

INTRODUCTION

Burnout can feel like the end, but it's a warning light, the sign to begin a powerful journey back to balance, purpose, and renewal. You have the strength to reclaim your energy, nurture your well-being, reignite your interests, and flourish with greater clarity and peace.

~ Ronald Dancziger

Am I that guy? The one who walks away when things get tough? Is that the man I want to be?

“I won't be home for a couple of days. I don't know where I'll be. I just don't have anything to give. I can't handle this life anymore.”

The pitted plastic payphone lay heavy in my hand.

My shoulders slumped as I heard her choking gasps. What little energy I had emptied onto the rubbish-strewn metal floorboard of the grimy phone booth.

How can I be so selfish? Moira is facing her worst fear: breast cancer. My daughter is in critical care for the fourth time this year. I can't pay the bills no matter how many hours I work. I have no answers.

It was easier to go off-grid in the early nineties. No phones, network connections, no umbilical cord iPhone tracker. You just faded away. And that's all I had the ability to do in that moment as my life crash landed. The island I found myself on was desolate, distant, and unreachable. I held everything together for as long as I could, but now I was empty—spent, lost, alone.

The situation was one I'd never have thought I could recover from. It was a slow roll that took years and a hundred incidents of 'what next?'

Have you felt that kind of desperation?

Is overwhelm a constant companion, overriding every other sensation now? Feel as though life is heading to that never-go-back space?

Burnout is real. It's seen in every corner of society. High achievers constantly in the spotlight and those living in quiet desperation huddled in corners, hoping not to be noticed.

This collaboration of twenty-five highly intuitive, badass professionals transports you through their stories of self-healing to lay before you the answers they used to overcome the tremendous obstacles of burnout and overwhelm.

Yes, they've been there, done that, and have the T-shirt. No matter that it's sweat-stained, torn, and covered in dirt from the internal battles each waged.

There will be stories that talk to you, sentences you copy and put on your bathroom mirror, and scenes that steal your heart and have you reaching for the Kleenex box.

The hope of each of these authors is to share their experiences, as hard as they are to display to the world, so you'll know you aren't alone. And, you'll learn from their lessons and not repeat them.

Yes, I was that kid. "Don't touch the stove, it's hot." Always curious, I ended up with bandaged fingers.

How hot is it? How long before I can touch it? Can I do something else with the burner as it cools?

Curiosity was ever-present and to this day is one of the attributes I use to find the best in people, travel the world, and find purpose in everyday life. Use your curiosity to find the answers within. These chapters were written for you—to learn, change direction, or take that first step, next step, or decisive step in walking out of the fire.

Emotional burnout isn't about doing too much; it's about not getting the reward you need. You can't pour from an empty cup. Recognizing burnout is the first step to refilling that cup and reclaiming your energy.

~ Ronald Danczinger

CHAPTER 1

LIFE ON AUTOPILOT

TAKE BACK THE CONTROLS

R. Scott Holmes

Burnout is nature's way of telling you, you've been going through the motions your soul has departed; you're a zombie, a member of the walking dead, a sleepwalker. False optimism is like administering stimulants to an exhausted nervous system.

*- Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly; On Being a Man**

MY STORY

Work-life balance was me standing on one leg, on a tightrope over a crevice, while juggling chainsaws.

Moira and I drove for an hour and a half into Boston, ate a cafeteria supper, and stayed with our daughter while trying to communicate with her doctors and nurses. The drive home was quick at midnight with no traffic. We relieved my father-in-law, who was asleep in the rocking chair after caring for our two older daughters. Then rinse and repeat until Amanda was released.

I was thirty-five years old. My daughter Amanda contracted Herpes Encephalitis Simplex 2 ten years before, resulting in multiple impairments. Although she survived, she couldn't care for herself. She was medically unstable and was sent to the Boston hospitals on a regular basis.

We maneuvered between keeping my older daughters' lives as normal as possible with school and dance class, and advocating for Amanda with the medical community and institutions.

Up at five o'clock, I would get Amanda up and prepped so Moira could take care of her throughout the day. Home at six o'clock with a "She's all yours!" from my frazzled wife.

Life was a struggle. With all energy spent keeping our family together, little space remained for anything else.

The energy it took to get out of bed in the morning, much less the desire to face whatever the day would throw at us, was monumental. Our marriage revolved around making it through the day and dealing with whatever new shoe had fallen.

Is this all life there is to life? How can I support everyone when we can't get enough help for Amanda? Moira is exhausted from constant care. I can barely get more than two consecutive hours of sleep.

*If I were to be totally sincere
In every desperate attempt to save the world,
I forget that there are nights I can't even save myself.
I stand at the end of every line of souls I try to lift,
as if I'm the least deserving of my own compassion.
And maybe I am.*

~ Mohamed Yossri

ISOLATION:

Life was lonely caring for a child with special needs. Family kind of shows up. They generally didn't understand. "Why can't you come to the cookout this weekend?"

The physical and mental gymnastics required to get everyone there were taxing. Even if our child was healthy that day, the two hundred pounds of equipment, special food, and mental fortification of dealing with normal family relations still took an extraordinary effort.

Showing up was hard because of the work it took to maintain a semblance of an ordinary quality of life. Family conversations were stilted because the only conversations we had were with nurses, aids, physical and occupational therapists, doctors, and hospitalists.

Our lives revolved around our girls, and we built castle walls to keep them safe against a world that was constantly battering the gates.

At three and a half years old, we made the decision to allow Amanda to live in a premium care facility specifically for "those kids" who were multiply involved and couldn't be cared for at home. Massachusetts was one of two states that had pediatric nursing home beds. We were blessed to have this option available.

Talk about a *Sophie's Choice*—give up our daughter so our family could survive.

Give up so our oldest two could have a semblance of freedom as they grow up.

Give up the hope we had of not failing our daughter.

This was humbling, guilt-inducing, fracturing, and devastating.

Yes, it was the best choice for all concerned. Amanda got the constant care we knew wasn't possible at home. Our older two daughters maintained a normal upbringing. My wife continued her studies to complete her teaching degree.

I focused on getting out of debt.

It was the best choice mentally and physically, but at what cost? It was heart-crushing as a parent.

The other shoe:

“Scott, I just got a call from the doctor's office. Something showed up in the mammogram.”

Moira's jaw clenched, and tears rolled down her cheeks. Fear was etched on her face as she crumpled to the bed.

“I'm sure it's nothing. You are not your mom. She had ovarian cancer when she passed,” I whispered, trying my best to comfort my wife's greatest fear.

It was a miracle that the pencil-point tumor lying against her chest wall was seen. Moira was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. It ended up requiring a radical mastectomy and chemotherapy treatment.

Now I was faced with a crisis of the unending spiral of caregiving—phone in hand, not knowing if I could walk back into my life, the only life I knew.

The overwhelm crushed my chest, making me gasp for the simplest breath. I was failing—my wife, my daughters, and my family. Above all, I failed to meet what I was taught life should be.

How do I prove to my wife and daughters that I still want to be the father and husband I thought I should be and could be? Am I the man who leaves when times get tough?

I was a complete and utter mess.

After that weekend of contemplation, heartache, and finding my big boy pants, I moved out, at Moira's suggestion, to my parents' house just down the street. They didn't ask many questions but were supportive, knowing I was in a dark place.

I didn't know how I felt. I was confused. *Divorce? We were separated. Do I still love her in the same way? Could she ever forgive me?*

Life was spinning faster and faster, and the only thing I felt was dizzy, ungrounded, and desperate to hold onto something solid.

*“Courage is not having the strength to go on;
it is going on when you don't have the strength.”*

~ Theodore Roosevelt

THE NEXT CHAPTER:

A therapist suggested Al-Anon. While I didn't know much about it, I knew friends who attended Alcoholics Anonymous. It scared me that I fit the profile while not being a drinker.

Walking into that meeting in the church basement, I tried desperately to fold up inside myself so no one could see me.

“Write three things you are grateful for,” the speaker said. “We are working on the fourth step.”

At that point in my life, I couldn't come up with one thing. How sad was I?

Gratitude. What a concept!

As I went to sleep that night, I allowed the concept of being thankful to sink in. I had a bed, a roof over my head, and I was in a warm place. I guess that will have to do.

When I woke up, gratitude was the first thing that came up.

Thank you for allowing me this new day.

I felt better. *Maybe this gratitude thing really works.*

Over the course of the next few weeks, I made a list of what I felt grateful for each day. The list grew, and I began to see life differently. Slowly, my perspective changed:

- Moira was alive and in treatment at Mass General.
- My girls were healthy and doing well in school.
- Amanda was in good hands at the nursing home.
- My parents were healthy.
- I found Al-Anon teachings that touched my heart.
- I moved back into the house.
- My daughters started to accept me again.
- Days seemed brighter—in color instead of shades of gray.
- The cyclone spinning around me slowed down.

While days were lighter, I still wore the layered armor accumulated over years of protecting, supporting, and always being ready for whatever life would throw at me.

THE NEXT SHOE:

“Mr. Holmes, this is the head nurse at the nursing home. I don’t know how to say this, but she’s gone. We found her not breathing. I’m so sorry.”

The phone call we had expected dozens of times happened on a night with no warning signs. Amanda was just gone.

My heart was ripped from my chest. My only thoughts were: *What’s next? How do I get Moira through this? How do we tell the girls?*

The blur of identifying Amanda in the ER, saying good-bye and holding her for the last time, telling the girls their sister died, and making arrangements seemed to take forever and a moment all at the same time.

The wake and funeral whizzed by in a procession of people, hugs, and well-wishes. I felt a veil dropping over my eyes—I couldn't see the world the same way. Life was darker and out of focus.

A year later, my boss called me into his office in the high-rise building overlooking downtown Boston. I felt nonplussed, not caring, and empty.

“Where are you?” he questioned.

“I've shown up for work every day. Why?”

“I've seen this before. Growing a beard, the vacant stares. I haven't seen you smile since your daughter passed. You need to come back to the living.”

I was decimated. Tears streamed down my face as I allowed myself to feel something other than total overwhelm for the first time in forever.

Someone saw me for the first time in so long. Part of me was angry that he couldn't just let me be. The other parts jumped at the chance to step out and move. The realization I was on autopilot struck me—one foot in front of the other to survive.

Moira walked the same path—there but not there. Like a Macy's Thanksgiving balloon led down the street with all the tethers holding us in place. Everyone saw the brightly colored characters, but not the immense hollow interior that couldn't be filled.

What else am I missing? How can I move forward?

I sat at the bar at a reception, speaking with Lees, a high-level yoga instructor. Being a smart-ass know-it-all, I said, “That's for women who have nothing better to do.”

“Oh, really? Bend over and touch your toes, right now!”

I slid smoothly from the barstool, bent over, and reached all the way to my knees. I couldn't move any further, no matter how I stretched.

“I guess I'm just a stiff white guy.” I was embarrassed by my performance.

“I’ll see you Saturday at nine at the health club,” she said as she peacocked away.

Is this something I’m really going to do?

It felt right. I was out of shape, had no flexibility, and was stuck in my routine of no routine.

The room, the incense, the meditation music, the quiet, being able to listen to my body, and that small whisper of a voice that appeared without outside distractions was calming. And exhilarating.

For the first time in my adult life, I felt attached and grounded. After two years, once a week wasn’t enough. I started yoga daily and practiced all the poses I’d learned. Not only did I feel better physically, but mentally I was sharper and able to concentrate.

I do this today, decades in the making.

THE BOOTS DROPPED:

“Dad, come quick, Mom’s gasping. Hurry!”

My daughter held my wife’s flaccid hand as she leaned over the hospital bed in the downstairs dining room. Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I tumbled down the stairs half-dressed.

Moira’s gasps were the crackling death rattle breath. She hadn’t had food or water for ten days, subsisting on pain patches and prayers. Twenty years of fighting cancer led to that moment.

“Moira, it’s okay. You can let go now.”

And she was gone.

The arrangements made through hospice gave us respite. We didn’t have to make decisions. We could comfort each other. My girls lost their mom, a space I could never hope to fill, no matter how many times I put my cape on to rescue them. The Superman routine didn’t work for this.

Having never been alone since I was nineteen, I was lost, rambling around the house with only the cat to talk to. He didn't like long conversations.

Rebuilding my life was daunting. I didn't know where to start. Seemed like I kept crash-landing in this life.

THE NEXT STEPS:

“Come on, let's check out this Reiki class. You need to get out and do something. It could be fun,” Patti insisted.

I was lost, with no direction yet intrigued by the thought of learning something new. We were the only two participants, and it couldn't have gone better. I loved the intensity and the understanding of energy.

Before I could do Reiki 2, I needed to practice self-Reiki for at least three months. Every morning, I went through the practice, not knowing what to expect. What came forward was this sense of my body.

A quiet nod to its wisdom.

I took inventory of my physical, emotional, and spiritual body. I was coming back to me, the one I lost through so many years of caring for everyone else.

That understanding brought me to new questions.

What do I have to change in my life?

How do I say no to things that don't resonate with me?

When can I say yes to myself and not feel guilty?

Connections and relationships changed as I established new parameters and boundaries. Old ones lessened. New ones grew.

I put my Superman cape in the closet and focused on saving me.

Reiki 2 followed by Polarity Therapy, Reiki Master Training, RYSE studies, and Theta Healing 1, 2, and 3.

I flew into worlds I never dreamed of. I saw outrageously beautiful dimensions of the universe and of myself I never imagined.

From that perspective, I realized I wanted to give back, lift people up, and facilitate healing for others.

I was finally in a place to work with hospice, a resolution I made to honor Moira. The 40-hour certification dealing with transitioning and death was life-changing. Over the years, I've never regretted a single minute I gave to volunteering.

I now gave out of abundance, not from an empty cup.

How can you fill your cup to overflowing?

THE ANSWER

The 5-G's: Gratitude, Guidance, Grounding, Guardrails, and Generosity

GRATITUDE:

Can't see your way out of the black hole you fell into? No light at the end of the tunnel? Not able to think your way out?

What if ten minutes a day changed your perspective? Is that an investment you can undertake? No time? No energy?

It's micro-steps, small incremental steps done every day that bring clarity. In burnout, we only see the fight-or-flight responses, all or nothing.

Set a goal before you even put your feet on the floor.

Express gratitude for all the good in life in a journal, your phone, or wherever you can see and record them.

Before work? Noontime? At night, when the house is quiet? Find what fits you.

Past reflections of gratitude remind us of what was important that day—to see how far we’ve come. Looking back six months is an amazing way to see who we were. And, if you’re like me, remembering what you ate for breakfast yesterday is a reach.

GUIDANCE:

We all have that voice inside our head that shows up at the damndest times:

- Two o’clock in the morning when you’re trying to sleep.
- When you feel your lowest after another hard day.
- After a big let-down.

When we’re most vulnerable, that loud voice is there to be heard. What if we were intentionally quiet, without interruption, without outside noise?

Meditation, like all things, looks different for everyone:

- On the back porch first thing in the morning with a fresh cuppa.
- In your favorite chair as the last hours of the day fade.
- Sitting in lotus with incense wafting to the ceiling.
- Walking or being walked by the dog along the wooded, leaf-strewn path.

However it looks, the sensation is the same—safety, serenity, peace, in tune.

Find that space for yourself. Not there? Create it. If you need more direction, get counseling, therapy, or join a support group, but speak with someone trusted.

GROUNDING:

Develop habits infused with intention that become rituals. They become the building blocks for your foundation. The stronger your practice and the more often you activate it, the more present you can be throughout the day.

I found yoga, meditation, and Reiki as grounding practices.

Nature is great at grounding: the ocean, sky, mountains, lakes, sunrises, parks, and your own backyard. Find what creates that connection to Mother Gaia (another G).

GUARDRAILS:

Set boundaries with your time. Don't like boundaries? Use parameters, fences, or speed bumps. You're building the groundwork for growth.

The ability to say no, or at least not an immediate yes, puts up gateways that allow you to decide what you give yourself and your energy to.

The hardest part of creating boundaries for yourself is using your voice—speaking up and sticking to what you want. You may lose people, or your relationships may change as you enact these rules of engagement.

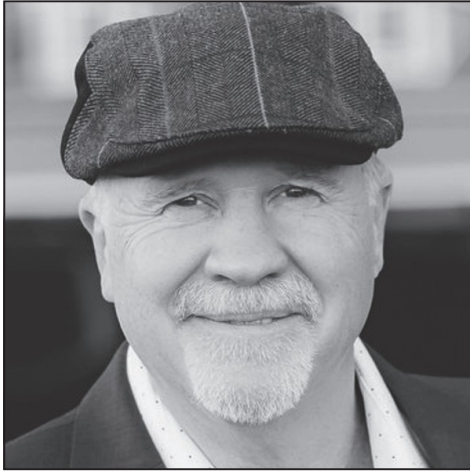
This isn't being selfish. This is self-healing. You're training everyone how you want to be treated and how far you're willing to go.

GENEROSITY:

Now that you have this foundation of self-fulfillment and understanding, you might want to share your newfound knowledge and clarity.

Generosity comes in many forms. Giving of yourself—to be in service—takes many forms. Sharing, teaching, mentoring, volunteering, or working with charities are ways to give back. When you come from the perspective of abundance, you give and serve in whatever opportunity appears.

Burnout can last months, years, or decades without your awareness. Step out and find a new path. You owe it to yourself.



R. Scott Holmes is a quantum healing practitioner, transformational coach, and Amazon bestselling author whose work bridges science, spirit, and the human heart. A Reiki Master Teacher, Polarity Therapist, RYSE Teacher, Theta Healer, Universal White Time Healing practitioner, and certified Find Your Voice Coach, Scott blends a decade of study with the hard-earned wisdom of

lived experience.

Scott's path into holistic healing began in the depths of loss. After a 20-year caregiving journey with his wife and multiply-impaired daughter and the passing of his wife of 39 years, he was guided into the world of energy, awareness, and transformation. Through this awakening, he discovered not only how to heal but also how to help others find meaning, freedom, and joy in their own lives.

Through one-on-one sessions, teaching, hospice volunteering, and his monthly podcasts, Scott has held sacred space for countless professionals and seekers, helping them remember who they are and reconnect to their innate wholeness. His collaborations with **Brave Healer Productions** capture the essence of his journey: honest, heart-centered explorations of resilience, authenticity, and the alchemy of healing.

When not teaching or writing, Scott can be found traveling the world with his wife, Patti—exploring sacred sites, tasting local cuisines, climbing mountains, and meditating by the sea. Yoga, Qigong, and daily meditation keep him grounded in gratitude, curiosity, and wonder for this extraordinary life we get to live.

Connect with Scott to find the Five G's in your life:

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Podcasts:

Today's Conversation with Sara Jane and co-host Scott Holmes
on YouTube: <https://youtube.com/todaysconversationwithsarajane>
<https://youtu.be/20HC2QOQqYA>

Soul Empowerment with David McLeod, Ilene Dillon, Sara Jane, and
Scott Holmes: <https://bit.ly/4c3DRuL>