

July 9, 2025

Thriving in the Trenches

Overcoming Burnout for Immigration
Legal Providers

switchboard
connecting resettlement experts





Thank you for joining today's training!

We will begin momentarily.



Today's Facilitator



Kristen Nilsen

Mentoring Attorney, VECINA

Today's Roundtable Panelists



Patty First

Executive Coach

Patty First Coaching, LLC



Jori McChesney, LMHC, NCC

Counselor, Psychotherapist

Caring Counseling Services, PLLC



Kathy Purnell, JD, PhD

Director, Managing Attorney

Human/Civil Rights Law Center

Learning Objectives



By the end of this roundtable, you will be able to:

1

EXPLAIN

general and current
causes of burnout
among immigration legal
service providers

2

IDENTIFY

12 warning signs of
burnout for immigration
legal service providers

3

APPLY

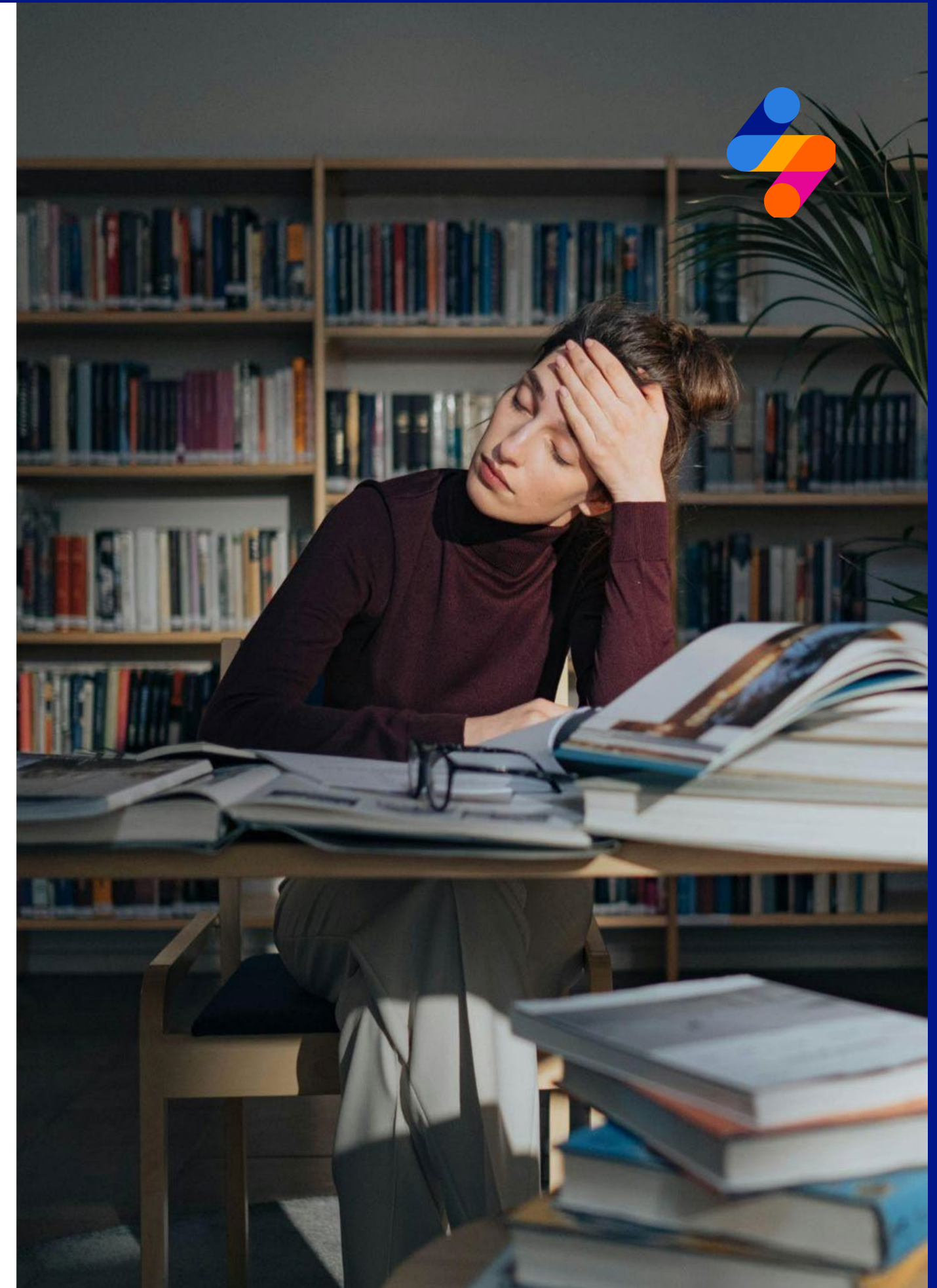
organizational and
personal strategies to
minimize burnout and
maximize personal well-
being



What does "burnout" mean to you?

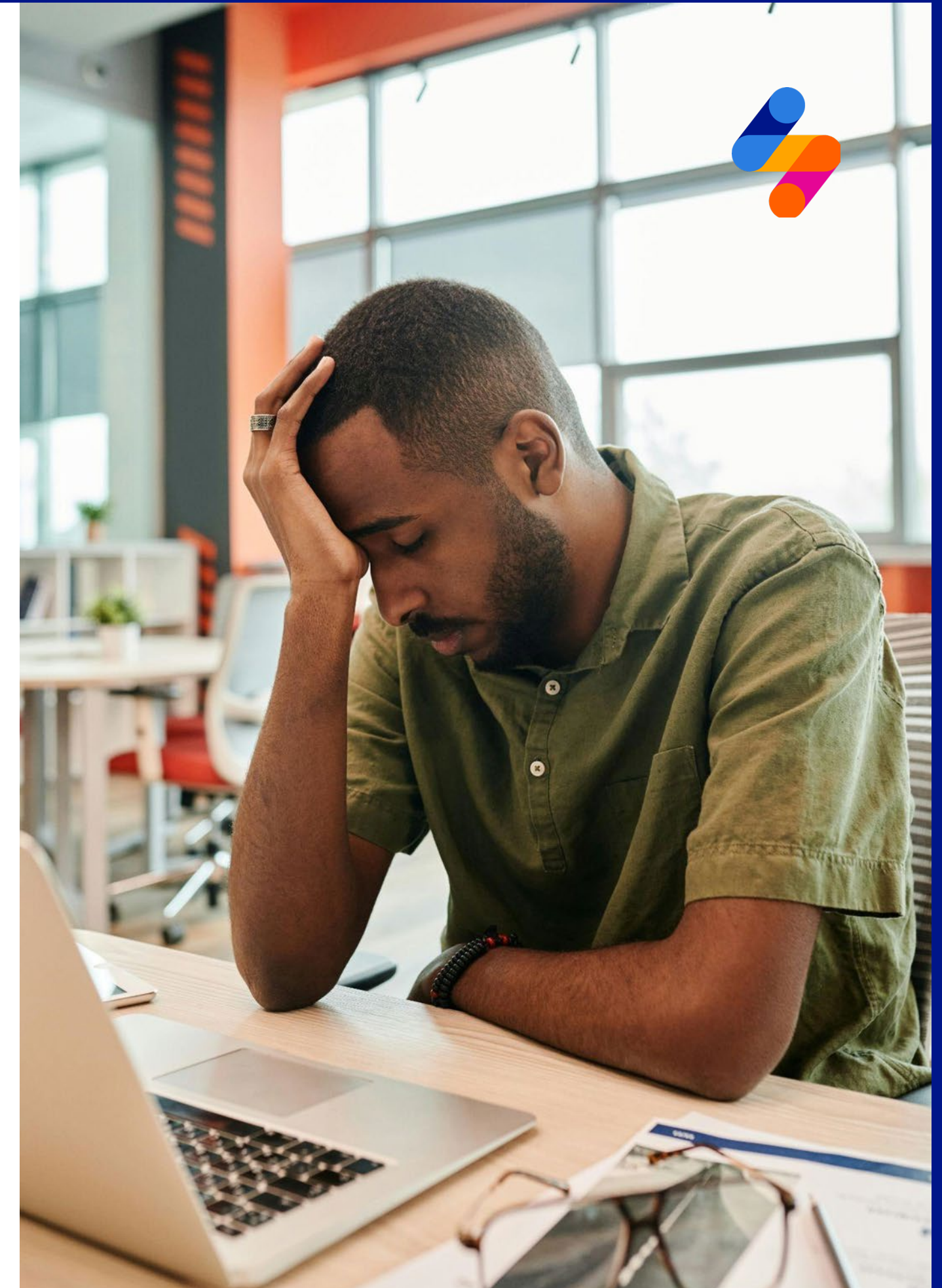
What are general causes of burnout for immigration practitioners?

- Heavy caseloads
- Isolation
- High stakes and pressure



What are some current causes of burnout for immigration practitioners?

- Unpredictable immigration laws
- Bureaucratic challenges
- Loss of funding and other support



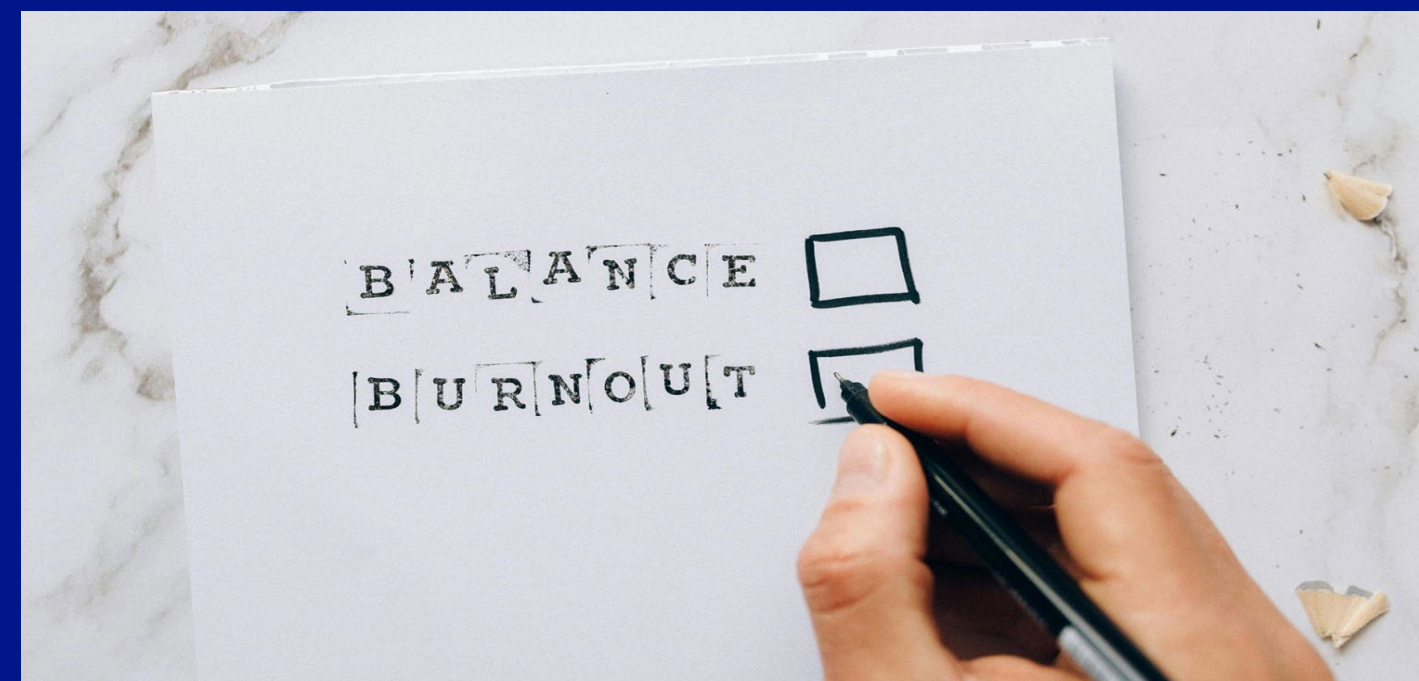


Case Scenario: Sarah

Sarah is the only immigration practitioner working at a nonprofit that provides free immigration legal services to newcomer communities. During her four years in this role, the caseload has grown significantly due to a rising number of people seeking legal help as immigration procedures rapidly change.

The combination of her caseload and added administrative duties leaves Sarah with little time for self-care or a personal life. She often works late into the night, responding to emails, reviewing files, and trying to keep the office organized. The constant backlog and tight deadlines make her feel like she's always falling behind.

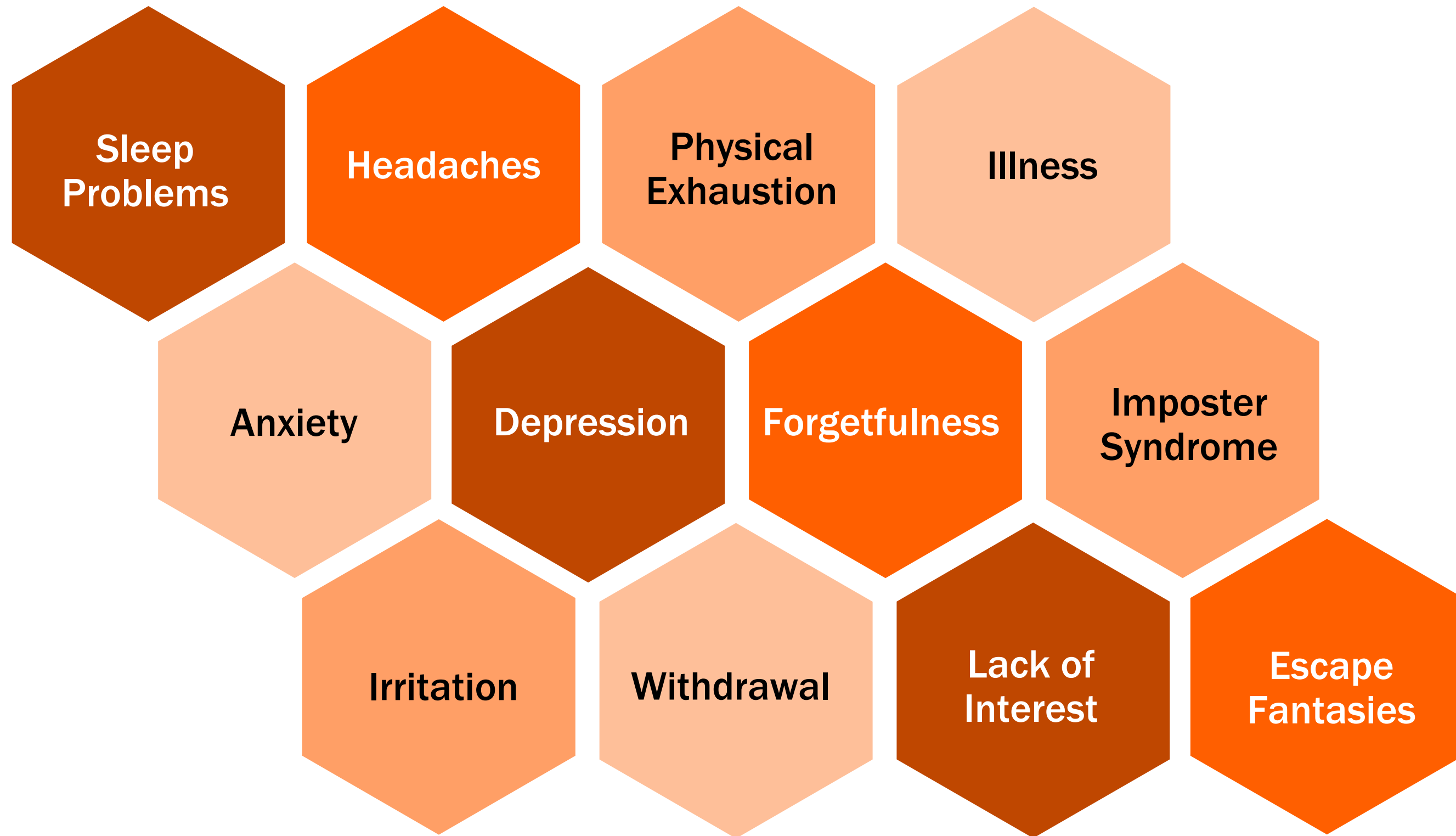
Sarah notes a lack of resources at the nonprofit. The office has few trained volunteers, and many support staff have been laid off due to funding cuts. Her role, which was supposed to involve leading and mentoring a team, now feels more like a logistical nightmare, leaving her frustrated with her inability to help staff or clients in the way she used to.





What aspects of your job do you feel could lead to burnout?

Warning Signs and Symptoms of Burnout



How does burnout develop?



1

Honeymoon Stage

Full of energy! Going above and beyond to prove yourself.

2

Stress Stage

Struggling to keep up with work demands. Neglecting self-care. Feeling irritated and anxious.

3

Chronic Stress Stage

Feeling out of control or powerless. Physical symptoms start to manifest.

4

Burnout Stage

Feeling empty, unmotivated, or isolated. Increased illness. Abandoning personal needs.

5

Habitual Burnout Stage

Always feeling low, anxious, or fatigued. Little interest in demonstrating your abilities.

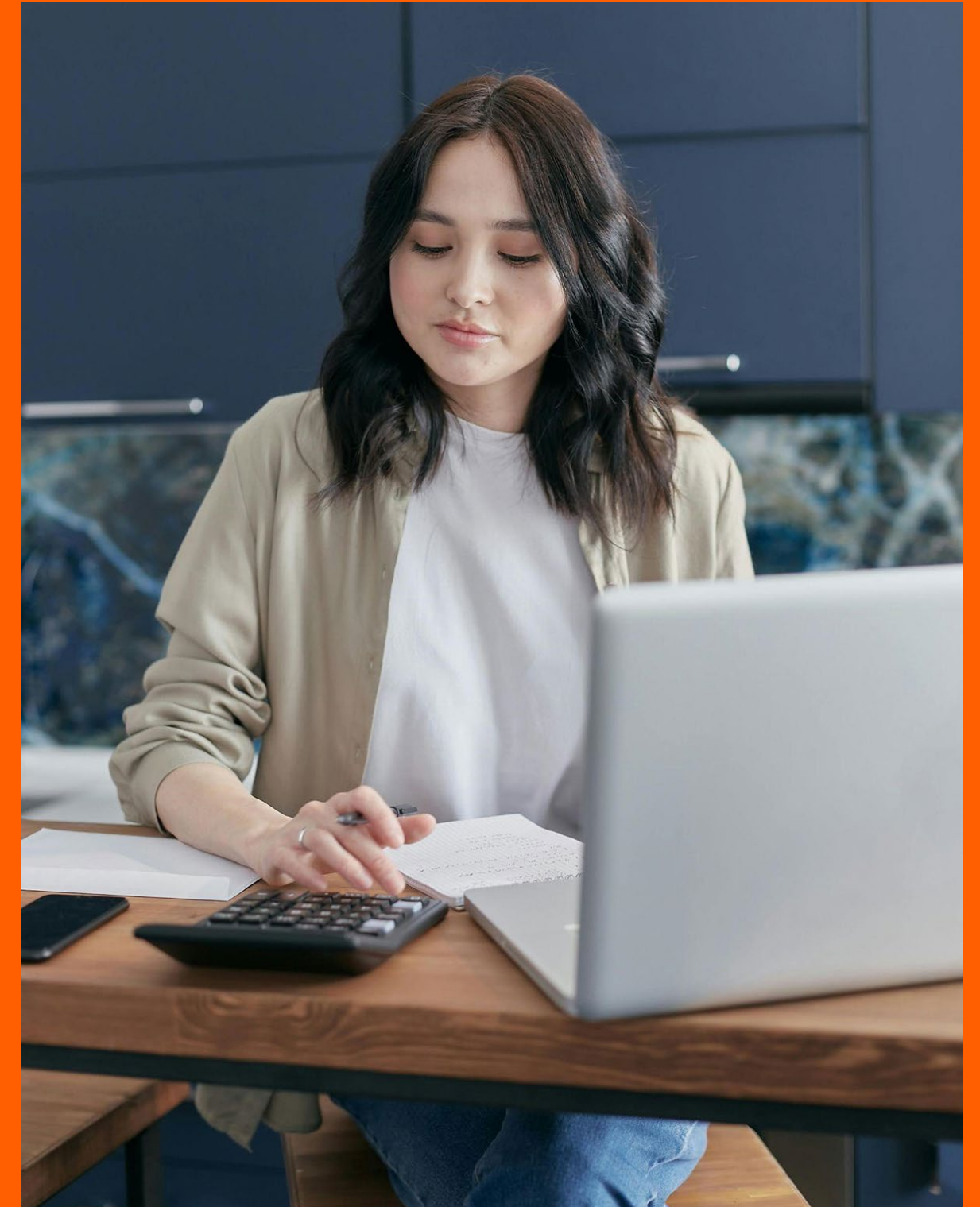


Case Scenario: Sarah (cont.)

Sarah has started to feel emotionally drained. The constant pressure of managing difficult situations has led to increased anxiety and a sense of helplessness. She often feels exhausted and sad. She has difficulty deciding which case to work on next. Drafting legal briefs or statements for her clients is taking longer and longer to complete.

Sarah has also been experiencing frequent headaches, digestive issues, and a sense of constant fatigue. Her immune system seems compromised, as she's been catching colds more often than usual.

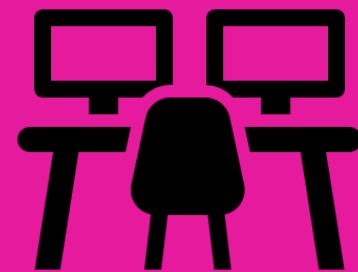
In addition, Sarah's personal relationships have suffered. She doesn't have the mental or emotional energy to engage with her friends or family. Her partner has noticed that she's often distant and irritable.





Which of these signs of burnout do you see in yourself?

Overcoming Burnout



Organizational Support

How can workplaces better support immigration legal advocates to avoid or overcome burnout?



Personal Boundaries

What changes can immigration legal advocates make to their personal lives to avoid or overcome burnout?

Individual and Organizational Strategies to Reduce Burnout





Case Scenario: Sarah (cont.)

Sarah's situation is a common one in the nonprofit sector, where legal staff are often driven by a deep sense of mission but face systemic challenges that lead to burnout. Addressing burnout requires both personal and organizational change.

Sarah speaks with her supervisor about ways to improve internal processes and increase access to volunteer help. She also joins a community of practice for immigration practitioners to share

experiences with managing legal casework and coping strategies for the unique challenges of their work.

Additionally, Sarah decides to set specific work hours, take regular breaks throughout the day, and start cycling classes at her local gym.



How do you set boundaries between work and personal life?

Audience Q&A with Today's Roundtable Panelists



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Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

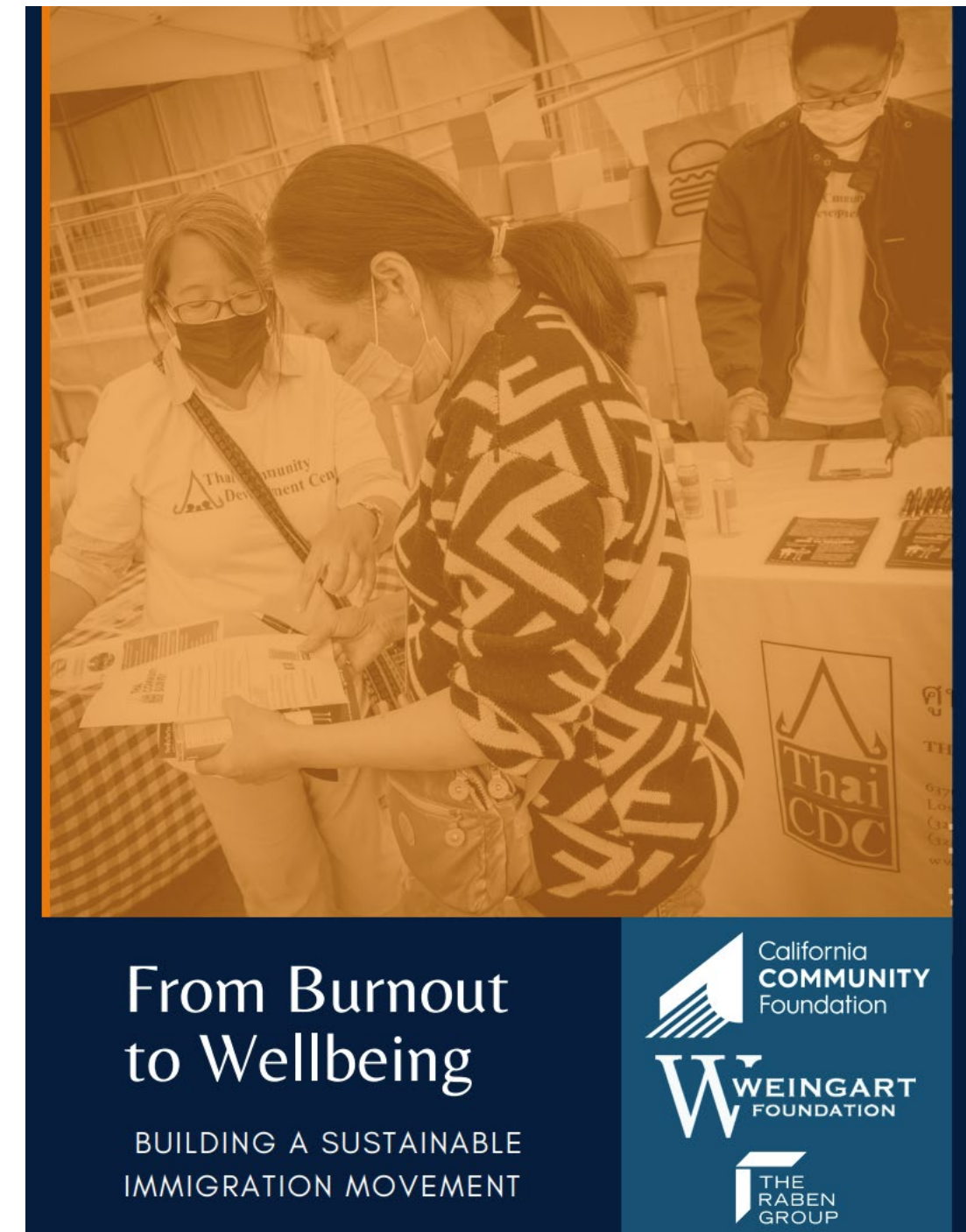
- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance





Recommended Resources

- [AILA Lawyer Well-being Week Seminars](#)
- ["R.A.I.N." meditation](#)
- [Report: From Burnout to Wellbeing: Building a Sustainable Immigration Movement](#)
- [Blog: What immigration practitioners need to know about vicarious trauma and burnout](#)
- [Book: The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives](#)
- [Book: The Age of Overwhelm: Strategies for the Long Haul](#)
- [Book: Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide for Caring for Self, While Caring for Others](#)





Stay Connected



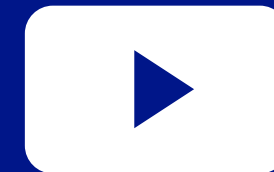
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