



FROM THE BOOK

The Human Shock Absorber

Resources Companion

Templates, Tools, and Discussion Guides

for Social Performance Practitioners

APPENDIX A
Templates
& Tools

APPENDIX B
For Managers
& Organizations

APPENDIX C
Discussion
Guide

Thomas Gaultier

thomasgaultier.com

Contents

APPENDIX A Templates and Tools

- A.1 Daily Resilience Routine Template
- A.2 Support System Mapping Worksheet
- A.3 Career Sustainability Assessment
- A.4 Pre-Meeting Preparation Checklist
- A.5 Post-Incident Debrief Template
- A.6 Personal Ethics Statement Template

APPENDIX B For Managers and Organizations

- B.1 How to Support Your Social Performance Team
- B.2 Warning Signs of Burnout in Your Staff
- B.3 Organizational Practices That Help and Hurt
- B.4 Making the Business Case for Practitioner Wellbeing

APPENDIX C Discussion Guide

- C.1 Questions for Individual Reflection
- C.2 Questions for Team Discussions
- C.3 Workshop Facilitation Guide
- C.4 Facilitation Tips

These resources are meant to be used, not just read. Print the templates, adapt the discussion questions, and modify the workshop designs. Make them work for your context.

APPENDIX A

Templates and Tools

This appendix provides practical templates and tools referenced throughout the book. These are designed to be photocopied, adapted, and used in your daily practice. Feel free to modify them to suit your specific context and needs.

A.1 Daily Resilience Routine Template

Use this template to design a sustainable daily routine that supports your wellbeing. The goal is not perfection but having a default structure to return to when things get difficult.

MORNING PRACTICES

Wake time target:

.....

Physical movement (type and duration):

.....

Nourishment (breakfast routine):

.....

Mental preparation (meditation, journaling, quiet time):

.....

Time before checking email/messages:

.....

Non-negotiable morning element:

.....

DURING WORKDAY PRACTICES

Recovery break frequency: Every _____ hours

.....

Recovery break activity:

.....

Lunch practice (where, how long, with whom):

.....

Method for noting significant events:

.....

Hydration/nutrition reminders:

.....

END OF DAY PRACTICES

Target end time:

.....

Closeout practice (writing tomorrow's priorities, reviewing accomplishments):

Processing method (talking, journaling, physical activity):

Transition ritual (physical act signaling end of work):

EVENING PRACTICES

Protected non-work activity:

Connection time (family, friends, community):

Wind-down routine before sleep:

Target sleep time:

Target hours of sleep:

FIELD / TRAVEL ADAPTATIONS

When in the field, I will maintain these minimum practices:

A.2 Support System Mapping Worksheet

A healthy support system includes multiple people serving different functions. Use this worksheet to map your current support network and identify gaps.

PROFESSIONAL UNDERSTANDING

People who understand my work and can offer professional advice:

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

People who care about me and can provide comfort and acceptance:

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

MENTORSHIP AND GUIDANCE

People with more experience who can offer perspective and strategic guidance:

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

People outside my industry who remind me the world is larger than my work:

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____ How often we connect: _____

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Therapist/counselor:

Coach (if applicable):

Other professional support:

GAP ANALYSIS

Categories where I have inadequate support:

Actions I will take to address these gaps:

A.3 Career Sustainability Assessment

Use this assessment periodically (every 6 to 12 months) to evaluate whether your current role is sustainable. Be honest with yourself.

Rate each dimension from 1 (completely unsustainable) to 5 (fully sustainable):

WORKLOAD

Is the volume of work manageable over the long term?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

SUPPORT

Do I have the management backing, resources, and team support I need?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

ETHICAL ALIGNMENT

Can I do this work without regularly compromising my core values?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

HEALTH IMPACT

Is this work sustainable for my physical and mental health?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

RELATIONSHIP IMPACT

Can I maintain important personal relationships while doing this work?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

GROWTH POTENTIAL

Am I continuing to learn, develop, and find the work engaging?

Rating: _____ (1-5) Notes:

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Total score: _____ / 30

Interpretation:

25-30: Generally sustainable. Focus on maintaining and strengthening.

18-24: Mixed sustainability. Identify and address problem areas.

12-17: Significant concerns. Serious changes needed.

Below 12: Unsustainable. Consider major role change or exit.

Is this role sustainable for the next 1 year? _____

Is this role sustainable for the next 3 years? _____

Is this role sustainable for the next 10 years? _____

Key changes needed to improve sustainability:

A.4 Pre-Meeting Preparation Checklist

Use this checklist before significant community meetings, especially those with potential for tension or conflict.

CONTEXT AND INTELLIGENCE

- ☐ I understand the history of the issue being discussed
- ☐ I know who the key stakeholders are and their positions
- ☐ I am aware of any recent events that might affect the meeting
- ☐ I have identified potential flashpoints or sensitive topics
- ☐ I have consulted with local staff or colleagues about current dynamics

LOGISTICS AND SAFETY

- ≡ Meeting location is appropriate and accessible
- ≡ I have confirmed date and time with all parties
- ≡ I have a communication plan if something goes wrong
- ≡ I know the exit routes from the meeting location
- ≡ Someone knows where I am and when to expect me back

CONTENT PREPARATION

- ≡ I am clear on the meeting objectives
- ≡ I know what I can and cannot commit to
- ≡ I have prepared responses to likely questions
- ≡ I have necessary documentation/materials
- ≡ I have prepared how to deliver any difficult messages

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ≡ I understand relevant cultural protocols
- ≡ I am dressed appropriately
- ≡ I have appropriate translation/interpretation if needed
- ≡ I am aware of any relevant religious or cultural observances

PERSONAL PREPARATION

- ≡ I am rested enough to be fully present
- ≡ I have eaten and am properly hydrated
- ≡ I have taken a few minutes for mental preparation
- ≡ I am in the right emotional state for this meeting
- ≡ I have a plan for processing the meeting afterward

A.5 Post-Incident Debrief Template

Use this template after difficult incidents (confrontations, crises, highly emotional encounters) to process the experience and capture learning.

INCIDENT DETAILS

Date: _____ Location: _____

Brief description of what happened:

.....

.....

.....

WHAT WENT WELL

Actions that helped manage the situation:

.....

.....

WHAT COULD HAVE GONE BETTER

Actions that might have improved the outcome:

WARNING SIGNS

Were there warning signs that could have predicted this incident?

PERSONAL IMPACT

How am I feeling about this incident?

Physical symptoms I am noticing:

What support do I need?

LESSONS AND FOLLOW-UP

Key lessons from this incident:

Follow-up actions required:

Who else needs to be informed?

A.6 Personal Ethics Statement Template

Use this template to articulate your personal ethical framework for this work. Review and update it annually or when facing significant ethical challenges.

MY PURPOSE IN THIS WORK

I work in community relations because:

MY CORE VALUES

The values that guide my professional practice are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

MY COMMITMENTS

I commit to always:

MY NON-NEGOTIABLES

I will never:

WHEN FACING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

When I face difficult ethical choices, I will:

EXIT CONDITIONS

I will know it is time to leave a role or organization if:

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Next review date: _____

APPENDIX B

For Managers and Organizations

This appendix is addressed to those who manage community relations professionals and to organizations that employ them. Supporting your social performance team is not just good ethics. It is good business.

B.1 How to Support Your Social Performance Team

Community relations professionals face demands unlike most other corporate roles. They absorb community anger and corporate frustration. They work in ambiguous situations with unclear authority. They carry emotional weight that accumulates over time. Supporting them requires deliberate effort.

Structural Support

Adequate staffing: Ensure teams are sized for sustainable workloads. Chronic understaffing is one of the primary drivers of burnout in this profession.

Clear authority: Define what decisions CROs can make and what resources they can access. Accountability without authority is a recipe for frustration and ineffectiveness.

Access to leadership: Give CROs direct access to senior decision-makers. Community insights lose value when filtered through multiple organizational layers.

Reasonable schedules: Build rotation and leave schedules that allow genuine recovery. The "always on" expectation is unsustainable.

Emotional and Psychological Support

Mental health resources: Provide access to counselors or therapists who understand occupational trauma. Generic employee assistance programs are often inadequate.

Debriefing protocols: Establish regular debriefing after difficult incidents. Do not expect staff to simply absorb traumatic experiences and move on.

Peer support: Create opportunities for CR professionals to connect with each other, both within and across organizations. Isolation worsens psychological strain.

Normalize difficulty: Create a culture where acknowledging struggle is acceptable. When managers model vulnerability, staff feel safer seeking help.

Professional Development

Training beyond technical skills: Include psychological resilience, conflict management, and ethical reasoning in professional development.

Career pathways: Create clear advancement paths that do not require leaving the function. Limited career progression drives talented practitioners away.

External engagement: Support participation in conferences, networks, and communities of practice. External connection reduces isolation and brings new ideas.

Recognition: Acknowledge good work publicly. CR professionals often feel invisible within organizations.

B.2 Warning Signs of Burnout in Your Staff

Burnout rarely announces itself clearly. By the time someone says they are burned out, significant damage has often already occurred. Learn to recognize the warning signs early.

Behavioral Changes

Withdrawal: The person who used to be engaged becomes quiet in meetings. They stop volunteering for assignments. They avoid informal interactions.

Cynicism: Comments about communities or the work become increasingly negative or dismissive. The idealism that characterized earlier performance fades.

Decline in quality: Work that was once excellent becomes merely adequate or worse. Attention to detail decreases. Deadlines slip.

Increased conflict: The person becomes more irritable, defensive, or difficult to work with. Relationships with colleagues deteriorate.

Physical and Emotional Signs

Fatigue: Persistent tiredness that does not improve with rest. The person looks exhausted even at the start of the week.

Health problems: Increased sick days, frequent illness, chronic complaints about sleep or physical symptoms.

Emotional flatness: Loss of the emotional range that effective CR work requires. The person seems to be going through the motions.

Unhealthy coping: Increased alcohol use, poor eating habits, abandonment of exercise or other healthy practices.

What to Do When You See Warning Signs

Have a direct conversation: Express concern without judgment. "I have noticed some changes and I am wondering how you are doing."

Listen without rushing to solutions: Sometimes people need to be heard before they can accept help. Do not immediately try to fix things.

Offer concrete support: Reduce workload, adjust schedules, provide additional resources. Words of encouragement without practical help are insufficient.

Connect to professional help: Know what mental health resources are available and facilitate access. Remove barriers to seeking help.

Follow up: Check in regularly. Recovery takes time, and ongoing support is essential.

B.3 Organizational Practices That Help and Hurt

Organizational culture and practices significantly affect CR team wellbeing and effectiveness. Some practices support sustainable performance; others undermine it.

Practices That Help

Early involvement: Including CR in project planning from the earliest stages, when community input can actually shape outcomes.

Respected voice: Treating CR insights as valuable intelligence, not obstacles to be managed. Acting on the concerns CR raises.

Realistic expectations: Setting targets that are achievable given resources and circumstances. Recognizing that some outcomes are beyond CR's control.

Commitment follow-through: Honoring commitments made to communities. Nothing undermines CR credibility faster than broken promises.

Adequate budgets: Funding community programs at levels that allow genuine impact, not just tokenistic engagement.

Learning culture: Treating community relations challenges as opportunities for organizational learning, not just problems to be blamed on individuals.

Practices That Hurt

Late engagement: Bringing CR in only after problems emerge, when options are limited and relationships are already damaged.

Shooting the messenger: Blaming CR staff for community opposition that results from decisions they did not make and could not influence.

Metric fixation: Focusing on easily measured outputs (meetings held, documents produced) rather than meaningful outcomes (trust built, conflicts prevented).

Constant reorganization: Frequent restructuring that disrupts relationships and institutional knowledge. Communities lose trust when their contacts keep changing.

Cutting corners: Pressure to rush consultation, minimize compensation, or avoid difficult conversations. Short-term savings create long-term costs.

Ignoring staff wellbeing: Treating CR burnout as individual weakness rather than organizational failure. High turnover should prompt examination of conditions, not just recruitment of replacements.

B.4 Making the Business Case for Practitioner Wellbeing

For those who need to justify investments in CR team wellbeing to leadership, here are the key arguments.

The Cost of Turnover

CR roles have high turnover due to burnout and unsustainable conditions. Each departure costs:

Recruitment expenses: Advertising, interviewing, selection processes.

Training investment: Months of onboarding before new staff are fully effective.

Relationship disruption: Community trust is built with individuals; departures require starting over.

Institutional knowledge loss: Experienced practitioners carry irreplaceable understanding.

Calculate your current turnover costs. Compare them to the cost of improved support. The math usually favors retention.

The Cost of Poor Performance

Burned-out practitioners perform worse. They miss early warning signs. They damage relationships. They make poor decisions under pressure. The costs include:

Project delays: Community opposition that could have been avoided with better engagement.

Reputational damage: Incidents that become public and harm company image.

Legal exposure: Grievances that escalate to formal complaints or litigation.

Regulatory problems: Failures that attract government attention and compliance costs.

The Value of High Performance

Well-supported CR teams create value:

Operational continuity: Strong community relationships prevent disruptions.

Social license: Community support enables project advancement.

Risk intelligence: Engaged practitioners provide early warning of emerging issues.

ESG performance: Strong social performance supports investor relations and market access.

Talent attraction: Reputation for supporting staff attracts better candidates.

A Simple Investment Framework

Consider these investments in practitioner wellbeing:

Low cost: Debriefing protocols, peer support structures, manager training.

Medium cost: Professional counseling access, professional development, adequate staffing.

Higher cost: Dedicated wellbeing resources, comprehensive mental health programs.

Start with low-cost interventions. Document results. Build the case for larger investments based on demonstrated value.

APPENDIX C

Discussion Guide

This guide is designed to support individual reflection, team discussions, and workshop facilitation using this book. The questions and exercises can be adapted to your specific context and needs.

C.1 Questions for Individual Reflection

These questions can be used for personal journaling or individual coaching conversations.

Identity and Purpose

- Why did you enter this profession? Has your "why" changed over time?
- How do you explain your work to people outside the industry? What do they understand and miss?
- Where do you locate yourself between company and community? Has that position shifted?
- What aspect of your identity is most challenged by this work?

Wellbeing and Sustainability

- What physical symptoms do you carry that may be related to work stress?
- How would your closest relationships describe the impact of your work on your availability and presence?
- What warning signs would indicate you are approaching burnout?
- What practices currently sustain you? What practices have you abandoned that you should reclaim?

Ethics and Values

- What ethical dilemma have you faced that still troubles you?
- What are your absolute non-negotiables? Have you ever come close to crossing them?
- How do you distinguish between strategic compromise and surrender of values?
- What good have you done that you might be discounting or forgetting?

Legacy and Future

- What impact are you most proud of, even if it was small or invisible to others?
- What would you want said about your work when you leave your current role?
- Is staying in this profession a conscious choice or an inertia? How do you know?
- What would need to change for this work to become more sustainable for you?

C.2 Questions for Team Discussions

These questions are designed for team meetings, away days, or regular check-ins among CR colleagues.

Opening Questions (Low Risk)

- What brought each of us to this work? What keeps us here?
- What is one thing we wish people outside our function understood about what we do?
- What recent experience reminded us why we do this work?
- How do we explain our work to family and friends? What responses do we get?

Wellbeing Questions (Medium Risk)

- How are we really doing, as a team and as individuals? What are the honest answers?
- What support do we need that we are not currently getting?
- How can we better support each other during difficult periods?
- What would make this work more sustainable for each of us?

Practice Questions (Medium Risk)

- What have we learned recently that we should share with each other?
- What challenging situation is someone facing that could benefit from collective thinking?
- What skills or knowledge gaps do we need to address as a team?
- How can we improve our processes for debriefing after difficult incidents?

Deeper Questions (Higher Risk, Require Trust)

- What ethical tensions do we face that we do not usually discuss openly?
- Where do we see gaps between organizational rhetoric and reality in how communities are treated?
- What would we change about how our function is positioned and supported?
- How can we advocate collectively for better conditions for ourselves and our communities?

C.3 Workshop Facilitation Guide

This guide provides frameworks for workshops or training sessions using the book. Adapt timing and content to your group's needs.

WORKSHOP OPTION 1: Half-Day Introduction (3-4 hours)

Objective: Introduce key concepts and create space for reflection on personal practice.

Pre-work: Participants read Part I (Chapters 1-3) before the session.

Agenda:

- Welcome and context setting (15 min)
- Small group discussion: "What resonated from the reading?" (30 min)
- Large group debrief (15 min)
- Individual exercise: Support System Mapping (20 min)
- Break (15 min)

- Presentation: Key concepts from Parts II and III (30 min)
- Small group discussion: "Where do you see yourself?" (30 min)
- Individual exercise: Career Sustainability Assessment (20 min)
- Closing: Personal commitments and next steps (15 min)

Materials needed: Copies of templates A.2 and A.3, flip charts, markers

WORKSHOP OPTION 2: Full-Day Deep Dive (6–7 hours)

Objective: Comprehensive exploration with practical tool development.

Pre-work: Participants read entire book before the session.

Morning Session (3 hours):

- Welcome and personal stories: "Why I do this work" (45 min)
- The weight we carry: Discussion of Part II concepts (45 min)
- Break (15 min)
- Individual assessment: Career Sustainability Assessment with coaching pairs (45 min)
- Building support systems: Mapping exercise and gap analysis (30 min)

Afternoon Session (3 hours):

- Tools for the trenches: Practice sessions with difficult conversation frameworks (45 min)
- Ethics in the middle: Case study discussion (45 min)
- Break (15 min)
- Personal ethics statement: Individual drafting with peer review (45 min)
- Collective commitments: What we will do differently (20 min)
- Closing circle: One word or phrase to carry forward (10 min)

WORKSHOP OPTION 3: Ongoing Book Club (6–8 sessions)

Objective: Sustained engagement and peer support through regular discussion.

Format: Weekly or bi-weekly sessions of 60–90 minutes.

- Session 1: Introduction and Part I (Chapters 1–3)
- Session 2: Part II, first half (Chapters 4–5)
- Session 3: Part II, second half (Chapters 6–7)
- Session 4: Part III, first half (Chapters 8–9)
- Session 5: Part III, second half (Chapters 10–11)
- Session 6: Part IV, first half (Chapters 12–13)
- Session 7: Part IV, second half (Chapters 14–15)
- Session 8: Integration and commitments

Each session follows this structure:

- Check-in: How is everyone doing? (10 min)
- Key takeaways: What resonated from the reading? (15 min)
- Discussion: Deeper exploration of themes (30 min)
- Application: How does this apply to our situations? (20 min)

- Closing: One commitment for the coming period (10 min)

C.4 Facilitation Tips

Creating Safety

The topics in this book touch on vulnerability, trauma, and ethical challenge. Effective facilitation requires creating psychological safety.

- Establish confidentiality norms explicitly at the start.
- Acknowledge that this content may be triggering for some participants.
- Provide options for participation; no one should be forced to share.
- Have mental health resources available to share if needed.
- Model appropriate vulnerability yourself as facilitator.

Handling Difficult Moments

- If someone becomes emotional, normalize it: "This work touches important things. It makes sense that feelings come up."
- Offer breaks when energy shifts significantly.
- Be prepared to follow up privately with participants who seem to be struggling.
- Do not force resolution; sometimes acknowledging difficulty is enough.

Balancing Content and Connection

- The value of these sessions is as much in connection as content.
- Allow tangents when they serve the group's needs.
- Balance individual reflection with group discussion.
- End with concrete commitments to bridge discussion and action.

These appendices are meant to be used, not just read. Photocopy the templates. Adapt the discussion questions. Modify the workshop designs. Make them work for your context. The goal is not perfection in following the guides but progress in supporting yourself, your colleagues, and the communities you serve.

Thomas Gaultier | thomasgaultier.com