

Thrive Summary

By Arianna Huffington

What does success look like to you?

Thrive examines the true cost of highly-driven success. Through Arianna Huffington's first-hand account of stress, burnout, and exhaustion, we're shown that these are common features of contemporary working life. *Thrive* redefines success, and shifts the focus to well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving.

Make no mistake, in Huffington's call to redefine success, money, and power are still two valuable metrics; they just need a third one for balance. For some, success and "making it" equates to getting the corner office, or a bigger paycheck. In which case, success may be synonymous with money and power. However, for Arianna Huffington, this Western narrative is problematic, because it might not sync with our core values.

Huffington had a wake-up call that made her realize that money and power might work well in the short-term, but over time, aren't sustainable. In 2007, she found herself lying in a pool of blood, on her home office floor. Exhaustion had triggered the fall, and as she fell, she hit the corner of her desk, cutting her eye and breaking her cheekbone. In the wake of this fall, she went from doctor to doctor, in search of an underlying medical problem. No medical issues were found, but there did seem to be one critical problem. Everything she was going through pointed towards stress. Huffington was working an 18-hour, 7-day workweek, which impacted her health and well-being. She realized that despite being a highly successful businesswoman, this was of no consequence, if she wasn't around to enjoy her success.

This brief summary of *Thrive* gives us insight into one of *Time* magazine's most influential people. As a renowned blogger and co-founder of the *Huffington Post*, established author, and CEO, Huffington is an expert on having found success, but, she takes us on a quest to redefine it. Importantly, Huffington asks the question, 'What if we can simultaneously do well, and more importantly... be, well?' She believes that to truly thrive in both our work and personal lives, we need to broaden our definition of success by including four additional benchmarks, or pillars as she calls them. These four pillars are, well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving. However, *Thrive* is more than just a call to reduce stress, and redefine success. Huffington gets personal and practical. It's not only about the wake-up call that caused her to rethink what it means to be successful; it's about the science and strategies that she relies on, and believes can help individuals and companies thrive.

A New Blueprint for Success

The standard for Western work culture, is underpinned by stress and sleep deprivation. Nowadays, exhaustion is like a badge of honor, but this comes at a huge cost.

Did you know that more than 22 million people in the USA use illegal drugs to combat stress, almost 9 million need sleeping aids to fall asleep, and the percentage of adults using prescription drugs has gone up 400% since 1988? Problems such as burnout, stress, and depression, have become worldwide epidemics, and interestingly, women seem to pay a very high price. Nearly 40% of women have an increased risk of heart disease and heart attacks than their less-stressed female colleagues. What's more, women in high-stress jobs are also more likely to be alcoholics than those in low-stress positions. Trends show that many women abandon their high-powered jobs and careers, as soon as they can afford to do so.

The First Pillar: Well-being

It's time to put well-being at the forefront of how we do business.

Employee health, isn't distinct from a company's bottom line. Studies reveal that U.S. employers spend around 200-300% more on indirect costs of healthcare. These costs are in the form of absenteeism, sick days, and lower productivity, as opposed to actual healthcare payments. It's becoming more obvious that companies need to prioritize wellness.

Companies should go to great lengths to ensure that employees' well-being is prioritized, by allowing for flexible work schedules, having onsite exercise facilities, supplying healthy food, and even creating nap stations. The truth is that most companies adopt a culture where sleep is

seen as a weakness. On the other hand, a good company should promote sleep as an absolute necessity, to both wellness and productivity. Huffington takes wellness a step further and conducts a lot of staff meetings while hiking. The logic is that walking out in nature helps us to step out of focused-mode thinking, into a more open-minded, creative headspace. She says that this is when they often come up with their best ideas.

On an individual level, there are also many different ways that we can build our own well-being. *Thrive* explores the importance of meditation, exercise, quality time with family, friends, and even our pets, in order to boost well-being.

But deep down, most of us know what our minds and bodies need when it comes to nurturing ourselves, the difficulty is actually in doing these things. Marie Asberg, a professor at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, describes burnout as the exhaustion funnel that we slip down, when we give up on things that we don't think are important. Professor Mark Williams takes this a step further, and says that we often give up on the things that nourish us, because they seem optional. It's for these reasons that it's so important to view activities that nurture our well-being, as necessities, rather than luxuries.

If you remember one thing from this book, it's that sleep is a necessity, and not a luxury. The one keystone habit Huffington swears by, is sleep. When we redefine success, we all need to redefine our relationship with sleep. Sleep is underrated, and not having enough of it, is very detrimental to our health. Former American president Bill Clinton used to survive on only five hours of sleep a night, and he admits that every serious mistake that he made in his life, was because he was too tired. It's essential to get our 7-8 hours of sleep each night, but for some, that's

easier said than done. The good news is that researchers have discovered that short naps during the day can help us course-correct. Famous nappers have included Leonardo Da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill. Research also shows that short power naps prime the brain to function at a high level; they also help us to perform better, to find solutions to problems, and recall information more accurately.

So, if you want to perform at the top of your game, it's quite simple, you can literally sleep or nap your way to the top.

The Second Pillar: Wisdom

Wisdom is defined as the ability to learn from experience, and to trust our intuition.

Life is a classroom, and everything that happens to us, be it positive or negative, acts as a teacher. What counts, is how we learn from our experiences as well as the ability to tap into our intuition. Hence, wisdom is the capacity to move from struggle, to a place of grace, no matter what challenges we encounter along the way. This effort to recenter should be something that we commit to, and practice daily. However, some roadblocks interfere with this inward journey. These obstacles are things such as, "hurry sickness," the "iPhone paradox," and the "obnoxious roommate in our heads."

Firstly, let's tackle the epidemic of, "hurry sickness." We understand the word famine as it applies to a food-shortage, but are you familiar with the concept, time-famine? Time famine was coined by Professor Leslie Perlow, and she argues that in our quest to save time, we cram in as

much as possible, and fear any unused second. We download productivity apps, and search for the latest time-saving hack, but ironically we still end up feeling rushed and time-deprived. This feeling is something that we carry around with us all the time and it's one of the major causes of stress and anxiety. When we're so preoccupied with time, or lack thereof, it's almost impossible to tap into that place of inner wisdom and peace.

Another core message of *Thrive*, is that we all need to slow down. Carl Honore's "wake up" moment, regarding resetting the pace of his life, triggered him to write his book, *In Praise of Slowness*. It's a story that might help us to shift our hurried mindsets. Honore was on his phone while standing in a queue, and in order to use his time productively, he started skimming the newspaper. A headline, "The One Minute Bedtime Story," caught his eye. The article was about children's books that are condensed to 60 seconds, and having a two-year-old at home, he thought that this would be a great time-saver. While making a mental note to remember this, he suddenly thought to himself, "Have I gone completely insane?" It was at this very moment that called attention to his inner feeling of time famine, and it made him realize that his quest for time-saving hacks was detrimental to how he was living and relating to others.

So while speed can be fun, productive, and powerful, we often all need to slow down a bit more. The secret is balance. We need to do everything at the right speed; sometimes fast, sometimes slow, and sometimes in between.

When we have the chance, it's important to slow down. But our precious "in-between moments" are frequently being hijacked by our devices. The digital dilemma we face is that we're hyper-connected, over-stimulated,

and bombarded with an endless stream of information. And this is often unfettered. David Brooks says that: "Ours is a generation bloated with information, and starved of wisdom. Information doesn't equal knowledge, and knowledge doesn't equal wisdom." So, while we have social media, which can make us feel connected, it can also be an obsessive distraction. Furthermore, our increased dependence on technology makes it harder to form a deeper understanding of the world and connect with our deep intuition.

But it's not just the iPhone paradox, where our devices are preventing us from tapping into insights and intuitions; it's also the unfriendly voice in our head. Meet your inner critic, or "obnoxious roommate." It's easy to feel as if we aren't living up to our expectations or potential when we are comparing ourselves to others. Very often, we feel bad because we feel like we don't measure up to the societal message of what success and "having it all" looks like. That's why it's essential to recenter and reconnect to an authentic sense of what it means to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

We need to redefine success on our own terms, according to our values and goals, and not according to what's imposed on us by society. Wisdom of this nature helps us to separate our everyday worries and preoccupations from what's truly important. The cornerstone of wisdom is letting go of habits and mindsets that no longer serve us. So, in short, give up what no longer works for you, and hold on tightly to what's most important.

The Third Pillar: Wonder

When Huffington's mother passed away, the family made a memorial bench for her. They also had it engraved with her philosophy, 'do not

miss the moment.' This is a timeless lesson, but one that we often forget because of our busy lives.

When was the last time that you took the time to really and truly enjoy a moment?

Often we aren't present enough to fully experience the wonders around us, and we have fallen into the trap of photographing moments, rather than experiencing them. We look down at our devices, rather than into the eyes of loved ones. And, continually documenting our lives comes at a cost. The cost is that we miss the wonder of the moment.

Wonder is an important pillar that enables us to thrive, because it helps us to be in the moment, in sync with the flow of life, and to see things from a different perspective. There are countless experiences that can help awaken the childlike wonder buried within us. Being in nature, and appreciating art in all its forms, are two powerful sources of wonder. However, to be in awe of, and to remember the good things in life, takes a little practice. Rick Hanson's book, *Hardwiring Happiness*, talks about how we tend towards negative experiences. In fact, when it comes to the good times, he says, 'It takes an extra 10-20 seconds to heighten the installation into neural structure'. In other words, we need to take extra time to experience feelings of awe and gratitude, and to overcome our natural bias towards the negative.

The element of serendipity can also fill us with a sense of wonder and purpose, and help us feel more connected to ourselves, one another, and the universe. A man called Paul Grachan was buying a sandwich, and when he pulled out the money to pay for it, he noticed that the name, Esther was written on the note. He smiled because his girlfriend was named Esther, and so, later he framed the bill, and gave it to her as a gift.

Years later, when they were married, Esther told him why the gift meant so much to her. When she was 19, she was unhappily dating somebody, and she wondered how people know who they're meant to be with. It was then that she had a crazy thought. She decided that she would just write her name on a dollar bill, and decided that the man who got it, would be the man who she would marry. Their story is an unbelievable coincidence, and it led Paul and Esther to question the role fate and destiny had played in their lives. Their story filled them with a sense of wonder, and made them feel as if there was something magical and joyful at work in the world. Some would argue that we shouldn't assign any cosmic significance to coincidence, but Huffington suggests that we should assign all the significance we want to it, and as long as we aren't dogmatic about it, there's no real downside.

The Fourth Pillar: Giving

Well-being, wonder, and wisdom, are critical pillars to redefining success and thriving, but they're incomplete without the fourth, which is the act of giving.

To give, means to care, to love, and most importantly, to show empathy and compassion. Giving also means stepping out of our comfort zones to help and to serve others. And, this shouldn't just be in times of crisis, we should tap into our natural humanity in countless ways throughout our daily lives. The reality is that we face multiple crises daily. Did you know that 2000 children under the age of five, die every day from diseases that could have been prevented if they had access to clean water, and proper sanitation? 3 million people die each day from poor nutrition, and 1.4 million die because they don't have access to vaccinations.

The long-distance swimmer, Diana Nyad, tells the story of a man living on

her street. The man had lost his wife, and had to earn a living, in order to take care of his children. Diana's neighbor, who already worked two jobs, took it upon herself to organize everyone in the neighborhood, to come to his assistance. They were all asked to deliver dinner to the man and his children, on specific days, and that if they couldn't, they needed to make alternate arrangements because it was their duty to help. In the words of David Foster Wallace, true caring is to do things again and again, in a myriad of ways, every single day.

The challenge is, for families and businesses to make giving the norm, and volunteering should come naturally to us. The idea is that all of this giving, actually gives back to us. Giving is one of the major pillars that help us to thrive, both at work, and from a health point of view. It turns out that nice guys don't actually finish last. Research shows that people who give their time to others, end up more successful than those who don't. So, the benefits of giving also pay off when it comes to health and well-being. A crucial component is a hormone called oxytocin. It's known as the love hormone, and it's released by our bodies during experiences such as childbirth, falling in love, and having sex. Researchers have found that people also release oxytocin through kind acts of service, which helps to lower anxiety and mitigate shyness.

So if you want to live a longer, healthier, happier life, then you need to focus on others, and give freely.

In Conclusion

Our labor isn't working, when it comes to how we perceive success. The traditional model of success is flawed, and it's making us unhappy, stressed, and anxious. Humans are working to the point of breaking point, and we're living in a society where sleep deprivation and burnout

are the norms. Furthermore, the spaces, the gaps, and the things that allow us to recharge, all take a back seat.

The challenge is, to redefine success, not necessarily by giving up on power and money, but by adding in notions of well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving. In the new definition of success, building financial capital isn't enough; we need to do everything we can, to protect the future of our human capital.