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Summary

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# Show Up Hard

BOOK BY SHANNON WEBER

## A ROAD MAP FOR HELPERS IN CRISIS

**“Challenging times crave leadership, often on a moment’s notice...”** p. 15

*Show Up Hard* is a ‘road map’ to sustainable leadership. Written as a guide to support both formal and informal leaders, it assists readers with how to ‘show up’ for others during times of uncertainty without burning-out in the process. This book addresses the question of how we preserve the energy and drive necessary to create change while maintaining boundaries essential to our own wellbeing.

*Show Up Hard* is written in three parts, addressing challenges at each stage of the ‘empathetic leadership journey’: *embarking* on the process (book one), the *detours* and dilemmas (book two), and finally, *arriving* at a balanced, healthy leadership approach (book three). This book reminds us that empathy takes courage, requires maintenance, and demands an ongoing plan to ensure we have the strength to keep ‘showing up’ for those in need.

### Key Concepts:

Sustainable Leadership	Empathy	Boundary-Setting	Wellbeing
Mindful Conversations	Emotional Labor	Crisis Management	
Reflection	Personal Narrative	Identity	Self-Preservation

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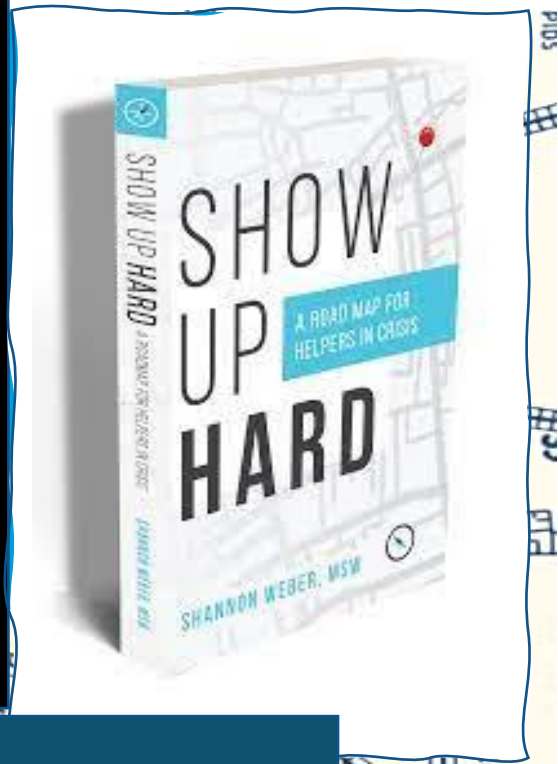
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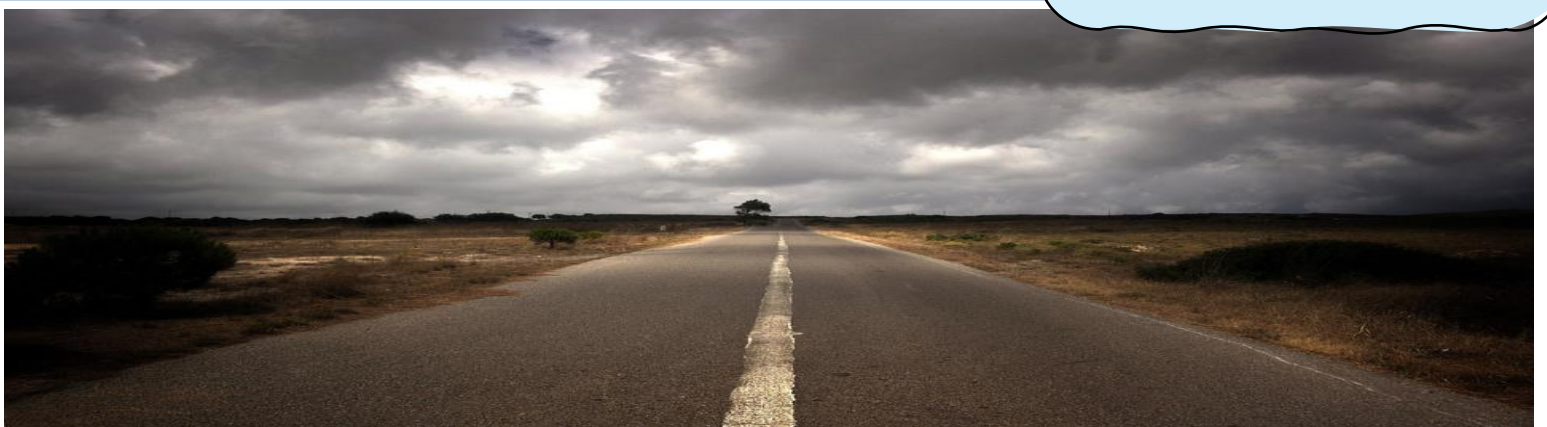
## About The Author *Shannon Weber, MSW*

Shannon Weber is a social entrepreneur, motivational speaker, author, leadership coach and mother of three. She holds a Master's of Social Work (MSW) from Tulane University, New Orleans and runs a program supporting the care of HIV positive pregnant women, based out of San Francisco General Hospital. She began her work as an 'empathetic helper' leading a crisis hotline early in her career. This experience was the first of many to inspire her

to develop a framework for encouraging change through meaningful connections. This framework became the foundation for **Show Up Hard**. Weber's initiatives on HIV-focused sexual and reproductive health have aided thousands across the globe, awarding her the UCSF Chancellor's Award for public service in 2018. In addition to her work in the health sector, Weber provides consulting and coaching services including

leadership retreat workshops, leadership curriculum and program training, consultations on boundary-setting and avoiding burnout and crisis management training.

*"Sustaining ourselves for the long haul, learning how to get unstuck, and contributing to a sense of belonging at work so our colleagues are buoyed up for the journey is key to success in creating change." p. 16*



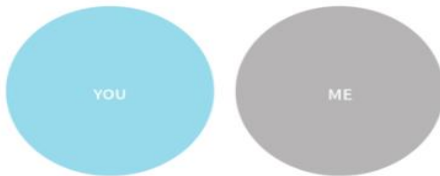
Book One:

## 1. A Framework For *Showing Up*

# Embarking

When offering our emotional support in times of need, we do not always know where to set boundaries once our 'generous giving' begins. How much support do we offer before we get lost in it? At what point does our support lose productivity and becomes enabling? There lies a delicate balance in understanding when and how to provide support through our emotional labor, the type of connection needed, and when that support must end. Weber creates a circle-framework for deciding how we choose to engage or "**Show Up**", depending on the context of a situation.

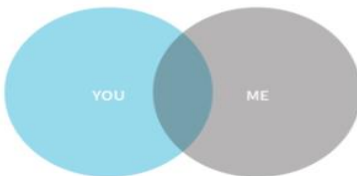
### FRAMEWORK



Missed Connection



Enmeshed



Compassionate Witness

**Missed Connection** – your interaction is distant, no real change is made, empathy is not exchanged.

**Enmeshed Engagement** - you fully immerse yourself the supportive role. Your time, energy, emotional and physical resources are in full-use and you actively engage in finding the solution. It is unclear where "one person begins and the other ends". Their struggles become yours and you are prone to burnout.

**Compassionate Witness** – you 'Show Up' as an empathetic, resourceful observer. You are there to hold space for the other to find resolution but are not attached to their success or define the outcome. You are the support, not the answer.

The space where the circles overlap is your "sweet spot", your zone of maximum opportunity. This is where crisis intervention works. Being a Compassionate Witness takes courage, skill, clear communication and awareness.

## 2. Put Yourself On The To-Do List

Understanding your own desires, beliefs and preferences is essential when engaging with others as a Compassionate Witness. In order to create boundaries necessary for your emotional labor, you need to know yourself AND put your wellbeing first.

Self-care is the practice of putting yourself on your own to-do list. Rather than viewing self-care as a reaction to burnout, we must shift our mindset to view it as an investment in our own resilience. Ask yourself: How do I replenish myself to sustain my role? What does self-care mean to me?

### To-Do List

- What I need mentally
- What I need physically
- What I need emotionally
- What I need spiritually

*"Passion is not a protector from burnout" – p. 21*

## 3. Leading Is A Posture

A Compassionate Witness is an agent of change. Leaders at all levels, both formal and informal, commit to the emotional labor of 'Showing Up' to support change. However, 'leader' is not a job title nor is it a certain set of skills. It is a 'posture' of being in the world and can be adopted by anyone with the courage to believe that change is possible and has the commitment to lead. Even purpose-driven helpers can cause damage with their leadership. Be mindful of your influence.

### Leaders are those who:

- ✓ Have the potential to guide someone to a better place
- ✓ Possess the ability to shine a light on the path ahead
- ✓ Consider themselves a steward of the well-being of others, even if it's just one person

## 4. Empathy Is An Adventure

To **Show Up** as a Compassionate Witness requires empathy. Being empathetic involves the courage to go on a "journey" from the comfort zone of your own narrative. This means seeing the world through another's lived experiences and challenging yourself to try something new. Leaders who seek to create change through times of uncertainty must do so through the narrative of others.

Being empathetic requires a connection to and understanding of another person's feelings, experiences, and situation. A shared background is not necessary. Rather, the most profound empathetic adventures come from connections with those opposite of us.

**Ask yourself: What new territory did this adventure take you to? What shifted as you experienced the empathetic response? Where did your journey begin? Where did your journey end? How might you 'stamp' an empathy journey passport? What empathy muscles did you build?**

## 5. Skills To Build For The Journey

Another skill of a **Compassionate Witness** is understanding how crisis and conflict impact those around you.

Two types of crises: Situational (accidental deaths, natural disasters, loss of a job, etc.) and Developmental (childbirth, retirement, etc.)

Developmental crises can be prepared for, whereas situational crises are unpredictable and unplanned.

Both types involve coping mechanisms to return to 'equilibrium' – not back to 'normal' but to a regulated state.

The skillful job of a leader is to **recognize** and be **aware** of the circumstances, and to **encourage** healthy coping mechanisms to help stabilize those in crisis. Your job is not to 'fix'.

Understanding how and when to access empathy is a skill. Empathy is not always a 'first response', but can be learned, developed and honed with mindful practice. Like working your physical muscles to build strength, your 'empathy muscle' grows stronger with the mindful practice of **noticing**. What is your first response to situations that require your empathy? Are you drawn to support or inclined to turn away? As you practice **noticing**, you begin to understand how your mind and body respond to challenges. **Noticing** gives you the information needed to build on your capacity and comfort for providing empathetic help.

An effective leader also understands and recognizes their own 'default' response to conflict and can transition between resolution styles depending on a circumstance. A Compassionate Witness will see conflict, acknowledge it, and make a plan to support.

*The baseline for understanding crisis, coping skills and conflict as a leader is choosing how to respond and understanding the responses of others.*

## 6. Embark Before You Are Ready



Opportunities to **Show Up Hard** present themselves whether we are ready for them or not. You do not have to master the role of a Compassionate Witness before practicing empathetic leadership. **Showing Up** is having the courage to lead "where you are at" and recognizing that *you are enough.*

Book two:

# Detours

## 1. Confusing Leading With Saving

Even when our empathetic intentions as are good, our ego as a leader is often seduced by the idea that we might “save” someone. This urge is a dangerous detour from your Compassionate Witness path. Your role as an effective leader must be sustainable. Be clear on what your role is and what it is not.

**Remember: being unattached to the outcome of a crisis is essential to being a Compassionate Witness.**

## 2. Are Your Narratives Your Identity?

Why do you Show Up? Understanding what brought you to this work and recognizing what will sustain you is essential to your role. But, does your narrative still serve you or have you become stuck in this identity?

If your lived experiences have begun to define who you are in your role, have created triggers, limitations, or no longer serve you as a leader, it is important to revisit, and release.

“Narrative becomes identity. OWN YOURS.”

P. 109

If you want to help support others in crisis, you must recognize how your own “sticky stories” effect your support. This will assist you in noticing others’ “sticky stories”, allow you to distance yourself from them, and create space for them

## 3. Empathy Is Not Sympathy

**“To connect with others and create change, we must travers the chasm between sympathy and empathy” p. 115**

Leaders recognize that sympathy is not enough to **Show Up Hard**. Sympathy comes from a place of pity rather than connection. Empathy takes energy, engagement, commitment and emotional labor.

A common phrase used when showing sympathy is “*I’m sorry*”. Does your apology come with action? If not, it has little meaning. “*I’m sorry*” is what you say when you’ve done something wrong. Being empathetic takes connection and action to help in the process of moving forward.

This does NOT mean giving unsolicited advice. Show the other that you are there for them, are holding space for their healing journey and be present.

## 4. Tunnels

Tunnel vision develops when we are under pressure from trauma, conflict or crisis. When this happens, we tend to see fewer options rather than opportunities. Compassionate Witnesses offer support through the emotional labor of helping to brainstorm scenarios outside of the “black or white”, “do or die” binary options that those in crisis are stuck on.

This does not mean creating a heroic plan to “save the day”, rather, providing support for someone to take small steps to expand their options to create change for themselves. They may still choose a “black or white” option, but they’ve had the “freedom of movement” between a variety of options to make their choice.

**Be an active listener and ask open-ended questions.**

## 5. Leaky Containers

Emotional labor is not infinite. We all have a maximum limit, yet we often embellish our capacity for helping. Compassionate Witnesses must be reliable and dependable. As leaders, they Show Up in ways they can deliver, and be counted on. Therefore, in order to prevent a “leaky container”, they must be honest and clear when setting expectations for their involvement and support. This serves both the supporter and supported in managing expectations.

Your “container” – your capacity for emotional labor – may not be the same for everyone. You must redefine your availability for what is best in a particular situation, considering your own circumstances and ability to deliver support.

Consider: **container mediums** (in-person, phone, email), **time** (24/7, evenings only), **topic** (triggers, past trauma), **resources** (time, materials, financial support, your network, your home).

## 6. Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma is the secondhand effects of trauma experienced by friends, family members and helpers of those who had the traumatic experience (p. 158). This trauma is real, and those who embark on empathetic adventures are vulnerable to it.

As Compassionate Witnesses, we must **notice** when the trauma experienced by someone else has transferred to us and how this might leave a mark on our narrative identities. How has this vicarious trauma effected you? What must you do for yourself to move past this trauma while making space for it as a motivator? How does this impact how you **Show Up Hard**?

***Noticing and acknowledging vicarious trauma is an act of generosity. Self-care is the essential to being a Compassionate Witness.***

Book three:

# Arriving

## 1. The Intersection Of Empathy And Resilience



The intersection of empathy and resilience is where productivity lies and where you will create the most change. It is where you will find prospective in your role as a Compassionate Witness.

Notice. Observe. Show Up. Own it

## 2. Automate Resiliency



Beyond the basic awareness of setting boundaries and putting ourselves on our own “to-do list”, we need to deepen our commitment to our own resilience by automating “investments” to sustain ourselves, just as you automate funds into a savings account when financial planning.

This investment does not require money, as the best self-care is free. These include finding the joy or taking a break during regular, every-day practices. Your resiliency plan takes **intention and attention**.

Your **intention** presents when you actively focus on the act of investing. **Attention** is the practice of noticing opportunity. When you encounter a personal crisis or an opportunity to Show Up as a Compassionate Witness, increase your attention to your own resiliency practices.

**The investment is a sign of your willingness and commitment to Show Up.**



### 3. Commit To Possibility

To enhance our role as a Compassionate Witnesses, we must detach ourselves from outcomes and create **openness to possibility**. This is the understanding that the outcomes of our support may not play out the way we envisioned. We must put aside our beliefs and goals for what success looks like for someone else, as Showing Up is not dependent on seeing a situation through to the end or even knowing the outcome.

Gauge your success as an empathetic helper on the quality of your support **in the moment**: your openness, your encouragement, modeling calm, your role as a listener.

### 4. Practice Is A Practice

Like muscle memory, building the skills to support our emotional labor takes practice.

**Wisdom for the Journey:**

- Don't wait to be invited to the journey – permission is granted
- Don't wait until you have all the answers. Begin here. Now.
- Be dependable. Leaders keep promises.
- Learn by experience. Compassion and connection are skills that can be built.
- Learning by doing means we make mistakes. Make them and be gentle with yourself.
- Honor confidentiality
- Commit to Showing Up. Be brave, try again.
- Do the hard work, define your boundaries.
- Find travel buddies to embark on the journey with you.
- Get “unstuck”, even if the path is uncertain.

### 5. Return To Equilibrium, Changed

In the pursuit of creating change, we do the hard work of defining our boundaries, balancing our egos, investing in our emotional labor, and making deposits into our own resiliency. Throughout this process, we as leaders change, but our process stays the same.

We continue to Show Up Hard because we are needed.

Leading is not a job, it is a way of life. The end of one “journey” is the start of another.

**Show Up for it.**

## *Analysis and Critique*

In Shannon Weber's book, **Show Up Hard**, the importance of reflection, engagement, courage and wellbeing is communicated to all those in leadership roles. Throughout the book, Weber emphasizes that a "leader" refers to anyone in a "helping role", be it a family member, friend, or formal manager. This is important, as leaders at all levels are prone to burnout, with or without an official "title". Weber addresses the question of how to sustain the emotional labor of leading in crisis by analyzing the **ways we engage** with others. This relationship not only effects the success of those we help but our **own wellbeing**, as focus often lies on the outcome of a crisis rather than the process of supporting another in finding their own solutions. Weber's visual framework for engaging gives readers a clear breakdown of the difference between and implications of a "missed connection", an "enmeshed" relationship, and the role of a **Compassionate Witness**. This framework challenges the reader to reflect, evaluate and adjust their engagement methods depending on the situation, promoting the wellbeing of both the **supporter** and the **supported**.

The strategies Weber provides to support readers in achieving the role of a **Compassionate Witness** can be applied to any level of crisis support in any professional or personal setting. Her analogy of **"leaky containers"** used to explain our level and type of capacity for emotional labor is particularly useful. This metaphor provides readers a strategic way to recognize and determine the specific support they are able to give depending on the circumstances of the crisis, the relationship to the person in need and the resources they have available. I believe this is important to understand as a common cause of "imposter syndrome" in aspiring and practicing leaders is the feeling of inadequacy. Effective leaders are not required to "fix". Rather, they have the desire to engage and the courage to set boundaries.

Though Weber provides space for personal reflection, strategies for engagement and advice for "embarking" on an empathetic leadership journey, the inclusion of **alternative communication strategies** or a **discussion guide** for leaders to prevent or move past "missed connections" or "enmeshed" relationships would have provided an additional tool for readers.

## *Implications for Human Resource Leadership in Schools*

This book can inform human resource leadership in schools as it clearly outlines what the role of an effective leader is during times of crisis, and what it is not. Explicitly identifying the roles of "supporter" and "supported" helps to clarify what each party is responsible for during problem solving or healing and creates expectations regarding where the ownership of crisis solution lies in each context. In a school setting, principals can use the strategies in this book to clarify what teachers, staff members and parents are responsible for in their own crisis management, help guide them to finding solutions to their problems, and assist in maintaining a Compassionate Witness role to ensure empathy is used along with professional boundaries. This will protect the wellbeing of all parties involved.

## *Discussion Questions:*

1. In a professional setting, how would you begin an empathetic conversation with someone that has asked for your support in crisis?
2. What steps are involved in shifting your support from “enmeshed engagement” to that of a Compassionate Witness? What empathetic strategies/actions/conversations are important in this shift? How could this shift in engagement be challenged by “vicarious trauma”?
3. As a leader in a professional setting, how would you approach a situation where a colleague/employee has denied your support as a Compassionate Witness? Does your role as a formal leader create obligation for involvement? In what context would you insist support be given? In what context would abstaining from support be important?
4. How do you invest in your resiliency? How can you support others in their own investment?
5. How does your support as a Compassionate Witness differ when engaging with colleagues and family? How are your capacity “containers” different in each context?

## *References:*

Weber, S. (2018). Show up hard: A road map for helpers in crisis. (n.p.): Self-published.

