



Whitepaper

Voice Dialogue and burnout

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How can Voice Dialogue help with recovery from, and prevention of burnout?

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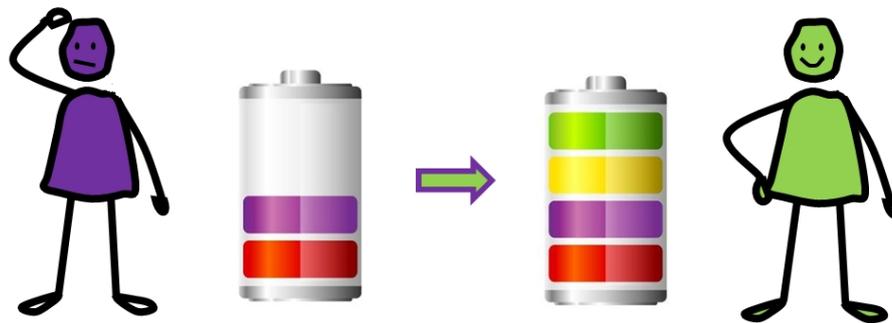
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How can Voice Dialogue help with the recovery and prevention of burnout?

Anita Roelands & Robert Stamboliev

1 Introduction

Almost 16% of employees in organizations in the Netherlands experience burnout complaints (Hooftman et al). With an employed labor force of 8.7 million people, this means more than 1.3 million people (CBS). As a coach, you will regularly come across people who walk around with burnout complaints. With coaching you can mean a lot to these people. However, you may have noticed that you cannot always start working with your method immediately, simply because you notice that clients are too tired for psychological work. This article provides guidance on how to check when you can effectively start using your methods. We also discuss the question of what you can do for people with an (impending) burnout before you start working with your client with therapeutic methods.

2 Diagnosis: burnout

There are slightly divergent views on burnout in the Netherlands. One view is that burnout falls under psychological complaints and that burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, distance and reduced competence (Taris et al., 2013). The treatment that results from this definition is aimed at improving the coping style and reducing somatization. Somatisation stands for the phenomenon that physical symptoms are caused by psychological or emotional factors. Another view is based on burnout as a physical exhaustion reaction of body and mind; this usually as a result of prolonged use of the stress system on the body (CSR Center, Sapolsky, 2004 and Feltz-Cornelis, 2014). The treatment focuses on learning to stop this and finding the causes of the exhaustion. These two views, by the way, do not exclude each other, because one of the causes of the depletion of energy is generally the fact that there is a less effective coping style. New research will lead to adjustments to the existing definitions regarding burnout (Desart et al, 2017). Hopefully, as a result, a clearer bridge

can be built between the different views that prevail around burnout. Until that time, healthcare professionals will place different accents (emotional versus physical exhaustion) in their approach, diagnosis and behavior, prompted by the fact that they both point to a different cause. The first view is about the lack of an adequate coping style; the second view is that the client has too little knowledge and skills to know how to top up his own battery). In short, burn-out is in the first view between the ears and in the second view in the body. In this article we start from the second view: burn-out as a result of the depletion of the physical battery. As a result of this empty battery, people then get physical, cognitive and psychological complaints. In addition, the exhaustion may have to do with a poor coping style, so we will certainly discuss this here.

3 Two types of burnout

In addition to the above views on the occurrence of burnout, a distinction can also be made in the way in which burnout shows itself. We distinguish two types of burnout. Burnout type one does not seem to be a burnout for the outside world, because this form of exhaustion is characterized by hyperactivity. At first glance, hyperactivity appears to belong to an entirely different domain than exhaustion. However, this is misleading because exhaustion is often very large with type 1 burnout. It is characterized by a constant nervous, rushed feeling, due to a structurally too high cortisol level. The body is in a constant state of activation. People who suffer from this can no longer get their system into a rest position; this as a result of a disrupted autonomous nervous system. In addition, the cerebral cortex - the place in the brain where information is received, processed and interpreted - receives less fuel due to a lack of energy and the quality of mutual brain connections decreases. This leads to concentration problems and ineffective behavior. People can also suffer from all kinds of other physical, emotional, cognitive or behavioral complaints. These people need to be slowed down, because otherwise they will get too low an energy level and their effectiveness will be compromised (LESA guideline, 2011).

With type 2 burnout, the cortisol level drops; the hyperactivity can no longer manifest itself. There has been such a large buildup that exhaustion is complete: the battery is empty. With these people it is unclear how they can be slowed down; the point is that they are hardly able to do anything (Keijsers, Van Minnen & Hoogduin, 2004). Where with burnout type one the problem is that the "off" button or "resting position" is no longer easy to find, whereas with burnout type two it is precisely about being exhausted because of the "on" - button or "activation mode".

First Aid for Stress Complaints

For the first burn-out complaints of both type one and type two, it is also wise that clients call in sick to have the disturbed stress hormone balance repaired at home and to (learn to) recharge the battery until there is sufficient physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral again. resilience is to return to work (LESA guideline, 2011).

4 The importance of the intake

First of all, it is important to estimate whether the client is developing a burnout or whether there is even a burnout. Whether it is type one or type two. After all, in order to be able to perform psychological work as a counselor, it is necessary that the client is sufficiently resilient. This resilience requires that the client can control himself again. Treatment is often not possible at the low point of a burnout. In that case, tranquility, few incentives, nature around you and a lot of sleep are usually the most important ingredients. Before you actively start working with a client, a certain degree of resilience is required. An important goal of the intake is to be able to properly assess this resilience. We estimate resilience by investigating how much energy the client still has (how full or empty is the battery?).

In the intake you can make a cognitive and energetic assessment of the severity and extent of burnout. Both inputs can be used side by side. If the diagnosis and objectives are clear, treatment can start. We first set out the two ways in which you can conduct the intake in succession.

5 The intake performed cognitively and practically

Prior to the intake interview, questionnaires can be taken with which you can objectify the extent to which there is burnout here. The response scores that emerge from these questionnaires provide an impression of somatization, stress reactions, possible depression or anxiety reactions, degree of exhaustion, cognitive functioning, distance to work, feeling competent and type of complaints. These outcome measures give you, as a healthcare professional or coach, a first impression of the extent to which you are dealing with a form of burnout. These results also show whether other psychological symptoms are involved, such as an anxiety disorder or depression. However, due to personal response tendencies (exaggeration or weakening), a distorted image may arise and this information must always be verified and supplemented during the intake interview. Questionnaires and intake interviews are therefore complementary to each other.

Questioning the type of complaints in the cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioral field during the intake interview provides a lot of information. With burnout, combinations of the following characteristics are common:

Cognitive characteristics

- poor concentration
- can no longer record information
- experiences everything as "too much"
- Unstructured thinking and poor decision making
- reduced memory
- doom thinking and worrying

Emotional characteristics

- all emotions are stronger than usual or someone indicates that they have been remarkably flat lately (nothing touches anymore; indifference)
- feeling desperate, powerless or despaired
- sad
- panicky
- feeling guilty

Physical characteristics

- dog-tired
- major unrest and hunted body
- bad sleeping
- pain complaints such as back, stomach, head and neck pain
- high blood pressure
- hypersensitive to sound

Behavioral characteristics

- get nothing out of your hands
- have limited professional and social effectiveness
- react differently than they know about themselves (for example, be easily annoyed or cannot or will not stay in groups for long).

As a healthcare professional or coach you pay attention to the number of complaints from the above list that are present at the same time and the duration of these complaints. If three or more of these symptoms have been present for more than half a year, that is an indication of a burnout. The chance that this is actually the case increases if there is a strong presence of "exhaustion" or "fatigue".

During the intake it is also important to check a number of preconditional, influential matters regarding the energy level. Try to get a picture of other energy users, such as the presence of a chronic illness or addiction, a process during debt counseling, but also at life events, such as a divorce, death (mourning), work stress, dismissal or, for example, a relocation, illness up close. Also consider medication, alcohol and coffee use, eating behavior, current condition. Also check screen use of TV, laptop, smartphone. Due to intensive screen use in the evening, the stress system can persist; this can seriously disrupt falling asleep and sleeping. It is also important that blood values (for example for iron, thyroid function, diabetes) are checked by the doctor.

During the intake it is good to be alert to the simultaneous occurrence of burnout with symptoms of depression, anxiety disorder or other psychopathology. For example, someone who has many panic attacks or often hyperventilates may experience excessive anxiety and possibly develop an anxiety disorder.

We have only discussed the ability to estimate the burnout above. We have left out other intake topics and questions that we ask to get a complete picture of the client. This involves, among other things, questioning someone's work and private situation, how the complaints have developed in succession, whether there have been previous treatments and with what purpose and what expectations someone comes. In this article we omit the general side of the intake for the rest.

6 The intake performed energetically: working with resonance

We have described a cognitive and practical approach so far. In addition, to detect burnout as a facilitator, we can use ourselves as an instrument. In this article we follow the methodology of Voice Dialogue. This does not mean this is the only method or technique that can serve as an energetic entry point for burnout. You can also think of cognitive behavioral work, Schema Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming or, for example, System Constellations. By using yourself as an instrument, we assume that people are, as it were, "made the same way". It is precisely through these agreements that it is possible to make "energetic" contact with each other. We call this energetic tuning "resonance" (Stamboliev 2012).

Resonance is a general human principle that can also be found in the language that we use. Expressions such as "she is such a warm person" or "what a cool cat" indicate this energy perception. Many people are "energy sensitive" by nature but are often unaware of this. By learning to use this sensitivity consciously, you become a better "instrument" as a facilitator.

People perceive in different ways. It is important to know your own strengths and to develop your own style of resonance. Some are by nature - or "culture" (think of upbringing) - perhaps less sensitive than others to listen to their bodies and work with resonance, but it is certainly possible to learn and train.

If the facilitator has worked on himself sufficiently and does not suffer too much from counter-transference, then he can get information about the client by listening carefully to himself. This can be done beforehand in silence (if you already know the client), but also during the course of the session.

If the client takes the floor, the counselor may experience a feeling of heavy tiredness in his body after a few sentences. He literally hears this tiredness in the voice of the other, or it is expressed through his own body. It is also possible that the facilitator sees an image, for example a fallen tree or someone with heavy chains on arms and legs. It can also happen that the facilitator gets a heavy feeling in his body, for example, as soon as he gives an explanation himself to do a certain exercise. Such physical reactions can act as a warning signal. It may indicate the condition of the client. The counselor can then check these promptings or images as if they were actual symptoms that emerged from a questionnaire (see the cognitive approach described above). We have learned over the years to take these signals very seriously.

Two forms of resonance

There are different forms of resonance, two of which are discussed below. It is about resonating through one's own body and resonating through the conscious calling of one's own sub-personalities.

-Resonate through your own body

Your own body provides a lot of information. This approach fits in well with Gendlin's Focusing method. While breathing quietly, bring your attention to your body and wait for a response. This can come in the form of a thought, an image, a word. After the reaction comes up, focus on your body again to experience how the body responds to this perception. This way you can go back and forth a few times between the experience in your own body and the reaction to it, until you have a stable handle. You can ask your whole body for a reaction, but also specific parts. What happens in your abdomen, chest, head, etc., and what does this part tell you?

-Resonating through consciously calling one's own sub-personalities

Calling one's own sub-personalities is part of Voice Dialogue, a method developed by psychologists Stone and Stone (1989; 1991; 1993). Voice Dialogue is based on the idea that these different parts, these partial personalities, can each be approached separately. Each sub-personality has its own willpower, thoughts and feelings, and its own voice. After sufficient training you will know a number of them and you will be able to consciously evoke them within yourself. This way, the 'controller' can feel in us how things are with the client's 'controller'. The 'vulnerable child' in us feels how it is with the vulnerability of the other person, the Power will feel how it is with the power of the client.

In the counseling you can then ask the client how he experiences his body. If the client is still in the early stages of burnout, this can work well. Here we want to emphasize the importance of the intake again, because if there is a burnout, it is often too tiring for a client and asked too much to ask this question. The client is then still in a complete "shutdown" mode, in which first of all rest and sleep are required (see earlier).

The energetic approach; case 1

Robert: "Man, in his mid-40s. The original question is about dealing with conflicts and its leadership style. There are just a lot of changes going on at work and client has interpersonal problems with some of his team members. When we talk about this, I notice that I feel myself getting heavier. I then check with my client what it is like to talk about this. He indicates that it costs him a lot of energy. When I think of possible interventions and discussion topics, the heavy feeling I experience becomes even stronger than before.

I advise the client to definitely take a month off. This coincides with the holiday season - we are approaching summer - and he is relieved. Two months later he has recovered sufficiently, he has some of his natural resilience back and we resume the coaching. He has not been burned out, but was hit just before the summer.

The energetic approach; case 2

Robert: "Woman, late thirties. She was diagnosed with burnout by the company doctor. The resonance that I experience with her is strange. What she describes resembles burnout in words. At the same time, I do not experience the usual weight or fatigue in my body when I tune into my client. This surprises me. I get the image of a young kitten that meows happily. This resonance dynamic is repeated three times. I choose to share this with her. She recognizes it and laughs.

I advise her to have a medical check-up done. This shows that she has contracted a virus earlier on a trip to Africa. This virus can be treated relatively quickly and easily. The complaints disappear after a short time."

7 Recovery from burnout

Due to the exhaustion, the client with burnout often experiences great distress and emotional instability at the start of counseling. There is a strong need for guidance for dealing with the disease and for sitting at home. In addition to exhaustion, this emotionality and need for support are reasons that psychological work does not work at that time. The need for total peace and quiet, concentration problems and difficulty in taking in stimuli disturb the interaction. If the client has many questions that refer to the need for support and stability, there are indications that active interventions and treatment are still too early.

The most important goal in this phase of burn-out recovery is to get the energy up to standard and then to keep the battery filled.

Gaining energy

In order to get the energy up to standard, it is wise to explain how a person's battery actually fills up and how a person's battery drains (CSR Method) through education about the stress and recovery system. In addition, it is important to see if there are enough moments of recovery in someone's day schedule. The client is given a number of precepts as a guide, such as:

- relaxation after every effort
- nothing in the evening
- limit screen usage
- "uptake" towards the night
- do pleasant things during the day, but which are short-lived and
- build in a lot of peace

In this initial period of coaching you work as a counselor from the 'expert' role and from a supporting role. You provide guidelines and therefore guidance in this period of disruption. This includes daily routine, diet, sports and exercise and improving sleep.

Keep the battery filled

To preserve the acquired energy, clients must learn to recognize signals. These are signals that indicate that a person's battery (the total amount of energy in all cells of the body) needs to be topped up. To keep your battery filled, it is also the art to help the client recognize what costs energy and what gives energy.

Signals present themselves differently for each phase, Jaap van der Burgh and Hans Reijnen say in their book "Burned out. Recognize the prevention and cure of burnout "(2007). They identify four phases that people go through when developing a burnout. The four phases are:

1. healthy phase
2. risk phase
3. phase of chronic stress (also called overvoltage)
4. exhaustion, or burnout.

In the recovery from burnout, we walk these phases as well as possible in reverse order with the client. You examine which signals someone currently has and knows about themselves. This can be on a physical level, but also on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level. We do this primarily for the phase where someone is. In an experiential way we let clients understand which signals someone

has and knows about themselves in the other phases. For example, we try to walk a route from phase 4 via phase 3 and phase 2 to phase 1 (healthy phase). When all phases have gone through, the client is not only "healed", but he has in particular learned to name, recognize and act on the characteristic signals at each phase.

It gives the client reliable information to watch for these battery signals; this is usually better than just paying attention to the amount of energy felt. Namely, when many stress hormones are active in the body, they can give a "feeling of energy". However, this "energy" is misleading; the client still does not know how much energy is actually in the battery. Signals are then a more reliable source. You help the client to recognize these signs of battery run during the day, so that the client can act on it in the moment. You can also have signals of battery run-off determined with resonance techniques. You then end up with a knot in the stomach, a rising headache, a trembling eye, an increased muscle tension in the forearms, neck or shoulder blades, and so on. It appears that unique clients can indicate unique cues that can be used as an early warning system to prevent worse.

By means of the above you help the client to investigate what helps to activate the recovery system and to stay in it for a sufficiently long time, so that the overactive stress system normalizes more and more.

Both topping up the energy level and normalizing the stress system give a first impetus to self-care. If the client learns to get and keep the battery filled, your role as a coach is informative, supportive and stimulating.

Then you help the client deal with the causes of stress, the pitfalls and challenges, taking into account the battery. All this is about discovering the art of living; how can they enjoy all this again and live in full potential?

8 Work with Voice Dialogue on recovery from burnout

When the energy has increased again, there is enough support for daily things, then it is time to look at possible internal causes, in the personality of the client. Only at this stage do we start working intra-psychically. We do that with Voice Dialogue, where we let go of the expert role to a large extent.

With the underlying model of the "psychology of selves", Voice Dialogue is not only an important diagnostic tool, it can also have a literally "healing" effect. It is an effective method for restoring the balance and for self-management.

For the introduction of Voice Dialogue, we must go back to the time when Jung formulated his theories about complexes and archetypes (Jung, 1960; 1965). Since that time, we have become familiar with the idea that a person consists not only of one "I", but of a large number of different "I's" (parts, sub-personalities, archetypes, energy patterns).

Another important principle that Stone and Stone use (1989) is the arrangement of the parts in polarities. On one side of the polarity there are the survival mechanisms (primary selves), such as the controlling part, the tendency towards perfectionism, the critical powers and the rational energies with which people can work and which they use to cope with life. For example, a part that we use to survive is the part of us that is nice to others, the so-called pleaser.

Each of these parts, or poles, has an opposite part that we are often not aware of or that we have suppressed (disowned selves). We call these the opposites of the survival parts. For example, we can find emotional energies opposite our rational survival energies and our needs, weaknesses and

vulnerabilities as opposed to our strength and independence. And if the pleaser has developed as an aware ego, then there is a disowned self, in which the egoistic side of us will be found.

Time and again it appears that we, as human beings, cannot function well if we do not understand these oppressed parts of ourselves and structurally deny them in ourselves. This applies to both our private and working lives. If we only live from our survival strategies, we will lose our balance and discover that we are missing "something". This applies to us as individuals, but also to teams that work together within the framework of an organization: if teams or departments stick to an organizational culture in which only a certain type of behavior is valued, they will sooner or later get stuck or lose their balance.

A key aspect of Voice Dialogue is the development of the so-called Aware Ego (Stone and Stone, 1989). This Aware Ego means that you take a middle position between the poles; from there, a large number of sub-personalities are accessible and many more informed choices can be made. From the Aware Ego, these choices are almost literally more deliberate, because - from all kinds of poles one after the other - you can always make different considerations and thus arrive at your choice. We describe below what a Voice Dialogue session with "The Hard Worker" looks like in practice.

A Voice Dialogue session with "The hard worker"

Johan has achieved a lot. He is 35 years old, has built his own business in the communications sector and offers work to around 20 people. He would like help with the question why he is so tired and listless and no longer has any inspiration. He was referred by a friend who has experienced the same thing and who is familiar with working with polarities.

When Johan comes for a first interview, he appears to be very tired, possibly a pre-stage of burnout. However, he is stable enough to work intra-psychically.

Together we investigate which values are important to him. There appear to be several, because his highly developed sides are:

- Hard work;
- Perfectionism;
- Taking responsibility; and
- Wanting to be nice.

We conclude together that this combination of values carries the risk of burnout and can explain why Johan feels that way at the moment.

He then gives "voice" to one of his developed sides, the "hard worker".

By talking to this side, it becomes clear where "the hard worker" comes from and what motivates him. In this way Johan will be better able to recognize this side of himself when it comes to the fore. And by "giving a voice" to this side something else is happening. Giving unlimited space on this side of itself (stretching) leads to self-relativity after some time. It is as if "the voice" will automatically stop talking and then show its opposite pole (see figure 1).

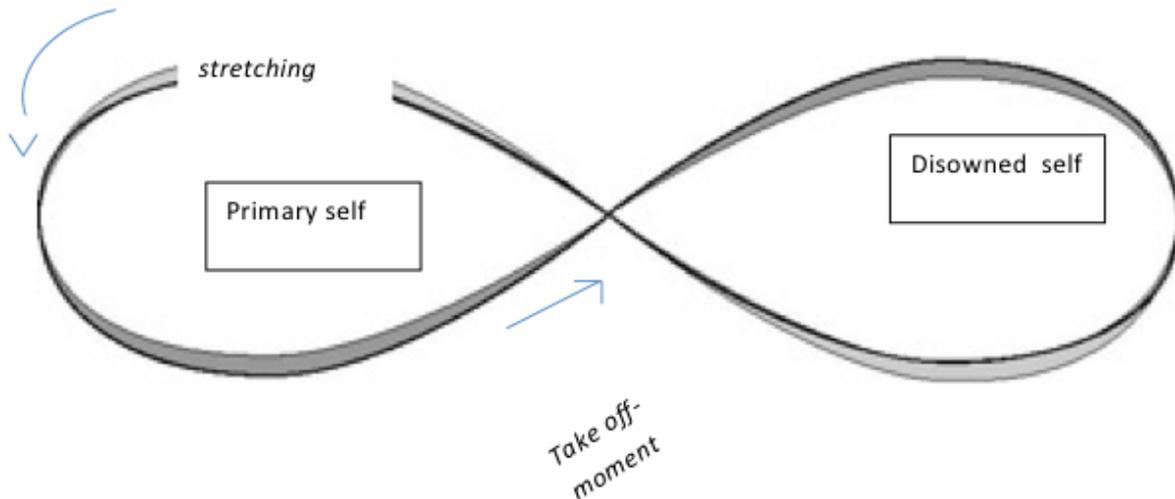


Figure 1: Stretching technique

Johan then naturally experiences his other, less developed side. He feels tired and sad and suddenly sees a big black hole in front of him, what we call "vulnerability." He decides to investigate this side further and thereby further develop this side of himself. He is going to devote more time to himself, do nothing more and be more alone. That is a conscious choice for him at the moment. By using this technique he learns to consciously and proactively take care of his vulnerability instead of outsourcing it to the primary survival pattern.

In the following conversation Johan examines what it is like when he is more at home and takes the time for himself, so is less socially active. Is he still liked? Because that was also one of his values, "being liked".

He wants to try to find the balance in "healthy selfishness."

We will once again list Johan's polarities in figure 2 below.

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------|---|
| Hard working | opposite | Relaxing |
| Perfectionism | | It doesn't have to be perfect |
| Taking responsibility | | Letting go |
| Wanting to be liked | | Setting boundaries Choosing for yourself |

Figure 2: Polarities in the Johan case

Johan's primary aspects (the concepts on the left) do not have to disappear, in fact, they belong to him. But too much of it is not healthy, he has experienced that. So it seems important to find a counterweight in the opposite pole, the right-hand side. This becomes possible because Johan has become aware of his vulnerability and fears that were protected by the survival pattern and that he can now take care of himself. Johan decides to keep the weekends to himself, to delegate more at work, to be critical of his time (for example by limiting the amount of business meals) and generally having more fun.

Subpersonalities that can rob your energy

A subpersonality is susceptible to robbing ones energy and it starts to turn against the person if it is not balanced with its opposite. We often come across the following subpersonalities that are predisposed to people susceptible to burnout (see Figure 3). Both preventively and to recover it is important that we help the client to become aware of this, to develop an Aware Ego for this part and to gain access to the opposite pole. The latter generates energy and ensures balance.

| Primary | Opposite |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| The Pusher | The Relaxed one |
| The Perfectionist | "Can it be a little less?' |
| The Responsible | The one who can let go |
| The Autonomous | The one who can ask for help |
| The Pleaser | The one who can set limits |
| The Personal | The Impersonal |
| The Helper | The Selfish one |
| The Fixer | The Accepting one |

Figure 3: Deployment-sensitive sub-personalities and their opposite

Finding a good balance between the primary parts and the opposite pole is an art in itself; an art of living. Certainly if the subpersonalities are predisposed.

9 The art of living with burnout: what does life want to teach you?

With regard to coping, learning to deal with the stress factors that come your way, many people can learn a lot. For us as coaches/counselors, there is a lot of beautiful and important work to be done in this area. We see it as an art of living to keep yourself in balance in heavy weather. This art of living not only applies to the recovery from burnout, but is important for the development of every human being in all facets of life. And yes, coping is an important skill to learn and develop when recovering from burnout.

Learning to recognize your primary selves and to see how much energy they use is a major step in recovery from burnout. Clients recognize the tiring of it as soon as they see that they are, as it were, trapped in that fragmented pattern. When a client comes loose from a subpersonality such as "The Perfectionist" or "The Loyalist", the underlying vulnerability suddenly becomes noticeable. Often there is immediately room to take care for themselves instead of acting loyally or perfectly. There is also the possibility to choose for other behavior, behavior from the opposite pole ("The Relaxed One" with texts such as: "let things go," "80% is good enough" or "Can it be a little less?") . The development of these opposites and the possibility to make contact with them provides a reservoir of energy and provides much more freedom of choice and behavioral options. That is something very different from the route that someone first has to get burned out and inadvertently "commutes" to the opposite pole by becoming sick and being unable to do anything for a while.

Primary parts are only energizing if they are in balance with their opposite pole. And that balance can only arise if one's own vulnerability can be tolerated. We call self-care to tolerate and take care of

this vulnerability: paying attention to and taking care of all parts of us; also and precisely the disowned selves and those needs and feelings that we have suppressed for a long time.

The art of living with burnout is:

- being able to perceive your own subpersonalities
- taking care of the underlying vulnerability
- gaining access to disowned selves
- recognizing battery signals and be able to top up the battery in time
- Being able to set limits with the help of these parts

Being able to apply this means that you can choose when the perfectionist is actually quite handy to use and when not. You will see that it is ok to cancel a night out for work from "The Loyalist", but then also speak to "The Beach Bum" in yourself and then once again to sleep undisturbed for a hole in the day. This is how you learn to dance with the different parts in yourself.

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