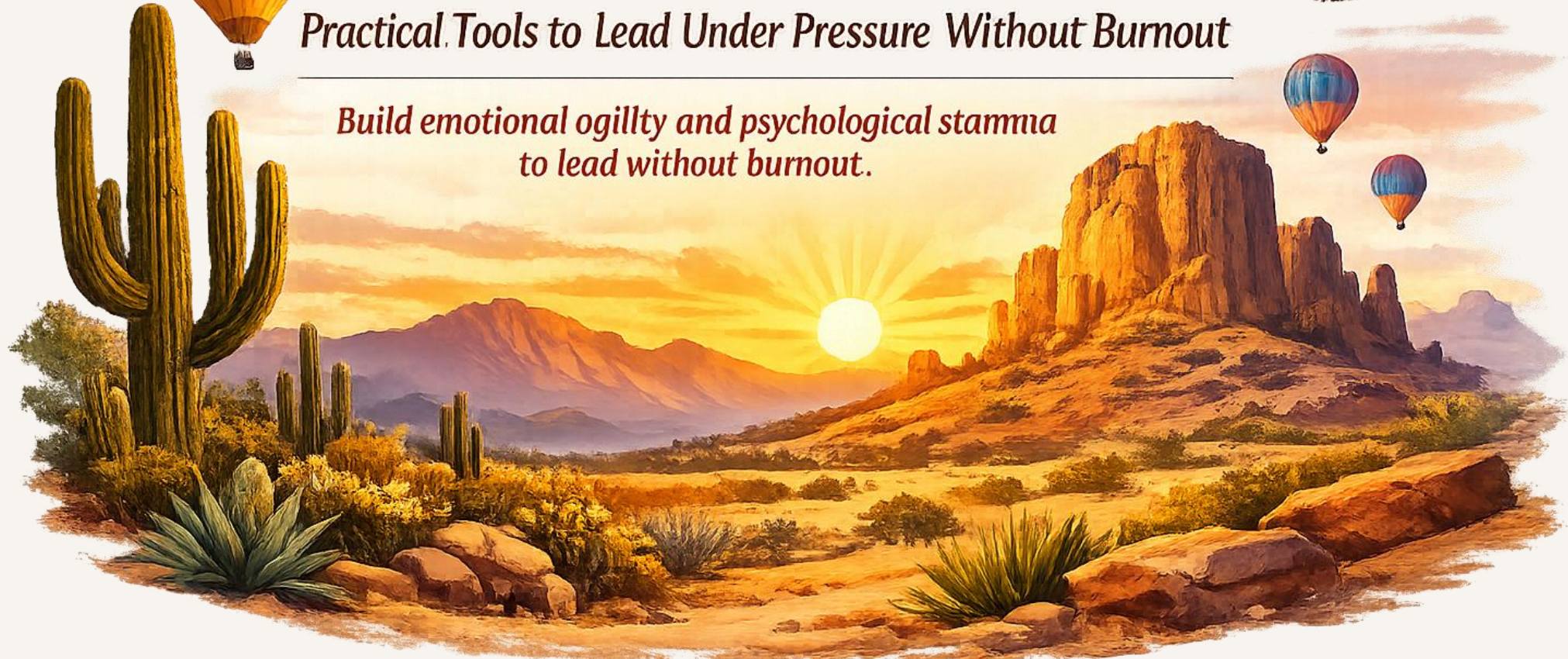




Stress to *Strength*

Practical Tools to Lead Under Pressure Without Burnout

*Build emotional agility and psychological stamina
to lead without burnout.*



Stress to Strength: Practical Tools to Lead Under Pressure Without Burnout

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Dr Pitchiah “Dr Pitch” Balasubramanian PgMP, PMP, PMI-PMOCP, GPM-b

Assistant Teaching Professor, Arizona State University

Board Chair – PMI Arizona Chapter

About the Speaker



- Experienced Leader – Over three decades of progressive technology, business and operations project leadership experience
- Industry Expertise – five different industries
- PMI Leadership/Volunteer – Global and Local
- Community Volunteer
- STEM Advocate
- Educator, Mentor and Coach
- Thought Leader & Speaker

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, attendees will be able to:

- Understand the neuroscience of stress and its effects on performance and decision-making
- Learn emotional agility techniques to stay adaptive and grounded under pressure
- Apply practical recovery and workload management strategies to prevent burnout
- Explore methods to foster psychological safety and balance in teams



When project pressure rises, what typically happens to you?

 The Slido app must be installed on every computer you're presenting from

Your Brain on Stress: Helpful... Until It's Not

- The amygdala reacts in milliseconds to perceived threat.
- Short-term stress sharpens focus; chronic stress reduces working memory.
- Under sustained overload, creativity and decision quality decline.
- Stress narrows cognitive bandwidth.
- Stress is not the enemy — unmanaged stress is.

Pressure can sharpen performance temporarily — but prolonged activation shuts down strategic thinking

Driving a Car (Control, Awareness, Limits)

You are the driver — not the road conditions.



Are you driving responsibly, or are you flooring the accelerator?

From Reaction to Response

- Notice emotion (Name it)
 - Normalize it (It's data, not identity)
 - Navigate it (Choose aligned action)
 - Shift from "I am stressed" → "I am noticing stress"
- The 90-Second Reset
 - Pause
 - Breathe (4-6 breathing)
 - Label emotion
 - Choose intentional response

Pressure Tests Leadership Maturity

- Reactive Leader:

- Blame
- Urgency escalation
- Emotional leakage

- Agile Leader:

- Regulates tone
- Slows escalation
- Models calm accountability

Micro Practice: “What does this moment require from me?”

It's Not Just Tired — It's Depletion

Burnout Signals:

- Cynicism (disdain, skepticism, negative attitude towards people/work)
- Emotional exhaustion (feeling drained, depleted, overwhelmed, unable to cope)
- Reduced effectiveness (decreased performance, poor concentration, difficulty achieving goals)
- Compassion fatigue (reduced empathy, emotional numbness, inability to care or connect)

Burnout = Chronic output > recovery

Recovery Is a Leadership Discipline

Daily:

- 5-minute reset breaks
- Walking meetings
- Transition pauses between meetings

Weekly:

- No-meeting blocks
- Strategic thinking time

Boundary Tools:

- “Not now” language
- Delegation clarity
- Capacity transparency

Calm Is Contagious. So Is Chaos.

Teams mirror leader nervous systems.

Create safety by:

- Acknowledging pressure openly
- Inviting dissent safely
- Separating issue from person
- Rewarding learning, not just speed

Build Team Resilience Systems

Create a healthy work environment for your team

"Red Zone" Check-Ins



Address stress before it escalates.

Emotional Temperature Rounds



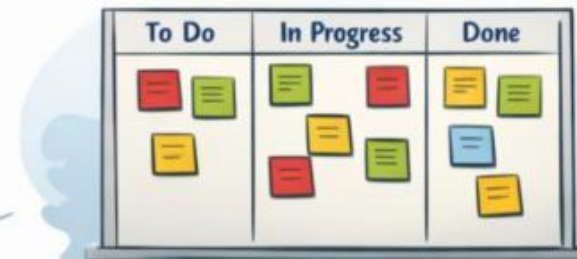
Share & support emotional states.

Clear Decision Escalation Paths



Know who decides what.

Workload Transparency Boards



Make tasks & limits visible.

“What would make this sprint sustainable?”

Activity: Pressure Mapping & Strength Design Lab



Purpose: To help project leaders diagnose stress patterns in real project scenarios and intentionally redesign responses to prevent burnout and improve decision quality.

Duration: 15 minutes

You will work in small groups (4–6 participants)

Step 1 – Identify

Select ONE high-pressure project scenario from your experience (or choose from examples provided).

Step 2 – Diagnose

Using the Pressure Diagnosis template, analyze your scenario through 3 lenses - Brain Impact (Cognitive Lens), Leader Behavior (Emotional Lens) and Burnout Risk (Energy Lens).

Step 3 – Redesign

Now intentionally redesign your response.


Create a Stress-to-Strength Plan using the template given on Emotional Agility Tool, Boundary / Reset Action and Psychological Safety Behavior.

Ask: Select a lead from your team to debrief.



Commitment & Application

Which stage will you apply immediately?

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Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways

Stress Is a Signal — Not a Sentence.

- ✓ Pressure is inevitable in project leadership
- ✓ Burnout is not a badge of honor
- ✓ Practice on ‘4-check system’ simple framework daily:
 - Physical Self-Care (Your Energy System)
 - Mental Self-Care (Your Focus System)
 - Emotional Self-Care (Your Resilience System)
 - Personal & Purpose Self-Care (Your Growth System)

Thank you!

Let's continue the conversation!



Pitchiah "Pitch" Balasubramanian
PhD, MBA, MS, PMP, PgMP, PMO...
Board Member | Change Advocate |
DE&I Champion | Educator | Speaker

