



# Webinar: Thriving in the Trenches: Overcoming Burnout for Immigration Legal Providers

July 9, 2025, 1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

Transcript

## Introduction

**Kristen Nilsen:** All right, I hope you all can see and hear me. Thank you for joining us this morning for our webinar, *Thriving in the Trenches: Overcoming Burnout for Immigration Legal Providers*. My name is Kristen Nilsen. I'm the mentoring attorney at VECINA, one of the facilitators for today. I'll be here to guide us through our discussion, introduce our speakers, and help answer any questions at the end.

## Today's Panelists

**KN:** To introduce our speakers today, we have first, Patty First. She's an executive coach at Patty First Coaching and the Chief Strategy and Impact Officer at The Raben Group. She is an executive coach who specializes in using positive psychology to help organizations and the people who work at them thrive. A lawyer and an advocate for progressive causes for much of her career, Patty's own journey facing anxiety and burnout means she intimately understands the struggles and challenges people at organizations face.

**KN:** Patty is also the Chief Strategy and Impact Officer at The Raben Group. Over her more than two decades at Raben, she has earned a stellar reputation for her diplomatic and persuasive approach and for building and nurturing relationships with partners and across coalitions. She knows how to help social justice leaders and organizations achieve their missions without losing their way, deploying her training as a certified coach to help people and organizations sustainably thrive. Patty is one of the authors of *From Burnout to Wellbeing: Building a Sustainable Immigration Movement*, the research report that inspired this roundtable and which we'll refer to throughout. The report seeks to answer the question of how the immigration sector is doing in terms of wellness and sustainability.

**KN:** Next up, we have Jori McChesney. She's a certified mental health counselor in the state of Washington and is a nationally certified counselor. Jori has worked in the mental health field for over 20 years, and along with providing individual therapeutic services and private practice since 2013, Jori also works with community mental health agencies in providing services to unhoused individuals and families. Jori is a member of the American Counselors Association and the Washington Mental Health Counselors Association.

**KN:** Then our third speaker is Dr. Kathy Purnell. She is the Director and Managing Attorney of the Human/Civil Rights Law Center and part-time instructor of Immigration Law and Policy at Western Michigan University's Political Science Department. She started her social enterprise to serve the public and enhance democracy through public legal training, low-bono representation, and strategic partnerships to advance the public good. She is also the pro bono chair of the Michigan chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and a certified affiliate of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. Her philosophical coaching programs,



or resilience retreats, at the GilChrist Retreat Center aim to help advocates thrive and build their capacity to engage, reimagine, and transform our communities.

**KN:** Welcome to our panelists, and we look forward to what they have to say to us today.

## Learning Objectives

**KN:** To go through our learning objectives for today, by the end of this roundtable, you should be able to do, hopefully, all three of these things: One, explain the general and current causes of burnout among legal immigration service providers; two, identify at least 12 warning signs of burnout for immigration legal service providers; three, apply organizational and personal strategies to minimize burnout and maximize personal well-being.

## Discussion Question

**KN:** We are going to have an interactive session here. We're going to use an app called slido.com. You can use your phone to scan that QR code to join, or you can go to slido.com and enter that code: 1666 620. That will allow you to interact with us throughout this presentation. All of your answers will be anonymous. There are three or four of these throughout, so please join us and help us answer these questions. Our first question is,

What does “burnout” mean to you?

**KN:** We'll give it a few minutes to see anything pop up that people have to answer this.

[silence]

**KN:** Some great answers so far. Being overly exhausted, deep exhaustion, lots of exhaustion, yes. Feeling overwhelmed, losing motivation to [provide] quality service, for sure. Irritable, mood swings. Apathy, that's a big one. Overwhelmed with cases. See, it's popping up with some of the most popular answers. Overwhelmed, lack of motivation, exhausted, for sure. [silence] Hitting a wall where I lack bandwidth to add value to my work, yes. Feeling down, not having control. Great. These are all great answers. Thank you so much.

## 1. Causes of Burnout Among Immigration Legal Service Providers

### General Causes of Burnout for Immigration Practitioners

**KN:** We'll start with the first question, or the first subject. For this, Patty, what are some general causes of burnout for immigration practitioners?

**Patty First:** Thank you, first of all, everybody, for joining and for those answers. It's really helpful to help us tailor what we say today. As Kristen mentioned, much of what I'm going to talk about today comes from a study that I did assessing the well-being of immigration practitioners in Los Angeles and surrounding counties. This was back in 2022.



**PF:** I want to just level set really quickly and define burnout a little bit. It's deeper than being tired, as I think you all know. The exhaustion, right, rather than just a tired day. It's like a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that's brought on by repeated or prolonged stress.

**PF:** That prolonged stress is really important because I think it goes to the causes for burnout among immigration practitioners. As you all know, immigration has always been a very intense field, a very intense thing to practice. For immigration practitioners in particular, lately, we look at the layers and layers and layers of prolonged stress. You have huge caseloads that have only increased. Then we layer onto that COVID. We've got changing laws in administrations. We've got the decreasing ability for practitioners to help clients achieve relief. Cases that once may have been routine are now much more high-stakes.

**PF:** You're having to constantly adapt as rules change. On top of this, organizations are losing funding at a time when they need more staff. All of this is really creating a lot of burnout among practitioners. One of the things we found in our study in 2022 is that burnout among immigration practitioners is very, very, very high. I'll leave it at that, I think, Kristen.

**KN:** Great. Thank you. Jori, I wanted to ask you, are there any bigger-picture causes of burnout that affect practitioners, not just job-related, but anything bigger that they should be concerned about?

**Jori McChesney:** I think right now, just outside of anything political, there are just a lot of different causes for burnout. There's the overwhelm with social media. There's the overwhelm with having to live your life in the world in general when there's so much uncertainty. Added to all of those layers, our work is part of our life. Oftentimes, our life can feel like our work. Really, there's a lot of overlap right now, especially in the service provider industry, if we're in it for a reason, because we care about other people. Sometimes it is very hard to separate self from job.

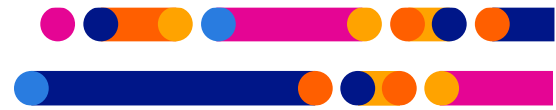
### Current Causes of Burnout for Immigration Practitioners

**KN:** Great, thank you. We're going to turn to Kathy next. Kathy, on the next slide, we're getting into some more of the current causes. What do you see as some of the current causes of burnout for immigration practitioners?

**Kathy Purnell:** Thank you, everyone. Thanks to everyone for sharing your insights so far. When I thought about the definition of burnout, much of which has already been touched on, one thing that I often reflect on is the physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, and how a lot of that is tied to negative attitudes towards ourselves and others that may just creep up on us.

**KP:** Thinking about some of the causes of burnout, there are many things that are happening now that are contributing to this sense of exhaustion, may impact our performance, and may generate without us even realizing it once we face these different stressors, the different negative attitudes towards ourselves and others where we may start to feel hopeless, feel drained, worn out, ineffective, underappreciated, powerless, or frustrated in our ability to shield our clients from harm. This is all very heavy stuff.

**KP:** In our moment, I think it's safe to say, especially given the responses that we've seen so far, it's really heavy, especially if we experience it in isolation or we don't frequently share or connect with others to talk about these things. I feel like it's important for us, as we see on this slide, to name them, especially in this space for the purpose of self-awareness to help us explore tools that can help us foster resilience and explore



how to develop and create supportive systems within ourselves and within our organizations to identify and help avoid burnout among ourselves and peers.

**KP:** When we go through these, I don't want us to get stuck in our perceptions of these factors, because we're bombarded with these daily. It seems like immigration is always the latest headline, and we're constantly, as Jori lifted up, being bombarded with these things on social media. Instead, I want us to look at these from a contemplative space, thinking about these as situations that can change at any time, the human toll and impact that they have, so that we can think about the strategies that we may already have within us and that we can expand within organizations to foster resilience.

**KP:** The first one, unpredictable immigration laws. This, in a way, is nothing really new to us as a community of advocates and people that work in this space, because as we all know, a lot in immigration law is dependent upon executive branch discretion, as it always has been. With new administrations, we do see a lot of regulatory change on immigration and new priorities implemented. Clearly, what's different now is the speed and the focus on immigration, which is often accompanied by a lot of dehumanizing public rhetoric on immigration in this space.

**KP:** Even though we see a lot of legal challenges to a lot of these new initiatives that seem to come at us at a very rapid pace, it's hard for us to not be impacted by this because the people who are impacted are human beings who are our neighbors. We see impacts on our colleagues as well as others that have to adapt to these changes every day. There's a clear human toll on us as practitioners as we try to struggle to determine with certainty how these changes will actually impact the clients that we're advocating for, how we advise them, and if we can ever get a sense of confidence that we've done all that we can or identified every remedy that's available.

**KP:** This adds to our workload and stress and contributes to feelings of, potentially, ineffectiveness once it becomes clear to us how little we actually can control despite all of our best efforts and preparation. It's totally human to be frustrated and angry in this space. Acquiring resilience for this first one may require rethinking how we define success and becoming aware of what we can and can't control. Then, also, to think about organizational resilience in terms of building support and engagement for our teams to help us navigate in this moment.

**KP:** With the second one, with bureaucratic changes, there have been many. These have included, most notably, rapid changes in immigration enforcement, which we've seen with the rescinding of an ICE memorandum, changing how immigration enforcement occurs, all the way to changes in who is subject to detention, mandatory detention, and expedited removal, among many. Then, most recently, on July 4th, changes in fees. These all are bureaucratic things.

**KP:** When we think about even just the change in the fee structure, for the first time, asylum seekers right now will be asked to pay fees to seek asylum. These rapid changes, clearly to name this, is important because it clearly adds to the stress and workloads of immigration practitioners and understandable feelings that these changes are not attuned to the lived realities of our clients and their vulnerabilities. We may feel that they're unfair. These, also, can lead to feelings of frustration and anger.

**KP:** Then the loss of funding and other support. This one, especially in light of the executive orders and the curtailment of support for refugee programs, I feel like, especially in this space, it's important to name that. For refugee programs and unaccompanied youth, we've seen the direct impact in terms of layoffs, the loss of



colleagues who are not only our peers, but the broader support structures for ourselves and our clients. All of these stressors are unique. They add to our workload, and they erode the support structures that we can lean into to help one another to get through this moment.

**KP:** To summarize, I think self-awareness and perception, naming these things are important because we feel these pressures and stresses all the time. The response to just hunker down, push through, work harder—hard work is always valuable and really critical, especially because so much is on the line for our clients. If we keep doing that, and if that’s our go-to response, especially when the entire context is shifting in ways that may not support those outcomes, if we don’t adapt successfully, and in a resilient way, burnout will have a way to creep up on us, as we’ll discuss later. It urges us to think proactively, “How do we cultivate resilience, both in ourselves and structurally in these times?”

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much, Kathy, for that really detailed response to this.

### Case Scenario: Sarah

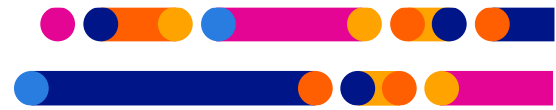
**KN:** Moving forward. All right. We have a case scenario. We’d like to introduce Sarah to you. Sarah is an immigration practitioner. She’s the only immigration practitioner working in a nonprofit that provides free immigration legal services to newcomer communities. During her four years in this role, the caseload has grown significantly due to the rising number of people seeking legal help as immigration procedures rapidly change.

**KN:** The combination of her caseload and added administrative duties leaves Sarah with little time for self-care or 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.

**KN:** For this, Kathy, as a practitioner, what factors do you see here that could lead to Sarah experiencing burnout?

**KP:** This scenario, I think, was really well crafted. It immediately made me reflect on my time leading a nonprofit legal office as part of a network, Justice for Our Neighbors [(JFON)] Michigan, which coincided with the period when I also started to design these resilience retreats for nonprofit leaders and attorneys. I empathize a lot with Sarah. I was the sole attorney in an office that, at the time I had started, had a half-time legal assistant and an eroding base of volunteers because of a prolonged absence of a regional attorney for the office. I was there from 2018 to 2021. If all of us do the math, that too was a period of rapid regulatory change in the immigration space.

**KP:** Our caseloads were exploding, and the demand for us to collaborate with other refugee resettlement agencies in a very intentional way to provide targeted forms of support and training for many vulnerable populations was also on the rise. Then COVID hit on top of everything else. JFON, now it’s called Immigration Law & Justice, the way we operated was in a church-based, community-based clinic model. The demands on our services did not decline, and yet, because of COVID, it became its own logistical nightmare. I definitely feel for what she’s experiencing.



**KP:** There are a couple of things that I wanted to lift up. The first is the need for boundaries to protect our capacity, to be effective, and to preserve the community that sustains us, like friends, colleagues, and family. In the second paragraph, this lack of balance in personal and professional life that we see was a major red flag for me. I think it's imperative for us as practitioners to never rationalize away how important it is to just take a breather, whether that's five minutes away from your desk, a quick walk outside, taking time to play with your cat, or more extensive breaks, like taking vacations, is really important to foster the ground that sustains us.

**KP:** This reminded me of my interactions with an executive director at JFON. She was extremely savvy. She was an attorney. She saw what was happening to me as a practitioner in that moment, and others. She implemented a policy, which at first I didn't understand. She just said, "No more emails after 5:00 to anyone on the team or during weekends." I scoffed at that at first because I thought to myself, "Why? I can't adhere to that. I'm thinking about my cases all the time. I need to get this message out to my legal assistant or to peers in other offices."

**KP:** It was interesting because her reaction to me was not to get annoyed with me, but she actually asked me why I thought it was necessary to send emails after hours. I really had to think about it. I didn't think I was an unreasonable person. I said, "I need to because I might forget. I'm working all the time, I'm thinking about my cases all the time. I might forget. I don't want to." She basically stuck to the boundary and the policy and then said, "Hey," creatively to me, "if you really need to write that email, schedule the send." Write it whenever you want, but it'll be received by somebody else during business hours.

**KP:** When I thought about that, that I think is a really interesting example of boundary setting at the organizational level because it forced me to really think about why was I so attached to this idea that I had to send out information or to think about my cases all the time. Why am I doing that? Is that really productive for either myself or for my colleagues?

**KP:** One of my favorite discussions about boundary setting, which I know we will talk about later in this presentation, Prentis Hemphill had a really great discussion where they note that the hesitation people feel when they try to erect boundaries has to do with the fact they may confuse them with walls, which basically are set up to try to initially maybe protect ourselves, but they have a way of congealing and locking ourselves in. It's better to think about boundaries as opposed to walls, which are more porous. Then, instead of trapping us inside, they're responsive, movable, and highly dependent on real-time assessment. Boundaries are necessary because they are how you guide and protect your life energy.

**KP:** This is something I think, when we think about whether it's ways to set boundaries for ourselves or institutionally with certain practices, like the email practice, for example, to really think about how to preserve the resilience of yourself and others in a space.

**KP:** Then, the other item that's in this scenario that I thought was really fascinating and brings to mind self-judgments and how our minds go to certain places, like Sarah clearly seems frustrated that her job feels like it's changed or transformed in ways because of the budget cuts, because of the layoffs to staff. Judgments like this can really add a layer to stress. The resentment and experiencing frustration is totally understandable. Then, when our minds immediately go to those kinds of thoughts, we may miss the various things that we can do in our immediate environment to transform our situation.

**KP:** This reminded me also, I mentioned, a lot of Stoic thought that I'll talk about more later, really encourages us to reflect on what we can control and what we can't control in order to really assess the wide range of things



we can actually do with what we can control. Looking at her situation, it made me think about my JFON situation during COVID. It felt like a logistical nightmare. It felt like we had no way of providing services to our clients in a way we really wanted to. When we took a step back and really thought about, “Okay, the main thing is, what’s necessary to serve our clients? What do we have the capacity to do?” It turned out that we ended up doing the mentoring and leading others, but by expanding our team of volunteers.

**KP:** We had people doing things like asylum crew, country conditions research. We were training a lot of people who were willing to work with us over the phone, work with us to do components of cases to dramatically expand the team. If I got stuck on, “Oh, wow, this isn’t what I was hired to do. I don’t have the resources,” instead of looking at what I could do in that situation to build our team’s resilience to meet our client’s capacity, it would have been an entirely different story. It made me think about what can we control? What can’t we control? Understanding we always have a lot more.

**KP:** The Stoics always like to talk about how they say that within our power are our thoughts, actions, our opinions, aims, desires, and dislikes. That doesn’t sound like a lot, but if you break it down, that’s actually quite a bit when we think about how we think about things that may make us angry, frustrated, and our power to transform.

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much, Kathy, for that really... reflection on what’s going on with Sarah here.

### Discussion Question

**KN:** I believe we have next another Slido. Again, you can use the same Slido screen you were on before, or you can rescan this QR code or go to the website [slido.com](https://slido.com) and enter this seven-digit number: 1666 620. Our next question is,

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

[silence]

**KN:** We’ll give everybody a couple of minutes here to respond. Too many cases, not enough staff. Feeling alone, for sure. Case notes, yes. Staying on top of everything. Lack of solutions, definitely. Not enough staff. Again, pressure from co-workers. [silence] Getting it 24/7 because your family members are also immigrants, yes. Definitely the outside forces. High demand, absolutely. Wonderful responses, everybody.

## 2. Warning Signs of Burnout for Immigration Legal Service Providers

**KN:** We’re going to move on to the next segment, talking about the signs and symptoms of burnout. Jori, these graphics, we’re going to see a non-exhaustive list of warning signs and symptoms. This will just list 12, but we know there are a lot more. Would you please explain a bit more about these symptoms?

**JM:** Yes. I apologize, were you going to put them up in the little—

**KN:** Yes, I should. Yes.





## Warning Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

**JM:** Okay. With the warning signs and symptoms of burnout, sleep problems is absolutely one of the number one, just because if our mind doesn't shut off, then it's going to impact our sleep. Sleep is so imperative to mental health, emotional health, physical health, all of that. When we have issues with sleep, it's going to filter into all other areas of our lives.

**JM:** Headaches can come from stress. It can come from eye fatigue. It can come from excessive thought processes, cognitive overload. Headaches are something that really we think can be from a variety of different things. It could be lack of water. Really attending to those physical needs can help. When you start to feel the headaches, drinking water might be able to help you determine whether it's just dehydration or if it's a symptom of burnout.

**JM:** Physical exhaustion. Our mental load, our emotional load, and our physical load, they're all sort of combined in this one bank of energy that we have every day. When we're physically exhausted, we have less to attend to our mental and emotional energies. Same thing if we're feeling overstressed, we have less to attend to our physical well-being. Physical exhaustion is another one.

**JM:** Illness comes about because if your body is physically tired, it has less energy to attend to fighting off colds and fighting off illnesses, that kind of thing.

**JM:** Anxiety is a big part. Sometimes it is important to identify whether it is worry versus anxiety because there is a big difference between "I am worried about my clients" and "I have anxiety because of my clients," and so understanding the differences there. Same thing with depression. "I'm really sad at the state of some things," versus, "I'm depressed." One is a clinical diagnosis and one is a feeling. Sometimes it is important to make sure that we're correctly labeling our feelings so that it doesn't feel like it's more of a chronic issue, although it all feels chronic at this point.

**JM:** Forgetfulness. Forgetfulness comes from lack of executive functioning. When we are living in a primitive cortisol and adrenaline flooding of our body, we have less ability to put our thoughts together, and that can lead to forgetfulness.

**JM:** The imposter syndrome: "I'm not doing what I can. Other people are handling it better." Imposter syndrome is across the board. I don't care who you are and what job you have; at some point, we've all had imposter syndrome. It's really hard not to go into how to fight that, but we will get to that later.

**JM:** Irritation. Absolutely, irritation with when you're driving, when you're answering a call, if you're in the middle of something and somebody says, "Mom" or "Dad" or your dog barks, and things like that. Irritation is a sign of burnout. It's a sign of overwhelm. It's also a sign of being human. It's important to identify that as well. Just because you're irritated doesn't mean you're overwhelmed.

**JM:** Withdrawal. It's that, "People don't understand what I'm going through. My family does not know what I go through every day," and so we have this tendency to withdraw. Because we can't share all of the details of what goes on in our lives due to confidentiality and things like that, it can feel very isolating. We can feel very siloed in our lives. That withdrawal is sometimes part of that burnout or overwhelm.





**JM:** Lack of interest. Somebody mentioned apathy before. Lack of interest in things that used to bring us joy, used to bring us interest. That lack of interest is part and a symptom of overwhelm and burnout.

**JM:** Escape fantasies. These can take on a variety of different descriptions. It can be escaping into books. It can be escaping into movies. It can be escaping into our thoughts. All of those can be used as coping skills, but there is a point at which coping skills can then influence the burnout and overwhelm, especially if it's used to distract when it is important to be attending to what's going on around you.

### How does burnout develop?

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much, Jori. I'm going to go over quickly on "How does burnout develop?"

**KN:** First, there's a honeymoon stage. As immigration practitioners, we all are idealists about helping our clients, doing good in the world, so we're full of energy. We're going above and beyond to prove ourselves and to do the best we can for our clients because we're advocates, right?

**KN:** Then we get to the second stage, which is more of a stress stage. Now we're starting to struggle to keep up with our work demands. We're starting to neglect self-care, maybe feeling a little irritated and anxious when things don't go our way with the administration or things don't go our way before USCIS, or we can't take on certain cases because they're not within our scope of work. It's just we start to feel a little bit stressed. Things are a little bit more of a struggle.

**KN:** Then, to the third stage, we get to a chronic stress stage. We start to feel a little bit out of control or powerless. We feel like outside forces are really dictating everything that we do, and we have very little say in what we can do. This is when you start to get your physical symptoms starting to manifest. You start to maybe feel sick more often, you get headaches more often, and your sleep is lacking.

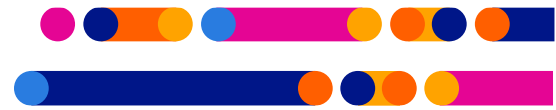
**KN:** The fourth stage is the actual burnout stage. This is where you're feeling empty, unmotivated, or isolated, definitely increased illness, taking more sick time, and you start to abandon your personal needs. Maybe you go down to showering every other day or something like that. You're just too focused on work, at the same time feeling unmotivated and like you're not really doing anything.

**KN:** Then, finally, you get to the habitual burnout stage. This is where you're always feeling low. You're always feeling anxious. You're always feeling fatigued. You have little interest in demonstrating your abilities. You don't care about your cases anymore. You're looking for a way out or a way to do something else.

**KN:** You can see how this develops. This isn't saying that once you get to stage five, you can never go back in stages. There are definitely things that you can do.

**KN:** In this slide, I wanted to also ask Patty, are there any other signs or symptoms that can develop during this process that immigration practitioners should be aware of?

**PF:** Yes. I want to point out two of them. I also want to say that with each layer here, your stress hormones rise—some of them anyway—cortisol keeps rising and rising and rising until you take active steps to unwind the stress and let those stress hormones come down. We're going to get to this in a second. That's why the steps to overcome burnout are very, very, very important for your health.



**PF:** Two things. One is compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue happens when you are in the stage of burnout where you no longer feel compassion or empathy for your clients. They just seem like one long line of people. I know a couple of folks mentioned apathy, feeling numb earlier. This is a sign that you might be heading towards compassion fatigue. If you are, it's really important that you talk to somebody, try to get some help, try to unwind some of the stress.

**PF:** Then the second one I wanted to mention that I meant to mention before is called secondary traumatic stress, or STS, which is when you repeatedly hear about somebody else's trauma, like in an asylum case, that can create a secondary traumatic stress response for you. Secondary traumatic stress and burnout are really highly correlated. Especially in immigration, they just live right next to each other. Just to put both of those on the table as well, in case you are feeling those. Also, because I think they particularly affect immigration practitioners rather than people with other jobs.

### Case Scenario: Sarah (continued)

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much. I think we go back to Sarah now, if I'm correct. Yes. Sarah 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 cases to work on next. Drafting legal briefs or statements for her clients is taking longer and longer to complete. She's also been experiencing frequent headaches, digestive issues, sense of constant fatigue. Her immune system seems compromised as she's been catching colds more often than usual. In addition, her personal relationships have suffered. She does not have the mental or emotional energy to engage with her friends or family. Her partner has noticed that she's often distant and irritable.

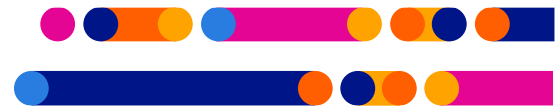
**KN:** Jori, what signs and symptoms do you see in Sarah here that could be signs of burnout?

**JM:** The burnout obviously is with the feeling exhausted and sad. The difficulty in deciding which cases to work on next, that goes to the cognitive functioning. Often with overwhelm, we feel like our attention is divided always, and it's really hard to put two thoughts together sometimes. That can be part of that not really knowing what to do next. Taking longer and longer, part of that is the overwhelm of the not being able to make this sentence meet this sentence meet this sentence. There can be a hyper focus on trying to get this one piece perfect rather than looking at it as a whole, which could also be taking longer and longer.

**JM:** The frequent headaches, digestive issues, and constant fatigue—that could be fully related to not being hydrated, not getting the right food. That's where it's also really important to be attending to your physical well-being, especially when you're feeling rushed. Our body does tell us what it needs. With headaches, sometimes it really is just, "How much water have I had today?"

**JM:** The personal relationships, the mental or emotional energy to engage with family and friends, feeling very isolated, and often, the more we withdraw, the more isolated we feel, and the more our family members or our friends don't know how to help us. At some point, they just go, "Well, she'll come to us if she needs our help." Then there's a disconnect. Then there's a, "I can't go to them because they're too busy."

**JM:** Again, that distant and irritable, that definitely goes down to that feeling isolated and withdrawn. It's hard to feel connected when you are withdrawn and overwhelmed and stuck in your head with the work that you're doing.



## Poll Question

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much. Next Slido. This is just a poll just to see which of these signs of burnout that you see in yourself. You can enter one by going to the QR code or going to the website again.

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

[pause]

**KN:** Definitely taking longer to do things is for sure. [chuckles] All of these things. The screen's pretty evenly divided. All right. Thank you so much. We'll move on to the next.

## 3. Strategies for Minimizing Burnout and Maximizing Well-Being

**KN:** Now we're going to talk about what we can do to address all these issues. I'm going to start with Patty. How can workplaces better support immigration legal advocates to avoid or overcome burnout?

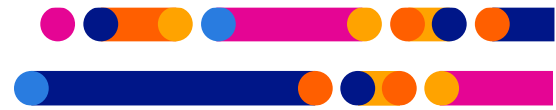
### Overcoming Burnout

**PF:** I know that the report link was just dropped into the chat, so everything that I'm talking about actually comes from—in our study, we asked interviewees what their organizations could do to help them overcome burnout or to take steps to ensure they didn't get burnout. These come directly from other immigration practitioners. The first thing I'll say is it's very important to get help from professionals because recovering from burnout is a multilayered process. In our study, like I think we've heard from some of you, many immigration practitioners said they were too overwhelmed to care for themselves because they had the weight of people's lives on their shoulders. What I'm going to talk about has that background as well.

**PF:** The first one is having managers ask people how they're doing for real. Like ask staff what interventions would be most helpful. The solutions to burnout at an organizational level cannot be top-down. They have to be informed by staff. I think in doing that, in asking, we're also normalizing talking about burnout, which is not talked about for real [chuckles] in organizations often. It's maybe paid a little bit of lip service to, but really talking about it, normalizing that.

**PF:** The third is paying for therapy or having a health plan that pays for therapy, having options so you can choose a health plan that pays for therapy. We heard from several people that after paying for rent and groceries, they didn't have money for anything else, and that many in the immigration field are also dealing with historical or personal traumas. Often, that's why they get into the work in the first place, because it may be their background or their family's background or their history. Being able to unpack all of that and unpack the causes of your burnout at the same time with a professional is really important.

**PF:** Compensating other self-care activities like meditation or yoga classes or gym memberships, the organization compensating these things. I will say for all of these, we also had recommendations in the report that funders need to fund these things for organizations. We recognize that organizations have budgets and need more money. Letting staff know that it's not only okay to take care of themselves, but it's really essential to their work, so teaching people about burnout. Model setting boundaries, for example, as an organization, as Kathy was talking about earlier.



**PF:** Then the last two really are understanding that different cultures are going to need different things. For example, you might have some people for whom you keep talking about self-care, and they're like, "This doesn't resonate for me. That's a really Western idea. What about community care?" Just recognizing different cultures are going to need different things, and the organization has to be adaptable to that. Then paying for coaching, paying to help people, again, figure out strategies that are going to help them through this, and help them to get to a better place.

**KN:** Great. Thank you. Then for setting personal boundaries, Kathy, what are changes that immigration legal advocates can make to their personal lives to avoid or overcome burnout?

**KP:** There are many. Actually, I really love one of the final points that Patty made about there's no one size fits all and that different cultures may require or need different things, or different things will resonate with different people. I wanted to just lift up, I guess, generally, these are some things that I found very helpful, and I think there are a wide range of these sorts of practices that exist out there.

**KP:** The general categories I wanted to lift up was just, again, boundary setting, by being attuned to your body and mind, especially, because as we've discussed, there are many warning signs for burnout, a lot of things that can put us at risk for that, especially if you're experiencing negative self- or perceptions about others.

**KP:** For me, contemplation breaks have always been helpful. As advocates, especially lawyers, I feel like we use our minds all the time, but not necessarily to think about and reflect on our own thoughts and why we may be feeling or judging situations in certain ways. Mindfulness can range from getting grounded and focusing on our breathing to mindful walking to gratitude practices, where we are more aware of the wide range of things that keep us grounded and supported in this moment.

**KP:** Then when we think about challenging or using contemplation breaks to challenge negative attitudes towards ourselves and others, doing things that lift up or look at things that remind us about our fundamental humanity. There's so many wonderful examples in Stoic thought, and I can't possibly share all of these with you today, but you can find all of these online. There are a bunch of things called sunrise meditations in Stoic thought, and a lot of them look like this.

**KP:** One of my favorite ones is—it's a really short paragraph, and it just reminds us and urges us, if we have—Literally, it starts out, "When you have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning, think about what your job is, that you're getting up not to do a job, like a profession only, you have a job to do as a human being." That helps me a lot because it reminds myself that I am not my entire job, that I have other obligations to other human beings and my cat, among other things. Thinking about what that looks like for you, and to let that guide you.

**KP:** Then another really fun one is the sunrise meditation. It's from Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, where he says, "Today I will rise, and the people that I will encounter will be surly, scheming, but they're all human. We all need to work together, the way that teeth fit together." It's just sometimes, just reading. Timeless text, for me, has always been helpful, but that comes from my background. My PhD is actually in political philosophy, so that's what made me start to want to share with a lot of lawyers who may be resistant to general mindfulness or meditation practice to also find other ways to reflect on one's attitudes and limiting thoughts, like timeless texts, but there are a lot of different ways to do that.



**KP:** I think one thing that I do feel lawyers and a lot of immigration advocates are great at, there are many different ways to fight that tendency to isolate ourselves or to just wall ourselves off from one another. There are so many different listservs and ways to give mutual support. Not just from AILA, which is the American Immigration Lawyers Association, but there's so many coalitions that have listservs where people freely give mutual guidance and support to one another. I feel like those are really helpful to get tapped into, and organizations should pay for those types of support networks because they overcome quickly the limited staff or resources that any one organization may have by reaching out to one another and allowing people to access those resources.

**KP:** Just as one quick fun aside, the same ED that I talked about before, in our first staff retreat, she actually passed out copies of the book *Trauma Stewardship*. It's a phenomenal book. The reason she did that was to force a conversation in a safe space or a brave space to talk about self-care and our self-perceptions when we're providing services to others, that we need to be cognizant of how we're showing up and that we need to take care of ourselves in order to be effective in caring for others.

### Individual and Organizational Strategies to Reduce Burnout

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much. Now we're going to turn back to our 12 signs and symptoms. We want to leave a little bit of time for questions, so I'll go through this fairly quickly. There's going to pop up in fours, Kathy, if you could address any personal ways that people can overcome these issues, and Patty, if you can address any organizational strategies that businesses can take.

**PF:** Sure thing. Do you want me to start with organizational?

**KN:** Sure. Go for it. Cool.

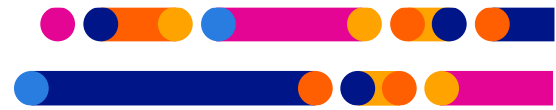
**PF:** We've divided these into physical issues, mental, and social. For physical, things organizations can do are things like providing gym memberships or class pass or whatever so that people can go and take care of themselves if they want to. Encourage walking meetings. Encourage breaks. Even just a supervisor saying, "Hey, I noticed that you've been working for four hours, six hours straight with no break. Why don't you take a break for half an hour and go outside if you can?"

**PF:** Limiting caseloads. I know that's really hard to do, especially as more and more organizations need more money and staff, but having some kind of limit on caseloads or a better way of spreading them out, I've seen that as being really helpful.

**PF:** Kathy, do you want to address the first row of physical strategies, and then we can move on to the second row for individuals?

**KP:** Hi. Yes. I feel like we all have a lot of expertise in this space. I was just going to lift up one type of meditation practice that I really wanted to lift up and share, and I've added it as one of the resources, is called RAIN. That's specifically for individuals who may feel overwhelmed. That may crosscut with several of the symptoms that we're seeing on this slide. RAIN is a really easy acronym for Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture.

**KP:** The Recognize is just sit with, without judgment, the situation that you're facing. Allow these things to be without judgment so that you can have that reflective space and not immediately react to something. Then also



Investigate by posing questions to yourself and about your understanding of that situation. The big one is N, the Nurture, to have self-compassion when you're experiencing a moment of overwhelm. If you google that, there are a lot of great resources and guided meditations. It's a good place to start. The link that I shared can link you to other additional resources as well.

**PF:** Thank you, Kathy. That's great. I use RAIN all the time. It's fantastic. Highly recommend it. On the mental health side for organizations, having a wellness policy. A lot of organizations do not have wellness policies. Having a wellness policy is great, and there are models that you can find online. As I said earlier, compensating therapy, compensating people for self-care, allowing for mental health days and for breaks, wellness stipends. Having someone that people can talk to when they need to. For example, if they just did a really hard intake, who is the person on staff that they can immediately talk with? Things like that. Jori, do you want to just mention putting your own oxygen mask on?

**JM:** Sure. One of the things that I talk to all of my clients about is that we all know on airplanes, if something happens, we have to put oxygen on ourselves before we can assist others, even our own children, because without oxygen for ourselves, we lose the ability to help others. Whether that putting oxygen on yourself is taking a small, little walk outside, stopping, taking 10 seconds to just focus on your breath. One of the grounding techniques I've worked with people on is just looking around and identifying five things that you see in your immediate area can help slow down and, again, put oxygen into your breath, oxygen into yourself, so you can then attend to other people.

**KN:** If it's okay, I'm going to cut you off here. I think this has all been good ways to help all of these things, but I wanted to move on so we can get to the Q&A. We have very little time, but thank you so much.

### Case Scenario: Sarah (continued)

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

**KN:** Sarah speaks with her supervisor about ways to improve internal processes and to 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, she decides to set specific work hours, take regular breaks throughout the day, and start cycling classes at her local gym.

**KN:** Jori, can you recommend any other additional options for Sarah to pursue to improve her well-being?

**JM:** Sorry, I was a little distracted. Setting specific work hours is very important. Part of that is making sure that you're scheduling time with other people so that you're building up those natural supports. That sometime we don't think about is really reinforcing those natural supports and those natural connections that we have with other people, making sure that we're spending time now.

### Discussion Question

**KN:** Great. Thank you so much. We'll move forward. Last Slido. Let's do this one really quickly.



### How do you set boundaries between work and personal life?

**KN:** Couple seconds here. If you don't have an answer, that's totally fine. [chuckles] [silence] Logging out, yes. [silence] Not giving your personal cell number. [laughs] That's a big one. [silence] Logging off. Everybody else seems to agree. Logging off, turning off the computer, going home. Perfect. All right. Thank you all so much. We're going to move forward. We have a short amount of time for Q&A.

## Q&A Panel

**KN:** If anybody has any questions, please type it in the Q&A box. You'll see that at the bottom, a little box that says Q&A. You can type right in there. I did have one question I wanted to start with. Let me see if I can get to it.

### What is a good way if you have reached the stage of burnout to move backwards? What would be the first thing that you would recommend people do?

**PF:** Jori, I think you should take that one.

**KN:** [laughs]

**JM:** I think the first thing that you should do if you feel like you are or you are concerned that you are moving into a state of burnout is reaching out to your employers. Some employers have EAP programs. They're employee assistance programs. The other thing to look at is looking for therapeutic services in your area. There are low-cost options. Having somebody that is a neutral third party that doesn't have an emotional tie to what you're doing can help in downloading or offloading some of the concerns that you have in a safe and confidential environment.

**KN:** Great. I wanted to mention one of the things in the question and answers is somebody asked,

### Do other states have lawyer assistance programs, either a committee or a service?

**KN:** They recommend that. Maryland has this for attorneys. I'm licensed in Washington. We have one. I think a lot of other states do. One of the nice things is attorneys are mostly pretty supportive of each other, especially in the immigration context. Patty or Kathy, do you want to add anything?

**PF:** Many states do. Not every state bar association does, but many bar associations, even if they don't have that, they have a well-being area community of practice, or something like that. Those are also really helpful because, like Jori was mentioning earlier, they give you the community of people who are talking about the same thing, and that it's just really helpful to know that you're not alone.

**KP:** Absolutely, yes. I was just going to add that's one of the resources, the AILA Lawyer Well-being Committee. If you are a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and even if you're not, because what I love about that is they make that resource, the lectures and the talks they do for Well-being Week, that's public. Even if you're not a member of AILA, you can access that.

**KP:** Kristen, you're on mute.





**KN:** Thank you. One more question here from the question and answer:

**What do you recommend when you recognize burnout in yourself and coworkers, but your employer is not well situated to support you or doesn't know how to support you?**

**PF:** That's hard. I would say a couple of things, and I know we're right at time. One is feel free to use the study we did to give your employer some specific things that you would like them to do. It does not have to be super expensive. It can be supporting flexible work schedules, things like that. There are also grant programs that some funders have.

**PF:** For example, I know if you're in the LA area, California Community Foundation and the Weingart Foundation have a pooled fund for wellness at immigration organizations. It's called the Immigrants Are Essential Fund. I think there are probably other organizations or other funders that do the same thing. I would be very specific with your employer about what you need and have a conversation about what they think they can do. I would also have them look for foundation grants.

**KN:** Just one quick addition. The Retreat Center Collaboration, that's actually a national network where people, if you want to go and just take a step away and go to retreat, many of the organizations on that list will actually have programs where they will pay or waive the fees for retreats or for housing at a retreat center. In addition, I know that the Fetzer Institute, and there are others like this that will actually give organizations the space and snacks and the time to bond at a retreat center. They give nonprofits free space so that they can have these types of retreat experiences as a group. That would be another resource to think about if resources are tight.

**KN:** All right. That sounds amazing. I want to look into that. Thank you all so much for attending today. We're right a little bit over time, so we're going to go through the last couple of things real quickly.

## Conclusion

### Reviewing Learning Objectives

**KN:** Just to repeat the learning objectives: Hopefully, you'll be able to explain the general and current causes of burnout, be able to identify at least 12 warning signs of burnout, and you're able to apply some of these organizational and personal strategies to minimize burnout and maximize personal well-being.

### Feedback Survey and Recommended Resources

**KN:** We could go for quite a bit longer on this topic. It's hard to fit everything into an hour. We've also identified some resources that you all can refer to. In the meantime, please scan this QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey. It's a very quick survey, just five questions, that helps us improve our future trainings and technical assistance.

**KN:** Some of the links are appearing in the chat right now. Hopefully, you'll be able to click on those, and then we'll also be sending them out after the webinar when we send out the video and the other resource links.



## Stay Connected

**KN:** Thank you so much for all attending. We really appreciate it. Here's a way to stay connected with Switchboard. Go to the SwitchboardTA.org website. Email [switchboard@rescue.org](mailto:switchboard@rescue.org). We're also on YouTube. [laughs] I forget all the different—a lot of ways to access Switchboard. Go to the website, and you'll be able to access all that as well. Thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

**JM:** Thank you for the opportunity, Kristen.

**KN:** Thank you, Jori, Patty, and Kathy. We really appreciate you speaking today.

**PF:** Thanks so much.

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