

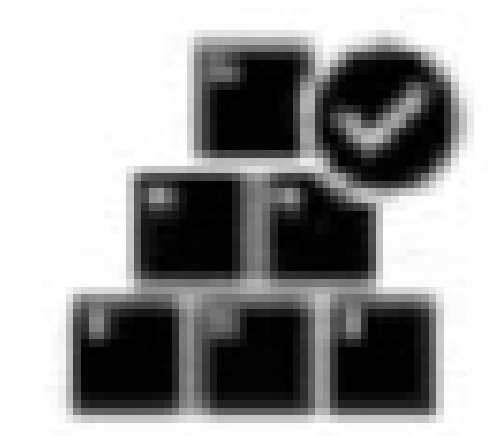
Balancing Data and Wellbeing: Strategies for Self-Care, Advocacy, and Success

*Karen Egypt, Assistant Director of Assessment
Office of Assessment & Technology*

North East Association for Institutional Research
IR Guiding Light Webinar
May 14, 2025

Karen Egypt

❖ 34 years in higher ed, 25+ years in
IR/Assessment/Enrollment Management



Reformed Perfectionist



Highly Analytical



Highly Creative



Highly Driven



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND



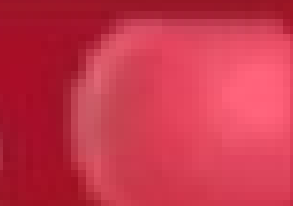
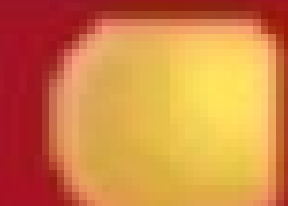
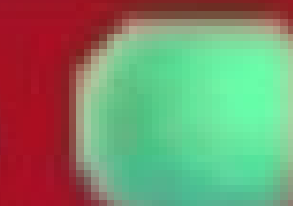
What is Work-Life Balance?

Work-life balance is your **personal, sustainable rhythm** for meeting professional responsibilities without sacrificing personal wellbeing.

- ⚖️ It's **personal**. What works for one person may not work for another.
- 🧘 It supports **mental and emotional health**.
- ⌚ It's about **sustainability**—not just short-term productivity.
 - 🚩 Overwork can create unrealistic norms and expectations.
 - 🔍 An absence of complaints ≠ an absence of problems.

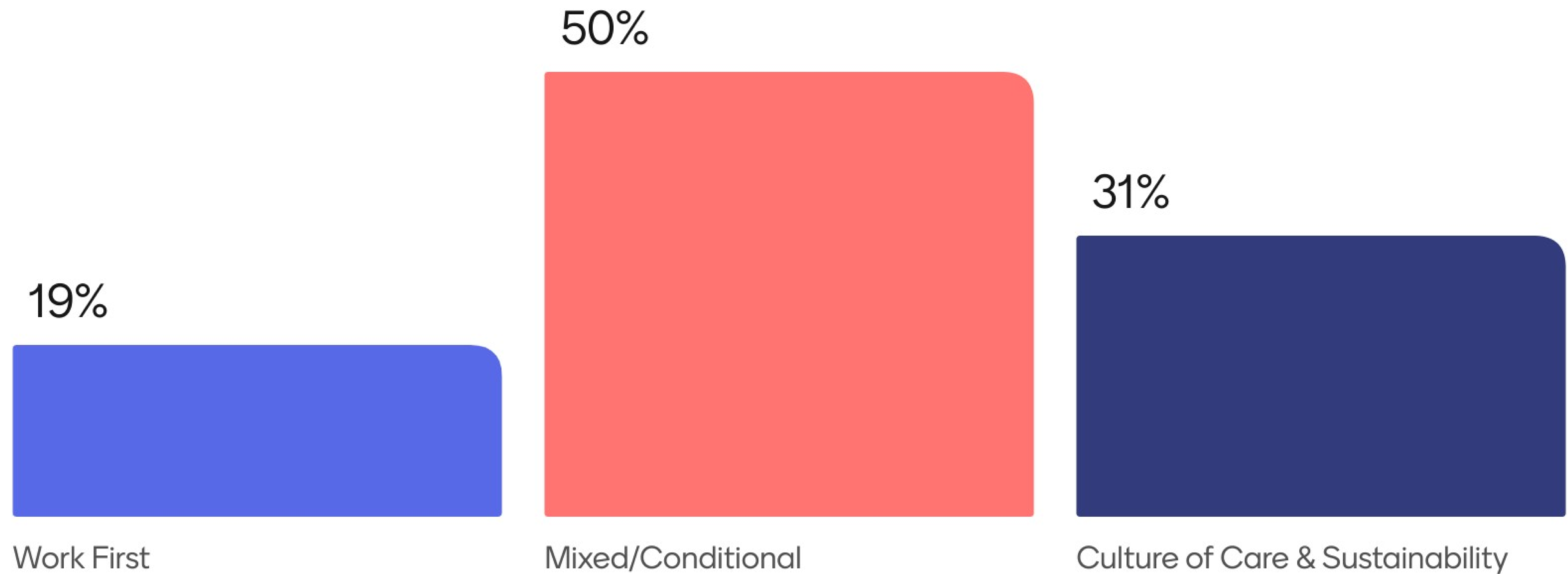


Work Culture Spectrum: From Work First to Culture of Care & Sustainability

Cultural Dimension	Work First Culture 	Mixed/Conditional Culture 	Culture of Care & Sustainability 
Flexibility & Time Autonomy	Strict in-office, long hours, remote work options limited or discouraged	General support for flexibility in work hours and location, long hours periodically at peak periods	Flexible hours, remote/hybrid normal and supported, trust-based
Leave & Time Off (PTO)	Use of Leave generally discouraged or penalized	Adequate PTO is available and not discouraged, but workload makes it hard to take without falling behind.	Culture supports and encourages use of PTO; PTO generous or unlimited leave
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Leadership Behavior	Leaders models and prioritizes work	Mixed signals from leadership	Leaders model balance with supportive policies and intentional actions.
Communication Norms	Off-hours messages expected/responsive	Non-work hours generally respected	Clear boundaries, respect for non-work hours
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Quality of Work Relationships	Hierarchical, transactional, or siloed; unhealthy dynamics ignored except as legally required.	Quality of relationships vary widely; support exists but conflict resolution is unclear or supervisor-dependent	Collaborative, respectful culture; clear norms & processes to minimize or address toxic behavior
Wellness Resources & Supports	Wellness seen as 'extra' or individual responsibility; minimal investment in programs	Wellness programs offered but underfunded, poorly communicated, or hard to access	Well-resourced, inclusive wellness offerings (e.g., mental health, fitness, caregiving support); time to use them without stigma

Work Culture

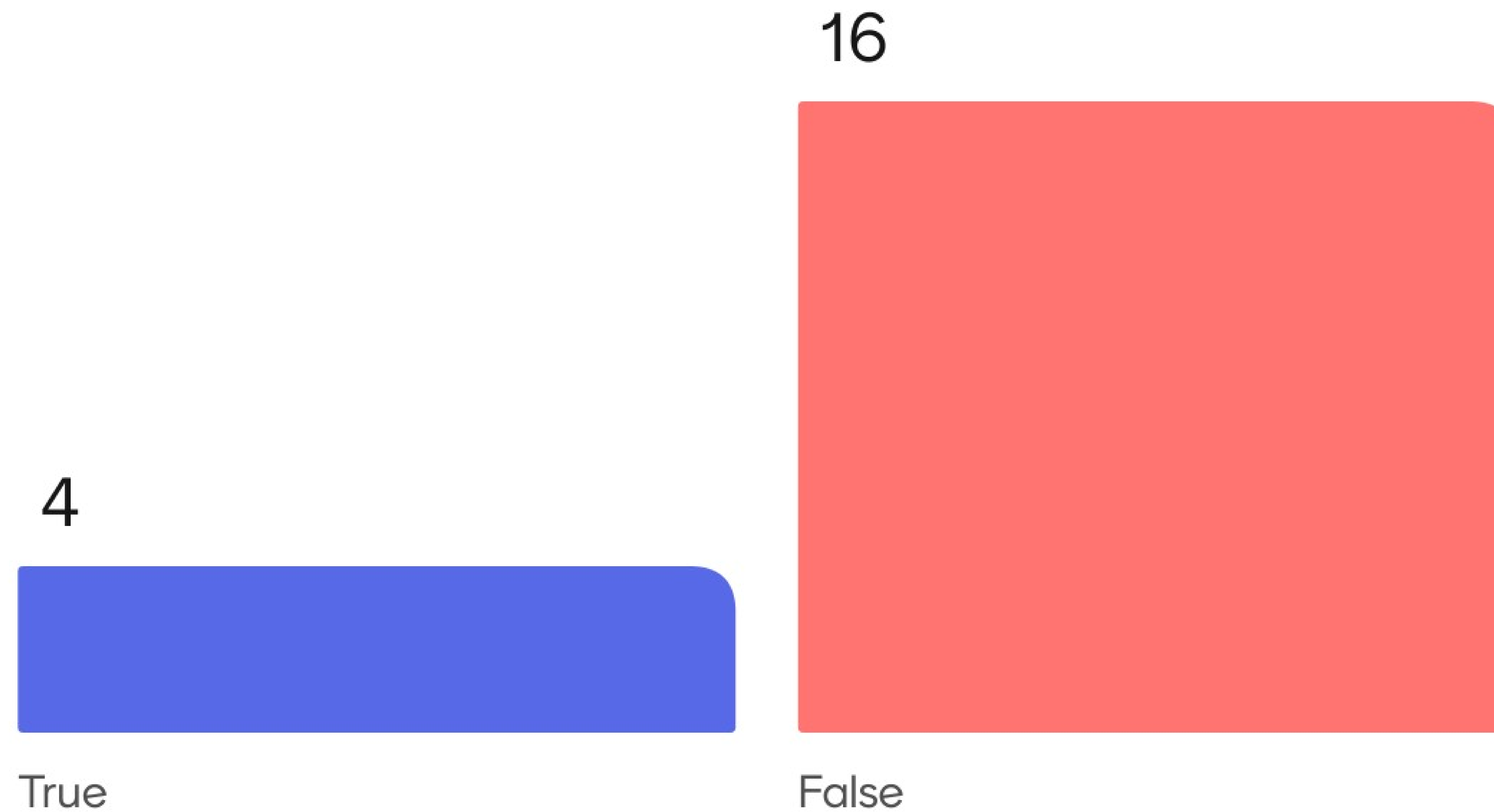
How would you generally describe your current work culture?



Taking the Lead— At What Cost?



Supervisor acknowledge contributions, express appreciation, collaborate to create sustainable and equitable workload.



The Quiet Cost of Transition



And It Got Worse: An Even Steeper Price



What actions could I have taken to improve/mitigate the situation?

Talk to ombudsperson

Seek additional allies/support

Layout the extra time you were spending and why

Sit down with your supervisor and HR to clearly communicate expectations.

run, job seek.

Set and communicate boundaries early. Sometimes it's not on you no matter how much you advocate...

decide what can be completed realistically and refuse to do the additional work

Escalate to HR. Push back when asked to take on another person's responsibilities or request additional pay to compensate.

What actions could I have taken to improve/mitigate the situation?

Request a priority list for the additional tasks.

succint overview version
(since some folks won't read / listen to 10 pages)

Advocate for additional contract or part-time support

Let people know when you are unavailable but when you can get to it

I can help with part A and B, but not part C

Lessons Learned

What Contributed to the Challenge

- 🚫 Leaders lacked reporting experience
- 🔄 I normalized unsustainable effort
- 😬 Assumed hard work would be recognized
- ⚠️ No regular check-ins with leadership
- 💡 Lack of visible breakdowns hid the burnout

What I Would Do Differently

- ✅ Ask questions about leadership style, values, and support systems during hiring
- ✅ Set boundaries and document scope of work early
- ✅ Don't assume—effectively communicate needs, ask for help
- ✅ Establish routine updates with prioritization discussions
- ✅ Advocate for sustainable practices, even when leadership assumes all is well

💡 ***“Overwork isn't a badge of honor—it's a warning signal.”***



Communicating Boundaries: Protecting Your Time and Energy

Unshakeable Boundaries 

12 Professional Power Phrases

"That won't work for me, but here's what will"

Redirects the conversation instantly. No justification needed.

"I'm unavailable after 6pm, I can help tomorrow at 9"

Sets clear time limits without room for negotiation.

"I need to check my schedule before answering"

Creates a buffer zone for thoughtful decisions, not reactive yeses.

"My calendar is blocked for deep work until 2pm"

Establishes professional-sounding barriers that few challenge.

"Which of these priorities should I set aside?"

Shifts responsibility back while showing your full plate.

"I've set aside 30 minutes for this conversation"

Time-boxes interactions that tend to expand endlessly.

"I can help with part A and B, but not part C"

Partial assistance feels more supportive than total rejection.

"I don't respond to messages on weekends"

Simple expectations that prevent future disappointment.

"This needs my full attention - can we schedule it?"

Transforms immediate demands into planned interactions.

"I've learned I can't take last-minute requests"

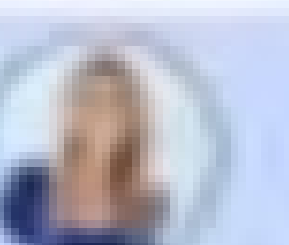
Frames your boundary as a professional lesson, not a choice.

"Let me think about that and get back to you by [time]"

Creates space without creating tension or immediate commitment.

"That's outside my zone of wisdom - here's who can help"

Turns rejection into redirection with professionalism.



Some Alternative Professional Power Phrases

Instead of ...	Use
My calendar is blocked for deep work until 2pm	I'm available at [time].
Which of these priorities should I set aside?	To make sure I meet expectations across the board, would it work if I delivered [Task A] by [date/time] and [Task B] by [date/time]?
I've set aside 30 minutes for this conversation	I have a hard stop at [time], but we can continue at another time if needed.
I can help with part A and B, but not part C	I can take on part A and B—should we find someone else for part C?
I've learned I can't take last-minute requests	I'll do my best to accommodate, but I may need until [new timeline].
That's outside my zone of wisdom – here's who can help	[Name] may be the best person to help with this request.



What can we do, as leaders or experienced professionals, to actively foster a culture of care and sustainability, especially within high-pressure, high-demand environments?

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Regular communication with supervisors and stakeholders

Respect other's boundaries

Model good behavior; practice setting boundaries for ourselves and our teams; advocating above and below for healthy practices.

Regularly scheduled touch base meetings

Step up as a co-collaborator or take over some duties as needed.

Setting realistic expectations.

Utilize good project management resources and techniques

Request priorities if given several tasks

What can we do to actively foster a culture of care and sustainability, especially within high-pressure, high-demand environments?

Good communication

slow things down
wherever & whenever
possible

regular pulse checks with
staff about capacity, talk
about expectations related
to capacity & balance

Offering help and asking
for help meeting
deadlines

prioritize and let non-
priorities go

model the behavior

Setting Boundaries

Leadership Strategies

- ❖ Audit current responsibilities to identify low-impact or outdated tasks that can be eliminated or automated.
- ❖ Reallocate or transition certain duties to other teams or offices where they more appropriately belong.
- ❖ Establish clearer expectations around work hours, response times, and availability to support healthier boundaries.
- ❖ Encourage transparent conversations about workload, capacity, and professional development goals.
- ❖ Celebrate and reward efficiency, collaboration, and sustainable work practices—not just high output.



Q & A



What resonated most with you today?

Not feeling appropriately acknowledged for going above and beyond in a previous job

The boundaries phrases - both sets - really helpful and made me re-think some of my own normal responses

And the time it took to recover from burnout

your personal story


overwork can create unrealistic expectations

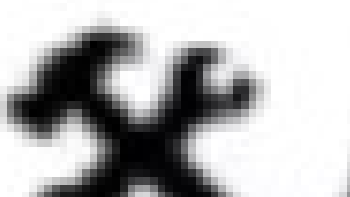
How you processed your experience at the other job. Ways to have done it differently but also knowing it was time to move on for your health.

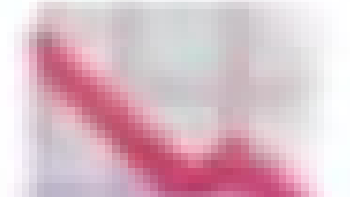
the examples of what a sustainable/caring environment looks and feels like

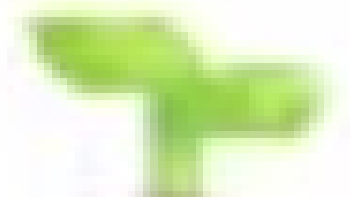
I want to print out that rubric of work culture models and ask folks to assess our office

Final Reflections & Takeaways

 **Communicating boundaries is a skill—one that can be practiced and strengthened.**
Framing your needs clearly and respectfully can help you advocate more effectively, even in challenging environments.

 **As leaders, we shape culture through the behaviors we model and reward.**
Strategically pushing back on overwork, encouraging transparency, and honoring boundaries all help make sustainable work possible.

 **Sustainability doesn't always require more resources—sometimes it's about rightsizing.**
Eliminating low-impact tasks, realigning responsibilities, and setting clear priorities can free up time and energy.

 **A culture of care and sustainability is possible, even in high-pressure contexts.**
It takes intention, collaboration, and a willingness to rethink the status quo.








ORLANDO, FL
May 20-23, 2025
Pre-conference: May 19-20

Thurs, May 22, 2025
2:30 PM

Balancing Data and Well-Being: Thriving Amid Workload & Expectations

Karen Egypt, Assistant Director of Assessment, University of Maryland
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