



THRIVING IN BUSINESS AND BEYOND

with

Arianna Huffington

In this interview with The Shift Network's CEO Stephen Dinan, Arianna Huffington shares an exclusive glimpse into how she's able to do so much and still take great care of herself. Though her schedule is very full, she walks her talk balancing her professional life and personal life by recharging and renewing herself with the tools she describes in her book, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*.



1. How have your spiritual practices helped in the building of *The Huffington Post*?

The practices that mean so much to me are part of *HuffPost*'s DNA. To give just a few examples, in April we held our two-day Third Metric Live event, *Thrive*, in New York. More than 2,000 people attended to be part of a conversation on how we can unplug, recharge and renew ourselves, and redefine success beyond money and power. The Third Metric is a major editorial initiative at *The Huffington Post*. We're using all the tools at our disposal to tell the stories of people redefining success to include well-being, wisdom, wonder and

giving, and – just as important – inviting people to tell their stories themselves.

2. What do you see as the most significant mistake you made early on as an entrepreneur and how did you turn it around?

My most significant early mistake was buying into the collective delusion that burning out is the necessary price for accomplishment and success. Recent scientific findings make it clear that this couldn't be less true. Not only is there no tradeoff between living a well-rounded life and high performance, performance is actually improved when our lives include time for renewal, wisdom, wonder and giving. I wish I could go back to the early days of *The Huffington Post* and tell myself: "Arianna, your performance will actually improve if you can commit to not only working hard but also unplugging, recharging and renewing yourself." That would have saved me a lot of unnecessary stress, burnout and exhaustion. Years later, I turned this mistake around by adopting daily practices to keep me on track. The result is a more fulfilling life, one that gives me breathing spaces and a deeper perspective.

3. What did you do to consciously develop *The Huffington Post* as a trusted brand?

Early on, we established a strict set of guidelines for everything we publish. Everything has to clear a quality bar. We revere fact-checking, fairness and accuracy. As the saying goes, it's ok to have your own set of opinions, but not your own set of facts.

4. How have you built the principles of thriving into the DNA of your company?

At *The Huffington Post*, since the news never stops – and there is the temptation for editors, reporters, and engineers to try to match the twenty-four-hour news cycle – we do a lot to prevent burnout. First, we make it very clear that no one is expected to check work email and respond after hours or over the weekend (unless, of course, these are their working hours). Everyone has at least three weeks of vacation time, which they are highly encouraged to take. And I have implored *HuffPosters* – without much success, I must admit – to eat lunch away from their desks. We also have two nap rooms in our newsroom, which are now full most of the time, even though they were met with skepticism and reluctance when we installed them in the spring of 2011. Many were afraid their colleagues might think they were shirking their duties by taking a nap. We've made it very clear, however, that walking around drained and exhausted is what should be looked down on – not taking a break to rest and recharge.

5. What do you see as the flaws in a typical American entrepreneurial mindset and how do we fix them?

The big flaw is the belief that burning out is the necessary price for entrepreneurial success. Nothing succeeds like excess, we are told. If a little of something is good, more must be better. So working eighty hours a week must be better than working forty. And being plugged in 24/7 is assumed to be a standard requirement of every job worth having today – which means that getting by on less sleep and constant multitasking is an express elevator to the top in today's work world – especially in the highly-competitive, highly sleep-deprived startup world.

6. How do you define success now?

A sane definition of success has to go beyond how much money we can make, how big a house we can buy, and how high we can climb up the career ladder. Jobs and financial security will always be important, but when we fall into the trap of chasing only the successes built on money, fame and power, we miss out on the happiness, purpose and meaning that come from reaching out to others, pausing to wonder and connecting to that place from which everything is possible.

7. What are the daily practices and commitments that you have to encourage your own thriving and well-being?

I start every morning with 20 to 30 minutes of meditation and exercise as often as I can. I also have a specific time at night when I regularly turn off my devices – and gently escort them out of my bedroom. Disconnecting from the digital world helps me reconnect to my wisdom, intuition and creativity. When I wake up in the morning, I don't start my day by looking at my smartphone. I take a minute to breathe deeply, be grateful and set my intention for the day.

8. What are some tips to help a person transition to the mindset of thriving?

Introducing just five minutes of meditation into your day can make a profound difference. Eventually, you can build up to fifteen or twenty minutes a day (or more) but even just a few minutes will open the door to creating a new habit – and all the many proven benefits it brings.

9. How do you see the role of women in transforming our workplace cultures?

If we're going to redefine what success means, if we are going to include a Third Metric to success, beyond money and power, it's going to be women who will lead the way – and men, freed of the notion that the only road to success includes taking the Heart Attack Highway to Stress City, will gratefully join them both at work and at home. In fact we are already witnessing a global shift toward leadership values traditionally considered feminine: flexibility, compassion, collaboration, empathy and nurturing.

10. What are the three most influential books that you've read that helped you become a more enlightened business leader?

Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World
by Mark Williams and Danny Penman

Williams and Penman give a variety of quick and easy ways to practice mindfulness, including what they call “habit breaking.” Each day for a week you choose a habit such as brushing your teeth, drinking your morning coffee, or taking a shower, and simply pay attention to what’s happening while you do it. It’s really not so much habit breaking as habit unmaking – it’s taking something we’ve placed on autopilot and putting it back on the list of things we pay attention to.

Catching the Big Fish by David Lynch

Lynch, the renowned director, is also a long time meditator. “If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water,” he writes. “But if you want to catch the big fish, you’ve got to go deeper. Down deep, the fish are more powerful and more pure. They’re huge and abstract. And they’re very beautiful.”

Give and Take by Adam Grant

Grant, a Wharton professor, cites studies that show that those who give their time and effort to others end up achieving more success than those who don’t. Salespeople with the highest annual revenue are those who are the most motivated to help their customers and coworkers; the engineers with the highest productivity and fewest errors are those who do more favors for colleagues than they receive. Nice guys don’t finish last!

11. How do you promote authentic connections and community in the workplace?

It all comes down to what I described above about preventing burnout. When employees are rested and recharged, authentic connections and community follow.

12. What other company most inspires you and why?

More and more companies are recognizing that a company's bottom line and the health of its employees are, in fact, very much aligned and that when we treat them as separate, we pay a heavy price, both personally and collectively. Unilever, to give just one example, is working to improve the lives of its employees – with programs that provide individual coaching on exercise, nutrition and mental resilience – at the same time as it is trying to fulfill its stated goal of improving the health and well-being of a billion people around the world.