

Nourish & Nurture

Stronger leaders, stronger businesses

Leading without running on empty

Sarah Lacey, Nourish & Nurture

In partnership with

SMALL BUSINESS CHARTER | HELP TO GROW MANAGEMENT COURSE | HELP TO GROW MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS | CABS CHARTERED ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Who I am

Sarah Lacey

Mental Fitness Strategist | Founder, Nourish & Nurture

- BABCP-accredited CBT practitioner and Level 4 Nutritionist with 24 years of clinical experience
- Specialist in menopause-informed CBT (EMBERS®), hormone health and sleep (CBT-I)
- Clinician at Kingsbridge Private Hospital and NHS
- Builds psychologically adaptable, high-performing teams across the UK and Ireland
- Corporate Mental Health Innovator of the Year 2026
- Best Innovative Small Business 2026 (Ballymena Business Excellence Awards)



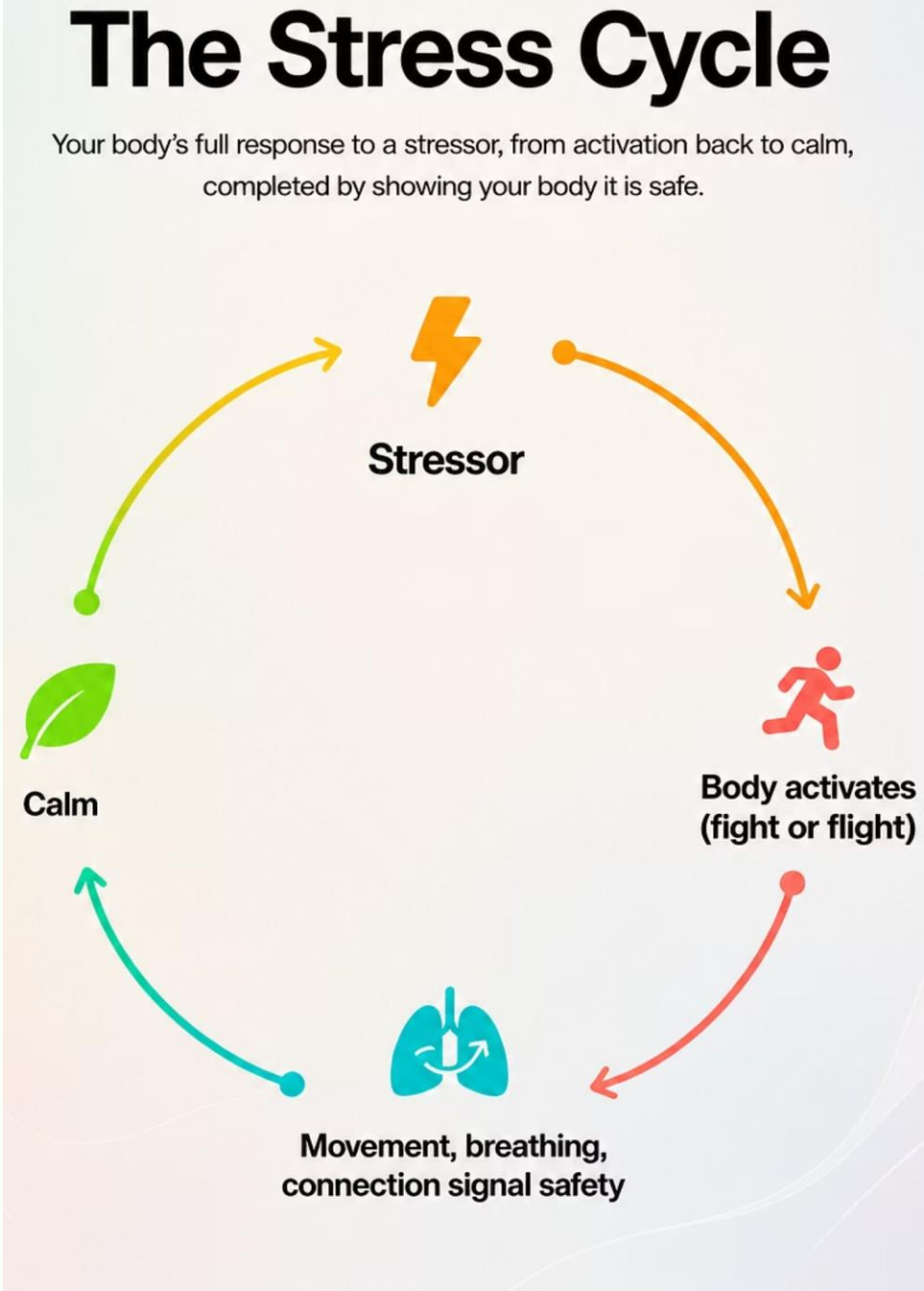
The leader running on empty

- You hold it all together and rest last, if at all
- You run on adrenaline and caffeine
- Your capacity is the ceiling on your business
- Depleted leaders make poorer decisions, and productivity and the team pay for it



What is actually happening

- Stress is designed to be short-term with stress cycles reaching completion
- Chronic cognitive and physical load keeps the sympathetic nervous system switched on
- The result: poor sleep, digestion or appetite disturbance, low energy, foggy thinking, short fuse

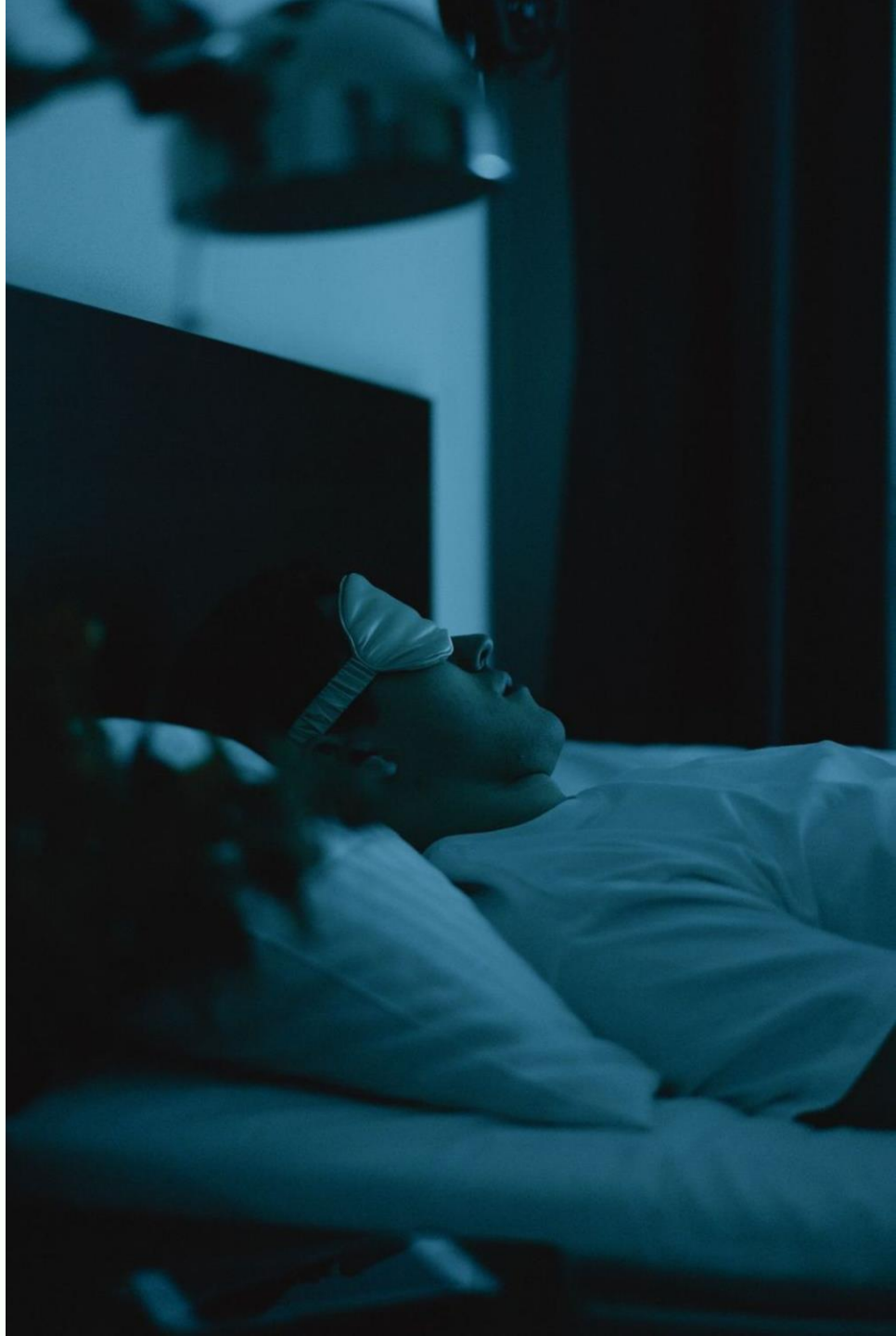


Sleep is your performance infrastructure

Sleep is when the brain recovers and consolidates

Poor sleep hits judgement, mood and self-control first

Treat it as infrastructure, the foundation for mental fortitude, gut health, energy and overall wellbeing



Practical sleep strategies



Keep a consistent wake time, even at weekends



Get daylight into your eyes within an hour of waking



Caffeine cut-off 3pm



Dim lights and screens in the last hour



Watch alcohol, it fragments sleep



Food is brain fuel

Cognition: your brain uses about a fifth of your energy

Energy: a sugar hit won't lift your mood, and can leave you more tired and less alert within the hour

Mood: what you eat regularly shapes how you feel, not just your waistline

Steady energy, steady leader



Protein and fibre at breakfast



A proper lunch, so caffeine isn't doing the work of food



Pair carbs with protein



Keep water within reach



Prep ahead for your busiest days

Add before you subtract

Oily fish once a week: NI adults average 30-60g a week against the recommended 140g

Build towards 30g of fibre a day: NI adults manage about 17g

Beans, nuts, wholegrains and colourful veg most days

Vitamin D, 10 micrograms daily, October to March



Hormones and the stress system

Cortisol is meant to rise and fall in a rhythm

Chronic stress Does not allow us to close Stress cycle and move on

Midlife change adds another layer, often mistaken for stress or ageing

- **Women:** estrogen, progesterone and testosterone change, bringing brain fog, poor sleep, anxiety, loss of confidence.
- **Men:** testosterone falls gradually and some develop deficiency, bringing fatigue, low drive, irritability, poor concentration

What helps

- Complete the stress cycle daily: move, breathe, connect
- Lift weights and aim to increase each week, body weight first (hikes, swimming)
- Go easy on alcohol, keep caffeine early



The thinking that keeps you depleted

All-or-nothing thinking: catch it, check it, change it

The tyranny of 'should': swap "I have to" for "I can, I will, I am choosing to"

Discounting what goes well: ask what you would say to a colleague

Rest feels like laziness: "My mind is telling me a story that..."

Constant worry: give it a time and a place, 10-15 mins after dinner

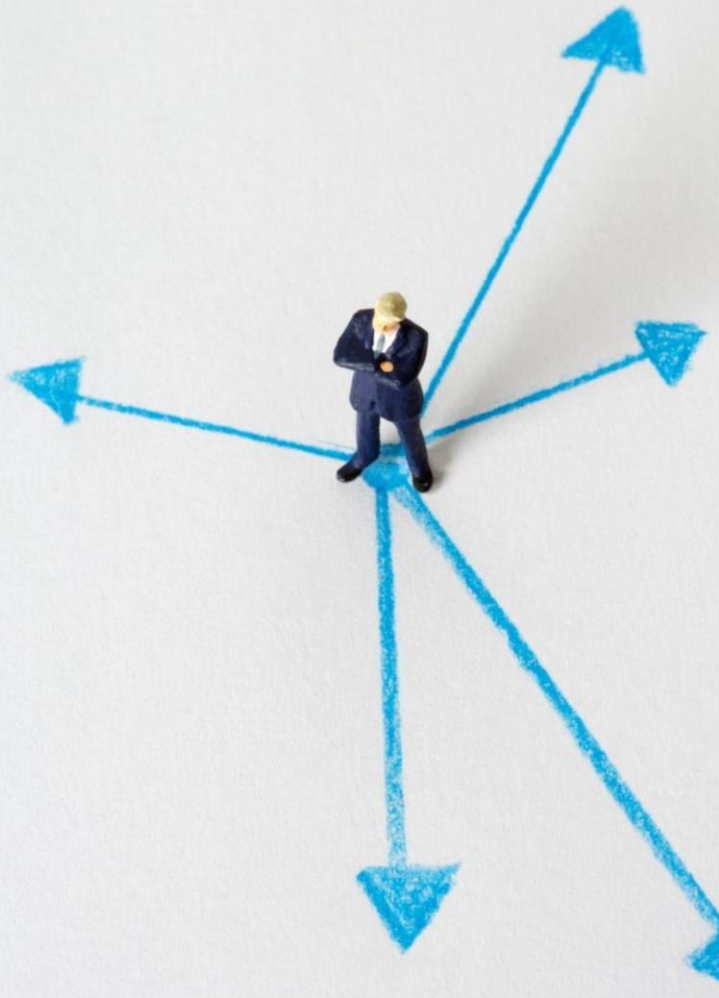


Emotional regulation

Early signs: firefighting, struggling to delegate, indecision, cynicism, always online

Regulation starts in the body

- Physiological sigh: two short inhales through the nose, one long slow exhale
- Name it to tame it: putting a precise word on a feeling reduces its intensity
- Self-distancing: talk to yourself in the third person, as you would a friend
- Opposite action: do the opposite of what the emotion is urging you to do



Leading by your values

- You can't do everything, so choose on purpose
- Name your top three values: they are your filter
- Ask of any demand: is this workable for me?
- Saying no to one thing is saying yes to another
- Protect one non-negotiable that matters to you
- Protect time to work on the business, not just in it

Your Capacity Blueprint

Write yours down now

Sleep

one habit

Food and energy

one change

Hormones and stress

one action

Thinking and regulation

one tool to trial

Values

one boundary to protect

Choose the ONE change that would help you most, and make it small enough to actually do. Your capacity sets the tone for your whole team.

Thank you

Sarah Lacey, Nourish & Nurture

Scan for feedback

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