

THE AUTHENTIC EDGE

Helping you to become who you are meant to be -- in your **personal life, relationships** and **career**.

August 5, 2025



What Does Your Brain Do When You're Overwhelmed?

When I feel overwhelmed, my brain has two favorite moves: either get lost in gardening or binge-watch cop shows where someone else is solving the chaos. It's my brain's way of saying, "Let's escape this mess instead of dealing with it." And honestly, it works... for a while.

For others, overwhelm looks like calling five friends to vent about how overwhelmed they are. Or blaming their boss, their partner, or the system. Or spinning in circles trying to do everything at once and finishing none of it.

Overwhelm doesn't just happen to us—it happens in the brain. And unless we know how to interrupt the cycle, we end up reinforcing it. That's what this month's newsletter is all about.

Inside, I break down:

- What actually happens in the brain when we're overwhelmed
- Why so many of our go-to coping strategies backfire
- And most importantly, what we can do to override our brain's natural response and shift back into clarity and control

This isn't about powering through or trying to do more. It's about giving the brain what it actually needs to reset, refocus, and regain access to executive function. I hope it helps you (and your team, kids, or clients) step out of the spiral and into something more sustainable.

Warm regards,

Anne Dranitsaris



Studies show that chronic stress and overwhelm contribute to burnout, disengagement, absenteeism, and reduced productivity. The American Institute of Stress estimates that workplace stress costs U.S. employers around \$300 billion annually through lost productivity, medical expenses, and turnover. Gallup research highlights that 76% of employees experience burnout at least sometimes, with 23% reporting they feel burned out very often or always. This leads to a measurable drop in output, as multitasking and constant interruptions caused by overwhelm can reduce productivity by as much as 40%.

In This Week's Newsletter

Feature Article:
Overwhelmed: It's the Undeveloped Brain at Work

Brain-Based Tip for Dealing with Overwhelm

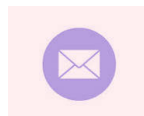
Did You Know?
Overwhelm Contributes to Reduced Productivity

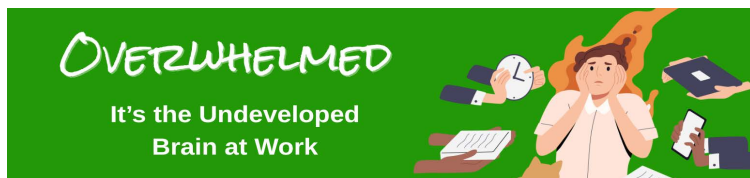
Food for Thought:
Are You Stressed or Overwhelmed?

Authentic Reflections:
Overwhelmed is Not a Problem to Solve

Upcoming Events:
Fall 2025

Anne Dranitsaris, Ph.D.
647.227.0332





How we lost the ability to focus on our own.

We talk about overwhelm as though it's a condition inflicted on us by the outside world—too many emails, too many projects, too many things to manage. But the truth is more uncomfortable: we are overwhelmed because our brains are undeveloped. Not unintelligent. Undeveloped. We simply never learned how to use our brain for what it was designed to do—focus, delay gratification, and prioritize.

Parents are meant to serve as a child's "borrowed executive function" until mid-teens. This is when the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain responsible for planning, attention, self-regulation, and judgment—is still under construction. Parents are supposed to be the scaffolding that helps children learn:

- How to sit in discomfort without distraction
- How to break down a task and do it step by step
- How to finish what you start
- How to manage impulses and wait for what you want

[Read the Full Article](#)



In my work with leaders, educators, therapists, and parents, one of the most common challenges that surfaces is how to support others when they're overwhelmed — especially staff in fast-paced environments or children in emotionally dysregulated states.

When we see someone spiraling into stress or panic, the instinct is often to jump in and fix it. To soothe, rescue, solve the problem, or take something off their plate. It feels helpful. Necessary, even. But often, it's not.

Over time, this kind of rescuing leads to learned helplessness, dependency, and burnout — not just for the overwhelmed individual, but for the person constantly stepping in to "help." What gets missed is that overwhelm isn't a problem to be solved by someone else. It's a brain state. And brain states can be shifted.

The Coaching Shift: From Fixing to Facilitating Development

When I coach clients who manage staff or care for children, I help them understand that they are not the solution to someone else's emotional state. Instead, they are facilitators of emotional development. The real opportunity lies not in solving the immediate issue, but in teaching the person how to recognize their emotional and cognitive state, and make a different choice.

[Read the Full Article](#)

Are You Stressed or Overwhelmed? Why the Language We Use Matters

We often use the word "stressed" to describe how we feel, but many of us are actually overwhelmed—and that distinction matters.

Stress is a natural response to a specific demand or challenge. It can be short-term and even help us stay focused or meet a deadline. Overwhelm, on the other hand, is when the brain feels overloaded with too much information, too many tasks, or competing priorities. It's not energizing. It's paralyzing.

When we confuse overwhelm with stress, we reach for the wrong solutions. We try to power through, take a break, or breathe it out. But overwhelm isn't just about needing a moment of calm. It's a signal that the brain's executive function is struggling—it needs support to process, prioritize, and reset.

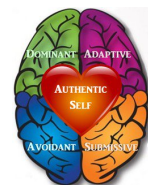
By using more accurate language, we create space for better support. If someone is overwhelmed, they might not need a walk or a mindfulness app—they might need help organizing, saying no, or setting boundaries. When everything feels equally urgent, the brain can't sort through it alone.

Naming what we're actually feeling gives us a path forward. Overwhelm needs tools than stress—and recognizing that difference can prevent burnout and lead to real relief.

"To recognize you are feeling overwhelmed you must develop self-awareness.

Emotional self-awareness is the moment you pause and recognize, 'This feeling is mine, and it's trying to tell me something.'

Brain Tip for Dealing with Overwhelm



When you experience overwhelm, your brain's alarm system—the amygdala—goes on high alert. This alarm triggers a flood of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, designed for survival, not clear thinking. These chemicals prepare you to fight, flee, or freeze, but they also pull resources away from the prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain responsible for focus, planning, decision-making, and self-control.

When the prefrontal cortex goes offline, the brain stops prioritizing. Everything feels equally urgent, making it hard to decide what matters most. This is why in moments of overwhelm, people scroll, pace, or do anything but the most important task—they are literally working with a hijacked brain.

Chronic overwhelm trains the brain to stay in this reactive state. Over time, it weakens your ability to focus, delays the development of executive function, and makes your baseline stress levels higher.

Exercise: Narrow Your Focus to One Thing

Beyond the financial cost, the toll on mental health is profound. Overwhelmed employees report more frequent health issues, higher levels of dissatisfaction, and a greater likelihood of leaving their jobs. Organizations with high levels of overwhelmed employees and low employee engagement face up to 63% more sick days and have a significantly harder time retaining talent. The problem stems from systemic factors such as unclear priorities, too many demands, constant digital interruptions, and underdeveloped focus and self-management skills. Addressing these issues requires intentional change and developing skills such as self-management, prioritization and boundary setting.

Workshops for Women on the Path to Authentic Living

Fall 2025

These workshops and groups are designed to support breaking free from the limitations of roles, beliefs and fears to get on YOUR path to individuating and achieving your authentic potential.

- **60+ Women's Group: Continuing the Journey**

A soulful, supportive space for women 60 and older who are committed to deepening their journey of individuation. Share wisdom, reflect on purpose, and embrace the next chapter with intention.

- **Imposter Syndrome Workshop: Reclaim Your Inner Authority**

Quiet the inner critic and step fully into your worth. This experiential workshop unpacks the root causes of imposter syndrome and provides brain-based strategies to rewrite your internal narrative.

- **Breaking the Chains of Attachment: A Codependency Workshop**

Learn to identify unhealthy attachment patterns, understand emotional entanglements, and create boundaries that support freedom and authentic connection.

More information about the sessions is coming soon. If any of the groups or workshops sound interesting to you, contact me at anned@annedranitsaris.com. Fall Sessions: October. Limited group size – secure your place early



This isn't just a course on how to meditate—it's a training in how to live.

In this intimate, small-group setting (6–8 participants), you'll learn how to use mindfulness to shift out of autopilot, calm your reactive brain, and become more present in your everyday life—at work, at home, and in your relationships.

Over 4 weeks, you'll:

- Learn how mindfulness supports emotional regulation and brain function
- Practice simple, powerful techniques to anchor your attention
- Explore the patterns that keep you stuck in worry, distraction, or self-criticism
- Build habits of awareness, compassion, and presence you can use anytime, anywhere

Each 75-minute Zoom session includes group discussion, guided practice, and reflection to help you integrate what you learn—not just on the cushion, but in real life.

October 15th & 17th, 2025 | \$195.00 plus HST. Weekly home practice and workbook included.

For more information or to register, visit **Mindfulness in Everyday Life Workshop** on my website.

Give your mind the reset it's been craving—and learn to live fully in the moment.



Anne Dranitsaris, Ph.D.

If your mind never stops racing, if you're constantly bracing for what might go wrong, or if you struggle to be present no matter how hard you try—there's nothing wrong with you. Your brain is just stuck in a reactive loop. Hypervigilance is exhausting and won't go away without retraining the brain.

For decades, I've helped people break free from the autopilot patterns that keep them anxious, distracted, or disconnected. These patterns are often wired in childhood and reinforced by stress, expectations, and roles like the "caretaker," the "doer," or the one who "keeps it all together."

Mindfulness with me isn't about learning to meditate—it's about learning to wake up. I teach practical tools to calm your nervous system, sharpen your attention, and shift from reacting to responding. Whether you're dealing with burnout, emotional reactivity, or just want to feel more grounded and clear, I'll help you rewire your brain so you can live with presence and purpose.

If you're ready to stop running on survival mode and start experiencing your life as it's happening, visit www.annedranitsaris.com. You're not here to just get through the day. You're here to be here.