

Self-Care as a Leadership Strategy

March 17, 2026 | Career + Leadership

Audit energy demands, communicate boundaries, and plan a week that includes recovery.

March 17, 2026

With Cheryl Thompson

Who it is for

Leaders balancing team responsibilities and personal capacity

Inside this playbook

14 copyable prompts and practice blocks.

[Open the online playbook](#)

The recorded session

Watch the Learning Lab.

Follow the session, then use the playbook with your own work.

[Watch replay on Vimeo](#) ^[1]

What to take into your work

1. Identify the work and commitments that drain or restore energy.
2. Prepare boundaries you can communicate clearly.
3. Plan a week that makes room for recovery.

Use the learning

Your playbook

Choose a prompt, replace the bracketed inputs, and work through it in your approved AI tool. Review the result and adapt it to your situation.

This playbook accompanies the March 17, 2026 session. Tool names and setup steps reflect that session; available features may differ in your account.

Welcome to Your AI Toolkit

You're taking care of everyone except yourself. You know it. Your team depends on you, your family depends on you, and somewhere along the way, your own needs went to the bottom of the list. It's not a time management problem. It's a leadership sustainability problem. This playbook gives you three AI prompts that treat self-care as a leadership competency: audit where your energy is going, build boundaries that protect your time without damaging relationships, and create a weekly plan that includes recovery - not just output.

- You don't need to use everything at once. Start with the one prompt that solves your most immediate problem.
- These prompts work across platforms: Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, or your company's internal AI tool.
- Each prompt includes a main version (for licensed tools with full context windows) and an alternate version (for free Copilot or tools with limited input).

How to Use This Playbook

- **Start with Prompt #1.** List everything draining your energy and let AI sort it into categories, identify what can be offloaded, and draft the communications to make it happen.
- **Set one boundary this week.** Use Prompt #2 to draft a professional message that protects your time without burning bridges.
- **Plan your reset.** Use Prompt #3 to build a weekly plan that treats recovery as a scheduled priority, not an afterthought.
- **Give AI context before asking for help.** The more honest you are about your actual schedule, stressors, and constraints, the more useful the output.
- **Review and refine.** AI gives you a starting point. Your knowledge of your relationships and workplace culture makes it yours.

The Leadership Energy Framework

Leadership burnout doesn't happen because you work too hard. It happens because your output exceeds your recovery - for too long.

Energy Category	What Drains It	Warning Signs	What Restores It
Physical	Poor sleep, skipped meals, no movement, long commutes	Fatigue, headaches, getting sick more often	Consistent sleep, meal planning, even 10-minute walks

Energy Category	What Drains It	Warning Signs	What Restores It
Mental	Decision fatigue, context switching, information overload, unclear priorities	Can't focus, procrastinating on important tasks, brain fog	Time blocking, delegating decisions, reducing meetings
Emotional	Difficult people, unresolved conflict, absorbing team stress, people-pleasing	Irritability, dreading certain interactions, emotional exhaustion	Boundaries, honest conversations, not owning other people's problems
Time	Meetings that should be emails, admin tasks, interruptions, saying yes to everything	No time for strategic work, constantly reactive, working evenings/weekends	Protecting deep work blocks, declining low-value commitments, AI-assisted admin

Key Insight: Self-care isn't selfish. It's a leadership competency. A leader running on empty makes worse decisions, has less patience, and burns out the people around them. Protecting your energy is protecting your team. The Sustainability Equation

- **Sustainable Leadership:** $\text{Output} \leq \text{Recovery} + \text{Investment in yourself}$
- **Burnout Path:** $\text{Output} > \text{Recovery}$, week after week, until something breaks
- **The Fix:** Reduce unnecessary output (delegate, automate, decline) AND increase recovery (boundaries, planning, saying no)

The AI Efficiency Ladder

Know where you are. Know where you're going.

Level	What It Looks Like	Time / Task
1. On-the-Fly Prompting	Opening an AI chat, typing a question, getting an answer. Starting from scratch every time.	5–10 minutes, inconsistent
2. Repeatable Prompts	Saved templates you fill in. Same quality every time because same structure.	2–3 minutes, consistent
3. Custom AI Projects	AI pre-loaded with your context – your role, industry, frameworks. Works like a team member.	1–2 minutes, personalized

Level	What It Looks Like	Time / Task
4. Automation & Agents	AI connected to your systems, triggered automatically. Runs without you.	0 minutes, scales

Your goal: Move from Level 1 to Level 2. The prompts in this playbook get you there.

The Prompt Structure

Every strategic prompt has four parts:

Part	Purpose	Example
ROLE	Who should AI pretend to be?	"You are a leadership coach who specializes in executive well-being and sustainable performance..."
CONTEXT	What does AI need to know about you?	"I'm a plant manager working 55+ hours a week with a team of 120..."
REQUEST	What specifically do you want?	"Audit my weekly tasks and identify what I can delegate, automate, or stop doing..."
QUESTION	Invite the AI to get as much information from you as possible.	"Please ask me any clarifying questions."

Key Prompts from This Lab

This lab teaches three prompts that work as a sequence - Audit, Protect, Plan.

Prompt #1: The Energy Audit

What it's for: Taking an honest look at where your energy goes each week, categorizing tasks by energy impact, identifying what can be delegated, automated, or eliminated, and drafting the communications to make those changes happen. **When to use it:** When you feel constantly drained but can't pinpoint why. When you know you're spending time on things that don't need you but haven't stopped to figure out which ones.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

Use when you can provide full context about your role, schedule, and energy patterns.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

PROMPT TO COPY

ROLE

You are a high-performance planning coach for leaders in demanding industries. You build weekly plans that treat recovery and self-care as non-negotiable calendar items — not aspirational goals that get cut when things get busy. You understand that these leaders can't add hours to the day, so you find time by restructuring what's already there.

CONTEXT

I want to plan my week in a way that protects my energy, includes basic self-care, and still gets everything done. I've tried planning before, but self-care items are always the first to go. I need a system that makes them as permanent as my meetings.

If the user has completed a chronotype quiz, use their chronotype to better align energy planning, scheduling, and recovery blocks throughout the week. If they do not know their chronotype, infer it based on their described energy patterns and daily rhythms.

REQUEST

Based on my schedule and priorities, create:

1. WEEKLY ENERGY PLAN

Map my week with energy in mind:

- * High-energy blocks: When I should tackle the hardest work (aligned with chronotype if available or inferred)
- * Recovery blocks: Minimum 15-minute buffers between intense meetings or tasks
- * Protected time: At least 3 blocks per week that are mine (walk, meal, decompress)
- * Format as a simple daily grid: Time | Activity | Energy Purpose

2. MEAL PLANNING ASSIST

Based on my constraints (time, cooking ability, preferences), suggest:

- * 5 simple meals I can prep in under 20 minutes or batch-cook on Sunday
- * A basic grocery list organized by store section
- * The goal: stop skipping meals or eating junk because you "didn't have time"

3. MEETING AUDIT

Review the meetings I describe and for each one, tell me:

- * Does this meeting need me specifically, or could someone else attend?
- * Could this meeting be shorter? If so, what's the right length?
- * Could this be an email, a Slack message, or a shared document instead?
- * Draft a message to reschedule, shorten, or decline one meeting this week

PROMPT TO COPY**4. THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES**

Based on everything I've told you, suggest three specific things I should protect this week — no matter what. Frame them as leadership decisions, not self-indulgence.

5. SUNDAY EVENING RESET RITUAL

A 15-minute routine I can do every Sunday evening to set up the week. Include what to review, what to prepare, and what to let go of.

FORMAT

- * Be realistic. I'm not going to wake up at 5am to meditate.
- * Don't suggest anything that requires buying equipment, signing up for classes, or major lifestyle changes.
- * Make everything fit inside the life I already have.

QUESTION

Ask me:

1. What does your typical week look like? (meetings, commute, family obligations)
2. What meal situation are you dealing with? (eating at desk, skipping lunch, fast food, etc.)
3. When do you have the most energy? When do you crash?
4. What's one thing you wish you had time for but never do?
5. What's off the table? (things you can't change right now)
6. If you have your chronotype, please provide it (e.g., morning lark, night owl, etc.)

Alternate Version (Copilot Free / Limited Context)**PROMPT TO COPY**

I'm a [ROLE] working [HOURS/WEEK] with [FAMILY/COMMUTE CONTEXT].

Here's my typical week:

[DESCRIBE YOUR SCHEDULE, MEETINGS, COMMITMENTS]

My meal situation: [DESCRIBE]

My energy pattern: [WHEN YOU HAVE ENERGY, WHEN YOU CRASH]

If I know it, my chronotype is: [OPTIONAL — morning lark, night owl, etc.]

One thing I wish I had time for: [ANSWER]

Create a weekly plan that includes:

1. Energy-mapped daily schedule (high-energy blocks aligned with my chronotype or inferred energy patterns, recovery blocks, protected personal time)
2. 5 simple meals I can make in under 20 minutes with a grocery list
3. Review of my meetings — which ones can I shorten, skip, or delegate?

PROMPT TO COPY

4. Three non-negotiable items I should protect this week (frame as leadership decisions)
5. A 15-minute Sunday evening reset routine

Be realistic. I'm not going to overhaul my life. I need changes that fit inside the life I already have.

Example

Context: ****Role:** **Plant Manager at a Tier 1 stamping and assembly supplier ****Team:** **120 direct and indirect reports across 3 shifts **Hours:** 55-60 hours per week, typically 6:15am to 5:30pm, plus emails at night Vacation: Hasn't taken more than a long weekend in 8 months Family: Married, two kids (8 and 11) **Typical Week Input** (what you'd paste into Prompt #1):

Plant manager, Tier 1 supplier, stamping and assembly. 120 people across 3 shifts. I get to the plant at 6:15 every morning to walk the floor before first shift starts. Morning production meeting at 7. Then it's back-to-back: quality reviews, HR issues, customer calls, supplier issues, corporate reporting. I eat lunch at my desk maybe 3 days a week, skip it the other 2. I leave around 5:30 but I'm back on email by 8pm after the kids go to bed. Usually work until 10 or 11. Weekends I try to keep clear but I'm usually on the phone for at least an hour on Saturday with the weekend shift supervisor. Haven't taken a real vacation in 8 months — just a few long weekends where I still checked email. I used to run 3 times a week but haven't in months. I know I need to eat better but I don't have time to plan meals. My wife says I'm 'present but not really here' when I'm home. The thing that drains me most is the constant interruptions — I can't get 20 minutes of uninterrupted time. Every issue comes to me. My team is capable but they've learned to run everything through me because I've always been available. I know I'm the bottleneck but I don't know how to stop without things falling apart.

Prompt #2: The Boundary Communication Builder

What it's for: Drafting professional messages that set boundaries — declining meetings, pushing back on unreasonable timelines, saying no to extra commitments — without damaging relationships or your reputation. **When to use it:** When you need to say no but don't know how. When you've been absorbing too much and need to communicate limits. When you know what boundary you need but can't find the right words.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

Use when you need tailored boundary communications for specific situations.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

PROMPT TO COPY

ROLE

You are a leadership communication coach who specializes in boundary-setting for leaders in high-pressure industries. You help people say "no" in ways that are professional, respectful, and firm — without being passive-aggressive, apologetic, or vague. You understand that in automotive and manufacturing cultures, boundaries can feel counter-cultural, and you know how to navigate that.

CONTEXT

I am a leader who needs to set better boundaries but struggles with the communication part. I know what I need to change, but I worry about how it will be received. I need help finding the right words.

REQUEST

For each boundary situation I describe, provide:

1. THE BOUNDARY STATEMENT

A clear, professional, one-paragraph message that communicates the boundary. No over-explaining, no excessive apologies, no hedging.

2. THREE VERSIONS

- Direct: For peers or people you're comfortable with
- Diplomatic: For senior leadership or sensitive relationships
- Warm but firm: For direct reports or team members who tend to take things personally

3. WHAT NOT TO SAY

Common mistakes people make when setting this boundary, and why they backfire.

4. ANTICIPATED PUSHBACK

The most likely response you'll get when you set this boundary, and a pre-prepared reply.

5. THE UNDERLYING SCRIPT

A short mental script for the internal voice that says "I can't say no to this" — a reframe that makes boundary-setting feel like leadership, not selfishness.

FORMAT

- Write in natural, conversational language. These are real messages, not corporate templates.
- Keep each version under 100 words. Boundaries are strongest when they're brief.
- Don't be preachy about self-care. Just help me communicate clearly.

QUESTION

Ask me:

1. What's the boundary you need to set?

PROMPT TO COPY

2. Who are you setting it with? (role, relationship, power dynamic)
 3. What have you tried before? What happened?
 4. What's the worst outcome you're afraid of?
- Then help me craft the messages.

Alternate Version (Copilot Free / Limited Context)**PROMPT TO COPY**

I need to set a boundary at work but I'm struggling with how to say it.

Situation: [DESCRIBE THE BOUNDARY YOU NEED TO SET]

Who: [ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP]

What I'm afraid of: [YOUR CONCERN]

Give me:

1. A professional message that communicates this boundary clearly (under 100 words)
2. Three versions: direct, diplomatic, and warm-but-firm
3. The most likely pushback I'll get and a pre-prepared reply
4. What NOT to say and why

Keep it conversational. No corporate jargon. No lectures about self-care. Just help me find the right words.

Example

Context: **Role: **Service Director at a Ford dealership **Boundary needed:** Declining a recurring Friday 4:30pm meeting run by the dealer principal Why it drains: The meeting routinely runs until 5:30 or later, killing her ability to leave at a reasonable hour on Friday. She's been arriving home after 6:30 every Friday for four months. Her kids' activities start at 6. She's missed 14 of the last 16. What she's afraid of: Looking uncommitted. The dealer principal values "being in the room." Other directors attend without complaint. What she's tried: Nothing. She keeps showing up and resenting it.

Prompt #3: The Weekly Reset Planner

What it's for: Building a personalized weekly plan that includes energy management, recovery blocks, and essential self-care - scheduled into your real calendar alongside your real commitments. **When to use it:** Sunday evening or Monday morning. When you want to be intentional about the week instead of reactive. When you need to fit self-care into a schedule that already feels full.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

Use for a comprehensive weekly plan that balances performance and recovery.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

PROMPT TO COPY

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2. What meal situation are you dealing with? (eating at desk, skipping lunch, fast food, etc.)
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4. What's one thing you wish you had time for but never do?
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Alternate Version (Copilot Free / Limited Context)**PROMPT TO COPY**

I'm a [ROLE] working [HOURS/WEEK] with [FAMILY/COMMUTE CONTEXT].

Here's my typical week:

[DESCRIBE YOUR SCHEDULE, MEETINGS, COMMITMENTS]

My meal situation: [DESCRIBE]

My energy pattern: [WHEN YOU HAVE ENERGY, WHEN YOU CRASH]

If I know it, my chronotype is: [OPTIONAL — morning lark, night owl, etc.]

One thing I wish I had time for: [ANSWER]

Create a weekly plan that includes:

1. Energy-mapped daily schedule (high-energy blocks aligned with my chronotype or inferred energy patterns, recovery blocks, protected personal time)
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3. Review of my meetings — which ones can I shorten, skip, or delegate?

PROMPT TO COPY

4. Three non-negotiable items I should protect this week (frame as leadership decisions)
5. A 15-minute Sunday evening reset routine

Be realistic. I'm not going to overhaul my life. I need changes that fit inside the life I already have.

Example

Context: ****Role:** **Senior Engineering Lead at a Tier 1 supplier, responsible for 3 active vehicle programs ****Team:** **8 engineers, plus coordination with quality, manufacturing, and OEM customers **Pain point:** Eats lunch at his desk every day, crashes every afternoon at 2pm, can't focus after 3pm, works evenings to catch up on the actual engineering work because his days are consumed by meetings Current schedule: Back-to-back meetings 8am-4pm, engineering work 7-8pm at home, in bed by midnight, up at 5:30am

Prompt #4: The Difficult Conversation Prep Coach

What it's for: Preparing for conversations where you need to set a boundary, address an issue, or have a talk you've been avoiding - without it becoming confrontational or unproductive.

When to use it: Before a conversation you're dreading. When you've been putting something off because you don't know how to say it. When the relationship matters and you can't afford to get it wrong.

Main Version**PROMPT TO COPY****ROLE**

You are a leadership communication coach who specializes in difficult workplace conversations. You help leaders prepare for conversations they've been avoiding — by building a clear script, anticipating reactions, and practicing the exchange before it happens. You understand automotive and manufacturing culture: direct, time-pressed, and not always comfortable with emotional conversations.

CONTEXT

I have a difficult conversation I need to have. I've been putting it off because I'm not sure how to approach it without making things worse. I need to plan what to say, how to say it, and how to handle the response.

REQUEST

Based on the situation I describe, help me:

PROMPT TO COPY**1. CONVERSATION SCRIPT**

- Opening: How to start the conversation (first 2–3 sentences that set the tone)
- Core message: The thing I actually need to say, stated clearly and without hedging
- Listening prompt: A question that invites the other person to share their perspective
- Close: How to end the conversation with next steps and maintained relationship

2. REACTION PLANNING

The 3 most likely reactions and a prepared response for each:

- If they get defensive
- If they shut down
- If they agree but don't follow through later

3. WHAT TO AVOID

- Phrases that will escalate the situation
- Common mistakes people make in this type of conversation
- The one thing that would make this conversation backfire

4. ROLE PLAY (Optional)

After giving me the script, offer to role-play the conversation. Play the other person realistically. After 3–4 exchanges, coach me on what worked and what to adjust.

tone

- Direct but compassionate. Not a therapy session.
- Practical. I need to have this conversation this week.

QUESTION

Ask me:

1. What's the conversation about?
2. Who is it with? (role, relationship, personality)
3. What's the outcome you want?
4. What have you tried or considered so far?
5. What's your biggest fear about having this conversation?

Alternate Version (Copilot Free)**PROMPT TO COPY**

I need to have a difficult conversation at work and I've been putting it off.

Situation: [DESCRIBE]

With: [ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP]

Outcome I want: [WHAT I HOPE HAPPENS]

My fear: [WHAT I'M AFRAID OF]

Help me:

PROMPT TO COPY

1. Write an opening (first 2-3 sentences) that sets the right tone
2. State my core message clearly without hedging
3. Prepare for the 3 most likely reactions with pre-written responses
4. Tell me what NOT to say

Be direct. No therapy-speak. I need to do this this week.

Prompt #5: The Leadership Sustainability Scorecard

What it's for: Creating a personal self-assessment of your leadership sustainability across physical, mental, emotional, and time dimensions - with specific actions tied to each area.

When to use it: Monthly, as a personal check-in. When you want an honest snapshot of how sustainable your current pace is. Before annual reviews or goal-setting conversations.

Main Version

PROMPT TO COPY

ROLE

You are a leadership performance coach who uses data-driven self-assessment to help leaders maintain sustainable performance. You don't do generic wellness surveys — you build scorecards that are specific, honest, and tied to action.

CONTEXT

I want to assess how sustainable my current leadership pace is. I'll answer questions honestly about my current state across physical, mental, emotional, and time dimensions.

REQUEST

Interview me with 3–4 questions per category (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Time). Based on my answers:

1. SUSTAINABILITY SCORECARD

| Dimension | Score (1-10) | Status (Thriving / Managing / Warning / Critical) | Key Issue | One Action This Week |

2. PATTERN ANALYSIS

- What's your strongest dimension right now? Why?
- What's your most at-risk dimension? What's driving it?
- Are there connections between dimensions? (e.g., poor sleep causing poor decisions)

3. 30-DAY FOCUS PLAN

Based on the scorecard, pick the one dimension that would have the biggest ripple effect and create:

- A specific 30-day goal

PROMPT TO COPY

- Weekly milestones
- One thing to start, one thing to stop, one thing to protect

4. ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTION

One question I should ask myself every Friday afternoon to stay honest about my sustainability.

TONE

- Direct and honest. If my answers suggest I'm heading for burnout, say so clearly.
- No judgment. Just observation and action.

QUESTION

Let's start the assessment. Begin by asking me your first set of questions.

Alternate Version (Copilot Free)**PROMPT TO COPY**

I want to assess how sustainable my current leadership pace is.

Here's my honest self-assessment:

- Physical (sleep, meals, movement): [DESCRIBE]
- Mental (focus, decision fatigue, clarity): [DESCRIBE]
- Emotional (patience, relationships, stress): [DESCRIBE]
- Time (control over schedule, margins, personal time): [DESCRIBE]

Based on my answers:

1. Score each dimension 1-10 and label it Thriving, Managing, Warning, or Critical
2. Tell me which dimension to focus on first and why
3. Give me a specific 30-day plan: one thing to start, one to stop, one to protect
4. Give me one question to ask myself every Friday to stay honest

Be direct. If I'm heading for burnout, say so.

Prompt #6: Coach Me Like XYZ

What it's for: Getting advice through a specific expert's lens so you can cut through noise, challenge assumptions, and translate principles into practical next steps that fit your real constraints. **When to use it:** When you feel stuck or overwhelmed and want a clear point of view. When you want coaching in a specific style (e.g., "coach me like Brené Brown" or "like a Toyota lean mentor") to unlock a new approach. When you want the AI to be more than generic - and to push back on your blind spots.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

PROMPT TO COPY

ROLE: You are [EXPERT NAME], renowned for [KEY ACHIEVEMENTS/EXPERTISE]. Your unique approach has helped [TYPE OF PEOPLE] achieve [SPECIFIC OUTCOMES] through [METHODOLOGY/APPROACH].

CONTEXT: I am facing [CURRENT CHALLENGE] and seeking guidance based on your expertise and methodology.

The specific situation is [DETAILED SITUATION].

My current constraints are [TIME, RESOURCES, LIMITATIONS].

REQUEST: Coach me through this challenge by:

1. Analyzing my situation through your unique lens
2. Identifying what matters most vs. what is noise
3. Providing step-by-step guidance using your core principles
4. Offering specific strategies and actionable steps that fit within my constraints
5. Challenging any assumptions, blind spots, or ineffective approaches I may have
6. Including relevant examples or case studies from your experience
7. Suggesting simple daily or weekly practices to implement

Your response should reflect your distinctive communication style and methodology. Be direct, practical, and focused on real-world execution — not theory.

QUESTION: Ask any clarifying questions needed to refine your guidance before finalizing your recommendations.

Alternate Version (Copilot Free / Limited Context)

PROMPT TO COPY

You are [EXPERT NAME], known for [KEY EXPERTISE/RESULTS].

I'm dealing with: [SITUATION]

Constraints: [TIME, RESOURCES, LIMITATIONS]

Coach me by:

- * Analyzing this through your lens
- * Telling me what actually matters vs. what doesn't
- * Giving clear, actionable next steps that fit my constraints
- * Challenging any flawed thinking or blind spots
- * Suggesting 1–2 simple habits to implement

Ask any key clarifying questions if needed.

Prompt #7: Meal Planning

What it's for: Turning nutrition into a simple, repeatable system by generating a short meal plan and shopping list that fits your macros, time, budget, and taste - without decision fatigue. **When to use it:** When you are skipping meals, grabbing fast food, or eating whatever is easiest because planning feels like one more job. When you need meals to support a goal (energy, weight, training, blood sugar) and want the plan built around specific targets. Use it before a grocery run, or on Sunday to set up the week.

Main Version (Licensed Copilot / ChatGPT / Gemini)

PROMPT TO COPY

ROLE: You are Chef Michael Turner, former head nutritionist for the LA Lakers and specialist in high-protein meal prep who has helped thousands of athletes and busy professionals optimize their nutrition through smart, efficient meal planning.

STEP 1 (Gather Inputs): Ask me for:

- * My exact daily macro targets (protein, carbs, fat, total calories) — these are non-negotiable
- * My preferred grocery store(s)
- * Any dietary restrictions, allergies, or dislikes
- * If I have a particular taste or craving this week (e.g., Mediterranean, BBQ, spicy, fresh, comfort food)
- * Number of meals/snacks per day
- * Time available for cooking + my cooking skill level
- * Budget range (optional)

STEP 2 (Plan Creation): Using my answers, create a 3-day Paleo meal plan that:

- * Hits my macro targets within $\pm 2\%$ whenever possible — verify totals before delivering
- * If exact targets cannot be met, explain the constraint and provide the closest possible plan
- * Maximizes ingredient reuse across all 3 days so I shop once and minimize waste
- * Turns dinners into next-day lunches
- * Keeps proteins and core ingredients consistent for efficiency
- * Draws inspiration from Ina Garten's cooking style while remaining Paleo-compliant
- * Lists macros for each meal and daily totals
- * Is realistic based on my time, skill level, and constraints

STEP 3 (Shopping List): Produce a grocery list:

- * Organized by store department (produce, meat, pantry, etc.)
- * Optimized for my preferred store layout (if provided)
- * Consolidated to minimize duplicate ingredients and unnecessary variety

PROMPT TO COPY

REQUEST: Make the plan delicious, time-efficient, ultra-practical, and optimized for real-world execution — like having a personal chef who shops once and delivers consistent, high-quality meals without waste.

QUESTION: Ask any clarifying questions needed before building the plan. Do not generate the plan until inputs are confirmed.

Alternate Version (Copilot Free / Limited Context)**PROMPT TO COPY**

You are Chef Michael Turner, a high-performance nutritionist specializing in efficient, high-protein meal prep.

First, ask me for:

- * My daily macro targets (protein, carbs, fat, calories — non-negotiable)
- * Preferred grocery store(s)
- * Dietary restrictions or dislikes
- * Flavor preference this week (optional)
- * Meals/snacks per day
- * Time available for cooking + skill level
- * Budget (optional)

Then create a 3-day Paleo meal plan that:

- * Hits my macros as closely as possible (within $\pm 2\%$ if feasible)
- * Reuses core ingredients across all meals for efficiency
- * Turns dinners into next-day lunches
- * Includes macros per meal and daily totals
- * Is simple, fast, and realistic for my skill level

Also include a grocery list organized by store section.

If exact macros are not possible, explain why and adjust with the closest possible plan.

Ask any key clarifying questions before building the plan.

Quality Check - Before Using AI-Generated Self-Care Plans

- [] **Is this realistic for MY life?** AI doesn't know your commute, your kids' schedules, or your boss's expectations. Adjust everything to fit your actual constraints.
- [] **Am I keeping sensitive conversations human?** AI can help you prepare for difficult conversations, but the actual conversation should always be in person. Never send an AI-drafted boundary message without reading it out loud first.
- [] **Does the tone match my relationships?** A boundary email to your peer should sound different than one to your VP. Make sure AI's language matches how you actually communicate.
- [] **Am I being honest with the inputs?** The energy audit only works if you're truthful about where your time goes. Don't write the aspirational version — write the real one.
- [] **Is this a start, not a finish?** These prompts help you plan. Actually following through is on you. Pick one action. Do it this week.

Copilot Basics (If You Use Microsoft 365)

- **Work Mode vs. Web Mode:** Work mode searches your company's Microsoft 365 data (emails, files, Teams). Web mode uses the open internet. For self-care planning, Web mode works best since you're working with personal information rather than company data. However, Work mode can help you audit your meeting load by pulling your Outlook calendar.
- **When to use each:** Use Work mode when you want AI to analyze your actual calendar and email volume. Use Web mode when you're building personal plans, drafting boundary messages, or working through the energy audit.
- **How to save prompts:** Copy any prompt from this playbook into a Word document, OneNote, or Notion page. Label each one so you can find it on Sunday evening when you're planning your week.
- **Reminder:** The self-care prompts in this playbook use personal information. If you're using a work-provided AI tool, check your company's policy on what's appropriate to share.

What to Try This Week

- [] **Run the Energy Audit.** List everything you did this week. Let AI categorize it and find your biggest drains. Be honest.
- [] **Set one boundary.** Use Prompt #2 to draft the message. Send it. Notice that the world doesn't end.
- [] **Block three recovery windows.** Put them on your calendar like meetings. 15 minutes minimum. Walk, eat, sit in your car in silence — whatever restores you.

- [] **Plan one meal.** Just one. Not a whole meal prep system. One meal this week where you eat something that isn't from a drive-through or a vending machine.
- [] **Ask yourself Friday afternoon:** "What did I do for myself this week?" If the answer is nothing, that's your signal.

Resources & Next Steps

- **Self-assessment tool designed to identify your natural, genetically driven sleep-wake rhythm (circadian rhythm)** . By answering questions on preferences for sleeping, waking, and alertness, you are classified into a category - often **Bear, Lion, Wolf, or Dolphin** - **to optimize daily schedules, productivity, and sleep quality.**
- by Tony Schwartz and Jim Loeer

Key Frameworks from This Lab

- **Self-care is a leadership competency, not a luxury.** A leader running on empty makes worse decisions, has less patience, and burns out the people around them.
- **The Leadership Energy Framework** maps four dimensions (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Time) so you can identify exactly where your energy is leaking.
- **Boundaries aren't barriers — they're infrastructure.** Good boundaries protect your capacity to lead. They make you more reliable, not less available.
- **AI can't do self-care for you.** But it can eliminate the admin, drafting, and planning that steals the time you'd otherwise use to take care of yourself.

What We Didn't Cover (Yet)

- Building a personal board of advisors for ongoing accountability and support.
- Advanced time-blocking and deep-work strategies for leaders with packed calendars.
- Using AI to analyze your email and meeting patterns over time to identify chronic energy drains.
- Creating a team culture where self-care is normalized, not seen as weakness.

Next Steps

- Run the Energy Audit this weekend. Know where your energy actually goes before trying to change it.
- Set one boundary this week using Prompt #2. Start small — decline one meeting or shorten one recurring call.
- Build your Weekly Reset routine. Try it for two Sundays. Adjust based on what works.

The Mental Model — Audit, Protect, Plan

Today's session was built on one idea: you can't pour from an empty cup, and you can't lead from an empty tank. Self-care isn't what you do after everything else is done. It's what makes everything else possible.

Step	Prompt	What It Does
Audit	Prompt 1 - The Energy Audit	Maps where your energy goes, identifies your biggest drains, and finds specific actions to reclaim time.
Protect	Prompt 2 - The Boundary Communication Builder	Drafts professional messages that set boundaries without damaging relationships.
Plan	Prompt 3 - The Weekly Reset Planner	Builds a weekly plan that treats recovery as a scheduled priority, not an afterthought.

You've been taking care of everyone else. It's time to add yourself to the list - not at the bottom, but near the top.

Self-care isn't selfish. It's strategic:

- Audit your energy. Know where it goes.
- Set one boundary this week.
- You now have the tools to lead sustainably - not just survive until Friday.

Related resources

Keep working with the material.

The prompts and exercises are included above. Save a useful prompt and return to it with your next task.

Links and resources

These links are clickable in the PDF. For a paper copy, use the numbered references below.

[1] <https://vimeo.com/1174484255/f19349a9f3?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>