

Hello and welcome to Bridge The Gap Contributor Wednesday, I'm Christy Cunningham and it is sales and marketing week here at Bridge The Gap. And if you can believe it, it is almost June. Holy cow. This year is just going by. And for many of you, for many of us, we've been working hard this year. Whether you are seeing the volume starting to come back, or you are in the hustle trying to make some magic happen, we're all feeling it. And we've been feeling it for a while. And one thing that has started to come up more and more is fatigue, right? Some of us are getting tired. We've been going strong in a sprint for five months straight, and guys, we still have a long way to go. We still have the summer that prime selling season to go through. And if we're already feeling fatigued and burned out, then that's a real sign that we need to take some stock and make some changes.

So today in this podcast, I want to dive a little bit more into that. I want to talk a little bit about why we need to take care of ourselves and what fatigue really does to our performance. I think there are some barriers that working in senior living and working in senior living sales are very unique that many, I know, struggle to kind of work within those barriers and still manage to take care of themselves. And then there's an analogy that I have felt really inspired by in my life. I don't know if it came from somewhere else or if it just came from an original idea that I had. But I want to share that with you in hopes that it gives you a different perspective on how to recognize what you need and how to go about incorporating that into your life.

So that you're preventing some of the fatigue and burnout that you might be experiencing. So whether you are at the community level, whether you are at the corporate level, or somewhere in between, the idea that you yourself are getting tired or burnt out, or your teams are getting tired and burnt out is not new, right? We all are seeing the articles and experiencing this on the everyday. Some of us have become so accustomed to this, that it feels almost normal. Others, you're looking at yourself or your teams and you're struggling and you don't really know what to do because the pressure's on. You've got to make it happen and you just have to push through it.

So what I want to call out here is that if we aren't taking this moment to recognize that we've been in a dead sprint, and this is a marathon race and that we need to take care of ourselves and our team members in order to really perform well, then we're missing tremendous opportunity. So if you are miserable in your world, because you're not taking care of yourself, because you're fatigued, you're burnt out. Even though you may think you're leaving that at the door, even though you may think that that's not really affecting you, it is. There is no way that you are bringing your full creativity, passion, enthusiasm, and all the possibilities in you to the table when you're tired. Our bodies just don't allow that guys. When we start to get into an overwhelmed state, our senses start to narrow in their focus.

It's physiological. It is just what happens. So no matter how hard we try to fight that our bodies are narrowing their focus. We may not even realize the ways that we're not tuned into other details. We're not taking in the full picture. We're not thinking of all the possibilities and we just get narrower and narrower until we're just in a task-minded world where we just need to accomplish boom, boom, boom. And we think that that's productivity. We think that that's performance. We don't even know what we're missing in that case. So whether you think that everything's okay because you're just surviving the task list, or whether you recognize that oops, something is wrong and maybe you've made some missteps and you are recognizing you're getting tired. Performance comes through taking care of yourself, especially sustained performance like what we're asking for right now. Not only that, but performance in

a team capacity or in a career capacity means that you've got to hold onto your people or that you need to be able to hang in roles for periods of time to build a career path and to build that, that success behind you.

Well, if you are yourself, chronically burning yourself out, or you as a leader are seeing the team members beneath you who are just burning themselves out, you have a problem. You have a problem. And no leader, that's not their problem, it's yours. And this affects performance because hey, in a team, well, if you've got constant turnover like we have in senior living, particularly the sales roles have very high turnover across the country, you think your occupancy isn't going to be affected? Oh my gosh, you're going to take a major hit because not only do you have to go find a new person, train that person, give them time to actually get up in their performance. But you know, have the time you have all the missed opportunity that happened in that period. And there might be a unicorn out there that you find that just miraculously walks into a job and starts getting more sales than anybody else did, but that's generally not how it works.

So that turnover is hurting you every time. And I get it. Sometimes that turnover is needed and necessary, whatever, but there's a lot of times when we're turning and burning people, simply because we don't know how to nurture people. And we don't really know how to take care of our people. If you in your career are trying to build a track record of success, but you aren't taking care of yourself, or you don't know how to work in a way that nourishes you while you're working hard, then you're going to be burning out chronically from each job, moving onto the next, just to do the same thing there. And that's not a great way of building your career. I've met a lot of folks actually who've gone that route in senior living and actually just attributed that to the industry and said, well, this is just, I just can't do senior living sales.

And I'm just going to make a change maybe to another discipline in senior living or maybe outside of the industry altogether. I can't tell you how much amazing talent we've lost simply because individuals and leaders don't know how to help engage this idea of self-nourishment, self-care as a mechanism of maintaining high performance, or encouraging stamina to perform. And that's what we need right now. We need all of you out there be performing at a high level over a sustained amount of time. So this is a call to you. This is a call to your leaders that now is the time to recognize how important this is before we get into the crazy time that is actually going to be crazy in the peak of this selling season. Right now is the time to tune into that. If you want to see your teams, make it to the finish line, still going strong.

There are some barriers in senior living sales that in particular senior living sales that I want to talk about, because a, I know, I think that there are some places out there where some of this is being questioned, but generally it's not the majority. And we all have to survive and thrive in an environment and under circumstances that can sometimes impede our desire to take better care of ourselves. So what do I mean by that? One is the schedule. Holy smokes. It doesn't matter if you're in the building, you're in middle-management, you're at the corporate level. If you are working in senior living sales and sometimes even marketing, there are high expectations on your availability. Some of you are working weekends right now, trying to pump up your teams for their manager-on-duty responsibilities to maintain sales through the weekend, right?

Some of you salespeople had a tour walk in at five-thirty last night and were there until seven-thirty because they stayed for dinner and wanted to continue to experience the community afterwards. We are one of the only industries that has such demand on the schedule at every level. And it is absolutely expected that your schedule might be a little unpredictable that you make yourself available, that you kind of have an on-call element, that you might work some weekends, that you might work some holidays. That is a pretty normal expectation to some extent in this industry. And that makes maintaining boundaries and therefore having time set aside for self-care kind of a challenge because you may have all the great intentions in the world of, you know, doing a workout or seeing somebody really important to you in your life.

But then whoops, the rug is pulled out from underneath you, and now you've got something else that you have to do instead related to your job. And that's a very real barrier to doing the things that we know we need to do. The second is something that might be more true to folks in every industry. But I see it a lot in ours, in particular, is that we're so optimistic. We're so optimistic that just over this next hill, just after this next turn, just this next week, month, couple of months, things are going to be better and I'm going to be able to take a breather then. Except for does that time ever really come? Rarely. It's not a realistic expectation to begin with. And also from a corporate level, from a leadership level, the whole mechanism is in place to recognize any fade in your output and to then spur you to push, push, push, push, push.

So even if there was an opportunity to take a breath, the corporate mechanism in place in a lot of organizations is designed to actually be triggered in that moment to keep you pushing and to not let you take that break, because we don't want to see that that may have a negative impact on performance. So it's actually, the corporate entity is actually working against you in that scenario from actually being able to take that break or that breath. And then the third is, is more cultural. We live in a world where everyone's telling us what we should be doing. You know, how much of this food or that food, should we be eating? How much exercise? What kind of exercise? How often should we be doing X, Y, and Z? I mean, almost every single thing in our lives can be prescribed according to someone else's regimen.

And there are many of us who have tried to adhere to that and a, it doesn't really work for us. We might beat ourselves up over not being quote-unquote, disciplined enough to stick to those regimens. Or we may find that when we try to stick to that, ultimately our schedules and everything else just wreck it to pieces and it doesn't work anyway. And we just kind of go into our survival modes that we're in. So these barriers prevent even the most well-intentioned sales leader, salesperson, from being able to really implement change. So over the years, I've started to think, well, what else? Like how it started, frankly, guys with me, I'm sort of prone to leave it all on the field, so to speak and give it my all and kind of trust that eventually I'll get my needs met and that hasn't always been the case.

And I've had a cycle just like many of you through periods of burnout and really feeling disconnected from the things that make me feel great in my life. And that's not a great place to be. And if I'm real honest, I wasn't really doing all that I could have been doing in my job either. Or I wasn't doing all I could have been doing for the people who were working with me at the time. So this analogy has kind of taken over in my life, which is this idea that there is only one of you on this planet earth. And there will ever only be one of you. There will only ever be one Christy Cunningham in this world. There will only ever be one of you, Monica, Sarah, John, Kevin, there will only ever be one of you.

So this idea kind of sparked me into thinking, well, what if each of us were like plants? You know, if you look at the range of plants, you've got the cactuses next to the Ivy, the grasses next to the ferns. You've got trees, bushes, roses, all kinds of different variety. And each one of those plants requires different things. The care and feeding instructions on their tags, it's all different. And it might even be different depending on where they're planted or what the specific circumstances of their environment are. And I started to think, well, what if we are like plants? What if each of us individually, because there's only one of each of us, actually had our own unique care and feeding instructions. And what if knowing those basic care and feeding instructions from an intuitive place, not from a prescriptive place of all these other people telling us what to do, because they couldn't possibly tell you in a prescribed monologued way what to do when there's so much variety in this world.

What if that came from inside of us? What if our intuition and our bodies, our minds, our souls could actually inspire us to be thinking about what would be on my tag. If you walked into Home Depot and there was a Christy plant sitting there on the table, what would that tag have on it? What would my care, my basic care, and feeding instructions be? And this analogy has been really powerful for me personally because it's helped me really define for myself what really is something that I really need versus just like a list of things that I aspire to do or things that I'm just trying to force myself into a disciplined regimen to do, which never really seemed to work. This idea of how am I nourishing myself, that this is Karen's feeding instructions kind of switched my mentality.

And the folks that I've been coaching, I think are getting that too. And how this affects us on the job is that when you know your care and feeding instructions, when you know those basic things that you need to really nourish yourself, you can fight the effects of the stress, the pressure, and the fatigue. You can prevent and even reverse some burnout. And you can maintain boundaries where you need to, where you need to. So that you are replenishing yourself and not just spending your time escaping into things that really aren't nourishing your plant. When I'm coaching folks, I'm sorry, guys, if you're not into the touchy-feely analogy stuff, then sorry, this episode may not be for you. Stick it out though. You might still get something out of it. If however, this is making your wheels turn, I'll kind of give you some of the steps that I go through with some of the folks that I work with, right?

So people I've managed in the past, people that I coach even to this day, questions I asked myself. So the first is, taking some time, any length of time to just really think about what would be on my little botanical tag. What are my care and feeding instructions? Looking at your life now, think what actually gives you that little burst of energy or that makes you feel a little more ready for the day? Or the next day, after you've done something, those are symptoms that something's nourishing you. And that it belongs probably somewhere on your care and feeding instructions. Versus like I said, just escaping and you might be like zombing out in front of the TV. You think you're relaxing. But as soon as that show is over, you go straight back into that anxiety or stress or pressure or stress.

That may not be something that's really nourishing you. So taking some time to define that if you're in a spot and I know some of you out there are where you are maybe so disconnected from that, that you don't even really know what would be on your tag. Look for clues in your past, look for clues in the past, different points in your life and start to experiment with what it would look like or make you feel like to have little bits and pieces of those things into your life today. You may have a longer road to kind of

define that care and feeding instructions, but that's okay. There is no deadline here. But you want to get kind of a general sense of what's on your care and feeding instructions. The second step is to look at well proportionally, how much time am I actually spending on those things that are nourishing me versus spending on the things that really aren't? And start to think about where you can just trade up, trade your time that you were spending on something that wasn't really nourishing and feeding you to do something that does instead, and also look for ways that you can engineer your life if you will.

Where you make certain things that are consuming your time, like more efficient or not quite so time demanding so that you've got a little extra to spend towards something on your care and feeding instructions. The third step is recruit. You know, there might be a lot of reasons why you need other people to support you, and it's okay to need that. You know, if you aren't sure what your boss is going to think about you setting maybe a boundary, so you can have a very necessary part of your care and feeding instructions met, then you need to go recruit their help. Maybe it's your coworkers or your friends or your family, but bring in a community of people who can really help you maintain it. You might have guilt when you are not making those extra five calls at the end of the day, and you choose instead to go to the yoga class, there might be a real tug of war there if you are really ingrained in your behaviors that are burning you out, there might be some of that you have to work through where you might feel really insecure with that.

So recruiting people to help you is really important. As a leader, you need to learn and recruit your team members to share. We talk a lot in leadership about how important it is to know your team and really try to dig in and know things about their lives and whatever else. And guys, I'll be honest. This has always just felt kind of like superficial to me. I have only in a handful of instances had leaders that have, at least in my experiences have actually done that in a way that was truly meaningful. But I've had a lot of leaders who have asked me about my kid or something about my life and then we just move right onto the next topic. They were checking a box in terms of knowing me.

Well for you leaders out there, let me just flip this a little bit and just give you another reason why you should know your team. But I'm going to challenge you, just don't know them, know their care and feeding instructions. Learn that, have open discussions with them, because if you really want to be a fantastic leader, then what you need to be able to do is recruit your team to be sharing that, to support each other. And that's your job is to help people get nourished, to get their gas tank filled so that they can live to fight another day. So they can sustain their performance and be rock stars. That is your job. If your folks are burning out, if you don't have meaningful discussions around balance or helping them to know when it's okay, say Hey, take a breath, fill up the tank.

Cause tomorrow's going to be a doozy. If you are there to help guide and direct them, they're going to struggle. And everybody's got some different variants in terms of their awareness of what they need. And I think we all should have and deserve to have a truly engaged leader in our world who cares about our care and feeding instructions and is coaching us and working with us to help us make that possible while also being awesome in our work. That is a part of what we do as leaders. So again, you need to recruit your teams or you need to recruit up the line to help support this mechanism because it really is a community approach, especially in senior living sales where it is so demanding and where we do have to be so available to our customers. It's just not humanly possible for one person to be all that

everybody, all the time, so you have to have a community of people who are working together to achieve that goal but also to help make sure that everybody gets to have nourished life as well.

The last step is start somewhere. Just even if it's the tiniest thing that you're doing, that maybe you only have one thing on your care and feeding instructions that you know right now that's okay. Just do a little bit of that. You will start to feel better almost immediately when you are involved in things that are truly nourishing you. And then last, know that these are going to evolve. Just like plants at different seasons, different environments, different ages, plants needs change over time. So give yourself that wiggle room. That last thing you need right now is another laundry list of regimen that you're going to force yourself to try to do, give yourself some grace and some love to say, Hey, I'm going to stay in this intuitive place. I'm just going to feel out as my needs change.

And I'm going to give myself permission to change and adjust with the focus on how am I really nourishing myself and learning more about my care and feeding instructions over time. And so give yourself permission to allow that, to change and leaders, give yourself permission to keep discovering and learning and supporting your team members as they change because they all will. The folks that I've had that I've worked with that were really early in the careers versus those that were maybe sunseting in their careers had different needs and their care and feeding instructions were different. One wasn't better than the other. But part of my job as a leader is to try to understand and help deliver for those folks the support that they need to take care of themselves while they do their good work. The reason why this analogy has stuck with me for so long is because frankly, it has been one of the only things that has helped me to kind of reconcile the very real barriers that we have in senior living sales with self-care.

Because if I know what my basic care and feeding instructions are, meaning like at the minimum that I need to be healthy mind, body soul, then when my boundaries are getting pushed, like with scheduling issues, a, I might've recruited some help so they can help me maintain boundaries. Or b, is that I can be more deliberate about when I give on my boundaries because it's what's needed and important for my role and maybe get more creative in my needs getting met in other times of the day or the week, or it may also help me to recognize when no, you know what? These last five calls are just going to have to wait for tomorrow, because I need to go and need to go give myself a little charge up so that I can hit it hard tomorrow.

And it wasn't until I really had something I was trying to achieve. And it wasn't until I had something that I was trying to actually do when I was thinking about nourishing myself, that I was actually able to maintain boundaries while also being available and flexible and doing the amazing work that needed to be done. And because it was coming from an intuitive place where I was actually looking and recognizing it, how I was feeling that I didn't have to put all the extra pressure on myself to adhere to somebody else's regimen. The message overall, whether you love this analogy and it works for you. Great. Go for it, run with it. The message overall here is one, high-performers and good leaders are focused on how do we refill the tank as we're driving hard? They're not just take, take, taking from themselves and from their teams.

If they do, then they're probably cycling through constant burnout, less than stellar performance, even though they think they're great. Even though others may even think that they're doing great, they're not bringing their all. They can't. And they are turning and burning in their own careers or on their teams.

And it is ultimately affecting their performance. And they're in survival mode. There is a better way. And right now, in this moment, of this year, we have the opportunity to recognize where in the last five months, maybe we've been focused too hard on sprinting, maybe where we haven't been taking care of ourselves along the way. And you have the opportunity to get that right before we have our next big push here. Cause it's coming. It might already be knocking on your door. But no matter how busy you are, no matter how much you think that by taking some time away to actually focus and recharge your batteries, that that's not hurting your performance.

Actually, the opposite is true. Yes, you are busy. And yes, driving your performance at work is important. But something miraculous happens when you give your brain a break, is that when you go back at it, it magically sees new possibilities, or you have a little extra in the tank to do that extra on the job or in your life. We have this moment. You are not weak. You are not lazy. You are not uncommitted. And you are not entitled for following your basic care and feeding instructions. I'm going to say it again because I think that there are folks out there who really need to like, let this sink in. You are not weak. You are not lazy. You are not uncommitted and you are not entitled for taking care of yourself. In fact, you are doing what you need to do to have stamina, to be focused, to bring your whole creativity and agility to your job. And that's guys, the kind of person who, and the kind of leader who really rocks it over a period of time. And isn't just a quick burnout. It is okay to do that. And whether you are suffering from maybe some bad habits, some unhealthy drives for other people's attention, or even you're suffering from being involved with some pretty poor leaders, it is okay to stop and say, what can I do different here?

And to make these changes. And to make these commitments for yourself, for your teams to do better work. So this is a call to us all this month. And I hope that this has been a good recharge for you and maybe good timing for you to think about how can I be a better leader? How can I be better as an individual in my life, by nourishing myself, taking care of myself? There is only one of you in this world. No one else can tell you what to do for yourself. It needs to come from you and you need to recruit people and build a community around yourself that can help you sustain it. So this has been another episode of Bridge The Gap Contributor Wednesday. Again, I'm Christy Cunningham. If you'd like to connect with me, you can find a link out to me on BTGvoice.com

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