



# **MANGING THE WELLBEING OF YOURSELF AND YOUR STAFF**

**A guide for NZDF Leaders on how  
to avoid burnout and craft a better  
work life**

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# Looking after yourself, your family and your team

By the time you get to leadership roles, you are old enough and experienced enough to look after yourself, without being told how. The problem is, sometimes work and life gets hard and we can find it difficult to make the right decisions for our own wellbeing.

If you are not healthy and well, you will have a hard time looking after your family, let alone your team.

This workbook has a dual purpose. It is designed to prompt you to be honest with yourself about how you are tracking and give you some tools to improve your work life design. At the same time, you also need to think about how you lead and look after your people. The decisions you make about how you craft your personal workplace wellbeing has implications for how your people can manage their wellbeing. They will follow your lead.

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# Work and Life

The role of a leader or manager can feel all encompassing. Not only is the workload high, but the emotional burden of being responsible for your people as well as outputs can weigh on you. On top of that, you need to still have capacity for your home life. This can be tough to balance, but it is possible.

There is a lot written about work life balance. You can Google the topic and find ‘Six Tips to Work Life Balance’ or ‘7 Steps to a Better Work and Life,’ but we will never really get to the heart of the issue until we get real with ourselves about the realities of work and life. In the words of Nigel Marsh, “certain job and career choices are **fundamentally incompatible** with being meaningfully engaged on day to-day basis with our family.”<sup>2</sup> You may have a young family, aging parents, fur babies or teenagers. You may have no significant family demands but a busy side hustle as an adventure sports athlete. Whatever your home life is, finding time to fully invest in it may be severely hampered by the demands of significant leadership positions.

The fact that you have made it this far in the organisation, suggests that you are here (hopefully) because you want to be. **You persevere and pursue this work because it is meaningful and worthwhile.** If your job is important to you then it is highly likely you want to be seen by your superiors, peers and subordinates as capable, confident and in control. You may place a lot of stock in your work reputation, and have ambitions for future roles. If ambition is not in your veins, you may be driven to work hard to ensure your people are safe and looked after, or to ensure that the work is done right (or all of the above). Whatever drives you, the problem is you may find yourself being swept into long days, after-hours calls, worrying in bed late at night over tasks, demands and decisions instead of sleeping. Your attention is not limitless, which means your ability to switch over and give your kids, partner, or friends your full attention is impacted. The wheel is spinning, but the hamster is in the back checking his work email.



**“Work is a rubber ball, if you drop it, it will bounce back. The other four balls - family, health, friends, and integrity - are made of glass. If you drop one of these, it will be irrevocably scuffed, nicked, perhaps even shattered.**

Gary Keller

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<sup>2</sup> Nigel Marsh is a British author, check out his ted talk on work life balance: [ted.com/talks/nigel\\_marsh](https://ted.com/talks/nigel_marsh)

# Burnout

Let us take a moment for a reality check. The NZDF is trying to survive in a post-pandemic world, with high attrition, similar to many other organisations. The global pandemic has led many people to re-evaluate their priorities around work and life, often deciding they want more of the latter - more of a life. In the NZDF, we lost civilian staff rapidly as well as Officers, NCO's, and key trade personnel. The result is that remaining staff will be picking up the slack. People who were already working hard will now 'double hat' and try to cover short falls. The burnout of our key staff is likely to be our greatest risk for immediate future.

By the way, I am talking about you. If you are in the NZDF and in a leadership role, chances are you are working hard, and giving it your all, and you may be at risk of giving too much of yourself to meet outputs.

Burnout is not some psycho-babble word of the hour. It is a real syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress characterised by:

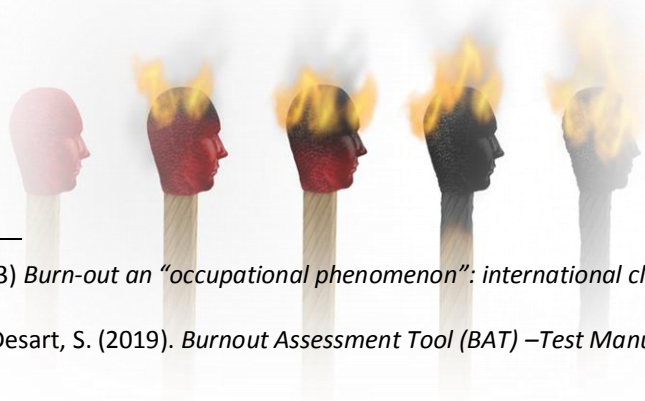
- Feelings of energy depletion, exhaustion or overwhelm
- Increased mental distance from one's jobs or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- Reduced professional efficacy (belief in your own ability), potentially manifesting in feelings of incompetence.<sup>3</sup>

People sometimes describe it as feeling as if they are drowning. Sometimes, people can manage the work stress as it piles on, and get through the day ticking off items and staying close to being on top of things. However, when they get home, they have literally used up all the energy they had to give and have nothing left for their family. This can manifest for some people as having a very 'short wick', meaning your kid just has to leave a sock on the floor and you flip out. For others, it might result in a strong desire to hide or run away. Some people drown their stress in alcohol. It may look different for different people, so let's do a quick quiz and see where you are at:

On the following page is a validated questionnaire called 'The Burnout Assessment Tool-Short version' or BAT-12. The questionnaire was developed by Schaufell, De Witte & Desart in 2019<sup>4</sup>, and the one included here is a shortened version of the original.

The intent of including this is **NOT** for you to self-diagnose, as this tool was **not** designed to provide a conclusive diagnosis. The purpose of this tool is to give an indication of burnout-related symptoms and to prompt you to act if your score highlights any concerns.

Review the items and fill this out for yourself or pass it to someone in your unit or family. If the score indicates a high risk of burnout, then the best course of action is to seek help from a health professional. A list of NZDF providers is included at the end of this workbook.



<sup>3</sup> World Health Organisation (2023) *Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": international classification of diseases*. Retrieved from [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

<sup>4</sup> Schaufeli, W.B., De Witte, H. & Desart, S. (2019). *Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) –Test Manual*. KU Leuven, Belgium: Internal Report.

## Burnout Assessment Tool –Short Version (General)

### Instruction

The following statements are related to how you feel. Please state how often each statement applies to you.

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
<b>Exhaustion</b>					
1. I feel mentally exhausted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. At the end of the day, I find it hard to recover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I feel physically exhausted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Mental Distance</b>					
4. I struggle to find any enthusiasm for my work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I feel a strong aversion towards my job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I'm cynical about what my work means to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cognitive Impairment</b>					
7. I have trouble staying focused	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I have trouble concentrating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I make mistakes because I have my mind on other things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Emotional Impairment</b>					
10. I feel unable to control my emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I do not recognize myself in the way I react emotionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I may overreact unintentionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Scoring

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
1	2	3	4	5

Add your scores up to get a total score, then divide your total score by 12 (the number of questions) to get your average score.

<b>No-low risk of burnout</b> = Average score of <b>1.00-2.53</b>	<i>If you score in this range burnout is not likely an issue.</i>
<b>Moderate risk of burnout</b> = Average score of <b>2.54-2.95</b>	<i>If you score in this range you may benefit from getting help (or doing something different).</i>
<b>High risk of burnout</b> = Average score of <b>2.96-5.00</b>	<i>If you score in this range you should get some help.</i>

## Digging into Stress

Burnout is about a chronic overload of stress over time. We feel exhausted because our levels of stress are high and work is relentless –there is no respite. Given the relationship between burnout and stress, it is a good time to dig into stress itself. By understanding exactly what we are talking about, we can use this information to our advantage in tackling potential burnout issues.

Let's get the lingo right for a start. We bandy the term 'stress' around, and this can be confusing to some degree, as stress could be a feeling to some, and a reaction to others. To help our understanding, let's use the term 'stressor' to refer to the thing in our environment that generates a reaction in us, and let's refer to that reaction we have (whether emotional or physical) as 'the stress response'.

### *Flight or Fight*

You have probably heard about flight, fight or freeze, but it is worth going over it again to help us understand our relationship with the stress response. It begins with the familiar tale of the cave person and the lion...

The stress response in humans, often referred to as **flight or fight**, evolved from our need to scan our environment for danger, and then make quick decisions on how to get ourselves out of that danger for one sole purpose – survival. The cave person milling around on the African Savanna would see a rustle in the grass and immediately the oldest part of our brain – the amygdala – located deep within the temporal lobes, would sound the alarm (it's a lion!). Your amygdala initiates the release of neuro-chemicals that result in significant physiological changes to the body. Our heart will beat faster, blood pressure would rise, and airways open up. This is all geared to get our body ready to run or fight.

What should we conclude from this? **The stress response is good.** It is adaptive and it helps us survive. When we are feeling 'stressed' our body is on alert, it is prepared for action. It is this adaptive stress response that has allowed humans to stick around for as long as we have.

## The upside of the stress response

It is worth taking a quick pause to just dwell on that thought for a second – the **stress response is good**. You likely joined the military because you wanted a little adventure in your life. You wanted some action. You know that this organisation places its people in situations that are often dangerous and demanding. We deploy into combat environments, disaster zones, and areas of unrest. We do it for good reasons: to help people, to protect our country's security interests. Our stress response serves us well in these situations. Our response to stress heightens our senses, gears us for action and allows us to push our bodies past normal endurance. When there is no stress, pressure or threat we have to work harder to motivate ourselves and stay focused. Take a second to imagine yourself in a job with no stressors at all. What would that job look like? Is that the sort of job you would like? I would guess not.



## The Stress Cycle

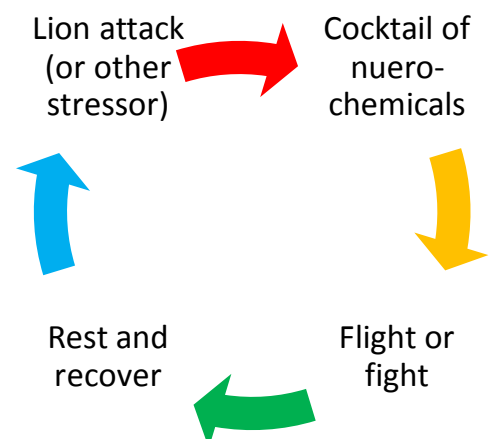
The story of **flight or fight** has an ending that we do not often focus on. We run from the lion, we climb the tree, scale the cliff or forge the river, get back to our cave, and collapse on the floor next to the fire. Our clan mates guard the door, cook us up some nice fresh fish, and listens in awe to our exciting tale of survival. We are exhausted, having run far, but we rest, recover and restore our bodies through good food and social connection. This is because the *flight or fight* response is part of a **stress cycle**.

The hormones released in the initial 'oh sh\*t!' reaction need a chance to dissipate. Physically, our heart rate needs to return to normal, and we need to restore energy to our body after we have expended it on running or fighting. Psychologically, our brain needs to acknowledge 'I am safe now'. **Burnout occurs when we do not get a chance to complete this cycle.** In other words, burnout can occur when we stay in a physiologically aroused state for a longer period of time and psychologically, at some level, we don't feel like we are in a safe place. Our bodies need to return to homeostasis, which means getting back to a balanced state where everything is functioning normally. This includes normalizing our heart rate, blood pressure, and energy levels, and our brain recognizes that we are no longer in danger.

When stressors are coming at us thick and fast, if we do not get deep restorative sleep and do not get a chance to relax and recover, we can enter a state of chronic stress. The exhaustion resulting from burnout can occur because we have been in a state of active engagement with the threats in our environment, and our bodies are simply worn down from the lack of respite.

## Completing the Stress Cycle

So how do we complete the stress cycle? A long weekend and a scented bath? The reality is that dealing with stressors is a constant process; it is not a one-off weekend away on the Kapiti Coast. If we are facing stressors daily then we need to do activities daily that complete the cycle. What activities? Here is the magic bullet you have all been waiting for....





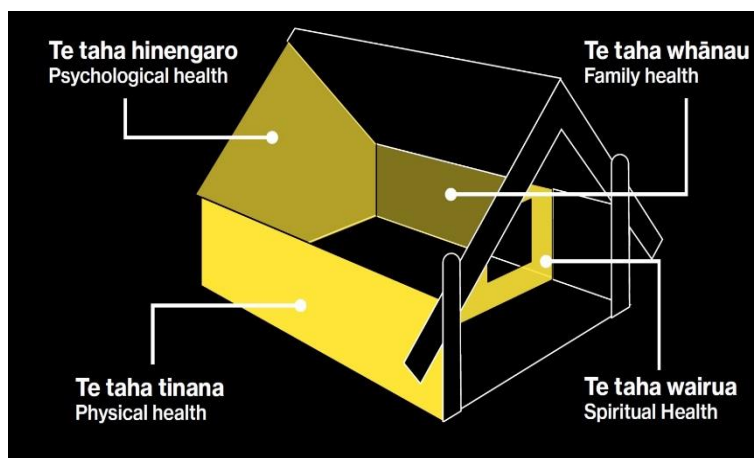
The best way to complete the stress cycle is exercise, deep restorative sleep, great social connection with people who care about us, and eating good healthy food. That's right, it's no magic bullet, it is not a one-off solution and it certainly isn't rocket science. The research is clear that these four things are foundational to dealing well with stressors in our environment on a regular basis.

There is a problem, however. If we get into a state of chronic stress, where the 'stressor' is constantly in our environment, it can be difficult to do the basics. If work is relentless, and when we finally get home, we have small children to deal with, it is very hard to find 30 minutes for a run or a spot of yoga. Or if you don't have time in your day to process what is happening, your brain can be your worst enemy when you lie in bed at night, choosing that time to start problem-solving what's going on at work. Social connection might not seem a relief, when your friends or family are in a worse situation than you are, and your social time is taken up with helping to share the emotional burdens of those you love.

Completing the stress cycle needs to happen daily. Being 'ok' is not a one-time event, it is a process.<sup>5</sup> We need to start building awareness of when things start to build up and whether our wellbeing strategies are actually working. If you are trending towards burnout, then it is likely something is interrupting your cycle, and you are not getting the respite and recovery you need.

## Resilience

Resilience is another term that can mean different things to different people. In the NZDF, being resilient means that we are able to continue to perform and cope during challenging situations. For example, making good decisions under fire despite fear for your team's safety. Another example might be working long into the night to support a community devastated by floods. Despite feelings of fatigue or distress you are still able to smile and engage productively with your team and with civilians in need. Resilient people utilise both physical and mental skills that allow them to work through the challenges of life and work. Being resilient does not mean being unrealistically happy and free from worries; it is about having worries, or experiencing stressors, acknowledging their existence and still being able to soldier on. Resilience is something that can be developed with effort over time.



A helpful way to view resilience is a model called 'Te Whare Tapa Wha',<sup>6</sup> where a house or 'whare', is used as a metaphor for your wellbeing. You need to be mindful that your overall wellbeing is impacted by all the walls of your personal whare, your body (tinana), mind (hinengaro), family (whānau) and spirit (wairua). If one of these walls is in trouble, your whare, (wellbeing) can collapse. This model does not mention work but the reality is the health of your mind, body, spirit and family can affect your performance at work – so

<sup>5</sup> Nagoski, E & Ngaoski A (2020) Burnout: Solve your stress cycle, Penguin Publishing

<sup>6</sup> The NZDF Health website with more information about resilience: <http://orgs/sites/nzdf-health/mind/resilience/resilience.html>

too can your work impact on the wellbeing of all these areas at home.

Some of our leadership roles are **big**. Work can feel like it is all-encompassing. It can feel like a lot is riding on you, and you may have to make some hard decisions around compromising what emotional energy you can give to your family and friends.

It is common to experience moments where you may feel like a ‘crappy’ mother, father, partner, son or daughter – the list goes on. You are not alone in feeling this way.

What is worse, though, is **when you do not realise that you are compromising your relationships for the sake of your job**. That is when you are so embroiled in work that you do not notice the ‘glares’ and the withdrawal of your loved ones. You can get so distracted by work stressors that you may not realise what you are missing at home. Alternatively, it may be that you have not noticed how your health has dipped (except that your pants have shrunk). It is important to stay tuned in to how you are feeling physically, as if you lose touch with your physical health, when you do check in, it might be a harder slog to get yourself back on track.

There is no right way to approach this. While there are 6 tips, 7 steps, models, and frameworks up the wazoo, the best thing to do is figure out what will work for you, in your context, in your particular role, with your particular family situation. This resource is designed to give you some things to think about that may be useful for how you tackle your resilience as a commander or leader. However, what is true for all of you is:

**You are important. Your wellbeing and health is important to, not only the success of your unit, but also the effectiveness of the wider Defence Force. Do not sacrifice yourself on the pyre of military outputs...<sup>7</sup>**

The quote on page 4 discusses work as a rubber ball that can bounce back. You *may feel* indispensable to the organisation, but without you, it will go on. That may seem harsh, but it is the truth. Even in wartime, we lose people, and the organisation moves on. What will not move on easily is your family. They only have you, and your career manager is not able to post a replacement into their lives.



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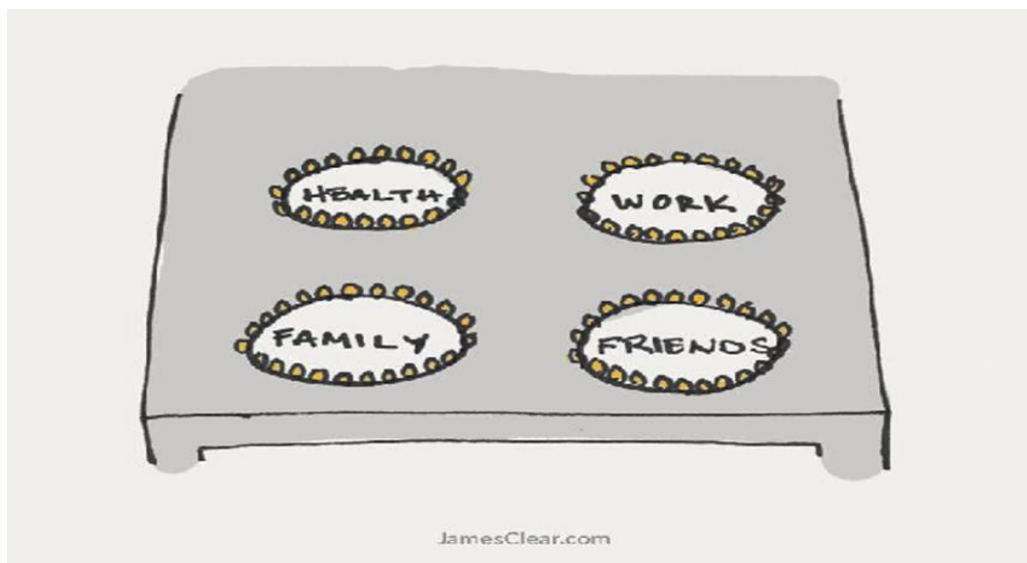
<sup>7</sup> These are the words are mine, and may not reflect the views of the wider Organisation. There is a caveat – unless we go to war! Then we may end up sacrificing people, in the sense that we know we will sometimes put our lives at risk for the greater good.

## Four Burners Model of Work-Life

The Four Burners Model is a way of conceptualising the work-life situation. Notice I said situation – and not balance! The idea is that your life is like a box of ... no wait, wrong metaphor. In this resource lets view your life as like a gas stove top, with each of the main areas of your life represented by a gas burner. You have a burner for your work, one burner for your family, one for your social life or hobbies, and one for your health. The gas being fed to each burner represents your **time, energy, and focus**. The Four Burners Theory holds that:

*“In order to be successful you have to cut off one of your burners. And in order to be really successful you have to cut off two”<sup>8</sup>*

To understand this concept, you need to acknowledge this fundamental premise: **We have a finite amount of time, energy, and focus**. We do not have unlimited energy or time, and that means we need to pay attention to where we are spending it. Part of the challenge of our modern living is that we are bombarded with messages about the need to be happy and successful. Social media will flood our feeds with ways to be fit and beautiful, with courses on how to be rich and successful in addition to apps that will help us find Zen. So, we end up believing to be successful, we must be stunning human specimens with a boat, beach bach, 2.5 attractive, well-behaved children, a great job and a regular meditation practice. Oh, and if you haven’t run a marathon yet, you better sign up for something soon. Not to mention, we need to be successful in our super-well-paid jobs to afford all of this.



James Clear: Four Burners Model

This myth about true success is so insidious that we may not even notice it. The underlying subliminal message some of us fall victim to is “you have to have everything to be truly successful”. In contrast, the Four-Burner Model tells us “you can only be truly successful in one thing”.

If you need evidence of this, look more closely at our politicians, actors, musicians, comedians, athletes and business moguls who have become truly successful in their field. How many divorces

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<sup>8</sup> Quote taken from James Clear at [Jamesclear.com/four-burners-theory](https://www.jamesclear.com/four-burners-theory). James reported that he got this quote and model from David Sedaris of the New Yorker.

litter their past? How close are they with their children? How much of that body is real, and how much is plastic? Are they happy?

Now to be fair, you are not taking on the role of Health Minister or becoming the next Marvel Avenger. You are a leader in the New Zealand Defence Force. The principles are the same, though. You can give all your time, energy, and focus to this role, and you will be a fantastic leader (if you are also smart and caring – because, let us be honest – there have been some leaders in the past who did ‘marry the job’ but were still terrible). If you turn up your work burner all the way, then you must compromise somewhere else. That means less time and energy to spent on your family. You can still have a relationship; you just won’t be a perfect partner.

### **The Modern Family**

Let us also take a minute to acknowledge that we are now over 20 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is not 1950 anymore, but our military is built on a post-World War II ethos and value set. What I mean is that when our military structure and hierarchy were established, society was very different. Men went to work and were the head of the household; women stayed home and looked after the children. Homosexuality was hidden, and people living in de facto relationships outside of marriage was not the norm!

Fast-forward 70 years, and society looks very different. Gender identity is a constantly evolving concept. Even if women wanted to stay at home and look after the kids, the cost of living does not often allow it. Two-working parents is the norm, people are living together before marriage, and the nuclear family is outdated.

Whether you are a working mother or a working father, the challenges are converging. Men can no longer rely on their wives to pick up children and cook dinner. Increasingly, men are required to pick up more and more home and child care duties, which means if you are a hardworking leader and have kids, it is not guaranteed your partner can pick up the slack of family life that you drop! Many military people end up with au pairs or nannies, just to get by, but even that is becoming increasing cost-prohibitive as expenses continue to rise.

Either you or your partner will need to compromise somewhere and somehow. You can fully commit the majority of your time and energy to work and leave your partner to pick up the slack of home life. This will come with a cost to both of you. Alternatively, you can choose to reduce your time/energy commitment to work, to allow for some input into your family. This too will come with a price.



While this sounds doom and gloom, it is not meant to be. It is meant to encourage you to consider this reality:

## You can't have it all<sup>9</sup>

And prompt you to think about your options by asking yourself the question...

## What price are you willing to pay?

Do not leave the decision around what your work-life design should look like to the NZDF. Because if you do not make the decision yourself, if you let the organisational demands decide for you, then you may not like the result. If given the choice, this organisation will take all you have to give, because that is the way the military (and most other organisations) have been designed. The organisation, however, is not evil; it does not have a conscience. The NZDF is an entity and cannot be blamed for this. You are the one with agency. Although your level of agency may differ, depending on rank or role, you need to make this decision, and make it with careful thought and intent.

Be mindful that the decisions you make for yourself in this space, **may also impact the 'work burner' for all your subordinates**. Whether by role modelling what you value, or by the fact that you ask more of your team because work success is your imperative. This is neither right nor wrong, but once again, it comes with a price attached, not just for you, but also for your people. You need to acknowledge that as a leader you may have more control over your work burner than those who work for you. You should not take that significant responsibility lightly.

If you have children but have a partner that does the main share of the childcare, you can afford to burn your work burner hot. Many people do not have that luxury. Women in particular are frequently disadvantaged here, as statistically they pick up the majority of house and childcare<sup>10</sup> responsibilities but must still perform at work. If you don't children but your staff do, you may not fully grasp the pressures they face in their lives. If you burn your work burner hot and require all others to do the same, without reference to their home context, then you may have a blind spot as a leader. Expecting the same outputs from all people at work may seem equitable to you, however if you do not understand the complexities and context of each individual's situation you are neglecting a fundamental element of effective leadership.

Some leaders in the organisation can get frustrated at staff who require time off for sick children or other family responsibilities. Other leaders can get frustrated when people take time off for study or sports. If you find yourself feeling frustrated because your staff members (or your boss) are not as committed to work as you, then you may be experiencing a clash of values. Tuning into that frustration and understanding where it stems from is an important first step. The second step is developing empathy and understanding for people who have different values from you. Right now, at this point in the resource, we are talking about you, your life situation, and getting you into a healthy place. However, you may owe the same courtesy to your staff. In the second half of this resource, we will discuss the role of the leader in crafting a safe and healthy work environment for their team with respect to workload and burnout.

That said – we are still talking about you! So, back to your assessment of you...

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<sup>9</sup> Maybe you can? What do I know! If you think you can –you go for it! Most people can't and not having it all is okay too. I sound like I am trying to please everyone here and maybe I am.

<sup>10</sup> Childcare is not the only factor. People are often looking after sick or aging parents or extended family.

### **Deciding on Trade-offs, means Knowing your Values**

So what now? After you have been given the tough talk about trade-offs, and choosing your own work-life design, you are probably left thinking, how do I do that? Most of you will already have made these decisions, but it is useful to take a pause and look at your current work-life design, and ask- was this intentional? If you have a moment, have a go at this quick activity where you are asked to reflect on how you were, where you are now, and what you want to be:

### **Three Years Ago**

How would you rate your work-life design three years ago? Where were you in your career? What kind of leader were you? What big events did you have on in your life and family? How satisfied were you with how you were tracking in each area? Give yourself a score out of 10 for how satisfied you were with your work performance and the other areas of your life (you can change the headings if needed). Put this score in the box, and then write some points about what you were doing and why you scored that way. Notice what was lower and what was higher.

<b>Work</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Family</b> <input type="text"/>
<b>Social</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Health</b> <input type="text"/>

### **Now**

How would you rate your work-life design right now? Where are you in your career? What kind of leader are you? What big events or commitments do you have on right now? How satisfied are you with how you are currently tracking in each area? Give yourself a score out of 10 for how happy you are with your work performance and your other life areas. Put this score in the box, and then write some points about what you are doing and why you scored that way. Once again, notice what scores lower and what scores higher.

<b>Work</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Family</b> <input type="text"/>
<b>Social</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Health</b> <input type="text"/>

**Three years from now**

How would you like your work-life design to be at the end of your posting, or in three years? What kind of leader do you want to be? What big events or commitments do you want to make or be engaged in at that time in the future? How satisfied do you think you will be? Give yourself a score out of 10 for how you would like to be performing in your work, life, and family – and how fit and healthy you think you will be (or hope to be!). Note: don't just give yourself a 10 out of 10 for each area!!! The point is to make a hard decision on what you want to score high on, and what you are willing to compromise on. For example, in three years, you may decide that work can take a backseat to your tennis ambitions, and if so, you might score work only a 6/10. Once again, once you have scored, write some notes about what you will be doing and why.

<b>Work</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Family</b> <input type="text"/>
<b>Social</b> <input type="text"/>	<b>Health</b> <input type="text"/>

## **Reflect**

Now that you have taken the time to look back and look forward, what do you notice about what is important to you? Did you rate yourself high in all areas because you are a legend and winning at life? Did you rate some areas lower in the past and higher in the future? How did that feel?

Has there been a time when your family paid the price for high work performance or vice versa? Have you experienced a health issue that suggests your work might be costing you precious time better spent on managing your health, family, and lifestyle factors?

It may be trite to say this, but there are no right answers because the answers reflect what you, in your context, want and value. You are allowed to love your job and place that over having a family; that is your choice, and it might be right for you.

If you have rated your future self as higher in some areas than you are now, ask yourself this...

**What will it take to get that area to where I want it to be?**

**Will it take sacrifice in other areas?**

**Will it require doing something different?**

**Will I be acting in alignment with my values if I put more time and energy into that area at the expense of others?**







## Compromising Work

I just want to check in and see if you found yourself acknowledging that your commitment to work did create sacrifices in other areas, but that you felt trapped in the situation or compelled by your own leadership to deliver. In Defence, we are known for our 'Can Do' attitude. Right up to the highest levels in this organisation, we struggle to say no. Our people pay the price for our inability to set realistic expectations for the government and the New Zealand people. On a macro level, the NZDF also has **limited time, energy, and focus** and yet our leaders don't often say no (up and down the command chain). **We need to get better at this.** We, as an organisation, must mature and acknowledge our limitations and our capacity. **Each and every leader is responsible for this.** If you are a leader, you do have agency; you can say no. You may be the first, but if you are saying no in order to protect your own people from burnout, then you are showing true courage, comradeship, and integrity. That is three values against one – commitment. Commitment would have us see it through no matter what. Sometimes there is tension in our values, which is normal and okay. We must acknowledge it and manage it. Our role as leaders is to make good decisions in complex situations. So managing this tension is part of the job. This is a good time, though, to talk not just about NZDF values, but your values – because your most important values should not only affect your decisions about work and life but inform them.

## Values and Psychological Flexibility

If you have never stopped to think about what your values are, it might be a good time to explore them. This might feel like ‘another psychy exercise’, but there is great benefit in unpacking what is truly important to you, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, understanding your values and recognising when you are acting in concert with them (or out of concert) is part of being ‘psychologically flexible’. That term roughly means the ability to pursue valued life aims despite the presence of distress.<sup>11</sup> In other words, people who have psychological flexibility are able to stay the line, even when they are stressed, or bad stuff goes down. When everything is piling on top of you, your mind needs to be able to accept the suffering, not get hooked into negative thinking, and still move forward with positive actions. By understanding your values, you can always find your true north, even in the snowstorm. Was that one metaphor too many?

Let me give you an example. You are the CO of a unit and you have multiple demands on your time. Currently, there are three people being charged for three different things. You worry this indicates you have a culture problem. You have also heard that one of your staff is getting on people's nerves with their overly dogmatic leadership style. On top of this, there is an MOD visit coming up and you have paperwork you haven't attended to. Emails you have not read now number in the 50s. All that is going on and you haven't even thought about the fact you promised to cook tonight, because your partner has cooked the last three nights. Later that night, when you finally have some downtime you have the option of logging on and answering those emails or you could go for a walk with your partner, or you could watch the latest episode of ‘The Expanse’.<sup>12</sup> The list really could go on. When you are overloaded and maxed out – what do you do? When you know and can articulate your values, you can take some of the hard work out of it:

- If my top value is doing a good job, this means it is my primary driver in life, and I love to be on top of my work: action = get emailing!
  - I value justice & fairness (start with the charges)
  - I value my people (dig into the culture and leadership problems first)
  - I value how my senior leaders view me (crack on with MOD visit)
- If my number one value is my family, it's the most important thing to me then: action = put away the work phone and hang out with my partner
- I value nerdy science fiction and being a part of new worlds: action = relax and enjoy that new Netflix show

You can hopefully see from the example that you cannot do it all. You can spend your evenings emailing beside your partner while they watch Netflix, but your attention is on your work. If you choose to do all the things, then you will do them all to a diminished degree. Therefore, you *can* do it all but in a half-arsed kind of way. Acting in alignment with your values, means making intentional choices to act in ways that will feed into what you have decided is important to you. If you are reading this and think – the only right answer here is to hang out with your partner, then you don't quite get it. That might be the right answer *for you*. Spending time with loved ones is very important (and good for your physical health too<sup>13</sup>) but everyone values different things, and your values may differ from others. You are allowed to value your work as important to you. It may be more important to you at times than quality family time. This does not mean you do not love your family.

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<sup>11</sup> Doorley et al (2020) Psychological Flexibility: what we know, what we do not know and what we think we know. *Social and personality Psychology Compass* (14(3), DOI 10.1111/spc3.125666. This definition by Doorley et al., is only one definition. Stephen Hayes, who is likely considered one of the biggest contributors to the work on psychological flexibility has a more complex definition: *Psychological flexibility is the ability to make contact with experience in the present moment fully and without defence.*

<sup>12</sup> If you haven't seen this – it is a magnificent Sci-Fi series, found on Amazon Prime. The Director of Psychology gives it 5 couches (that's a psych joke).

<sup>13</sup> Studies show that people with loving relationships live longer than lonely people (Health.Harvard.edu)

It just means that you gain meaning and purpose from your work and that family considerations may come second. The point is **you** get to decide what is most important to you.

So values can help you craft your work-life design in a way that supports what you cherish, not what social media tells you is important. Remember this resource is called ‘work-life design’, not work-life balance! Knowing your values is not just about ensuring you spend your downtime in a 100k mega marathon, it is also about how you cope with challenges as a leader.

Now go back and look at the other things going on in this example. Competing work priorities – emails, MOD visit, charges, culture issues, and difficult personalities. This is a typical day in the life of a CO/XO/OC/WO, and most of you will have times when all of this and more is going on. Knowing your values as a leader will help you prioritize and be consistent in your work approach. Sharing your values with your team, will help your people understand why you are prioritising the things you do. Don’t get me wrong, some things may need to be prioritised that have no relationship to your values (like pandering to a visiting politician), but they may give you the more pertinent talking points to hit that politician up with when you are making uncomfortable small talk over mini-pies at morning tea.

If you are finding that you are unable to work in alignment with your core values during your workday, that could be a crucial red flag indicating you are in the wrong line of work! If you have to do things that trigger a values clash, it can have negative consequences for both your mental health and wellbeing. At the extreme end is something we call moral injury. For example, if your core value is caring for people and human rights, you might find it challenging being deployed on an international mission working with coalition partners, and having to be involved in drone strikes by other nations that result in collateral damage. For more information on that, contact your friendly local psychologist. In the workplace on a day-to-day basis, compromising your values will drain you and wear you down and can often trigger negative emotions. If you value efficiency, and doing everything to a very high standard, you may struggle with the scarcity of resources that results in the 80% solutions we often create in the military context. If caring or looking after people isn’t important to you, then you may be worn down by the day-to-day personnel issues that inevitably suck up your time as a leader. If you joined up because you love to blow stuff up, and now you find yourself stuck behind a desk all day doing paperwork, it probably won’t matter how many runs you go for, or scented candles you light, you may find life a continual slog.

## **Your Leadership Philosophy**

If you have not developed your leadership philosophy on an Institute of Leadership Development course, it is a good time to do it during your first year as CO or OC/XO/WO. A leadership philosophy is like your very own manifesto. It is a document that describes the belief systems underpinning your leadership. It should be guided by your values. You don’t need to have it before you start, as giving yourself time to ‘bed in’<sup>14</sup> to the role will help you understand just what kind of leader you want to be – and what kind of leader you are at risk of becoming. A good place to start is to establish what your four core values are (you can have more or fewer, depending on your preference). There is a **values exercise** at the end of this resource that will help you identify and rank your values. If you have not got a good understanding of your values, stop here and go and do that exercise then come back for the next section.

Once you have established your values, a great next step is to figure out what your **guiding principles** are that fit underneath this value. For example, if you decide you value people – what does that really mean in terms of how you act? Valuing people means different things to different people. Establish what it means to you, in terms of the rules you like to follow. From here, you can set

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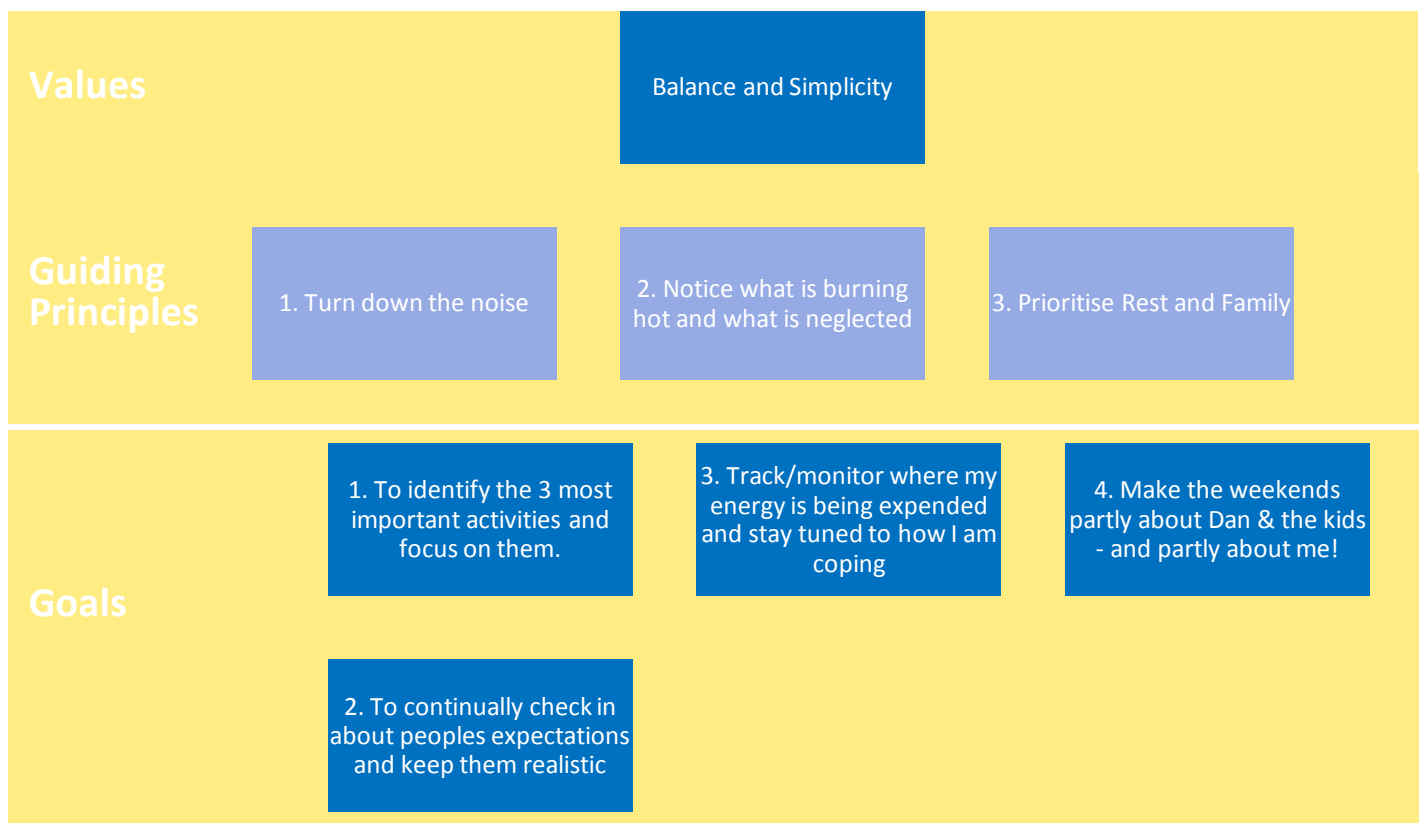
<sup>14</sup> Bed in- interesting colloquialism that means to become established and start working properly.

**behavioural goals** around how you would like to act as a leader. Here are a couple of examples from the work I did with my own values:

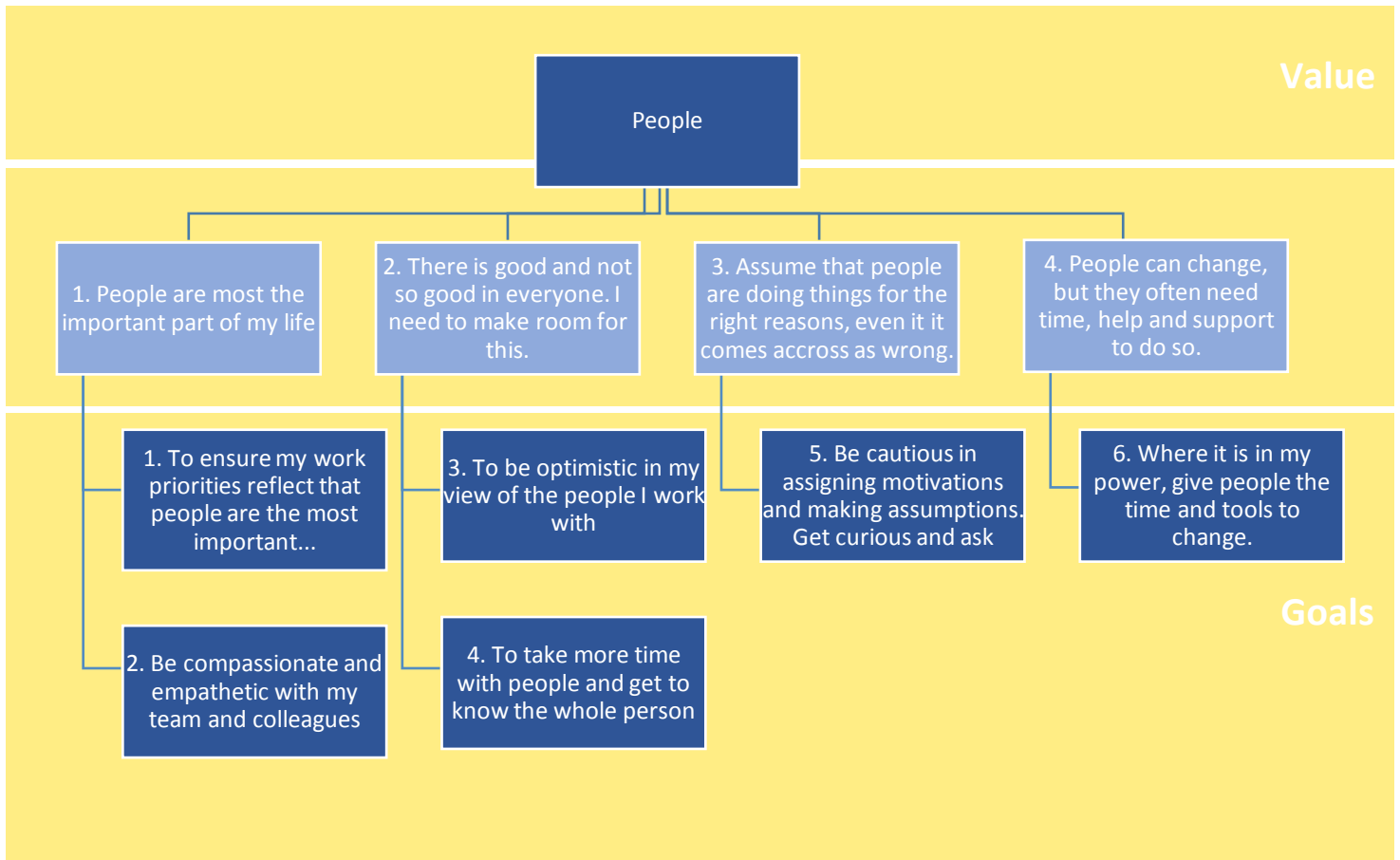
I did some thinking and digging and decided I really value balance and simplicity in my life. This value relates to my work-life design. I really do not like to have too much going on at once. I have crafted my life to have only a few key things going on: my work, my family and... well, that's it. No adventure races or iron women competitions for me. No squash tournaments or photography competitions on the side. Why? Because I notice that I am more resilient, content and relaxed when I just have those things to focus on (it helps that I love both). To guide me in this, I have a few principles and some goals that fall from that. You can do this with your own value set, and what is important to you, my example above is just to give you some cues as to how to think about your own values.

A more work-related example is my value around people. 'People' is such a bland title, but I ran out of emotional energy to think of something spiffier. Below you will see two examples around my value of balance and simplicity and my value around people. The first example shows how I manage myself and the second example shows how my guiding principles will shape how I deal with my staff:

***Operationalising your values: Example 1***



## Operationalising your values: Example 2

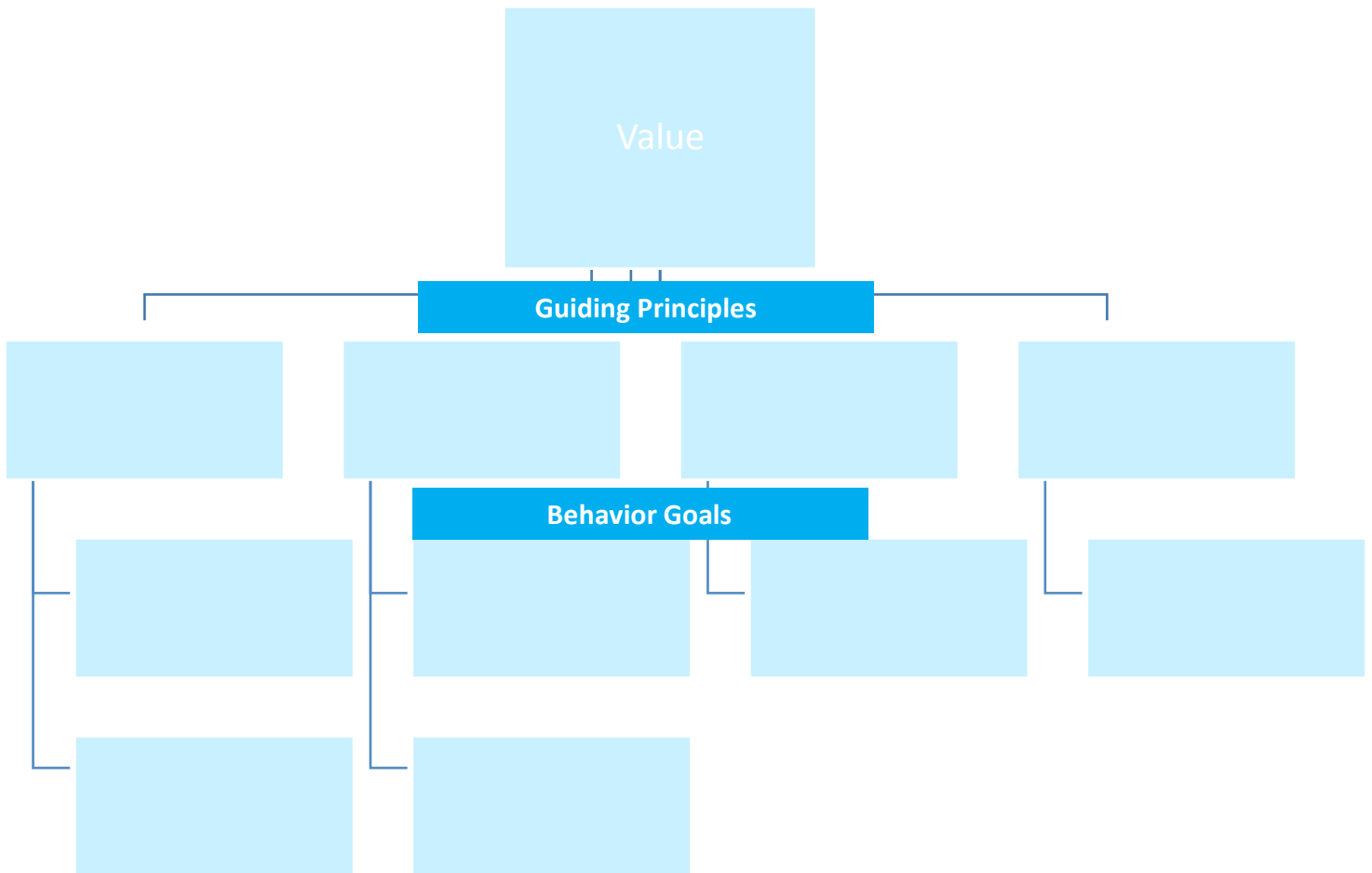


## My Core Values

What are your four core values? Write these values in this box. If you can, rank them from 1 to 4. These things should drive your decision-making, and guide your behaviour. These will help you know if it really is worth giving up your personal time to do those extra work emails.

### For extra Credit

After you have identified your values, now it is time to operationalise them. If you want to have a go at deciding on some guiding principles and goals for your time as a leader.



Once you have hashed this out, you might find writing your leadership philosophy to be easier. How you do your philosophy is up to you. My advice is that you think about the work-life design you want and include this in your document, as you will be role modelling to your people, how you are going to manage the tension.

I will say that if you do not value people this makes being in a leadership role very difficult. You might like to reconsider your job choice. In the NZDF, we are relying on you to care about your people. We will continue to lose good people unless our leaders improve at protecting, encouraging, and developing their teams.

## Know your Warning Signs

Now that you know more about what drives you, you are in the right headspace to make a great start in your work-life design. Given that life will throw some hurdles at us, it is a good time to do a fancy risk matrix on ourselves. What will it look like when we are derailing from our course? And by that, I mean, what does it look like when our work-life is kicking us in the pants, we are doing things that don't align with our values (yelling and screaming at the kids, for one thing), and how do we pull ourselves back? Developing your own red light indicators (or warning signs) of when you are out of alignment with your values will help you notice, then recover. You can even give your list of warning signs to a friend, colleague, or coach to help keep you accountable.

### What are my Red Flags?

*List the signs that tell you things are not going well.*



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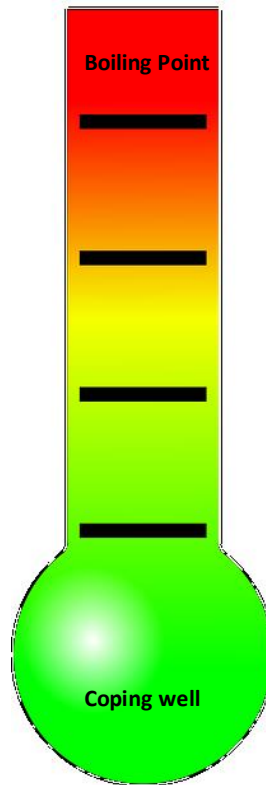
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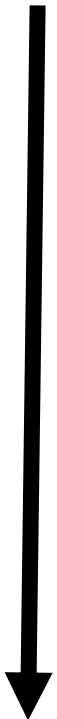
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### What are my Strategies?

*List the strategies you have to bring you back*



# Leadership and Wellbeing

Actions speak louder than words. All companies say they care, right? But few exercise that care

*Simon Sinek*

In the NZDF, we say that one of our key values is comradeship. We also say that our people are our most important asset. You will have been to parades, functions, events, presentations, and medal ceremonies and heard this Māori whakatu: *‘He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata!’* What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people! How true do you think this is for the NZDF? For your Service? For your Unit? Having just completed a values exercise, was ‘people’ one of your core values? How about comradeship? How do you show that as a leader?

The service personnel and civilians of this organisation hold all of our leaders to a very high standard. They expect that Military leaders in the NZDF will care about their people. They expect that care will be visible and tangible, that it will be seen in the way people are treated, and in the way their leaders attend to their wellbeing. After reading through the first half of this workbook, you will have taken a deep look at yourself. How is your mental health? How are your resilience levels? What is your work-life design like, are you living in alignment with your values?

The next point needs to be very clear. Regardless of what your values are:

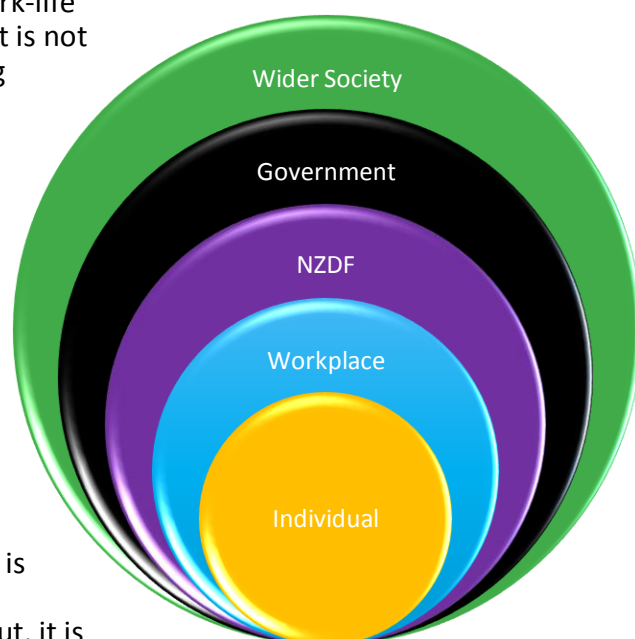
## **If you are a leader, looking after your people is your job.**

That means that even if you are an engineer, a logistician, a pilot, or a carpenter, if you have people working for you, your job is to ensure that the workplace they come to every day supports their wellbeing. The discussion we have had on **burnout** and work-life has focused up to now on the individual. However, burnout is not just about the individual. We must view burnout from a big picture, systems perspective.

## **A Systems View of Burnout**

The diagram to the right illustrates that the individual is embedded in a system of systems. The characteristics of the individual interact with the characteristics of the workplace, which in turn is greatly influenced by the wider organisation. If the features of the workplace include poor job design and under-resourcing, then the individual will be placed in a situation where the risk of burnout is higher.

I want to make it clear that burnout is a workplace issue. It is not about the individual. Research has shown that while individual characteristics do play a role in the risk of burnout, it is





organisational and environmental factors that are the strongest predictors of the likelihood of someone developing burnout.<sup>15</sup>

If the NZDF has a 'can do' culture, this will interact with the under-resourced work environment to increase the risk. If the government asks the NZDF to surge support into a disaster zone, fully aware that the NZDF is understaffed, this adds a further layer of risk. If the NZDF member is facing work strain in a wider society that is currently in cost of living crisis, the stressors on the individual will have a compounding effect.

### **Individual Factors**

As mentioned, individual characteristics do play a small part in risk of burnout. If an individual is a perfectionist, overly conscientious, or diligent then they are more at risk. Highly driven, diligent people will work very hard, sometimes to the detriment of their own personal needs. The irony here is that these characteristics are highly desirable in employees, and we select people for roles often based on these characteristics (conscientious, diligent, and loyal).

However, regardless of an individual's personality characteristics, it is a leader's job to put in place realistic boundaries that keep people from overworking and burning out. If you have an individual who is prone to overwork, you cannot rest on your laurels and blame them for their overzealous work ethic; you need to coach them to program in the respite they need to thrive. You may also need to ensure their job design is sustainable.

### ***The Fishbowl Metaphor***

When someone presents as burnout in our teams, it is easy to view that person in isolation and assume that this issue is theirs and theirs alone. They are a sick fish in our team fishbowl. However, if it is the water that is too hot, cold, acidic, or alkaline, taking the fish out, sending the fish to the doctor, or putting the fish on sick leave is not going to solve the problem. After a yoga retreat, your goldfish will come right back to the problematic fishbowl and get sick again. Not only that, there are likely other fish in the bowl that will start to feel the effects of the poor water quality and start to get sick too. Burnout is a problem with the bowl or the water – not the fish. So treating the fish will not fix the problem.



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<sup>15</sup> McAlpine, S. (2021) *Beyond Burnout, A New Zealand Guide*. Penguin Random House. NZ

## Causes of Burnout

While we know that burnout is caused by exposure to chronic environmental stressors over time, which can be exacerbated by individual tendencies to over work or worry. Researchers have identified six main causes that contribute to burnout.<sup>16</sup> These are:

- Overwork
- Lack of control (people not having control over what they do in their day-to-day work)
- Sense of isolation (feeling like they are alone, have no support)
- Insufficient rewards (not being recognised for the hard work, or feeling like it's all for nothing)
- Absence of fairness (lack of equity in pay, rewards or treatment)
- Values conflict (doing work that clashes with your primary values)

Just for a moment, think about each of these causes or contributors to burnout. You can see that each of them is a feature of the workplace. As a leader, you need to be tracking the environment that your team is working in.

## Leadership, the Workplace and Burnout

Each team, unit, squadron, brigade, ship, or Service has its own complex system of variables that can produce the environment of factors such as the causes mentioned above, that result in individual burnout or distress. In some cases, the individual plays a role, but in most cases, the workplace can be identified as the primary culprit in creating burnout. We need to start viewing people with burnout as the canary in the coal-mine. When the canary falls down that tells us that there is a problem with the mine. In the same way, a sick goldfish tells us there may be a problem with the fishbowl.



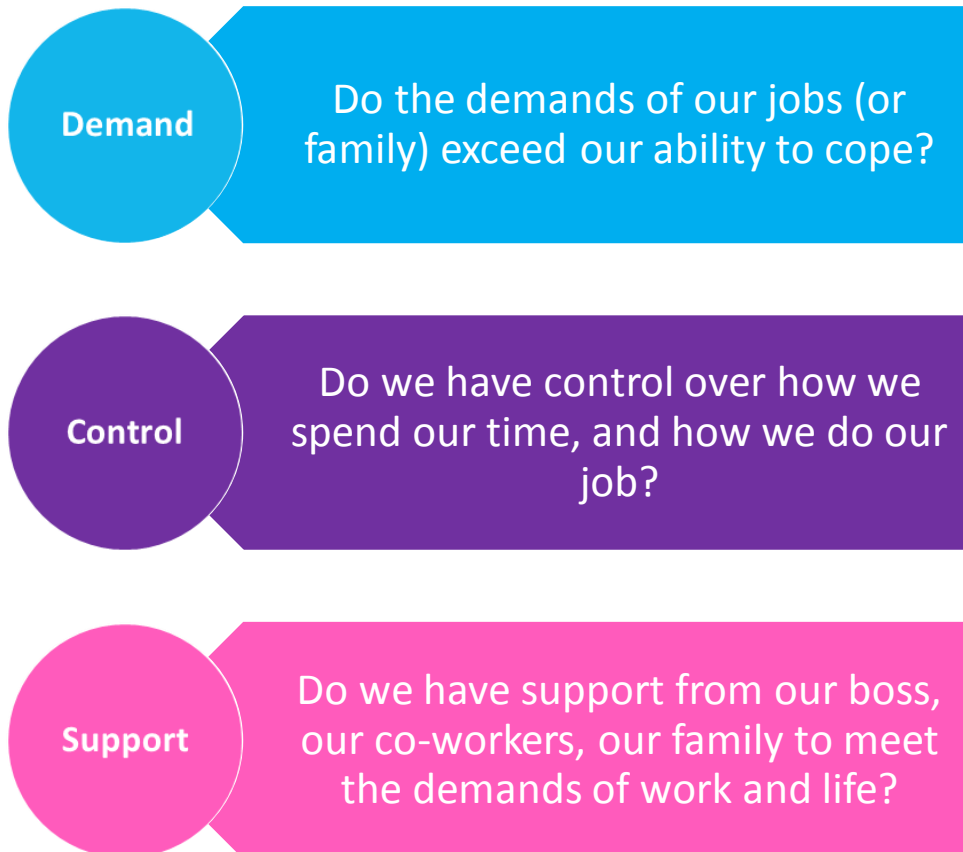
**It is then the responsibility of you, the leader, to change the conditions in the mine or in the fish bowl.**

A useful and well-researched model that helps us understand the role of the workplace in regards to both individual stress levels and burnout is the 'Job-Demand-Control-Support Model'.

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<sup>16</sup> Maslach, C. Leiter, M (2017) *Understanding Burnout*, The handbook of Stress and Health: A guide to Research and Practice. First Edition.

## Job Demand Control Support Model



Here is a little more detail around how this can go wrong in a workplace and contribute to wellbeing issues or burnout:

### **Demands**

#### **Not enough people to do the work.**

Sound familiar? There are many gaps across our three Single Services and also in our civilian teams that have led to too much work and not enough people to complete it. When someone is posted, resigns, or deploys, we are often in a situation where the remaining people have to pick up the slack and may double or triple hat. As a leader at any level of this organisation, we need to proactively balance getting the job done with our people's wellbeing. If you have taken no steps to fill gaps or provide relief in a staff shortage, then you, as a leader, hold responsibility for the burnout of your team members. Your choices in this situation are:

- Fill the gaps (using contractors, reservists, posting someone else in)
- Reduce the work (turn something off)
- Reprioritise activities and put longer timelines on things that can wait

#### **Poor Job Sizing/Lack of Role Clarity**

Regardless of people numbers, some of our roles are just too big for one person to complete in a reasonable working week. As a leader, you are responsible to ensure the job description is realistic. We talk about expecting our people to go above and beyond, and it is lovely when they do; however,

that should be on occasion. Going above and beyond consistently all the time can lead to burnout, and having a role that is more work than one person can reasonably handle, can result in unfair expectations. In addition, having a lack of role clarity can make the job feel too big. If your people are experiencing burnout, you need to look at each and every job/role and assess if it has a clear purpose, and the workload is reasonable. I'm repeating myself, but as a leader, this is another way you are responsible for your people's level of stress. You may have inherited the job size and structure, but you have the power to change it. If the role or position is too big, or ill-defined your choices are:

- Review the employment profile and job responsibilities. Get expert/outside advice on what is reasonable for one position to be responsible for, and reduce the requirements for the role.
- Create more boundaries on what your staff member is responsible for and required to do. Ensure you have given them clarity around this so they understand what they need to accomplish.
- Make your priorities explicitly clear. Tell your people you will take responsibility for what is not accomplished, so that they do not feel the burden of not achieving the goals (due to lack of resources).

## **Control**

### **Lack of autonomy in the role**

If people do not have some level of autonomy in the work that they do, whether it is how they approach it, the tasks they get to do then this has been shown to decrease motivation, job satisfaction, and increase the risk of burnout. The research is clear, that leaders who are able to provide their people with some level of autonomy, discretion, and self-direction will increase the engagement of their people. Our military has many units that reduce individual autonomy of our soldiers, aviators, sailors and sometimes civilians. As a leader you need to look for ways to empower your people. Your choices are:

- Identify the elements of the job that your staff member can have control over, or make decisions about and give them the agency to make those decisions.
- If there is no mechanism to give your staff more control, create this. For example, give them choices about when and how they do things, if they can't control what they do. Give them control over small things in your workplace, like music on the radio, or how your environment is set up.

## **Support**

**Lack of Social Support:** People are social creatures, and a key requirement for individuals to thrive in the workplace is a strong sense of belonging and social connection. The lack thereof can increase the risk of burnout and stress-related issues dramatically. As a good leader, you will need to take responsibility for creating this sense of belonging and social connection. This will not come easy to many, and if you are not naturally talented in this area of leadership, then get help. You can create systems and get support to create the best social environment that has your people loving their work. You can achieve this by:

- Team sports
- Social events
- Shared lunches
- Ensuring NZDF people policies support your people (if they don't, submit minutes requesting they be changed)
- Being an empathetic leader who shows care and concern for your staff

- Getting coaching to develop your people skills if you struggle with this.
- Appoint a second in command who is known for their people skills to support you.

**Poor Culture/Cultural Issues:** As an NZDF leader, you have a direct responsibility to provide a safe working environment for your people. An environment where individuals are bullied, harassed, or experience unwanted sexual behaviour will lead to higher levels of distress and make individuals more at risk of burnout. This is also true for discrimination. If people cannot be their true selves at work, the extra psychological effort of 'fitting in' will increase the risk of burnout. This is another way you, as a leader in the workplace, are responsible for burnout. You can track this through your yearly pulse survey or just by talking to people and checking in on them. If you find there are cultural issues in your unit you can reach out for support and help to deal with these issues.

In many cases you may be the problem. You might not realise that the way you engage with your staff is creating issues for them. If you tend to micro-manage or demand of your staff without giving them good direction, resources or support then you could be unwittingly creating a toxic environment for them. Again the key is to get a sense of how your team is tracking. Talk to them, allow for them to give you feedback without jeopardy. Work on generating humility in yourself. Your choices as a leader for dealing with cultural issues are:

- Ask your people what needs to change to make things better. If you don't get good answers, then you will need outside support to figure this out.
- Get an external person to investigate the culture of the unit and provide you with a report and recommendations
- If the problem is you, you may need coaching and support to change your behaviours.

## Psychosocial Hazards

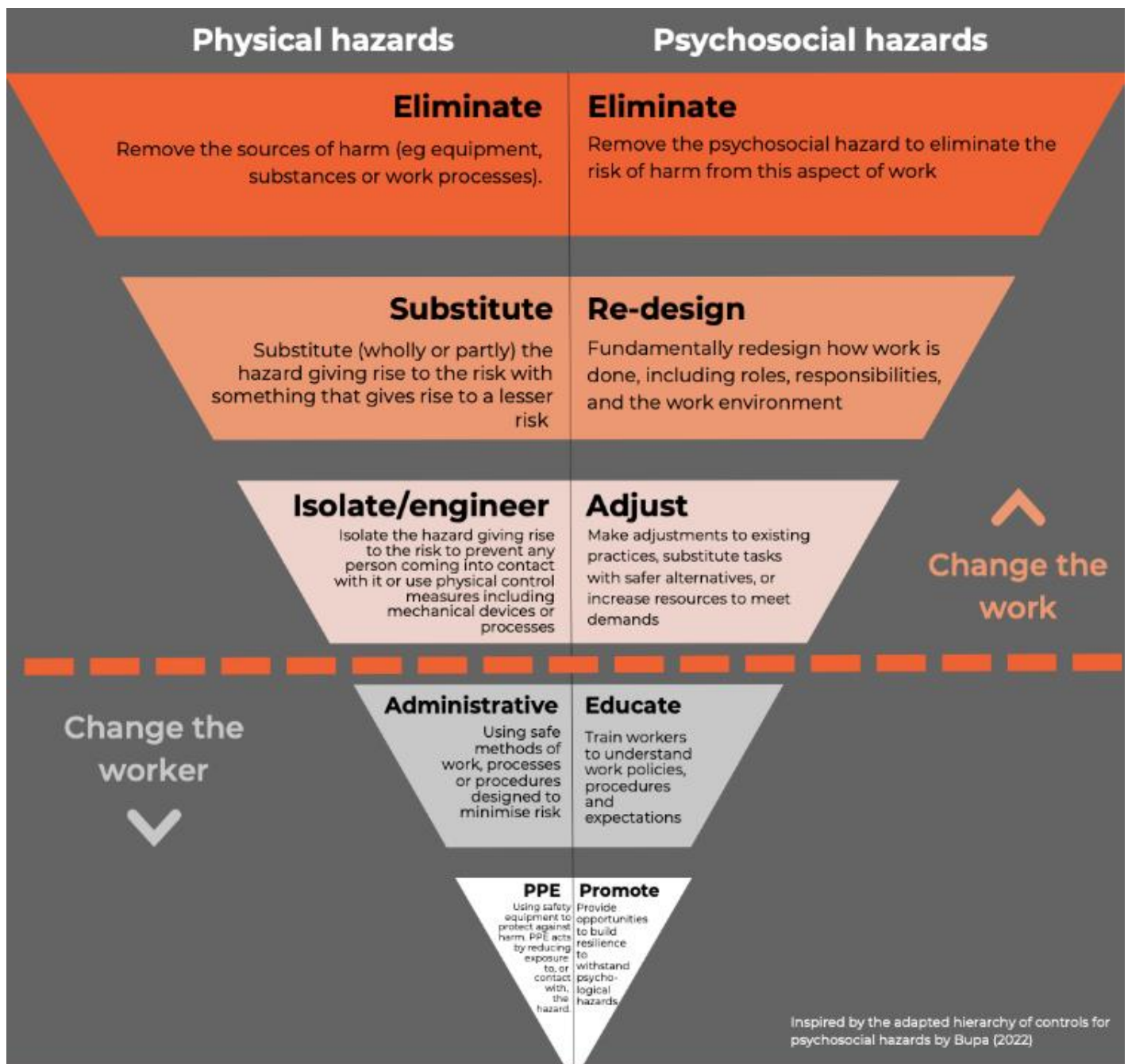
The New Zealand Government has now recognised that there are hazards in the workplace that are not simply physical. What I mean by this is that previously NZ Health and Safety Laws focused on things like appropriate safety equipment such as helmets or harnesses to prevent people from being injured. The Government now recognises that there are risks in the work place that are psychosocial hazards. A psychosocial hazard is a risk or hazard in someone's environment that can trigger a stress response and result in harm to a person's physical or psychological health. Overwork, or work overload, is an example of a psychosocial hazard.

There are several ways to deal with psychosocial hazards. We can:

- **Prevent exposure:** This is the ideal! You prevent someone from falling off a roof by providing a harness. You prevent burnout from providing someone with a reasonable workload in a supportive environment. We may not be able to prevent burnout on operations, as war and military deployments will inevitably result in high levels of stress. Preventing exposure is ensuring the fishbowl is good. However in situations where you can't prevent exposure, you can support recovery.
- **Support recovery:** We have systems in the NZDF to support recovery from operations. It is a shame we also need to support people to recover from their everyday peacetime work environments. However, this does involve intervention from doctors, chaplains, psychologists and supporting professionals. We can also be proactive by promoting resilience. This is treating the fish from the fishbowl.
- **Promote wellbeing:** This is what is happening right now. This resource, the burnout seminar, the wellbeing month are all about proactively encouraging people to behave in ways that support their wellbeing. This is again **supporting the fish and not changing the fishbowl.**

## Proactive Leadership

The diagram below is taken from a Government Health and Safety resource.<sup>17</sup> It is called 'The Hierarchy of Controls of Psychological Health and Safety'. The diagram shows that in the same manner that we address physical hazards, we can conceptualise psychosocial hazards. I encourage NZDF leaders to look to change their work environments – the coal mine or the fishbowl, and eliminate hazards, or redesign the environment to improve the experience of workers. There is too much focus on changing the worker, but this is far less effective than changing the work.



<sup>17</sup> <https://www.healthandafety.govt.nz/assets/documents/heirarchy-of-controls-for-psychological-health-and-safety.pdf>.

## Options for Accessing Help in the NZDF

There are several ways in which you can access professionals to help you or your team within Defence. The Defence Health Hub shown in the picture below is the best place to find the help you need. It is located on the ILP. I do encourage leaders to reach out for help if they are feeling the strain of work overload. I worry that the Commander may be the last person to ask for support. As a leader it is important to role model the ability to recognise that you need help, and then to follow through and access help. Unless you think that getting help means you're weak – then we have bigger problems. If you take the initiative to support yourself and your team this means you are proactive, motivated, courageous, and smart.

Defence Health Hub:



## Summary

It needs to be said one last time that you are important. You are very valuable to this organisation, and we want you to be healthy and well. That may mean dropping some work balls, missing some key activities, or saying no to things. If missing an email or 20 means you are healthy and well, that is fantastic. Let us get better at allowing people to be human. Let us all take responsibility for designing our work and life to allow us to thrive. Let us support our people like they expect us to.

As a leader, you are responsible for your own well-being and the health of those who work for you. It may feel at times that some of the levers to make their work lives better are out of your control. That is not the case. If there is an issue we need to start raising our hands and calling out the problems. The best way to do this is sometimes just to not deliver and reduce our outputs. That may mean that some jobs are not going to get done; however, pushing through and breaking people hides that true problem – a lack of resources. We can and should be able to reduce outputs in peacetime to build up our resilience. We don't have the same options to pull back outputs on operations.

The ultimate goal here is to create a life that you want for yourself, a life that allows you to act in alignment with your values and to put your time, energy, and focus where it matters most. A life that means that service to your country is optimal when it counts.

## ANNEX A: Values Exercises

# Identifying Your Values

Do you know what your core values are? Maybe you haven't really thought about it before, but it is worth taking the time to think about what we value. Values are the things you believe are the most important to you in the way you live, work, play, and spend your time. They are your 'heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being'.<sup>18</sup>

While you may not have thought consciously about it before, your values will emerge in everyday life, when you make hard choices, when you pursue your interests, and when life's experiences bring you pleasure, pain, or meaning. Values can be different for different people. A good way to recognise your values is to notice when you feel joy, or fulfilment or pleasure and think about what generated those feelings.

If we are connected to and act in alignment with our values, it is likely that our lives will feel more meaningful, rich, and fulfilled. It is also the case that acting in alignment with our values may allow us to endure more and feel more resilient in the face of life's challenges.

This exercise sheet is one way to help identify and connect to your values. Attached to this sheet are a series of value cards. First, cut them out. Then go through the cards, read each one, take a second to think, and then place each card on one of the squares below. As part of this task, you are not allowed more than 10 cards in the 'very important to me' pile.

Once you have gone through all the cards, if you feel there are some words/values that are missing, feel free to create your own and add them.

Your next task is to look through the 'very important to me' pile and cull that down to your top four. This does not mean that the remaining six are not still very important. The intent is to identify your top four. The next step will be to start looking at how you can live these values in your day-to-day life. For that, you can try the exercise worksheet called 'Operationalising Your Values'.

My top four values are:

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**Very Important To Me**

**Quite Important To Me**

**Not So Important To Me**

<sup>18</sup> Russ Harris (2008), *The Happiness Trap: How to stop struggling and start living: A guide to ACT*



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Acceptance</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be open and accepting of myself and others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Accuracy</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be accurate in my opinions and beliefs</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Achievement</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To have important accomplishments</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Adventure</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To have new and exciting experiences</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Attractiveness</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be physically attractive; vibrant with healthy vitality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assertiveness</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Autonomy</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be self-determined and independent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authority</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be in charge of and responsible for others</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authenticity</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be authentic, genuine, real: to be true to myself</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Beauty</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To appreciate beauty around me</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Caring</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be caring towards myself, others, and the environment</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenge</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To take on difficult tasks and problems</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Change</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To have a life full of change and variety</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comfort</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To have a pleasant and comfortable life</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Compassion</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To act with kindness towards those who are suffering</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connection</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Contribution</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself, or others or the world</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conformity</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Courage</b></p> <p>To be courageous or brave, to persist in the face of fear, threat or adversity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Creativity</b></p> <p>To be creative or innovative</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Curiosity</b></p> <p>To be curious, open-minded and interested: to explore and discover</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cooperation</b></p> <p>To be cooperative and collaborative with others</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Courtesy</b></p> <p>To be considerate and polite towards others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dependability</b></p> <p>To be reliable and trustworthy</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Duty</b></p> <p>To carry out my duties and obligations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ecology</b></p> <p>To live in harmony with the environment</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Excitement</b></p> <p>To have a life full of thrills and stimulation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Encouragement</b></p> <p>To encourage people to achieve</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Equality</b></p> <p>To treat others as equals, to help create a world where people are treated equally</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Faithfulness</b></p> <p>To be loyal and true in relationships</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fairness</b></p> <p>To be fair to myself and others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fitness</b></p> <p>To maintain or improve my fitness to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>To adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Freedom</b></p> <p>To live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Friendliness</b></p> <p>To be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Forgiveness</b></p> <p>To be forgiving towards myself or others</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fun</b></p> <p>To be fun-loving; to seek, create and engage in fun-filled activities</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fame</b></p> <p>To be widely known and recognised, for one's accomplishments</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Family</b></p> <p>To be loving and caring to my family; to give my time and attention to those I love</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Friendship</b></p> <p>To be loving and caring to my friends; to give my time and attention my social group</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Gratitude</b></p> <p>To recognise and appreciate the good in myself, people and life, expressing thankfulness and acknowledging the contributions of others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Generosity</b></p> <p>To be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>God's Will</b></p> <p>To align one's actions and decisions with divine guidance and purpose.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Growth</b></p> <p>To seek continual learning and development</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Humility</b></p> <p>To be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Honesty</b></p> <p>To be honest, truthful and sincere with myself and others</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Humour</b></p> <p>To see and appreciate the humorous side of life</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Health</b></p> <p>To be physically, emotionally and spiritually balanced</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Helpfulness</b></p> <p>To be helpful to others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hope</b></p> <p>To be hopeful and optimistic</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Industry</b></p> <p>To be industrious, hard-working, dedicated</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Independence</b></p> <p>To be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Intimacy</b></p> <p>To open up, reveal and share myself- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Justice</b></p> <p>To uphold justice and fairness</p>

<p><b>Knowledge</b></p> <p>To gain insight, understanding, wisdom, and intuition through learning and experience.</p>	<p><b>Kindness</b></p> <p>To be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others</p>
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<p><b>Love</b></p> <p>To act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others</p>	<p><b>Leisure</b></p> <p>To take time to relax and enjoy</p>
<p><b>Mindfulness</b></p> <p>To be conscious of, open to and curious about my here and now experience</p>	<p><b>Mastery</b></p> <p>To be competent in my everyday activities</p>
<p><b>Pleasure</b></p> <p>To create and give joy, satisfaction, and enjoyment to oneself and others.</p>	<p><b>Power</b></p> <p>To strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organising</p>
<p><b>Popularity</b></p> <p>To be liked by others and to be seen as friendly and approachable.</p>	<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>To have meaning and purpose in my life</p>

<p><b>Reciprocity</b></p> <p>To build relationships in which there is fair balance of giving and taking 'it is better to give than to receive'</p>	<p><b>Respect</b></p> <p>To be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard</p>
<p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <p>To be responsible and accountable for my actions</p>	<p><b>Romance</b></p> <p>To be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection</p>
<p><b>Rationality</b></p> <p>To be guided by reason and logic</p>	<p><b>Realism</b></p> <p>To see and act realistically and with pragmatism</p>
<p><b>Resilience</b></p> <p>To be able to bounce back from adversity</p>	<p><b>Resilience</b></p> <p>To be able to bounce back from adversity</p>

<p><b>Risk</b></p> <p>To take risks and chances</p>	<p><b>Safety</b></p> <p>To secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others</p>
<p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <p>To be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions to guide personal growth and behaviour</p>	<p><b>Self-care</b></p> <p>To look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met</p>
<p><b>Self-development</b></p> <p>To keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character or life experience</p>	<p><b>Self-control</b></p> <p>To act in accordance with my own ideals</p>
<p><b>Sensuality</b></p> <p>To create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses</p>	<p><b>Sexuality</b></p> <p>To embrace and express one's sexual identity and desires in a healthy, respectful, and consensual manner</p>

<p><b>Spirituality</b></p> <p>To connect with others, nature, or a higher power; to find peace, purpose and the meaning of life</p>	<p><b>Skilfulness</b></p> <p>To continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them</p>
<p><b>Supportiveness</b></p> <p>To be supportive, helpful, encouraging and available to myself or others</p>	<p><b>Simplicity</b></p> <p>To live life simply with minimal needs</p>
<p><b>Solitude</b></p> <p>To have time and space where I can be apart from others</p>	<p><b>Stability</b></p> <p>To have a life that stays fairly consistent</p>
<p><b>Tolerance</b></p> <p>To accept and respect those who differ from me</p>	<p><b>Tradition</b></p> <p>To follow respected patterns of the past</p>
<p><b>Trust</b></p> <p>To be trustworthy, to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable</p>	<p><b>Virtue</b></p> <p>To uphold high moral standards and ethical principles, striving to live with integrity, honesty, and compassion</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Wealth</b></p> <p>To accumulate and manage financial resources, ensuring security, comfort, and the ability to support myself and others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>World Peace</b></p> <p>To promote peace in the world</p>
<p><b>My Value:</b></p>	<p><b>My Value:</b></p>
<p><b>My Value:</b></p>	<p><b>My Value</b></p>