

# Holding the Container

A self-audit for people who carry other people's weight for a living.

Some work is done on material and some work is done on people, and the second kind has a cost the first does not. Coaches, therapists, chaplains, counselors, physicians, nurses, teachers, social workers, HR leaders, facilitators, and anyone managing a team through something hard are all doing versions of the same job: staying steady while somebody else does not have to be.

The load is real and largely invisible, including to the person carrying it. It rarely arrives as a crisis. It arrives as drift: hours that creep, terms that soften, a shrinking margin between sessions, and a growing sense that the work is fine and you are tired in a way sleep does not fix.

Everyone asks who is holding them. Almost nobody asks who is holding you.

This takes twelve minutes. It measures load and structure rather than character, and a high score describes a set of arrangements rather than a failing.

## How to use it

Answer for the last **ninety days**. Answer quickly; the first read is usually the accurate one. Score each statement by how true it has been.

0 Rarely or never true

1 Occasionally true

2 Often true

3 Almost always true

Total each section, then add them for a score out of seventy-two. Section scores matter more than the total, because they tell you which arrangement to change first.

### WHAT THIS IS AND IS NOT

This is a structured self-reflection built from patterns that recur in practice. It is not a validated psychometric instrument, and it does not diagnose anything. Treat the result as a prompt for a conversation with someone who knows the work: a supervisor, a peer consultant, a coach, or a therapist.

## One · Capacity

*Whether there is room left over at the end of the day.*

|                                                                                           | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 I finish the working day with nothing left for the people I live with.                  |   |   |   |   |
| 2 I schedule people back to back with no gap to reset between them.                       |   |   |   |   |
| 3 Rest restores less than it used to, and I notice it taking longer.                      |   |   |   |   |
| 4 I have cancelled my own appointments, exercise, or plans to absorb someone else's need. |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION ONE                                                                               |   |   |   |   |

## Two · Boundary drift

*Whether the terms you set are the terms you keep.*

|                                                                                         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 5 Sessions or conversations run past their agreed end more often than not.              |   |   |   |   |
| 6 I am reachable outside working hours, and people know it, and they use it.            |   |   |   |   |
| 7 I have waived a policy of my own before anyone asked me to.                           |   |   |   |   |
| 8 There are people I work with whose relationship to me no longer has a clear category. |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION TWO                                                                             |   |   |   |   |

## Three · Discharge

*Where the weight goes after you put it down.*

|                                                                                                       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 9 I carry specific people home with me and think about them in the evening.                           |   |   |   |   |
| 10 I have no regular place to speak about the difficulty of the work with someone who understands it. |   |   |   |   |
| 11 My supervision, consultation, or peer group has lapsed, or never existed.                          |   |   |   |   |
| 12 I use something at the end of the day to come down: a drink, a screen, a scroll, an hour I lose.   |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION THREE                                                                                         |   |   |   |   |

## Four · Attribution

*Whether you can still tell whose feeling is whose.*

|                                                                                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 13 I feel responsible for outcomes that belong to the other person.                 |   |   |   |   |
| 14 Someone else's stalling or relapse registers as my failure.                      |   |   |   |   |
| 15 I leave certain encounters carrying a mood I cannot trace to anything of my own. |   |   |   |   |
| 16 I manage how people feel about me during the work, and it shapes what I say.     |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION FOUR                                                                        |   |   |   |   |

## Five · The edge

*Whether you are working inside what you are trained for.*

|                                                                                               | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 17 I am holding something for someone that is beyond my training, and I have kept holding it. |   |   |   |   |
| 18 I do not have written criteria for when I would refer someone elsewhere.                   |   |   |   |   |
| 19 I say yes to work I am uncertain about because the person in front of me needs someone.    |   |   |   |   |
| 20 There is a case I have not told anyone about.                                              |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION FIVE                                                                                  |   |   |   |   |

## Six · Exchange

*Whether you are paid and contracted for the work you actually do.*

|                                                                                         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 21 I discount, defer, or decline to name my fee, and I do it before being asked.        |   |   |   |   |
| 22 Significant parts of what I deliver are unpaid, unwritten, or outside any agreement. |   |   |   |   |
| 23 The hours I am compensated for are fewer than the hours the work takes.              |   |   |   |   |
| 24 Asking for what the work is worth feels at odds with the spirit of the work.         |   |   |   |   |
| SECTION SIX                                                                             |   |   |   |   |

TOTAL OUT OF 72

## Reading the result

The bands are descriptive rather than diagnostic. Read the one you land in, then go back to your highest section score, because that is where the next change lives.

- 0–17**      **Held.** Your structure is doing its job. The useful move is protecting it, since drift is what happens to good arrangements under load rather than an event that announces itself. Note which section carries your highest score and watch that one.
- 18–35**      **Drift.** Ordinary, correctable, and worth correcting now. One or two arrangements have quietly changed shape. Restoring a single boundary or reinstating a single consultation slot usually moves several items at once.
- 36–53**      **Load.** Something structural is out of shape and effort will not resolve it, because the arrangements are producing the result. This band typically needs an outside eye. Working harder inside the current structure reliably makes it worse.
- 54–72**      **Depletion.** Treat this as information about the arrangements. Work of this kind degrades under sustained depletion, and it commonly degrades before the person doing it notices. The first step is telling one qualified person the whole truth of it this week.

### IF THIS LANDED HARD

A high score on a Tuesday afternoon is not a verdict. It is a description of arrangements that can be changed, and most of them are more changeable than they feel from inside. If what surfaced here is heavier than a scheduling matter, speak with a therapist or a clinical supervisor rather than working it out alone.

### MY HIGHEST SECTION, AND THE ONE ARRANGEMENT I WILL CHANGE

*One arrangement, with a date. Restoring a single boundary usually moves several items at once.*

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## What the sections tend to mean

**Capacity** is usually a scheduling problem wearing the costume of a character problem. It responds to structure faster than to resolve.

**Boundary drift** compounds silently, and each individual concession is defensible while the accumulation is not.

**Discharge** is the section most predictive of the others. People who have somewhere to put the weight can carry considerably more of it.

**Attribution** at a high score is the classic occupational hazard of this work. It is trainable, and supervision is what trains it.

**The edge** is the one with ethical and professional exposure attached. Item twenty deserves particular attention: the case you have told nobody about is the case that most needs a second pair of eyes.

**Exchange** is the section people are most reluctant to score honestly. Undercharging is frequently an expression of the same reflex that produces the other five, which is the difficulty of asserting a need while occupying the role of the one who meets them.

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## A second pair of eyes

Sections three and five are the two that resist self-correction, for the same reason: both describe something you cannot see from where you are standing. Supervision, peer consultation, and coaching all exist because this category of work has never been safely done alone, and the people who last in it are the ones who arranged to be held by something.

If the audit surfaced something you would like to think through with someone, that conversation is available at [iaculus.org](http://iaculus.org).

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