

Sustainable Leadership for self and when leading others.

By Caz Pringle Bowden

Unmasking

- Recognise and name the *hidden costs* of over-functioning: perfectionism, people-pleasing, and masking exhaustion.
- Late diagnosis or hormonal shifts often strip away the ability to keep “holding it all together.” Naming this is not weakness.
- Awareness creates choice: we can lead with transparency rather than performance.

Body-Based Pacing

- Sustainable leadership starts with *body literacy*: noticing fatigue, overstimulation, and energy rhythms.
- **Normalize cyclical and tidal energy**
- Integrate rest, movement, and micro-regulation practices throughout the workday — short walks, stretching, grounding, sensory resets.
- Replace narratives of “push through” with “pause and recalibrate.” We don’t subscribe to or celebrate the “sleep when your dead, no pain no gain” hyperproductive narratives.
- Designing work schedules around cycles and times when resilience might be lower. Job sharing when capacity is fluctuating.
- We don’t need permission to rest — we need leaders who understand that rest *is* the revolution. Presenteeism is not helpful for anyone.

Self-Compassion

- Reframe “laziness,” “disorganisation,” or “burnout” as signals of needing to tend to your nervous system, not failure.
- Burnout is not just exhaustion — it’s a nervous system injury
- Practising self-kindness builds internal safety and reduces shame.
- Compassion is a leadership competency, not a luxury.

- We're not too much — we're just wired for wonder in a world built for consistency.

Systemic Shifts

- **Redefine what effective leadership looks like:** flexibility, empathy, and relational care *alongside* productivity. **Relational care** the idea that safety and wellbeing are built through *relationships* — not just tasks, checklists, or outcomes.
- **Corporates often treat burnout like a “battery issue”** — take two weeks off and recharge. But ADHD + hormonal burnout needs a **systems reset**, not a recharge. The brain's threshold for overstimulation has changed — and so must the environment.
- Returning to the same expectations (multitasking, sensory load, emotional labour) without change is like sending someone with a sprained ankle back into a marathon.
- **Promote repair over performance:** ask “What would make this sustainable?” instead of “When will you be back to full speed?”
- **Stop rewarding urgency:** replace “quick turnaround” with “thoughtful response.”
- Consult with and integrate the perspectives of the neurodivergent people.

Peer Support

- Connection with others who are going through similar experiences reduces isolation and shame.
- Build networks or groups for women navigating ADHD, hormonal changes or neurodivergence in leadership.
- Sharing lived experience normalises support-seeking and collective resilience.
- Neuro-affirming and lived experience specific EAP and access to mental health supports that are designed for their neurodivergent brain.