



From Burnt Out to Fired Up Reigniting Your Passion for Teaching

By Morgane Michael (Solution Tree Press, 2022)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

- ~ If you are experiencing burnout, you don't have to stay stuck. There are concrete strategies you can learn to address it.
- ~ This book helps you better understand *how* to get out of burnout. It hands you the tools and strategies you need to recharge.

Why I chose this book:

We've all heard that if we want to show up for our students and colleagues, we need to put on our own oxygen mask first – we need to take care of ourselves. But without any guidance, this starts to ring hollow. What I like about this book is that the author shares research on what helps people thrive in difficult times (like pandemics!) and then provides strategies to show us what we can actually *do*. This book essentially presents social-emotional strategies for the *adults* in our schools. It's time to move beyond oxygen mask analogies and make our staff members' (and our own) self-care a priority.

This book is written by a teacher for teachers, and it has a lot to offer all educators who are burned out but don't feel fully empowered to change their situation. While there are real challenges that teachers can't tackle on their own – the pandemic, the cultural and political climate of the moment, and broader system-wide issues – there are also real strategies educators can implement to relieve their stress, find their way out of burnout, and revive their passion for teaching.

My hope is that you, as a leader, will hand these strategies to every educator you know. I'm even providing a bonus PowerPoint presentation plus a reproducible handout to make it as easy as possible to hold an in-house workshop and help your teachers find their way back from burnt out to fired up again.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ A five-part framework to counter burnout – REFLECT, REFRAME, REFOCUS, RECONNECT, and REVEAL
- ✓ Research-based strategies you can put into practice right away to help you overcome burnout
- ✓ The Main Idea's suggestions for PD, including a PPT with an outline for a workshop you can use with your staff immediately to help all of you address burnout at your school

Introduction

Even before the pandemic, educators were stressed out. Between testing, lack of appreciation, inadequate pay, and having to support a lot of students with varied and significant needs, burnout is not new to our profession. In this book, the author examines research on what contributes to our well-being and includes information and strategies based on this research.

To organize all of this information, she developed a framework (the **5 Rs**) for addressing teacher burnout that mirrors the 5 core competencies of SEL established by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning):

- (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) responsible decision making, (4) social awareness, and (5) relationship skills

The **5 Rs Framework** to Counter Burnout:

REFLECT: It's important to carve out time to reflect on our needs, emotions, and general state of mind

REFRAME: To develop resilience, we must learn to reframe our inner narratives in a way that helps us to rebound.

REFOCUS: To overcome the purposelessness that often comes with burnout, we need to learn to refocus on our dreams and goals so we can live the personal and professional life we hoped for.

RECONNECT: Humans are wired to connect, so finding ways to build connections with others helps us to counter burnout.

REVEAL: Our well-being suffers when we don't have avenues to express ourselves – self-expression is an antidote to that.

Chapter 1 – REFLECT: How to Tune In and Check Up on Yourself

The Reignite Roadmap – Follow the 5 Rs

REFLECT	REFRAME	REFOCUS	RECONNECT	REVEAL
---------	---------	---------	-----------	--------

There is no doubt that teaching is a stressful profession. Some research shows that almost half of new teachers in North America leave the profession within the first five years. And 61% of respondents in a recent AFT study report their work is “always” or “often” stressful. Those in the “helping” professions – like education – tend to feel a particularly high level of burnout characterized by a great deal of emotional exhaustion and feelings of fatigue. When teachers experience burnout they often get stuck in an emotion – like despair, grief, helplessness, resentment, or anger – and can't move through that emotion. Here is one definition of burnout:

“A psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job.”

The truth is that many educators simply haven't learned to practice their *own* SEL skills despite focusing on developing these skills in *their students*. This chapter begins with the first important skill to help counter burnout: REFLECTION.

Research shows that *reflection* is an important step in addressing burnout. When we are more aware of how we're feeling and what we need, we then can engage in the specific self-care practices we need to help address our own particular burnout. Below are three areas that are helpful to reflect on: our needs, our emotions, and our gratitude. It is key, as educators, to create space during our busy days for reflection so we can better know ourselves when we are close to burning out.

Reflect on Your Needs

If we can become more aware of our needs, we can make better choices that will help us meet those needs. One well-known therapist describes six universal emotional needs, detailed below. Different people are more motivated to meet different needs in this list:

1. Certainty – Some people need a sense of security and will want to create certainty during uncertain times.
2. Uncertainty – Some people seek novelty, variety, and unpredictability to bring a sense of excitement to their lives.
3. Significance – Some people (often teachers) want to matter and seek some type of significance. They may also need recognition.
4. Belonging – People who need to belong seek relationships and connections. Humans are wired to connect and belong.
5. Growth – Humans often need to grow, learn, and seek to gain mastery.
6. Contribution – Some people are motivated by wanting to have a positive impact on those around them – as many educators are.

Reflect on Your Emotions

Reflecting on your emotions is a way to identify them, so that you can move through them rather than getting stuck in them which is often what happens in burnout. If you can learn to *identify*, *name*, and *observe* your emotions without judgment, this will help you to be able to manage those emotions. Below are some universal emotions humans experience:

Happiness, Joy, Sadness, Grief, Anger, Disappointment, Fear, Excitement, Guilt, Shame, and Gratitude

Becoming aware of these emotions gives you a better idea of what you need, and what to do next on your path to wellness. “Name them to tame them.” In addition to reflecting on your emotions, it helps to become more *accepting* of those emotions. This involves practicing self-compassion. When you struggle or make a mistake, rather than beating yourself up, treat yourself the way you would treat a friend or a student. Sometimes it helps to recognize that you are not alone and that suffering is a universal part of the human

experience. By tapping into our common humanity, we come to see that others experience similar challenges, “The pain I feel in difficult times is the same pain that you feel in difficult times.”

Reflect on Gratitude

Research shows there is tremendous benefit to pausing and reflecting on the good things in your life. Appreciating what you have is even associated with *physiological* benefits such as a strengthened immune system and lower levels of stress in addition to happiness and life satisfaction. After an exhausting week of teaching, reflecting on gratitude might be as simple as reminding yourself that you are thankful to be working with children. However, the key is to do this regularly, that is, develop a gratitude practice.

Below are a few times during the day when a busy educator might carve out time to reflect (and use the strategies below):

Take a brief walk.	Wake up 5 minutes earlier than usual to have time to reflect.
Take an extra minute to reflect during your morning shower.	Set an alarm for a 3-minute reflection break at noon.

REFLECTION Strategies

- *5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Technique*: When you feel overwhelmed, this focuses you on the moment and brings calm. Wherever you are (and people don’t know you’re doing this!) think about what you see, physically feel, hear, smell, and taste. Breathe throughout.
- *Three Good Things*: Every night before bed, reflect on three good things that happened during the day and record them in a journal or your phone. This strategy, from Martin Seligman, gets your brain to search for what’s good each day so you can do this at night.
- *Journal Prompts to Tap Into Your Common Humanity*: When feeling alone and overwhelmed, take out a journal and write three things: (1) Acknowledge your stress: What is causing my stress? How is it affecting my body and thoughts? (2) Remind yourself that you are not alone: Who might be experiencing similar stress? (3) Be kind to yourself by thinking about yourself in the third person: What advice would you give yourself? How would you encourage yourself? How would you comfort yourself?

Chapter 2 – REFRAME: How to Be Resilient in the Face of Adversity

The Reignite Roadmap – Follow the 5 Rs

REFLECT	REFRAME	REFOCUS	RECONNECT	REVEAL
---------	---------	---------	-----------	--------

Reframing is an instrumental part of how we become resilient in the face of adversity. Rather than telling ourselves negative stories when we’re struggling, we need to reframe those narratives into ones that will serve us better and get us through the challenging time.

Part of why we experience burnout is that we feel many things in our environment are out of our control. With reframing, we examine and re-shape our inner monologue, something we *can* control. For example, the founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, says that resilient people typically reframe the three common narratives below on the left with more resilient narratives on the right:

Personalization (“It’s all my fault.”) People with this mindset blame themselves for hardships.	Those with a resilient mindset recognize that challenge is a natural part of life.
Permanence (“I will always feel this way.”) People with this mindset believe they will always feel the despair they feel now. The struggle will never end.	Those with a more resilient mindset believe that this is just their circumstance <i>now</i> and it will not last forever.
Pervasiveness (“Bad things <i>always</i> happen to me.”) People with this mindset feel they have bad luck in <i>all aspects</i> of their lives.	Those with a resilient mindset look for what’s good in their lives – <i>everything</i> isn’t awful all the time.

Our Thoughts Shape Our Actions

Part of why reframing is so important is that what we *think* affects what we *do*. It is estimated that we have between 50,000 and 65,000 thoughts a day. If our beliefs about ourselves are positive there is a greater likelihood that our actions will be positive. For example, let’s say you’re a middle school teacher and you always wanted to teach third grade. Then, a third-grade teaching position opens up – if you have positive beliefs about your ability to take on this new role, you’ll be more likely to apply for the job.

Three Steps to Adopt a Reframe Mindset

Be careful not to confuse reframing with “toxic positivity” in which you only focus on the positive and deny more challenging emotions (grief, anger, shame). It is impossible to feel happy all the time and these emotions are an important reminder to step back and examine what you need. Instead, a *reframe mindset* is about being deliberate in how we respond to our situation and believing we have the power to reframe our situation in a way that truly serves us. Again, reframing isn’t about changing the situation but viewing our struggle in such a way that we feel empowered to bounce forward. Below are three steps to adopt a reframe mindset.

1. Look for the Opportunity Within the Challenge

Within every struggle it is possible to look for some growth or lessons learned. Rather than the pain, focus on the growth opportunity. For example, imagine you are a kindergarten teacher with a student who had experienced deep trauma and who constantly lashes out and disrupts your class. Rather than focusing on the hardships you must be facing, reframe the situation in a way that focuses on the

positive, “I am learning important skills for supporting students who have experienced trauma. I am providing a safe space for this student and demonstrating to all students that adults can keep them safe.”

2. Lean Into Positive Beliefs About Yourself

Take time to reflect (see Chapter 1) so you can remember your assets. Ask yourself, *What are my strengths? What do I believe about this current situation and my ability to handle it? What do I need right now?* Reflection is a key part of developing a reframe mindset.

3. Propel Yourself Forward

Part of a reframe mindset is your ability to not only reframe your narrative, but to begin to take the next steps forward. Taking small, predictable, routine steps will help you build your resilience and propel you forward. By taking incremental steps you build the momentum needed to begin to forge a path toward recovery. You need to believe it is within your power to take these small steps.

Take Action in Areas You Can Control

Part of burnout comes from feeling we cannot control external stressors that impact our moods and bodies. While we may not have complete control of these stressors, there are often ways to mitigate the impact of them that are *within our control*. Take a look at the following five types of stressors and what you might be able to do about them:

Type of Stressor	Ways to Minimize Stressors
1. Physical Stress: Includes physical stressors like noise, lights, pain, and even proximity to other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease noise • Turn down lights • Go outside • Listen to calming music
2. Emotional Stress: Strong negative and even positive emotions (like out-of-control excitement in your classroom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build in reflection time • Take deep breaths • Name your feelings • Take items off your to-do list
3. Cognitive Stress: When your brain has been taxed for too long or when you are learning something new that is demanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take more time for difficult tasks • Outsource some tasks • Write tasks on your to-do list so you don't forget items
4. Social Stress: The stress of building relationships, trying to fit in, managing disagreements, or even dealing with small talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give yourself alone time to recharge • Avoid situations that require small talk • Cancel plans if you're not up for them
5. Pro-social Stress: Tuning into the stress of others – often due to our empathy – such as students or parents who are distressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create healthy boundaries • Get help from a professional • Put yourself first even if you feel guilty

REFRAMING Strategies

- *Resiliency Journaling Exercise:* To reframe when you are stressed, it helps you to identify what's within your control. In a journal, list the factors outside and within your control, name the learning in the challenge, and create an action plan for an ideal outcome.
- *Positive Mantras Exercise:* Mantras help you reframe by replacing your negative self-talk with positive self-talk. Think of three weaknesses of yours (always late, too serious, terrible at technology). Then write reframes that re-cast these as strengths (*I live in the moment, I am dependable and professional, I have identified a new growth area – work on technology!*) Post these everywhere!

Chapter 3 – REFOCUS: How to Be Intentional to Reach Your Goals and Dreams

The Reignite Roadmap – Follow the 5 Rs

REFLECT	REFRAME	REFOCUS	RECONNECT	REVEAL
---------	---------	---------	-----------	--------

Sometimes experiencing a lack of purpose or growth can lead to feelings of burnout. Stress comes from feeling directionless or frustrated. Part of building your resilience is creating a sense of forward motion. One way to do this is to create meaningful personal and professional goals to propel you forward. Goal setting is one of the best ways to meet your needs for growth, and also to reconnect you to your purpose and values.

Educators who are more connected to their purpose in schools are more likely to be happy, more fulfilled, and less stressed out. When educators regularly set and work toward goals, they see improvements in their classrooms, develop more self-efficacy, develop a more positive self-concept, have improved relationships with students, and experience an increase in passion for teaching. And not only are goal-setting educators happier in the classroom, they are happier in their lives as well.

How to Create Goals

Start now by setting some important goals using the components below that have been shown to make your goals more effective.

- **Get Clear** – When our goals are too vague, it can be hard to make them happen. Begin by thinking about larger issues like your values (What's important to you? What inspires you? What gives you meaning in your classroom? What keeps you going when you are struggling?). But then be sure to make your goals more concrete – perhaps by using the SMART framework to formulate your goal (make sure your goal is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound).

- **Visualize** – Visualizing our goals motivates us to achieve them. Take some time to imagine *what could be*. What might success in your personal or professional life look like? What are some experiences you’ve had in which things were going well? Consider your current reality, the strengths and skills you have, and where you hope to be by setting this goal.
- **Anticipate Obstacles** – It helps to anticipate obstacles in advance. Name these roadblocks and then plan for what resources, skills, or habits you will need to overcome these obstacles and meet your goal.
- **Identify Partners** – Plan ahead for who might be a good partner to help you with your goal. Who might support or coach you? Who might hold you accountable?
- **Break it Down** – It helps to break goals down into chunks. What might be a benchmark goal for the next two weeks? What are some longer-term goals you’ll need to accomplish to meet your overarching goal?

How to Meet Your Goals

Below are some tips to prevent you from derailing your goals and keep you on track.

- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Not only is it helpful to break goals into smaller chunks, but you will feel buoyed by celebrating small wins. For example, if your goal is to hold mini-conferences with your students every day, then check it off in your planner each day that you accomplish this. If your goal is to write report cards at a less stressful pace, plan something small like writing for just 15 minutes each day and then reward yourself with some special *you* time!
- **Create Categories:** It helps to create goals around important categories in your life such as family and friendships, spirituality or beliefs, work and career, health and well-being, education and learning, and fun and leisure. See the following example of a productive way to organize your goals (and note each begins with a verb to make it more action-oriented!)

<p style="text-align: center;">Family & Friends</p> <p><i>Short-Term:</i> Save Saturday to go to the park with my own kids. <i>Long-Term:</i> Commit to a monthly get-together with colleagues.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Work & Career</p> <p><i>Short-Term:</i> Sign up for the next district PD on literacy. <i>Long-Term:</i> Prepare to teach a different grade next year.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Health & Well-Being</p> <p><i>Short-Term:</i> Walk 3X this week during lunch or recess. <i>Long-Term:</i> Make time every week for a gratitude walk.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Fun & Leisure</p> <p><i>Short-Term:</i> Finish editing fall photos for the family photobook. <i>Long-Term:</i> Plan a winter trip for the family this month.</p>

- **Don’t Procrastinate:** Procrastination can actually increase our stress levels – not what we want when we’re trying to overcome burnout! One counterintuitive way to avoid procrastination when we’re working toward our goals is to give our brain regular cognitive breaks from the task at hand. Another suggestion is to follow the advice above – breaking down your goal so it seems less overwhelming will prevent you from the negative self-talk that often leads to procrastination.
- **Write Down Your Goals:** One study shows that people were 33% more likely to meet their goals if they wrote them down compared to those who kept them in their heads. Use that SMART framework or the Create Categories model above!
- **Prioritize Tasks:** Educators are a dedicated bunch which often leads them to treat all tasks as urgent and important – an approach likely to lead to burnout. If you want to meet your goals without increasing your stress, you need to examine the tasks on your plate and separate out those that are urgent (grab our attention but may not be contributing to our goals) and those that are important (relate directly to our larger personal and professional goals but may not have a concrete deadline or may not be able to be dealt with quickly). It will take time and reflection to prioritize those thoughtful tasks that contribute most directly to our goals.
- **Build in Accountability:** Research shows that when you build in some type of external accountability, you’re more likely to meet your goals. Find an accountability partner you can check in with and who can gently remind you of your goals. Morgane Michael gives an example of setting a 6am check-in call every Monday with her teacher friend as a way to remind each other of their goals.

REFOCUSING Strategies

- **Vision Board Exercise:** To help make your goals more concrete, create a “Vision Board” – a collage of meaningful letters, words, images, and symbols that will create an image of your goals. Keeping this board visible will help remind you of your goals.
- **Goal-Setting Template Exercise:** A [template](#) like the one below will help to walk you through important goal-setting steps:

Goal 1:	Goal 2:
Life Category (Family, Health, Work, Fun, etc.):	Life Category (Family, Health, Work, Fun, etc.):
Short-Term Goal: Long-Term Goal:	Short-Term Goal: Long-Term Goal:
Roadblocks I anticipate & how I will overcome them:	Roadblocks I anticipate & how I will overcome them:
What success would look like:	What success would look like:
Who and what do I need?	Who and what do I need?

Chapter 4 – RECONNECT: How to Boost the Quality of Your Social Connections

The Reignite Roadmap – Follow the 5 Rs

REFLECT	REFRAME	REFOCUS	RECONNECT	REVEAL
---------	---------	---------	-----------	--------

As humans, we are at our best in community, interconnected with one another, and enjoying relationships we have built through the mutual exchange of empathy, compassion, and kindness. We seek to understand what others are going through (empathy), we feel their joy and pain alongside them (compassion), and we act to help each other and to lift one another up (kindness).

If you are feeling burnt out, you may be hungry for the sustenance of human connection. You're expending all your energy just to get by, but not experiencing the mutuality, the refueling, or the uplifting power of a strong web of other humans around you. Research tells us that social connections are some of the best predictors of our success, our health, and even our life expectancies. If you want to be a fired-up educator, you will need to prioritize the human interactions in your life. Connect with new people, reconnect with others, and nurture your existing relationships.

While considering others and feeling for others are a part of building that web, *acting for the good of others*—kindness—has the greatest impact. Kindness can serve as an antidote to depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Kind acts impact our brain chemicals. Endorphins (joy), oxytocin (love), serotonin (happiness and calm), and dopamine (reward) can all be released in our own brains as well as recipients' brains.

And kindness is contagious too. A neural mechanism called “mirror neurons” enables humans to imitate others around them, learn from them, connect with them, and even feel their feelings. Through acts as simple as a smile or a kind word, we have the ability to make those around us feel seen and valued, and to contribute to a greater sense of safety and belonging. With kindness, we can begin to build a community that can protect us all from burnout.

So, if kindness is so great, why aren't we all doing it all the time? The reason: roadblocks.

Roadblocks That Stand in the Way of Kindness

Incompetence	Sometimes you don't know what to say or do. But even a simple message like “I'm thinking of you” is likely better than nothing.
Inconvenience	You just can't seem to make time to do what you wish you could. But is there something easier you could do that would be better than nothing? A text instead of a phone call? A gift card instead of a gift?
Insecurity	You might think, “ <i>Who am I?</i> ” to offer help to this person if they out-rank you or just aren't that close to you. On the other hand, if not you, then who? A simple, human-to-human acknowledgement like, “Are you doing okay?” could mean the world to someone.
Inconsistency	Sometimes when we make a special event out of being kind, or save up all our charitable acts for the holidays, we forget that kindness is needed year-round. It's better to make small acts of kindness a habit rather than save big gestures for once or twice a year.
Feeling Too Busy	As an educator, you <i>are</i> busy. It doesn't take long, though, to smile or say “good morning” even on your busiest days.

Connecting with other humans through kindness is essential to feeling alive and being our best selves. No matter how busy you are or how many people's problems are weighing on you, you can choose to be kind.

So where do you begin creating real connectedness among the teachers, staff, and students at your school? It's not something you need to wait and hope for it to magically click into place. You can build connections intentionally. And the skills we need are no different than the basic social-emotional skills we teach to children. We need *social awareness* (the capacity to understand others' viewpoints and show concern for them) and *relationship skills* (communicating well, working through conflict, asking for help, etc.). Much of this, you already know, but you may be out of practice applying these skills in some areas of your life. Here are 8 quick skill-builders if your own SEL needs a tune-up.

8 Ways to Build Connection (with children and adults)

Learn Names – Knowing and using others' names is key to building a sense of community cohesion and trust. There are many tricks out there for committing names to memory (repeating them back, visualizing their spelling, or even creating alliterative nicknames such as “Mighty Miles”). Do what works for you so that you can learn and use the names of those around you.

Greet Others – Once you know someone's name, maintain the connection by greeting them when you see them, even if it's just in passing. If you can, take a moment to build on the connection by asking about themselves and listening to what they tell you.

Listen – You can use the acronym EARS to help you remember the techniques of active listening. Make eye contact (E). Avoid distraction (A). Reflect back what the speaker says (R). Summarize their main points (S). But even more than these surface level techniques, listen with intention. Put your desire to understand the speaker ahead of your desire to be understood.

Offer Help – Think of helping as a part of who you are. An offer of help doesn't always have to be something huge. It could be as small as an extra photocopy of something they might find useful, the loan of a particular book, or a helping hand carrying a box of supplies. Small acts can be habitual and sustainable, adding just a drop of positive connection here and there throughout your day.

Ask for Help – Get used to the feeling of reciprocal helping with, for, and from your colleagues by not just offering help, but asking for it too. You don't need to wait for a crisis. Small stuff is perfect for building up the habit. Ask for advice or a second opinion on something you're considering for your classroom. Ask for help hanging a poster straight or moving a big table. Reciprocity builds trust, and trust builds lasting relationships.

Follow Through – Circle back on the connections you make. If someone tells you about an upcoming event, ask them later how it went. If you and a colleague grumble about the rain together one morning, make a point of texting them in appreciation of the sunny weather the next day. New connections especially need a follow-up communication in order to solidify into something longer-lasting.

Make Positive Assumptions – The child acting out in class, the defensive colleague, the griping parent...they all have their reasons for acting the way they do. Though it may be difficult, you can choose to assume the best in their intentions rather than taking their behavior personally.

Play – One of the best ways to counteract stress and build a positive culture is to get outside of school or at least outside of the daily grind and engage in something creative, social, and ... fun. A team scavenger hunt, an annual barbeque, or a silly birthday tradition can go a long way toward strengthening cohesion and connectedness.

Reconnecting with those around you opens you up to greater meaning and increased happiness. It also contributes towards an improved environment at your school with tangible and emotional benefits that can help protect everyone from burnout.

RECONNECTING Strategies

- *The Seven-Day Text Challenge*: Invite an educator friend to complete this challenge with you. Every day for a week, text each other something to celebrate (No line at the copier! Started my report card comments!) Respond with encouragement. At the end of the week, reflect on your feelings toward your friend, your work, and yourself. Has this practice impacted your overall happiness?
- *Positive Connection with a Student*: Choose one of your students who contributes to your stress in some way. For the next two weeks, take two minutes per day to connect with that student. Ask authentic questions about their interests. Share a joke. Spend time listening to whatever they would like to tell you. This type of interaction is well-known as an intervention for improving student behavior, but what does it do for your self-esteem as a teacher, or your happiness as a human being?

Chapter 5 – REVEAL Your True Self: How to Embrace Creativity as an Expression of Your Humanity

The Reignite Roadmap – Follow the 5 Rs				
REFLECT	REFRAME	REFOCUS	RECONNECT	REVEAL

We all have an innate need to express ourselves. Practicing creativity—revealing what makes you uniquely you—can connect you to a deeper sense of well-being and purpose. If you are feeling burnt out from the daily grind of doing work assigned to you—work that comes from outside of yourself—it may be time to ask, what work is there to be done that comes from *inside* of you? What visions, projects, or ideas are you keeping inside that you could choose to reveal.

The Benefits of Creativity and Self-Expression

Creativity, self-expression, and play provide a proven boost to happiness and mental health – a perfect antidote to feeling burnt out. They also strengthen neural pathways, training our brains to continue thinking creatively and giving fuller expression to ourselves. As educators, we can enjoy these benefits ourselves and pass the benefits on in our classrooms. Thinking creatively enables us to better solve teaching problems AND it allows us to model creative problem-solving and a playful, expressive approach to life to our students. Students, of course, can derive the same happiness and mental health benefits when they are free to express themselves, and creative thinking will serve them well as they face uncertainty in their futures.

What Counts as Creativity?

When it comes to reaping the benefits of self-expression, nearly anything goes. Certainly, the obvious avenues like drawing, painting, making music, or writing poetry count. But if that feels like a high bar, there are plenty of more accessible options. Journaling, snapping photos with your phone, cooking, or decorating can all be forms of self-expression if they feel like a way to release or reveal something true about yourself.

Even the work of teaching can be creative expression if you approach it creatively and use it as a means to bring forth yourself. Planning an inter-disciplinary unit or decorating your classroom for an upcoming theme could be a great creative outlet. Novel experiences too can help reveal your hidden or stifled creative self. Take a walk in a new neighborhood, listen to a different type of music, browse an interesting shop, or try out a class in something new to you like pottery or improv. Maybe you will awaken a part of yourself that has been waiting to be revealed.

Roadblocks to Creativity

Of course, it isn't always easy. If you're burnt out and feeling like you are constantly running just to meet the basic demands of your job and life, who has time for a pottery class? Here are a few common roadblocks to creativity (plus some suggested work-arounds).

Time Confetti	Our time is frequently interrupted and broken into smaller and smaller bits by notifications from our phones, email, social media, etc. This makes it hard to get into the “flow” of a creative pursuit (this deep flow is what makes us feel happy and fulfilled!) Try creating boundaries around your time—a phone-free hour (or day), turning off notifications, and training yourself to check your devices less frequently can help.
Trouble Getting Started	One common roadblock is simply getting started. Often, the flow of ideas doesn’t work quite how we think it will. Many writers and artists say that their great ideas have come from working through worse ideas first. Signal to your brain that you are open to inspiration by getting started on the work. Play your old guitar, write a page a day in a journal, grab a pen and start doodling. New ideas may well follow.
Perfectionism & Comparison	Browsing images on social media can be so intimidating! All those adorable bulletin boards and perfectly-decorated cakes are enough to stop any amateur from giving it a shot. But remember, the benefits of self-expression aren’t from the Pinterest-worthy end-product. The benefits are in the process—in combining your ideas and the materials you have to make something new.
Negative Self-Talk	Whether it comes from yourself or from others, negative talk can be killer to creativity. Listen for these phrases that extinguish creativity and try to replace them with creative fuel. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><u>Talk that Extinguishes Creativity</u></p> <p><i>That won’t work.</i></p> <p><i>We always do it this way.</i></p> <p><i>We already tried that.</i></p> <p><i>I can’t.</i></p> <p><i>No.</i></p> <p><i>No one else does that.</i></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><u>Talk that Fuels Creativity</u></p> <p><i>Tell me more...</i></p> <p><i>Why?</i></p> <p><i>How could we...</i></p> <p><i>Wouldn’t it be cool if...</i></p> <p><i>Yes!</i></p> <p><i>I wish...</i></p> </div> </div>

Above all, don’t get too hung up on the type of creativity that you think *won’t* work for you. Sure, there may be supplies you can’t afford, classes you don’t have time for, or skills that are just not your thing. But self-expression isn’t only found in professional grade paints or multi-week acting workshops. Self-expression comes from you, doing a thing you enjoy, with materials you have or can get. It awakens a bit of joy and reveals a bit of who you are. And maybe, with practice, a bit more of you will be revealed, a bit more joy will awaken, and a bit more passion will ignite. As Michael puts it, “Creativity is the way we pour our heart into all that we do...”

REVEALING Strategies

- *The Everyday Photo Five-Day Challenge*: Using your phone, take four or five photos every day for five days. Try taking photos at different times of day. And rather than aiming for photos of beautiful sunsets or posing people, try capturing your everyday life, just as it is (the view from your bed, candid photos, close-ups on objects). At the end of five days, review the photos and reflect on the experience. You can download a more detailed guide for this exercise [here](#).
- *The Rate My Day Activity*: Each day for a week, make note of how you’d rate the fun in your day on a scale of 1-10 and also which activities contributed most to your sense of fun. At the end of the week, look for patterns. What increases the fun, playfulness, and joy in your life? Can you find ways to incorporate these activities more often?

Chapter 6 – REIGNITE: Map Your Way from Burnt Out to Fired Up

While research can provide us with information, and even tried-and-true strategies, ultimately it will be *you* who takes that new information and decides how to put it into practice in your life. You might work alone, or—even better—you might work alongside colleagues if that is possible for you, but your road will be your own. That’s empowering! You don’t need to wait around for others to make changes, you can start today and map out your own path back from burnout.

This chapter provides 5 downloadable worksheets (available here: <http://go.solutiontree.com/teacherefficacy>) to help you address each of the 5 areas in Michael’s framework:

- My REFLECT Roadmap
- My REFRAME Roadmap
- My REFOCUS Roadmap
- My RECONNECT Roadmap
- My REVEAL Roadmap

As Morgane Michael puts it, “When you choose to author your own destiny, you have the power to live out a truly wholehearted and passionate existence.”

THE MAIN IDEA's PD Suggestions to Help Staff Move From Burnt Out to Fired Up

This is an outline for an in-house professional development workshop you might offer for teachers at your school to teach them strategies to move from burnt out to fired up. I also created a **PowerPoint presentation** and workshop **HANDOUT** you can use during the workshop to guide and supplement this outline. Email Jenn if you'd like a copy of the PPT.

The activities are organized into Morgane Michael's "5 Rs" framework.

I. REFLECT

The following activities are designed to help guide your staff through a process of self-reflection in order to address burnout.

A. Reflect on Your Needs

1. Consider the following six psychological needs. Often, our actions are driven by these needs. When we're feeling burnt out, it may be because one or more of our needs is chronically unmet.

Certainty – Some people need a sense of security and will want to create certainty during uncertain times.

Uncertainty – Some people seek novelty, variety, and unpredictability to bring a sense of excitement to their lives.

Significance – Some people (often teachers) want to matter and seek some type of significance. They may also need recognition.

Belonging – People who need to belong seek relationships and connections. Humans are wired to connect and belong.

Growth – Humans often need to grow, learn, and seek to gain mastery.

Contribution – Some people are motivated by wanting to have a positive impact on those around them – as many educators are.

2. Take a moment to reflect on your personal needs (also on the **HANDOUT**). Which of the above 6 needs do you feel are *best* and *least* met by your current life?

3. Turn and talk with a neighbor. If you're comfortable, share which need you think is best met for you right now, and which you need to address. Alternatively, jot down your thoughts if you do not feel like sharing.

B. Cultivate Gratitude

1. The impact of gratitude journaling is well-founded in research, but sometimes the pressure of filling a journal may be more of a burden than a joy. Right now, take a moment to reflect on reasons you have to be grateful. Is there someone in your life, or even someone in this room who deserves some thanks from you?

2. Use a single sticky note to jot a note of appreciation—to a colleague, a friend, or a family member—and resolve to give it to that person sometime this week. If a daily journal practice is not for you, consider cultivating an irregular sticky note habit! Alternatively, share names of gratitude apps with teachers and have them take out their phones, explore the apps, and choose one they might want to try. Samples include: [3 Good Things](#), [Gratitude](#), and [Presently](#).

C. Increase Emotional Awareness

1. Take a look at this list of common emotions (also on the **HANDOUT**):

Happiness	Joy	Sadness	Grief	Disappointment
Fear	Excitement	Guilt	Shame	Gratitude

What are you feeling right now? (If doing a virtual session, take an anonymous poll of emotions.) Close your eyes for a moment and see if you can identify where in your body you feel the emotion. Is there something you need to do in response to that emotion?

2. Making space and time for awareness of our emotions can make a big difference in our well-being. Consider cutting out the emotion meter provided in the **HANDOUT** and posting it above your computer to remind you to reflect on your feelings.

3. Choose a time in your daily routine during which you can plan to reflect on your emotional state. Possible choices include:

- When my feet touch the floor in the morning
- When I walk from my car to the building
- After I park my car at home
- After I turn on the coffee machine
- When I step outside to walk to my car after work
- When I lay my head down at night

Or take out your phone, explore some emotion tracker apps like [Daylio Journal](#), [DailyBean](#), or [Moodnotes](#), and choose one to use!

II. REFRAME

To prevent burnout, it helps to *reframe* problems. The following activities are designed to help your staff begin to reframe challenges.

A. Address Stress

1. In small groups, read over the 5 types of stress and their definitions (in the **HANDOUT**).

Type of Stressor	
1. Physical Stress: Includes physical stressors like noise, lights, pain, and even proximity to other people	4. Social Stress: The stress of building relationships, trying to fit in, managing disagreements, or even dealing with small talk
2. Emotional Stress: Strong negative and even positive emotions (like out-of-control excitement in your classroom)	5. Pro-social Stress: Tuning into the stress of others – often due to our empathy – such as students or parents who are distressed
3. Cognitive Stress: When your brain has been taxed for too long or when you are learning something new that is demanding	

2. Self-identify: Which types of stress do you most commonly experience?

3. While we don't have control over *all* of our sources of stress, the key to addressing stress is taking actions *we can control*. With a partner, choose one or two types of stress and brainstorm actions you could take that *you have control over* to help relieve the stress.

B. Face Challenges

1. On the workshop **HANDOUT** or on your device, write about a challenge you are currently facing.

2. With a partner, work through the 3 steps to adopt a reframe mindset:

- (a) Could the challenge you chose contain any hidden opportunities for growth?
- (b) What strengths or resources do you already have that you can bring to the challenge? What else do you need?
- (c) What are some very small, routine steps you might take to handle this challenge effectively?

III. REFOCUS

Lack of purpose and lack of growth can both contribute to feelings of burnout. Refocusing on their goals can help staff move forward!

A. Create Goals

1. On your own, brainstorm some goals you *might* focus on by category (using the template below and in the **HANDOUT**).

2. With a partner, share the goal you're most interested in pursuing in each category, brainstorm together what *one* first step for each goal might look like, then write this in the **HANDOUT** and in your calendar.

Family & Friends	Work & Career
<i>Goals I have been wanting to do:</i>	<i>Goals I have been wanting to do:</i>
<i>Choose one goal:</i>	<i>Choose one goal:</i>
<i>One small next step you could do (Write it here & calendar it):</i>	<i>One small next step you could do (Write it here & calendar it):</i>
Health & Well-Being	Fun & Leisure
<i>Goals I have been wanting to do:</i>	<i>Goals I have been wanting to do:</i>
<i>Choose one goal:</i>	<i>Choose one goal:</i>
<i>One small next step you could do (Write it here & calendar it):</i>	<i>One small next step you could do (Write it here & calendar it):</i>

IV. RECONNECT

Much of our well-being is rooted in our connections with others. Here are a few activities to revive our human connections.

A. Experience the Contagiousness of Emotion (“The Mirror Neurons Activity” as described on pp.112-113)

1. Pair up, ideally with someone you work less with. Partners should stand facing one another and decide who is Partner 1 and 2.
2. Partner 1, use your self-discipline to remain emotionless. Partner 2, smile the biggest, warmest, most genuine smile you can for the next seven seconds without breaking eye-contact. If time allows, trade roles and try again.

This exercise is intended to demonstrate the contagious nature of laughter and positive emotions. The take-away here is this: our small actions have enormous potential to impact the emotional environment in which we work.

B. Asses Your Personal Roadblocks

1. Read through the roadblocks to kindness and connection below. Things like busy-ness or feeling unsure what to do can get in the way of our best intentions to connect with one other. Do any of the roadblocks below interfere with you making human connections?

Roadblocks That Stand in the Way of Kindness and Human Connection

Incompetence	Sometimes we don't know what to say or do.
Inconvenience	You just can't seem to make time to do what you wish you could.
Insecurity	You might think, “ <i>who am I?</i> ” to reach out to this person if you aren't that close.
Inconsistency	Sometimes when we make something a special event, we forget it's needed year-round.

2. Whatever roadblock you most identify with, try answering your excuses with the phrase “something is better than nothing.” How could you apply “something is better than nothing” to the roadblocks you face? (For example, a “Happy Birthday” text might not be as good as card and a gift, but it *is* better than not acknowledging a friend's birthday at all).

3. Take a moment to share in pairs. What is your roadblock? What might it look like to apply “something is better than nothing?”

C. Plan for Increased Connection

1. Consider these 3 small ways you might begin to make connecting a habit: 1) Greeting Others, 2) Asking for Help, 3) Offering Help
2. Which of these would you like to personally improve? Choose one and make a plan to increase your connectedness either by greeting someone you normally wouldn't, requesting help, or offering help that you typically might not. Start today!

V. REVEAL

As humans, we all have an innate need for creativity, and our well-being suffers when don't have avenues to express ourselves creatively. Help your staff develop their self-expression as a strong antidote to burnout.

A. Practice Creative Thinking (“The 30 Circles Exercise” as described on pp. 150-151 of the book)

1. Have teachers take out a blank piece of paper and draw 30 circles (6 rows of 5 each) of roughly the same size circle. They don't need to be perfect! For 3 minutes, ask them to use a pen to transform as many circles as you can into everyday objects (for example, a basketball, a fishbowl, a clock, etc.)
2. After 3 minutes, share your circles at your table. How do people's approaches differ? Did anyone do anything creative or unusual? Reflect on your emotional state. How did you feel when you started the activity? How did you feel while you were drawing? How did you feel as you looked at others' drawings?

Though probably no one produced a great work of art during this exercise, it is likely that many people experienced positive emotions, and even relief from stress as they engaged their creative mind in a task very different from their day-to-day work.

B. Awaken Your Personal Creativity

We sometimes resist creative endeavors because we don't believe we have the skill, money, or time. You don't have to be a professional actor or quilter to get creative. You can get a lot out of starting small and expressing yourself with what you have.

1. Consider this list of small actions that could add a creative outlet to your life and brainstorm more ideas with the whole group:

- Listen to some high-energy music on your commute and sing along or car dance!
- Keep a small pad of paper and a pen near where you drink your coffee in the morning and try out a daily doodle.
- Take some artistic close-ups or unusual-angle photos with your phone.
- Make up your own! What small and easy to implement artistic act appeals to you?

2. Choose one (or more) to try a few days in the coming week. Share this with a partner. At the end of the week, take some time to reflect on the process. How did your small artistic action impact you emotionally? Is it something you would like to continue? Are there other creative actions that you want to take next?

THE MAIN IDEA is a *subscription service* for busy educational leaders.

Each month I send one education or leadership book summary along with PD ideas to use with staff. I also have other goodies – podcasts about the books, PPT workshops you can use, over 140 book summaries in my archives, and more.