



WHAT I GAVE UP TO KEEP MYSELF

By **Natanya Wachtel**

Six months ago, I had a near-fatal accident on a former partner's stage at their wellness event. It was public. It was destabilizing. And it forced a pause.

But this wasn't my first collapse.

I've rebuilt after paralysis. I've rebuilt after loss. I've rebuilt after earlier near-death experiences. Reinvention isn't a branding concept for me. It's muscle memory.

What made this moment different was context. I wasn't rebuilding quietly. I was running companies. People depended on my judgment. Revenue didn't pause because my body did.

So here was the real question:

What happens when the person at the center of a system can't operate the way they used to — and the system doesn't get to collapse with them?

As a behavioral scientist, I study adaptation under pressure. High performers compensate. We move faster. We absorb more. We rely on personality, proximity, and velocity. It works — until it becomes fragile.

The accident wasn't the lesson.
It was the stress test.

It revealed how much of our growth ran through me. How much lived in consulting instead of structure. How much depended on speed as proof of value.

So I had a choice: rebuild the same machine and hope I could power it the same way — or redesign it.

We chose redesign.

We formalized leadership redundancy so no single person is a point of failure. We clarified governance and crisis protocols. We confidently continued to expand beyond consulting into media and publishing because identity work doesn't hold if it only lives inside private strategy sessions. It needs context. It needs repetition. It needs community.

We tightened our partner filter. Shared messaging is no longer enough. We examine incentives, decision-making patterns, and how organizations behave when something inconvenient happens.

I gave up speed and doing-it-all as the primary metrics for my value.

I gave up scaling through proximity alone.

I gave up the comfort of being indispensable.

And here's the part that matters for any founder or executive reading this:

If you stepped away from your business tomorrow, what would break first?

Is your leadership a role — or a single point of failure?

Are your partnerships built on shared risk and accountability — or shared language and optimism?

These are not emotional questions. They are operational ones.

The accident didn't make me wiser.

It forced me to see where we were overexposed.

This isn't a comeback story.

It's a strategic redesign — one that prioritizes durability over velocity and structure over heroics.

And I'm still building it.

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