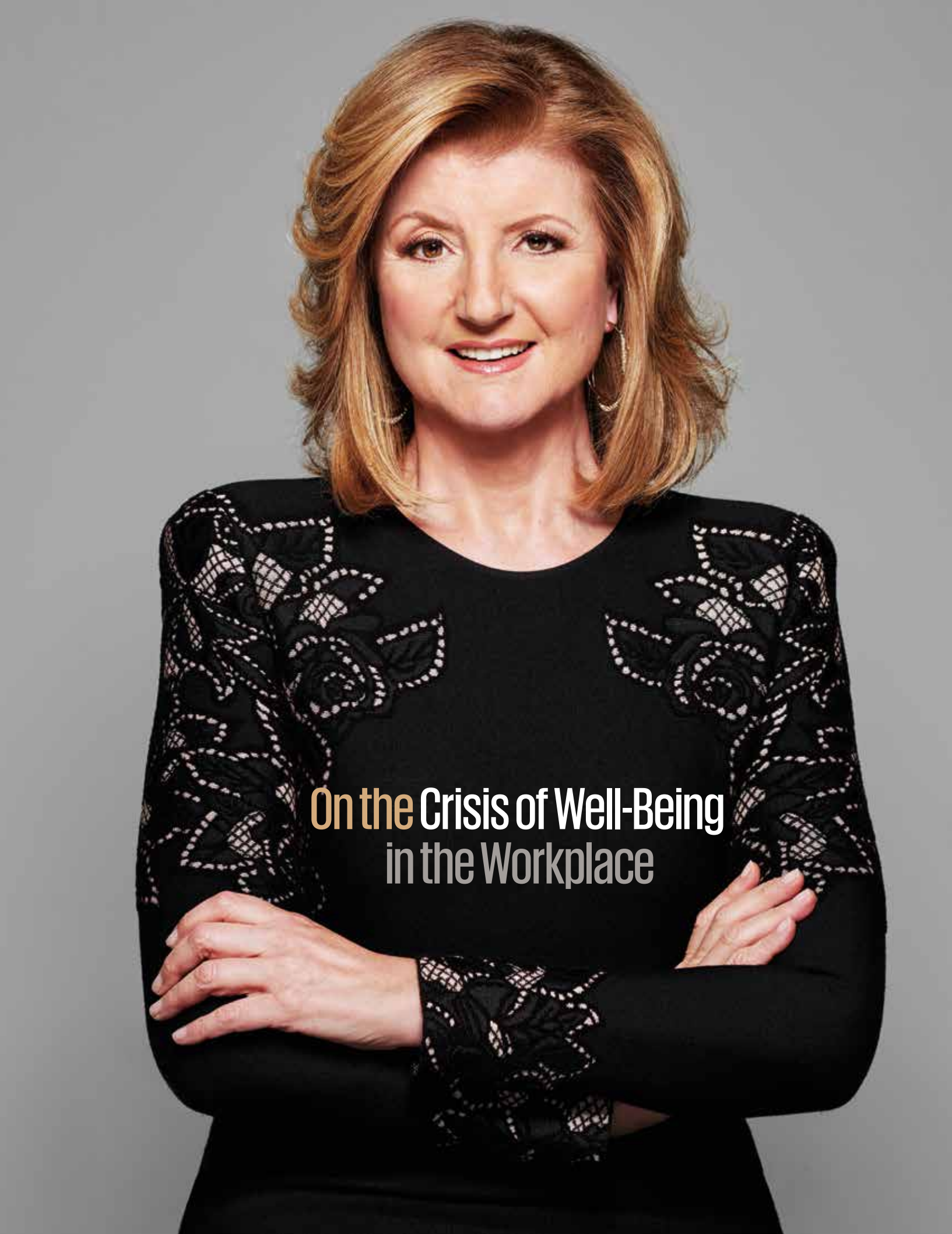


A YEAR AFTER SHE'D BEEN NAMED ONE OF TIME'S 100 MOST influential people in the world, a sleep-deprived and exhausted Arianna Huffington collapsed at her home office. Her head smashed against the corner of her desk. Ms. Huffington awoke in a pool of her own blood. • That moment marked the beginning of Ms. Huffington's quest to "Ignore the workaholic wisdom that says we're lazy for not living up to the example set by notoriously self-professed undersleepers" – and to inspire others to do the same. • Ms. Huffington published the best-selling *Thrive* in 2014, a book that called for us to redefine what a successful life and career looked like: "More and more scientific studies and more and more health statistics are showing the way we've been leading our lives – what we prioritize and what we value – is not working." *Thrive* extolled practices such as walking, meditation, mindfulness and rest. One section's tongue-in-cheek counsel: "Sleep your way to the top." • A year later, Ms. Huffington left her position as Editor in Chief of Huffington Post to start Thrive Global, which helps individuals and companies address many of the issues highlighted in her book. Recently valued at more than \$120 million, Thrive Global works with firms like JPMorgan and Hilton to make their workplaces healthier and higher performing. The company also produces a range of content, from blogs to podcasts, to "serve as a global hub for the conversation about well-being and performance." • Thrive Global also sells quirky, health-conscious products. The phone bed, for instance, is a miniature bed meant to encourage people to "tuck their phones in" at night before going to sleep themselves. Its mini-sheets

The author, entrepreneur and well-being expert talks to Brunswick's **BLAKE SONNENSHEIN.**

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

are made of microfiber cloth. Other products are digital. ThriveAway deletes or archives emails while you're on vacation; the app "Thrive" allows you to schedule blocks of time where you can't be reached on your smartphone and it will even auto-respond to texts on your behalf. One Washington Post reporter customized his auto response: "Arianna Huffington told me to put my phone away." • Ms. Huffington spoke recently with Brunswick's Blake Sonnenshein about what's broken with the modern workplace and what science suggests can fix it. She also had a message for leaders: "Well-being is no longer just an HR issue, it's a bottom-line issue."



On the Crisis of Well-Being
in the Workplace

To eat well, to sleep well, to exercise – these are ultimately personal decisions. How do employers promote arguably intimate choices without appearing to cast judgment or insert themselves into employees’ personal lives?

Yes, they’re personal decisions, but they’re also deeply impacted by our work and our workplace. We don’t check our humanity at the door when we leave for work – we take our whole selves to work. There is no work life and home life – there’s just life. What employers can do is not just encourage employees to prioritize well-being but also put in place policies that make that easier rather than harder.

At Thrive Global, we have a set of cultural values that we not only employ at our own company but also teach to others. One of those is to relentlessly prioritize and be comfortable with incompletions.

Nobody can do anything important, let alone thrive, if they don’t establish clear priorities and relentlessly ask themselves what matters most. It means knowing the difference between what’s important and what’s not – and what requires a quick turnaround and what doesn’t. When you determine that something isn’t a priority – or isn’t worth doing at all – that opens up new space, time and possibilities.

The second step is to realize that there isn’t anybody in any demanding job who can complete everything each day. Doing ambitious, meaningful work means having to embrace incompletions. If you’re able to complete every possible task before you go to sleep, you’re not challenging yourself enough. Structure your day so you’re able to declare an end to it knowing that you’ve handled the essential priorities – but also knowing that you’ll arrive tomorrow recharged and ready to tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

You often point out there’s a powerful business case for well-being. Why aren’t more corporate leaders realizing it?

Science unequivocally proves that fully recharged employees are a huge competitive advantage. If you’re running a company and you think qualities like decision-making, creativity, energy, focus, collaboration and innovation have no effect on the company’s long-term survival, then, yes, feel free to ignore the well-being of your employees and whether the workday of the company is structured to allow them a good night’s sleep. But I can tell you that that’s not a company I’d buy stock in.

Well-being is no longer just an HR issue, it’s a bottom line issue. Those that don’t care about it are ceding a huge competitive advantage. No good leader would leave such easily available resources and tools

“Studies show that US employers spend **200 to 300 PERCENT** more on the indirect costs of healthcare, in the form of absenteeism, sick days and lower productivity, than they do on actual healthcare payments.”

“In the UK, stress results in **105 MILLION** lost workdays each year.”

Source: Thrive, Arianna Huffington

for success unused, but it’s amazing that so many still do – though thankfully, fewer and fewer do.

One example of this cultural shift was a 2016 Harvard Business Review article about how “sleep deficiencies can undermine important forms of leadership behavior.” The authors are from McKinsey – and one of them is a sleep specialist. If someone a few years ago had shown me an article by McKinsey consultants saying that the way for executives to be better leaders is to sleep more, not less, and that McKinsey would actually have a sleep specialist on staff, I would have assumed the piece was in *The Onion*.

But the piece was real, and so is the science behind it. As the authors note, sleep has a profound effect on the brain’s prefrontal cortex, home of advanced cognitive processes like planning, decision-making and problem solving – all very handy skills for business leaders. “Sleep (mis)management, at one level, is obviously an individual issue,” the authors write. “But in an increasingly hyperconnected world, in which many companies now expect their employees to be on call and to answer emails 24/7, this is also an important organizational topic that requires specific and urgent attention.”

What about those who see well-being campaigns as a luxury for employers with money to spare?

They’re absolutely wrong. Well-being isn’t a luxury, or an add-on or a perk. It’s not about fancy cafeterias or having a gym in the office – a company can have all those and still be fueled by burnout and stress. Well-being needs to be woven into the DNA of a company’s core purpose and culture. And that’s not dependent on a company’s profit margin. It’s companies that are operating in challenging environments that most need the resilience well-being provides. And companies that realize this have a competitive advantage.

Could you have made such a success of the Huffington Post without the brutal work schedule and focus that led to your eventual burnout?

Absolutely. I wish I’d learned the value of prioritizing my well-being much earlier in my career. I now know that I still would have achieved whatever success I have, but I would have done it with more joy, more happiness and with less of a cost to my health.

We founded *The Huffington Post* in 2005, and two years in we were growing at an incredible pace. But after my collapse from exhaustion and sleep deprivation, I had to ask myself, was this what success looked like? Was this the life I wanted? I was working 18 hours a day, seven days a week, trying to build a business, expand our coverage and bring in investors.

In the traditional measures of success, which focus on money and power, I was very successful. But I was not living a successful life by any sane definition of the word. I knew something had to radically change. I couldn't go on that way. Today, I realize that whatever success I've been lucky enough to have was in spite of – not because of – overwork and burnout.

If you could get most CEOs in the same room, what is the one thing you would tell them to start – or stop – doing?

Model the company culture you want to see. Most CEOs and business leaders I talk to are on board with well-being. They know the connection between well-being and performance and a lot of them preach it within their companies. But even the best well-being programs won't be effective if there's not buy-in from senior management to model the change.

What about employees? What can they do on their own to manage well-being?

Be zealous about their well-being in the workplace, even if their employers aren't. And that means remembering that a great day starts the night before. All aspects of our well-being are intricately connected. If you're not sleeping enough, that will make you less able to handle stress the next day and more likely to compensate by doing things (like slamming caffeine) that will make it harder to sleep – and onward (or downward) the spiral goes.

It's important to remember that well-being is about all parts of your life, both at home and at work. If you prioritize your well-being, a virtuous circle will replace that vicious one.

What would you say to employees who work in cultures that still measure commitment by hours chained to one's desk or iPhone?

There are still too many companies using burnout as a proxy for dedication. And for those stuck in companies like that, I'd say, first, that they should try to use whatever influence they have to change their company culture.

If you can't get your employer to listen, it's important to prioritize your own well-being both at work and outside of work as best you can – that includes taking small two- or three-minute breathing breaks while at work, doing some movement exercises at your desk and, especially, making time to unplug and recharge outside of work, which can include things like taking walks without your phone or charging your phone outside your bedroom.

"Of all the sleep-deprived Americans, women are the most fatigued. Working moms get the least sleep, with

59

PERCENT reporting sleep deprivation, and 50 percent saying they get six hours of sleep or less."

"A study published in Science calculated that for the sleep deprived, an EXTRA HOUR OF SLEEP can do more for their daily happiness than a \$60,000 RAISE."

Source: Thrive, Arianna Huffington

BLAKE SONNENSHEIN is a Partner in Brunswick's New York office, specializing in both the consumer and private equity sectors.

Does your advice vary based on a company's size, or the country where it operates?

There can be different strategies employed when a large company needs to make changes throughout the company, and different cultures have different ways of talking about these issues, but the core principles are the same: to unlock the human potential of their employees by putting well-being at the center of the company.

The methods needed to scale the behavior change – whether it's in-person workshops, digital tools or, usually, a combination of both – are customized for each company. And regionally, we tailor our solutions to draw on the ancient traditions that every culture has to keep people connected with themselves and with what really matters.

Are you optimistic for the future of well-being?

Absolutely, we're in a real moment of transition. But cultural shifts like this don't happen on a dime. So what you see in times of profound transition are examples of the old paradigm that's being superceded right alongside examples of the new paradigm that's establishing itself. And that's where we are right now.

Exhibit A of the old paradigm is the recent saga of Elon Musk. After he gave an interview to The New York Times about how he'd been working 120-hour weeks and sleeping in the office for weeks on end, I wrote an open letter to him pointing out the fact that all elements of our job performance actually improve when we prioritize our well-being. The whole point was that it's a myth that we have to choose between ourselves and big ambitions and goals. I wasn't asking him to choose between taking care of himself and taking care of Tesla. I was reminding him that taking care of himself is taking care of Tesla. It's the same choice.

That's the old paradigm – and so many people who are stuck in it seem to believe it's either/or.

And on the other side, there's someone like former Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini. He's long been a leading voice for changing our workplace to leverage the connection between well-being and the bottom line. Years ago, he broke his neck in a ski accident, which led him to yoga and meditation. He then implemented a program offering meditation, yoga and mindfulness to Aetna employees. The result was a 7 percent drop in healthcare costs, and 69 minutes of additional productivity per day for the employees who participated, which Aetna valued at \$3,000 per employee per year.

So we're in this time when leaders are operating on two entirely different – and even mutually exclusive – premises. And we know from the science which one is going to win out. ♦