Why We Need New Role Models

Speakers:
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(Transcription by RA Fisher Ink)

David Kirkpatrick: Please join me on stage, Kristin and Arianna.

We’ve had so many conversations already today that set you guys up so perfectly. I mean, this issue of the larger reasons why there’s a health crisis. It’s not a healthcare crisis, it’s a health crisis. Esther Dyson was talking about it. So many people. Rob Andrews from the Health Transformation Alliance is talking about it. So, in a second I want you to talk what you are doing, but I want to first introduce you. And I’ll start with Arianna because I’ve known you a while. You are really a pretty amazing person.

[APPLAUSE]

Kirkpatrick: It’s funny. It’s not just that you started HuffPo and you wrote a book about Picasso, but I keep running across things you did even 25–30 years ago that I didn’t even know about.

Arianna Huffington: That’s because I’m 3,000 years old.

[LAUGHTER]

Kirkpatrick: No, but you wrote—I have this weird thing with literary magazines and you have essays that I found that are so incredible from a long time ago, when you had a totally different last name and everything.

[LAUGHTER]

Kirkpatrick: And anyway, I just really think it’s fascinating what you’re doing and I want you to tell us about it. But I am just happy you were able to join us. Kristin is the CMO of JPMorgan Chase, which is not a member of the Healthcare Transformation Alliance. But, I don’t know if you heard a little bit of Rob earlier. I think you probably have reasons to consider that. I don’t know if that’s not your area at the bank. But, do you call it a bank? What do you call it?

Kristin Lemkau: It is a bank.

Kirkpatrick: Okay.
Lemkau: Indeed. Proudly!

Kirkpatrick: It’s a sprawling, 150,000-employee—

Lemkau: —240,000, but yes.

Kirkpatrick: Why did I have that wrong? It’s a lot of people. So, quickly, why are you up here with Arianna and what are you—just start talking about what you’re doing and why it’s pertinent to a conversation on healthcare and, to some degree, the role of technology in healthcare.

Lemkau: Sure. So, I think it goes to the 240,000 employees that we have. And when you think about health and the cost of healthcare, as the two previous speakers had spoken about, I think the first revolution was fitness. Everybody got that. And then the second was nutrition and cafeterias at work started getting more healthy and executive dining rooms started getting healthy. And sleep, I think, is the last one that people are understanding is actually a relevant part of that equation. The third metric, I think, as Arianna speaks about it.

So, JPMorgan Chase was one of Thrive Global’s first clients, proudly. Because, I think, we understand that fitness and nutrition are only part of it and we are not in an industry that’s well-known for cultivating sleep and mental wellness as something that’s important. I think our CEO is a huge believer in it. He’s a cancer survivor and he understands the importance of sleep in his own regimen. And so, Thrive was really the first platform, and Arianna’s a great spokesperson for this, that had the data to prove it.

Kirkpatrick: And Thrive is a whole new approach to health, really. So, what is Thrive Global?

Huffington: So, Thrive Global is the company I launched on November 30th and, as you just heard, JPMorgan was a launch partner, together with Accenture. And Thrive Global is really two main things. One, is the corporate part. We go into corporations, whether it’s big multinationals like JPMorgan or small companies that are growing fast, like Airbnb, and we help them create the kind of culture that demonstrates through data that when employees take care of themselves, it’s better for the bottom line. So, we are basing everything on the latest science and the connection between well-being and performance.

So, the differentiator is that this is not the Yoga Journal. This is not like a feel-good benefit for employees. This has to be driven not just by HR, but by the C-suite, as happened at JP, thanks to you, Kristin. Because the recognition that when employees are not taking care of themselves, everything is affected. First of all, their productivity. Absolutely, unequivocal data that we have been living under the delusion that in order to succeed, you have to burn out. Right? We were all brought up like that. I famously collapsed 10 years ago because I believed that. And since the first industrial revolution, we’ve been thinking that human beings should be treated like machines and the goal with machines is to minimize downtime. But the human operating system is not a machine. So, downtime is not a bug of the system, it’s a feature.
We bring in the latest data and then we bring in the new role models. And that is essential. Because people don’t just learn through data, they learn through stories. That’s where the medial platform of Thrive Global comes in. And the media platform focuses on these two things. Think of it like the Huffington Post, only about one thing. If the Huffington Post is about everything, from Trump firing James Comey, to Beyoncé’s twins, to everything in between, we are only about one thing, which is how do we change the way we work and live to improve health, well-being, and productivity. And so, role models are key.

The day we launched, for example, we had a piece from Jeff Bezos saying, “Why my getting eight hours of sleep is good for Amazon shareholders.” Making the connection between sleep, leadership, and decision-making. We had a piece by Kristin where she talked about taking the challenge that we launched at JPMorgan, which actually, I think, was pretty revolutionary. We announced it onstage at JPMorgan with their general counsel, who is the only woman general counsel of a major bank, and with a video that Kristin was the force behind, that invited all the 240,000 employees to take one of these four challenges.

Now, imagine a bank launching a video like that to everybody that asks them for 28 days to work on their sleep, unplugging from technology—which we find is a major source of mental health problems, lack of sleep, etcetera—gratitude, and/or mindfulness. I thought this was amazing and Kristin had an incredible piece where she talked about how she was picking two of the challenges, sleep and unplugging from technology—

Lemkau: They’re related.

Huffington: She set her goals. The two are very related. And Kristin, you should talk about it. But it was amazing and we had such a great response, including from ABC Evening News and, “Could you connect us with her?” They couldn’t believe that JPMorgan was advising their employees to sleep!

[LAUGHTER]

Huffington: You know, this is like the boiler room of burnouts. So, that’s kind of the culture shift that we’re helping accelerate.

Lemkau: It was amazing. When we first talked about, “Okay, how are we going to launch this? If we just talk about sleep and gratitude, we are going to sound like the Yoga Journal. So, we had to make it competitive because it’s a bank. And we had to make it sort of open-source, user-generated. So, we had—the video kicked it off. And we honestly didn’t know how it was going to go. We thought, “Okay, well, a few of us are going to try this and maybe people will think it’s hokey.” And we were surprised at how much it took off. And people were really starving for it and all of a sudden it became okay to talk about how you struggle with sleep and struggle with unplugging from technology. And we took the Thrive/HuffPo content model and had people blog about it. So, it became more of a community support thing that seemed to work really well for our culture and people loved it.
Kirkpatrick: So, this idea of bringing things like mindfulness and meditation to banking is not intrinsically resisted, based on your experience so far.

Lemkau: People picked up on the sleep first. The sleep and unplugging with technology resonated the most in our industry.

Kirkpatrick: But are these other things going to come in the wake, do you think?

Lemkau: They did, they did. And making that connection back to the importance of sleep was important.

Kirkpatrick: I'm curious, how many people in the room meditate in some fashion?

Huffington: That's amazing!

Kirkpatrick: I think there is a pretty big thing happening here. So, I wanted to ask you, Arianna—

Huffington: Well, first of all, can I just say, this is amazing. And I bet most people in your organizations don’t know that. So, I would love to invite you to write about it on Thrive. I'll give you my email address, so you can get the VIP treatment.

[LAUGHTER]

Huffington: ah@thriveglobal.com.

Kirkpatrick: We are live streaming, Arianna, but okay. Whatever.

[LAUGHTER]

Huffington: You know what? Honestly, I think this is key because just one more example. I was at the conference that JPMorgan had in Miami for the biggest private wealth clients. And Barry Sommers, who is the CEO of the Global Private Wealth Bank, came up to me and said, “You know, 10 years ago, my life was at a crossroads. I had put on weight, I was in a mental fog, my career wasn't going anywhere. I took matters in my own hands, I started sleeping for eight hours, meditating twice a day. My assistant knows she can not put any meetings during my afternoon meditation. And working out every day.” And nobody at the bank knew that. Honestly, there was somebody after my speech who came up to me and said, “I can’t do all the things you are saying. I have a very big job at JPMorgan.” I said, “Who do you report to?” He said, “Barry Sommers.” I said, “Well, go talk to him, because he obviously has a bigger job than you have.”

[LAUGHTER]

Huffington: So, then I was at the Fortune Brainstorm in San Diego and I said, “Barry, it’s time for me to out you.” So, he came on the panel and talked about it. And, Kristin, I don’t know if you’ve talked to him since, but he had an amazing response. Literally, people were lining up at the conference to talk to him. So, I really urge you to tell your stories. Because we’re in this
amazing period of transition and multiple behaviors are co-existing. And the people who are practicing some of these things and getting benefit, need to speak up. Because we are still listening more to the people who are burning out and think that’s why they’re succeeding.

**Kirkpatrick:** So, I want to ask you more about this period of transition because, obviously, there are not that many people who are better at media than you. You’ve proven that. I also know you wouldn’t be starting a new company, no offense, just to consult with a few companies. So, do you think that you can really push this idea over an extended period as a way to help drive an overall societal shift that you see incipient?

**Huffington:** Absolutely. The goal of Thrive Global is to accelerate the culture shift. We’re not arrogant to think we are creating the culture shift. The culture shift is happening. But if we can accelerate it, we are going to minimize a lot of suffering. As you know, David, you and I have known each other for a very long time. One of the things that got me into journalism and got me to found the Huffington Post was the recognition there is a lot of suffering in the world. Journalism can put a spotlight on it. We can do something about it. The truth is, it’s moving much more slowly than we wish. But this is a case where, if we can actually change the belief system that drives most people and produce enough scientific data and enough role models, we can really accelerate that shift not just here but around the world.

The idea for launching this company, ironically, was given to me three and a half years ago when I was in Hangzhou to speak at the Jack Ma Conference. Actually, his first women’s conference. And I spoke about “Thrive,” which was name of the book I had just published. And at dinner that night, he said to me, “The biggest crisis in China is going to be the stress of people, a lot of it exacerbated by technology.” They have over a hundred million people suffering from mental health, depression, anxiety-related issues. He said, “There is no market leader. If I were you,” he said, “I would leave HuffPost and launch this company and I’ll back you.” And at the time, I really thought, “Oh, come on, I’ll never leave HuffPost. It’s like my third child. I don’t know what he’s talking about.” But I smiled politely and moved on. As this became a bigger and bigger issue for me and I really wanted to spend 100% of my time on it, I did decide to leave HuffPost and launch Thrive Global and Jack Ma is one of the early investors in the series A.

**Kirkpatrick:** Oh, he is. I just have to tell something funny. My watch just buzzed and I looked at it and it said, “Breathe.”

[LAUGHTER]

**Kirkpatrick:** It’s some Apple app that I never even turn on that still does that every now and then. But it just underscores your point! There is something happening that we can’t even fight here, right?

**Huffington:** Exactly. And that just one little reminder during the day to breathe can have a big impact on stress not becoming cumulative. You’re not going to avoid stress during the day. But if you can have these little pauses that help us course-correct, it makes a big difference.
Kirkpatrick: Okay, I want to get audience questions and comments, but I’ve got to ask you one thing. And I don’t know the answer to this, but you are such a trenchant and passionate writer about politics. Are you still doing that much of it?

Huffington: If you’ll follow me on Twitter, you’ll see that I tweet about politics all the time.

Kirkpatrick: But you’re not writing the longer pieces still?

Huffington: I write about it in the context of resilience. I think there is a connection.

Kirkpatrick: The reason I’m asking is, is it frustrating to—because, for a long time, that was like your thing was you were like really the politically—and we’re in such a strange time. And obviously, it’s a time that includes a transition towards some cool stuff that we’re talking about up here. But, there’s some other things happening. How do you integrate that part of yourself?

Huffington: The two things are incredibly connected. Because I really believe one of the reasons why we’re having such a crisis in leadership is that leaders are so disconnected from their own wisdom. We are all kind of glamorizing data, but I think we are drowning in data and starved for wisdom. So, I think the more we can help people—whether they’re leaders or voters—reconnect with their own place of wisdom and resilience, the faster it will be for us to change the political realities that are so tragic at the moment. I don’t think you can separate the two. I’m absolutely convinced about that. I mean, look at all the leaders who don’t have the guts to stand up in the Republican party and be direct and honest about what’s happening. I mean, it’s amazing that John McCain is the only one speaking out and he had to be tortured for years.

[LAUGHTER]

Kirkpatrick: Who would have thought Lindsey Graham would be some kind of role model? I mean, really.

Lemkau: Right.

Huffington: Well, not yet. Not yet. He’s like—

Kirkpatrick: He actually voted not to poison the planet last week. You know, go on.

Huffington: I know. Amazing. [LAUGHS]

Lemkau: It’s a low bar.

Kirkpatrick: It’s a low bar, but 47 Republicans voted to poison the planet, it’s true. But this is not a political convention here, or conference. But, okay. I think we should take quick audience interactions. Who wants to say something or ask something? Okay, Bob. And, Bob, identify yourself because these people don’t know who you are.
Klitzman: Robert Klitzman from Columbia University. I assume Thrive is a for-profit enterprise and I was wondering what kind of business model there is, considering it’s, quote, “making money off of people relaxing and meditating,” for instance.

Huffington: You know what, it’s not making money off people relaxing. I think that’s the old paradigm. It’s making money out of people being healthier and more productive in their lives and absolutely affecting the metrics of corporations and affecting the lives of people who make these small behavioral changes. The revenue model is revenue from corporations, like JPMorgan, like Accenture. At JPMorgan, we’re not just working with executives, we are working with their call centers because they are dealing with some of the biggest stress.

At Accenture, we’re doing 100 trainings all over the world. In China, in India, in Argentina, we have dozens of trainers. So, all our trainings range from live to online courses, to what we call Thrive Tribes, sustainability models. And on the media platform, the revenue model is native advertising and branded content series. Our launch sponsor was Quaker Oats for a full year of branded content. We just launched a podcast. Our first podcast was with Jennifer Aniston. We launched it on iHeartRadio. Sleep Number, the mattress company, is the sponsor. So, actually, we are very lucky in that, unlike most start-ups, we are not pre-revenue. We are post-revenue. And I think the reason why we are able to have such a thriving revenue model is, frankly, also because of where the world is and because of the need and the hunger for this.

Lemkau: And I can say just as one of the clients, we could have done this on our own, I guess, had a campaign to sleep eight hours. It wouldn’t have worked. So, we needed Arianna as the spokesperson and she’s done a number of employee events and client events for us. We needed the media platform part of it, so the model of doing user-generated content and the 28-day challenge piece of it, and the idea that you had of outing the Barry Sommers of the world to the people that have these stories. When I came up in my business, the person who worked the hardest, wins. It was whoever worked the hardest, got promoted. And changing that culture by having the people, both at the top and in the call center, talk about their stories, was an important part of it.

We’re going to try to model out a Thrive platform within one call center, as a hold-out, compared to the others, to see if it has a notable impact on attrition, which is a huge financial problem.

Kirkpatrick: Okay, that leads to the question I was just going to ask you. Do you and Jamie Dimon believe that by doing this, ultimately, you’ll be able to tie corporate performance metrics to having done it?

Lemkau: That’s not why we did it, but yes. Yes. And where you can prove out that data, I think a hold-out of a call center will be an important place to do it. We ran the numbers when Arianna came and spoke at our senior leadership conference of what the added productivity and compensation would mean. But, that was more just a wakeup call for everybody about why there’s a business case, per the Jeff Bezos piece, to sleep more.
Huffington: And Jamie ended his speech at your leadership conference, urging people to prioritize their well-being. That is a very significant change. I mean, David, you’ve been writing about this business longer than anybody. Isn’t that like—

Kirkpatrick: The corporate leaders don’t like to talk like that kind of thing.

Lemkau: Until they have a cancer scare and then they will.

Kirkpatrick: Because basically, it implies an acknowledgment of vulnerability, which in leadership, in the world generally, is not considered an attribute of leadership. And that’s going to your point about Washington. I mean, if you have an openness about the fact that everybody makes mistakes and you’re vulnerable, you can actually make better decisions and make better interaction and do more bipartisan cooperation and a lot of other things, don’t you think?

Huffington: Well, everything is connected. And the key is that we all know that when we are running on empty, as Kristin wrote in one of her pieces—She’s actually a wonderful writer on top of everything else, which is helpful. It’s good to have role models who can write—about how she can look back and identify that her biggest mistakes were made when she was tired. And you mentioned, you know.

Kirkpatrick: Wow.

Lemkau: Right. And I think that’s where the business case of sleeping eight hours really came for me. Which is that, if you don’t, you may get an extra hour of stuff done, but the other 16 hours are going to be far less quality and you’ll make more bad judgments.

Huffington: And incidentally, the eight hours, just so that you may be asking, “How much sleep do I really need?” And I’ve tracked all the data here and, if you have a genetic mutation and one and half percent of the population does. I’m sure there are some people in this room who can sleep three or four hours and feel great. And good for you. You have a genetic mutation. You can test yourself, if you want to be sure. I know I don’t. And the vast majority of people don’t. The vast majority of people need seven to nine hours. You may feel absolutely perfect with seven, or you may need eight. You can decide that once you sort of test yourself and how you feel. But, I just want to remind those who’ve forgotten Biology 101, you cannot train yourself to have a genetic mutation.

[LAUGHTER]

Kirkpatrick: Okay, at least one more comment or question? Please, over here. Identify yourself. Because we do have to end on time, obviously.

Ray: Hi, my name is Ray. I loved what you said about leaders today are disconnected from their wisdom and I’d love if you can expand on that. But, beyond that, the whole topic of we’re in a period of transition. And clearly, things are going on in the world that require more thoughtful, more connection to wisdom. What’s the next step? How to even accelerate this further, what you’re looking to do? That’s the question.
Huffington: Great question, thank you. So precisely because we are going through such a time of incredible change, nobody can just do maintenance, either in a business or in our own lives. Things are changing too fast. We need to tap into that place of wisdom more than ever. And I feel that one of the main next frontiers now is our relationship with technology. David, you’ve written a great book on Facebook. What we see is happening right now is that we are all addicted to our devices.

Kirkpatrick: Yes, I’m glad you got to this. Yes, go on.

Huffington: And we need to set boundaries to that addiction. Because otherwise, we are going to sacrifice our very humanity. And we have partnered at Thrive Global, the media platform, with Tristan Harris, who was recently profiled on 60 Minutes and you heard him speak at DLD and at TED. And he was a Google ethicist and a product engineer. And he, basically, has analyzed the way that all the social media and other technology companies are truly, in an attention economy, hijacking our minds. And this is not an even battle. Because you may think, “Oh, I have my will power.” But as Tristan says, you have a thousand Facebook engineers and a thousand Snap engineers and a thousand Google engineers who know how to hook you. And it’s particularly dangerous with teenagers. You see anybody here with teenagers can actually testify to the fact that this is a real addiction. And teenagers are increasingly outsourcing their self-worth to the number of likes their salad gets on Instagram. And this is just not sustainable.

So, this is where we also need new role models. So, on Thrive Global, for example, we had Selena Gomez write about she regularly does a digital detox. Now, teenagers who won’t listen to me or to you, will listen to Selena Gomez. So again, here, we’re bringing in new role models. Katy Perry did an Instagram that went crazy on Sunday with a pillow we had sent her. We’ve produced these pillows that say, “Sleep your way to the top.”

[LAUGHTER]

Huffington: And she did a little Instagram, I don’t know if you saw it, with her little pillow, “Sleep your way to the top.” Suddenly, this is like the new craze online. So, we can use social media to accelerate the adoption of these things. Because, basically, we can use technology to help us set boundaries with our relationship with technology. I think this is an existential battle. As Tristan has his great phrase, it’s a gunfight and you don’t bring a knife to a gunfight. So, we are using everything, including we’re launching a new app. We are working with Samsung on that. Which, basically, will help you turn your phone into a dumb phone for specified periods of time and you can’t override it.

But in order to accelerate the new cultural norm adoption, David, if you texted me and I had powered down, you would get a text back, “Arianna is powered down until 3:00 PM.” So not only it’s bidirectional, which is very important. And the second thing is it will give you a mirror of your social media consumption. So, it will say, “David, you spent seven and a half hours on Instagram last week. May we suggest you cut it down to seven?”
Kirkpatrick: I hope my daughter's in the room.

Huffington: If you say yes, it will give you milestone warnings and at seven hours, it will cut you off. So, basically, we need support. We can't just pretend that we'll do it on our own because the power of all these ways to hijack our mind is very great.

Kirkpatrick: Well, I know Kristin has a plane to catch. We've got to wrap this. But thank you so much, both of you, for being here and I'm so glad you said that last thing, Arianna. It was really good. Thank you so much. Bye-bye.