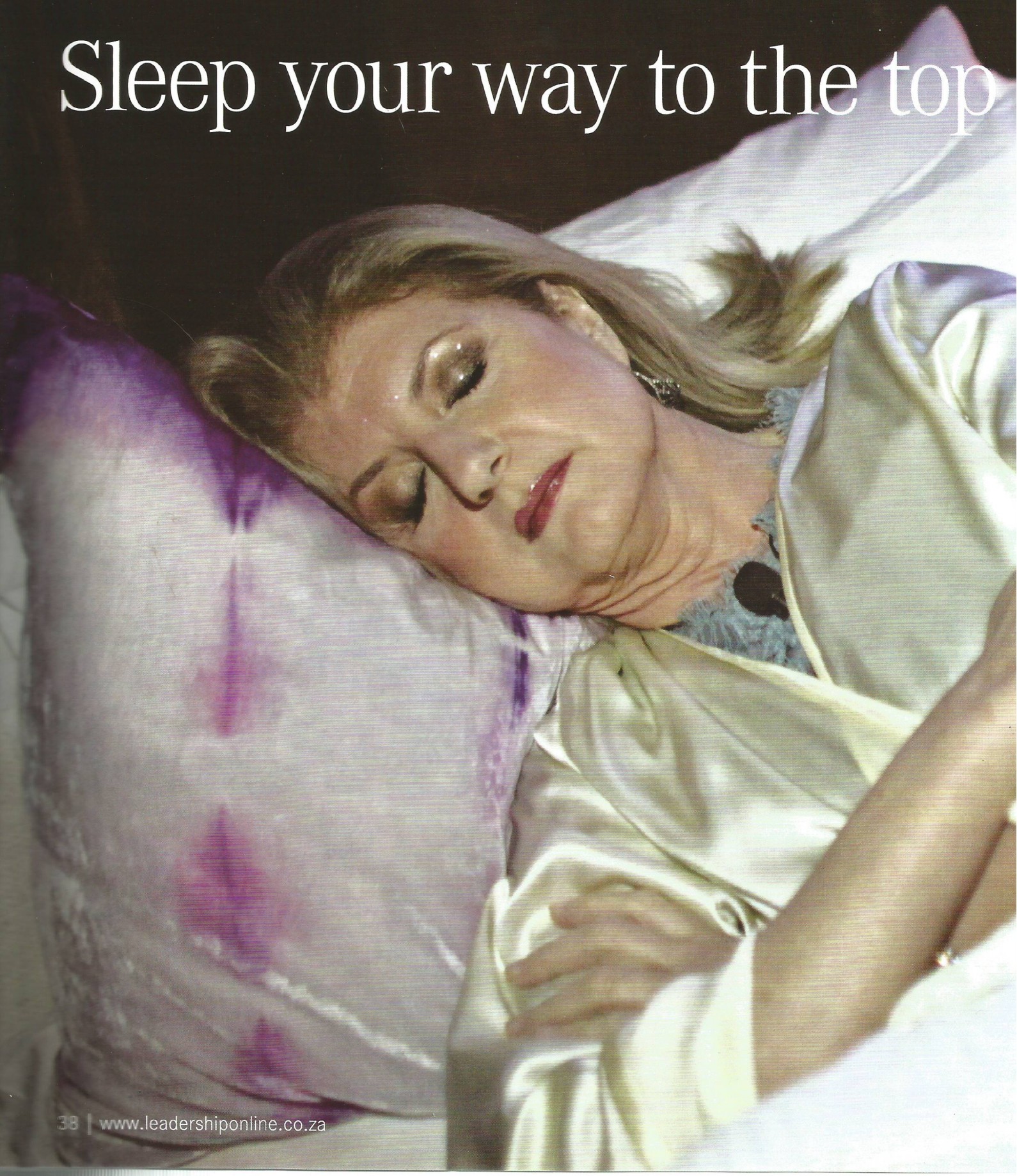


# Sleep your way to the top



**Media mogul Arianna Huffington is one of a number of high-profile international businesswomen calling for a more sustainable approach to success and leadership which includes wellbeing, compassion, mindfulness and self-nurturing. Can local businesswomen, and their male counterparts, learn from these feminist mass media mentors?**

In her new book, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Happier Life*, Arianna Huffington – American author, ex-politician, president and editor-in-chief of the Pulitzer Prize-winning news aggregator and blog *The Huffington Post*, and one of *TIME* Magazine’s Most Powerful Women of 2014 – shares the personal wake-up call that got her to question everything she believed about success. In 2007, when the two-year-old *Huffpost* was growing at a rapid rate, she collapsed from exhaustion in her office, smashing her cheekbone and cutting her eye in the process. She’d been working 18-hour days, seven days a week.

In the seven years since, she’s changed the way she works, and convincing others to do the same is now part of her life’s work. Her philosophy – that we should thrive as we succeed – works according to what she calls The Third Metric, which she explained in an interview with *Biz News*: “When I looked around at colleagues, friends, the world at large, [I realised] that we had shrunk the definition of success down to two metrics: money and power. We had left out what I now call the third metric, which includes our wellbeing, our wisdom, our capacity to wonder and bring joy into our lives, and our capacity to give. Without these four pillars, life is really reduced to our to-do list.”

She’s not the first woman in media to encourage a more nurturing approach to success. Oprah Winfrey paved the way for the others now challenging the macho approach to business, including Facebook’s chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer, president of the New America Foundation Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Marie Forleo, a web TV host and mentor at the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in South Africa.

The debates on women and leadership that these women, and others, have sparked, led Huffington to suggest a third women’s revolution is under way, one that builds on the bra-burning that got women into the workplace by questioning the philosophies, policies and practices of that workplace. She may have a point. In the *Forbes* article, “The 2013 Power Women of Davos”, Moira Forbes said: “Seeing Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg alongside Arianna Huffington, next to Marissa Mayer, was a

powerful reminder that women’s influence is on the rise, even in fields/industries where their representation may still be limited.”

And if the spate of online debates surrounding these women are anything to go by, their views are gaining traction. As Samantha Page, editor of *O, The Oprah Magazine South Africa*, says: “It’s exciting to have the conversation around women in leadership brought back to the watercooler and the dinner table. Not since writers like Gloria Steinem, Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Eve Ensler, to name a few, have we had such vigorous debate about feminism.”

### Why listen?

Why should the masculine business model, transported from America to the rest of the world, be challenged? In the epilogue to *Thrive*, which is packed with personal vignettes and up-to-the-minute research, Huffington explains: “We now know through the latest scientific findings that if we worship money, we’ll never feel truly abundant. If we worship power, recognition and fame, we’ll never feel we have enough. And if we live our lives madly rushing around, trying to find and save time, we’ll always find ourselves living in a time famine, frazzled and stressed.”

The Third Metric is not just a nice idea, meant to make life cushier. It’s about making us more productive workers and leaders. We need only think back to June, when Jacob Zuma’s ability to lead was questioned owing to a heart condition, diabetes, high blood pressure and exhaustion, to see how crucial health is for leadership. Following the apparent suicides of top executives, including Tata MD Karl Slym and former Nokia CEO Kari Kairamo, and the deaths of local media personalities Eddie Zondi and Vuyo Mbuli, *Destiny SA* magazine considered the mental health and lifestyle challenges that come with the pressures and pace of being in positions of prominence.

Huffington covers the possible costs of climbing the corporate ladder: burnout (one Harvard Medical School study found that 96% of leaders felt burned out); addictions; depression; and lifestyle diseases such as heart disease. And while the health of businessmen is frequently discussed, that of businesswomen is of great concern – not only because many working women are also mothers, but because their health may suffer more: An American study

showed that “women in stressful jobs have a nearly 40% increased risk of heart disease and a 60% greater risk of diabetes,” says Huffington. In SA, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a major killer of women, with one in four likely to suffer from some form of CVD before 60, says the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA.

Huffington believes there should be no trade-off between being good at your work and living the good life: we should prioritise both. For Huffington, this means adding wisdom, wonder and giving to our daily (working) lives. Above all, it means bringing wellness into every workstation. Here are some of her suggestions.

### Corporate Kumbaya

According to the 2012 Discovery Healthy Company Index survey, high blood pressure and high cholesterol are the two biggest health threats facing corporate South Africa. Given that stress worsens both these risk factors, reducing stress remains key. Less stress has cognitive and mental pay-offs, too: When you’re calmer, you think clearer, essential for making high-level decisions. “After all, the function of leadership is to be able to see the iceberg before it hits the Titanic,” says Huffington.

So, given that research by leadership training company, Fierce Inc., showed that 58% of workers feel no less stressed after holidays, what’s the best way to ease stress? Mindfulness meditation, says Huffington: “Through mindfulness, I found a practice that helped bring me fully present and in the moment, even in the most hectic of circumstances.”

To prove that she hasn’t gone hippie, she lists a host of professionals ‘outing’ themselves as meditators: twitter cofounder Evan Williams, LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner, the late Steve Jobs, Ford Chairman Bill Ford...

While *HuffPost* staffers can take advantage of the meditation classes on offer, companies around the world are also using meditation to improve worker productivity. The Bank of England offers its employees meditation; the Search Inside Yourself meditation programme is hugely popular at Google’s HQ; and Fortune 500 companies who trained at the United States Institute for Mindful Leadership reported improved decision making.

While South African employers may be slow on the uptake where meditation is concerned, Huffington includes practical steps for individuals. (Visit [www.mindfulness.org.za](http://www.mindfulness.org.za), a

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ARIANNA HUFFINGTON | Leadership

We should thrive  
as we succeed

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non-profit that run programmes developed by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, whom Huffington credits with making meditation “make sense” to her.) Who knows? Perhaps you, like Huffington, may one day kick-start conferences with a group meditation.

## Walk the talk

The first investor to support *The Huffington Post* was convinced to do so while on a hike with Huffington, who recommends scheduling meetings that involve movement. It's not a bad idea, considering that South Africa has the highest overweight and obesity rates in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a recent Lancet study, and that 45% of those suffering from burnout never exercise, according to research by the WorkWell Research Unit at North-West University. And anyone who has had to sit through a dull PowerPoint presentation can attest to the fact that when we sit, our minds wander. But when we wander, our minds still.

The sedentary nature of desk work is a leading cause of poor health. In the 2012 Discovery Healthy Company Index survey, 68% of employees didn't meet the recommended physical activity guidelines. Since most people are too bushed (and busy) to fit in gym sessions at the end of a long day), and that most of their lives are spent at work, perhaps it's high time movement entered every workplace.

## Sleep your way to the top

Of all the lifestyle changes Huffington made, getting more sleep was the most transformational. So much so, she calls herself a “sleep evangelist” and she's had nap rooms installed at *HuffPost* offices.

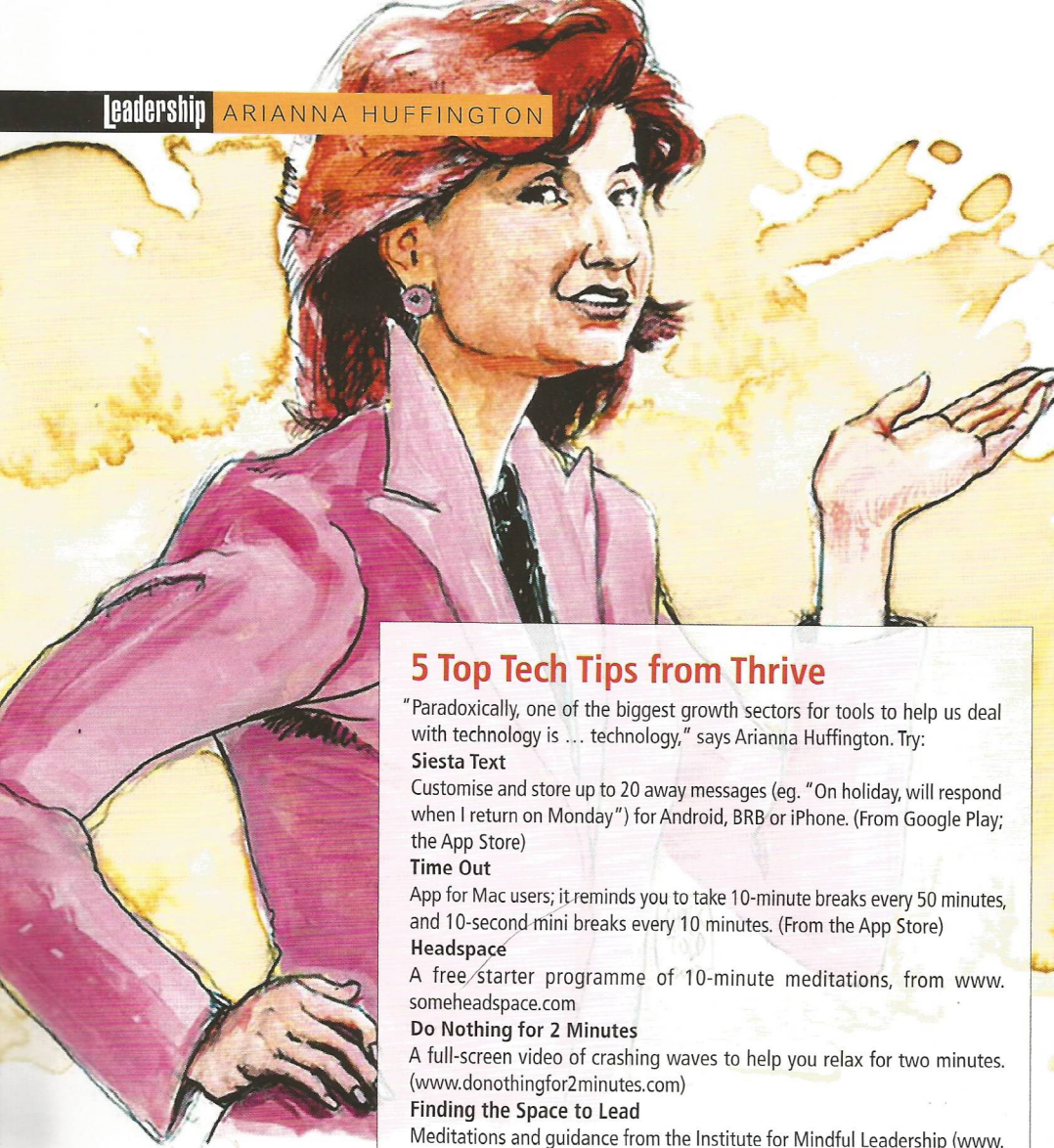
And she's not the only one with a new belief in the merits of slumber. When Google China's CEO was diagnosed with cancer, he decided to look after his health by getting more sleep, firstly, saying: “I naively used to compete with others to see who could sleep less.” Huffington

balks at this “time macho” – the way in which sleep is sacrificed for success.

Donald Trump credits his success to getting by on three or four hours' kip a night. Even our own Jonathan Jansen, in his book *Letters to My Children*, said: “My life changed when I realised I could excel on four hours' sleep per night; sleep is a learnt behaviour.”

But this is detrimental for the majority of us, say sleep experts in a spate of media articles. In one recent BBC feature, medical researchers said society had become “supremely arrogant” in ignoring the importance of sleep and that doctors should actually begin prescribing it. We're a sleep-deprived society, and reports of sleep disorders are increasing so much, specialised sleep clinics are popping up across the country.

Apparently, we're getting two hours less sleep a night than 60 years ago. In terms of sleep cycles, those 60 minutes mean something. Every night as we sleep, we pass through around four sleep stages, which each includes REM



## 5 Top Tech Tips from Thrive

"Paradoxically, one of the biggest growth sectors for tools to help us deal with technology is ... technology," says Arianna Huffington. Try:

### Siesta Text

Customise and store up to 20 away messages (eg. "On holiday, will respond when I return on Monday") for Android, BRB or iPhone. (From Google Play; the App Store)

### Time Out

App for Mac users; it reminds you to take 10-minute breaks every 50 minutes, and 10-second mini breaks every 10 minutes. (From the App Store)

### Headspace

A free starter programme of 10-minute meditations, from [www.someheadspace.com](http://www.someheadspace.com)

### Do Nothing for 2 Minutes

A full-screen video of crashing waves to help you relax for two minutes. ([www.donothingfor2minutes.com](http://www.donothingfor2minutes.com))

### Finding the Space to Lead

Meditations and guidance from the Institute for Mindful Leadership ([www.findingthespacetolead.com](http://www.findingthespacetolead.com))

sleep, the dream stage when brain activity is as active as when we are awake, perhaps even higher. Your brain also uses this time to integrate new facts and lessons into existing knowledge, and to process memories and emotions. The first cycle of REM is short, but after six hours of sleep, it gets longer. This is why the fact that we're sleeping two hours less a night than before is worrying: we may be sacrificing REM, vital for our moods and learning ability.

If you're overtired, the brain's amygdala (emotion centre) is up to 60% more reactive, and its connection to the prefrontal cortex (responsible for judgment) is weakened. Meaning? You're more emotional, less rational.

It's as bad as arriving at work drunk, says sleep technician Anton Fourie, a clinical technologist at sleep centres at Milnerton and Durbanville MediClinics, given the effects of sleep deprivation, including: "Irritability, cognitive impairment, memory loss, yawning,

hallucinations, tremors, aches, decreased accuracy, increased heart rate and development of co-morbidities such as diabetes, obesity and impaired immunity."

And while we know that after one week of sleeping five hours or less a night, a man's testosterone drops by 10 to 15%, less is known about why women are among the most chronically sleep-deprived. "Women are 1.4 times more likely to report insomnia and in general suffer more sleep problems than men," says Fourie.

So if there's one tip we should take from *Thrive*, it's to prioritise sleep.

### Digital detox

In what she admits is a paradox, Huffington says switching off from our devices is essential – perhaps rich, coming from a media mogul who apparently carries two cellphones. But she's trying to set an example. Her 'no emails after hours' company policy is appreciated by her

staff, who return to work recharged. Indeed, going home at 17h30 to be with the family, as Sheryl Sandberg does, is pointless if you're constantly checking your phone for work emails or social media updates.

Increasingly, international companies are taking heed of the added stress and distraction that heightened connectivity brings. Companies that have suggested 'quiet time' or PTOs (Predictable Nights Off) from emails and smartphones, say productivity and worker satisfaction has improved.

Ironically, in a move you'd expect from a media group, *HuffPost* has introduced features that help motivate users to return to a state of calm: the smartphone app *GPS for Soul* features breathing exercises, pictures of your loved ones and more; while *HuffPost's* Screen Sense section publishes the latest reports on how technology is affecting our lives.

### The bigger picture

*Thrive* includes this 2006 quote by British Prime Minister David Cameron: "It's time we focused not just on GDP but on GWB – general well-being." This sentiment points to the growing field of 'happiness economics', which is getting governments to factor in emotions as well as economics. In 2013, *The Economist* reported that the happiness industry "was one of the more surprising industries to have taken off during the current period of economic downturn."

Research is proving that the old motivators – money and power – are no indicator for either productivity or happiness. Huffington points to a 2012 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which showed the countries that worked fewer hours (Holland, Germany, Norway) ranked higher in productivity than those that put in the most hours (Greece, Hungary, Poland). The 2012 World Happiness Report, commissioned by the UN, found that "at any given level of income, people who cared more about their earnings were less happy overall." These macro-level findings should inform the way businesses operate, suggests Huffington.

### First-world problems?

Huffington is aware that the principles she advocates may be seen as a luxury that only the financially secure, developed nations can entertain. So, does her Third Metric approach have a place in South Africa?

The figures suggest so. According to Statistics SA, work absenteeism costs our economy R12 billion annually. Discovery Health's research shows that eight working days are lost to illness or injury per employee per year, R10 000 per person annually. Occupational Care South Africa found that two out of three employees who fail to show up for work aren't actually physically sick; while a 2013 study by the WorkWell Research Unit shows that medical aid expenditure on employees who are burnt out is double.

In terms of legislature, worker wellbeing is no longer a luxury. As part of the New Companies Act of 2011, companies are obliged to consider worker wellbeing under social responsibility.

"In the past, most wellness initiatives were driven by a moral case," explains Dr Ina Rothman, Managing Director of AfriForte, the private sector company that converts WorkWell's research into practical risk management and action research tools for business clients. "Globally, and even more so in SA, the business and legal case for wellbeing is becoming more and more important."

Companies are increasingly realising that their employees' wellbeing is not a luxury – it's partly their responsibility, and there's a growing number of employee wellbeing programmes being implemented nationwide. The annual Discovery Healthy Company Index leads the way in showing which companies take health most seriously, awarding for various categories including Healthiest Company, Best Facilities and Least Stressed Employees. As Discovery points out, good results not only translate into more productivity; they enhance a firm's reputation, helping attract and retain staff.

Rothman says preventing burnout has become standard practice in many large firms, as are awareness campaigns and stress-management initiatives, and research by the Top Employers Institute South Africa showed that firms offering support to staff suffering from burnout rose from 36% in 2013 to 46% in 2014 and there was an 11% rise in those with sports facilities on site.

But this is not to say things are as positive as they should be. There are specific local challenges that need to be taken into account when it comes to employee wellbeing in South Africa, including:

Lack of mental health support: Health and stress management expert Dr Arien van der Merwe has said that well-designed wellness

programmes should focus on "maintaining the balance and harmony of all six levels of human existence: physical body, mind, emotions, soul/spirit and occupational (including environmental) aspects." While an on-site gym takes care of the physical, companies should take emotional wellbeing as seriously because despite the fact that one in three South Africans will likely suffer from mental illness, government expenditure on mental health is so minimal, some provinces are actually unable to report actual figures for it. SA Depression & Anxiety Group, for instance, gets no government funding, and in 2013, psychiatry was allocated just 4% of the health budget. Since national mental health services are inadequately resourced, companies should start talking about mental wellness (and perhaps, like Huffington suggests, consider mindfulness meditation classes) with the mind to decrease the stigma around disclosure and offer support for conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Cultural factors: "Cultural sensitivity in the measurement of stress and burnout risks is very important in SA," says Dr Rothman. Reporting on psychological stress is often seen as a weakness, and the concept of stress is sometimes foreign: "I've been confronted with comments such as, 'There's not even a word for stress or burnout in my language, therefore it doesn't exist in my culture'," says Dr Rothman.

Class considerations: While worker safety was first highlighted in the mining industry in SA, current wellbeing initiatives still tend to focus on higher level employees. "The situational factors affecting wellbeing for lower level workers differ from higher level workers," says Dr Rothman, but research here is limited and challenged by language barriers. "We need to put more effort in this," she says.

The need for evidence: A considerable challenge to the sustainability of employee wellbeing initiatives is the need to prove the impact of these efforts by showing the return on investment, says Dr Rothman. Otherwise, it makes no business sense. "Wellbeing needs to talk the language of business and the language of boardrooms! How do wellness investments contribute to productivity, attendance levels, work engagement, retention, corporate citizenship behaviour, decrease in stress and burnout, and employee health? Airy-fairy stuff will not be sustainable in the long run," she argues.

And, perhaps, therein lies the rub. In tough times, money still holds the greatest power. So while arguing for worker wellbeing on the basis of proven improved productivity and profitability seems counter to the basis of Huffington's Third Metric philosophy, this may be the only way her nurturing approach can get its foot in the boardroom door.

Huffington's book has met with some criticism: some recall the anti-feminist stance of her youth; others say staff worked long shifts to set up this year's Thrive conference... But these remarks could be seen as a form of PHD (Pull Her Down) syndrome, and many appreciate Huffington as a role model for personal transformation and work-life balance. As *O's Page* says: "I loved *Thrive* for the perspective she's able to share, having been a working mother and successful career woman. She has been there and done that and has lived to tell the tale – an enlightened one, at that."

We may not be near the tipping point Huffington sees in the US, but with talk and action around worker wellbeing gaining traction globally, perhaps it won't be long before women leaders here ride the Third Wave. ▲

Deidre Donnelly

