

You Can't Help Others If You Forget Yourself

As a transgender man activist in Nepal I always said “yes” to everything helping the community, doing public speaking, being in the media while ignoring my own well-being. I learned the hard way that we must take care of ourselves first, speak up when we are struggling and build organizations where well-being is taken seriously. This story is about how I learned the hard way that self-care is not selfish.

For years, I believed being a “good” activist meant always showing up for my community and giving best at projects and programs no matter how I felt inside. I said yes to every request, I pushed myself into the public eye even when I was struggling with social anxiety, and I ignored my own needs.

At first, I thought this was my duty as a trans activist. But over time, I learned that you cannot truly serve your community if you are not taking care of yourself. This is my story about burnout, learning to speak up, and understanding that it's okay to set boundaries even in activism. This story matters to me because I know I'm not the only one. Many activists push themselves until they break. I want to share my journey so that others especially trans activists understand why taking care of ourselves must come first.

When I started my activism journey, I was full of energy and passion. I believed leadership meant putting myself last. If someone called me with a problem I would listen, if there was an urgent case, I would drop everything to help, if there was a media event I would show up even if I felt anxious. For a long time, I never said no. The first time I finally did, I felt guilty and ashamed. But I also realized it was necessary. Saying “no” was not about turning my back on the community but it was about protecting myself so I could keep going in the long run. I started noticing I was not myself anymore. I wasn't enjoying things I used to love. I woke up anxious and heavy. I stopped feeling excited about my work, I avoided social events, and I felt too drained to show up in the media. I thought maybe I was just lazy but the truth was I was burned out and mentally and emotionally drained. I think my burnout came from carrying too much of the community's pain inside me. I listened to so many struggles and internalized them until they felt like my own burden. Over time this created heaviness I could not shake off.

Recognizing burnout and mentally drained was not easy. For me, the signs were losing joy in things I once enjoyed, feeling anxious all the time, and avoiding people and spaces I once felt confident in. These were clear signs that something was wrong. At that point, I reached out for help. I took support from psychiatrists, and I am still struggling with it but now I have a support system. My friends and doctors understand me, and that makes a big difference. I am slowly learning to deal with drained situation by taking one step at a time. I don't rush myself. I remind myself that time and situations change and that this phase will pass too. What helps me most is remembering that healing is not linear and it's okay to take as long as I need. I also learned that organizations need to take staff well-being seriously. We cannot just focus on reports, outputs, and activities without checking how our people are really doing inside. Well-being is not an extra it's part of the work.

We are not just workers, leaders or advocates we are human beings. And we cannot keep fighting for change if we are running on empty. This journey taught me that burnout sneaks up when we

ignore our own signals but recognizing it early through lost joy, constant anxiety or that heavy emotional burden can save us. The key message from my story is that self-care isn't selfish it's the foundation of true activism. Check in on yourself regularly ask **“Am I okay? Do I need to say no?”** Create safe spaces where we can share not just our work but our struggles. Let's build a culture of care in our organizations, in our activism, and in our hearts. I hope my story encourages you to put yourself on your own priority list because only then can we truly help others.