



If you're a longshoreman reading this, we want to begin by saying something that probably doesn't get said often enough.

Thank you.

Most people have no idea what it takes to do what you do. They see stocked shelves, fuel at the pump, construction materials arriving on time, and packages showing up at their front door. What they rarely see are the men and women working on the docks before sunrise, in the rain, the cold, and the heat, carrying responsibilities that leave little room for error. They do not see the vigilance required to do the job safely. They do not see the pressure of knowing that a momentary lapse in attention can have consequences for you, your coworkers, and the families who depend upon all of you.

They see the cargo.

They rarely see the cost.

We are writing this article from two different perspectives. One of us, Jared Parker, has spent years working as a union longshoreman. The other, Dr. Jeffrey E. Hansen, has spent more than three decades helping people recover from trauma, addiction, anxiety, depression, and the effects of chronic stress. Although our paths were very different, they eventually converged

around a common realization: many hardworking men and women carry burdens that nobody sees until those burdens become too heavy to carry alone.

The Weight You Carry

Your profession demands far more than physical strength. Every shift requires focus, awareness, judgment, communication, and discipline. You work around heavy machinery, suspended loads, moving equipment, unpredictable weather, and conditions where a momentary lapse in attention can have life-altering consequences. You understand that safety is never accidental. People are counting on you every day, and that level of responsibility eventually becomes part of who you are.

The challenge is that your body understands those demands as well. The human nervous system was designed to help us survive danger. When circumstances require vigilance, the brain releases stress hormones that sharpen attention and prepare us to respond. That response is helpful and often necessary. The problem is that the nervous system was never designed to remain on high alert indefinitely.

Over time, many longshoremen discover that although they have left the docks, part of them never truly clocks out. Sleep becomes less restorative. Patience becomes harder to find. Irritability appears where calm once lived. Worry becomes a constant companion. Sometimes the people we love most end up carrying the consequences alongside us. We become distracted, withdrawn, short-tempered, or emotionally exhausted without fully understanding why.

If any of that sounds familiar, we want you to hear something clearly.

There is nothing weak about what you are experiencing.

In many cases, your mind and body are responding exactly as they were designed to respond to prolonged periods of stress and responsibility. The problem is not weakness. The problem is wear and tear. Years of carrying heavy loads eventually affect even the strongest backs. The same is true of the nervous system.

When Stress Becomes More Than Stress

Jared understands this reality firsthand.

For years he carried burdens that became heavier and heavier. Some came from work. Some came from life outside of work. Like many people who are struggling, he searched for ways to cope. Eventually those struggles contributed to addiction and nearly cost him his life.

Fortunately, that is not where his story ended.

Through recovery, effective therapy, faith, and the support of people who refused to give up on him, he found healing. Today he is healthy, sober, and committed to helping others avoid the road he traveled.

His story is not one of weakness. It is a story of resilience, recovery, and hope.

One of the things we have both come to understand is that addiction rarely begins because someone is trying to destroy their life. More often, it begins because someone is trying to survive it.

When you spend years carrying responsibility, operating under pressure, dealing with difficult life circumstances, absorbing loss, managing fear, or living with unresolved emotional pain, your nervous system naturally begins searching for relief. Human beings were never designed to remain in a constant state of activation. We long for rest. We long for peace. We long for something that helps us feel normal again.

Sometimes that search for relief takes healthy forms. We exercise. We spend time with family. We pursue hobbies. We pray. We talk with trusted friends.

Sometimes it takes unhealthy forms.

Alcohol, prescription medications, gambling, pornography, compulsive behaviors, emotional withdrawal, or endless distraction can provide temporary relief from stress, anxiety, loneliness, exhaustion, or emotional pain. For a little while, the burden feels lighter. The problem is that temporary relief often comes with a hidden price. What begins as a solution gradually becomes another source of suffering. The very thing that once seemed to help starts creating new problems in relationships, health, finances, work, and personal well-being.

If this has happened to you, we want you to hear something important.

Shame is not the answer.

Understanding is.

A Different Way of Understanding Resilience

Over the years, Jeff has worked with military personnel, first responders, healthcare professionals, trauma survivors, and individuals struggling with addiction. Again and again, he has seen the same truth emerge. Strong people struggle. Strong people become overwhelmed. Strong people sometimes need help. And strong people can heal.

It was through experiences like these that we eventually developed what became known as the NeuroFaith® model. We are not asking you to become a psychologist, and we are certainly not asking you to become a theologian. What we are suggesting is that human beings make much more sense when we stop viewing them as a collection of isolated symptoms and begin looking at the whole person.

One of the things both of us have learned, albeit from very different directions, is that the longshoreman who cannot sleep, the worker who feels anxious all the time, the man struggling with addiction, the husband who finds himself becoming increasingly distant from his family, and the individual who feels disconnected from his faith are often not dealing with five separate problems. More often, they are experiencing different expressions of the same underlying strain.

Our physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, sense of purpose, and spiritual lives are deeply interconnected. When one area suffers, the others often feel the impact. Likewise, when healing begins, it rarely stays confined to a single area of life. It spreads. The husband becomes more present. The father becomes more engaged. Sleep improves. Anxiety decreases. Relationships begin to strengthen. Life starts feeling manageable again.

The NeuroFaith® model integrates modern neuroscience, trauma-informed care, and faith into a practical framework for healing and resilience. One of its central ideas is that many of our struggles make far more sense when we understand how the nervous system works. Chronic stress changes us. Trauma changes us. Years of carrying burdens can change us. The encouraging news is that healing is possible as well.

As this series continues, our goal is not to bury you in psychological jargon or academic theory. Neither of us has much interest in that. What interests us is helping good people understand why they are struggling and what can be done about it. We want to explore practical tools that can help you sleep better, manage stress more effectively, strengthen your relationships, improve recovery from difficult experiences, and better understand how the mind, body, and spirit work together.

We'll talk about why your nervous system sometimes feels like it is stuck in high gear. We'll talk about why anxiety, depression, burnout, and addiction often emerge when people carry too much for too long. We'll discuss practical approaches that have helped countless individuals recover and thrive, including therapies and strategies informed by neuroscience, trauma recovery, emotional regulation, healthy relationships, and faith.

Most importantly, we want you to understand that there is nothing hopeless about what you're experiencing. The nervous system can heal. Relationships can heal. Lives can heal.

We have both seen it happen.

One of us has lived it.

The People Waiting at Home

At the end of the day, there is something more important than the cargo.

There is your family.

There are the people who love you.

There is the life you have worked so hard to build.

Every container that moves through a port represents commerce. Every ship unloaded represents another piece of the machinery that keeps our nation functioning. The work matters. It matters tremendously. The country benefits from your skill, your dedication, and your willingness to shoulder responsibilities that most people will never fully understand.

Yet when your career eventually comes to an end, the people who love you will not remember how many containers you moved, how many shifts you worked, or how many difficult days you pushed through. They will remember whether you were present. They will remember your laughter, your wisdom, your kindness, and the relationships you built with them over the years.

That is what we hope this series helps protect.

Not simply your ability to work.

Your ability to live well.

Your ability to enjoy the life you have worked so hard to build.

And if, as you read this, you recognize yourself in some of these struggles, please don't wait for the next article.

Reach out.

Talk to someone you trust. Talk to your doctor. Talk to a counselor, pastor, sponsor, recovery group, or mental health professional. If stress, depression, anxiety, addiction, or emotional pain are beginning to affect your life, your work, or your relationships, seek help now.

There is no shame in asking for help. In fact, some of the strongest people we have ever met were those who had the courage to admit they could not carry the burden alone any longer.

The Hidden Cost of Keeping America Moving
Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

The purpose of this series is to help you better understand what you're facing and to provide practical tools for the road ahead. But if you need help today, don't wait for tomorrow. There are people who care, there are effective treatments available, and there is genuine hope for recovery.

America depends upon its longshoremen.

But the people who love you depend upon you.

Take care of both.