

# SLEEP, WISDOM, WELLBEING, WONDER & GIVING:

## HOW ARIANNA HUFFINGTON WANTS YOU TO THRIVE



AN EXPERT INTERVIEW WITH ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

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# SLEEP, WISDOM, WELLBEING, WONDER & GIVING

*with*

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

## ABOUT ARIANNA HUFFINGTON



Arianna is the founder and CEO of Thrive Global, the founder of The Huffington Post, and the author of 15 books, including, most recently, *Thrive* and *The Sleep Revolution*.

In May 2005, she launched The Huffington Post, a news and blog site that quickly became one of the most widely-read, linked to, and frequently-cited media brands on the Internet, and in 2012 won a Pulitzer Prize for national reporting. In August 2016, she launched Thrive Global, a corporate and consumer well-being and productivity platform with the mission of changing the way we work and live by ending the collective delusion that burnout is the price we must pay for success. Thrive Global provides trainings, seminars, e-courses, coaching and ongoing support based on the latest scientific findings to improve people's health and increase productivity for both companies and individuals around the world.

She has been named to Time Magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people and the Forbes Most Powerful Women list. Originally from Greece, she moved to England when she was 16 and graduated from Cambridge University with an M.A. in economics. At 21, she became president of the famed debating society, the Cambridge Union. She serves on numerous boards, including Uber and The Center for Public Integrity.

Her last two books, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success* and *Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder* and *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night At A Time*, on the science, history and mystery of sleep, both became instant international bestsellers.

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## ABOUT SARA MARTIN RAUCH, MS

DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY & PLANNING, WELCOA



Sara's purpose is helping people fulfill their highest potential in work and life through corporate health promotion. She has launched award winning wellness programs, created new wellness products, and engineered work environments to create cultures of health across multiple industries. At WELCOA, she is responsible for conceptualizing the strategy behind new innovative products and bringing them to market, developing new content and content channels and maintaining relationships with WELCOA's network of business partners and content providers. She has been a session and keynote speaker at a variety of community and national events including National Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) Conference, the Art and Science of Health Promotion Conference, and the National WELCOA Training Summit. She sits on the Johns Hopkins Mental Health in the Workplace Advisory Council, the CDC Workplace Health Resource Center Steering Committee, and has served as Ambassador for the American Association of University Women.

Sara's background includes corporate training, organizational development, and health promotion management. Before joining the WELCOA Team, Sara managed the award-winning Well@Work employee wellness program for the 5,000 employees of BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and served as Health Management Consultant for the BlueCross commercial book of business. Sara received her BA in Psychology from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and her M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

In 2007 Arianna Huffington had a major health wake-up call. Her demanding career was wreaking havoc on her health, and like many professionals, she found the pervasive definition of success one that was fundamentally at odds with wellbeing. Since then, she has not only sought to thrive more in her own life, but set out to help others do the same. Her best-selling books *Thrive* and *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life One Night at a Time* both converge with corporate health promotion by tackling the intersection between wellbeing and work, and her corporate wellness start-up Thrive Global aims to do the same. WELCOA sat down with Arianna to learn more about what it takes to thrive and what the work place can do to tackle the sleep deprivation crisis.

★ **SARA MARTIN RAUCH** Personally, I first became interested in wellbeing as it related to work while watching my father wrestle with a lack of purpose, a toxic work culture, a resulting drug and alcohol addiction, and the aftermath. I watched work unravel my father and leave him emotionally bankrupt, eventually letting his addiction take over, and losing his job, his freedom and his family. I thought as a young person: this can't be what work looks like. This can't be what my work life looks like. So, I went to school for Industrial/Organizational psychology (the psychology of work), and I made my career about helping work be part of the solution for people. Even still, your words at the beginning of *Thrive* where you call for a new definition of success—one that includes wellbeing—seem to be an ideal we still need to be granted permission to hold. What does it mean for you to include wellbeing in our definition of success?

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** That's an amazing story! And it so well illustrates my answer to your question: that we need to see how vital our overall well-being—and having a sense of purpose and meaning in life is a key part of our overall well-being—is to life.

And yet, for so many people, well-being and success, or at least their definition of success, has diverged, or are Venn diagrams that barely intersect. Ancient philosophers used to focus on the questions like: what is a good life, and what does it mean to live one. But somewhere along the way—a process that was greatly accelerated with the Industrial Revolution—success became mostly about money and status and power. But those don't fulfill us. What does fulfill us—meaning, purpose, family, friendships, deep connections with others—haven't changed. And so we have an epidemic of people having variations of the tragic experience of your father.

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And that's why it's so important to bring our definition of success back into alignment with what we really value.

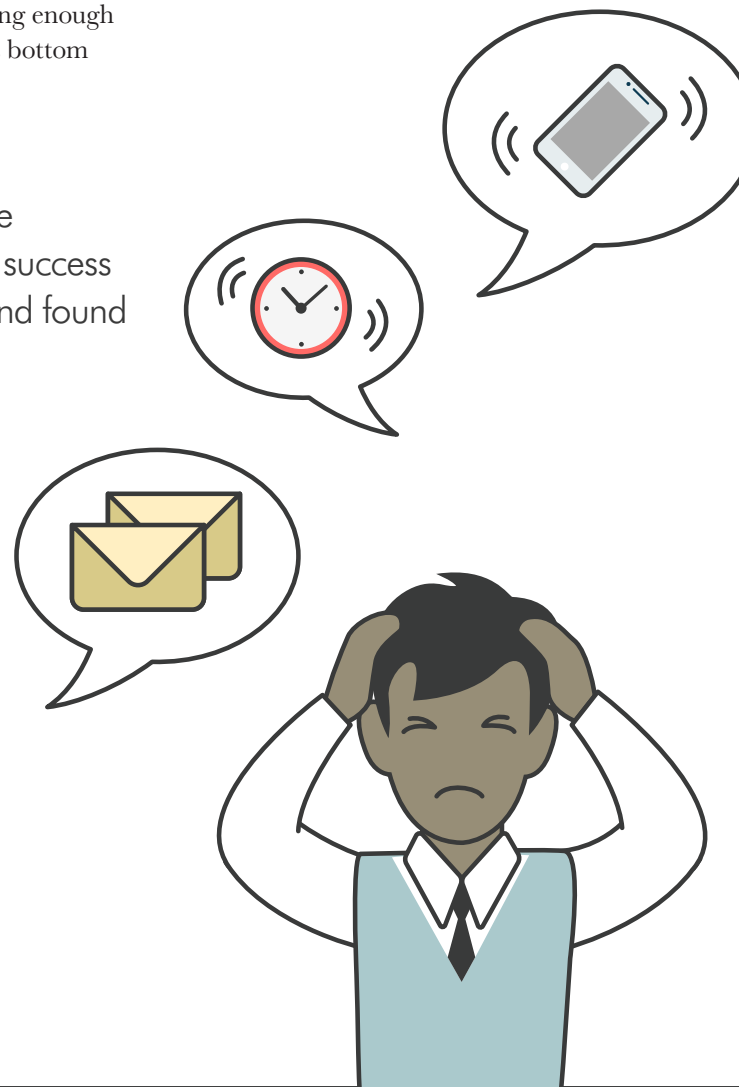
★ **SMR** The pervasive employee wellness value story is one that is still strongly tied to healthcare cost containment and health risk management. Looking at things from your perspective, what do you think is the true value of improving wellbeing at work that our industry should communicate?

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** You're exactly right that too many wellness programs have come to be seen by employees as simple health-cost saving measures, which benefit the company more than the workers. But what we need to do, and what Thrive Global strives to do, is go upstream and deal with the root causes of many of these conditions like smoking, obesity, and heart disease. And that means dealing with stress and burnout. Once you do that, a lot of those downstream problems will be mitigated. And that means not simply hectoring employees to lose weight or take blood pressure medication, but creating a corporate culture that encourages things we know help fight stress: time off, disconnecting, getting enough sleep each night, volunteering. These all create benefits for the company's bottom line, but they also benefit everybody. It's a win-win.

★ **SMR** What ultimately compelled you to launch Thrive Global? What is included in Thrive Global's definition of success as an organization? (I took the assessment on your site and found out I am Part-Time Thriving and have work to do.)

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** I'm glad you're at least part-time thriving—and I hope you'll score higher next time! What compelled me to launch Thrive Global was that several years ago I collapsed from exhaustion. I made some changes to my life, and then a few years later wrote two books about stress, burnout, and sleep: *Thrive* and *The Sleep Revolution*. And as I went around the world talking about these issues, I was overwhelmed by the response. Everywhere I'd go, I'd hear the same thing: how people were burned out, exhausted and felt like they just couldn't keep up anymore. And I realized that I had to go from writing about this problem to doing something about it. So I founded Thrive Global to help people move from knowing what they should do to actually doing it.

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★ **SMR** Let's switch gears and talk about sleep. At WELCOA, we of course track what our Members are looking for to help them design wellness initiatives for their own or client organizations. More than stress, physical activity, nutrition, program design, any other resource type, our Members are looking for resources about how to improve sleep hygiene amongst employee populations. Sleep is our #1 most searched keyword. You say in your new book *The Sleep Revolution* that we have a sleep crisis. You have a whole chapter devoted to sleep and the workplace where you make many points about the ways work impacts our sleep—from workload and scheduling to the built environment. Specifically, in what ways do you think the workplace is a driver of this crisis?

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** The workplace is the driver in many ways – most generally because to be able to sleep means putting away the day, and our day is filled with work (and, increasingly, with nothing but work). And technology has exacerbated and amplified this. Now that we're connected 24/7, we're also connected to work—and all of its anxieties, worries, emails and to-do items—24/7. So that's why at Thrive we don't talk about work/life balance, because that presumes work and life are on opposite sides. To find a new way of living, we need to find a new way of working, to integrate life into our work. So that means changing our business culture from one that celebrates burnout to one that celebrates the idea that taking care of yourself is the real sign of dedication to your job – because we now know from science the profound connection between well-being and performance.

★ **SMR** We talk a lot (and do a lot of dreaming too) at WELCOA about the future of the workplace—how do the workplaces of tomorrow support humans differently to improve health? From where you are standing now—having dived deeply into wellbeing as it relates to our performance and now even deeper into sleep as an antecedent of wellbeing—what do you think is the role of the workplace in addressing sleep deprivation among employees?

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** The workplace plays an important role. In a system in which people feel like they have to choose between sleep and succeeding at work, most people will choose the latter. That's the system much of the world is under now, but it's a false choice. What we're trying to do at Thrive Global is bring in the science that clearly shows that this is bad for both the

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employees and the companies. So businesses need to show employees that they're giving more than lip service to well-being.

★ **SMR** What do you want professionals in the employee wellness space to know about the impact that sleep can have on their own lives or on the lives of the employees they serve?

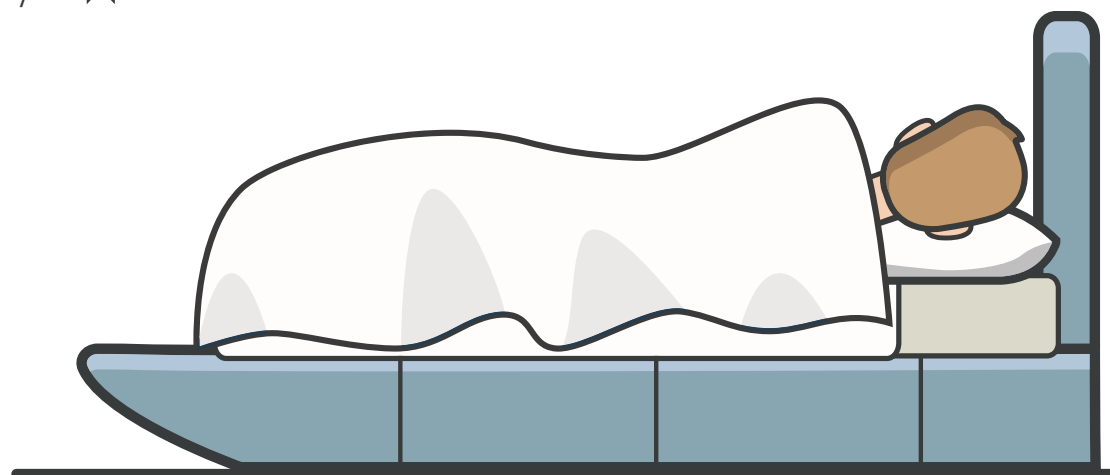
**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** Well, they probably already know quite a bit about it, but for those who are serving others, it's especially important to remember what they say on airplanes, to secure your own oxygen mask before helping others. You'll be a lot more effective championing well-being if you first take care of your own well-being!

★ **SMR** If you could mentor someone whose job was to design workplace initiatives to help employees thrive—whether it be in regard to sleep, wisdom, wellbeing, wonder or giving—what piece of advice would you give her (or him, of course)?

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON** First, to repeat the answer to the previous question, I'd tell her to take care of herself. And not just because that will make her more creative, resilient, and productive, but because she'll be modeling the change she wants to see. But also, and this is something we do at Thrive Global, I'd tell her to try to design programs that make change as easy as possible for people. At Thrive, we've broken down the elements to well-being into what we call "micro-steps," small, achievable habit changes that people can incorporate into their daily lives right away. People can get intimidated by the idea of changing their lives, so she should tell them it's okay to start small and not judge or blame themselves when they don't succeed right away.

★ **SMR** Thanks so much for your time. It has been an honor having a conversation with you. 🙌

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