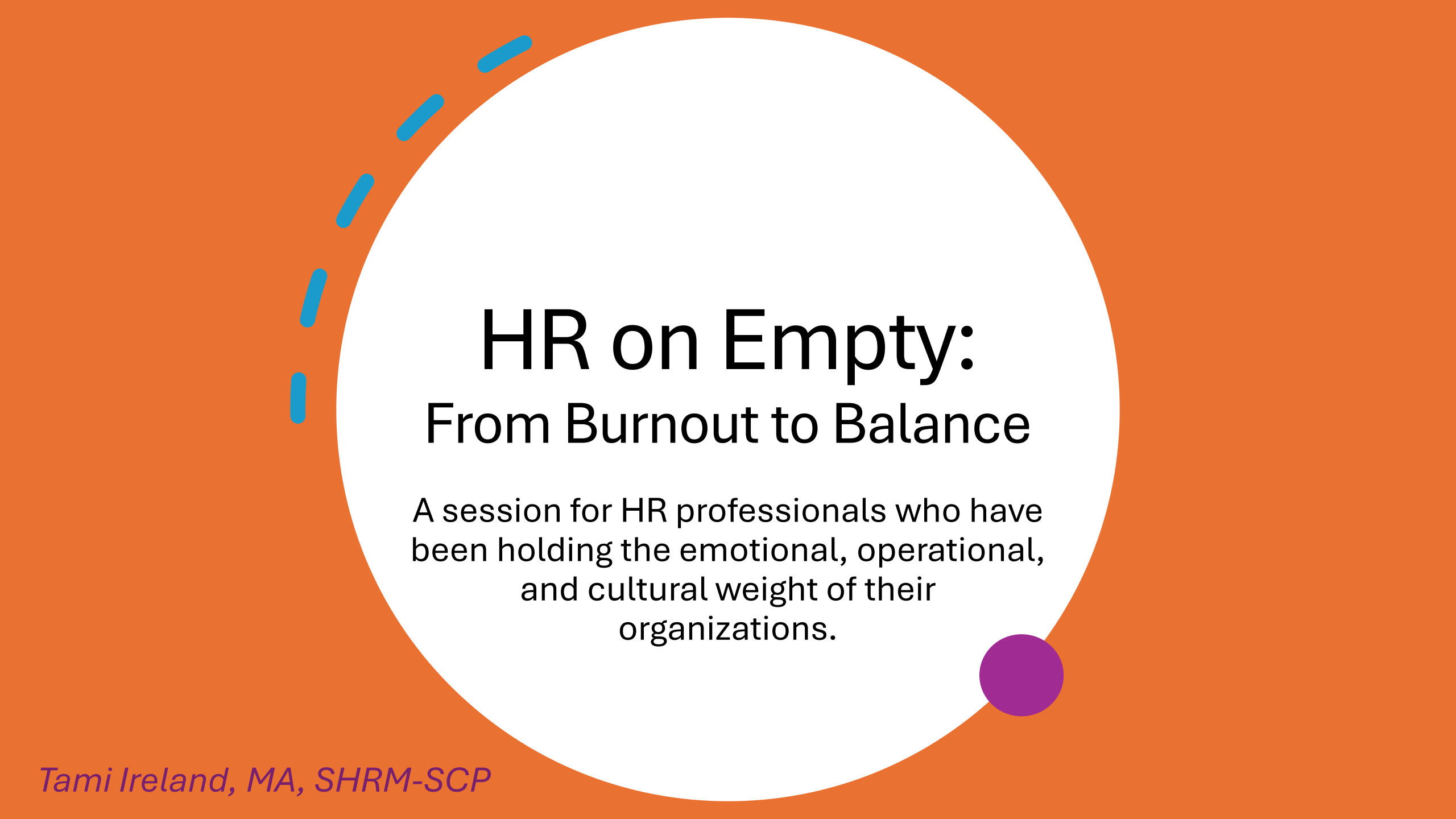




HR on Empty: From Burnout to Balance

A session for HR professionals who have been holding the emotional, operational, and cultural weight of their organizations.

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Barometer of the Room

Where are you?

**Running
on Empty**

Running Low

Holding Steady

Refilling Tank

In Balance

Today's Objectives

Recognize

Recognize the signs of HR burnout through data, lived experience, and organizational patterns.

Understand

Understand the systemic causes driving HR exhaustion — beyond workload alone.

Identify

Identify gaps that contribute to burnout and learn how to influence leaders toward shared ownership.

Apply

Apply practical strategies to set boundaries, redistribute emotional labor, and build psychological safety.

Rebuild

Rebuild personal and team resilience by reconnecting to purpose, celebrating unseen wins, and creating sustainable ways of working.

WHAT

Burnout isn't being tired. Burnout is being *empty*. It's the moment you stop feeling like yourself.

SHRM – “a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged, unmanaged workplace stress”

World Health Organization:

- Exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Inefficacy





Early Warning Signs

- Emotional exhaustion masked as professionalism
- Irritability, detachment, cynicism
- Declining empathy
- Decision fatigue
- Avoidance of conflict or escalations
- Over functioning for leaders

Organizational Indicators



Workforce Indicators

- Increased turnover within HR
- Higher sick time/PTO usage
- Increased leaves of absence
- Lower engagement scores
- Declining internal mobility



Workload Indicators

- Growing open requisitions
- Increased ER case volume
- Higher span of support per HRBP
- Increased after-hours work
- Growth in compliance responsibilities without additional resources



Performance Indicators

- Slower response times
- More errors
- Missed deadlines
- Lower stakeholder satisfaction

WHY

- **Dual-role overload** — being asked to operate as both strategic leaders and tactical responders simultaneously.
- **Continuous change saturation** — supporting nonstop organizational change without recovery periods.
- **Invisible emotional labor** — absorbing conflict, distress, and organizational emotion that others don't see or carry.
- **Leadership gaps** — stepping in when leaders avoid difficult conversations, fail to manage performance, or escalate prematurely.
- **Moral injury** — executing or witnessing decisions that conflict with personal values or professional ethics.
- **Boundary erosion** — constant availability, blurred roles, and “always-on” expectations.
- **Crisis-first culture** — HR functioning as the organization's default first responder to every emergency.
- **Unclear ownership of people leadership** — HR carrying responsibilities that should belong to managers and executives.
- **Lack of support for HR well-being** — being responsible for everyone else's care while receiving little structural care themselves.
- **Chronic understaffing** — rising expectations without corresponding resources or headcount.

How to change



Re-Establish People Leadership Ownership



Set Boundaries Around Expectations



Build Psychological Safety With Leaders



Teach Empathic Leadership Skills



Redistribute the Emotional Load

Re-Establish People Leadership Ownership

HR is not the organization's emotional first responder.

- Push performance conversations back to leaders
- Clarify leader vs. HR responsibilities
- Coach leaders to handle conflict early
- Stop absorbing work that belongs in the line

Set Boundaries Around Expectations

We cannot be the 24/7 crisis hotline.

- Name unrealistic expectations
- Slow the pace when leaders escalate unnecessarily
- Redirect “emergencies” that aren’t emergencies
- Model healthy boundaries

Build Psychological Safety With Leaders

HR carries moral injury when asked to execute decisions we didn't make.

- Ask leaders to bring us in earlier
- Share people impact
- Normalize honest conversations
- Advocate for transparency

Teach Empathic Leadership Skills

Empathy is a leadership skill, not a personality trait.

- Train leaders in active listening
- Coach leaders on compassion
- Model empathy
- Reinforce empathy as a competency

Redistribute the Emotional Load

HR burnout often comes from carrying emotional labor that was never ours.

- Share responsibility for morale
- Push change management back into the business
- Stop being the conflict sponge
- Build shared ownership for culture



Rebuilding Personal and Team Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover, reconnect, and sustain ourselves in a system that often asks too much.

- Burnout → Balance
 - Exhaustion → Capacity
 - Isolation → Connection
 - Survival → Sustainability
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Reconnect to Purpose

- Connect daily work to organizational mission
- Share stories of lives and careers positively influenced by HR
- Purpose is not the tasks – it's the impact.

Celebrate Unseen Wins

- Celebrate the emotional labor we carry
- Recognize moments we prevent harm
- Hone the work that doesn't show in metrics

Build Strong Connections

- Peer support and coaching
- Regular debriefs after difficult cases
- Team check-ins beyond workload discussions
- Opportunities for shared problem-solving

Sustainable Ways of Working

- Prioritize high-value work
- Establish realistic service expectations
- Normalize boundaries
- Manage workload according to capacity

Invest in Growth and Renewal

- Professional development
- New challenges and learning opportunities
- Mentoring relationships
- Stretch assignments aligned with career goals

