Session 42: Service Under Strain: Showing Up When It Costs

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard; workbooks and pens; index cards

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Name their personal early-warning signs that service is becoming strain
- Build an if–then plan for the hard day (Session 29 method) for their service post
- State when stepping back from a post is faithfulness, not failure — and how to hand a post back cleanly

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that posts are proven on bad days; plan for strain before it arrives. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Anyone can serve on a good day. Posts are proven on the bad ones — the tired day, the unthanked month, the week your own recovery is wobbling. Today we plan for strain before it arrives, because it will arrive.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "Tell about a commitment — any commitment — you kept on a day you wanted to quit. What carried you through that day?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Service loads the same systems recovery does: sleep, mood, pride, and time. Strain shows up early and quietly — irritability at the people you serve, fantasies of applause or escape, a craving hiding inside the sentence 'I deserve a break from all of this.' The warning-sign chain (Session 28) applies to the helper as much as to the newcomer: catch the chain at stage one, while it is still just a tired Tuesday.

- **Strain has stages** Tired, then resentful, then grandiose or gone. Each stage has an exit: rest at stage one, an honest conversation at stage two, a clean handoff before stage three.
- **If–then beats willpower** 'If it is my service day and my craving score is above a six, then I call my accountability partner before the shift and I tell the post leader I am having a hard day.' Written in advance (Session 29), it holds when motivation does not.
- **A clean handoff is faithful** Stepping back with notice and a prepared replacement protects the post and the people. Vanishing is the failure; handing back is stewardship.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Relapse prevention research treats return to use as a process with identifiable warning signs and decision points, and the same chain logic applies to helper strain in a service role (Marlatt & Gordon, 1985; Gorski & Miller, 1986). Key sources for this session: Marlatt & Gordon (1985); Gorski & Miller (1986); SAMHSA (2012). Evidence strength: Moderate — established clinical model literature. Spiritual

practice: Daily examen / evening inventory — correlates with warning-sign monitoring and honest self-examination; evidence: Moderate (Marlatt & Gordon, 1985; Gorski & Miller, 1986). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. What is your earliest personal sign that service is turning into strain?
2. What does 'I deserve a break' usually mean in your mouth — rest, or escape?
3. Write your if–then for the hard service day: what is the trigger, and what exactly happens next?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Chain check — a four-stage service-strain exercise, distinct from the five-stage Warning-Sign Chain (solo, then pairs): each person writes their service-strain chain in four stages — trigger, thought, feeling, urge — and marks the earliest point they can honestly catch it. Pairs exchange chains and each partner adds one interruption the writer missed. Remind the room: chains shared here stay here, under the group agreements.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Write your service if–then plan on a card and keep it where the strain will find you — wallet, phone case, or workbook cover. Bring the card to the next session. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Service is never a substitute for a participant's own recovery work. If a facilitator sees service crowding out meetings, counseling, or rest, name it to the Program Director — the program will shrink a post to protect a recovery, every time.

Closing (2 minutes)

Faithfulness is not feeling it. Faithfulness is the plan working on the day you do not. Write the card; carry the card. Next session: the shadow side — when giving becomes a place to hide.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐