What's Your Relationship to Making the Impossible Happen?

Heroics

You are a superhero, yes? You're the one that gets called to step up and save the project that was initially mismanaged or has gone off the rails. You're the one that can be counted on for calm leadership when an engagement enters crisis mode. You make order out of chaos.

For achievers, it can feel amazing to be the chosen one. Well, it feels stressful as hell or like a soul-sucking slog while you are making the impossible happen. But the *payoff feeling* when you are done… now *that* feels good.

For like a minute.

If you are honest with yourself, you probably barely have time to acknowledge your win before moving onto the next herculean effort or to pick up the pieces from projects that were neglected while you were saving the day.

It's okay to like the feeling that comes from doing what others can't. In fact, be proud you are such a badass! But if it is coming at an expense to your well-being, then it is time to step back and chart a new course forward.

Mind Games

It's common to fall into the "just get through this and things will be different" thought trap. But it's not healthy. And it's unlikely.

More likely, you are caught in a pattern where leadership above you (whether or not you are a leader) routinely under-resources projects (whether time, budget, technology, or staffing) and overcommits to stakeholders (e.g., clients, their own boss, the board, etc.).

You may also think the stakes are so high you can't let the project fail. (Your boss may literally be telling you they are that high.)

Two common versions of high stakes:

1) We can't let the client down

Yes, delivering results/products to clients is what the organization is there to do. But I ask you, is there a history/pattern of over promising what can be delivered to a client and on what time frame? Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the engagement is scoped appropriately in the first place? If you keep delivering the impossible, it will continue to get written into agreements for deliverables.

2) This is key for the organization's reputation

I don't doubt that this may be true. But I do ask, why is it up to *you* to save it? If the issue is a true priority for the organization, why isn't the leadership above you properly strategizing/resourcing/planning/leading?

Are the stakes really that high?

If you had a health emergency that took you out of work for a month, your employer would figure out how to cope without you. That project with the non-negotiable deadline? I'd wager it would be changed or the deliverables scaled back or executed to a lesser quality.

When you don't push back, you are treating the deadline, scale, scope, and quality as immutable givens. They rarely are. And it shouldn't take a health emergency for you to attend to your well-being. You deserve workday vitality every day.

And that's what makes this extra hard to stomach – the same organization that touts employee well-being as a priority is the one where you are sacrificing your own day in and day out.

Consider This

In the absence of your organization's culture magically changing, it falls to you to decide whether you'll continue playing the role of the savior.

1. Do some introspection.
This part isn't necessarily fun so give yourself some grace.

How have you contributed to the dysfunctional situation? Consider how each of the following may or may not be a factor.

To what extent is your professional (and personal) identity wrapped up in being a hero or achiever?

To what extent have you taken careful stock of your own work portfolio before taking on too many additional projects?

How is your skill in prioritize your existing work, including renegotiating, delegating, deferring, or choosing not to complete it?

How true is this statement for you? *"I know that technically I can do [the impossible thing], so I feel compelled to do it. It feels like failure otherwise."* Explain.

2. From your reflection above, what, if anything, do you need to change or work on?

3. Understand your personal tradeoffs

Consider the consequences of the stress and long hours you put in to save a project. Contrast that with the ego boost you get from achieving and any immediate or likely financial gain from delivering.

What are you getting by delivering and what does it cost you?

4. Think through consequences

Ponder what might happen if you challenged the status quo and stopped being a superhero. **What if you just delivered exceptional work, not heroic work?**

How might your boss react? Would this impact your reviews negatively or would they still be positive, just without a note about your ability to save the day?

How would it impact your chances for advancement? Have you paused to ask yourself if you want to continue advancing in this organization, given its culture?

How would your professional capital and reputation be impacted inside your organization? Outside it?

5. Check in

Take a moment to step back and see where you are at now that you've reflected.

What's on your mind?

What does your gut say?

How is your body feeling?

What is the very next thing you need to do about any of this?

6. Next steps

Make a plan to follow through on what you determined was next.

If you don't know what's next, then brainstorm a list of small ways you might be able to assert some healthier boundaries, regardless of whether you make a bigger change later. For example, consider not checking your email during certain hours or ending a meeting on time so you can eat lunch.

Choose 1 to 3 items from that list and commit to experimenting with it tomorrow or next week.

Your Plan:

BeBurnoutProof.com