



The Work Is Sacred Toolkit

Practical Tools for Protecting Your Career, Your Purpose, and Yourself

Exclusive Companion Guide to *Nonprofits Unfiltered*
Money, Power, and the People Who Carry America's Charities

A Note Before You Begin

Welcome — and thank you for choosing Nonprofits Unfiltered.

This toolkit is your exclusive bonus, and it was created for one reason: too many people doing this work have been told that exhaustion is just part of the job.

It isn't.

What you'll find in these pages are honest, practical tools to help you assess where you are, name what's not working, and begin protecting the most important resource in the nonprofit sector — you.

Work through it at your own pace. Return to it as things change. And know that picking it up in the first place was already an act of courage.

The work is sacred. So are you.

The truth?

Exhaustion is not a badge of honor. It is a warning sign.

If you've ever questioned your worth, your calling, your sanity, or your future because of a nonprofit job — this toolkit is for you.

The pages ahead will ask you to be honest. Uncomfortably honest, sometimes. They'll ask you to name things you may have been avoiding: toxic patterns, unmet needs, boundaries you gave away, dreams you set aside.

That honesty is not an act of disloyalty to your cause. It is an act of integrity — toward yourself, and ultimately, toward the people you serve.

How to use this toolkit

Work through each section at your own pace. Some exercises take five minutes. Others may take weeks to process. There are no right answers — only honest ones. You can return to any section as your situation changes.

***Never confuse your willingness to serve with permission
for others to take more than you can give.***

Part One: The Nonprofit Worker Health Score™

Rate yourself honestly — this is for your eyes only

Complete this assessment using a scale of 1 to 5:

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Purpose & Meaning

1. I still feel connected to why I entered nonprofit work.	Score: ____
2. I believe my work makes a meaningful difference in people's lives.	Score: ____
3. I feel genuinely respected by my organization.	Score: ____
4. I am proud of the work my organization does in the community.	Score: ____
5. I still find joy and fulfillment in serving others.	Score: ____

Workload & Sustainability

1. My workload is manageable on a typical week.	Score: ____
2. I can take vacation time without guilt or constant check-ins.	Score: ____
3. I rarely work evenings or weekends unless I choose to.	Score: ____
4. I do not feel chronically overwhelmed or underwater.	Score: ____
5. I can fully disconnect from work after hours.	Score: ____

Leadership & Trust

1. My supervisor communicates honestly and transparently.

Score: ____

2. I receive useful, constructive feedback on my work.

Score: ____

3. I trust the leadership of my organization.

Score: ____

4. Organizational decisions are explained to staff.

Score: ____

5. I feel psychologically safe to speak up without fear.

Score: ____

Workplace Culture

1. Conflict and disagreement are handled respectfully.

Score: ____

2. I can express a dissenting opinion without negative consequences.

Score: ____

3. People at my organization are treated fairly and equitably.

Score: ____

4. I do not fear retaliation for raising concerns.

Score: ____

5. I feel genuinely included in my workplace community.

Score: ____

Personal Well-Being

1. I sleep reasonably well most nights.

Score: ____

2. I rarely dread Monday mornings or the start of the workweek.

Score: ____

3. My stress levels feel manageable most of the time.

Score: ____

4. I maintain healthy, nourishing relationships outside of work.

Score: ____

5. My sense of identity is not entirely defined by my job.

Score: ____

Career Growth

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. I am learning, developing, and growing professionally. | Score: ____ |
| 2. I am fairly compensated for the value I bring. | Score: ____ |
| 3. I see a viable, desirable future at my organization. | Score: ____ |
| 4. I have a clear sense of my next career step. | Score: ____ |
| 5. My contributions are genuinely valued and recognized. | Score: ____ |

Boundaries

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. I say no to requests that exceed my capacity when necessary. | Score: ____ |
| 2. I protect my personal time and recovery space. | Score: ____ |
| 3. I am not expected to answer emails or messages around the clock. | Score: ____ |
| 4. I ask for help or support when I need it. | Score: ____ |
| 5. I do not feel guilty for taking care of my own needs. | Score: ____ |

Hope & Future

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. I believe my professional future can be better than my present. | Score: ____ |
| 2. I still feel a sense of optimism about the work I do. | Score: ____ |
| 3. I have considered what my next chapter might look like. | Score: ____ |
| 4. I believe I deserve to work within healthy, ethical leadership. | Score: ____ |
| 5. I know my value — and I act accordingly. | Score: ____ |

Scoring Key

Add up all your scores from the eight sections above. Your total reveals where you are — and what may need attention.

160 – 200

 **Thriving**

You're in a healthy place. Keep protecting what's working — and help others get here.

120 – 159

 **Strained**


You're managing, but something important is off-balance. Pay attention to the lowest-scoring sections.

80 – 119

 **Running on Empty**

You're running on fumes. Burnout may already be underway. This toolkit was made for this moment.

Below 80

 **Time for Change**

Your current situation may be causing real harm. Your wellbeing matters more than any job. Take this seriously.

What to do with your score

Revisit your lowest-scoring category first. That section holds your most urgent work. Return to this assessment in 60–90 days to measure your progress.



Part Two: Burnout Assessment

Recognize the signs before they define your days

Burnout doesn't arrive all at once. It accumulates quietly — in the extra hours, the unanswered needs, the parts of yourself you slowly stop protecting. This assessment helps you name what's already happening.

Instructions

For each statement, rate how often you experience it: 0 = Never | 1 = Rarely | 2 = Sometimes | 3 = Often | 4 = Almost Always



Emotional & Mental Signs

1. I feel emotionally drained at the end of most workdays. *Frequency: ____*

2. I feel detached, numb, or indifferent toward the people I serve. *Frequency: ____*

3. I find it hard to care about outcomes that used to matter to me. *Frequency: ____*

4. I feel resentful toward my organization, colleagues, or clients. *Frequency: ____*

5. I find myself going through the motions rather than engaging fully. *Frequency: ____*



Physical Signs

1. I experience physical symptoms I believe are stress-related (headaches, stomach issues, fatigue). *Frequency: ____*

2. I have trouble sleeping, or I sleep too much and still feel exhausted. *Frequency: ____*

3. I struggle to concentrate or stay present in meetings and conversations. *Frequency: ____*

4. I forget things I would normally remember easily. *Frequency: ____*

5. I feel physically unwell more often than I used to. *Frequency: ____*

Work Behavior Signs

1. I dread going to work or starting the workday.	Frequency: ____
2. I procrastinate on tasks I used to tackle without hesitation.	Frequency: ____
3. I feel like nothing I do is ever good enough or makes a real difference.	Frequency: ____
4. I have reduced my effectiveness or productivity but can't seem to change it.	Frequency: ____
5. I am seriously considering leaving this job, this field, or both.	Frequency: ____

Interpreting Your Score

0 – 15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low Risk	<i>Burnout is not currently a major concern. Maintain your boundaries and self-care practices.</i>
16 – 30	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Risk	<i>Early warning signs are present. Take them seriously now — prevention is far easier than recovery.</i>
31 – 45	<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk	<i>Burnout is actively taking a toll. You need meaningful change, rest, and possibly professional support.</i>
46 – 60	<input type="checkbox"/> Critical	<i>You may be in crisis. Please prioritize your wellbeing above all else. Seek support — you deserve it.</i>

What signs are you most recognizing in yourself right now?

What would it look and feel like to be functioning at your best?



Part Three: Compassion Fatigue Assessment

When caring for others depletes the capacity to care for yourself

Compassion fatigue is distinct from burnout. It emerges not from overwork alone, but from the emotional weight of witnessing and absorbing others' suffering over time. Nonprofit workers are especially vulnerable.

What makes compassion fatigue different

Burnout is driven by exhaustion and overload. Compassion fatigue is driven by empathy — specifically, by the cumulative cost of caring deeply about people in pain. Both can co-exist, and both require care.

Reflect on Each of the Following

I notice I have started to feel detached from the people I serve. (Describe when and how this shows up.)

Hearing about others' pain or trauma has started to affect my personal life in these ways:

When I think about the most difficult stories or situations I've encountered in this work, I feel:

The last time I felt truly refreshed and emotionally restored was:

The things that help me process and recover from emotionally heavy work include:

What would sustainable compassion — giving from a full cup, not an empty one — actually look like in my life?

A gentle reminder

Feeling the weight of this work does not make you weak. It makes you human. Compassion fatigue is a professional hazard — not a personal failing. Acknowledging it is the first and most important step.



Part Four: The Boundary Builder

Reclaiming your limits — with clarity and without apology

Boundaries are not walls. They are not selfishness. They are the precise and honest articulation of what you need to sustain your work and your life. Naming them is the beginning of protecting them.

Why boundaries matter in nonprofit work

Nonprofit culture often weaponizes mission to extract more labor, more sacrifice, and more emotional availability than is healthy or sustainable. Saying yes to everything is not a virtue — it's a path to burning out the people most committed to the cause.

Complete each prompt as honestly as you can:

The boundaries I've allowed to erode in this job are:

I will no longer accept or tolerate:

I deserve to have these needs met at work:

After 6 p.m. (or my designated end of day), I will:

On weekends and days off, my commitment to myself is:

My early warning signs that a boundary is being crossed are:

When a boundary is crossed, my plan is to:

The person(s) I will share these boundaries with for accountability:

Saying no is a complete sentence.

You do not owe anyone an elaborate explanation for protecting your wellbeing. A boundary stated clearly and calmly — without over-justifying or apologizing — is a sign of professional maturity, not selfishness.



Part Five: Toxic Workplace Checklist

Know the signs — and trust what you see

Toxic workplaces are rarely obvious from the outside. They often present well — compelling mission, charismatic leadership, strong brand. The damage happens behind closed doors, and often so gradually that those experiencing it begin to doubt themselves.

Check every statement that is true in your current workplace, even if it makes you uncomfortable.

Leadership & Power

- Leadership is not held accountable to the same standards as staff.
- Decisions are made without transparency or meaningful explanation.
- Staff input is solicited but rarely — if ever — actually influences outcomes.
- Credit for successes is claimed by leadership; blame for failures falls on staff.
- One person's mood can define the entire culture of a given day.
- There is a clear inner circle with preferential access to leadership.

Culture & Communication

- Staff turnover is chronic and often unexplained.
- Good employees leave regularly, and leadership does not address why.
- Gossip, triangulation, and indirect communication are the norm.
- People are afraid to speak up, disagree, or raise concerns.
- There is a persistent gap between stated values and actual behavior.

- Favoritism visibly shapes who gets opportunities, support, or protection.

Workload & Wellbeing

- Staff are expected to absorb the workload of unfilled positions indefinitely.
- Burnout is treated as a personal failing rather than an organizational problem.
- Working nights and weekends is implicitly required or visibly rewarded.
- Requests for reasonable accommodations are met with resistance or resentment.
- Physical or emotional symptoms of stress are ignored or dismissed.
- The organization celebrates overwork as dedication.

Equity & Fairness

- Pay equity across race, gender, and seniority is not tracked or addressed.
- Marginalized staff consistently receive less support and more scrutiny.
- Concerns about discrimination or harassment are downplayed or ignored.
- HR exists primarily to protect the organization, not employees.
- Staff who raise concerns are quietly sidelined or pushed out.
- Retaliation — formal or informal — is a real fear for most people.

If you checked more than 8 statements:

You are likely in a toxic workplace. The problem is systemic — not personal. What you're experiencing is real, and naming it clearly is the essential first step. The rest of this toolkit will help you decide what comes next.

If you checked 4–8 statements:

Significant problems exist. This may or may not be changeable. Pay attention to whether things are improving or getting worse over time. Use the tools in this toolkit to make a clear-eyed plan.

Part Six: Interview Translation Guide

What they say — and what to actually ask

Toxic workplaces are excellent at sounding good in interviews. Learning to translate common phrases — and knowing the questions that reveal the truth — can save you years of unnecessary suffering.

What They Say	What It Might Mean	Ask This Instead
"We wear a lot of hats here."	Understaffed and over-relying on individuals	"What does a typical week look like for someone in this role?"
"We're like a family."	Expectations of above-and-beyond loyalty, boundary violations	"How does the organization handle disagreement or conflict?"
"We move fast and stay nimble."	Reactive culture, lack of systems, chronic chaos	"How are major decisions made and communicated to staff?"
"This role is great for someone passionate about the mission."	Low pay justified by cause; martyrdom expected	"Can you share the salary range and how compensation is reviewed?"
"We're a high-performance culture."	Burnout is normalized; rest is seen as weakness	"How does the organization support employee wellbeing?"
"We need someone who can hit the ground running."	No onboarding, no support, sink-or-swim environment	"What does the onboarding process look like for new hires?"
"The previous person left to pursue other opportunities."	May be a vague explanation for a forced or unhappy departure	"Why is this role open, and how long was it vacant?"
"Leadership is very hands-on."	Micromanagement, poor delegation, low trust	"How would you describe the management style on this team?"

Two questions that reveal almost everything

"What do you wish you had known before taking this job?" and "What is one thing you would change about working here?" Watch how people answer — the hesitation, the spin, or the genuine candor — as much as what they actually say.



Part Seven: Salary Negotiation Worksheet

Know your worth — and ask for it with confidence

Nonprofit workers are among the most likely to undersell themselves — conditioned to believe that caring about compensation means caring less about mission. That is a lie that serves organizations, not you.

The truth about nonprofit salaries

You can be deeply committed to a cause and also need to pay your rent. Negotiating your salary is not greed — it is professional self-respect. It also sets a precedent for everyone who comes after you.



Document Your Value

Before any negotiation conversation, complete this inventory. Specificity is power.

Key accomplishments in the last 12–18 months (be specific — numbers, programs, outcomes):

Revenue generated, grants written, or funding secured:

Teams led, people managed, or cross-functional projects coordinated:

Programs launched, expanded, or improved under your leadership:



Know Your Market

Salary negotiation requires data. Use at least two of the following sources to establish your market range:

- Idealist, Nonprofit AF, or comparable nonprofit job boards for posted salary ranges
- Glassdoor, Levels.fyi, or LinkedIn Salary for role-specific benchmarks
- Your state's nonprofit association salary survey (many publish annually)
- Candid/GuideStar for peer organization compensation data in 990 filings
- Conversations with trusted peers in similar roles at peer organizations

Market rate low end for my role and region: \$

Market rate high end for my role and region: \$

My current compensation: \$

My minimum acceptable salary for a new role: \$

My ideal / target salary: \$

Negotiation Phrases That Work

"Based on my research and the scope of this role, I'm targeting a salary in the range of \$X–\$Y."

→ Anchors the conversation at your number, not theirs

"I'm very excited about this role. Is there flexibility in the offer?"

→ Opens the door without making it adversarial

"Can you share the full compensation package, including benefits and any flexibility on start date or title?"

→ Expands the negotiation beyond base salary

"I'd like a day or two to review the offer before responding."

→ Buys you time without signaling hesitation

"I understand the constraints — can we agree to revisit this in six months?"

→ Builds in a formal checkpoint if the initial offer is firm



Part Eight: Career Roadmap

Where you are, where you're going, and how to get there

A career doesn't happen to you. It is shaped — by your decisions, your relationships, your willingness to invest in yourself, and your clarity about what you actually want. This roadmap helps you build that clarity.

Where You Are Right Now

My current role and primary responsibilities:

The skills I use most often:

The aspects of my current role I find most energizing:

The aspects of my current role I find most draining:

Where You Want to Go

Timeline	Where I Want to Be / What I Want to Be Doing
1 Year	
3 Years	
5 Years	

Skills to Develop

Skills I need to reach my 1-year goal:

Skills I need to reach my 3–5 year goal:

How and where I will develop these skills (courses, mentorship, stretch assignments):

People and Organizations to Know

Mentors I want to cultivate or deepen relationships with:

Peers I admire and want to learn from:

Organizations I would be proud to work for one day:



Part Nine: Chapter Reflection Journal

Processing what you're learning — and what it means for you

Use this journal section after reading each chapter of *Nonprofits Unfiltered*. Writing your reflections is more powerful than simply noting them — it helps you move from passive recognition to active ownership of your experience.

Chapter 1 Reflection

What surprised me most in this chapter:

What resonated deeply — or felt uncomfortably familiar:

What I need to stop accepting in my professional life:

One concrete action I will take as a result of this chapter:

Chapter 2 Reflection

What surprised me most in this chapter:

What resonated deeply — or felt uncomfortably familiar:

What I need to stop accepting in my professional life:

One concrete action I will take as a result of this chapter:

Chapter 3 Reflection

What surprised me most in this chapter:

What resonated deeply — or felt uncomfortably familiar:

What I need to stop accepting in my professional life:

One concrete action I will take as a result of this chapter:

Chapter 4 Reflection

What surprised me most in this chapter:

What resonated deeply — or felt uncomfortably familiar:

What I need to stop accepting in my professional life:

One concrete action I will take as a result of this chapter:

Chapter 5 Reflection

What surprised me most in this chapter:

What resonated deeply — or felt uncomfortably familiar:

What I need to stop accepting in my professional life:

One concrete action I will take as a result of this chapter:





Part Ten: Your Personal Action Plan

From reflection to action — in the next 90 days

This is where the toolkit becomes a living document. Clarity without action is just awareness. What will you actually do — starting now?

Three lists, one commitment

Complete each list below with honest specificity. 'Talk to my boss' is too vague. 'Schedule a meeting with my supervisor to discuss my workload by [date]' is a plan.

Three Immediate Changes

Things I will change in my behavior, habits, or boundaries — starting this week:

Immediate Change #1:

Immediate Change #2:

Immediate Change #3:

Three Conversations to Have

Conversations I've been avoiding — or that I need to initiate proactively:

Conversation #1 — With whom, about what, by when:

Conversation #2 — With whom, about what, by when:

Conversation #3 — With whom, about what, by when:

Three Boundaries to Protect

Specific limits I am committing to hold — and how I will enforce them:

Boundary #1 — What it is and how I will protect it:

Boundary #2 — What it is and how I will protect it:

Boundary #3 — What it is and how I will protect it:

My 90-Day Check-In

Return to this page in 90 days. Answer the following:

Which of the three changes did I actually make? What got in the way of the others?

Which conversations happened? What came of them?

Are my boundaries holding? What have I learned about my capacity to protect them?

How has my Health Score (from Part One) changed? What do I notice?

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Closing Reflection

The work is sacred.

Your life is sacred, too.

*Never confuse your willingness to serve
with permission for others to take more than you can give.*

You came to this work because something called you. That call is real, and it matters. But it was never a call to exhaust yourself — it was a call to show up, sustainably and fully, for as long as you can.

The toolkit you've just completed is not a one-time exercise. It is a practice. Return to it. Revisit your scores. Update your roadmap. Share it with a colleague who needs it.

The sector needs you at your best. Not hollowed out, not resentful, not counting the days until you can leave. It needs you whole.

You did the work. Keep going.

Every page you completed, every honest answer you wrote, every boundary you named — that is the work of a person who takes both their purpose and their life seriously. That is what the sector needs more of.