



ADRIAN GRUNDY

STOP

BEFORE YOUR BODY
MAKES YOU.

AN HONEST GUIDE TO BURNOUT FOR

Founders,

OWNERS *and*

LEADERS

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Before you start

This is not medical advice. I'm not a doctor or a psychologist. I'm a founder who ran a business hot for more than seven years until my body made me stop, and this is what I learned from it.

If you recognise yourself in these pages, please talk to a professional. If you are in crisis right now, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**, any time. The full list of help lines is at the back.

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START HERE

Introduction: I built it

| this is just what leadership costs.

I built a group of businesses that grew to more than 1,200 people at its peak. I was proud of it. For most of a decade it was the only thing I was.

Then my body made me stop.

I'd like to tell you I saw it coming and made a smart decision. I didn't. I ignored every warning, because I believed something that most founders and leaders believe: **this is just what leadership costs.**

It isn't. It's what leadership costs when you run it on suffering, and there is a point where the bill arrives whether you're ready or not.

This book is for founders, owners, managers and leaders. It's what I wish someone had put in front of me seven years earlier. It has three parts:

01 My story told straight, including the parts I'm not proud of.	02 Tools you can use this week: a burnout self-check, a 30- day reset and a weekly operating rhythm for leaders.	03 A harder question how do you build something that doesn't need you to suffer for it to work?
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7+ YEARS RUNNING HOT	1,200+ PEOPLE AT PEAK	115 → 94 KILOS, DOWN	30 DAY RESET INSIDE
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If you take one idea from it, take the title. Stop before your body makes you.



1

CHAPTER 1

Blow after blow

| The point is the stacking.

People ask when it happened. When did I break?

There was no single moment. That's the first thing I want you to understand, because many leaders wait for a dramatic event before they take it seriously. They think burnout arrives as one big crash. For me it was blow after blow after blow.

The business had become bigger than me. For months I hadn't been coping, and I knew it, and I told no one. I kept making decisions, kept turning up and kept performing.

Then the blows came. People I trusted professionally let me down. A personal relationship that was tied up in the business came apart while I still had to run the place. I'm not going to tell those stories here, because they aren't the point. The point is the stacking.

Each one on its own, I could have handled. I had handled worse. But I was already running on empty, and a system with no reserve can't absorb a shock. It just takes the hit.

My sleep went first. Then my nervous system: I was wired and exhausted at the same time, tense all day and unable to settle, however tired I was. In the end my body refused to keep going, and I had no choice but to stop.

The stack

Looking back, the blows were never the cause. They were the last straws on a back that had been loaded for seven years. Here is what that stack looked like:

01

Years of no real rest.

Not weekends off. Rest where my mind actually let go.

02

A business that outgrew my capacity.

Every extra person, site and problem still ran through me.

03

No one I could be honest with.

Leaders get lonely precisely because everyone needs them to be fine.

04

Sleep that had quietly stopped working.

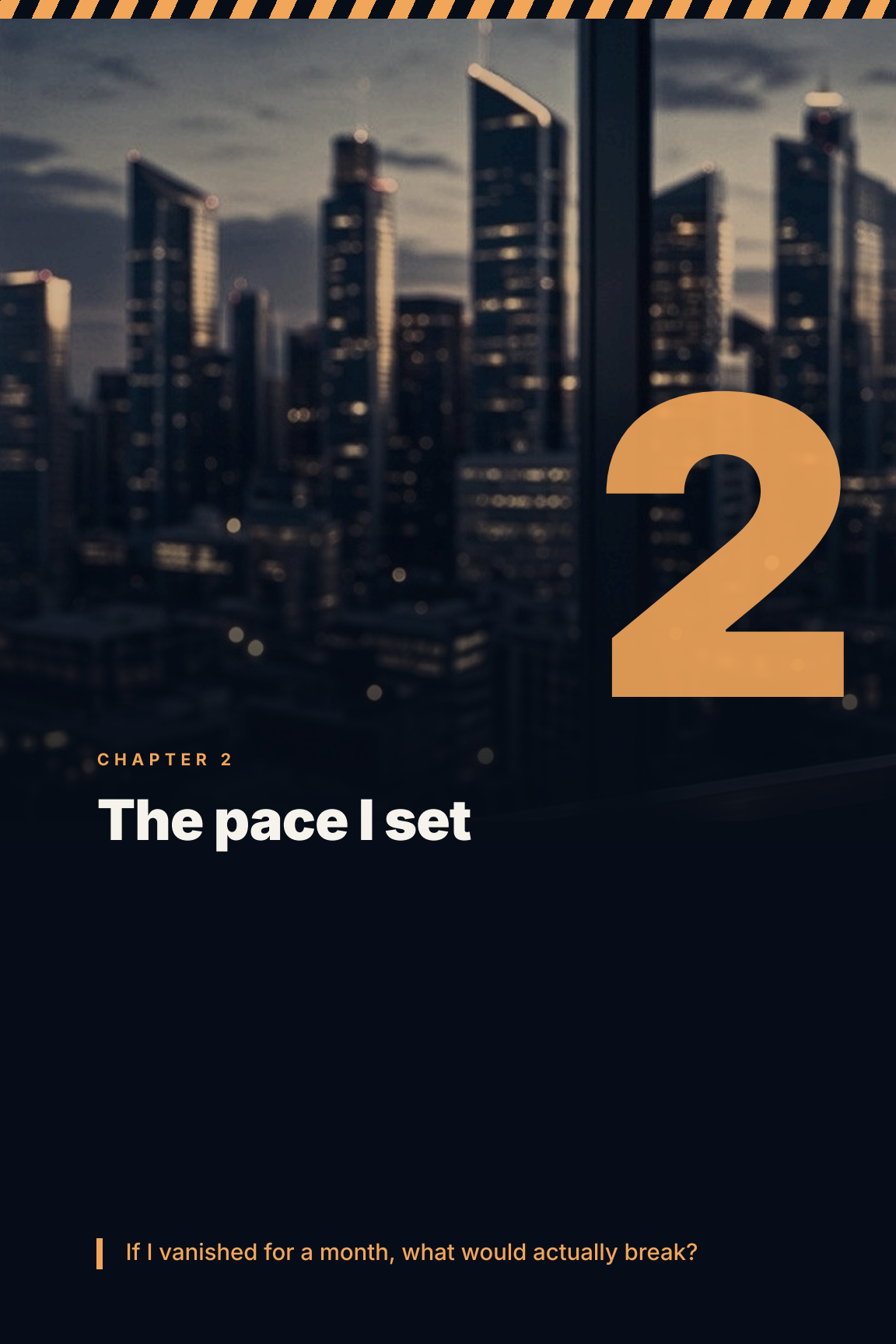
I couldn't switch off, and I was wired and tired at once.

05

Everything I enjoyed outside work had gone.

Training, friends, anything that wasn't the business.

If three or more of those are true of you right now, you are in the stack. You don't need the blows to arrive before you act.



2

CHAPTER 2

The pace I set

| If I vanished for a month, what would actually break?

In the last six months, everyone in my business could see how I was running. I wasn't sleeping. My managers had no capacity to take on more. And I couldn't hire fast enough to build around myself.

That's the bottleneck problem, and it has a cruel loop. You're too busy to hire properly. So you hire fast, or you don't hire, and everyone around you is stretched. So more lands on you. So you're busier.

But the part I'm least proud of is what happened to my standards.

Some people in the business should have been doing more. I knew it. And some of them had a vested interest in the business doing well, which meant they were comfortable with performance that was merely average. Before, I would have had that conversation within a week. In those months I didn't, because I couldn't fight any more.

That's what exhaustion does to a leader. It doesn't make you weaker in obvious ways. It quietly lowers the line of what you'll accept, because holding the line costs energy you no longer have.

Your pace becomes the culture

Whatever pace you set, people copy it or resent it. Either way it becomes the culture. In my case:

- My managers couldn't ask for help, because I was visibly drowning.
- Good people stretched past what was healthy to cover for me.
- Underperformance stayed in place, because nobody had the energy to challenge it, including me.

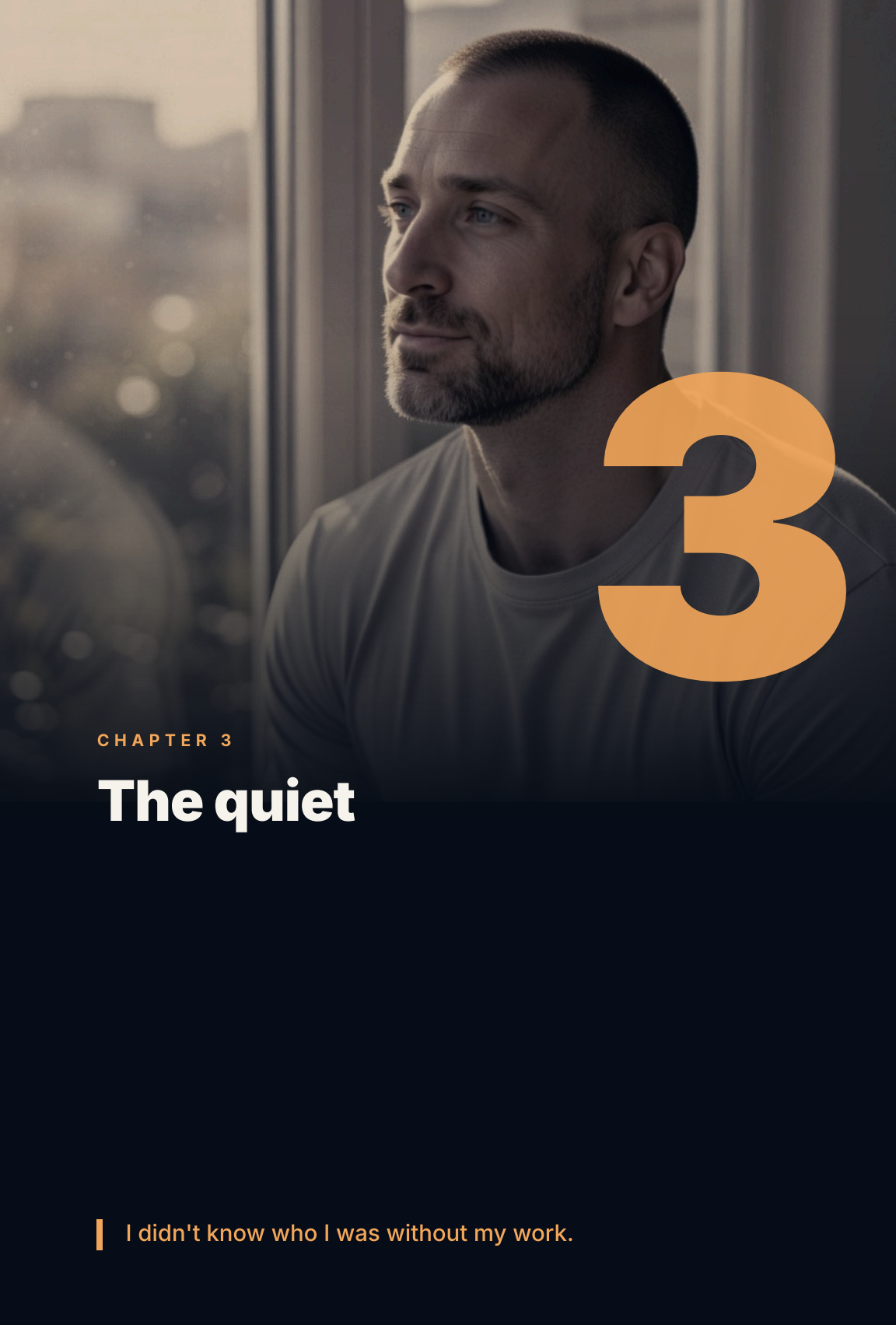
I didn't intend any of that. Nobody does. But the team was running on my exhaustion, and they felt it more than I realised.

The leader's pace check

Answer these honestly. Write the answers down, because your head will argue with you.

1. When did I last take a full week off with no email?
2. How many decisions currently wait on me and nobody else?
3. Is there someone I know should be doing more, and I haven't said so?
4. Do my managers bring me problems early, or only once they're on fire?
5. If I vanished for a month, what would actually break?

Question 5 is the one that matters. If the answer is "everything", you haven't built a business yet. You've built a job that you can't leave.



CHAPTER 3

The quiet

| I didn't know who I was without my work.

When I finally stopped, nobody warned me about the quiet.

I slept more than I ever thought a person could. Days of it. My body was collecting a debt that had been building for years.

I ate my feelings. I ended up at 115 kilos. I'm telling you that because it's true, and because founders rarely admit what the crash did to their bodies. I'm 94 kilos now. That change didn't happen quickly, and it started the day I stopped being ashamed of where I was.

And I refused to talk to my family or my friends. I felt like I had failed. In my head, the story was simple: I'd built something huge, and I'd lost it, so I was a failure, so nobody should see me.

I felt like my life was over. I felt powerless. Everyone around me wanted to help, and I shut them out.

Who am I without work?

This was the hardest part, harder than the sleep, the weight or the money: **I didn't know who I was without my work.**

Work was my only source of purpose and passion. It was how I introduced myself and how I measured my days. It was the reason I got up. When it was gone, there was nothing underneath, because I had never built anything underneath.

If you're a founder, this might be the most important paragraph in this book. Ask yourself:

If you stopped tomorrow, what would you say you were?

Who are you to the people who love you, apart from what you do?

What did you love before you built this?

If those questions make you uncomfortable, that discomfort is worth listening to. Identity built on a single thing is fragile. It holds while everything goes well, and it collapses when that one thing is gone.

What I'd say to the person in the quiet

If you're in the quiet right now, here's what I'd say.

Sleeping a lot is not laziness.

It's recovery. Let it happen.

"I failed" is a story, not a fact.

It feels like truth when you're exhausted. It's usually the exhaustion talking.

Don't hide from the people who love you.

You don't have to explain everything. Start with one message: "I'm not doing well, and I don't have the words yet."

Don't try to rebuild your identity in week one.

The quiet is the stage where you stop. Meaning comes later.

The quiet felt like the end. It was the beginning of working out who I actually am.



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CHAPTER 4

Ask for help sooner

| Waiting always feels cheaper than asking. It never is.

If I could send one message back to myself seven years earlier, it would be three words: **ask for help.**

I didn't, for the usual reasons. I thought it was weakness. I thought I had to be the strong one. I thought I could grind my way through. By the time I did ask, the problems were bigger and harder to untangle than they needed to be.

When I finally got support, it came from three places:

01

A GP.

The starting point. A GP can check your physical health, rule things out and refer you on.

02

Specialists.

Because burnout isn't only in your head. Your body keeps the score too.

03

Psychologists.

Someone trained to help me make sense of what had happened, with no stake in my business.

What helped

Professional support was the foundation. Four other things sat on top of it.

Training and my body.

Moving again, and treating my body as something to look after rather than something that carried me to work.

Stillness and rest.

Real rest, on purpose. Not scrolling, not planning, not "just checking email".

Community.

Letting people back in.

Honesty.

Saying the true thing out loud, even when it was embarrassing. Especially then.

How to ask for help, if you don't know how

Most leaders don't lack the willingness. They lack a script. Here are three you can use today.

TO A GP:

"I think I've been running on empty for a long time, and I'm struggling to sleep and switch off. I'd like to talk about what's going on and what my options are."

TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST:

"I haven't been okay for a while, and I've been hiding it. I don't need you to fix it. I just need you to know."

TO YOUR TEAM OR A KEY MANAGER:

"I'm carrying too much, and it's affecting how I lead. I need to change how we work. Can we sit down this week?"

In Australia, ask your GP about a mental health treatment plan, which can make sessions with a psychologist cheaper through Medicare. Your GP will tell you whether you're eligible.

The cost of waiting

Waiting always feels cheaper than asking. It never is. Every month I waited, the bill grew. Asking sooner would have cost me an uncomfortable conversation. Waiting cost me my health, my business and my sense of who I was.



CHAPTER 5

The burnout self-check

| The score matters less than the honesty.

This is a reflection tool, not a diagnosis. It can't tell you whether you have a medical condition. It can tell you whether it's time to talk to someone.

For each statement, score how true it has been for you **over the last three months**: 0 = not at all, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = almost always.

1	I can't switch off from work, even on holidays or at night.	0	1	2	3
2	My sleep is poor: I'm wired, I wake in the night, or I'm exhausted without being able to rest.	0	1	2	3
3	I've stopped doing things I used to love: training, friends, hobbies.	0	1	2	3
4	I feel numb or irritable about things that used to matter.	0	1	2	3
5	Decisions are piling up and waiting for me.	0	1	2	3
6	I'm tolerating things in my team or business that I wouldn't have a year ago.	0	1	2	3
7	I've stopped telling people the truth about how I'm doing.	0	1	2	3
8	My body is giving me warnings: illness, pain, weight change, restlessness, constant tension.	0	1	2	3
9	I tell myself "I'll rest when I've made it", and "made it" keeps moving.	0	1	2	3
10	If I stopped, I'm not sure who I'd be.	0	1	2	3

Your score

0–8	Under pressure but coping Use the operating rhythm in Chapter 7 and check again in a month
9–17	Early burnout territory Start the 30-day reset and book a GP appointment this month
18–30	You are in the stack Book a GP this week, tell one person today and read Chapter 4 again

If you answered 2 or 3 on question 8, 9 or 10, pay attention to it, whatever your total. And if at any point you feel unsafe, stop reading and call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

The score matters less than the honesty. Notice which questions made you flinch.



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CHAPTER 6

The 30-day reset

| Do what you can, and don't wait until you feel ready.

This plan is small on purpose. When you're depleted, a big plan is just another thing to fail at. Each week has one theme and a short list. Do what you can, and don't wait until you feel ready.

WEEK 1

Stop the bleeding

- Book a GP appointment. Do it today, before you talk yourself out of it.
- Tell one person the truth: "I haven't been okay."
- Set a hard stop time for work each day and keep it for seven days.
- Remove work email from your phone for at least one full day.

WEEK 2

Protect your body

- Pick a consistent wake time and a wind-down routine, with no screens in the last hour.
- Walk for 20 minutes a day, outside, without headphones on some of them.
- Eat regular meals. Don't treat food as a reward or a punishment.
- Follow up on anything your GP found.

WEEK 3

Hand something off

- List every decision that currently waits on you.
- Choose three and give them to someone else with a clear brief.
- Have the conversation you've been avoiding with someone on your team.
- Take one full day with no work at all, on purpose.

WEEK 4

Rebuild what's underneath

- Write down five things you loved before your work took over. Do one of them this week.
- Reconnect with one friend or family member you've been avoiding.
- Book your next professional session. Support works best when it's not a one-off.
- Write one page: "Who am I outside of work?" Don't polish it. Just start.

What to expect

The first two weeks can feel worse before they feel better, because you're finally noticing what you've been blocking out. That's normal. If it feels too heavy, slow down and talk to your GP or psychologist. This plan supports professional help and doesn't replace it.



CHAPTER 7

A leader's operating rhythm

Willpower runs out. A structure still works when you're tired.

A rhythm protects your energy better than willpower does. Willpower runs out. A structure still works when you're tired.

Here is a weekly rhythm I would build into any leader's week.

MONDAY, FIRST HOUR	Choose your three priorities for the week Stops the week being run by whoever shouts loudest
DAILY, END OF DAY	A shutdown ritual: write tomorrow's top task, close the laptop Gives your mind permission to stop
MIDWEEK, 30 MINUTES	Capacity check with your managers: "What's one thing you can't take on right now?" Surfaces overload before it becomes a crisis
FRIDAY	Review: what did I decide that someone else could have? Shrinks the bottleneck every week
ONE DAY A WEEK	Protected recovery, with no work and no "just checking" The whole point of the rhythm
QUARTERLY	Honest conversation with a coach, mentor or peer You can't see your own pace from inside it

Four rules that keep it honest

01

The two-minute decision test.

If someone else can make this decision, they make it. I decide only what only I can decide.

02

Hire ahead of the pain.

If you wait until you're drowning, you'll hire badly and rush it. Bring in capacity while you still have energy to onboard properly.

03

Hold the standard when you're tired.

Have the performance conversation within the week, not in six months. Delay costs more than the conversation.

04

Treat sleep as a business input.

If you're chronically under-slept, your decisions are worse, and your team pays for that.

Signals to watch in yourself

If you see any of these for two weeks in a row, treat it as a warning, not a phase.

- ☐ You're avoiding a conversation you'd normally have.
 - ☐ You're short with people for no reason you can name.
 - ☐ You've stopped taking holidays "because things are busy".
 - ☐ Your best people seem quieter, and you haven't asked why.
-



8

CHAPTER 8

Build a business that doesn't need your suffering

What would this business look like if it didn't need me
to suffer?

The idea that great leaders suffer for their business is one of the most damaging lies in business. It sounds like commitment. In practice it's a failure of design.

A business that only works when its leader is exhausted is a fragile business. It will fail the day you can't carry it, and it'll fail your people long before that.

So the question I'd leave you with isn't "How do I cope with this pace?" It's **"What would this business look like if it didn't need me to suffer?"**

01

Clear owners for every key process, so it doesn't all run through you.

02

Managers with the capacity to make decisions.

03

A culture where telling the truth about overload is safe.

04

A standard that holds even when you're not in the room.

05

A leader who has a life, an identity and a body outside of the business.

That last point matters most. I built the business and lost myself in it. Now I'm building myself first, and I've found that everything else works better that way.

Where I am now

I'm rebuilding. Differently. I know now what I didn't know then, and I'd rather share it than pretend it didn't happen. If this book helps you act one month sooner than I did, it has done its job.

If you want to talk, or you're building a leadership team, or you just want to say "me too", you can find me at **adriangrundy.com**.

Where to get help

If you or someone you know needs support, these services are free, confidential and available in Australia.

13 11 14

LIFELINE · 24 HOURS · CALL ANY TIME

Service	Phone	Hours
Lifeline	13 11 14	24 hours
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636	24 hours
MensLine Australia	1300 78 99 78	24 hours
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467	24 hours

In an emergency, call **000**.



About Adrian

Adrian Grundy is a Sydney-based operations and commercial leader. He built The Murdock Group, a group of businesses that grew to more than 1,200 people at its peak, and then stepped away when burnout forced him to stop. He writes about leadership, recovery and building businesses that don't run on suffering.

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If this helped, pass it to a founder or leader you care about.

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