



What If You're Not the Problem?



Hi, I'm Sheridan. I'm a psychology-trained somatic coach, researcher, and bestselling author. My work sits at the intersection of nervous system science and sustainable success.

I help sensitive, neurodivergent, and trauma-aware professionals recover from quiet burnout, rebuild capacity, and create ways of working that feel steady and humane. My approach blends qualitative research with coaching (drawing on Polyvagal Theory, emotional alchemy, and organizational psychology) to turn insight into sustainable change, within, and without.

[Click here to learn more about my story and qualifications.](#)

AI disclaimer: AI was used only for the practical parts – transcribing interviews and helping me condense sections for readability. I did all the reviewing, theme-finding, and analysis myself, and the final perspective is fully human-developed from my own research and interpretation.

Introduction – The False Binary

Over the past fifteen years I've sat on every side of the work equation (employee, entrepreneur, coach, and researcher). I've been told I was "too much," "too sensitive," and once, when I was 17, even "too Latina"... simply because I asked for my break on time. It was my first taste of how difference gets pathologized instead of understood.

Since then I've supported hundreds of professionals (many neurodivergent, trauma-aware, or quietly burning out) to rebuild clarity, calm, and confidence in how they work. And in my own seasons of collapse and renewal, one truth keeps surfacing: the problem isn't that we're broken. It's that our bodies and workplaces have different, conflicting needs.

When asked who or what was to blame for burnout, participants were conflicted. They blamed the system. Then themselves. Then the system again.

"I'm wired to never feel like I've done enough... it comes from childhood, always feeling slower than the rest of the herd."

- Jen

“Burnout isn’t just about work — it’s emotional problems outside work trickling in.”
– Koser

“You’re responsible for your professional health... you get to decide where you’re going to contribute your skills.”
– Jacqueline

This pendulum between self-blame and systemic frustration captures the modern worker’s paradox: we’re aware of the structural problems, yet still carry the physiological imprint that says *if I just tried harder, I’d be fine*.

The friction zone lives right there, between the nervous system’s need for safety and the culture’s addiction to performance. Understanding this tension is the beginning of redesigning how we work.

We live inside systems that reward endurance while our biology depends on rhythm. Growth-at-all-costs culture, rising living expenses, constant evaluation, and the myth that more insight automatically creates change. Decades of occupational-health research confirm that burnout arises not from weakness but from a mismatch between human design and work design (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

So this report begins with a simple question:

How do sensitive, neurodivergent, and trauma-aware professionals navigate the friction between their nervous-system needs and the systemic demands of modern work — and what practices restore alignment between the two?

You’ll find:

- Why burnout isn’t your fault
- What the real body-work mismatch looks like
- 7 somatic experiments to try this week
- How nervous-system safety becomes the foundation for creative, sustainable work

The Friction Zone — What People Are Feeling

Across forty conversations in design, tech, health, and entrepreneurship, the same patterns echoed: people doing “a good job” yet feeling nothing, a tired-but-wired loop of thoughts, insomnia, craving weekends that fill their cup and a sense of certainty, security and freedom.

“Sometimes it feels like I’m walking a tightrope — trying not to inconvenience others.” – Nancy

“I’m not overworked — I’m under-challenged. I’ve graduated from my job.” – Caroline

“I could hustle and contact 100 people today ... or create space for big-picture stuff.” – Edi

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Somatic coaching for burnout recovery — available online in Australia, the UK, and globally.

The deeper I listened, the clearer it became: burnout isn't a single state. It's an oscillation between body and environment, ambition and rest, belonging and authenticity. Most participants weren't disengaged; they were overloaded by ambiguity and under-resourced by recovery.

Their language was somatic: *zombie-like, frozen under a blanket, curling up to stare at the ceiling*. These weren't failures of discipline but signs of a biology begging for a different tempo.

Safety Before Strategy – Core Insight

Under chronic threat – economic uncertainty, AI disruption, evaluation cycles – the nervous system diverts energy from creativity toward survival. Awareness helps, but safety precedes strategy: insight can't land in a body that doesn't feel safe. Regulation in practice looks like pacing, clarity, and honest limits; the baseline becomes “I can handle what comes next.”

Research from neuropsychology and Polyvagal Theory shows that without perceived safety, the brain prioritizes defense over problem-solving (Porges, 2011; McEwen, 1998). Many interviewees described workplaces where belonging had to be earned but it wasn't clear how to do so:

“If I'm left out of stuff, it kind of hurts ... maybe my life would be better if I could feel content.” – Laura

“There are times as a founder it feels lonely ... you have to be okay doing difficult things.” – Jack

“I gave everything to this company ... and had to be ushered out by an admin.” – Shannon

As Brené Brown (2018) notes, most workplaces equate belonging with proving value rather than being valued for who we are. Yet Amy Edmondson's (2018) research on psychological safety confirms the opposite: people do their best work when they feel seen, supported, and safe to speak up.

When participants finally experienced true safety – a part-time arrangement, a circle of peers, a manager who saw their humanity – their bodies relaxed and creativity returned.

“They quickly created a part-time role for me ... realizing my value made me take the gas off myself.” – Elizabeth

Adaptability & the Body – Why Somatics Matter

We're living through relentless change. AI is reshaping industries; economic and political systems feel unstable. The collective question underneath every interview was:

“What do I do when it feels like the rug has been pulled out from underneath me?”

Adaptability — not certainty — is the skill that determines who thrives. And adaptability is physiological. A regulated nervous system lets us perceive nuance, recover from stress, and make clear decisions in uncertainty.

Somatic practice is therefore not a luxury but a performance technology rooted in biology. It teaches the body to distinguish challenge from threat, allowing curiosity to stay online even in chaos. This is especially critical for sensitive or neurodivergent professionals whose systems register overload quickly.

“High achievers don’t know when to switch off ... we take on too much until it’s too late.” – Katherine

“I fill my cup and then something stressful happens and I’m ten steps back.” – Blake

Somatic work builds the muscle of recovery — the ability to return to baseline faster. Over time that becomes confidence: *I can meet what’s next.*

The body learns adaptability through small, consistent rituals that build flow, trust, and safety.

1. **When you feel emotionally flooded or reactive**, you can try a 2-minute *Emotional Alchemy* practice — pause, bring awareness to your body, name one emotion or sensation, and breathe into it without trying to fix it. People often find that it helps the feeling complete itself and brings calm before responding.
2. **When you’ve just had a win or success and feel yourself shrinking or self-sabotaging**, you can try the [Expansion Practice \(chapter 9 of my book\)](#): orient to one pleasurable or grounded sensation and hold it for 17 seconds while breathing. People often find that it helps the body learn that it’s safe to experience more ease and abundance.
3. **When you’re stuck overthinking a decision** you can try [Strengthening Intuition through Somatic Intelligence](#): close your eyes, notice sensations in different body parts, and see which option feels softer, lighter, or calmer. People often find that this helps them access clarity and quiet confidence, rather than analysis paralysis.
4. **When you’re procrastinating or lost in perfectionism**, you can try small “experiments in spontaneity” — order a different coffee, take a new route, or release something imperfect. People often find that it helps rewire the nervous system to feel safe being visible and creative again.
5. **When you’re tense after feedback or feeling unsafe in structure**, you can remind yourself, “I have agency now.” Then adjust one element of your workflow (change a deadline, delete a task) and notice your breath steadying. People often find that this restores a sense of choice and safety in systems that once felt oppressive.

6. **When you feel disconnected or uninspired**, you can try the *Accessing Inspired Action* exercise: embody one supportive belief (“I can trust myself”) and ask, “What’s my next natural action?” Then wait in stillness until an answer arises. People often find that it leads to grounded motivation rather than forced effort.
7. **When your body feels agitated or overactivated**, you can try cross-body movements — alternating right hand to left shoulder and vice versa for a few minutes. People often find that it balances both brain hemispheres and brings a tangible sense of regulation and focus.

Adaptability isn’t built through control; it’s built through relationship. The more predictable signals your nervous system receives — through rituals, rest, and self-dialogue — the more fluidly you can move with uncertainty instead of against it.

Rebuilding Alignment — From Micro to Macro

Decades of organizational research mirror what the body already knows: autonomy, flow, and psychological safety predict sustainable performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2016). Systems thinkers like Senge (1990) and Meadows (2008) remind us that genuine change starts with mindset — with the internal patterns that shape every external system.

Micro-shifts (pausing before saying yes, breathing before replying, structuring rest as seriously as deliverables) create macro impact. They build the learning organizations and humane workplaces we keep wishing for.

If you’d like support applying these tools inside real-world constraints, [explore Somatic Coaching for Burnout Recovery](#). Or listen to reflective conversations on [The Sustainable Success Podcast](#).

A New Rhythm for Work + Invitation

Change isn’t slowing down. The pace of technology, politics, and culture will keep testing our capacity for uncertainty. But when we prioritize the body, we anchor in something ancient and trustworthy: rhythm. Somatic rituals (therapy, yoga, creativity, time in nature, coaching) are how we learn to move through change without losing ourselves. They’re not indulgent. They’re intelligent.

So go book the session. Join the class. Return to the practice you know restores you. And if you’d like to explore this work with me, here’s how:

Book a [Curiosity Call](#) — a free 20-minute chat to explore what’s coming up for you and whether somatic work could support you. Or, if you’re ready for structured support, my 5-week pilot begins soon, email me at sheridan@sheridanruth.com to enquire 🤍

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