

Excerpt from: *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*

By Arianna Huffington

On the morning of April 6, 2007, I was lying on the floor of my home office in a pool of blood. On my way down, my head had hit the corner of my desk, cutting my eye and breaking my cheekbone. I had collapsed from exhaustion and lack of sleep. In the wake of my collapse, I found myself going from doctor to doctor, from brain MRI to CAT scan to echocardiogram, to find out if there was any underlying medical problem beyond exhaustion. There wasn't, but doctors' waiting rooms, it turns out, were good places for me to ask myself a lot of questions about the kind of life I was living.

We founded *The Huffington Post* in 2005, and two years in we were growing at an incredible pace. I was on the cover of magazines and had been chosen by *Time* as one of the world's 100 Most Influential People. But after my fall, I had to ask myself, Was this what success looked like? Was this the life I wanted? I was working eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, trying to build a business, expand our coverage, and bring in investors. But my life, I realized, was out of control. In terms of 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 success. I knew something had to radically change. I could not go on that way.

This was a classic wake-up call. Looking back on my life, I had other times when I should have woken up but didn't. This time I really did and made many changes in the way I live my life, including adopting daily practices to keep me on track—and out of doctors' waiting rooms. The result is a more fulfilling life, one that gives me breathing spaces and a deeper perspective.

This book was conceived as I tried to pull together all the insights I had gleaned about my work and life during the weeks I spent writing the commencement speech I was to give to the class of 2013 at Smith College. With two daughters in college, I take commencement speeches very seriously. It's such a special moment for the graduating class—a pause, a kind of parenthesis in time following four (or five, or six) years of nonstop learning and growing just before the start of an adult life spent moving forward and putting all of that knowledge into action. It's a unique marker in their lives—and for fifteen minutes or so I have

the graduates' undivided attention. The challenge is to say something equal to the occasion, something that will be useful during a charged time of new beginnings.

“Commencement speakers,” I told the women graduates, “are traditionally expected to tell the graduating class how to go out there and climb the ladder of success. But I want to ask you instead to redefine success. Because the world you are headed into desperately needs it. And because you are up to the challenge. Your education at Smith has made it unequivocally clear that you are entitled to take your place in the world wherever you want that place to be. You can work in any field, and you can make it to the top of any field. But what I urge you to do is not just take your place at the top of the world, but to change the world.”

The moving response to the speech made me realize how widespread is the longing among so many of us to redefine success and what it means to lead “the good life.”

“What is a good life?” has been a question asked by philosophers going back to the ancient Greeks. But somewhere along the line we abandoned the question and shifted our attention to how much money we can make, how big a house we can buy, and how high we can climb up the career ladder. Those are legitimate questions, particularly at a time when women are still attempting to gain an equal seat at the table. But as I painfully discovered, they are far from the only questions that matter in creating a successful life.

Over time our society's notion of success has been reduced to money and power. In fact, at this point, success, money, and power have practically become synonymous in the minds of many.

This idea of success can work—or at least appear to work—in the short term. But over the long term, money and power by themselves are like a two-legged stool—you can balance on them for a while, but eventually you're going to topple over. And more and more people—very successful people—are toppling over.

So what I pointed out to the Smith College graduates was that the way we've defined success is not enough. And it's no longer sustainable: It's no longer sustainable for human beings or for societies. To live the lives we truly want and deserve, and not just the lives we settle for, we need a Third Metric, a third measure of success that goes beyond the two metrics of money and power, and consists of four pillars: well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving. These four pillars make up the four sections of this book.

First, well- being: If we don't redefine what success is, the price we pay in terms of our health and well- being will continue to rise, as I found out in my own life. As my eyes opened, I saw that this new phase in my life was very much in tune with the zeitgeist, the spirit of our times. Every conversation I had seemed to eventually come around to the same dilemmas we are all facing— the stress of overbusyness, overworking, overconnecting on social media, and underconnecting with ourselves and with one another. The space, the gaps, the pauses, the silence— those things that allow us to regenerate and recharge— had all but disappeared in my own life and in the lives of so many I knew.

It seemed to me that the people who were genuinely thriving in their lives were the ones who had made room for well- being, wisdom, wonder, and giving. Hence the “Third Metric” was born— the third leg of the stool in living a successful life. What started with redefining my own life path and priorities led me to see an awakening that is taking place globally. We are entering a new era. How we measure success is changing.

And it's changing not a moment too soon— especially for women, since a growing body of data shows that the price of the current false promise of success is already higher for women than it is for men. Women in stressful jobs have a nearly 40 percent increased risk of heart disease, and a 60 percent greater risk of diabetes. In the past thirty years, as women have made substantial strides in the workplace, self- reported levels of stress have gone up 18 percent.

Those who have just started out in the workforce— and those who haven't even yet begun— are already feeling the effects. According to the American Psychological Association, the millennial generation is at the top of the chart for stress levels— more so than baby boomers and “matures,” as the study dubbed those over sixty- seven.

The Western workplace culture— exported to many other parts of the world— is practically fueled by stress, sleep deprivation, and burnout. I had come face-to-face— or, I should say, face-to-floor— with the problem when I collapsed. Even as stress undermines our health, the sleep deprivation so many of us experience in striving to get ahead at work is profoundly— and negatively— affecting our creativity, our productivity, and our decision making. The *Exxon Valdez* wreck, the explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle, and the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island all were at least partially caused by a lack of sleep.

And in the winter of 2013, the deadly Metro- North derailment caused when William Rockefeller, the engineer at the controls, fell asleep, focused national attention on the dangers of sleep deprivation throughout the transportation industry. As John Paul Wright, an engineer for one of the country's largest freight rail operators, put it, "The biggest issue with railroad workers is fatigue, not pay. We are paid very well. But we sacrifice our bodies and minds to work the long hours it takes to make the money, not to mention the high divorce rate, self-medicating, and stress."

Over 30 percent of people in the United States and the United Kingdom are not getting enough sleep. And it's not just decision making and cognitive functions that take a hit. Even traits that we associate with our core personality and values are affected by too little sleep. According to a study from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, sleep deprivation reduces our emotional intelligence, self-regard, assertiveness, sense of independence, empathy toward others, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, positive thinking, and impulse control. In fact, the only thing the study found that gets better with sleep deprivation is "magical thinking" and reliance on superstition. So if you're interested in fortune-telling, go ahead and burn the midnight oil. For the rest of us, we need to redefine what we value, and change workplace culture so that working till all hours and walking around exhausted become stigmatized instead of lauded.

In the new definition of success, building and looking after our financial capital is not enough. We need to do everything we can to protect and nurture our human capital. My mother was an expert at that. I still remember, when I was twelve years old, a very successful Greek businessman coming over to our home for dinner. He looked rundown and exhausted. But when we sat down to dinner, he told us how well things were going for him. He was thrilled about a contract he had just won to build a new museum. My mother was not impressed. "I don't care how well your business is doing," she told him bluntly, "you're not taking care of you. Your business might have a great bottom line, but you are your most important capital. There are only so many withdrawals you can make from your health bank account, but you just keep on withdrawing. You could go bankrupt if you don't make some deposits soon." And indeed, not long after that, the man had to be rushed to the hospital for an emergency angioplasty.

When we include our own well-being in our definition of success, another thing that changes is our relationship with time. There is even a term now for our

stressed-out sense that there's never enough time for what we want to do— "time famine." Every time we look at our watches it seems to be later than we think. I personally have always had a very strained relationship with time. Dr. Seuss summed it up beautifully: "How did it get so late so soon?" he wrote. "It's night before it's afternoon. December is here before it's June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?"

Sound familiar? And when we're living a life of perpetual time famine, we rob ourselves of our ability to experience another key element of the Third Metric: wonder, our sense of delight in the mysteries of the universe, as well as the everyday occurrences and small miracles that fill our lives.

Another of my mother's gifts was to be in a constant state of wonder at the world around her. Whether she was washing dishes or feeding seagulls at the beach or reprimanding overworking businessmen, she maintained her sense of wonder at life. And whenever I'd complain or was upset about something in my own life, my mother had the same advice: "Darling, just change the channel. You are in control of the clicker. Don't replay the bad, scary movie."

Well-being, wonder. Both of these are key to creating the Third Metric. And then there is the third indispensable W in redefining success: wisdom.

Wherever we look around the world, we see smart leaders— in politics, in business, in media— making terrible decisions. What they're lacking is not IQ, but wisdom. Which is no surprise; it has never been harder to tap into our inner wisdom, because in order to do so, we have to disconnect from all our omnipresent devices— our gadgets, our screens, our social media— and reconnect with ourselves.

To be honest, it's not something that comes naturally to me. The last time my mother got angry with me before she died was when she saw me reading my email and talking to my children at the same time. "I abhor multitasking," she said, in a Greek accent that puts mine to shame. In other words, being connected in a shallow way to the entire world can prevent us from being deeply connected to those closest to us— including ourselves. And that is where wisdom is found.

I'm convinced of two fundamental truths about human beings. The first is that we all have within us a centered place of wisdom, harmony, and strength. This is a truth that all the world's philosophies and religions— whether Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Buddhism— acknowledge in one form or another: "The

kingdom of God is within you.” Or as Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world.”

The second truth is that we’re all going to veer away from that place again and again and again. That’s the nature of life. In fact, we may be off course more often than we are on course.

The question is how quickly can we get back to that centered place of wisdom, harmony, and strength. It’s in this sacred place that life is transformed from struggle to grace, and we are suddenly filled with trust, whatever our obstacles, challenges, or disappointments. As Steve Jobs said in his now legendary commencement address at Stanford, “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something— your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”

There is a purpose to our lives, even if it is sometimes hidden from us, and even if the biggest turning points and heartbreaks only make sense as we look back, rather than as we are experiencing them. So we might as well live life as if—as the poet Rumi put it— everything is rigged in our favor.

But our ability to regularly get back to this place of wisdom— like so many other abilities— depends on how much we practice and how important we make it in our lives. And burnout makes it much harder to tap into our wisdom. In an op-ed in *The New York Times*, Erin Callan, former chief financial officer of Lehman Brothers, who left the firm a few months before it went bankrupt, wrote about the lessons she learned about experiencing burnout: “Work always came first, before my family, friends and marriage— which ended just a few years later.”

Looking back, she realized how counterproductive overworking was. “I now believe that I could have made it to a similar place with at least some better version of a personal life,” she wrote. In fact, working to the point of burnout wasn’t just bad for her personally. It was also, we now know, bad for Lehman Brothers, which no longer exists. After all, the function of leadership is to be able to see the iceberg before it hits the *Titanic*. And when you’re burned out and exhausted, it’s much harder to see clearly the dangers— or opportunities— ahead. And that’s the connection we need to start making if we want to accelerate changing the way we live and work.

Well- being, wisdom, and wonder. The last element to the Third Metric of success is the willingness to give of ourselves, prompted by our empathy and compassion. America's Founding Fathers thought enough of the idea of the pursuit of happiness to enshrine it in the Declaration of Independence. But their notion of this "unalienable right" did not mean the pursuit of more ways for us to be entertained. Rather, it was the happiness that comes from feeling good by doing good. It was the happiness that comes from being a productive part of a community and contributing to its greater good.

There is plenty of scientific data that shows unequivocally that empathy and service increase our own well- being. That's how the elements of the Third Metric of success become part of a virtuous cycle.

If you are lucky, you have a "final straw" moment before it's too late. For me, it was collapsing from exhaustion in 2007. For *New York Times* food writer Mark Bittman, it was obsessively checking his email via his in- seat phone on a transatlantic flight, leading him to confess, "My name is Mark, and I'm a techno- addict." For Carl Honoré, author of *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement Is Challenging the Cult of Speed*, it was contemplating "one minute bedtime stories" for his two- year- old son to save time. For Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini, it was a skiing accident that left him with a broken neck and eventually led him to the rejuvenating practices of yoga and meditation. For HopeLab president Pat Christen, it was the alarming realization that, due to her dependence on technology, "I had stopped looking in my children's eyes." For Anna Holmes, the founder of the site Jezebel, it was the realization that the deal she had made with herself came at a very high price: "I realized, 'Okay, if I work at 110 percent, I get good results. If I work a little harder, I'll get even more out of it.' The caveat of this success, however, had personal repercussions: I never relaxed. . . . I was increasingly stressed. . . . Not only was I posting once every ten minutes for twelve hours straight, but I also worked for the two and a half hours before we started posting and late into the night to prepare for the next day." She finally decided to leave Jezebel. "It took over a year to decompress . . . a year until I was focusing more on myself than on what was happening on the Internet."

Since my own final straw moment, I have become an evangelist for the need to disconnect from our always connected lives and reconnect with ourselves. It has guided the editorial philosophy behind *HuffPost's* twenty- six Lifestyle sections in the United States, in which we promote the ways that we can take care of ourselves

and lead balanced, centered lives while making a positive difference in the world. As *HuffPost* is spreading around the world, we're incorporating this editorial priority into all our international editions— in Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, as well as in Japan, Brazil, and South Korea.

I remember it as if it were yesterday: I was twenty- three years old and I was on a promotional tour for my first book, *The Female Woman*, which had become an unexpected international bestseller. I was sitting in my room in some anonymous European hotel. The room could have been a beautifully arranged still life. There were yellow roses on the desk, Swiss chocolates by my bed, and French champagne on ice. The only noise was the crackling of the ice as it slowly melted into water. The voice in my head was much louder. "Is that all there is?" Like a broken record, the question famously posed by Peggy Lee (for those old enough to remember) kept repeating itself in my brain, robbing me of the joy I had expected to find in my success. "Is that really all there is?" If this is "living," then what is life? Can the goal of life really be just about money and recognition? From a part of myself, deep inside me— from the part of me that is my mother's daughter— came a resounding "No!" It is an answer that turned me gradually but firmly away from lucrative offers to speak and write again and again on the subject of "the female woman." It started me instead on the first step of a long journey.

My journey from that first moment of recognition that I didn't want to live my life within the boundaries of what our culture defined as success was hardly a straight line. At times it was more like a spiral, with a lot of downturns when I found myself caught up in the very whirlwind that I knew would not lead to the life I most wanted.

That's how strong is the pull of the first two metrics, even for someone as blessed as I was to have a mother who lived a Third Metric life before I knew what the Third Metric was. That's why this book is a kind of a homecoming for me.

When I first lived in New York in the eighties, I found myself at lunches and dinners with people who had achieved the first two metrics of success— money and power— but who were still looking for something more. Lacking a line of royalty in America, we have elevated to princely realms the biggest champions of money and power. Since one gains today's throne not by fortune of birth but by the visible markers of success, we dream of the means by which we might be crowned. Or perhaps it's the constant expectation, drummed into us from childhood, that no matter how humble our origins we, too, can achieve the American dream. And the

American dream, which has been exported all over the world, is currently defined as the acquisition of things: houses, cars, boats, jets, and other grown-up toys.

But I believe the second decade of this new century is already very different. There are, of course, still millions of people who equate success with money and power—who are determined to never get off that treadmill despite the cost in terms of their well-being, relationships, and happiness. There are still millions desperately looking for the next promotion, the next million-dollar payday that they believe will satisfy their longing to feel better about themselves, or silence their dissatisfaction. But both in the West and in emerging economies, there are more people every day who recognize that these are all dead ends—that they are chasing a broken dream. That we cannot find the answer in our current definition of success alone because—as Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland—“There is no there there.”

More and more scientific studies and more and more health statistics are showing that the way we’ve been leading our lives—what we prioritize and what we value—is not working. And growing numbers of women—and men—are refusing to join the list of casualties. Instead, they are reevaluating their lives, looking to thrive rather than merely succeed based on how the world measures success.

The latest science proves that increased stress and burnout have huge consequences for both our personal health and our health care system. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon found that from 1983 to 2009, there was between a 10 and 30 percent increase in stress levels across all demographic categories. Higher levels of stress can lead to higher instances of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fully three-quarters of American health care spending goes toward treating such chronic conditions. The Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital estimates that 60 to 90 percent of doctor visits are to treat stress-related conditions. While in the United Kingdom, stress has emerged in recent years as the top cause of illness across the nation. As Tim Straughan, the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Information Centre explained, “It might be assumed that stress and anxiety are conditions that result in a journey to a general practitioner’s consulting room rather than a hospital ward. However, our figures suggest thousands of cases a year arise where patients suffering from stress or anxiety become hospitalised in England.”

The stress we experience impacts our children, too. Indeed, the effects of stress on children— even in utero— were emphasized in the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. As Nicholas Kristof put it in *The New York Times*: “Cues of a hostile or indifferent environment flood an infant, or even a fetus, with stress hormones like cortisol in ways that can disrupt the body’s metabolism or the architecture of the brain. The upshot is that children are sometimes permanently undermined. Even many years later, as adults, they are more likely to suffer heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other physical ailments. They are also more likely to struggle in school, have short tempers and tangle with the law.”

One reason we give for allowing stress to build in our lives is that we don’t have time to take care of ourselves. We’re too busy chasing a phantom of the successful life. The difference between what such success looks like and what truly makes us thrive isn’t always clear as we’re living our lives. But it becomes much more obvious in the rearview mirror. Have you noticed that when we die, our eulogies celebrate our lives very differently from the way society defines success?

Eulogies are, in fact, very Third Metric. But while it’s not hard to live a life that includes the Third Metric, it’s very easy not to. It’s easy to let ourselves get consumed by our work. It’s easy to allow professional obligations to overwhelm us, and to forget the things and the people that truly sustain us. It’s easy to let technology wrap us in a perpetually harried, stressed- out existence. It’s easy, in effect, to miss the real point of our lives even as we’re living them. Until we’re no longer alive. A eulogy is often the first formal marking down of what our lives were about— the foundational document of our legacy. It is how people remember us and how we live on in the minds and hearts of others. And it is very telling what we don’t hear in eulogies. We almost never hear things like:

“The crowning achievement of his life was when he made senior vice president.”

Or:

“He increased market share for his company multiple times during his tenure.”

Or:

“She never stopped working. She ate lunch at her desk. Every day.”

Or:

“He never made it to his kid’s Little League games because he always had to go over those figures one more time.”

Or:

“While she didn’t have any real friends, she had six hundred Facebook friends, and she dealt with every email in her in- box every night.”

Or:

“His PowerPoint slides were always meticulously prepared.”

Our eulogies are always about the other stuff: what we gave, how we connected, how much we meant to our family and friends, small kindnesses, lifelong passions, and the things that made us laugh.

So why do we spend so much of our limited time on this earth focusing on all the things our eulogy will never cover?

“Eulogies aren’t résumés,” David Brooks wrote. “They describe the person’s care, wisdom, truthfulness and courage. They describe the million little moral judgments that emanate from that inner region.”

And yet we spend so much time and effort and energy on those résumé entries— entries that lose all significance as soon as our heart stops beating. Even for those who die with amazing *Wikipedia* entries, whose lives were synonymous with accomplishment and achievement, their eulogies focus mostly on what they did when they weren’t achieving and succeeding. They aren’t bound by our current, broken definition of success. Look at Steve Jobs, a man whose life, at least as the public saw it, was about creating things— things that were, yes, amazing and game changing. But when his sister, Mona Simpson, rose to honor him at his memorial service, that’s not what she focused on.

Yes, she talked about his work and his work ethic. But mostly she raised these as manifestations of his passions. “Steve worked at what he loved,” she said. What really moved him was love. “Love was his supreme virtue,” she said, “his god of gods.

“When [his son] Reed was born, he began gushing and never stopped. He was a physical dad, with each of his children. He fretted over Lisa’s boyfriends and Erin’s travel and skirt lengths and Eve’s safety around the horses she adored.”

And then she added this touching image: “None of us who attended Reed’s graduation party will ever forget the scene of Reed and Steve slow dancing.”

His sister made abundantly clear in her eulogy that Steve Jobs was a lot more than just the guy who invented the iPhone. He was a brother and a husband

and a father who knew the true value of what technology can so easily distract us from. Even if you build an iconic product, one that lives on in our lives, what is foremost in the minds of the people you care about most are the memories you built in their lives.

In her 1951 novel *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Marguerite Yourcenar has the Roman emperor meditating on his death: “It seems to me as I write this hardly important to have been emperor.” Thomas Jefferson’s epitaph describes him as “author of the Declaration of American Independence . . . and father of the University of Virginia.” There is no mention of his presidency.

The old adage that we should live every day as if it were our last usually means that we shouldn’t wait until death is imminent to begin prioritizing the things that really matter. Anyone with a smartphone and a full email in-box knows that it’s easy to be busy while not being aware that we’re actually living.

A life that embraces the Third Metric is one lived in a way that’s mindful of our eventual eulogy. “I’m always relieved when someone is delivering a eulogy and I realize I’m listening to it,” joked George Carlin. We may not be able to witness our own eulogy, but we’re actually writing it all the time, every day. The question is how much we’re giving the eulogizer to work with.

In the summer of 2013, an obituary of a Seattle woman named Jane Lotter, who died of cancer at sixty, went viral. The author of the obit was Lotter herself.

“One of the few advantages of dying from Grade 3, Stage IIIC endometrial cancer, recurrent and metastasized to the liver and abdomen,” she wrote, “is that you have time to write your own obituary.” After giving a lovely and lively account of her life, she showed that she lived with the true definition of success in mind. “My beloved Bob, Tessa, and Riley,” she wrote. “My beloved friends and family. How precious you all have been to me. Knowing and loving each one of you was the success story of my life.”

Whether you believe in an afterlife— as I do— or not, by being fully present in your life and in the lives of those you love, you’re not just writing your own eulogy; you’re creating a very real version of your afterlife. It’s an invaluable lesson— one that has much more credence while we have the good fortune of being healthy and having the energy and freedom to create a life of purpose and meaning. The good news is that each and every one of us still has time to live up to the best version of our eulogy.

This book is designed to help us move from knowing what to do to actually doing it. As I know all too well, this is no simple matter. Changing deeply ingrained habits is especially difficult. And when many of these habits are the product of deeply ingrained cultural norms, it is even harder. This is the challenge we face in redefining success. This is the challenge we face in making Third Metric principles part of our daily lives. This book is about the lessons I've learned and my efforts to embody the Third Metric principles— a process I plan to be engaged in for the rest of my life. It also brings together the latest data, academic research, and scientific findings (some of them tucked away in endnotes), which I hope will convince even the most skeptical reader that the current way we lead our lives is not working and that there are scientifically proven ways we can live our lives differently— ways that will have an immediate and measurable impact on our health and happiness. And, finally, because I want it to be as practical as possible, I have also included many daily practices, tools, and techniques that are easy to incorporate into our lives. These three threads are pulled together by one overarching goal: to reconnect with ourselves, our loved ones, and our community— in a word, to thrive.

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