# Working To Live 30 Day Workbook

A trauma-informed educational wellness worksheet for reflection, choice, self-care, and support.

Use this at your own pace. Skip, adapt, pause, or stop. You are allowed to choose what fits your body, culture, privacy, energy, safety, access needs, and real-life limits today.

This is a reflection tool, not a test. One honest sentence, one checked box, or one small next step can be enough.

A printable reflection and practice resource

## A 30-Day Burnout Recovery & Work-Life Rebalancing Workbook

## Working To Live

A 30-Day Workbook for Untangling Self-Worth from Productivity, Reducing Burnout, and Building a Life Beyond Work A GENTLER WAY FORWARD You are not a machine with a maintenance problem. You are a person whose needs, limits, relationships, play, rest, and meaning matter.

## This Workbook Belongs To _____

## Start Date _____

A self-guided workbook for anyone seeking a healthier relationship with work

## Working To Live - 1

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Before You Begin

SCOPE AND SAFETY This is a self-guided educational workbook, not a diagnosis, crisis service, medical advice, or employment or legal advice. You do not need a therapist or other professional to use it. Adapt activities for disability, culture, caregiving, financial realities, workplace power, and safety. Professional support is an optional resource and may be especially helpful when symptoms are severe, persistent, or difficult to manage alone. If work stress is accompanied by thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, inability to function, severe substance use, or danger at home or work, seek urgent local support or emergency care.

How to use this workbook

_____

_____ ☐ Aim for 15-30 minutes a day; consistency matters more than perfection. ☐ Choose "minimum viable practice" on depleted days. Skipping is information, not failure. ☐ Do not use the workbook to optimize every minute. Leave some pages unfinished on purpose.

☐ Notice consequences and power dynamics before using a boundary script. Make a safety plan when retaliation is possible. ☐ If strong reactions, repeated patterns, or significant impairment continue, consider contacting a trusted support person, licensed clinician, or appropriate medical provider.

Language matters "Burnout" is used here as a practical description of chronic work-related depletion, cynicism or distance, and reduced effectiveness-not as a personal weakness. Symptoms can overlap with depression, anxiety, trauma responses, sleep disorders, ADHD, substance use, medical conditions, caregiving strain, discrimination, and unsafe work environments. A thorough assessment may be warranted when symptoms are severe, persistent, or not limited to work.

Your agreement with yourself For the next 30 days, I am willing to experiment with…

_____

_____

_____ I will know I need more support when…

_____

_____

## Working To Live - 2

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## Do Something Right Now

Pick one. The goal is not to complete this page; it is to interrupt the cycle within the next five minutes.

Close one loop: Write the next physical action for one open task. If it is not yours or not necessary, delete, delegate, or defer it.

Exhale longer: Breathe in gently for 4 and out for 6, five times. Stop if breath focus is uncomfortable.

Orient: Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, and 1 you taste or appreciate.

Send a boundary: "I can't take this on today. I can revisit priority and timing tomorrow." Leave the chair: Stand, change rooms, step outside, or look at the farthest point you can see for 90 seconds.

End the day on paper: Write: Done / Waiting / Tomorrow's first step. Then close the work surface.

PERMISSION SLIP You do not have to earn this pause by finishing something first.

**What did I choose, and what changed by even 1%? _____**

**_____ _____**

**_____**

**_____ _____**

**_____ _____**

**_____ _____**

**_____ A 10-minute emergency reset □ Minute 1: Stop inputs; silence alerts and put both feet somewhere supported. □ Minutes 2-3: Name the state: "I notice urgency / fog / dread / agitation." □ Minutes 4-5: Meet a body need: water, food, medication as prescribed, restroom, temperature, movement. □ Minutes 6-7: Separate "must today" from "feels urgent." Choose one next step. □ Minutes 8-9: Communicate one realistic expectation or ask for clarification. □ Minute 10: Decide when work ends today and what will mark the transition.**

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## Why Work Can Take Over

The burnout loop High demands, low control, inadequate recovery, unclear expectations, value conflict, unfairness, isolation, and chronic overextension can keep the stress system activated. The brain may answer uncertainty with more checking, planning, proving, and working. Short-term relief reinforces the behavior; long-term recovery shrinks. Burnout is often both personal and systemic: individual coping cannot repair an exploitative or unsafe environment.

THE LOOP Demand or trigger fi threat story ("I must prove myself") fi overwork or avoidance fi temporary relief fi depleted recovery fi reduced capacity fi more threat.

Productivity-based self-worth

**When output becomes evidence of worth, ordinary limits can feel like moral failure. Rest may trigger guilt; _____ _____ _____ _____ praise may bring only brief relief; mistakes may feel identity-threatening. The work is not to stop caring. It is to widen the sources of identity and practice treating capacity as information rather than a verdict.**

Recovery is an active process Recovery includes sleep and physical restoration, psychological detachment from work, relaxation, autonomy, play, connection, and experiences of mastery chosen for their own sake. Passive collapse may be necessary at first, but sustainable recovery also makes room for enlivening activity and human contact.

Four levers for change ☐ Regulate: support the body and reduce unnecessary activation. ☐ Reframe: question urgency, perfectionism, and worth-equals-output stories. ☐ Redesign: change workload, workflow, boundaries, cues, and agreements. ☐ Reconnect: invest attention in values, relationships, pleasure, community, and identity beyond work.

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Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Baseline: Where Am I Starting?

_____ _____ Rate the past two weeks from 0 (not at all) to 4 (nearly every day). This is a reflection tool, not a diagnostic scale.

Statement 0 1 2 3 4 I felt emotionally or physically depleted by work. o o o o o I became detached, cynical, numb, or irritable about work. o o o o o I doubted my competence despite evidence of effort or skill. o o o o o I worked, checked, or thought about work beyond my chosen hours. o o o o o I felt guilty, restless, or unsafe when resting. o o o o o My sleep, appetite, concentration, body, relationships, or health were affected. o o o o o I had meaningful recovery time. (reverse reflection) o o o o o I felt like a whole person outside of work. (reverse reflection) o o o o o

- My current pattern

The signs that tell me I am moving toward burnout are…

_____ _____ The conditions-not just personal habits-that contribute are…

_____ _____ One thing I want my life to contain more of is…

_____ _____

## Working To Live - 5

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## Your 30-Day Map

## Week 1: Notice & Stabilize

Map the pattern, reduce immediate strain, and practice small recovery.

## Week 2: Boundaries & Beliefs

Challenge productivity-based worth and rehearse clear limits.

## Week 3: Redesign & Reconnect

Change systems, rebuild identity, and increase meaningful recovery.

## Week 4: Sustain & Choose

## Practice flexibility, prepare for setbacks, and design a livable future.

## Days 29-30: Integrate

Review evidence, commit to supports, and write the next chapter.

DAILY RHYTHM Arrive fi Learn fi Practice fi Reflect fi Close. Each day includes a "minimum viable" option so the workbook does not become another performance demand.

Microbreak menu ☐ 20-20-20: every 20 minutes, look about 20 feet away for 20 seconds. ☐ Drop shoulders; unclench jaw and hands; feel support beneath you. ☐ Walk to water or a window without bringing work input. ☐ Do 3 slow movements your body asks for; pain-free range only. ☐ Name one completed action before scanning for what remains. ☐ Take a connection break: send a non-work message or share a moment with someone. ☐ Use a sensory shift: cool water, sunlight, music, texture, or fresh air. ☐ Practice a 60-second "nothing to solve" pause.

## Working To Live - 6

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Build a Self-Care Ecosystem Self-care is not a purchase, a reward, or one more standard to meet. It is the ongoing practice of noticing needs, using available resources, reducing preventable harm, receiving support, and making conditions more livable. Some care soothes; some care solves; some care protects; some care connects.

Domain What is already helping? One unmet need / next support Physical sleep opportunity, food, hydration, medication as prescribed, movement, pain care, medical attention Emotional naming feelings, compassion, expression, grieving, therapy, reducing shame Cognitive fewer inputs, externalizing tasks, realistic standards, focus support, decision limits Relational belonging, reciprocity, asking, receiving, repair, boundaries, low-demand company Practical money, transportation, childcare, housekeeping, scheduling, accommodations, delegation Meaning & spirit values, culture, faith or spirituality, nature, service, creativity, ritual, awe Play & pleasure humor, novelty, sensual comfort, hobbies, curiosity, celebration, unstructured time Protective saying no, documentation, advocacy, safety planning, leave, consultation, changing environments My care is allowed to be… ☐ Small enough for today. ☐ Adapted to my body, culture, resources, and responsibilities. ☐ Shared with people and systems-not carried alone. ☐ Preventive, not only used after collapse. ☐ Pleasurable without being productive. ☐ A boundary, request, accommodation, or structural

change.

## Working To Live - 7

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Coping Skills by State

- Choose a skill that fits the state. If a strategy increases distress, stop and try a different channel.

Coping can _____ _____ create enough steadiness for choice; it does not require pretending the situation is acceptable.

Revved up / panicky: Orient to the room; lengthen the exhale; cool the face or hands; press feet into the floor; reduce inputs; use rhythmic movement; contact a safe person.

Angry / activated: Name the boundary violation; discharge energy safely; delay sending; write the uncensored version privately; identify the request, consequence, or repair.

Frozen / shut down: Warmth; gentle pressure; tiny movements; one sensory cue; co-regulation; choose a two-minute task; reduce language and decisions.

Scattered / overloaded: Brain-dump; sort into now/later/not mine; use a visible timer; single-task; body-double; close tabs; define the next physical action.

Ruminating / overthinking: Label "planning" or "replaying"; schedule a worry window; write the feared prediction; identify controllable action; shift to sensory attention.

Guilty after resting or saying no: Name the old rule; check for actual harm; repeat the value protected; allow discomfort; do not reopen the decision immediately.

Depleted / numb: Meet basics; lower demands; seek assessment if persistent; choose low-demand contact; use light, air, food, hydration, rest, and compassionate structure.

Disconnected from meaning: Do one values-based action; remember who benefits from your humanity; make or notice something beautiful; reconnect with community, culture, nature, or spirit.

- My coping card

**When I notice these early cues… _____**

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____ **I will try these three skills first… _**

_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ **If they do not help, I will contact / request… _____**

_____ _____

_____

_____ **A NOTE ON AVOIDANCE Short-term distraction can be useful. If it repeatedly delays sleep, care, decisions, or support-or creates new harm-pair it with a timed return plan and compassionate accountability.**

## Working To Live - 8

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 1 | See the Pattern

## Today'S Mantra

"I can observe a pattern without blaming myself."

## Learn

Awareness is not overthinking when it leads to choice. Today you will map the sequence that pulls you into overwork.

## Trigger Mapping

Describe one recent episode: trigger fi thought fi emotion/body cue fi action fi short-term payoff fi

_____

_____ longer-term cost.

## My plan / notes:

_____

_____

_____

Workday intervention ☐ Pause before the next automatic "yes" and say, "Let me check my capacity and get back to you." ☐ Take one intentional 2-5 minute break before depletion peaks. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Do not wait until you understand the whole pattern before changing one small part of it. Awareness grows through practice, not just analysis.

PRACTICAL TIP Put a sticky note where overwork usually starts: "What am I trying to prove or prevent?" QUESTION FOR GROWTH What becomes possible when I treat this pattern as learned and changeable rather than as my personality?

_____

_____ MINIMUM VIABLE PRACTICE Read the mantra once, take one slow exhale, and make one choice that protects 1% more capacity.

## Working To Live - 9

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 1 Reflection | See the Pattern

## What did working more help me avoid, control, or prove? _____

_____

_____

_____ _____

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ What happened when I practiced the intervention? Include neutral or difficult results.

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_____ What is one piece of evidence that my worth exceeded my output today?

_____

_____

_____ How did I care for myself, receive care, or reduce harm today?

_____

_____

MICHELLE'S REMINDER Growth is not measured by how perfectly you completed this page. Notice one honest thing, choose one supportive next step, and let that be enough for today.

Energy Stress Work detachment Self-compassion Life presence 0 1 2 3 4 5 0 1 2 3 4 5 0 1 2 3 4 5 0 1 2 3 4 5 0 1 2 3 4 5 Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 10

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## Day 2 | Capacity Is Data

## Today'S Mantra

"My limits are information, not evidence against my worth."

## Learn

Capacity changes with sleep, health, caregiving, grief, disability, hormones, stress, and resources. A realistic plan begins with today's capacity-not an idealized self.

## The Capacity Budget

Give yourself 10 energy units. Allocate them across required work, life care, people, recovery, and uncertainty. If the total exceeds 10, reduce scope, delay, delegate, or ask for help.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Before accepting a task: "What would need to move for this to fit?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Plan from the energy you actually have today. An honest plan builds self-trust; an impossible plan keeps teaching you that you are behind.

PRACTICAL TIP Before making a to-do list, rate your available energy from 0-10 and shorten the list accordingly.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH How would I plan differently if respecting capacity were a form of integrity? capacity.

## Working To Live - 11

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## Day 2 Reflection | Capacity Is Data

Where do I routinely budget energy I do not actually have?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 12

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 3 | Complete the Stress Cycle

## Today'S Mantra

"My body deserves recovery, not criticism."

## Learn

Stress may remain in the body after the task ends. Gentle movement, breath, emotion, connection, and safety cues can help signal completion.

## 90-Second Discharge

- Choose shaking out hands, a brisk walk, wall push, stretching, humming, or extended exhale. Track activation before and after from 0-10.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Schedule one 3-minute body break before you need it.

☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Regulation does not have to look peaceful. Walking, stretching, laughing, crying, humming, or shaking out tension may be the care your body wants.

PRACTICAL TIP Set a recurring two-minute transition between demanding tasks; move, breathe, or look outside.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What signals of safety or completion does my body respond to most reliably? capacity.

## Working To Live - 13

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## Stress Cycle

Which forms of regulation feel supportive, neutral, or irritating to me?

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_____
_____
_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 14

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## Day 4 | Define Enough

## Today'S Mantra

"Done can be a wise decision."

## Learn

Perfectionism often hides a moving finish line. Defining "enough" in advance protects time and makes quality intentional.

## The Enough Contract

For one task, write purpose, audience, must-have criteria, time limit, and what you will deliberately not do.

Stop when the contract is met.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "For this version, I can deliver A and B by Friday; C would require more time." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Decide what "good enough" means before anxiety moves the finish line. Your standards should serve the purpose-not punish the person doing the work.

PRACTICAL TIP Add a time limit and a "not included" line to one task before you begin.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Whose approval am I seeking when I exceed what the task actually requires? capacity.

## Working To Live - 15

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## Day 4 Reflection | Define Enough

## What am I afraid would happen if this were good enough? _____

_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? _

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 16

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 5 | Create a Workday Ending

## Today'S Mantra

"Stopping is part of doing sustainable work."

## Learn

Detachment improves when the brain receives a credible plan and a consistent closing cue.

## Shutdown Ritual

Review what is done; capture loose ends; choose tomorrow's first action; set availability; close apps; clear one physical cue; say an ending phrase.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Use: "Work is contained for today. I know where to begin tomorrow." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE A workday needs a real ending, even when the work is unfinished. The list can remain open while your availability closes.

PRACTICAL TIP Set an alarm 15 minutes before stopping time so you can close loops instead of leaving abruptly.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What am I afraid I will feel, remember, or face when work becomes quiet? capacity.

## Working To Live - 17

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 5 Reflection | Create a

## Workday Ending

**What makes ending feel unsafe or irresponsible? What reassurance is factual?** _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 18

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## Day 6 | Rest Without Earning It

## Today'S Mantra

"Pleasure does not need to justify itself."

## Learn

If rest is a reward, depleted people must perform before receiving what restores performance. Practice rest as maintenance and a human need.

## Unproductive Pleasure

Spend 15 minutes on something that produces no résumé line, income, improvement metric, or content.

## Notice urges to optimize it.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ Protect the activity by naming it simply: "I have a commitment." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE If rest makes you uneasy, start small and stay curious. The discomfort is often an old rule being challenged, not proof that resting is wrong.

PRACTICAL TIP Choose a pleasure that cannot be posted, scored, sold, or improved.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What would rest mean if it were a relationship with myself rather than a reward? capacity.

## Working To Live - 19

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## Day 6 Reflection | Rest Without

## Earning It

## What rules did I learn about idleness, play, or deserving? _____

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? _

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough.

☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 20

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## Day 7 | Week One Review

## Today'S Mantra

"Small changes count because they change the direction."

## Learn

## Reflection converts experience into learning. Review evidence, not just feelings of success or failure.

## Tiny Evidence Review

- List three moments you noticed sooner, paused, chose differently, or recovered-even imperfectly.
- Circle the

smallest repeatable action.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Tell one supportive person what you are practicing. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Measure this week by what you learned and protected-not only by what you completed. Recovery skills strengthen through repetition.

PRACTICAL TIP Highlight the easiest practice to repeat next week and place it on your calendar now.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Which small choice is beginning to change the direction of my life? capacity.

## Working To Live - 21

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## Day 7 Reflection | Week One

## Review

## What helped because it was small enough? _____

_____ ____

_____

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 22

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## Day 8 | The Pause Before Yes

## Today'S Mantra

"I am allowed to make considered commitments."

## Learn

Automatic agreement can be a safety strategy, identity strategy, or attempt to prevent disappointment. A pause creates room for consent.

## 24-Hour Yes Fast

For non-emergencies, do not answer new requests immediately. Use a holding phrase and review capacity, priority, desire, and consequence.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ "Thanks for thinking of me. I'll check my commitments and respond by tomorrow." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE A pause is a boundary skill. You are not required to make a permanent commitment while surprised, pressured, flattered, or afraid.

PRACTICAL TIP Save a pause phrase as a phone shortcut or email template.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What information do I need before my yes can be honest? capacity.

## Working To Live - 23

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## Day 8 Reflection | The Pause

## Before Yes

Whose discomfort do I manage by overcommitting?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 24

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## Day 9 | Say No Clearly

## Today'S Mantra

"No is a complete boundary; context is optional."

## Learn

A healthy no can be brief, respectful, and free of courtroom-level evidence. Overexplaining can invite negotiation.

## The No Ladder

- Write three versions: soft no, direct no, and firm repeated no. Practice aloud until your voice sounds steady enough.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ "I'm not available for that." / "I can't add this without moving another priority." / "My answer remains no." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE A respectful no may still disappoint someone. Their disappointment is not automatic evidence that you were unkind.

PRACTICAL TIP Practice your no while standing with both feet supported; slow down the last three words.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What kind of person do I believe says no-and is that belief fair or complete? capacity.

## Working To Live - 25

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## Day 9 Reflection | Say No Clearly

Which version protects me in low-, medium-, and high-power situations?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 26

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## Day 10 | Negotiate Priorities

## Today'S Mantra

"I can make tradeoffs visible."

## Learn

## When everything is urgent, ask the requester to participate in tradeoffs. This relocates prioritization from your nervous system to the work system.

## Priority Triangle

- List scope, time, and resources. If one is fixed, identify what must change in the other two. Draft your ask.

## My plan / notes:

_____

_____

_____

Workday intervention ☐ "I can complete X by Tuesday or X and Y by Friday. Which outcome is most important?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Do not silently solve impossible priorities. Make the tradeoff visible and invite the appropriate person to help decide.

PRACTICAL TIP When a new priority appears, ask what existing priority should move.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Where have I mistaken silently absorbing pressure for being dependable? capacity.

## Working To Live - 27

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## Day 10 Reflection | Negotiate

## Priorities

Where have I silently absorbed contradictory expectations?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 28

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 11 | Challenge the Inner

## Foreman

## Today'S Mantra

"I can guide myself without threatening myself."

## Learn

The harsh internal voice may promise safety through pressure. Curiosity and credible compassion improve flexibility without denying responsibility.

## Two-Chair Rewrite

- Write the foreman's demand. Name what it fears. Respond as a wise supervisor: factual, kind, boundaried, and specific about the next step.

## My plan / notes:

_____
_____
_____

Workday intervention ☐ Replace "What is wrong with me?" with "What support or clarity is missing?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE You may have learned to motivate yourself through fear. You can keep accountability while removing the threat.

PRACTICAL TIP Turn one self-criticism into a specific coaching instruction.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What would supportive inner leadership sound like during my hardest hour? capacity.

## Working To Live - 29

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 11 Reflection | Challenge the

## Inner Foreman

Does self-attack improve my work-or only increase urgency?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?
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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 30

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 12 | Untangle Worth from

## Output

## Today'S Mantra

"My worth is inherent; my work is one expression of me."

## Learn

A role is something you do, not the full definition of who you are. Identity breadth protects against workplace volatility.

## Identity Constellation

Create 10 "I am" statements with only two related to work. Include relationships, qualities, communities, values, curiosities, and lived experiences.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Share one non-work identity with someone who knows you mainly through work. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE When work occupies your entire identity, every work problem feels like a problem with you. Keep feeding the parts of you that no job can own.

PRACTICAL TIP Text someone about a non-work interest or identity you want to nourish.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Which part of myself do I want people to know that cannot be measured by productivity? capacity.

## Working To Live - 31

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 12 Reflection | Untangle

Worth from Output Which parts of me have been underfed by work?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step.

☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 32

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 13 | Make Guilt Bearable

## Today'S Mantra

"Discomfort can accompany a healthy choice."

## Learn

Boundary guilt does not always mean wrongdoing. It may be the sensation of violating an old rule. Learn to carry it without reversing the boundary.

Guilt or Responsibility?

Divide a page: actual harm to repair / someone's disappointment / uncertainty / old conditioning. Put the situation where it belongs.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "I understand this is disappointing. I'm still not able to take it on." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Guilt can be the price of changing an unhealthy pattern. Let it rise and fall without immediately surrendering the boundary.

PRACTICAL TIP Wait 20 minutes before changing a boundary because of guilt, unless safety requires action.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Can I allow another person to have feelings without making those feelings my assignment? capacity.

## Working To Live - 33

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 13 Reflection | Make Guilt

## Bearable

**What value does this boundary protect?** _____

_____ _____

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_____ **What did**

**I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 34

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 14 | Boundary Rehearsal

## Today'S Mantra

"Clarity is kindness to my future self."

## Learn

Skills become more accessible under stress when practiced before the high-stakes moment.

## Boundary Role-Play

- Write the request, your first response, likely pushback, your broken-record reply, and your exit line.

## Rehearse

twice.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Exit: "I've shared what I can do. I need to return to my priorities now." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Rehearsing words is not fake; it is preparation. A practiced sentence is easier to find when your nervous system is activated.

PRACTICAL TIP Record yourself saying the boundary once; listen for clarity rather than perfection.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What boundary would become easier if I accepted that I cannot control the response? capacity.

## Working To Live - 35

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 14 Reflection | Boundary

## Rehearsal

## What tone lets me be both respectful and unmistakable? _____

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## _____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 36

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 15 | Redesign the

## Environment

## Today'S Mantra

"My environment can support the life I choose."

## Learn

Willpower is expensive. Cues, defaults, friction, and visibility shape behavior. Change the environment so stopping requires less effort.

## Friction Audit

Remove one work cue after hours; add one recovery cue; make one distracting work behavior harder; make one valued activity easier.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ Turn off one nonessential notification and set a stated response window. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Make the healthier choice easier to see and reach. Small environmental changes can protect you when willpower is low.

PRACTICAL TIP Move work apps off your home screen and place a recovery cue where they were.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Which cue in my environment most strongly pulls me back into work? capacity.

## Working To Live - 37

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 15 Reflection | Redesign the

## Environment

**What in my space says "always available"? _____**

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? _____**

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 38

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 16 | Work in Sustainable

## Pulses

## Today'S Mantra

"Pausing supports the quality I care about."

## Learn

Attention fluctuates. Planned breaks can protect accuracy and energy; they are not proof of laziness.

## Pulse Experiment

- Try 25/5, 45/10, or 75/15. Before the break, write the next step. During the break, change posture and input channel.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ Put the break on the calendar as part of the task. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE A break taken before collapse is not unnecessary-it is preventive. Put recovery inside the work rhythm, not outside it.

PRACTICAL TIP Experiment with one focus interval today and write down when attention naturally changed.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What rhythm helps me remain a person while I am being productive? capacity.

## Working To Live - 39

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 16 Reflection | Work in

## Sustainable Pulses

Which interval fits my actual task and nervous system?

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_____ What

did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 40

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 17 | Reduce Open Loops

## Today'S Mantra

"I can trust a system instead of constant vigilance."

## Learn

Uncaptured obligations create mental rehearsal. A trusted external system reduces the need to keep remembering.

## Open-Loop Sweep

Capture everything on your mind. Mark: act, schedule, delegate, waiting, someday, or release. Choose no more than three active priorities.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "I've captured it; I do not need to carry it in working memory." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Your mind repeats unfinished tasks because it is trying to help. Give it a trusted place to put them, then practice returning to the present.

PRACTICAL TIP Keep one capture list-not several competing places your brain must remember.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What responsibility am I carrying only because I have not consciously decided where it belongs? capacity.

## Working To Live - 41

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 17 Reflection | Reduce Open

## Loops

Which item can I consciously release rather than repeatedly reconsider?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 42

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 18 | Reclaim Attention

## Today'S Mantra

"Availability is something I define, not an endless default."

## Learn

Digital systems profit from interrupted attention. Intentional communication windows reduce reactivity and make response expectations explicit.

## Inbox Windows

- Choose 2-4 message windows. Disable badges between them. Add an urgent channel only if truly needed and mutually agreed.

## My plan / notes:

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_____
_____

Workday intervention ☐ "I check messages at 10, 1, and 4. For genuine emergencies, use ___." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Instant availability is a habit and an expectation that can often be renegotiated.

Responsiveness does not have to mean constant interruption.

PRACTICAL TIP Close email and messaging during one 20-minute focus window.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What would thoughtful availability look like instead of constant availability? capacity.

## Working To Live - 43

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 18 Reflection | Reclaim

## Attention

## What am I predicting will happen if I am not instantly reachable? _____

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 44

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 19 | Ask for What You Need

## Today'S Mantra

"Needing support does not make me difficult."

## Learn

Support requests are more actionable when they name the observable problem, impact, and specific change.

## One Concrete Ask

Use: When ___ happens, the impact is ___. I'm requesting ___. Can we agree on ___ by ___? Identify backup options.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "When priorities change after approval, rework expands. Can we confirm changes in writing and adjust the deadline?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Make requests concrete enough for someone to answer. Asking clearly also reveals when the environment is unwilling or unable to support you.

PRACTICAL TIP Ask for one specific form of help instead of saying only that you are overwhelmed.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What does my difficulty asking for help reveal about trust, worth, or past experience?

capacity.

## Working To Live - 45

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 19 Reflection | Ask for What

## You Need

## What evidence and ally would strengthen this request? _____

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## _____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? ____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 46

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 20 | Reconnect with People

## Today'S Mantra

"I do not have to recover alone."

## Learn

Burnout narrows attention and can make connection feel like another task. Low-demand contact can restore belonging.

## Connection Menu

- Choose one: parallel time, a five-minute check-in, shared meal, walk, voice note, asking for help, or telling the truth without solving it.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "I don't need advice; could you keep me company for ten minutes?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE You do not have to be entertaining, positive, or productive to deserve company. Let safe people know what kind of presence would help.

PRACTICAL TIP Choose contact that matches your capacity: a walk, voice note, quiet company, or brief check-in.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Where in my life can I be witnessed without performing? capacity.

## Working To Live - 47

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 20 Reflection | Reconnect

with People Who helps me feel like a person rather than a performer?

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## What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 48

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 21 | Reclaim Play and

## Curiosity

## Today'S Mantra

"I am allowed to be a beginner and still belong."

## Learn

Play is flexible, intrinsically motivated, and not organized around evaluation. It expands a life compressed by performance.

## Beginner Hour

- Try something where competence is irrelevant: doodle, dance, puzzle, garden, cook experimentally, build, sing, or explore. No posting or scoring.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ Schedule curiosity before the calendar fills. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Play may feel awkward before it feels freeing. Protect it from evaluation long enough for curiosity to return.

PRACTICAL TIP Use inexpensive materials and set a playful constraint: ten minutes, no correcting, no audience.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What did play teach me about desire, spontaneity, or being alive? capacity.

## Working To Live - 49

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 21 Reflection | Reclaim Play

and Curiosity

**What did I enjoy before I learned to monetize, measure, or master everything?** _____

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 50

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 22 | Practice Values-Based

## Choice

## Today'S Mantra

"My calendar can become evidence of what matters."

## Learn

Values are directions, not achievements. A values-consistent life may include ambition and rest, contribution and limits.

## The Values Compass

- Choose five values. For each, write one tiny toward move and one work habit that pulls you away.

Pick one toward move today.

## My plan / notes:

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_____
_____

Workday intervention ☐ "This choice protects my value of health / family / integrity / creativity." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Values help you choose a direction when feelings and demands conflict. One values-based action can change the emotional meaning of a day.

PRACTICAL TIP Before one decision, ask: "Which option moves me one step toward the person I want to be?" QUESTION FOR GROWTH Which value deserves more space on my calendar than it currently receives? capacity.

## Working To Live - 51

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 22 Reflection | Practice

## Values-Based Choice

If productivity were not the judge, what would matter this week?

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_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?
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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 52

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 23 | Make Space for

## Enoughness

## Today'S Mantra

"This moment does not have to become more to matter."

## Learn

Scarcity thinking keeps attention on what is missing. Enoughness notices sufficiency without denying real needs or injustice.

## Savoring Practice

For 20 seconds each, attend to three ordinary moments of enough: warmth, taste, competence, beauty, safety, or connection.

## My plan / notes:

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_____
_____

Workday intervention ☐ End one task by naming what is sufficient today. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Enoughness is not pretending you need nothing. It is allowing one moment to be complete without immediately demanding the next achievement.

PRACTICAL TIP Pause for 20 seconds after something pleasant instead of rushing past it.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What is already enough in my life that I rarely let myself fully experience? capacity.

## Working To Live - 53

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 23 Reflection | Make Space

for Enoughness

**What becomes visible when I stop scanning only for deficits?** _____

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 54

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 24 | Plan for High-Demand

## Seasons

## Today'S Mantra

"Temporary effort needs a real ending."

## Learn

Balance is dynamic. During a true sprint, define duration, tradeoffs, support, and recovery-otherwise the sprint becomes the culture.

## Sprint Contract

## Name start/end dates, what "done" means, what pauses, protected nonnegotiables, warning signs, support, and recovery days.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "I can support this surge through Friday; after that we need to reduce scope or add capacity." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE A demanding season needs an ending, protection, and recovery. If no one can name the end, it is not a sprint-it is the operating model.

PRACTICAL TIP Write the end date of the current surge where you can see it; if none exists, request one.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What protections would make intense work truly temporary and recoverable? capacity.

## Working To Live - 55

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 24 Reflection | Plan for

## High-Demand Seasons

## What would prove this is temporary rather than indefinite? _____

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## _____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

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_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 56

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 25 | Respond to Setbacks

## Today'S Mantra

"I return; I do not have to restart from zero."

## Learn

A late-night work episode does not erase progress. Shame increases avoidance; a repair plan restores agency.

## The 24-Hour Repair

## Name what happened without labels; identify vulnerability and trigger; meet one need; repair one impact; adjust one system; resume.

## My plan / notes:

_____

_____

_____

Workday intervention ☐ "I crossed my limit yesterday. Today I am resetting by ___."

☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE After a setback, repair quickly and gently. The goal is not a perfect streak; it is becoming someone who knows how to return.

PRACTICAL TIP Use the sentence: "The pattern returned, and I am returning too." QUESTION FOR GROWTH What does the speed of my repair say about the self-trust I am building? capacity.

## Working To Live - 57

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 25 Reflection | Respond to

## Setbacks

**What would I say to a friend or someone I care about after the same setback?** _____

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step.

☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 58

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 26 | Address Moral Stress

and Value Conflict

## Today'S Mantra

"My distress may be meaningful information."

## Learn

Distress may arise when work pressures conflict with ethics or care. The answer is not always better coping; it may require consultation, documentation, advocacy, or exit planning.

## Values Conflict Map

Describe the conflict, stakeholders, power, risks, obligations, allies, formal channels, and safest next step.

Separate what is yours from what belongs to the system.

## My plan / notes:

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Workday intervention ☐ "I need clarification on how this decision aligns with our stated policy and responsibilities." ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Sometimes distress is a healthy response to an unhealthy situation. Do not use coping skills to silence information your values are giving you.

PRACTICAL TIP Document facts separately from interpretations when a situation conflicts with your values.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Is my distress asking for soothing, action, support, documentation, or distance? capacity.

## Working To Live - 59

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 26 Reflection | Address Moral

Stress and Value Conflict

**What action protects integrity without ignoring safety and livelihood? _**

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_____ **What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?** _____

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 60

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 27 | Design a Livable Week

## Today'S Mantra

"A livable week is a legitimate goal."

## Learn

A balanced life is not equal hours every day. It is a pattern with protected recovery, relationships, care, meaning, and flex.

## Ideal-Real-Next Calendar

Sketch an ideal week, your actual week, and one next-week version. Add anchors first: sleep, care, meals, connection, movement, and stopping times.

## My plan / notes:

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_____

Workday intervention ☐ Decline or shorten one commitment that crowds out an anchor. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Put life-giving anchors on the calendar before leftover space disappears. What matters deserves more than whatever time work does not consume.

PRACTICAL TIP Schedule one protected non-work anchor before accepting optional commitments.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH If my week were designed around being human, what would appear first? capacity.

## Working To Live - 61

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 27 Reflection | Design a

## Livable Week

Which 10% change would make the week more humane?

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## Working To Live - 62

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 28 | Build Your Support

## Ecosystem

## Today'S Mantra

"Support is a strategy, not a failure of independence."

## Learn

Burnout recovery is easier when support is distributed across people, systems, and services.

## Support Map

- List emotional, practical, clinical, workplace, community, financial/legal, and emergency supports.

Add one missing contact or resource.

## My plan / notes:

_____

_____

_____

Workday intervention ☐ "Could we schedule a regular check-in while I work on changing this pattern?" ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Independence is not doing everything alone. Mature self-care includes knowing where to find expertise, practical help, advocacy, and belonging.

PRACTICAL TIP Add one real name and contact method to your support map today.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What kind of support have I dismissed because I thought I should not need it? capacity.

## Working To Live - 63

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com

## Day 28 Reflection | Build Your

## Support Ecosystem

Where am I relying on one person-or only myself-for everything?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 64

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## Day 29 | Write Your Personal

## Operating Manual

## Today'S Mantra

"I can design around what I know about myself."

## Learn

Self-knowledge becomes protective when translated into clear instructions for ordinary and high-stress days.

## Operating Manual

Complete: I work best when… My warning signs… My nonnegotiables… How to approach me… What helps… What does not… My shutdown time… My repair plan…

## My plan / notes:

_____
_____
_____

Workday intervention ☐ "To do reliable work, I need priorities in writing and advance notice when possible." n ] Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Your personal operating manual can change. Self-knowledge is not a box; it is a living guide for making work more humane.

PRACTICAL TIP Share one line of your operating manual with someone affected by it.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH Which instruction in my operating manual would most improve my daily life? capacity.

## Working To Live - 65

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## Day 29 Reflection | Write Your

## Personal Operating Manual

Which part could I share with a manager, partner, or collaborator?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges?

_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 66

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 30 | Choose the Life Work

## Supports

## Today'S Mantra

"I work to support a life-and my life is already worthy of living."

## Learn

The goal is not perfect balance. It is an ongoing relationship with work in which livelihood and contribution do not consume personhood.

Letter from the Life Ahead

- Write from one year in the future. Describe ordinary mornings, work boundaries, relationships, body, play, meaning, and how you respond when old patterns return.

## My plan / notes:

_____

_____

_____

Workday intervention ☐ Choose three commitments, one conversation, and one support for the next 30 days. ☐ Choose one self-care need to meet before the day ends: _____ ☐ Choose one coping skill that matches my current state: _____ ☐ Choose a stopping time and write it here: _____ MICHELLE'S ADVICE Do not build the next chapter around proving you recovered correctly. Build it around what you want to notice, protect, share, and experience.

PRACTICAL TIP Choose one action for tomorrow that proves life-not work-sets the direction.

QUESTION FOR GROWTH What do I want to remember about myself when achievement is no longer the loudest voice? capacity.

## Working To Live - 67

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Day 30 Reflection | Choose the

## Life Work Supports

### What am I willing to stop sacrificing to prove that I care? ______________

____________________________________________________________________________

________ ______________________________________________________________

_______________________________ ______________________________________

______________________________________________________ _________________

____________________________________________________________________________

_______

### What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, or urges? __________

____________________________________________________________________________

___________ __________________________________________________________

__________________________________ __________________________________

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Close the day ☐ Capture tomorrow's first step. ☐ Name one thing that is complete enough. ☐ Physically transition away from the work zone.

## Working To Live - 68

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## Closing Check-In

Repeat the baseline ratings for the past week. Compare patterns rather than chasing a perfect score.

Statement 0 1 2 3 4 I felt guilty, restless, or unsafe when resting. o o o o o What changed?

The earliest burnout sign I can now recognize is…

_________________________________________________________________

_____ The boundary that helped most was…

_____

_____ A belief I hold more lightly is…

_____

_____ The system or condition I still need to address is…

_____

_____ The support I will seek is…

_____

_____

## Working To Live - 69

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## My Burnout Prevention Plan

## Green zone: sustainable

## What I look like / what keeps me here / routines to continue:

_____

_____

_____

## Yellow zone: strained

Early warning signs / what I will reduce / who I will tell:

_____

_____

_____

## Orange zone: depleted

Functional impacts / immediate supports / work adjustments to request:

_____

_____

_____ Red zone: unable or unsafe Professional, crisis, medical, workplace, or practical supports; what others

## should do:

_____
_____
_____ My three nonnegotiable anchors

**1.** _____
_____

**2.** _____
_____

**3.** _____
_____

## Working To Live - 70

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## Boundary Script Library

**Pause: "Let me check my capacity and priorities. I'll respond by __." Decline: "I'm not able to take that on." Tradeoff: "I can do X by Tuesday or X and Y by Friday. Which should I prioritize?" Scope: "That is outside the agreed scope. I can estimate the added time or we can keep the original plan." After-hours: "I'm offline now and will respond during my next work window." Meeting: "I'm not needed for the decision portion. Please send me the outcome and assigned actions." Interruption: "I can give this five minutes now, or focused time at __." Repeated pushback: "I understand the request. My availability has not changed." Caregiving/health privacy: "I have a personal commitment and am unavailable. I'll be back at __." Unsafe power dynamics: "I'd like to confirm the request, deadline, and priority in writing." Customer or service urgency: "I want to help. The soonest realistic option is __; if that does not meet the need, the alternative is __." Self-boundary: "New ideas go on the capture list; they do not automatically enter today's plan." USE JUDGMENT Boundaries are context-sensitive. Consider role expectations, collective agreements, culture, disability accommodations, financial constraints, and risk of retaliation. Documentation, consultation, advocacy, or a longer-term exit plan may be safer than a direct confrontation.**

## Working To Live - 71

Michelle Elder, MSW, LMHC | myreflectivecollective.com Mantras for an Overactive Mind "Urgency is a feeling; I can still check the facts." "A thought can be loud without being an instruction."

"I do not have to solve tomorrow from tonight." "My brain is offering protection, not prophecy." "I can write it down and let working memory rest." "Uncertainty is uncomfortable, not automatically dangerous." "I can disappoint someone and remain a caring person." "My value does not fluctuate with my inbox." "Rest is part of the rhythm, not the opposite of responsibility." "I am more than the role that pays me." "One humane next step is enough for this moment." "I can be ambitious without abandoning myself." Create three credible affirmations Credible affirmations acknowledge reality and choice. Try: "Even though ___, I can ___," or "I am learning to ___." 1. _____ _____ 2. _____ _____ 3. _____ _____ _____

## Working To Live - 72

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## Deeper Integration Notes

- Use this page independently, with a trusted person, in a support group, or with a professional if you choose.

You remain the owner of what you write and what support fits your situation. ☐ Notice symptom severity, duration, effects on daily life, sleep, health, relationships, substances, safety, caregiving, and workplace conditions. ☐ Explore family, cultural, and community learning around achievement, scarcity, duty, rest, identity, and safety. ☐ Remember that individual coping is not the sole answer to discrimination, exploitation, understaffing, or unsafe conditions. ☐ Test new beliefs through small experiments with a prediction and an observable outcome. ☐ Track whether boundaries increase safety and functioning; consider workplace power, retaliation, and livelihood constraints. ☐ Seek specialized support when useful, including medical, mental-health, legal, labor, disability/accommodation, substance-use, financial, community, or crisis resources.

## Patterns I want to understand more deeply:

_____
_____
_____
_____

## My strengths and protective factors:

_____
_____
_____

- My next experiment, conversation, or source of support:

_____
_____
_____

## Working To Live - 73

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## A Final Commitment

I am not promising never to overwork again. I am practicing earlier noticing, kinder interpretation, clearer choice, safer support, and faster repair. I will keep widening my life beyond what I produce.

The life I want work to support includes…

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____ For the next 30 days, my three commitments are…

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ When the old pattern returns, I will…

_____

_____

_____

_____

## Signed _____ Date _____

KEEP GOING GENTLY The workbook is complete when it becomes less important than the life it helped you re-enter.

## Working To Live - 74

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## My Reflective Collective - Michelle D. Elder, Msw, Lmhc

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It does not replace care from a licensed clinician, healthcare professional, attorney, trained advocate, emergency service, or other qualified professional. Laws, court procedures, services, and risks vary by location and circumstance.

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tell you whether to stay, leave, report, reconcile, forgive, or pursue court action. Adapt language and activities for culture, identity, disability, neurotype, age, literacy, sensory needs, and personal preference. Automatic translation can make mistakes; confirm legal, medical, emergency, and safety-critical wording with a qualified person.

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