

Dealing with the Rigors of Being an Athletic Administrator

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What's Keeping You Up at Night?

Being an AD is one of the most rewarding roles in education — and one of the most misunderstood, complex, and exhausting.

Rigors (noun): The demanding conditions, pressures, and responsibilities that test one's endurance, judgment, and emotional resilience — often revealing both the limits and the depth of a leader's capacity.

The Reality of the Rigors

The Invisible Load

Public visibility, constant accountability,
24/7 crises

The Triple Role

Manager, mediator, and motivator — all at once

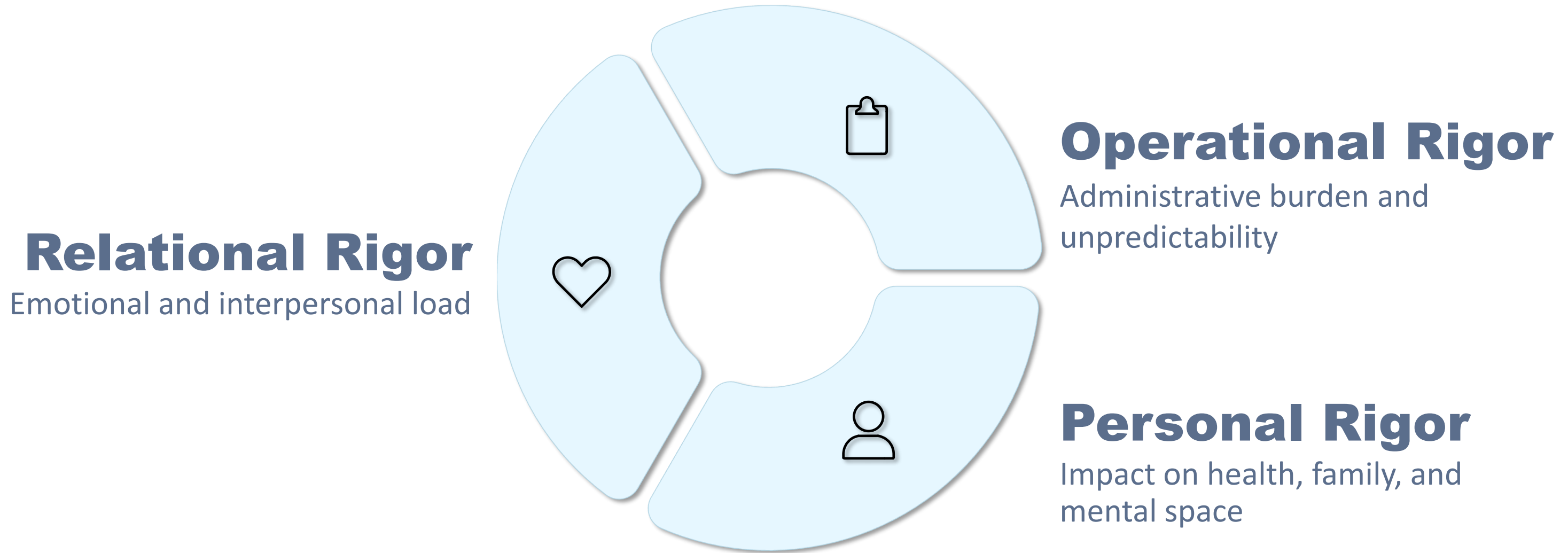
The "Always On" Culture

Texts, emails, and calls that never stop

The High Emotional Tax

Dealing with parents, athletes, coaches,
administrators, media, and community

Three-Headed Monster Model



Hidden Curriculum Roles: Grief counselor, crisis manager, community therapist



The Relational Rigors

These drain emotional energy and require constant diplomacy

Parent Interactions

Managing difficult conversations and high emotional expectations

Coach Conflicts

Navigating performance issues and staff accountability

Student Support

Supporting athletes through injuries, crises, and mental health struggles

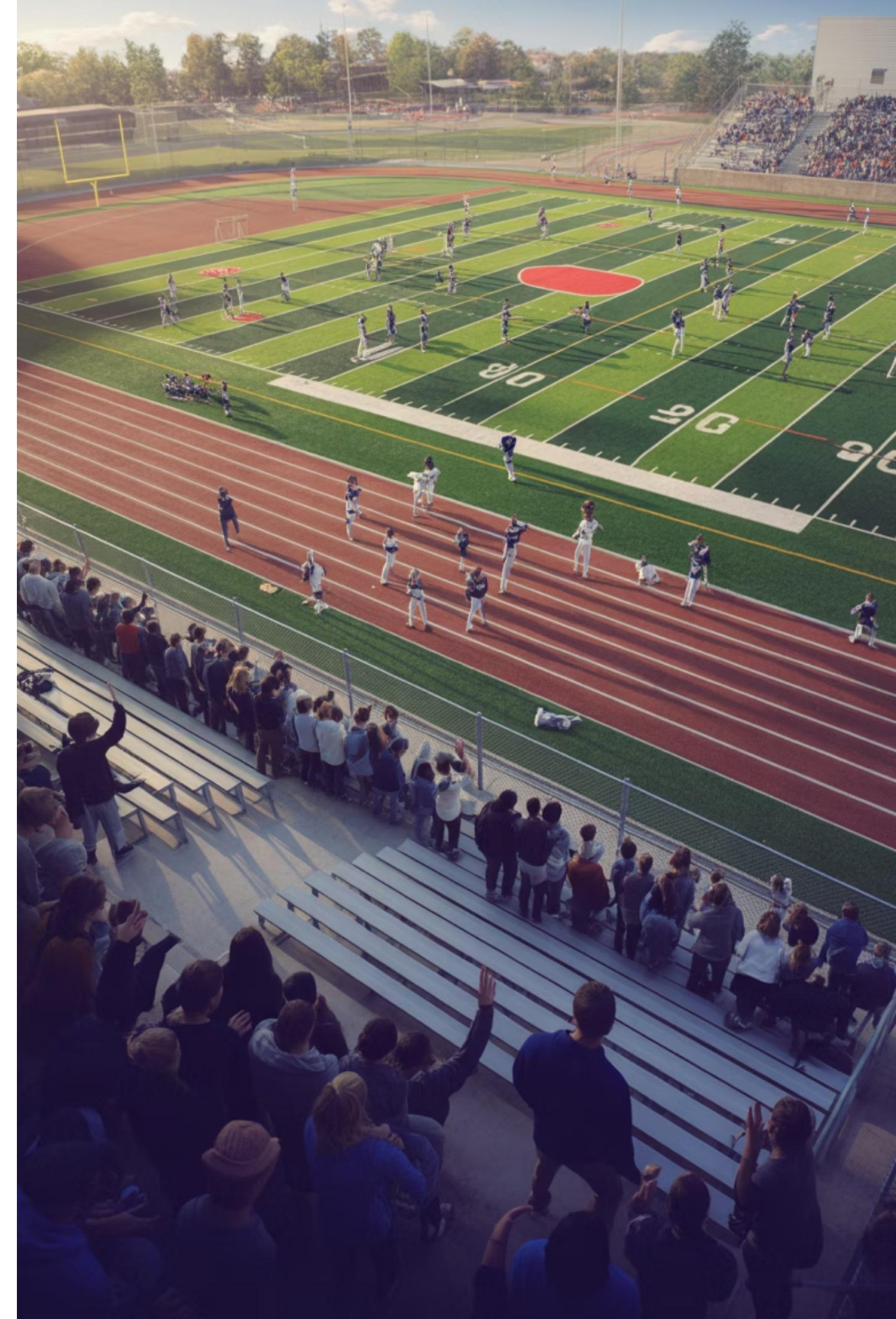
Public Face

Serving as the steady presence for decisions not everyone will agree with

The Operational Rigors





The logistical and procedural demands that never stop

- Overseeing schedules, transportation, officials, facilities
- Managing budgets, fundraising, and financial reporting
- Staying compliant with district policies, state rules, Title IX
- Daily surprises: bus breakdowns, field closures, referee no-shows
- Handling game-day operations and emergencies
- Running a department with limited staff and resources



The Personal Rigors

What the job takes out of you

-  **Long, Irregular Hours**
Evenings, weekends, holidays — the work never stops
-  **Physical & Mental Toll**
Constant alertness and responsibility leading to stress buildup
-  **Always On**
Texts, emails, and calls coming at all hours with difficulty setting boundaries
-  **Heavy Responsibility**
Carrying the weight of student safety, fairness, and program reputation



The Leadership Rigors

The burden of being the person who must lead through uncertainty



Hard Calls Under Pressure

Making decisions with incomplete information



Crisis Management

Handling injuries, misconduct, weather emergencies, PR challenges



Balancing Needs

Meeting demands of students, coaches, administration, and community



Culture Building

Guiding character development across dozens of teams



Beyond the Office: Community & Ethical Rigors

The Community Rigors

- Social media commentary and instant feedback
- Booster clubs and stakeholder expectations
- Community political tensions spilling into athletics
- High visibility district representation

The Ethical Rigors

- Ensuring fairness in playing time and opportunities
- Protecting student welfare amid competing demands
- Making unpopular but ethically right decisions
- Upholding values when shortcuts are rewarded

The Development & Identity Rigors

The Developmental Rigors

Mentoring new coaches while evaluating them, supporting growth while addressing gaps, leading professional development with limited resources, and staying current on best practices.

The Identity Rigors

Feeling misunderstood by those who don't know what the job requires, judged for outcomes you can't control, shouldering the invisible load of caring for kids who aren't your own.

❏ **The quiet pressure:** Being "the rock" when you yourself are exhausted

Mindset Shifts to Thrive, Not Just Survive



Separate Urgent from Important

Use the Eisenhower Matrix. Not everything urgent is important — and not everything is yours to solve.



Protect the Mission

Filter decisions through: "Does this improve the student-athlete experience?"



Lead Above the Line

Stay proactive rather than reactive. Build habits that keep you in strategic mode.



Not My Monkey Decision Tree

"Not my circus, not my monkeys."

Every person has their own responsibilities (their "monkeys"). Problems arise when we start taking ownership of **other people's** monkeys — their tasks, emotions, failures, or emergencies.

For ADs, because you're the problem-solver of the building, people constantly try to hand you their monkeys. The decision tree prevents that.

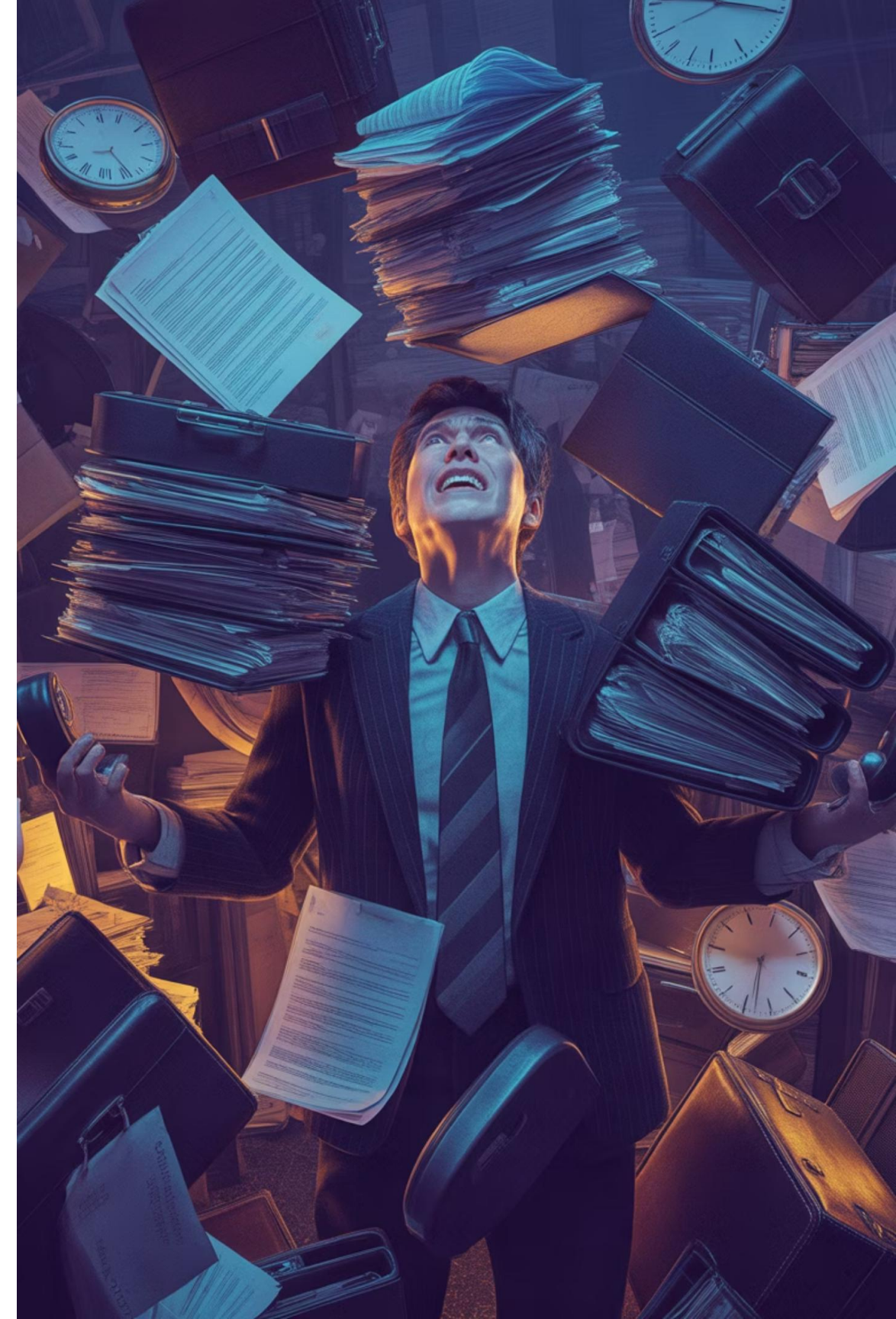


Why It Matters for Athletic Directors

ADs deal with parent frustrations, coach disorganization, teacher-athlete grade issues, community politics, facility mismanagement, student behavior, transportation errors, admin conflicts, and booster club demands.

❑ **If you accept every monkey handed to you, you drown.**

The decision tree creates clarity around what belongs to *you*, what belongs to *someone else*, what belongs to *no one*, and what needs collaboration instead of ownership.



The Decision Tree: Four Steps

01

Identify the Monkey

What exactly is the problem being brought to me?
Name it clearly before doing anything else.

02

Ask: "Whose Monkey Is This REALLY?"

Is this my responsibility by role? Does it belong to a coach, parent, student, or another department?

03

Decide Your Level of Involvement

Own it, support without taking ownership, redirect to correct owner, or step away entirely.

04

Communicate the Boundary

Use a script that is firm, kind, and clear to maintain boundaries.

Practical Tools for Relational Moments



Listen Fully

Before responding



Acknowledge Emotions

Validate feelings



Clarify Facts

Get the full story



Focus on Values

Safety, fairness, sportsmanship



Offer Next Steps

Not just policy

* Turn difficult conversations into developmental moments through regular check-ins, clear expectations, and feedback loops.



Time & Energy Protection Strategies

The 20-Minute Rule

Block out 20 minutes daily to handle unexpected tasks so they don't derail your entire day.

The 1% Rule

Make small, sustainable daily actions that strengthen you by 1%: a 5-minute walk, one intentional pause, 3 deep breaths.

70:30 Principle

You should be spending 70% of your time, energy, and effort on the things that give you life, motivate you, and hold your attention.

Protecting Yourself: The Personal Side



Burnout Warning Signs

Spot them early: exhaustion, cynicism, reduced effectiveness, emotional detachment



Your Non-Negotiables

Daily habits that keep you grounded: exercise, family time, mental reset



Your Inner Circle

Build trusted networks of peers, mentors, and support systems

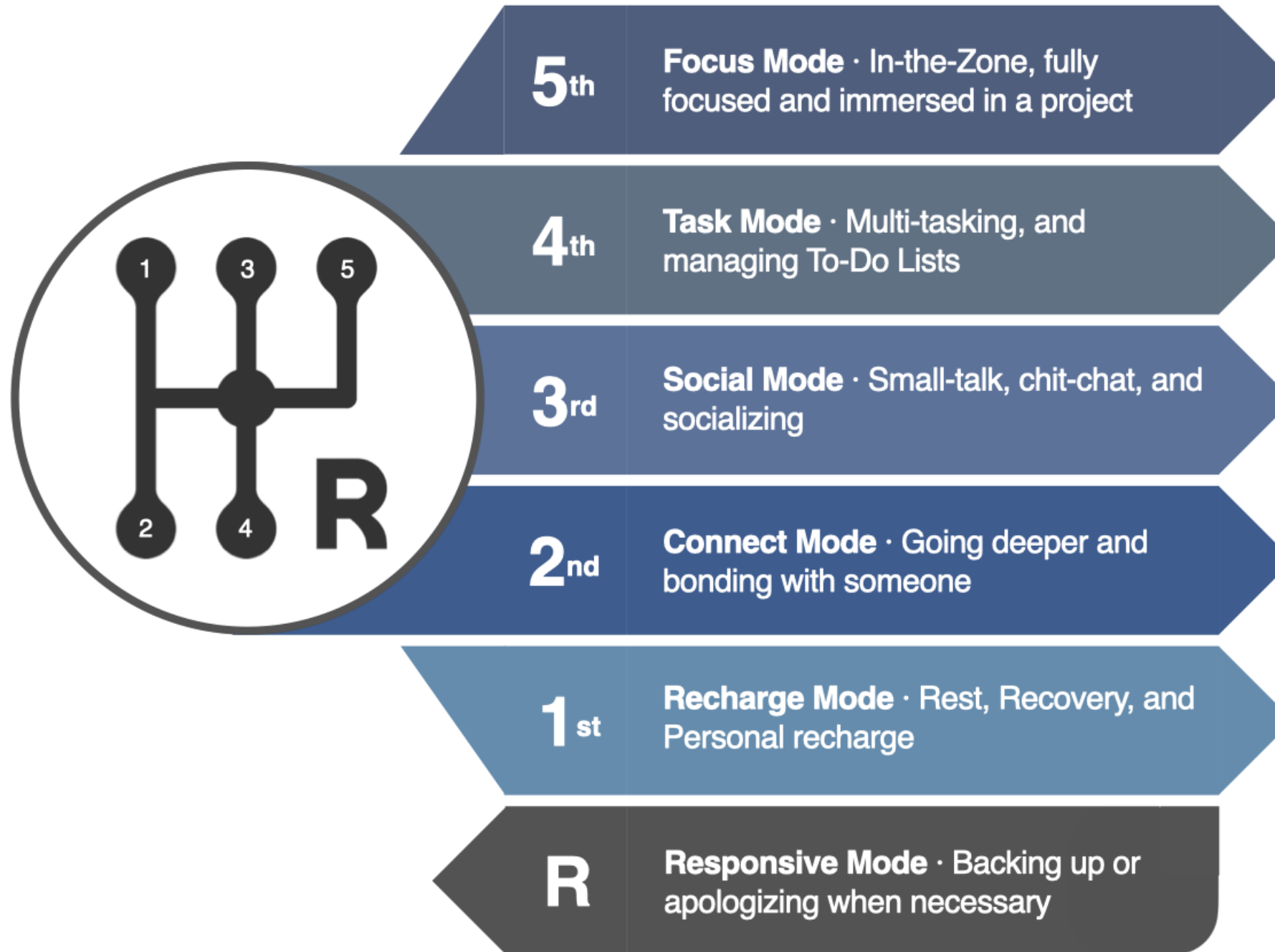


Give Yourself Permission

To say no, to delegate, and to unplug when needed

 **Remember:** A dead battery can't charge a dead battery

5 GEARS



3 Big Takeaways



Protect Your Mission

Keep focus on the student-athlete experience as your guiding filter



Build Systems Before You Need Them

Create structures for conflict, communication, and crisis management



Take Care of Yourself

So you can take care of others — you can't pour from an empty cup





Transform the Rigors

"The goal isn't to eliminate the rigors — it's to transform them into the very things that make us stronger, wiser, and more impactful leaders."

The rigors of being an athletic administrator are real, demanding, and relentless. But with the right mindset shifts, practical tools, and personal boundaries, you can thrive in this role — not just survive it.