

Wellness and Balance in Public Service: Supporting Maryland's Library Workforce

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Welcome to “Wellness and Balance in Public Service: Supporting Maryland’s Library Workforce.” My name is Loida Garcia-Febo. I look forward to sharing practical information and strategies to help library staff manage stress, maintain wellbeing, strengthen resilience, and sustain themselves while continuing their important work.

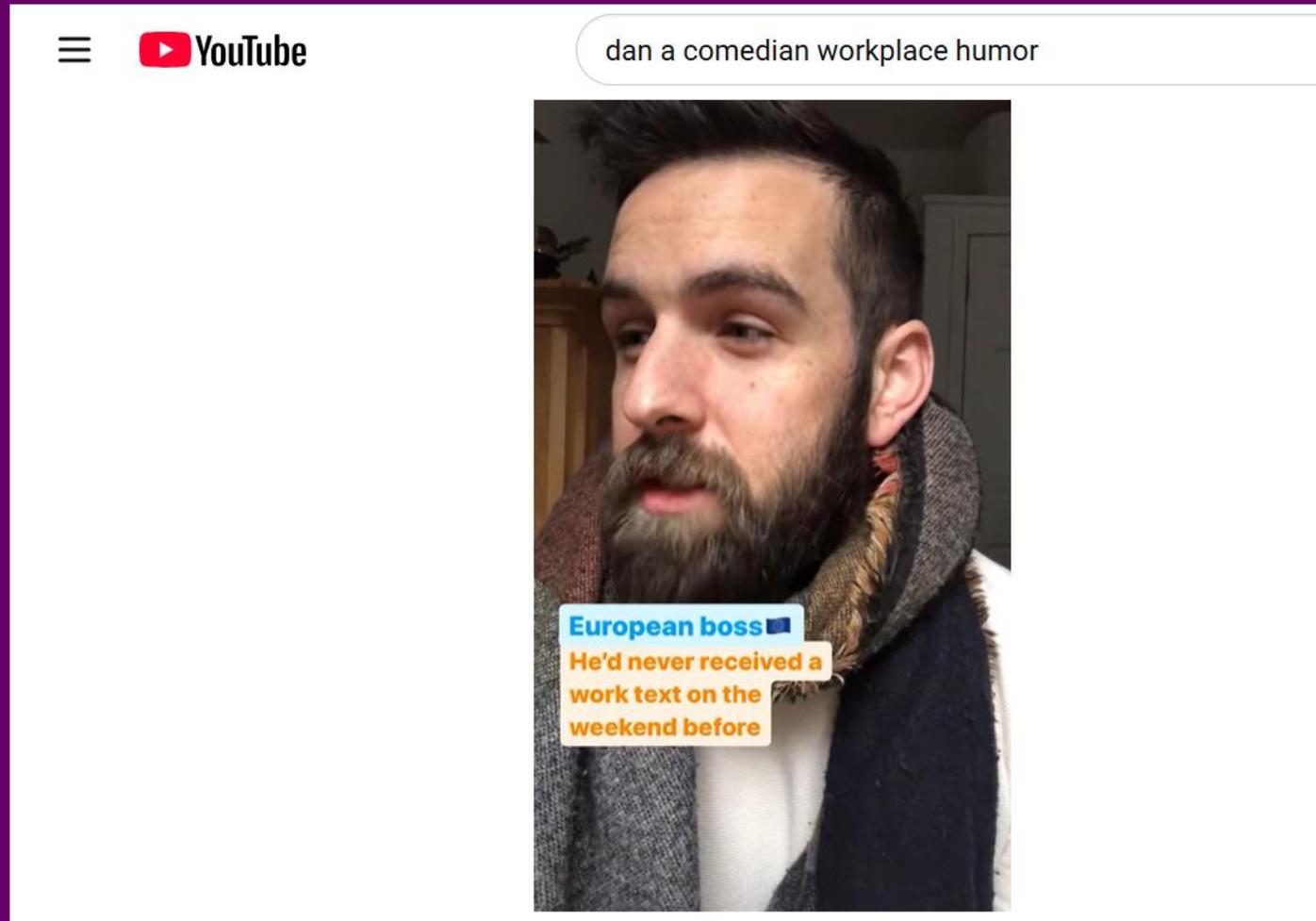
“Why did the librarian bring a ladder to work?”



“Why did the librarian bring a ladder to work?”
Because she wanted to reach the top shelf of self-care!

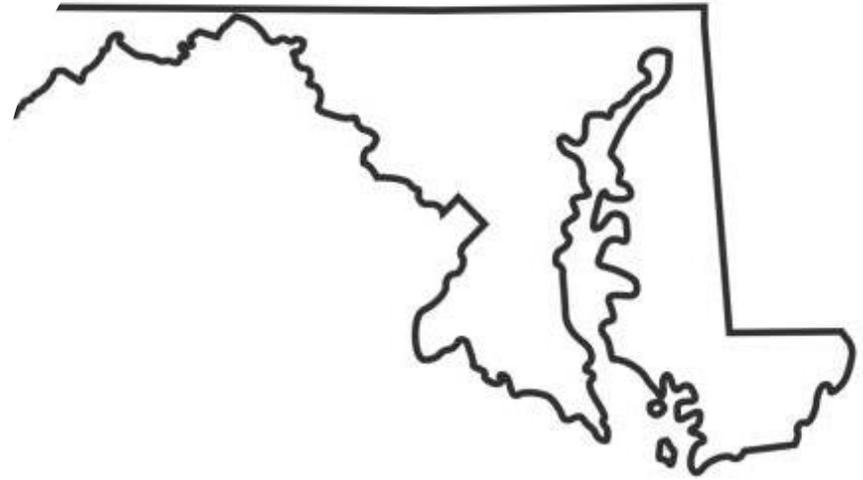


<https://youtu.be/KuYKEfTPdy8?si=-mxb2Di8-IKUAZ7Q>





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1. Identify key stressors and sources of anxiety and uncertainty affecting library employees in today's public service environment.

Wellness & Balance means

- Service without self-sacrifice
- Availability without depletion
- Rest without guilt
- Stepping back so we can step forward stronger

What is creating pressure in today's public service landscape

1. Emotional labor
2. Constant adaptation
3. Public and political scrutiny
4. Staffing and workload pressure
5. Overcommitment to mission
6. Ongoing uncertainty

If we understand the sources, we
can recognize the signals.
And if we recognize the signals, we
can intervene earlier.

Weekly Hours	Research Trend
35–40	Strong productivity + better balance indicators
40–45	Generally sustainable
50+	Diminishing returns
55+ (chronic)	Increased cardiovascular & mental health risks

Why this matters for Maryland

- Libraries are pillars of democracy, literacy, and community wellbeing. But institutions cannot be well if their workers are unwell.

The Wellness Continuum

Stress → Anxiety → Chronic Fatigue → Burnout



- **Notice** early signs.
- **Nudge** one small corrective action within 24 hours.

The Wellness Continuum: From Stress to Burnout

Stage	What It Is	3 Common Signs	3 Prevention Strategies (Early)	3 Strategies If You're Already Experiencing It
1. Stress	Normal physiological response to demands or pressure. Short-term stress can be motivating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tight muscles, headaches• Irritability or impatience• Trouble focusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5-minute breathing reset between tasks• Clarify daily top 3 priorities• Short movement breaks during shifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce nonessential tasks temporarily• Set one clear boundary (e.g., no email after X time)• Schedule recovery time within 24–48 hrs

Stage	What It Is	3 Common Signs	3 Prevention Strategies (Early)	3 Strategies If You're Already Experiencing It
2. Anxiety	Ongoing worry or anticipation of negative outcomes; stress becomes more persistent and internalized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racing thoughts • Sleep disruption • Feeling “on edge” even when off work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit overexposure to distressing news • Peer check-ins for reassurance & perspective • Structured planning time to reduce uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding techniques (5-4-3-2-1 method) • Talk with supervisor about workload clarity • Seek counseling or EAP support if needed

Stage	What It Is	3 Common Signs	3 Prevention Strategies (Early)	3 Strategies If You're Already Experiencing It
3. Fatigue (Chronic)	Prolonged mental and physical exhaustion from sustained stress/anxiety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent tiredness • Reduced motivation • Increased mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect sleep routine • Take full lunch breaks away from desk • Rotate demanding tasks when possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take personal day or use leave strategically • Reassess commitments outside core duties • Medical check-in if exhaustion continues

Stage	What It Is	3 Common Signs	3 Prevention Strategies (Early)	3 Strategies If You're Already Experiencing It
4. Burnout	Occupational syndrome resulting from unmanaged chronic workplace stress; includes emotional exhaustion and detachment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynicism or detachment from patrons • Feeling ineffective or hopeless • Emotional numbness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalize conversations about workload • Ensure equitable task distribution • Align tasks with personal strengths & purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have structured conversation with leadership • Consider role adjustment or temporary reassignment • Seek professional mental health support

The Wellness Continuum

Stress → Anxiety → Chronic Fatigue → Burnout

2. Recognize the importance of self-care and wellness as foundational components of effective and sustainable library work.

Self-care is foundational to sustainable, effective library work.

Wellness is
preventive,
not just reactive



Importance of Self-Care and Wellness

Self-Care Improves Performance and Sustainability

Research in occupational health shows:

- Productivity declines sharply after 50–55 hours per week
- Wellbeing is strongly correlated with work-life balance
- High-functioning countries like Denmark (~37-hour week) and France (35-hour legal standard) achieve high productivity **without overworking staff**

Importance of Self-Care and Wellness

The Ripple Effect of Wellness

- Calm, rested staff create **calmer, more effective library spaces**

Importance of Self-Care and Wellness

Self-Care Includes

- **Mind**
- **Body**
- **Boundaries**

Mind Wellness

Focus Area	What It Means	Quick Examples
Reflection	Pause and notice thoughts, emotions, and patterns	2-minute journaling, think about one patron success
*Mindfulness	Stay present, reduce *rumination	Box breathing, 3 slow breaths between tasks
Planning	Reduce uncertainty and overwhelm	Write top 1–3 priorities for the day, schedule tasks

Body Wellness

Focus Area	What It Means	Quick Examples
Sleep	Prioritize restorative rest	Set a bedtime routine, avoid late screens
Movement	Keep body active and release tension.	Walk a lap, stretch arms/neck, shoulder rolls Hobby movement.
Nutrition	Fuel energy and focus	Eat nourishing meals, hydrate consistently
Micro-Movements	Interrupt sedentary stress	Shake hands, stand for tasks, short stretch breaks

Boundaries Wellness

Focus Area	What It Means	Quick Examples
Saying No	Protect capacity and prevent overload	“Let me check my availability,” decline extra task
Personal Time	Respect rest, leisure, family	Take full lunch away from desk, no email after hours
Limit Overwork	Maintain sustainable hours	Leave on time once a week, avoid chronic overtime



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Reflection

Which self-care practices do I currently use, and which could I realistically integrate into my routine?



3. Practical Techniques for Managing Stress, Navigating Uncertainty, and Responding Constructively to Change

Stress Management Toolkit for High-Demand Environments

Technique Type	What It Does	Quick Example / Micro-Activity
Nervous System Reset	Stops escalation before it compounds	4-4-4-4 box breathing; press feet into floor
Grounding & Orientation	Reduces dissociation, panic, or flashbacks	5-4-3-2-1 sensory check; touch a desk or object
Cognitive Reframe	Shifts perspective to actionable steps	Replace “I can’t handle this” with “Next small step is...”
Physical Release	Completes stress cycle	Walk 1 lap, shake out hands, gentle stretches
Micro-Boundaries	Protects capacity	Pause before saying yes; take full lunch break

5–4–3–2–1 Sensory Reset (1–2 minutes)

- Notice **5 things you can see**
- Notice **4 things you can feel**
- Listen for **3 things you can hear**
- Identify **2 things you can smell**
- Notice **1 thing you can taste**

Cognitive Reframe

- Replace **“I can’t handle this”** with → **“What is the next small step?”**
- Replace **“This is a disaster”** with → **“This is challenging, but manageable.”**
- Replace **“Everything is going wrong”** with → **“What part of this is within my control?”**

Micro-Boundaries

- **Pause before committing** → “Let me check my schedule and get back to you.”
- **Protect your lunch** → Step away from your desk for the full break.
- **Email containment** → Close email for 30 minutes of focused work.
- **End-of-day ritual** → Write tomorrow’s top 3 and log off on time.
- **Time clarity** → “I have 10 minutes for this conversation.”

Navigating Uncertainty

Challenge	Micro-Technique	Outcome
Rapid change / policy shifts	Note “what I control” vs “what I don’t”	Focus, reduced anxiety
Emotional overload	Peer check-in or brief debrief	Normalize feelings, release tension
Exposure to traumatic content	Structured microbreaks	Prevent cumulative vicarious trauma
High workload	Prioritize Top 1–3 tasks	Reduce overwhelm, prevent mistakes

Responding Constructively to Change

Challenge	Constructive Response	Quick Example / Micro-Activity
Sudden policy or procedure change	Focus on what you can control	List top 1–2 actionable steps today
New technology or systems	Break tasks into small steps	Schedule 15-min learning block; ask for help
Increased workload or role shifts	Prioritize & delegate	Identify Top 3 priorities; delegate what you can
Emotional uncertainty / stress	Ground and regulate	5-4-3-2-1 sensory check; 3 deep breaths
Ongoing ambiguity	Use flexible mindset	Ask: “What’s the next small move I can take?”

Reflection:

What is one small action I can take right now to protect my energy and focus?



4. Strengthening Personal Sustainability and Sense of Purpose in Library Settings

Protect your energy
to continue serving sustainably.

“It’s about preserving the energy and capacity to experience joy, satisfaction, and meaning in both work and life.”



Pillars of Sustainability

Pillar	What It Supports	Quick Example / Micro-Activity
Self-Compassion	Reduces self-blame, emotional depletion	Say: "I did my best in this moment"
Purpose & Meaning	Anchors motivation	Write one patron success story, re-read thank-you note
Connection	Sustains support networks	Short peer check-in, brief colleague appreciation
Cognitive Flexibility	Adapts to uncertainty	List alternative ways to approach a problem
Recovery Routines	Restores energy	Walk, micro-movement, sleep hygiene

Sense of Purpose in High-Demand Work

Challenge	Purpose-Focused Action	Result
Facing repeated community crises	Identify one small positive impact today	Reinforces meaning, prevents cynicism
Exposure to traumatic stories	Reflect on personal values and mission	Emotional grounding
High workload / burnout risk	Align tasks with strengths & core mission	Maintains engagement & focus

Practical Sustainability Micro-Tools

Tool	Duration	Purpose
Top-1 Reflection	1 min	Reconnect with why work matters
3 Deep Breaths	30 sec	Calms nervous system
Peer Appreciation	1–2 min	Boosts morale & social connection
Micro-Walk / Stretch	2–5 min	Physical reset, energy release
Gratitude or Success Note	1 min	Strengthens emotional resilience

Think of **one personal** accomplishment, creative project, or meaningful connection outside of work that makes you proud. Hold that feeling for 30 seconds. Let it remind you that your value and purpose extend beyond the library walls.

Think of one patron **interaction** that reminded you why you do this work. Hold that feeling for 30 seconds. That is your anchor.

Top 5 Strategies for Extreme Trauma Recovery

1. Re-establish Safety and Predictability

- Trauma disrupts the nervous system and sense of control.
- Focus first on creating **physical and emotional safety**: routines, secure environment, predictable daily structures.

Examples: regular sleep/wake schedule, controlled micro-boundaries, safe spaces at work/home.

Top 5 Strategies for Extreme Trauma Recovery

2. Grounding and Present-Moment Techniques

- Helps survivors **anchor in the present** rather than relive past trauma.

Examples: 5-4-3-2-1 sensory check (name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear...), deep breathing, pressing feet into the floor.

- Reduces hyperarousal, flashbacks, and rumination.

Top 5 Strategies for Extreme Trauma Recovery

3. Reclaiming Control through Small, Achievable Actions

- Trauma often causes feelings of helplessness.
- Micro-decisions restore agency.

Examples: choosing one task to complete, setting one clear boundary, taking short restorative breaks.

Top 5 Strategies for Extreme Trauma Recovery

4. Meaning-Making and Purpose Alignment

- Survivors who reconnect with **personal values, mission, or a sense of purpose** regain psychological strength.

Examples: journaling about contributions, celebrating small wins, mentoring others, reflecting on “why I serve.”

Top 5 Strategies for Extreme Trauma Recovery

5. Support Networks and Safe Connection

- Healing is social: isolation exacerbates PTSD and burnout.

Examples: peer support groups, structured debriefs, trusted colleagues or mentors, professional counseling or EAP programs.

- Even brief social acknowledgment or sharing of experiences can reduce stress and improve resilience.

Strategy

Safety & Predictability

Grounding

Micro-Control

Purpose & Meaning

Support Networks

Quick Example

Consistent daily routine, secure workspace

5-4-3-2-1 sensory check, slow breaths

Set one boundary, complete a single task

Write a patron success story, reflect on “why I serve”

Peer check-in, mentor conversation, professional counseling

- Trauma doesn't just affect what we remember — it affects how the nervous system reacts every day. Recovery isn't about erasing the past; it's about creating safety, agency, connection, and purpose, moment by moment.

Routines for when everything feels overwhelming

- **Anchor in the present:** Daily grounding moments like deep breathing, noticing surroundings, or pressing feet into the floor.
- **Micro-structure:** Small predictable actions each day — making a bed, scheduling meals, or setting one clear task — to regain control.
- **Meaningful connection:** Brief check-ins with a trusted person, journaling one positive moment, or reflecting on a value or purpose.

5. Fostering Supportive Workplace Cultures

Supportive cultures aren't a luxury — they are essential for sustaining library staff, helping them stay grounded, healthy, and engaged in the face of constant change.

Characteristics of a Supportive Library Workplace

Characteristic	Why It Matters	Quick Example / Micro-Action
Psychological Safety	Staff can speak up without fear	Encourage check-ins, normalize asking for help
Clear Communication	Reduces uncertainty and stress	Share updates proactively, clarify priorities
Equitable Workload	Prevents chronic overload	Rotate demanding tasks, balance shifts fairly

Characteristics of a Supportive Library Workplace

Characteristic	Why It Matters	Quick Example / Micro-Action
Recognition & Appreciation	Builds engagement & meaning	Acknowledge small wins, thank staff publicly or privately
Flexibility & Autonomy	Protects boundaries	Allow micro-breaks, flexible schedules where possible
Peer Support & Mentorship	Strengthens connection	Peer debriefs, buddy system, brief daily check-ins

Reflection

- Think of one thing your team already does that makes work easier, safer, or more meaningful. How can that be strengthened?

Everyday Reset Toolkit for Library Workers

1. Micro-Resets – 1–3 min breathing, stretch, or grounding.

2. Boundaries – Protect lunch, end-of-day rituals, pause before saying yes.

3. Connection – Peer check-in, share success story, mentor moment.

4. Purpose & Reflection – Optional: note one patron impact, one meaningful interaction.

5. Recovery & Movement – Walk, step outside, short micro-breaks.

Tip: These can be combined daily, even during busy shifts, without needing extra time or judgment.

Wallet Card: 6 Quick Survival Tools for Library Staff

1. Breathe & Ground – 3 deep breaths, notice your surroundings.
2. Micro-Movement – Stand, stretch, walk a lap, shake hands.
3. One Small Action – Pick one achievable task right now.
4. Connection – Reach out to _____.
5. Boundaries – Take your lunch, pause before saying yes, step away if needed.
6. Professional Support – Call a trusted resource if stress feels overwhelming:

“Together, individual wellness plus cultural support is what keeps libraries sustainable — and people flourishing, succeeding, healthy and energized.”





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