

COMMUNITY BUILDING PROMPTS

Why Does It Feel Like You're The Only One Holding Everything Together?

Episode 9: Reflection & Discussion Guide

How to Use These Prompts

These prompts invite honest conversation about structural over-reliance — when groups quietly depend on one person's capacity to function. Use them in team debriefs, leadership circles, organizer support spaces, or anywhere people can speak truthfully about what they're carrying and why.

Ways to engage:

- Team retrospectives
- Leadership peer cohorts
- Coalition sustainability planning
- Supervision and support sessions
- Written reflection after overwhelming periods
- Facilitator debriefs

The HOLD Framework

The central claim of this episode:

You might not be tired because the work is hard.

You might be tired because too much has become dependent on you.

HOLD describes how structural over-reliance happens:

- H — Hidden Labor:** Invisible work, visible dependency
- O — Over-functioning:** Coping mistaken for capacity
- L — Load Concentration:** Too much responsibility in one place
- D — Depletion:** Burnout as structural outcome

Discussion Prompts

Which part of HOLD are you carrying right now — without it being named?

Are you doing hidden labor no one sees but everyone depends on? Are you over-functioning — stepping in before things break, smoothing conflict, absorbing stress? Is load concentrating on you — where nothing moves unless you push? Or are you experiencing depletion — the quiet erosion of energy, honesty, and hope? Name what's happening. Be specific about what you're carrying and what it costs.

What are you holding that your group needs to learn how to hold with you?

Think about the work that always ends up with you. What defaults to you because the group hasn't built capacity to do it collectively? Is it following up? Remembering everything? Translating between people? Managing conflict? Holding institutional memory? What would happen if you stopped doing it? Would the group learn — or would things collapse? If collapse feels likely, that's the pattern to name.

Where is your coping being mistaken for capacity?

You're functional. You're getting things done. But are you actually thriving — or are you just good at holding it together while drowning privately? Where is your ability to cope being read as proof that you can keep carrying more? What's the difference between what the group thinks you can handle and what you're actually experiencing? How long can that gap last?

If you disappeared tomorrow, what would stop?

Seriously — what would stall, break, or fall through the cracks? Who would step up? What would the group suddenly realize they'd been depending on you for? This isn't about your ego or importance. It's about whether the system is built to hold itself — or whether the system works because you are holding it together. If the answer makes you uncomfortable, that's the conversation your group needs to have.

Guidelines for Dialogue

Remove shame Over-functioning isn't a personal failure. It's a systemic pattern. Talk about it structurally, not individually.	Name patterns, not people Focus on what's happening ("load is concentrating") rather than blaming ("you're not pulling your weight").
Center the most exposed BIPOC leaders and women carry more invisible labor and are punished sooner when they stop. Acknowledge that reality.	Move to action Naming isn't enough. Commit to redistribution — drop, delegate, rotate, pair, or delay work.

DEEPER REFLECTION

The Racialized Dimension

The episode names how structural over-reliance shows up differently for BIPOC leaders. Consider:

“What invisible labor are BIPOC leaders carrying in your organization — and who benefits?”

Think about translation across power and culture. Managing tone so white colleagues stay comfortable. Protecting institutions from discomfort. Buffering racial stress for the group. This labor is expected, rarely named, and almost never compensated. Who's doing it? What's it costing them? What would it mean to redistribute it — or refuse it?

“What happens when BIPOC leaders stop over-functioning?”

Often, they're punished. Labeled "difficult" or "not a team player." Their competence is questioned. Their commitment is doubted. Meanwhile, white leaders who step back are seen as "delegating well" or "prioritizing self-care." Name the double standard. Who gets grace when they pull back — and who gets scrutiny?

“What would it mean to center BIPOC leaders’ sustainability as strategy — not sacrifice?”

What if your organization designed work around people doing the hardest work unleashing their power for transformative change sustainably? What structural changes would that require? What redistribution of resources, attention, and load? What shift in who gets to rest and who's expected to carry?

BONUS

For Teams Experiencing Over-Reliance

If your team is recognizing that someone is structurally over-relied upon, try these prompts:

“What have we been depending on [person] for — without naming it?”

Make a list. Be honest. What tasks, emotional labor, institutional memory, conflict management, translation, or follow-through have quietly become their job? Don't defend it — just name it.

“What can we redistribute this week?”

Don't try to fix everything at once. Pick one thing. Drop it, delegate it, rotate it, pair it, or delay it. Make the redistribution visible and specific. Say out loud who's taking what on and by when.

“How will we notice early next time?”

Build a regular check-in: "Where is load concentrating? Who feels stretched? What needs to be shared?" Don't wait for breaking. Notice when patterns are forming and interrupt them early.

PRACTICE TOOL

Creating Shared Language for Over-Reliance

The episode recommends building shared language so groups can name over-reliance before people break. Try these phrases:

“I'm noticing I've become the bottleneck”

“Load is concentrating”

“I'm feeling the rescue reflex”

“This is hidden labor — and it needs to be shared”

“We need to clarify ownership”

“What would happen if I didn't do this?”

“I'm not going to fix this — but I will help us decide who owns it”

Group reflection:

Which of these phrases would help your group? What other phrases do you need? How would you normalize using them?

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Commitment to Action

After engaging with these prompts, what will you actually do?

One thing I will stop carrying alone:

One conversation I need to have:

One norm my team needs to establish:

If you feel like you're the only one holding it together, you're probably not failing.

You're being over-relied upon.
