

Addressing Burnout in Executive Directors

Argentum Leadership Development and
Advancement Program

Capstone

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Why Burnout Deserves Our Attention

Bobbi



Burnout Statistics



Approximately 50% of Executive Directors have been in their role less than 5 years



42%: 1–4 years | 25%: 5–14 years
| 10%: 15+ years



Gallup Survey (2020): 76% of employees experience burnout at least sometimes, with a significant percentage of those in leadership roles facing chronic stress



Burnout impacts the entire team, leading to disengagement, high turnover & decreased morale

Benefits of Addressing



STRONGER
RELATIONSHIPS AND
TRUST



HIGHER QUALITY OF
CARE



CONTINUITY DURING
TRANSITIONS



GREATER ADVOCACY
WITH OWNERS,
REGULATORS, AND
PROVIDERS



STABLE LEADERSHIP >
REDUCED TURNOVER



CULTURE SHAPING
THROUGH LONG-TERM,
MISSION FOCUSED
LEADERSHIP

Four Core Contributors

Exhaustion

- Always-on demands, long hours, constant emotional labor

Lack of Control / Autonomy

- Conflicting priorities, limited decision authority

Lack of Fairness & Community

- Isolation, inequitable burden, limited shared accountability

Unclear Expectations & Values Mismatch

- Ambiguity, moral distress, misaligned metrics



Setting Clear Boundaries

Beth

Scenario

- It's 5pm on Friday & you've made it through the week. You've handled meetings, emergencies, families, staffing, finances — and the unexpected. You weathered the storm as a professional.
- Then, *DING DING*
- Your heart drops.
- Your stress spikes.
- Who is it now?!?
- It's from a resident or family member and you feel an even heavier obligation.



Setting Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries protect your emotional and mental well-being

Boundaries are personal limits we create

They are not about pushing people away

They are about showing up for yourself

Boundaries protect your peace, reduce burnout, and model self-respect.

Define Communication Channels & Hours

Preferred
communication
methods

Email for non-urgent matters

Phone for emergencies

Clear response
windows

Emails answered within 1–2
business days

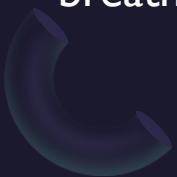
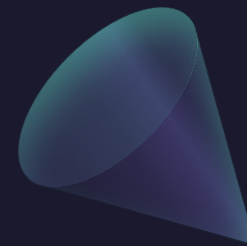
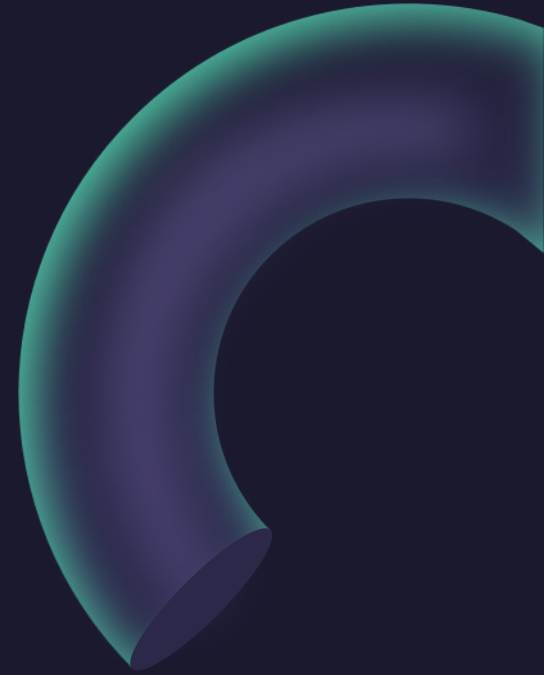
Texts answered 9 AM–5 PM,
Monday–Friday

Keep Messages Professional & Focused

Avoid	Keep	Suggest
Avoid personal chit-chat that blurs professional lines.	Keep responses concise and on-topic.	If a conversation becomes lengthy or emotional, suggest moving it to a scheduled call or in-person meeting.
Avoid sharing personal phone numbers whenever possible	Use work phone numbers and email addresses for communication.	Professional boundaries protect both access and longevity.

Example Boundary Phrases

- “I’ll be happy to address this during business hours. I’ll follow up tomorrow morning.”
- “For urgent matters after hours, please call the emergency line at [number].”
- “Let’s keep communication about maintenance requests in email so we can track them.”
- You must set boundaries and be the example
- It means being intentional and clear about expectations – so your team can breathe, recharge and come back stronger.



Consequences of Not Setting Boundaries

- When the boundaries between work and home disappear:
- Burnout accelerates
- Engagement declines
- Turnover increases
- Decision-making suffers
- Organizational performance is impacted

Protecting boundaries isn't personal preference — it's leadership responsibility.



Boundaries

Key Takeaways on Boundaries

Set the tone with boundaries

- Your team takes cues from you
- Avoid non-urgent messages after hours
- Schedule emails during working hours

Make it safe to unplug

- Set clear expectations around availability
- Model disconnecting yourself
- Midnight messages create silent pressure

Create a team agreement

- Clarify when to message and which channels to use
- Define what constitutes an emergency
- Simple guidelines reduce ambiguity and guilt



Resilience 2.0

Byron



Resilience vs. Antifragility

The Old Goal (Resilience):

- Focus: Bouncing back to a baseline after stress (Survival).
- Investment: Treating symptoms (e.g., wellness programs, EAPs).

The New Goal (Antifragility):

- Focus: Gaining strength and knowledge *from every crisis* (Growth).
- Investment: Changing culture and systems to mandate adaptation.

Strategic Imperative: Convert operational chaos from a cost center (burnout) into a **catalyst for organizational improvement.**

Pillar 1: Strategic Exposure (Investing in Adaptive Muscle)

Challenge: Protection from risk prevents the development of capacity.

Antifragile Investment:

Payoff: Creates leaders who proactively manage risk and possess a higher personal bandwidth for chaos.

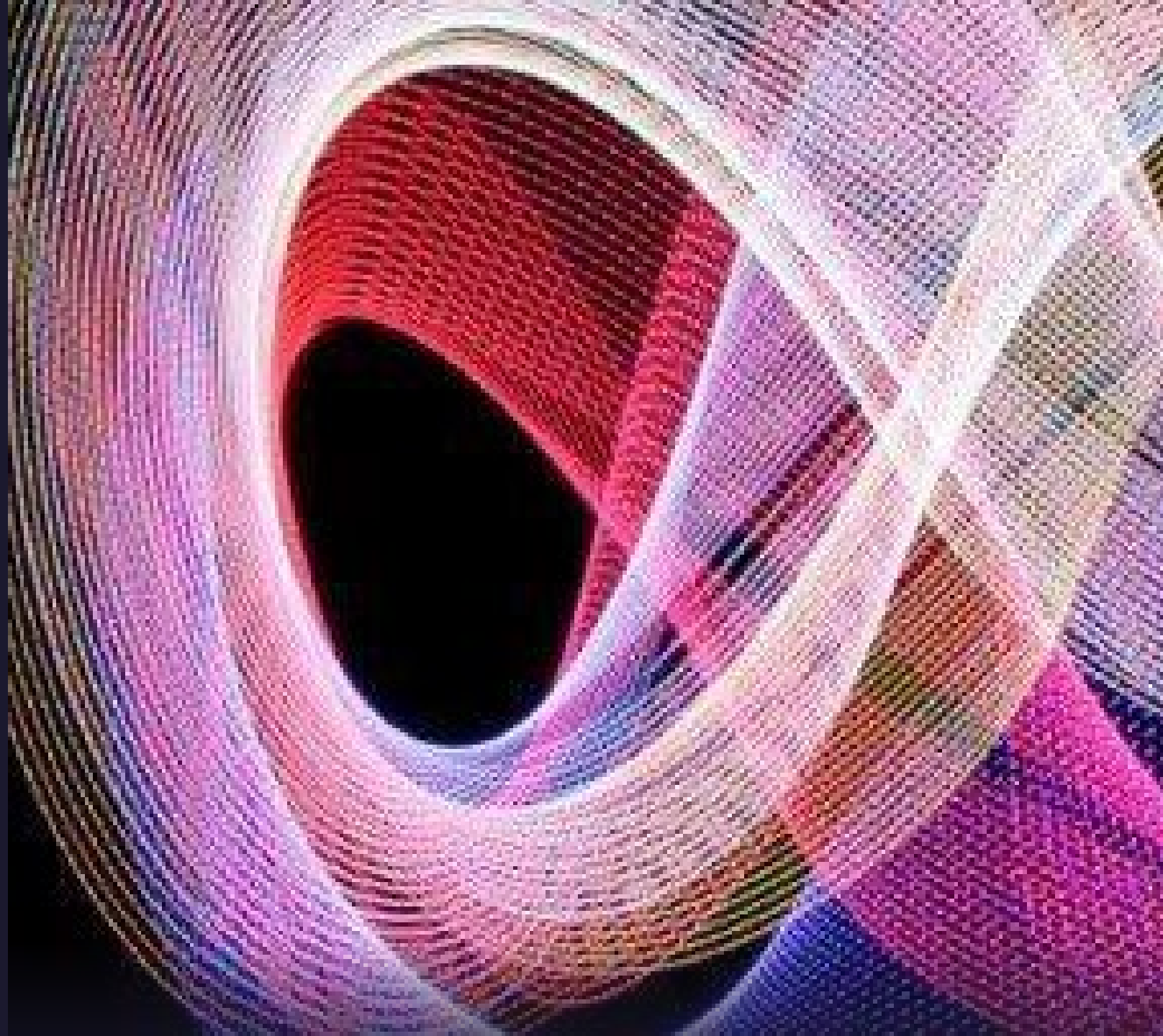
Controlled Stress (Hormesis): Delegate ownership of calculated, high-stakes operational risks to EDs.

Optionality in Decision-Making: Grant local autonomy within financial/operational guardrails; failure is a documented learning opportunity.

Knowledge-as-Capital: Mandate time for EDs to pursue intentional, high-intensity **learning challenges** (e.g., systems modeling, complex finance).

Pillar 2: Engineered Feedback Loops (Investing in Fairness)

- **Challenge:** Fragility increases when decision-makers are insulated from operational pain ("Skin in the Game" asymmetry).
- **Antifragile Investment:**
 - **Shared Stake:** Mandating Co-ownership of outcomes. Formally create **Antifragile Crisis Teams** (EDs + Corporate/Peers) to manage and resolve major issues collaboratively.
 - **Failure Analysis Protocol:** Implement a protocol where operational failure is treated as a **diagnostic signal**, focused solely on uncovering **systemic fragility**, not personal blame.
 - **Goal:** Eliminate the psychological drain of unfair burden and rapidly convert local failures into organization-wide upgrades.



Pillar 3: Protecting Core Assets (Investing in ED Longevity & Healthspan)



Challenge: Erosion of personal health and judgment due to continuous "always on" pressure.



Antifragile Investment:

The "Stop-Loss" Mandate: Institute a cultural commitment to **non-negotiable personal boundaries** (time off, family commitments).

Strategic Protection: Frame boundary enforcement as **necessary professional practice** for maintaining peak decision-making and long-term viability (longevity).

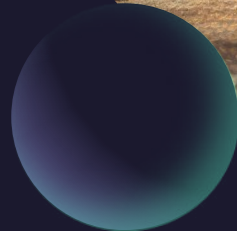
External Perspective: Invest in **Executive Coaching/Peer Mentorship** focused on applying Dichotomy of Control to conserve energy for high-leverage activities.



Payoff: Protects against strategic burnout and ensures key leaders are operating at maximum capacity.

The Strategic Imperative

- Developing Antifragility is a **mandatory strategic shift** that ensures we:
 - Increase our capacity to withstand market and regulatory volatility.
 - Consistently convert operational stress into **organizational growth and knowledge**.



A dark blue background with several glowing geometric shapes. In the top left, there is a sphere and a cube. In the bottom left, there is a large, thick ring. The shapes have a gradient from dark blue to a lighter, teal-like color.

Delegation & Empowerment

Bobbi

Delegation Myth

- Common beliefs that fuel burnout:
 - “It’s faster if I do it myself.”
 - “No one else will do it right.”
 - “Delegating means losing control.”
 - “If I don’t hold it all, things will fall apart.”



Reframing Delegation as Leadership

Delegation is not:

- Dumping tasks
- Avoiding responsibility

Delegation is:

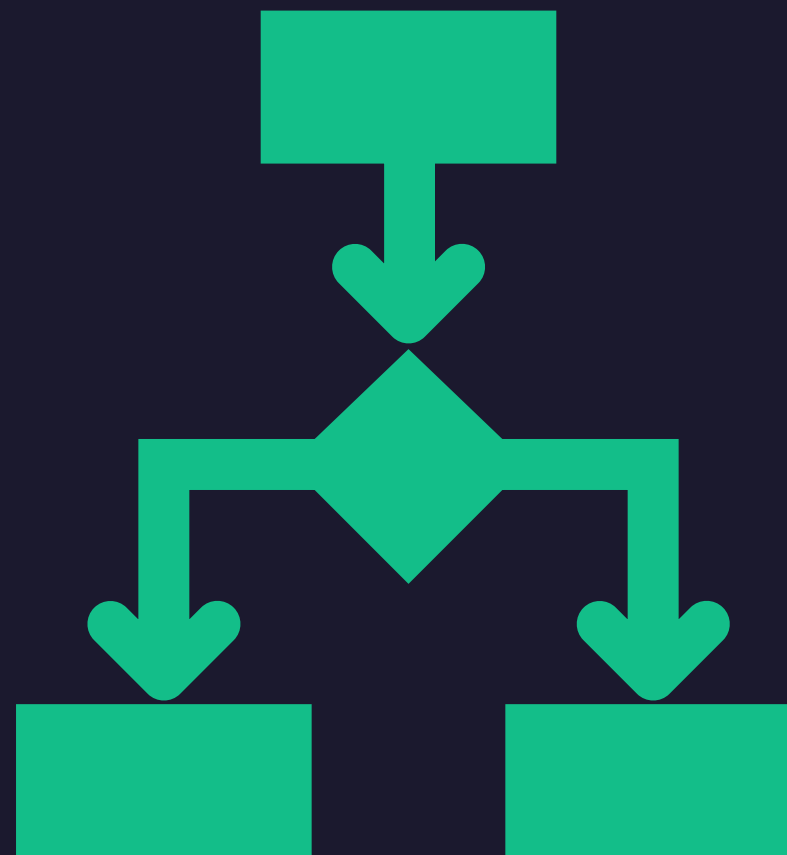
- Developing leaders
- Building bench strength
- Creating clarity and ownership
- Protecting your capacity for strategic leadership

Your role shifts from doer → developer.



Building Confidence in Your Team

- **To strengthen delegation:**
- Start with low-risk decisions and build up
- Allow room for different (not wrong) approaches
- Coach instead of rescuing
- Normalize learning—not perfection. *Progress not perfection!*
- **Growth requires space. Space requires letting go.**



How Delegation Reduces Burnout

Effective delegation:

Reduces decision overload

Restores time for strategic thinking

Creates shared ownership

Improves leadership retention

Builds a resilient community that doesn't rely on one person

Result -You move from *exhausted* to *sustainable leader and role model.*

Empowering Teams

Empowerment is not:

Tasks with instructions

Empowerment:

“Here’s the outcome we need.” What does success look like?

Clear boundaries + decision authority

Trust with accountability - reconnect

Builds confident department heads

Empowered leaders don’t just complete tasks—they solve problems.



Communication & Executive Director Burnout

Corrine

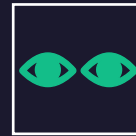
The “Carry Everything” Expectation

*In senior living, we’ve created this unspoken expectation that the best Executive Directors are endlessly available, unshakable problem-solvers who never break a sweat. It’s heroic. **It’s also completely unsustainable.***

— Kent Mulkey, Senior Living Leadership Consultant



Executive Directors sit at the center of constant, multi-directional pressure



Clarity, availability, and responsiveness are expected — always



Poor communication turns pressure into burnout



This “carry everything” expectation sets the stage for burnout- and communication is at the center of it.



1. Role Ambiguity & Expectation Confusion

Shifting priorities
and conflicting
directives
“Everything is
urgent” mode
becomes the default



2. Values Mismatch & Moral Distress

Pressure to pursue
goals that conflict
with core values
Misaligned metrics
vs. resident-
centered outcomes



3. Lack of Meaningful Feedback

Inconsistent
reinforcement and
unclear
performance signals
Erodes confidence
and professional
efficacy

Three Communication Breakdowns That Fuel Burnout

What Clear Communication Looks Like in Practice



**Expectation alignment
with regional &
corporate leadership**



**Consistent
communication with
department head
teams**



**Direct, timely
feedback — upward
and downward**



**A culture of asking for
help**

How Clear Communication Reduces Burnout

The antidote to burnout is not doing more — it's communicating with clarity, meaning, and intentionality.



**Clear expectations →
Reduced exhaustion**



**Honest, transparent
communication → Reduced
cynicism**



**Direct, consistent feedback
→ Increased professional
efficacy**

Closing Thoughts & Questions

- Burnout is not a personal failure
- It is a system issue — and systems can be redesigned
- Boundaries, resilience, delegation, and communication matter
- **Questions or discussion?**
- *Thank you for your time and engagement!*

