



When the Battery Won't Charge



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I never thought a piece of technology could perfectly mirror my emotional state. But then my iPhone 11 stopped charging.

The thing has been with me for (iPhone) generations. In iPhone years, it is basically a Greenland shark. It (along with my terabytes of secure cloud storage) holds 35,000 photos and videos. Memories of my kids' milestones, family gatherings, heartwarming texts, and more screenshots of memes I plan to spam my little sister with than I really should admit. All of it, a visual record of the life I've been trying to keep together as a colleague, a friend, a human. And then one day, it wouldn't hold a charge. No warning. No gradual decline and fade to black. Just...done. Dunzo.



When my iPhone stopped charging, my first instinct was panic. I jiggled the cord. Switched outlets. Cleaned the charging port. Pressed buttons in strange sequences. Turned it off and on a bunch of times like my television taught me in the 1980s. Nothing.

That sense of helplessness reminded me of a conversation I had with a teacher-friend just a week earlier. She said, "I used to love this job, but I just can't feel it anymore. I'm trying to find the passion inside me like I could before the pandemic, but nothing's connecting."

Just like my iPhone, her emotional battery had stopped taking a charge. I had to admit, I was with her. Sound familiar? Gosh, I hope not. But I surmise so.

Teacher Burnout Is Real - and It's Not Your Fault

Let's be clear: burnout isn't about weakness. It's not about poor time management, lack of passion, or even working too many hours (though this last one contributes). It's about being in a chronic state of stress without enough opportunities for real recovery.

Think of your phone. You can't keep running apps forever without plugging it in. And if you've ever tried to recharge with a bad cord or after ignoring the "low battery" warnings, you know what happens.

We're not that different.



SEL Steps to Recharge from Burnout

So what can we do when, like my iPhone (or my teacher-friend), we just . . . stop . . . charging?

Here are some practical Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-aligned steps I'm going to take. If you can relate, you could try them, too.



1. Pause and Diagnose

Just as I had to check my phone's charging cord, port, and power source, I have to figure out what's draining ME.

- Related SEL Competency - Self-Awareness: I will take stock of the symptoms. Am I tired all the time? Getting snippy more easily? Floundering to find my sense of purpose?
- Action Step: I will actively note the parts of my day that leave me feeling most depleted and look for patterns.

2. Clear the Clutter



My phone holds 35,000 photos and videos. That's a lot of weight for a single device to carry, even with support from the cloud. I might be carrying too much, too - emotionally, mentally, and physically.

- Related SEL Competency - Self-Management: I'm going to let go of what's not essential. Say no more often. Archive, delegate, or delete the tasks that aren't serving me. Having a self isn't selfish. That's a mantra I repeat to myself and others often. I plan to take it a bit more to heart.
- Action Step: I'm going to attempt a mental photo dump—write down everything I'm holding onto, then cross off what I don't need to deal with today, or soon, or maybe everrrrrrrrr.



3. Reconnect to a Power Source

Phones need a working outlet. I do, too.

- Related SEL Competency - Relationship Skills: I'm going to reach out to someone I trust and let them know how I'm really doing. I remind people all the time that they don't have to fix everything - just start by naming it. I plan to take my own advice.
- Action Step: This week, I will reach out to a colleague who gets me and can offer empathy instead of advice. I'll offer the same in return. Empathy is powerful. We're stronger together.



4. Update the Operating System

Maybe what worked for me last year isn't working for me now. That's OK. Phones need software updates. People need perspective shifts.

- Related SEL Competency - Responsible Decision-Making: It takes courage to ask myself whether I am teaching and leading in a way that honors my own limitations. I plan to look myself in the eye in my bathroom mirror and ask myself whether I am expecting more of myself than is humanly possible for me in this season.
- Action Step: I will pick one part of my day to simplify. I could reduce my grading load by switching to student self-assessment once a week, for example.



5. Charge in Small, Real Ways

Not everything needs a total system reset. Sometimes, a short charge is all I need to get going again.

- Related SEL Competencies - Self- and Social Awareness: To reiterate, and louder for the ones in the back, self-care isn't selfish. I will take real and regular short breaks. I might step outside during lunch (or make time for lunch, period). I might offload my email app on the weekends. I might give myself the gift of 10 minutes of no one needing me. And I'm going to look for the signs of depleted batteries in others and encourage them to do the same.
- Action-Step: Micro-recharge.
 - Make time for a 3-minute breathing exercise
 - Listen to my favorite song while I drive home after school drop-off
 - Say, "I did enough today" instead of "I didn't get to everything"

Parting Thought: The Data Is Still There

When my iPhone stopped charging, I thought I had lost everything. But the photos were still there. The memories, the love, the work - they hadn't disappeared. I just needed to find a new way to get power to them.

That's the nature of burnout, too, isn't it? Our spark isn't gone. It's just waiting for a better charger.

So if you're feeling like me and my teacher-friend - like your battery isn't just low, it's dead and dunzo - take a deep breath. Take a step back. And take the time to plug into whatever it is that you really need.

You're not broken. You're just out of charge. Maybe you need some tech support.



Like every good device - and every worthy educator - US, one and all - you deserve a reset, a recharge, and a reminder: You still work. You're still valuable. Your story is still worth saving.

Want to share your burnout story or how you're recharging? Send xSEleratED a message. We're in this together.

Our July Bonus Resource!



When the Battery Won't Charge: Recharge Planning Tool

Purpose: To help individuals and teams identify signs of burnout, reflect on what's draining them, and take SEL-aligned steps to reset, recharge, and re-engage—personally or professionally.

Instructions for Use:

Use individually or with a team during a planning day, staff meeting, or self-reflection session.

Choose one area to focus on at a time or work through all five steps.

Revisit and update this tool weekly or monthly to stay grounded and recharged.

Recharge Action Planner

| Step | SEL Area | What I'm Noticing (feelings, patterns, stressors) | What I Need Right Now (emotional, logistical, relational) | Action That I'll Try This Week | Support or Resources Needed |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Pause & Diagnose | <i>Self-Awareness</i> | | | | |
| 2. Clear the Clutter | <i>Self-Management</i> | | | | |
| 3. Reconnect to a Power Source | <i>Relationship Skills</i> | | | | |
| 4. Update My Operating System | <i>Responsible Decision-Making</i> | | | | |
| 5. Charge in Small, Real Ways | <i>Self- and Social Awareness</i> | | | | |



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[Our Recharge Planning Tool with instructions and fillable rich text and Google docs formats!](#)