CIRCLE 1 LIVING
Where worth lives.



Leave the Shift at the Door

Clock out and mean it

Seven reasons the shift follows you home

Seven field notes from the garage and the kitchen floor. Each one names an alarm, and one move that fits in a real shift.

Brandon and Lorraine Cover

True Path Publishing

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Contents

1. Post-shift anxiety · 3
2. How to decompress after a 12-hour shift · 9
3. Saying no to extra shifts · 15
4. Made a mistake at work · 21
5. Dreading your next shift · 27
6. Burned out on bedside nursing · 33
7. The patient you still carry · 38

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Post-shift anxiety

Post-shift anxiety, for a nurse, often looks like diligence: the chart is done and the note is still open. One question sorts the line that protects a patient from the line written for a review that never comes.

Tonight, before you add one more line to a chart that is already done, ask: is this mine, and who is it for?

If you are already at home with the app open, the question still works. One sentence, then close it.

You clocked out. The badge beeped. You are in the garage with the engine off, and the charting app is propped on the wheel, and you are adding a late entry to a note that was already complete.

You have driven back from the highway to make sure you signed something. You had signed it. You signed it again in your head on the way home, and then you signed it a third time in the parking lot, because the second signing did not stick.

Your family asks how the day was. You give them an organized report, by system, and then you ask if they have any questions. They wanted to know if you were hungry. You handed them a handoff.

You woke in the night certain you never told the next shift about the potassium. You told them. You told them twice, and one of them wrote it on her hand. The hand is not in the room with you. The doubt is.

You put two fingers on the inside of your wrist without deciding to. You are counting your own pulse against the second hand, in a car that is not a unit, on time nobody is paying you for.

You read the note the way a stranger in a blazer would read it, at a long table, with the chart printed and a highlighter uncapped. That person has never called you in. You write for them every night, and they are never satisfied.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

If you have stayed with a page that was already finished, because finished did not feel safe, this is for you. The page was not the problem. The alarm on the page was. Stephanie, the ICU nurse in *Leave the Shift at the Door*, knows it too. She clocks out at 7:38 and is still on Level 2 of the garage at 8:14, adding a late entry nobody asked for.

Why does the late entry feel like diligence?

Stephanie remembers the beep. The time clock took her badge on the second try. Nobody is paying her for the part of the day that happens after that. She has the hospital's charting app open, and she is writing the day again.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

The day was documented, and she knew it.

The new note says it again. She types *RN remained at bedside throughout* and studies the word *throughout*. Then she adds the time she stepped out to get a daughter a chair, and the time she stepped back in. It was 40 seconds. She puts the 40 seconds in the chart because a person she has invented might decide that 40 seconds was the hole.

Her phone buzzes over the note. Glen, at home. *Chicken's in the oven. No rush. Well, a little rush.* She does not answer yet. She reads the late entry from the top, the way she would read it if she were someone else. She saves the note. Her pulse is 94. She starts the car at 8:21.

She has worked 18 years. In 15 of them, nobody has called her into a room about a bed. She writes for that room anyway. The person in the blazer has never existed. The note is for him.

That is post-shift anxiety when it is wearing its most flattering coat. It does not feel like fear. It feels like being the nurse who does not leave holes. The honest names you have given it are not entirely wrong. *I am thorough. If I do not write it, nobody will know I was there. The family deserves a complete record.* Some of that is true. The required note is true. The second note, the one that exists so an imagined inquiry cannot catch you, is the alarm.

Which way of coping keeps rewriting a finished chart?

The way of coping her alarm reaches for is Standard-Setter, the one that freezes by raising the bar. The standard is real. The standard is also the wall. You do not look frozen. You look careful. You look like the nurse who stays.

The way you cope does not fire when the work is still in front of you and the patient needs a thing. It fires at the door of *done*. Done means someone else could read it. Done means you could be judged. The extra paragraph is a lock on that door.

The other ways of coping have their own pages. On Stephanie, this one is the freeze that looks like craft. The chart is the craft. The second writing of the chart is the wall.

The diagnostic is the timing. If you are still charting a finished day in a parked car, you are not documenting. You are buying a few more minutes in which nobody can say you left a gap.

Why does the usual advice fail when the alarm is running?

The advice you have already been given is not foolish. It is aimed at a different problem.

Leave it at work. You would, if the part of you that is still on the unit believed the note was finished. The advice treats the replay as a choice you are making with a calm mind. The replay is what the alarm does instead of letting you drive. You cannot talk a surge out of a garage. You can catch it, and you can ask one question before you type the next sentence.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

You care, and that is why it follows you. Caring is not the mechanism. Stephanie cares, and the chicken is getting cold, and the caring has been recruited. The alarm uses the part of you that is good at the job. That is why the extra note feels like love of the work. It is the alarm borrowing your competence.

Try not to think about it. An instruction to stop a replay is a second job, done badly, in the same car. The mind does not empty because you told it to. It empties when the note has an owner and a finish line. Until then, "don't think about it" is a request to hold your breath.

All three fail in the same place. They assume the problem is the content of the day. When the alarm is running, the problem is who the note is for.

Why do the required note and the defensive note feel like one task?

The required note and the defensive note are not the same object. One of them belongs in the chart. It is the record a patient and the next shift need. The other is a speech to a hearing that has not been scheduled. They sit in the same text box, which is why they feel like one task. They are not. The book draws that line in the first chapter, the one called Late Entry. The required note is outside your control in the sense that the job demands it, and it gets written. What you control is how you breathe while you write it, and the moment you decide it is done.

The blazer is a way of coping your alarm hired. Stephanie has a specific reader who has never been in the building. He has a highlighter. He is disappointed. If you have a version of him, he probably has a title. Risk. Quality. A lawyer. A manager you had 8 years ago. Name him once, on paper, not in the chart. A named reader can be retired. An unnamed one rides along for the whole drive.

Going back to the unit feels like safety and trains the alarm. The highway turnaround, the second signature, the text to a coworker asking if you mentioned the thing you mentioned. Each one buys a drop in the charge, and each one teaches the alarm that the drop is available if it keeps the file open. The charge comes back tomorrow a little cheaper to start. You are not weak for going back. You are rehearsing a ritual that cannot end, because the blazer is never satisfied.

What question sorts one sentence?

On the first Tuesday, the facilitator writes a sorting question on a whiteboard that does not roll straight.

Is this mine, and who is it for?

She had been a bedside nurse. Her line, said once, is that her back left before she did. She does not pretend the building is fine. She draws three circles, lopsided, and then she gives the nurses the second half of the question, because for this job "is this mine?" is not enough. A note can be yours to write and still be for the wrong person.

The card that goes behind the badge says the same thing. Signal and noise. The question: is this mine, and who is it for?

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Here is how to use it on one sentence, not on your whole career.

Read the sentence you are about to add. Ask the question out loud if the car is empty, and silently if it is not.

Is this mine? The clinical fact, the handoff, the thing the next nurse needs: yes. The 40 seconds of a chair, written so a stranger cannot accuse you of leaving: that sentence is yours in the sense that your hands are typing it, and it is not yours in the sense that the job required it. The job required the true note. It did not require the defense.

Who is it for? If the answer is the patient, the family who asked a real question, or the nurse taking the next shift, write it clean and stop. If the answer is the blazer, the hearing, the version of you that gets fired in a daydream, do not write it. Cross the impulse out. Leave the line unwritten. Stephanie, later in the book, reads one of her after-shift notes aloud and hears the prosecuting voice in it. She sorts which lines protect a patient and which lines protect her. She crosses one line out and leaves it crossed out. That is the move. Not a better speech. A deleted sentence that stays deleted.

The question is not a mood. It is a sort. You can run it in the time it takes the app to load. You do not need the whole book to run it once.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Where does one late note sit in the three circles?

Circle 3 is what you do not control. The census. The staffing. The boarder who has been in the hallway since Saturday. What a review would say if a review ever happened. Whether the family believes you. You can write a perfect paragraph and still not control any of that. The building is the building. Naming it is not an excuse. It is the only way the rest of the sort stays honest. If everything is "your responsibility," the extra note looks mandatory. It is not.

Circle 2 is what you influence. The handoff you give. The tone of the one call back you promised a daughter. The way the next shift hears the one fact that matters. Influence is not control. You can do the handoff well and still not control what they do with it.

Circle 1 is what you control. Your hands. Your breath. The sentence you add, and the sentence you do not. Who you decide the note is for. The moment you save it and start the car.

The late entry Stephanie writes at 8:14 is a Circle 3 promise. *If I cover every gap, the blazer will be kind.* Worth has never lived in that promise. It lives in the note that was already true, and in the drive home that she keeps postponing.

There is a line the book puts on a report sheet later, after she clocks out on time and then, in the rush, skips a callback she had promised. The lesson is not "care less." The lesson is this: a safe handoff is the floor. The defensive paragraph is above it. The promise to the daughter was hers. The alarm had her spend the carefulness on the wrong sentence.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

What do you do on the next shift you work?

Name the blazer once. Before the shift, one line on a scrap, not in the chart. Who is the note for when you are still typing in the car? Give that reader a shape. A blazer, a highlighter, a room you have never been called into. You are not being dramatic. You are making the way you cope visible. The alarm has a harder time hiring a reader you have already laughed at.

Run the question on one sentence. Not on the whole note. Pick the sentence you can feel yourself adding "to be safe." Ask: is this mine, and who is it for? If it is for the next nurse or the patient, keep it and make it shorter. If it is for the blazer, do not type it. If you already typed it, cross it out and do not put it back. One sentence is the whole practice. A whole-chart audit is how the way you cope turns the question into another shift.

Give the drive a finish line. When the required note is saved, the phone goes face down before you put the car in gear. Not as a prize. As the end of the document. If the urge to reopen the app hits at the first red light, you are not remembering a fact. You are reopening the hearing. Say whose sentence it would be. Then leave it closed.

If the replay is a surge, heart up, hands already moving, the ten-second catch in Dreading your next shift is the tool for that moment. This page is for the drift that looks like one more line. The seam after you are home, and the ten minutes before you go back, are on How to decompress after a 12-hour shift.

The opening of the book is on the nurses page. Level 2, the bad light, the chicken in the oven.

The book is Stephanie in that same garage, phone face down, the chart left closed.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

Burned out on bedside nursing

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Tonight, before you add one more line to a chart that is already done, ask: is this mine, and who is it for?

What to do

Name the blazer once. Before the shift, one line on a scrap, not in the chart. Who is the note for when you are still typing in the car? Give that reader a shape. A blazer, a highlighter, a room you have never been called into. You are not being dramatic. You are making the way you cope visible. The alarm has a harder time hiring a reader you have already laughed at.

Run the question on one sentence. Not on the whole note. Pick the sentence you can feel yourself adding "to be safe." Ask: is this mine, and who is it for? If it is for the next nurse or the patient, keep it and make it shorter. If it is for the blazer, do not type it. If you already typed it, cross it out and do not put it back. One sentence is the whole practice. A whole-chart audit is how the way you cope turns the question into another shift.

Give the drive a finish line. When the required note is saved, the phone goes face down before you put the car in gear. Not as a prize. As the end of the document. If the urge to reopen the app hits at the first red light, you are not remembering a fact. You are reopening the hearing. Say whose sentence it would be. Then leave it closed.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

To decompress after a 12-hour shift, a nurse needs a door more than a bathtub. The shift does not end when the badge beeps. Tonight's door is short. The fix that holds starts before the next one, with ten minutes in the car and one question at the time clock.

Tonight: shoes off, phone face down for the length of one glass of water, then walk into the house. You are allowed to be bad at small talk for the first few minutes. That is clocking out.

Next shift, no ten minutes in the car because you parked late or got a call? Do water and food on the walk from the lot, and ask the one question at the clock. Water and food are two of the four below. Two still counts.

You get home and stand at the counter with a bowl, or with nothing. Sitting down would mean the shift is over, and some part of you does not believe that yet. So you eat standing, or you forget to eat, and you call that being tired.

You tell yourself you will shower and be a person. You open the charting app "for one look," and the shower happens at a time you would not admit to a friend.

Your back has opinions. You ignore them until you bend for a shoe, a lid, a kid's backpack, and the shift collects its fee in the kitchen.

You have a list of decompressing activities saved somewhere. A bath. A walk. A show you like. None of them have survived a 12 that ran to 13. The list is not a plan. It is a wish you wrote on a day off.

You sit in the car before the next one, not to meditate, but to delay the door. That car has a smaller job than the wish.

You have probably walked in the door still running the last hour, and called the people you love by the wrong name for the first ten minutes. The shift did not follow you because you failed to own a bathtub. It followed because nothing in the day had a door.

Why does the shift follow a nurse into the house?

Pam is 53. Med-surg, 29 years, and a mother at home who sometimes wakes and calls for the nurse. On a Thursday she comes home at 8:20 from another 13 hours. She gets her mother settled, eats cereal standing at the counter, and goes to bed in her clothes. That is not a failure of character. That is a body that never got a seam between the unit and the house.

That is the seam at the top of this page, and it is short on purpose. If you live with someone, tell them the seam in advance so they are not greeted with a report. You are allowed to be bad at small talk for a few minutes. That is clocking out. It is not a betrayal of the unit.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Pam's back has already gone out once in the book, on her own kitchen floor at 2 a.m., because she bent the way she tells new aides not to bend. The seam will not rewind a back. It will sometimes keep the first bend of the evening from being the one that spends it.

Why does the long version never get scheduled?

The long version is real on a day off. A walk, a meal that requires a plate, a conversation that is not a report. Keep those. They are not the tool for the night you are describing when you search this.

The long version fails on a work night for a mechanical reason. It asks for an hour you do not have, from a nervous system that is still in the building. The alarm hears "relax" as a loss of vigilance. It will spend the hour reopening the chart, because reopening the chart feels like the job, and a bath feels like leaving a patient. You will call yourself bad at rest. You are not bad at rest. You aimed a Sunday practice at a Tuesday body.

Some nights you are clinging to the shift. Some nights the assignment was 6 patients and one of you, and the clinging is what the math did to your attention. Decompressing is not a confession that the building was fine.

Staffing, the length of the shift, the census: Circle 3. The ten minutes are not a substitute for a safe assignment. They are what you can still do on the assignment you were given.

What are the ten minutes in the car for?

They are before the next shift on purpose. After a 12, "go home and decompress" competes with dinner, homework, a parent, a commute, and the chart you are still arguing with. Before the shift, the car is already yours. You are sitting in it. The practice uses a room you have.

In the chapter called Ten Minutes in the Car, the daily practice is smaller than the advice industry, and it is ruder, which is why it can happen. Ten minutes in the car before you badge in. A card folded behind the report sheet, or behind the badge. And four things, in an order that is not poetic: water, food, a bathroom, your back.

Water. The cup you did not finish at 10:00, finished now, before the badge. If you walk in already behind on this, the shift will not pause for it.

Food. Something you can eat in the car. Noon happened, or it did not, and you are not going to find out at 8:20 over a dry bowl. Pam's cereal, standing at the counter at 8:20, is what this step moves earlier. Anything you can eat with one hand counts, if you eat it before you scan in.

On one of the workshop Tuesdays, Pam eats at the library table for the first time since noon. Nobody says a word. Every nurse at that table skipped noon too.

A bathroom. Go before you badge in. The shift turns "I'll go in a minute" into a philosophy.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Your back. One minute of not heroically bending. Shoulders, the way you will lift, the shoe you retie now so you do not retie it beside a bed. The ten minutes are not a cure for a back. They are a refusal to donate the first injury of the day to a rush.

Then the card. In the book it lives behind the badge, where your hand already goes. You do not need a new object. You need the question where the badge is.

What do you ask at the time clock?

The ten minutes are the body. The minute at the clock is the sort.

Before you badge in, one question, the same one from the first card: *is this mine, and who is it for?*

You are not re-charting. You are deciding what you are walking in carrying. The argument with yesterday's note. The text you owe. The fear that this shift will be the one that proves you are behind. Most of that is not the patient's. Some of it is yours to set down in one line, so it is not in your mouth at the first bedside.

If you keep one thing from this minute, keep the question. Five steps sit underneath it for the day you have the minute and not a surge:

Pause the pattern. You notice you are about to walk in already mid-argument.

Identify the intent. You ask what the argument is trying to do. Usually it is trying to keep you from being caught unprepared.

Verify the alignment: does this live in Circle 1 today? Is this minute for the patients you are about to meet, or for yesterday's argument?

Open a new option. One line on the scrap, or nothing. Not a new system.

Take the next step. Badge in. The minute is over.

About 60 seconds on an ordinary day. It is not the tool for the moment your body has already left the chair. That one is shorter, and it has its own page. You can run the question even when you do not recite the five steps. The five steps are there so the question does not become another way to prosecute yourself.

What do you control after a 12-hour shift?

You do not control the 12. You do not control the admission at 6:40. You do not control whether the house is quiet when you open the door. Circle 3 is allowed to be unfair. Naming it keeps you from using the ten minutes as a moral score.

You influence the handoff you give on the way out, and whether you eat before you are useless. Influence is Circle 2. It can fail. The next shift can still call. Your mother can still be awake.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

You control the ten minutes, the seam at the door, and the question. Circle 1. Not that the shift gets smaller. That the door between the shift and the rest of you gets a hinge. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Pam's finish is one whole shift with a real lunch, and a no to a staffing text. The ten minutes are how a body learns that the shift has edges.

What is the drive home for, once the chart is closed?

Nurses talk about the car as if it were one room. It is two.

The car before the badge is the practice above. You are still a private citizen for those ten minutes, even in scrubs. If you spend them rehearsing every patient you might get, you have turned the hinge into a pre-game. One line of sort, then the four things. You do not have the assignment yet. Inventing it is the alarm, arriving early.

The car after, with the chart still open, is the shift hiring overtime from your own pocket. If that is the car you recognize, the question on Post-shift anxiety comes before any breathing exercise. The chart has to close first. Then the drive can be a drive.

If you only have the energy for one of the two, do tonight's seam. The before-car is boring. Boring is the point. A boring door is a door you can find when you are already tired.

What do you do tonight, and before the next shift?

After the shift, one seam and then the house. Shoes off, phone face down for the length of a glass of water, then you walk in. Not a ritual with 14 steps. If you live with someone, they already know the seam, because you told them.

Put the four things in order, in the car, before the next badge. Water, food, bathroom, back. If you only do two, do water and food. The card can be a sticky note behind the badge for now. The book has a card. The sticky note is the same question.

One line at the clock. Is this mine, and who is it for? Write the answer only if a sentence is riding in with you that the patients did not ask for. Then badge in. Lingering to reopen a finished chart is the other pattern, and it has its own page: post-shift anxiety.

If the ten minutes keep getting eaten by dread before you even park, start with the ten-second catch on Dreading your next shift. The breath is for the surge. This page is for the ordinary long day that does not end.

The opening, with the garage and the badge, is on the nurses page. The book is the Tuesday Pam eats at the library table for the first time since noon, and every nurse there knows why nobody says a word.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

Burned out on bedside nursing

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Tonight: shoes off, phone face down for the length of one glass of water, then walk into the house. You are allowed to be bad at small talk for the first few minutes. That is clocking out.

What to do

After the shift, one seam and then the house. Shoes off, phone face down for the length of a glass of water, then you walk in. Not a ritual with 14 steps. If you live with someone, they already know the seam, because you told them.

Put the four things in order, in the car, before the next badge. Water, food, bathroom, back. If you only do two, do water and food. The card can be a sticky note behind the badge for now. The book has a card. The sticky note is the same question.

One line at the clock. Is this mine, and who is it for? Write the answer only if a sentence is riding in with you that the patients did not ask for. Then badge in. Lingering to reopen a finished chart is the other pattern, and it has its own page: post-shift anxiety.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Saying no to extra shifts

How to say no to picking up shifts, for a nurse, comes down to one sentence, not a confession. The text feels like a moral event. It is a staffing problem arriving in your pocket, wearing the voice of someone you do not want to disappoint.

Before the next staffing text comes, put this in your notes: 'Thank you for asking. Not this shift.'

If the text comes while you are still on the unit and already said 'maybe,' you can send the line an hour later. A late no is still a no.

The message comes at 4:02, or at 5:10, or while you are in the grocery store with a cart you have not finished. It does not say "optional." It says the floor is short, and it says your name, and your thumbs draft the yes before your back has voted.

You say yes on Monday for Tuesday, and Tuesday runs past the thing you had promised yourself, the class, the appointment, the night you were going to be home. You call that being a team player. Your day off becomes a rumor.

You say no once, and a coworker is cold to you for a week. The coldness works. The next text, you say yes faster, so the coldness does not come back.

You call out sick and spend the morning building a case, as if a fever required a closing argument. You apologize to people who were not harmed. You apologize to the group chat.

You pick up so the new nurse will not be alone, and you are right that she should not be alone, and you are also the third week in a row. The building has learned your number. Your number has learned to answer.

You tell your mother, or your partner, or your kid that you might have to go in. You say it lightly. They have heard the light voice before. They start adjusting the evening before you have sent the text.

It usually starts with a yes you sent before you had read the text, because the no felt like leaving someone in a room alone. The feeling is real. The conclusion is not. The short shift is the building's. The sentence you send is yours.

Why was Pam's chair empty?

Pam is 53, med-surg, 29 years, and a mother at home. The way of coping her alarm reaches for is Provider: fawn. The alarm keeps the peace by spending her. It does not feel like fear. It feels like being the one who does not let the floor drown.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

On a Monday night she says yes to Tuesday's day shift. Tuesday runs past 7:00. Her chair at the library table is empty, because the workshop meets while she is still on the unit she already worked. Kathy, the night ED charge who does not soften a sentence to be liked, says they are not taking a break. The room talks about the short shift. They name it as Circle 3. The staffing committee, the place a complaint can go and sometimes does, is Circle 2. Pam is not in the room to hear it. She is on the shift her yes built.

When she comes back, she tells the table about the Monday yes. The phone lights at 7:25 with the next week's text. She lets it sit. That is new. The sitting is the whole plot of the evening.

The sentence they practice until it sounds like her, and not like a script she is borrowing, is this:

Thank you for asking. Not this shift.

On Thursday the 4:02 text comes. She sends the sentence. She does not add a paragraph about how sorry she is, and she does not add a novel about her mother. The sentence is complete. A complete sentence is what the way she copes keeps trying to ruin, because a complete no feels like a slammed door, and that way of coping was raised to keep doors open with her own body.

Why does a no feel like abandonment?

The unit is short. That part is not a story you are telling yourself. Hallways fill. Call lights stack. A new nurse gets an assignment that should have been two people's. None of that is fixed by pretending your day off is a secret float pool.

What the alarm adds, on top of the true shortage, is a verdict. *If you do not go in, you are the reason.* The shortage existed before your phone lit up. It will exist after you say no. The text is the building asking a person, one person, to absorb a math problem with her circadian rhythm. You can love the people on that floor and still refuse the math.

What a scheduled shift already requires is your unit's process, not this page's. The extra shift is the other thing. The ripple shows up the next week. A coworker is cold. That night Pam snaps at her mother. The alarm, denied the yes, spends itself at home on the person who cannot write her up. The table catches it. "No to the text isn't no to the team." The cold coworker is Circle 3. She gets to be disappointed. Her disappointment is not a performance review you have to pass with your body. The snap at her mother is Circle 1, and it is the part Pam can repair without picking up the shift she already declined.

Later her daughter texts that she will sit with her grandmother on Tuesdays. The book does not treat that as a reward for the no. It treats it as what becomes possible when Pam is not the only person allowed to be useful. The fear in that way of coping is that if she stops, nobody else starts. Sometimes somebody else was waiting to be asked, and could not get a word in over Pam's yes.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Why do the polite scripts fail?

You can find a dozen ways to decline a shift that sound professional. Use clean words. The failure is not the wording. The failure is the apology you weld to the front, and the rescue you weld to the back.

I'm so sorry, I would if I could, next time I promise. The sorry hands the moral weight back to you. The promise hands them the next text for free. You have declined one shift and pre-accepted the one after it. The alarm is satisfied, because the no was not a no. It was a delay.

Let me see if I can move something. You are now doing staffing's job in your car, in the parking lot of a grocery store. Moving something is how a day off becomes a puzzle you solve for free. If you need to check a real conflict, check it once. Do not open a negotiation with your own dinner.

The sentence in the book works because it thanks the ask, names the answer, and stops. Thank you for asking. Not this shift. You can be warm and finished in the same breath. Warm and unfinished is how that way of coping lives.

What does the board's rule protect?

In the chapter called You Clock Out, the room gets a grid. Impact against effort, with one rule written where nobody can miss it: *You clock out.*

Required care is never in the corner you drop. The patients you already have, the meds, the turns, the handoff: that work is the floor. It does not go in the pile of things you are allowed to shrug off because you are tired of being a person. The extra shift, the one that is not your assignment, is not required care. It is the building's shortage looking for a volunteer. The grid is how you stop calling every ask by the same name.

Stephanie learns the same floor from the other side: a clean clock-out does not cancel a callback she promised. A no to extra work is not permission to drop the work that was already yours.

If your no is clean and your yeses inside the shift get sloppy, you have overcorrected. The table in the book exists to catch that. You can catch it yourself with one question at the door: did I hand off the patients I had, or did I only escape? Escape is not the practice. Clocking out is.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Where does one staffing text sit in the three circles?

Circle 3 is the shortage, the census, the coworker who goes cold, the manager who sighs. You did not create the grid they are trying to fill. You cannot fill it by becoming a second FTE in your off hours. Say that plainly so the guilt has to argue with a fact.

Circle 2 is the staffing committee, the charge nurse who can move an assignment, the coworker you can tell the truth to without a speech. Influence. You may ask. You may not get it. A no does not require you to solve the board first.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Circle 1 is the sentence, the thumb that waits, and the way you speak to your mother after. That is the worth. Not in being the nurse who never declines. In being the nurse who can decline and still be safe for the patients she already has, and still be someone her family recognizes.

Why does a real lunch belong with the no?

Pam's finish in the book is not only the text. It is one whole shift with a real lunch, and the no. The two belong together, and it is easy to miss why.

A nurse who never declines and never eats is running one pattern with two ways of coping. The skipped meal is the shift eating her from the inside. The extra shift is the building eating the day that was supposed to be hers. The way she copes experiences both as love. The body experiences both as a debt. If you only practice the no, and you still work your own shifts without sitting down, you have moved the abandonment onto yourself and called it discipline. The book does not call that a finish. The finish is the lunch and the sentence.

There is a practical order. On the shift you already have, you eat. That is not a lifestyle. It is the floor, the same way the handoff is the floor. On the shift that is not yours, you use the sentence. If you cannot do both in the same week, do the lunch first. A no sent by someone who has not eaten since dawn comes out either savage or soggy. Pam's first real lunch in a long time happens in the room of the practice, not as a prize at the end. The table can see it. Your kitchen can see it too, if you let the bowl reach a table.

What do you do with the next text?

Write the sentence before the text comes. Put it in your notes. Thank you for asking. Not this shift. Read it out loud once, in your kitchen, so your mouth knows it. The way you cope will try to improvise a softer version under pressure. The softer version is the yes in a cardigan. Use the sentence you practiced, the way Pam does, until it sounds like you.

Let it sit through one small thing. The length of a glass of water. The walk to the car. Not three days of haunting the group chat. Long enough that the thumbs are not the alarm's. If the shift is one you already owe, because of a schedule you agreed to, this pause is not a trick for getting out of the job. It is a pause so you know which kind of text you are holding.

After you send it, do not manage their weather. Do not follow up with a sorry. Do not offer a different shift to purchase the peace. If you snap at home, that snap is information. You declined the unit and billed your kitchen. Name it, apologize for the snap, and do not "fix" it by picking up Friday. The repair is the sentence at home, not a second yes.

The neighbor to this page, if the no is stuck because you are afraid of being the nurse who fails people, is Made a mistake at work. Different alarm, same talent for keeping a file open. If the dread is the night before the shift you already have, that is Dreading your next shift.

The opening is on the nurses page. The book is where Pam sends the sentence, and where the table is still there the week the coworker goes cold.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

Burned out on bedside nursing

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Before the next staffing text comes, put this in your notes: 'Thank you for asking. Not this shift.'

What to do

Write the sentence before the text comes. Put it in your notes. Thank you for asking. Not this shift. Read it out loud once, in your kitchen, so your mouth knows it. The way you cope will try to improvise a softer version under pressure. The softer version is the yes in a cardigan. Use the sentence you practiced, the way Pam does, until it sounds like you.

Let it sit through one small thing. The length of a glass of water. The walk to the car. Not three days of haunting the group chat. Long enough that the thumbs are not the alarm's. If the shift is one you already owe, because of a schedule you agreed to, this pause is not a trick for getting out of the job. It is a pause so you know which kind of text you are holding.

After you send it, do not manage their weather. Do not follow up with a sorry. Do not offer a different shift to purchase the peace. If you snap at home, that snap is information. You declined the unit and billed your kitchen. Name it, apologize for the snap, and do not "fix" it by picking up Friday. The repair is the sentence at home, not a second yes.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Made a mistake at work

A nurse who made a mistake, caught it, and told the right people can still be replaying it years later. The replay does not ask whether the patient is safe now. It asks whether the nurse is allowed to be done. Reporting and review belong to your unit's process. Questions about your license belong to your board of nursing or to counsel. This page does not stand in for either.

Tonight, write the hour once on paper, in plain words: what happened, what I did, what is next. Then put the pen down.

If the unit's review is still open and you cannot write 'what is next' yet, write 'waiting on the unit' and stop there. That is a true line.

You are in the shower, and the moment is in the shower with you. The pump, the dose, the time, the face. You adjust one detail and run it again, as if a cleaner memory could reach backward and fix the hour.

You told the right person. You wrote the right note. You did what your unit asked. The file at work moved on. The file in your chest did not get the memo.

You are kind to a new nurse who makes a cousin of your mistake, and you hear your voice go sharp anyway. The sharpness is not about her. It is the old hour, looking for a place to stand.

You check the policy at midnight, not because you are on shift, and not because anyone asked. You are looking for a sentence that will finally call you either innocent or finished. The policy does not do that. You read it again.

A family was kind. The kindness made it worse. You would have preferred a scene you could answer. Instead you got a quiet room and a private prosecutor who knows your employee number.

You have a version of the story you tell at parties, short and shrugged, and a version you do not tell anyone. The second version opens with I feel like a bad nurse, and it keeps the hours. It has been keeping them longer than the job has.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

If you have re-read a page looking for the sentence that would make the shame sit down, this is for you. The sentence was never in the page. It was in the part of you that thought punishment was the same thing as care.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

What happened in the four minutes?

Stephanie tells it in the chapter called Four Minutes. She is 41 when she tells it. The hour itself is from when she was 26. Four minutes at a pump. She caught it. She reported it herself. She got a counseling form anyway.

The facilitator does not turn the story into a lesson about how to document. She names the write-up as Circle 3. A system punished the nurse who reported. That is the building. It is not a verdict on the kind of person Stephanie is.

What the page can say is what the room sees. Stephanie has been writing for that hearing ever since. The late notes in the garage, the pulse counted on her own wrist, the 40 seconds of a chair added so a hearing cannot find a hole: the hearing already happened, in a small way, and the alarm decided it was not over. Kathy follows her into the hallway and says the line that lets the rest of them breathe. Everybody's got a Bed 6.

She does not explain the bed. She does not need to. Every nurse in the room has the one. The point of the line is not to collect horror. It is to take the mistake out of the category marked *only you, only this bad, only forever.*

What job is the alarm doing?

The next chapter is called One of Her. The card says the alarm is doing its job.

That is a hard sentence to lend to someone who is sure they deserve the replay. It sounds, at first, like permission. It is not permission. It is a description of the wiring. The alarm's job is to keep you from a danger it has already met. A mistake is a danger it can point at. So it keeps the file on the desk. It rehearses the hour. It scans new hours for a rhyme with the old one. It will do this whether or not the patient recovered, whether or not you reported, whether or not a fair person would call the case closed. Fair is not the alarm's department. Prevention by replay is.

This is why "forgive yourself" slides off. Forgiveness is a verdict. The alarm is not interested in verdicts. It is interested in the next four minutes, and it thinks the way to protect them is to keep you on trial. You can be a careful nurse and still be hosting a trial that ended. The carefulness is yours. The trial is the pattern.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

A page can show you the file. A page cannot sit with you at 2 a.m. if the file has become the whole night.

Which voice is the notebook, and which is the gavel?

In the chapter called Gavel, Stephanie reads one of her after-shift notes out loud and hears the prosecuting voice in it. The tool the book gives that voice is a pair of names. Notebook, and gavel.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

The gavel is the note that exists to sentence you. It sounds like charting. It has times and details and a tone of doom. It is written for the hearing, or for the counseling form, or for the version of you that should not be allowed back tomorrow. It can include true facts and still be a weapon. Truth is not the test. The test is what the sentence is for.

The notebook is the voice the report sheet is supposed to be. What happened. What I did. What is next. Plain, in that order, without a closing argument. Ryan, later, hears himself write "probably" into a triage note and stops writing it. The hedge and the gavel are cousins. One of them hides. One of them prosecutes. Neither one is the record a patient needs.

Stephanie sorts her notes. Which lines protect a patient. Which lines protect her. She crosses one line out and leaves it crossed out. The leaving is the practice. A crossed-out line you restore at midnight was never crossed out. The alarm is patient. It will wait for you to get noble and put the prosecution back in "for completeness."

You can do this with the story you tell yourself, not only with a chart. Write the hour in notebook voice, once, on paper that is not the legal record. What happened. What you did. What is next, if anything is still next. If the next line is "and therefore I am not fit to do this," that line is the gavel. Cross it out.

Why does advice about letting go fail to land?

Everyone makes mistakes. True, and useless at 1:00, because the alarm is not confused about the existence of other nurses. It is convinced that this one hour is the hour that defines you. A statistic about other people does not touch a file with your name on it. The comfort in the book is Kathy's line, which is not a number. Everybody's got a Bed 6.

Put it in perspective. Perspective is a Circle 3 project. You are being asked to feel smaller than the event. The event may have been serious. Pretending it was small is another way of coping. The move is not to shrink the hour. The move is to stop living in the courtroom beside it.

Write a reflection for your manager. Sometimes a workplace asks for that, and then you write it, for them, in the form they asked for, and you stop. A reflection the alarm writes for an audience of one, every night, is not professionalism. It is the gavel getting paid overtime. One reflection, for the person who asked, and then the notebook goes back to what happened, what you did, what is next.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Where does the old hour sit in the three circles?

Circle 3 is the form they gave her anyway. The policy as it stood. The outcome you could not steer once the hour had passed. The family's private thoughts. The checkbox on a form. You can hate a punishing system and still not be the system. Stephanie is not absolved by the label, and she is not sentenced by it either. The label keeps the write-up from masquerading as her worth. The write-up is not her worth.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Circle 2 is the conversation you may still owe a preceptor or a charge nurse. Influence. You can ask for it. You cannot force the building to become fair retroactively.

One more distinction, because the file loves a blur. Remorse that changes the next hour is Circle 1. Remorse that only replays the last one is the alarm charging rent. You can feel sorry and still close the notebook. Sorry is not a subscription. If the sorry has a next action, do that action and let the sorry end. If the sorry has no next action, it is not care anymore. It is the gavel, billing you for a shift you already worked.

Circle 1 is the voice in the note you write tonight. Gavel or notebook. The line you cross out and do not restore. The decision to sleep instead of re-reading the policy for a third time when nothing in the policy has changed since the second.

What do you do this week if the file is open?

One page, notebook voice, not for the chart. What happened. What you did. What is next. If "what is next" is another night of prosecution, write "nothing is next" and stop. Keep the page. Do not email it to yourself at midnight to see how it sounds.

Cross out one gavel line and leave it crossed out for seven days. Pick a sentence you say in the car. *I should not be allowed to forget this,* or *a good nurse would still be sick about it.* Cross it out on the paper. When you want it back, that want is the alarm, on time, doing its job. You can thank it for showing up and still not rehire it as your editor.

Tell one person the Bed 6 line, not the whole trial. Not a post. Not a group chat of people who will either absolve you too fast or pile on. One person who has a Bed 6 of their own. Kathy's sentence is short because the length was the problem. If you cannot think of a person, that loneliness is its own weight. A harder self-review will not fix it.

The replay that is not about one mistake, the ordinary late note after an ordinary shift, lives on Post-shift anxiety. The ten-second catch, for the moment the body goes before the thought, is on Dreading your next shift.

Stephanie's garage, before she ever tells the four minutes, is on the nurses page. The book is the hallway where Kathy says everybody's got a Bed 6, and the gavel line stays crossed out.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Dreading your next shift

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Burned out on bedside nursing

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Tonight, write the hour once on paper, in plain words: what happened, what I did, what is next. Then put the pen down.

What to do

One page, notebook voice, not for the chart. What happened. What you did. What is next. If "what is next" is another night of prosecution, write "nothing is next" and stop. Keep the page. Do not email it to yourself at midnight to see how it sounds.

Cross out one gavel line and leave it crossed out for seven days. Pick a sentence you say in the car. I should not be allowed to forget this, or a good nurse would still be sick about it. Cross it out on the paper. When you want it back, that want is the alarm, on time, doing its job. You can thank it for showing up and still not rehire it as your editor.

Tell one person the Bed 6 line, not the whole trial. Not a post. Not a group chat of people who will either absolve you too fast or pile on. One person who has a Bed 6 of their own. Kathy's sentence is short because the length was the problem. If you cannot think of a person, that loneliness is its own weight. A harder self-review will not fix it.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Dreading your next shift

Dreading going to work as a nurse often arrives before the thought. Your heart is already on the unit. The story about why shows up afterward, to give the heart a reason.

When the dread wakes you at 3 a.m., say 'there it is,' then one breath: in for four, hold for seven, out for eight.

If you are already in the parking lot and it is loud, run the breath with the engine off and your hand on the badge. One cycle, then go in. Decide nothing about the job today.

It is 3 a.m. The shift starts in the morning, or you are trying to sleep before a night, and the ceiling has become the board. You are assigning patients you do not have yet to a version of yourself that is already failing them.

You drive, and the dread sits beside you like a coworker who will not make small talk. The music is on. You are not in the car. You are in room 12, and room 12 has not happened.

You stand in the locker room longer than the shoes require. The badge is in your hand. Your stomach is doing a job your mind will later call "being prepared." Prepared would be a glass of water. This is a surge.

You think about calling out, and then you think about the text the call-out will cause, and then you are in trouble in two directions before you have put your shoes on. The dread has hired a second dread to guard the door.

A day off does not always clear it. Sunday, or whatever day your week uses as a hinge, gets eaten from the back. The last hours are not yours. They are the hallway, arriving early.

If you have lain awake running a day that had not started, and called it responsibility, this is for you. It was the alarm, early for its shift, convinced that if it hurt enough in the dark, the morning would be safer.

Where does Kathy find ten seconds?

Kathy is 61, night ED charge. The way of coping her alarm reaches for is Knight: fight. She does not come to be soothed. On the second Tuesday the facilitator starts to describe a tool for the moment the alarm takes the wheel, and Kathy laughs the short hard laugh.

"I don't have ten seconds."

She means it. Two radios, the bed board, a phone that does not stop, a medic at her elbow with a patient she does not have a room for, a husband yelling about the wait. A tool that requires a chapel will not survive her desk. She says so, with respect.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

The facilitator does not argue her out of the desk. She asks a different question. No ten seconds at the desk. Believed. Is there anywhere in a shift that Kathy does have ten? Not a clever ten. A real one.

The answer, when it comes, is the gel. Kathy's hands already go there, palm over palm, between the fingers, dozens of times a night. The count fits inside a motion the job already requires. In for four while the palms work. Hold while she does between the fingers. Out for eight on the thumbs and the wrists. She does not stop rubbing. Nobody at the desk knows she is doing anything but what policy already asked. She counts. Nineteen seconds. She had them. She had been spending them on nothing.

She names it, and the name stays on the board in bad handwriting. Foam in, breathe out.

That is the whole scandal of the tool. It does not ask the charge nurse to become a different animal. It asks her to use a ten she already had, on purpose, once.

What is the 3 a.m. alarm doing?

The alarm fires before the thought. That is the mechanic the book is willing to say in plain words. The body gets the current first. The story rushes in to explain the current, and the story is usually a prediction. You will miss something. You will be the weak one. The assignment will be the one that ends you. The prediction feels like information because your heart is already behaving as if it were true.

It is not information. It is the alarm doing its job on a memory of danger, or on a building that has been dangerous in the ordinary way, short and loud and too full. The alarm cannot tell a live threat from a Tuesday. So it sends the current early, in the dark, where you cannot badge in and spend it on a real task. You lie there and call the current a thought. The thought is the caption. The current came first.

The line, said once, in the room, is this. The alarm isn't broken. It's doing its job. It thinks you are in danger, and it has sent the current through to get you moving. You do not fight that sentence into a mood. You use it as a label. There it is. The alarm. Not a prophecy.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

Which two moves do you need at 3 a.m.?

The tool is six steps on a card. The facilitator calls them scaffolding. The chapter puts two moves in the body, and those two are the ones you need at 3 a.m.

Catch it. About ten seconds. Not ten seconds of doing nothing in a code. Ten seconds of knowing the alarm has gone off. Stephanie's fingers on her wrist. A foot already on the gas. A throat gone tight. Kathy's laugh. Pam out of the chair before she chose to be. You do not fight the current. You say, plainly, there it is.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

One breath, with a count. In through the nose for four. Hold for seven. Out through the mouth for eight, slow, the way you fog a mirror. Once. If the alarm is still loud after that, do it twice more. Start to finish, with the catch, it is about a minute. The long exhale is the piece of the wiring you can reach by hand. You cannot order your heart to stand down. You can slow an exhale on purpose, and the rest of the circuit gets a message that nobody is dying in the room you are in, which at 3 a.m. is a bedroom.

One cycle is the start. Three is the ceiling, for when the first one does not drop the volume. Three is not the default, and it is not a contest. If you turn it into a contest you will be doing the alarm's paperwork with better posture.

For the day you want the whole card:

Breathe.

Recognize (name the pattern in three words or fewer: "This is Fawn.").

Evidence (what is factually true right now?).

Accept (the alarm fired; it is not in charge).

Kindness (which circle is this voice pointing at?).

Return (one action, the next one).

Pam learns the count on a Tuesday, sitting down, feeling foolish. The hold is longer than she expects. Her shoulders drop on the way out, which is how she finds out how high they were. She does not expect to need it. She tells the room she is fine. At 2 a.m. on Friday she is in her kitchen. Her mother is at the stove, all four knobs turned, nothing lit, calling for the nurse. Pam turns the knobs off, one, two, three, four. Then she bends for the lid, fast and twisted, the way she teaches aides not to bend, and her back puts her down. Her legs are already gathering to get up, because someone is calling for the nurse, and her legs do not check whether the nurse can stand.

There it is, she thinks, and feels silly, and thinks it anyway. She makes the legs stop. In for four. The floor smells like the cleaner she uses on Sundays. Hold for seven, which is a long time with that back. Out for eight. The alarm is still loud. She does it twice more. On the third exhale her hands stop shaking. She is 53 years old on the linoleum, and she is not dying, and neither is anyone else in the house. She gets as far as sitting. She tells her mother to sit. She holds her mother's ankle, which is the only part she can reach, and they sit. It is the first break she has taken all week.

The story is not a promise that your back will unseize, or that a breath replaces a lift. Pam still has to get them both to bed. The breath did one job. It put a gap between the alarm and the next move, long enough that the next move was not a second injury.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

What is the dread not asking you to decide?

A lot of 3 a.m. dread tries to force a life decision before sunrise. Quit. Transfer. Call out. Become the nurse who does not feel this. Those questions are real, and they are not this tool. The tool is for the surge, so you do not make the large decision with your heart already at a sprint. The sort between the building and the part that is yours has its own page, Burned out on bedside nursing. Do that sort in daylight, after you have eaten. Do not do it on the kitchen floor at 2 a.m. The floor is for the breath.

Circle 3 is the assignment you do not control, the short staffing, the culture of dread that a unit can teach a new grad in a month. You are not weak for catching it. The building has been loud.

The breath does not make an unsafe assignment safe. If the dread is telling you the floor is short, the floor may be short. Use the ten seconds so you can say the true sentence to the person who can move the assignment, or so you can get home without a second injury. Circle 3 stays Circle 3 after you breathe. That is the point of naming it.

Circle 2 is the schedule you can sometimes influence, the charge who will hear a true sentence, the day off you protect with a no. Influence, not a guarantee.

Circle 1 is the catch and the breath, and the decision not to text a resignation to yourself at 3 a.m. The worth is in the ten seconds you spend knowing what the current is.

What do you do the next time it wakes you?

Find the ten you already have. Not a new ritual with a cushion. Gel, a red light, the walk from the locker to the desk, the minute the coffee pours. Kathy's ten was hiding in a motion she was already doing. Yours is too. If you cannot name it, you are looking for a chapel. Look for a motion.

Run one cycle, then judge. There it is. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. If the alarm is still loud, two more, and then you stop counting as a way to stay awake. One minute, not a practice that becomes the thing you dread. At 3 a.m., after the breath, the question is small. Is there a real action, or is there a caption? If there is no action, the lights stay off. The caption can wait for the parking lot.

Do not decide your career in the surge. Write the dread in one line if you need to get it out of the loop, and leave the line for daylight. The daylight page for "is this the job or is this me" is the bedside one linked above. The daylight page for the replay after a shift you already survived is Post-shift anxiety. This page is only the ten seconds, and the breath, and Kathy finding she had them.

The opening scene, before any of them know the count, is on the nurses page. The book is the night Kathy counts the breath inside the gel at her desk and names it foam in, breathe out.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Burned out on bedside nursing

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

When the dread wakes you at 3 a.m., say 'there it is,' then one breath: in for four, hold for seven, out for eight.

What to do

Find the ten you already have. Not a new ritual with a cushion. Gel, a red light, the walk from the locker to the desk, the minute the coffee pours. Kathy's ten was hiding in a motion she was already doing. Yours is too. If you cannot name it, you are looking for a chapel. Look for a motion.

Run one cycle, then judge. There it is. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. If the alarm is still loud, two more, and then you stop counting as a way to stay awake. One minute, not a practice that becomes the thing you dread. At 3 a.m., after the breath, the question is small. Is there a real action, or is there a caption? If there is no action, the lights stay off. The caption can wait for the parking lot.

Do not decide your career in the surge. Write the dread in one line if you need to get it out of the loop, and leave the line for daylight. The daylight page for "is this the job or is this me" is the bedside one linked above. The daylight page for the replay after a shift you already survived is Post-shift anxiety. This page is only the ten seconds, and the breath, and Kathy finding she had them.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Burned out on bedside nursing

Leaving bedside nursing is often the first phrase a burned-out nurse types. Before you decide, look at the word under it. Burnout hides two different facts: the building's math, and the part that is still yours.

Before you decide anything, take one page and draw two columns: the building's on the left, yours on the right.

Already drowning, with no room to sit with a page? Write one line in each column on your phone at the red light. The rest can wait for a day off.

You refresh a job board on the toilet, at work, and you close it when someone comes in. You are not looking. You are looking.

You love a patient at 10:00 and you hate the job at 10:20, and both feelings are about the same hour. The patient needed you. The hour had too many of them and one of you.

You cannot remember, without effort, the reason you took the job. When you try, the first sentence is about the building. The ratios. The pay. The way it was supposed to be different from the last place. The person you meant to be is not in the first sentence. She is under it, and she has not been invited to talk.

If you have called it burnout for a year and tried to fix yourself, when half of it was the board and half of it was a sentence you had stopped saying out loud, this is for you. The sort comes first. The decision, if there is one, comes after. This page will not tell you to stay, and it will not tell you to go.

Whose finish are you trying to complete?

In the chapter called Fix the Ratios, the facilitator asks why they started. Asked for their own reason, most of them name someone else's finish first. Fix the ratios. Fix the staffing. Fix the way a hallway is used as a unit. The facilitator does not scold them for it. She asks questions. The building's failures are real. They are also a strange place to store the reason you, personally, walked into this work.

Alexis is 34. Hospice now, after years of travel contracts. The way of coping her alarm reaches for is Adventurer: flight. When the room gets heavy she is the one who is gone for six minutes, and nobody asks, because flight looks like a reasonable errand. Her pattern is the next contract. A new city has a way of feeling like a new nervous system for about as long as the apartment stays mostly in boxes.

The chapter after the ratios is called The Horse. The practice is two letters. Alexis writes hers to the six-year-old who gave her a crayon horse the night her father died. She does not read it aloud. Not a slogan the hospital prints on a mug. A sentence that was hers before the building started answering the question for her.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

That is the sort. When you ask why you are still here, notice the first answer. If the first answer is a repair of the whole system, you have named Circle 3 and called it your purpose. Circle 3 can be your anger. It cannot be your worth. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Can the building be the problem without becoming you?

Staffing is Circle 3. The census is Circle 3. A hallway of boarders, one of them there since Saturday, is Circle 3. Nobody at that table caused it, and nobody at that table can fix a ratio with an exhale. If a page tells you the heaviness is only your attitude, the page is lying to protect the building. We will not do that.

The opposite lie says that because the building is hard, none of your patterns are in the room. Both can be true before lunch. Alexis has volunteered for every on-call week. Staying busy can still be the exit.

Flight is not always a suitcase. Sometimes it is a committee, a certification, or a move with the same alarm and a new badge. The test is whether you unpacked. Her finish in the book is the last box, another city's name still on the tape, opened. It shows one nurse whose busyness was the door out of her own reason.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

Deciding the shape of your work is a daylight question. It goes badly at 3 a.m., and it goes badly on an empty stomach. The ten-second catch for the surge itself is on Dreading your next shift. Use that so you are not making a life decision inside a sprint.

How do you sort this without a verdict?

Get a page. Draw a line down the middle. You are not making a pros-and-cons list for quitting. You are sorting owners.

Left side, the building. Write only what you do not control. Ratios. The number of patients. Whether the hall is a unit tonight. If you catch yourself writing a feeling on the left, move it. Feelings are not the building. They are yours, even when the building caused them.

Right side, yours. The sentence you say when a new nurse asks if it gets better. Whether you eat. Whether the next yes is a contract, a committee, or a way to avoid the crayon horse. The reason under the repair. One sentence, not a manifesto. If the sentence that comes is "fix the ratios," write it on the left, where it belongs, and ask again. Who did you start this for, before the building handed you its unfinished work and called it a personality?

You do not have to read the sentence to anyone. Alexis does not. The not-reading is part of the safety of the practice. A sentence performed for the room too early becomes another way of coping. Leave it on the page.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Then, and only then, look at the decision you have been pretending is urgent. Stay. Change units. Leave bedside. The decision may be obvious once the sides are honest, and it may not.

What does the usual advice smuggle in?

Practice gratitude. A specific thank-you you received can be a true memory. A demand that you feel grateful for an unsafe grid is the building asking you to do its public relations. Decline.

If you loved it enough, you would not be tired. Love is not a staffing ratio. Tired is what a body does. The question is which tired. There is the tired of a hard shift you would choose again for the sentence on the right side of the page. There is the tired of a life spent repairing someone else's finish. They feel the same at the time clock. They are not the same on the page.

Leave the profession or *never leave.* Both are someone else's finish, offered to you as courage. Courage is the sort. The leaving or the staying is a consequence, and it belongs to you in daylight, with a meal, and with a person who does not get a commission on the answer.

What does a Tuesday look like when you have not decided?

You do not need a sabbatical. You need one page and a shift you are already going to work. Before you badge in, the left column gets one line, written in the car. Today's building, named without a speech. The hall, the ratio, the boarder who has been there long enough to have a routine. That is Circle 3. You are not agreeing to it. You are refusing to call it your personality for the next 12 hours.

On the right, one line that is yours for this shift only. Not "be a better nurse." A thing you control. You will eat at a time you can point to. You will not open the job board in the bathroom. Small enough to finish.

Mid-shift, when the urge comes to fix the whole floor or to vanish, you ask which column the urge belongs to. Fixing the ratios mid-task is not available. Vanishing into a supply run you do not need is the six minutes in the hallway, and nobody asking. Both are the alarm. One pretends to be duty. One pretends to be a break. The right-column line is the one you come back to, because it is the only one that can be finished today.

After the shift, you mark whether the right-column line happened. If it did, the day had a piece that was yours. If it did not, you learn which way of coping ate it. That is data, not a verdict. Alexis's last box does not open because she hated the work on a Thursday. It opens because she could finally tell the city's name on the tape from the reason she started.

If the right column stays empty for a week, that is not a resignation order. It is a sign you have been living on the left, doing the building's job and calling it your character.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

What do you do before you decide?

The two columns, once, this week. Building on the left. Yours on the right. If the right side is empty, that emptiness is the information. Do not fill it with a slogan from a poster in the break room. Ask who the work was for, and write the name or the sentence you can stand. You do not owe anyone the reading.

One busy thing you are using as a door. A contract, an extra committee, a certification you do not want, a move you have not unpacked. Name it. You do not have to cancel it today. You have to see it. If naming it stings, it is probably yours.

No career verdict inside a surge. If you are awake at 3 a.m. drafting the speech, that is the dread page, not this one. Catch the alarm, sleep if you can, and come back to the columns when you have eaten. The book spends weeks on this because a Tuesday-night decision made of adrenaline is how that way of coping keeps the boxes taped.

The no that feels like abandonment, which is a different door, is Saying no to extra shifts. The opening of the book is on the nurses page. The book is the week Alexis opens the last box, the tape still printed with another city's name.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

The patient you still carry

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Before you decide anything, take one page and draw two columns: the building's on the left, yours on the right.

What to do

The two columns, once, this week. Building on the left. Yours on the right. If the right side is empty, that emptiness is the information. Do not fill it with a slogan from a poster in the break room. Ask who the work was for, and write the name or the sentence you can stand. You do not owe anyone the reading.

One busy thing you are using as a door. A contract, an extra committee, a certification you do not want, a move you have not unpacked. Name it. You do not have to cancel it today. You have to see it. If naming it stings, it is probably yours.

No career verdict inside a surge. If you are awake at 3 a.m. drafting the speech, that is the dread page, not this one. Catch the alarm, sleep if you can, and come back to the columns when you have eaten. The book spends weeks on this because a Tuesday-night decision made of adrenaline is how that way of coping keeps the boxes taped.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

The patient you still carry

Grief after a patient dies can close the chart and leave the patient in the car. The last report a nurse never gave is not a document for the hospital. It is a way to stop making your body the file.

Tonight, if a patient is still riding home with you, write them one last report on paper, with nothing that identifies them, and put it in a drawer.

The short version, for a night you are wiped: one patient, on paper, then a drawer.

You are fine on the unit. You give report. You clock out. In the car, a particular room is still occupied. You did not invite them. They are there for the red light, and for the shower, and for the moment your own family asks how the day was and you say "busy."

You cry where it is inconvenient, and then you apologize for the crying, as if grief were a breach of the dress code. Or you do not cry, and you decide the not-crying means you are the wrong kind of nurse, cold, finished, already gone. Both verdicts are the alarm. Neither one is the measure of what the patient meant.

You tell the story once, short, to a coworker, and it comes out as a case. Age, diagnosis, what you did. The part you cannot say would not fit in the chart. It is the sentence you wanted them to hear, or the one you wish you had not been too busy to stay for.

You avoid a room number, a song, a kind of shoes. The avoidance works until it does not. A stranger in a waiting room wears the shoes, and your day splits.

You are angry at a family who were afraid, or grateful, or loud. The anger surprises you. You file it under a verdict you were not taught a shelf for. You were in the room, and the room ended.

It is not only the first one. People talk as if the first death is the only one that counts, and then you meet a nurse who has been carrying a patient from years ago with the same care she uses for a new admission. The first one opens the file. It is not always the one that stays.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

If you have kept a person beside you in the car because putting them down felt like a second loss, ruder than the first, this is for you. Carrying is not the same as honoring. Sometimes carrying is the alarm, refusing to clock out of an hour that already ended.

What can this page do, and what can't it?

This page will not tell you how to document a death. That record is your unit's process.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

A letter you write at the kitchen table is not a substitute for a person when the nights have become the whole of it. Write the letter if you want it. Make the call if the letter is not enough. Both can be true.

What goes in the last report?

In the chapter called The Last Report, the room sets the rules before anyone writes. Privacy first. The letter is the last report they never got to give, written to the patient they still carry. 850 words or fewer. Read aloud only by choice. No performance. No collection. The point of the rules is that the letter is not a second chart and not a confession for an audience.

You write to one patient. Not to all of them, which is how the alarm turns a letter into a life sentence. One. The one who is in the car. You do not use a name if a name could identify a family, and you do not include the details that would let a stranger build the room. You are not creating a document. You are finishing a report that had nowhere to go.

What a last report contains, in the plain voice of a handoff, is what you would have said if there had been another minute and no audience. What you saw. What you did. What you wish you had said in the room, to them, not about them. What you are still holding that was never yours to hold for the rest of your career. Then you stop, even if the alarm wants a concluding argument about what kind of nurse you are. That argument is the gavel. The report is the notebook. What happened. What you did. What you are putting down.

850 words is a ceiling, not a goal. A page is enough. A paragraph is enough if the paragraph is the one you have been refusing to finish. You do not file it. You do not read it to the unit. You do not post it. If you want to read it to one person who can hold it, that is a choice, made after it is written, not a requirement that makes the writing real. Unread is allowed. Alexis, on a different night in the same book, writes a letter she does not read aloud. The not-reading is part of the practice, not a failure of courage.

When you are done, the paper has a place that is not the chart and not the group chat. A drawer is a place. A shredder is a place, if the words needed to be written more than they needed to be kept. Keeping is not holier than letting the page end. The patient is not the paper.

What happens in the eleven minutes?

The book does not leave the letter as a tidy assignment. The same night, the break becomes the chapter. Kathy, the night ED charge, walks out to the parking lot. Ryan finds her there at minute nine. She was his preceptor on a hallway night she does not remember, and the not-remembering is worse than the night. She apologizes for not remembering. She comes back inside and sits down for the first time in the workshop.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

What you can use is the shape. The nurse who has been the armor sits down. The nurse who was new, and who kept the night, is allowed to be in the lot. Nobody is fixed by a speech. Somebody is met.

Later, at 1:55 in the morning, Alexis is on call. She stays with a dying patient until six. A daughter is angry. Alexis takes the anger seriously, and she does not take it as a verdict on her own worth. The book's line, said in another chapter and lived here, is the distinction. Take it seriously. Do not take it personally. A family's grief can arrive as blame. The blame may have a true piece in it, and a frightened piece, and a piece that is not yours. You do not have to swallow all three to prove you care.

Is the huddle an assignment?

Because of that night, Kathy decides to try ten minutes in the break room after the next bad death. The other charge nurse holds the radios. The facilitator names what Kathy invented. The huddle. Kathy sits down first.

The book has a picture of a charge nurse who stops performing strength for ten minutes, with the floor held by someone else. That picture is not an order to launch a program, to run a debrief you have not been asked to run, or to become the person who processes everyone's death on your unpaid time. If your unit has a way of gathering, use it if it helps, and leave it if it is another performance. If it does not, the letter is the thing you can do without a committee. The radios still have to be held by a person, not by your guilt.

Circle 3 is the death itself, the disease, the hour it came, the family's private facts, the staffing that made the room what it was. You do not control that. A letter does not revise it.

Circle 2 is the coworker who can hold the radios, the chaplain who is already in the building, the charge who will hear "I need ten minutes" if you can say it. Influence. They may say no. The letter does not depend on their yes.

Circle 1 is the report you write, the choice not to put it in the chart, and the choice to sit down. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. Not in being the nurse who does not cry, and not in being the nurse who never sets the patient down.

Is a family's anger a grade?

A death often comes with witnesses who are not nurses. They are afraid, or late, or angry, or quiet in a way that reads as accusation. That is the distinction from the night Alexis stayed until six, and it is the whole skill, and it is easy to miss when you are tired.

Seriously means you do not swat the feeling away, and you do not correct a grieving person into being polite for your comfort. You hear the sentence. You check it against what happened. If there is a true piece, a missed call, a wait, a tone, you can say the true piece in notebook voice. What happened. What you did. What you will do, if anything is still possible. If the true piece belongs to the building, a delay nobody in the room controlled, you do not take it as yours. Staying with a family is not the same as confessing to a harm you did not do.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

Personally means the anger gets to rewrite your worth. That part you can set down, even while you stay in the room. The daughter can be furious and you can still be the nurse who stayed until six. Both fit in the same hour. The alarm will try to fuse them, because fusion is simpler. Fusion says: she is angry, therefore you are the reason, therefore you carry her, and the patient, and the hour, in the car. The letter is where the fusion comes apart. You write what was yours. You leave what was hers, and what was the disease, and what was the building.

None of this is a script for the room where someone is dying. In that room you do the work, and you do not pause to compose a philosophy. The sort is for after, when the chart is closed and the car is not. If you are still in the room, be in the room. The page will wait. It has waited this long.

What do you do if someone is still in the car?

One patient, on paper, off the record. Same rules as above. One patient. Nothing a stranger could use to find the room. What you saw, what you did, what you are putting down. Stop at a page if a page is where the report ends. Do not turn it into the prosecution of your whole career. If you feel the gavel start, cross that line out and leave it crossed out.

Decide the keeping after the writing, not before. If you require yourself to know the fate of the page before you write it, you will not write it. Write it. Then drawer, or shredder, or one person. Not the chart. Not a post. The hospital's record was a different task, and it is already done.

If the nights are the whole of it, get a person. That can be your EAP, a clinician, or 988 in the US, any hour. The letter is a tool for a weight you can still lift onto a page. It is not a test you have to pass before you are allowed to ask for company. Kathy sits down. That is the picture. Sitting down includes letting someone else hold the radios.

The mistake that became a permanent file, which is not the same as grief and sometimes wears its coat, is on Made a mistake at work.

The opening of *Leave the Shift at the Door* is on the nurses page. The book is the night Kathy calls the ten minutes, lets someone else hold the radios, and sits down first.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

Burned out on bedside nursing

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Tonight's move

Tonight, if a patient is still riding home with you, write them one last report on paper, with nothing that identifies them, and put it in a drawer.

What to do

One patient, on paper, off the record. Same rules as above. One patient. Nothing a stranger could use to find the room. What you saw, what you did, what you are putting down. Stop at a page if a page is where the report ends. Do not turn it into the prosecution of your whole career. If you feel the gavel start, cross that line out and leave it crossed out.

Decide the keeping after the writing, not before. If you require yourself to know the fate of the page before you write it, you will not write it. Write it. Then drawer, or shredder, or one person. Not the chart. Not a post. The hospital's record was a different task, and it is already done.

If the nights are the whole of it, get a person. That can be your EAP, a clinician, or 988 in the US, any hour. The letter is a tool for a weight you can still lift onto a page. It is not a test you have to pass before you are allowed to ask for company. Kathy sits down. That is the picture. Sitting down includes letting someone else hold the radios.

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.

CIRCLE 1 LIVING
Where worth lives.

When the book is out.

Leave the Shift at the Door

Clock out and mean it

Get notified

Be first to know when Leave the Shift at the Door is out. We write once, when that book is out.

circle1living.com/notify#nurses

Send it to a friend

The person still in the car after the badge has beeped. Send this page. They can read it without an account.

circle1living.com/nurses/why

Circle 1 for Nurses · Brandon and Lorraine Cover · True Path Publishing

© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it.