



Don Eash Coaching

OXYGEN MASK

THE RIGHT ALTITUDE

Your Burnout Diagnostic

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SMOULDERING RUIN

Total: 102 of 120

Why this is called the Oxygen Mask

You've heard it on every flight. Put your own oxygen mask on before helping others. It's not selfish — it's the only way you stay useful to the people you're trying to help.

This is yours. Forty questions answered. Ten sections to read. The whole document is built on one principle: the leaders who burn through their own oxygen never stop trying to help others — they just stop being able to. The mask isn't a luxury. It's the precondition.

What follows isn't a course or a coaching plan. It's a diagnostic — a snapshot of where you are right now, what's loudest, and what to do this week. Read it once through. Then come back to the First 30 Days section at the end, because that's the page you print.

— Don

SECTION 1 — YOUR ZONE

Smouldering Ruin

Total score: 102 of 120

You went from Banked Coals — an 18 out of 120 — to Smouldering Ruin at 102. That's not a gradual slide. That's a structural collapse, and it happened fast enough that you may not have fully registered the scale of it yet. Smouldering Ruin means your identity has fused with the work to such a degree that the burnout isn't just draining you — it's replacing you. Your body is screaming, your recovery is gone, your hours are doing damage, and the person you were outside of your role has gone quiet. This isn't a rough season. This is a system that caught fire while you were inside it.

SECTION 2 — THE SHAPE OF YOUR BURNOUT

The five categories of your assessment, scored side by side. The loudest one — the category where the data clusters highest — is highlighted. That's the one driving the rest of the document.



Each category is scored from 0 to 24, with 24 being loudest. Total possible: 120.

Patterns also scored 22. Body gets the spotlight because physiology is the leading indicator — the signal most leaders override the longest. The patterns work shows up in the sections that follow.

SECTION 3 — YOUR LOUDEST CATEGORY: BODY

Body is your loudest category at 22 out of 24, and it jumped from a 2. That means your body was fine — and then it wasn't, and now it's in full revolt. When Body leads in Smouldering Ruin, it means your nervous system has stopped whispering and started shouting, and the fact that it escalated this fast tells me you overrode a lot of early signals to get here.

The rest of this document goes wider — the patterns running you, the recovery you've lost track of, the body data you've been avoiding, the five hours next week, the thirty days after. But this category is where the loudest signal is, and it's worth keeping in earshot as you read the rest.

SECTION 4 — PATTERN AUDIT

All four of your patterns are running on an Identity engine. That means you don't just do the work — you are the work, at a level that's become load-bearing for your sense of self. The task accumulation, the availability, the bottlenecking, the automatic yes — none of those are habits you picked up accidentally. They're expressions of a belief that says: if I stop holding all of this, I stop being the person people need me to be. And that belief went from background hum to full volume somewhere between your first assessment and now.

YOUR LOUDEST PATTERN

The "I'll Just Handle It" Pattern

Score: 3 / 3

The 'I'll Just Handle It' pattern means you absorb tasks, decisions, and responsibilities faster than you release them. In your week, it looks like stepping in before anyone asks, carrying things that belong on other people's plates, and treating delegation as a risk rather than a tool. The pile never shrinks because every time something lands near you, you grab it — not because no one else can, but because not grabbing it feels like you're failing at something fundamental.

WHAT BUILT IT

At the Identity level, 'I'll Just Handle It' isn't a work strategy. It's a survival identity. Somewhere along the way, being the person who handles everything became how you know you matter. That's not vanity — it's often forged in real moments where stepping up was the only option. But the cost is that you can't put something down without feeling like you're putting yourself down. And when the load spiked — which it clearly did between assessments — you didn't have a way to say no that didn't feel like self-betrayal.

WHAT IT'S COSTING YOU ELSEWHERE

SHRINKING IT 10%

1. This week, identify three tasks you absorbed in the last 10 days that someone else could have owned. Write them down. Don't reassign yet — just name them.
2. Next week, hand one of those three back. Not the easiest one — the one that makes you most uncomfortable to release. Notice what the discomfort says about you.
3. In week three, before picking up anything new, pause for 10 seconds and ask: is this mine, or am I making it mine? Track how many times the answer is the latter.

That's the 10%. You'll resist all three steps. Start with step one.

SECTION 5 — RECOVERY PRESCRIPTION

Recovery is the easiest section in this document to underestimate. The patterns you named in the Audit are getting the attention because they're loud — they show up in your week, eat your time, generate visible cost. Recovery is quieter. It's what's missing, not what's there. And what's missing rarely makes it onto the priority list.

That's the trap. The patterns are loud. Recovery is quiet. And the quiet one is what needs to go in first.

THE READ ON YOUR RECOVERY

Your recovery leak is Daily — meaning you're not recharging at the end of a day, you're just stopping. The tank doesn't refill overnight; it just stops draining until morning.

THE DEEPER READ

When the engine is Identity, daily recovery doesn't just leak — it gets crowded out by the belief that rest is something you earn through output, not something you need to function. You went from a Recovery score of 4 to 20, which means whatever small daily recharge rituals you had got demolished. The Identity engine makes this worse because resting can feel like proof you're not as capable as you need to be. So you skip it, and your body absorbs the cost, which is exactly what your Body score is reflecting.

THE INSTALL

One non-negotiable 20-minute window every evening where you are unreachable and doing something that has nothing to do with work, productivity, or being useful. Not scrolling. Not 'catching up on something light.' Something that exists only because you enjoy it — a walk, music, sitting on the porch. Defend it like a meeting with the most important person in your organization, because it is. Two weeks. Every night. If you skip it, don't double up — just restart the next evening.

Defend the install for two weeks before you do anything else. Recovery is the foundation everything in the next sections rests on.

SECTION 6 — BODY SCORECARD SETUP

Your mind will tell you you're fine. Your body won't lie.

Most leaders I've worked with have a story about their burnout that doesn't match what their body is doing. The story is something like, "this season is hard but I'm managing it." The body — the resting heart rate, the sleep efficiency, the morning energy — is telling a different story, and they haven't been reading it.

This section gives you one number to track for two weeks. Not three. Not a dashboard. One. The point isn't to optimize. The point is to give you something objective to argue with the next time the story doesn't match the data.

YOUR METRIC: ENERGY & LEAN

Your body is crashing hard and you're leaning on something to get through the day — caffeine, sugar, adrenaline, alcohol, whatever the crutch is. This is your loudest body signal because at 22/24, your body has moved past fatigue into a pattern of collapse-and-prop-up that's become structural.

HOW TO TRACK IT

For two weeks, track three things every day in a notes app or on paper: your energy at 10am, your energy at 3pm, and what you used to bridge the gap. Rate energy on a 1-to-5 scale. Write the bridge — the third coffee, the energy drink, the snack you didn't want but needed, the nap you couldn't take. Don't try to fix anything. Just record it. You need the data before you need the plan.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

You'll likely see a pattern where mornings start tolerable and afternoons crater — and the bridges you're using are getting less effective. The gap between the two numbers will tell you how much debt your body is carrying.

WHAT'S GOING TO FIGHT THE DATA

The Identity engine will try to reframe this tracking as weakness — as proof you can't handle what you used to handle. That resistance is the engine talking, not reality. Track anyway.

SECTION 7 — THE FIVE-HOUR MAP

This is the section you're going to fill out. Not later. Now, before you close this document.

At 19/24 on Hours — up from a 5 — your schedule isn't just full, it's doing structural damage. Surgical framing means we're not looking for margin or balance. We're looking for the hours that are actively destroying your health, your relationships, and your capacity to think clearly. Somewhere in your week there are hours you're working that produce almost nothing except the feeling of still being in the fight. Those are the ones to cut first — not because the work doesn't matter, but because you physically cannot sustain this volume and the returns are already diminishing. Between your first assessment and now, you added roughly the equivalent of a second job's worth of strain. Something expanded, and it needs to contract before your body makes that decision for you.

So that's the assignment. Five hours, off your calendar by next Sunday night.

WHERE TO LOOK FIRST

The Pattern Audit named your loudest monster: The "I'll Just Handle It" Pattern. That tells me something specific about where your hours are leaking, and it changes which bucket you start with.

THE MATH

Every minute over 40 hours is borrowed from somewhere. Your Recovery scoring told us that daily recovery is the leakiest place — that's where the borrowed hours have been going. Five hours, this week. Borrowed from where the data says they're hiding. Returned to where the data says they should go.

THE WORKSHEET — THREE BUCKETS, FIND FIVE HOURS

Stop / Delegate / Shrink

What I'm cutting:

Hours per week reclaimed:

Cost to cut (the conversation, the email, the decline):

Protect / Defend / Lock

What I'm protecting:

Hours per week defended:

Cost to hold (the pushback, the guilt, the expectation):

Install / Build / Start

What I'm adding:

Hours per week invested:

Cost to start (the time, the discomfort, the adjustment):

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS SECTION

Read your three “cost to cut” lines back. Each one is a real cost — a conversation you've been avoiding, a “no” you owe someone, an expectation you've trained that you now have to retrain. If those costs aren't written down, the cuts won't happen. You'll get to the conversation, the cost will feel bigger in the moment than it does on paper, and the hour will go back on your plate.

Write them down. Then this week, pay them.

Open next week's calendar right now. Block the five hours you just reclaimed. Specifically. Not “free time” — block them as “Recovery” or “Strategic” or whatever language makes them stick on your calendar. The hours you don't block will get refilled by Wednesday.

SECTION 8 — IDENTITY RESET

This section isn't in everyone's document. It's in yours because of how you answered eight specific questions — about who you are outside this work, what comes up when you imagine letting go of the role, and what your life would look like if it disappeared tomorrow. Your answers crossed a threshold (Identity subscore: 19 of 24). That's why this section is here.

I want to be direct with you about something before you read further. The other sections of this document — Pattern Audit, Recovery Prescription, Body Scorecard, the Five-Hour Map — those work mechanically. You install the practice, you watch the data, the pattern shrinks. This section doesn't work that way. Identity isn't a pattern, and it doesn't shrink because you read about it. What this section can do is make something visible that you may have been carrying for a while without naming it. What you do with that visibility is a different conversation.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

OutsideSelf means you've lost the ability to have a conversation — even with yourself — that doesn't route through work. When someone asks how you're doing, the answer is about the project, the team, the deadline. When you think about the weekend, you think about what you'll catch up on. The person who existed before this role — the one with opinions about music, or books, or where to eat — has gone quiet. At 19/24 on Identity, up from 5, that person didn't fade slowly. They got buried under an avalanche.

THE DEEPER READ — YOUR ENGINE

When your Identity score is this high and the engine behind your patterns is also Identity, you're looking at a closed loop. The work defines who you are, which drives you to do more work, which further narrows who you are, which makes the work feel even more essential. The jump from 5 to 19 means this loop tightened dramatically and recently. Something happened — a role change, a crisis, a loss — that made the work feel like the only solid ground. And now the ground itself is giving way.

THE THREE CIRCLES

Find a piece of paper. Draw three concentric circles, one inside the other.

The inner circle is your Work Self. The version of you that exists in the role.

The middle circle is your Parallel Self. The version that exists outside work — relationships, interests, the body, place in family.

The outer circle is your Unchosen Self. The version that exists when no role is being performed at all. The version that just is.

Now write inside each circle what's currently there. Not what was there 20 years ago. Not what you wish were there. What's actually there this week.

For most leaders who land in this section, the inner circle is full and detailed. The middle circle has some entries but they've gotten thinner over the years. The outer circle is often nearly empty.

Write what's there. Don't fix anything yet. The imbalance is the diagnostic.

THE HAND-OFF VISUALIZATION

Two minutes. Do it now, before you read past it.

Close your eyes — or just look at a spot on the wall and let your focus soften.

Picture this: it's 18 months from today. You've decided, on your own terms, with full agency, to hand off the role. Not because you were forced to. Because you chose to. The handoff has gone smoothly. There's a successor in place. The clients are in good hands. The transition went the way you'd want it to go. The organization is thriving without you.

Now it's the next morning. Tuesday, no role to walk into. Your phone isn't blowing up. You wake up. You have a coffee. You look at the day in front of you.

Sit with it for two full minutes. Don't think about logistics, money, retirement plans. Just sit with the morning.

What comes up.

For leaders carrying high Identity scores, what comes up is rarely loss of income or status. What comes up is one of three things: vertigo (the day has no shape), quiet panic (I have nothing to do, what does that mean about me), or relief that turns immediately into guilt for having felt relief.

Whichever one came up, that's information. It's not a verdict. It doesn't mean you have to leave the role. It means there's something true about your relationship to the work that the work itself has been hiding from you.

WHAT THIS SECTION CAN'T DO

Everything else in this document has a practice attached. This section doesn't. Not because I forgot to write one — because identity work isn't a practice. You can't homework your way back to a self that's gotten quiet over years.

What identity work actually requires is some combination of three things, and most leaders need at least two of them.

1. Quiet time with someone who knew you before. A friend from before this role. A sibling. A college roommate. Their version of you is still there, in their head, intact. Sitting with them is a way of borrowing that version back for an afternoon.

2. A real conversation with a therapist or coach. Not because something is wrong with you. Because identity that's gotten this fused with a role usually has roots that are older than the role.
3. Time alone, doing nothing useful. Two hours a week. No phone. No book. Just sitting somewhere — a bench, a porch, a car in the driveway — letting the silence settle. Most leaders find this almost unbearable for the first three or four times. Then something shifts.

Start with one. The other two will get easier once one of them is moving.

SECTION 9 — STAY-OR-GO DIAGNOSTIC

Triggered because Identity (19), Hours (19), and Recovery (20) all crossed the 16-point threshold simultaneously.

Three of your subscores crossed the threshold that triggers this section: Identity at 19, Hours at 19, Recovery at 20. When all three are elevated like this, the question of whether to stay in your current role stops being theoretical. I'm not going to tell you to leave or to stay — that decision belongs to you, and it depends on factors I don't have visibility into. What I can tell you is that the data says your current role, at its current intensity, is not sustainable for your body or your identity. That's not an opinion. That's what a jump from 18 to 102 looks like.

The frame I'd give you is this: Can this role change enough, fast enough, to stop the damage? Not in six months — in the next 30 days. If the hours can come down, if someone else can carry load you're currently holding, if there's a structural change available that would bring these numbers back toward survivable — then staying is worth testing. But if the role requires what it's currently extracting from you, the math doesn't work. You're not failing the role. The role is consuming you. And the Identity engine makes this harder because walking away feels like losing yourself, when in fact staying is what's erasing you.

SECTION 10 — THE FIRST 30 DAYS

This is the page you print.

WEEK 1 — INSTALL

The frame.

You've taken this assessment before, and last time you were at 18. You don't need orientation — you need triage. Week 1 is about stopping the bleed: install the recovery practice, start collecting body data, and tell the people closest to you what's actually happening.

What you're doing.

- Install the 20-minute evening window tonight. Unreachable, non-productive, every night for 14 days. Set a phone alarm as a hard boundary.
- Start the Energy & Lean scorecard — energy at 10am, energy at 3pm, what you used to bridge. Notes app or paper. Every day.
- Tell three people — not coworkers — that you're in a bad stretch and you're working a plan. Name it out loud. This breaks the isolation the Identity engine feeds on.

What's going to push back.

The Identity engine will tell you that you don't have time for this, that 20 minutes of rest is 20 minutes of falling behind. It will also resist telling anyone because admitting struggle feels like admitting failure. Both of those instincts are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

The check.

By Sunday: did you take the 20 minutes every night? Do you have 7 days of energy data? Did you tell three people? If you hit two out of three, keep going. If you hit zero, that's data too — it means the system is stronger than your current leverage against it.

WEEK 2 — FIRST CUT AT THE LOUDEST PATTERN

The frame.

Week 2 is the first cut at the pattern. You've got a week of body data and a recovery rhythm started. Now you begin pulling one thread out of the pile you've been carrying.

What you're doing.

- Name three tasks you absorbed that belong on someone else's plate. Write them down. Pick the one that makes you most uncomfortable to release — and hand it back.
- Continue the 20-minute evening window. No exceptions, no negotiations.
- Continue the Energy & Lean scorecard. Same three data points.
- Cut five hours from your work week. Cancel, delegate, or decline — find five hours that are producing more strain than value and remove them.

What's going to push back.

Handing back a task when your Identity engine is running will feel like you're proving you can't handle it. Cutting hours will feel like abandonment. That's the engine. It lies. The people around you will likely adjust faster than you expect.

The check.

By Sunday: is the task reassigned and staying reassigned? Are you at 14 consecutive days on the evening window? Did you actually cut five hours, not just move them? Check the scorecard — you should have 14 days of data now.

WEEK 3 — THE DATA CHECK

The frame.

Week 3 is the data check. You have two weeks of body metrics, a recovery practice with some runway, and one structural cut behind you. Now you read what the numbers are saying.

What you're doing.

- Review 14 days of energy data. Look for the pattern — when does the crash hit, what bridges are you relying on, and is the gap between morning and afternoon narrowing at all?
- Continue the evening recharge. It should be starting to feel less like a chore and more like oxygen.
- Hold the task you handed back and the five hours you cut. Do not reabsorb. Defend the space.
- Cut five more hours. Same criteria — strain without proportional value. This one will be harder because the easy cuts are gone.
- Re-read the Identity section of this report. Sit with the OutsideSelf pattern. Ask yourself: when was the last time I did something just because I wanted to?

What's going to push back.

The data might show minimal improvement, and the Identity engine will use that to argue the whole plan is pointless. Or the data might show real movement, and the engine will say you're fine now and can stop. Neither is true. Stay with the plan.

The check.

By Sunday: can you describe your energy pattern in one sentence? Are the cuts still holding? Have you identified something — anything — you used to enjoy that has nothing to do with your role?

WEEK 4 — RETAKE

The frame.

Week 4 is the retake. You've done this before — you know the questions. The point isn't to score well. The point is to see what moved and what didn't, because that tells you where the engine is still running the show.

What you're doing.

- Retake the assessment. Answer based on right now, not based on what you hope is true.
- Compare every subscore to this assessment. Look especially at Body and Identity — those were your loudest signals. Note what moved more than 3 points and what didn't.
- Assess practice quality — did you actually do the recovery install and the body tracking, or did you do them for a few days and drift?
- Make no new commitments this week. Not one. Hold the line on what's already on your plate.

What's going to push back.

You'll want to declare this either a success or a failure based on the total number. Resist that. A drop from 102 to 85 isn't victory and it isn't defeat — it's directional data. The question is whether the Identity engine loosened its grip, even slightly. That's what the subscores will tell you.

The check.

By Sunday: retake is done. You have two sets of numbers side by side. You can articulate one sentence about what changed, one sentence about what didn't, and one sentence about what that means for month two.

AFTER 30 DAYS

The next 30 days aren't about fixing everything — they're a test of whether these practices can reach the Identity engine that's driving all of this. If the numbers move, the practices are working. If they don't, the engine is deeper than self-directed work can reach.

If nothing moves after 30 days of honest effort, it means the Identity fusion is load-bearing in a way that needs a real conversation with someone who can hold the weight of it with you — a coach, a therapist, someone who isn't inside the system. That's not failure. That's the data telling you the next right step.

Your code is saved through May 11, 2027. The assessment is here when you're ready to look again.

— Don