The four phases

One question underneath them all: is the pace you are keeping one you can sustainably inhabit? The framework is a diagnostic, not a prescription. It does not tell you what to do. It tells you where you are, which is what makes doing something possible.

1

Sustainable pace

Performing externally and recovering internally. Sleep does what sleep is supposed to do. Decisions arrive without the cost of two days of weighing them. There is slack in the system, and the slack is not laziness: it is the operational signature of a system not being drawn down faster than it is replenished. This phase exists. It is not common.

2

Functional override

External performance is still high. The numbers are working. Underneath, recovery has begun to quietly thin: sleep is not quite restoring, Sundays are not quite returning you to the start of Monday. You notice these things in passing and move on, because the override is built precisely to allow that move. Most founders live here for years. This is where the list lives.

3

Compounding override

The performance now costs more to maintain than it used to. Decisions take longer to arrive, or arrive carrying residue into the next one. Recovery is no longer recovering. The system is drawing down reserves that were not, in your mental model, available to be drawn down. Operational fixes from here address symptoms: they help, briefly, and the weight stays the same.

4

Forced reckoning

The body, the circumstance, the relationship or the deal produces an event that cannot be overridden. This is not the failure of the override; it is the override having done its job for as long as it could. And it is not the end of the work. It is the start of it: the recognition comes when you stop trying to return to phase two, and ask whether the original pace was ever the right one.

The body knows before the mind admits. The longer the override runs, the more it looks from the inside like personality rather than mechanism.