

A person in a kayak is silhouetted against the ocean at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with soft clouds. The person is in the lower center of the frame, holding a paddle. The water is dark with some white foam from the waves.

CRADLED THROUGH QUIET

HEALING THROUGH REFLECTION,
FAITH, AND GENTLE COURAGE

IRSA MUSHTAQ

WWW.SAFTGLOBAL.COM



About the author

Irsa Mushtaq is an experienced HR professional and career coach with over ten years of experience in full-cycle recruitment, talent strategy, and career development. By day, she excels as an HR professional, and by night, she is a dedicated career coach, guiding job seekers at every stage of their professional journey. With a distinguished track record of hiring, coaching, and training professionals across North America, the United States, and EMEA at all levels, from entry-level to executive, Irsa has empowered thousands, particularly newcomers to Canada, to successfully navigate the complexities of the job market.

She is currently pursuing a Master of Human Resource Management degree (MHRM) from a reputable U.S. university. Her professional credentials include CAPM (Certified Associate in Project Management), RPR (Registered Professional Recruiter), CIR (Certified Internet Recruiter), and multiple financial certifications in Canadian financial planning, investments, and mortgages.

Before transitioning into HR and career coaching, Irsa gained valuable experience in Canada's financial industry, working as a Financial Advisor for the Big 5 Banks. She specialized in investments, mutual funds, and mortgage planning, developing a deep understanding of Canada's financial landscape.

Irsa is the author of *Cradled Through Quiet*, where she shares her personal story of silent burnout and the heavy feelings that come from always trying to be enough for everyone.

Beyond her professional pursuits, Irsa is an avid traveler, long-drive enthusiast, fitness advocate, and real estate investor. She is passionate about lifelong learning, continuous skill development, and financial independence, encouraging professionals to invest not only in their careers but also in their long-term financial well-being.

It didn't start with a breakdown.

It didn't even feel like something was wrong at first. It started quietly.

A slow, creeping heaviness settled into my days.

I was still doing everything I normally did. Waking up, getting dressed, packing lunches, showing up to work. checking my phone, answering emails, replying to messages, playing with my daughters, and preparing meals.

But somewhere along the way, all of it began to feel distant. As if I were watching my own life unfold from the outside.

I wasn't exactly sad. I wasn't angry either. I was just tired. Deeply tired. Even after a full night's sleep, I woke up feeling drained. Everything felt heavy, even the things I once enjoyed.

But I kept going. I had responsibilities. People who needed me. So I moved through the days like a machine.

The more I achieved, the less it mattered. The moment I reached one goal, my mind had already moved to the next.

There was never time to pause, to enjoy, or to simply breathe. Life became a checklist. I didn't even realize I was burning out.

There was a weight on my shoulders. Not sadness. Not panic. Just a quiet, steady pressure. I was still doing everything. Smiling and showing up, but I wasn't really present. It was like I was behind a glass window, looking in on my life but not living it.

The joy I used to find in small moments started fading.

Still, I kept pushing. Because that's what we're taught. Work harder. Stay busy. Keep achieving. I told myself that once I reached the next milestone, things would feel better. But they didn't.

I wasn't unhappy. But I wasn't happy either. I was just stuck in a loop of doing and doing, without ever feeling grounded in any of it.

I spent years running. Chasing better roles, better income, a better version of myself. From the outside, it looked like I had it all. But inside, I was worn out. Not because I didn't care, but because I never gave myself permission to rest.

And then one evening, I sat down. No phone. No noise. Just silence.

And in that silence, something unexpected happened. Tears started falling. Slowly at first, then all at once. I wasn't sobbing, I wasn't even making a sound. But the tears wouldn't stop.

I tried to think what was really wrong?

Was there one clear reason? One big thing weighing on me? But I couldn't name it. There was no single moment, no sharp pain. Just a deep, aching tiredness.

I was exhausted. Not just physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually.

Exhausted from always trying to be my best.

Exhausted from being the strong one.

Exhausted from holding it together for everyone.

Exhausted from chasing the image of the best version of me.

I was burning in my own fire. The one I had lit with my ambition, my passion, my drive. The same fire that once fueled me had started to consume me.

I had given so much of myself to everything and everyone, I forgot to leave space for simply being. Just being human. Just being me.

I started thinking.. not about what I hadn't done, or what went wrong, or what I lost, but about what I had survived. What I had built.

The strength it took to keep going. The ideas I had. The risks I took. The resilience I showed.

That was the blessing!!

Not the titles. Not the praise.

But me. My fire. My heart. My will to rise again and again.

And I realized how much I had been demanding from myself without ever stopping to check in. I owed myself rest. I owed myself grace. I owed myself kindness.

Another truth came to light that night. Sometimes, the pressure doesn't just come from competition or criticism. Sometimes, it comes from love.

From people who believe in us. Who cheers for us. Who are proud of us. We don't want to let them down. So we keep raising the bar. We keep going, so they keep admiring us.

But in doing that, we lose parts of ourselves. We borrow time from our peace, our joy, our reflection. We tell ourselves it's temporary. But temporary becomes long-term.

In my case, I had set the bar so high that slowing down didn't feel like an option. I told myself I was strong. That I was built for this pace. And maybe I was. But even the strongest need care.

I stopped seeing the good in my life. I was too focused on what was next. What I hadn't done. What I still needed to prove.

And then, when I allowed myself to breathe, I saw all the beautiful things I was missing. Not because they weren't there, but because I wasn't present enough to notice them.

We lose people every day. Suddenly. Unexpectedly. And yet, we live like we have unlimited time. We chase and chase, forgetting to enjoy what we already have.

No one talks about that.

Enjoying your life doesn't mean giving up your dreams. It doesn't mean you stop aiming high. It simply means you stop punishing yourself for what didn't happen.

It means forgiving yourself for the mistakes. Letting go of the guilt.

Permitting yourself to slow down.

It means recognizing your blessings. Not just the big ones, but the everyday ones.

A warm drink. A quiet laugh. A deep breath. A soft sunset. The sound of someone you love. A long drive. A short trip.

It means being proud of yourself, even when no one is clapping. It means showing up with purpose, not pressure.

That night, I made a decision. I would still work hard. I would still grow. But not at the cost of my peace. Not at the cost of my health.

Because healing doesn't come from pushing through every challenge. It comes from knowing when to pause.

When to breathe. When to feel.

That was the blessing. Not the job title. Not the image. Me. My story. My fight. My heart.

And I made another quiet promise to myself. I would stop obsessing over what I lost. I had spent too much time focused on the past.

But when I really looked, I saw what still remained. The people who stayed. The growth I had. The strength I had built. The wisdom I had earned.

I realized I hadn't lost everything. I had gained things that can't be measured in numbers or resumes. And I saw something else too.

So much of the pressure I carried wasn't even mine. It came from family, culture, society. From people projecting their dreams onto me.

And I had been running, not for me, but to meet expectations I never chose.

I stopped doing that.

Now, I start each morning by asking myself, what do I need today? Not just physically. Emotionally. Mentally. Spiritually.

I give myself grace. I no longer treat rest as weakness. I no longer apologize for not being everything to everyone.

And slowly, life started to feel soft again. I noticed the light. The warmth. The small, sacred moments.

If you're reading this and everything feels heavy, please know you're not broken. You're just tired.

Sometimes, the weight we feel isn't failure. It's the cost of being strong for too long.

So breathe. Let yourself pause.

Think about what you've been through. What you've built. What you've survived.

You are not behind. You are not less.
You are the blessing.

And that's where healing begins. Not when life is perfect.

But when you remember who you are.

You don't need to become someone else. You just need to see the strength you already have.

So today, stop. Take a deep breath.

You don't have to chase anything right now.

Just be.

That's where peace lives. In stillness. In presence. In remembering yourself.

And when you find that place again, you'll realize something powerful.

You never lost the blessing.

You were the blessing all along.