

From Surviving to Thriving: Resilience Skills for Leaders in Advocacy

Case Study Scenario:

Mai is the Policy Director at a small advocacy nonprofit. She's always been passionate about her work, often logging 60-hour weeks during the legislative session. Lately, Mai feels like she's running on fumes. She starts each day already exhausted, and by evening she's too drained to do anything but fall into bed but only to lie awake worrying. In meetings, her colleagues notice Mai has become cynical, brushing off new ideas with comments like "It won't make a difference anyway." She's withdrawing from her team, eating lunch at her desk, and she's stopped attending Friday staff check-ins. At home, Mai's partner says she seems "miles away." Mai can't remember the last time she took a full weekend off. Last night, she answered urgent emails from a coalition partner at 12:30 AM. When a close coworker gently suggested she take a break, Mai sighed and said, "I can't! If I step back, everything will fall apart."

This scenario might feel familiar to some of you. Mai's story highlights the pressures advocacy leaders face.

Small Group Discussion

Let's take the next 15-20 minutes in small groups to discuss the scenario.

Here are a couple of guiding questions:

- What signs of burnout or emotional fatigue did you notice in Mai's story?
 - What were the red flags?
- If you were Mai's colleague or supervisor, how might you approach this situation in a supportive, trauma-informed way?
 - What could you say or do to help?
- What could Mai have done earlier to protect her well-being?
 - Identify at least one strategy she (or her organization) could use to help move from "just surviving" toward thriving.