous systems than they were built to handle — so they adapt in ways that keep you going short term, but slowly wire you toward burnout.

This workbook is that manual.

We're going to look at what's actually happening inside your brain and body when burnout takes hold. Not vague wellness platitudes. Real neuroscience, translated into language that makes sense. And then — because understanding alone doesn't heal — we're going to build your personal recovery plan, one exercise at a time.

You'll need a pen. You'll need honesty. And you'll need about ten minutes a day.

That's it. Let's begin.

— Lana

PART 1 — WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU

Chapter 1: Burnout Self-Assessment

Where Are You Right Now?

Before we talk about what burnout is, let's find out where you stand. The assessment below is not a clinical diagnosis — it's a mirror. It's designed to help you see your current state clearly, so you can track your progress as you work through this book.

Answer each question honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. Choose the number that best describes your experience **over the past four weeks**.

Rating Scale: **1** = Never / Not at all **2** = Rarely / A little **3** = Sometimes / Moderately **4** = Often / Quite a bit **5** = Always / Extremely

THE WIRED TO BURN OUT ASSESSMENT

Section A — Exhaustion (Physical & Emotional Depletion)

1. I feel physically drained by the end of the day, even when I haven't done anything particularly strenuous. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]
2. I wake up tired, regardless of how many hours I slept. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]
3. Small tasks that used to be easy now feel overwhelming. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]
4. I feel emotionally "used up" at the end of most days. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]
5. I get sick more often than I used to (colds, headaches, stomach issues). [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]
6. I rely on caffeine, sugar, or other stimulants just to get through the day. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]

Section A Total: ____

High scores in Section A suggest your brain and body have been in prolonged "on" mode, without enough time in recovery mode — a hallmark of burnout-related exhaustion.

Section B — Detachment (Cynicism & Disconnection)

1. I feel emotionally distant from the people around me, even people I care about. [**1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5**]

2. I've become more cynical or sarcastic about my work or daily responsibilities. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
3. I find myself going through the motions without really being present. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
4. I avoid social situations I used to enjoy. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
5. I feel like what I do doesn't really matter (at work or in my daily responsibilities). [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
6. I have less patience with colleagues, family members, or friends than I used to. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
7. I catch myself thinking, "What's the point?" about my work or the effort I put in. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]

Section B Total: ____

Section C — Diminished Capacity (Reduced Performance & Sense of Accomplishment)

1. I have trouble concentrating or making decisions. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
2. I forget things more often than I used to. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
3. I feel less competent at my job or daily tasks than I once did. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
4. Creative thinking feels impossible — my mind is blank or foggy. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
5. I procrastinate on things that used to come naturally to me. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
6. I feel like I'm falling behind, no matter how hard I try. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]

Section C Total: ____

High scores in Section C suggest that burnout may be affecting the parts of your brain responsible for focus, memory, and decision-making — not because you're lazy or incapable, but because those circuits have been running on overload for too long.

Section D — Physical Warning Signs

1. I experience tension in my body (jaw clenching, tight shoulders, back pain) most days. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]

2. My appetite has changed significantly — eating much more or much less than usual. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
3. I have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
4. I experience heart palpitations, shortness of breath, or chest tightness without physical exertion. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
5. I use alcohol, food, screens, or shopping to numb or escape how I feel. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]
6. I feel a persistent sense of dread, especially on Sunday evenings or Monday mornings. [1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5]

Section D Total: ____

Scoring Guide

Add up your totals from all four sections.

Grand Total: ____

Score	Zone	What It Means
25-44	☑ Thriving	You're managing well. This book will give you prevention tools.
45-64	⚠ Stressed	You're carrying more than you realize. Early intervention is powerful.
65-89	☑ Burning	Your system is under significant strain. Recovery is urgent and possible.
90-125	☑ Burnt Out	Your nervous system is in crisis mode. This workbook is for you — and please consider professional support too.

Now look at your section scores individually:

- **Section A (Exhaustion):** Scores above 20 suggest your body's energy systems are depleted.
- **Section B (Detachment):** Scores above 23 suggest emotional withdrawal as a protective mechanism.
- **Section C (Diminished Capacity):** Scores above 20 suggest cognitive impact from chronic stress.
- **Section D (Physical Signs):** Scores above 20 suggest your body is sounding alarms.

These section cutoffs are guideposts, not clinical diagnoses. They highlight where chronic stress may be hitting your energy, emotions, thinking, or body the hardest, so you know where to focus your recovery work.

YOUR TURN

My grand total score is: ___ My zone is: ___ The section where I scored highest is: ___ When I see my score, I feel: ___ One thing I notice about my results that doesn't surprise me: One thing that does surprise me:

A Word About Your Score

Whatever your number, I want to be clear: **this is a starting point, not a verdict.**

A high score does not mean you're weak. It means your environment has been asking too much of your nervous system for too long. You are not your score. You are the person who cared enough to take this test.

We're going to come back to this assessment at the end of your 90-day plan. For now, just let the number sit. Let it be information, not judgment.

Chapter 1 Takeaway: Burnout is measurable. Naming where you are is the first act of recovery.

Chapter 2: Burnout ≠ Tired

The Word That Changed Everything

In 1974, a German-American psychologist named Herbert Freudenberger was working at a free clinic in New York's East Village. The volunteers there had started their work full of passion and idealism. But after months of grueling hours and emotionally demanding patients, something happened to them. They became exhausted. Irritable. Cynical. They stopped caring about the people they'd come to help.

Freudenberger recognized this pattern — partly because he saw it in his volunteers, and partly because he saw it in himself. He borrowed a word from the slang of the time — "burnout" was

used to describe people depleted by chronic drug use — and applied it to what he saw in overworked helpers.

He described it as a state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion caused by one's professional life.

It was the first time someone gave a name to the thing millions of people were feeling but couldn't articulate: I'm not just tired. Something deeper is wrong.

The Three Dimensions: Christina Maslach's Framework

In the early 1980s, social psychologist Christina Maslach took Freudenberger's observation and built it into a rigorous framework. Through extensive research, she identified three core dimensions of burnout:

1. Emotional Exhaustion This is the feeling of being completely drained — not just physically tired, but emotionally wrung out. It's the depletion that sleep doesn't fix, because it's not about how many hours you rested. It's about how long your stress systems have been switched on without enough time in recovery mode.

2. Depersonalization (Cynicism) This is the protective wall your brain builds — in a way — when empathy becomes too expensive. You start treating people like objects. Patients become "the knee in room 3." Students become "those kids." Your partner's problems become "not my problem." It's not that you've become a bad person — it's that your brain has decided caring costs too much energy.

3. Reduced Personal Accomplishment Even when you're still performing at a reasonable level, you feel like you're failing. Your internal measuring stick is broken. You can't see your own contributions. You feel ineffective, incompetent, like a fraud — even when the evidence says otherwise.

Maslach's insight was revolutionary: **in her framework, burnout isn't just exhaustion — it's a pattern of exhaustion, withdrawal, and a collapsed sense of self-efficacy, to varying degrees.** That's what makes it different from simply being tired.

Burnout vs. Being Tired

Let's be precise about this, because the difference matters for your recovery.

Tiredness is a signal. Your body says: "I need rest." You rest, and you recover. The system works.

Burnout is a systems problem. Your body has been sending the signal for so long that the signal no longer leads to real recovery. You rest, and you don't really recover. You sleep all weekend and Monday morning feels exactly the same. The tiredness lives in your bones, your

thoughts, your motivation. It's not just a simple resource deficit — it's your whole resource system struggling to reset.

Here's a simple test:

	Tired	Burnt Out
Rest helps	Yes	Not really
You still care	Yes	Caring feels impossible
You can see the end	Yes ("Just need a vacation")	No end in sight
Emotions are accessible	Yes	Numb or flat
Recover with a weekend off	Usually	Rarely

This is where the free preview ends.

The full workbook continues with:

- Burnout vs. Depression — how to tell the difference
- What chronic stress actually does to your brain (the neuroscience)
- Your Burnout Timeline — mapping how you got here
- The 90-Day Recovery Plan with daily exercises
- Boundary scripts, energy audits, and career rebuilding strategies
- 15 chapters of science-backed, practical recovery work

[**📖 Get the full workbook on Amazon →**](#)

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This workbook is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice. The burnout assessment is an original tool by the author and is not a clinical diagnostic instrument.