



## TEN SHIFTS DRIVING A NEW ‘THRIVE’ REVOLUTION AT WORK

By [Renee Moorefield](#), CEO of [Wisdom Works Group](#) & Chair of the [Wellness at Work Initiative](#) for the Global Wellness Institute

Our current era will go down in history as one of profound turmoil. Global conflicts, increasing alarm about climate change and our planet’s diminishing natural resources, rising inequalities, a growing distrust in technology, and political upheavals are but a few of the challenges we grapple with. Countless people feel like the world is suddenly upside down—with everything up for question, and in our worst moments, everything up for grabs.

It’s no surprise turmoil permeates our organizations too. According to the world polling firm Gallup, [employee disengagement is at an astounding 85%](#), a global norm resulting in approximately \$7 trillion in lost productivity. (Your organization is likely reeling from this gloomy reality.) Today’s workplaces are frequently powered by burned out, stressed out people—not the kind of human energy that fuels sustainable innovation and growth. “[We have simply accepted overextension as a way of life,](#)” says [Dr. Emma Seppälä](#), Science Director at the Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. A sad but too often true commentary on our collective condition.

Yet, perhaps it is our turmoil—and our shared lack of feeling engaged, fulfilled, energized, and secure—that’s causing an upsurge in prioritizing wellbeing. So much so that I believe the revolution to *thrive* has finally come to work. According to experts at the Global Wellness Institute’s [Wellness at Work](#) initiative and other inspiring leaders, this revolution is fueled by (at least) ten shifts now underway.

### SHIFT 1: THRIVING IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

More employers recognize human thriving is core to sustainable success. [Marianne Hewlett](#), Senior Vice President at the global digital transformation company [Atos](#), says this year we’ll even see “[wellbeing becoming a board priority](#), not just the domain of the HR department.” I wholeheartedly agree. More leaders are learning to use the world’s collective stresses and imbalances as catalysts for evolving new ways of thinking and new values, capabilities and solutions to enhance thriving. We’ve lived the alternative: we’ve seen vitality give way to illness and disease, joy traded for disengagement at work and at home, and effectiveness eroded by burnout. We’ve too often endangered our most precious inner resources—hope, resilience, compassion, generativity—and, as a result, diminished our capacity to live, work and connect fully. The time is ripe for employers to perceive people not as static human resources but as vibrant human *becomings*, with untold potential to be unleashed toward positive outcomes.

Plus, as competition for talent grows globally, a thriving work culture is becoming a key strategy to attract and retain the best. [Anna Bjurstam](#), Vice President at [Six Senses Resorts & Spas](#), says it clearly, “We can no longer accept workplaces that do not allow us to thrive—whether in the built environment, the culture, or the activities to promote wellbeing. Thriving is not only about ROI, it is a way of life employees require to stay and be passionate.”



## SHIFT 2: MOVE OVER WELLNESS PROGRAMS—IT'S TIME TO REINVENT WORK

The nature of work today is dynamic and fluid, and it will become even more so in the future. The automation of work; artificial intelligence; the gig economy; shifting values toward authenticity, personal autonomy and work-life integration; and a flood of other technological, demographic, cultural and geopolitical changes are prodding us to redefine what work means as part of the employment—and human—experience.

Effectively navigating today's work upheavals requires sustaining high levels of motivation, energy and creativity. To nurture this capacity, employers from global corporations such as the [Virgin Group](#) to smaller firms such as [Blue Earth Network](#) are relying less on wellness programs alone. They are reinventing work and workplaces by putting people at the center. This means recasting everything about work—relationships between people, organizational structure and culture, the physical environment, the [use of technology](#), brands and communication, the act of working itself—as an avenue to inspire people to bring physical, mental and emotional wellbeing to their jobs every day. Work does not need to be an unending drain on vitality. Wise employers are taking the lead by creating work and workplaces where people actually leave work *more* refreshed, capable, resourceful and well than when they arrived.

## SHIFT 3: TRANSCENDING OUR SELVES WITH PURPOSE

Workplace wellness has so frequently been narrowed to fitness challenges, health benefits, and paid-time-off that it has lost touch with one of its most essential ingredients: meaningful purpose. Not any longer! Organizations such as Atlanta-based bank [SunTrust](#) and online retailer [Zappos](#) emphasize the power of shared purpose to energize employees and customer relationships, operate with greater clarity and effectiveness, and (re)build trust between business and society. Purpose pays—not only is shared purpose an intrinsic motivator to get great work done, purpose-driven organizations enjoy a distinct competitive advantage by performing better in key business measures such as revenue, innovation in products and services and strategic transformation.

Smart organizations assist employees in discovering their personal purpose, too. Why? Because finding true meaning in life is linked to a gamut of good outcomes, from better sleep and [physical health](#) to [protection from cognitive decline](#). Purpose-driven people benefit from higher eudaimonic wellbeing—that enduring kind of happy—and [lower inflammatory gene expression](#), a physiological process underlying cardiovascular, neurodegenerative and other diseases. Plus, they show [higher focus and engagement](#) at work, qualities clearly sought by employers.

## SHIFT 4: WELLBEING AMPLIFIED BY WOMEN-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

Creating women-friendly workplaces benefits everyone, not just women. “With women making up 50% of the potential global workforce, there will be a growing focus on the unique challenges of women at all socioeconomic levels,” says [Mim Senft](#), CEO of [Motivity Partnerships](#) and Cofounder of [Global Women for Wellbeing](#). “This will put a brighter spotlight on diversity, the challenges of care-giving, pay inequities, ageism, and other wellbeing concerns that don't just plague women employees.” Underinvesting and underutilizing female talent is shortsighted to boot; evidence from [Mercer](#), [Bank of Mellon](#) and [World Economic Forum](#) already underscores the link between advancing women at work and vital measures of organizational performance—greater financial returns, better operating results and higher stock price appreciation.



## SHIFT 5: DEEP INCLUSIVITY: BEYOND CHECK-THE-BOX DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

"Inclusion is the missing piece that makes a workplace healthy," says [Joel Hershfeld](#), IT and Healthy Workplace Advisor at [Materials Distribution Agency](#) in Canada. Today, embracing inclusivity is taking on greater depth, as check-the-box diversity initiatives are no longer sufficient. Organizations increasingly operate as boundary-spanning networks, requiring them to build structures and practices—around recruiting, promotion, and development to leadership and team management—that bring out the best in *all* people. Strategic approaches to workplace diversity and inclusivity are blending conventional categories such as ethnicity, nationality, and age group with less obvious (but no less important) distinctions such as gender identity, values and worldviews, lifestyle practices and thinking styles. #TimesUp, #LGBTIQ, #ThePressForward and other societal and industry movements are adding to the pressure to ensure everyone has opportunities to be respected, belong, succeed and be well.

This is hard work, sure. But as the [latest global research from Deloitte Insights](#) suggests, organizations such as consumer goods giant [Proctor & Gamble](#) that are serious about diversity and inclusion produce more innovative, engaged and high-performing teams; are more profitable than their peers; enhance their brand appeal; and attract top talent for their future. Not to mention: *everyone* is worth it.

## SHIFT 6: MENTAL WELLBEING FINDS TRACTION

Employers are experimenting with a spectrum of mental health approaches: from advocacy for mental health conditions to [an explosion of mindfulness programs](#) to [sleep training](#) and [brain training](#) to Silicon Valley's [consciousness-hacking](#) in the search for optimal performance and flow. But research shows that we have a long way to go. For instance, public research initiative [BrainFacts.org](#) reports that "the cost to the global economy of neurological and mental health disorders such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease, including healthcare expenses, loss of productivity in the workplace, and impact on families, reached \$2.5 trillion in 2010, and could reach \$6 trillion by 2030. By then, the economic burden of mental unwellness will be [higher than those of cancer, diabetes and respiratory conditions combined](#)."

The upside? [New advances in understanding brain structure and function](#), along with neuroplasticity (the amazing capacity of the brain to learn and change), means that people can boost brain fitness, lower their stress and increase their productivity via online games and videos, interactive tools, mindfulness and meditation, regular micro-breaks, and a host of other wellness practices. [Gerry Bodeker](#), public health academic at University of Oxford and Columbia University and Chair of the [Mental Wellness Initiative](#) insists, "Inspired leaders will make strides to implement evidenced-based strategies for the mental wellbeing of their employees. They'll recognize that the happiness, generativity, effectiveness and wisdom that results is the very foundation of organizational excellence and enlightened leadership."

## SHIFT 7: ONE SIZE FITS ONE

The personalization of health and wellness has been advancing for decades, and today it is moving toward deeper insights and greater scale. Wellness DNA and other biomarker testing, digital diagnostic and health tools, gamification, cognitive technologies for behavior change, artificial intelligence, and data integration are among the many advances enabling health and wellness options (from food to pharmaceuticals) to be individualized to a person—from her needs, challenges and physiology to her lifestyle preferences and personal values. [Gloria Treister](#), corporate wellness veteran and founder of [Wellness](#)



Evolution, claims, “Educating employees about the root causes of their wellness concerns and then helping them identify key areas to optimize their unique biochemistry will empower them to take charge of their own health and wellbeing.” As a result, more employees will participate in wellness lifestyles at work and at home, and also become a more proactive part of their health and wellness care team.

### SHIFT 8: BIOPHOBIC TO BIOPHILIC

“Homes, buildings and communities are being completely reimagined to be healthier for people and the planet,” says [Mia Kyracos](#), strategic advisor to the groundbreaking [Build Well to Live Well](#) research, wellness lifestyle brand expert, and Chair of the [Wellness Communities](#) initiative. This reimagining taps into our innate impulse to connect to nature. When we play in a park, sit by a flowing stream, or hike up a mountain, we think and feel better, heal faster and experience less stress. [Steelcase](#), [Apple](#), [Interface](#), [Google](#) and [Kickstarter](#) are part of a growing list of organizations experimenting with biophilic-designed workplaces, using natural light, materials, colors and textures; trees, plants and water; and flexible workspaces that connect people with nature. And through nature, connect people with more of themselves.

Don’t underestimate this shift! It goes well beyond building workplaces that “do no harm” toward nature-inspired spaces that strategically optimize performance, lower stress and fatigue, drive healthy life- and work-styles, and empower thriving and renewal within people and relationships. Plus, the organization “by nature” achieves 100% engagement by everyone in the biophilic space—an unprecedented number given the low participation rates of most wellness programs.

### SHIFT 9: THE WELLBEING OF WE

We’re experiencing a big change in how people come together to achieve common purposes and do work. Rarely is work done by one of us. Instead, the best work usually happens between us. Teams, global networks, partnerships, ad hoc project groups—the unit of work has moved from *me* to *we*, and so have strategies for wellbeing. Organizations are exploring a range of practices to foster high-trust environments of mutual respect and psychological safety—where people bring out the best in each other, and as a result, improve the shared outcomes they achieve. [Accenture](#) is transforming societal issues such as race and religion into bridge-building dialogues at work before those issues turn into workplace toxicities. [HeartMath](#) is inventing new social coherence technologies to optimize collective action. And [Morningstar](#) is democratizing power using self-managed teams where colleagues find joy weaving their unique talents into activities that strengthen fellow colleagues.

Sock manufacturer [THORLO](#) uses [whole relational wellness](#). THORLO President Richard Oliver notes that the essence of this approach is, “...tending to your relationship with yourself first—your self-awareness and why you do what you do—as well as your relationships with others and your local community. Even your relationship to the planet.” This deep framework of trust in relationships across THORLO’s business system enables the company to not only provide immense customer value and grow internationally, but also more easily pivot when market opportunities change. Taking care of the *we* is at once a strategy for wellbeing and business sustainability.





## SHIFT 10: CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP

None of the other nine shifts have staying power without the conscious evolution of leadership. Working across the globe, there isn't a leader I know that doesn't want to elevate their capacity to personally thrive and make thriving a game-changer for their teams, relationships and organizations. More leaders are ready to up-level their internal operating systems—those beliefs and worldviews empowering or limiting what they can achieve—and become more effective at leading with an inspired vision to contribute to uplifting workplaces and societies. They are realizing that technology, the built environment, culture, brands and everything else about the company can elevate (or erode) humanity.

Consider the close to 2,500 businesses in 50 countries and 130 industries now operating as B-Corps (“benefit” corporations), as well as the conscious leadership movement (think IKEA, Unilever, and Salesforce) to make commercial enterprise a force for wellbeing. LeeAnn Mallory, incoming Chair of the Board for Conscious Capitalism Dallas, says, “Exemplary leaders are modeling the way with more openness, more humility, and the willingness to cross functions and organizational levels to create positive impact for all of their stakeholders.”

Organizational titles are even reflecting this shift. Don't be surprised to see more titles like Chief Value Officer, Chief Equality Officer, Chief Ecosystem Officer, Chief Wellness Officer, Chief Purpose Officer and Chief Wisdom Officer as leaders strive to lift people, performance and the planet to higher virtues such as service, compassion, responsibility and wisdom.



Renee Moorefield, PhD, is CEO of Wisdom Works, dedicated to building thriving leaders and organizations worldwide. She's coached thousands of senior and emerging executives—from Fortune 500 teams to social entrepreneurs—seeking to operate from greater consciousness, wellbeing, and internal balance, plus the generative capabilities to uplift their workplaces, families and communities, and our planet. Renee chairs the Wellness at Work initiative for the Global Wellness Institute, authors the leadership blog *Wellbeing + Strategy*, and has been featured in *Forbes*, *Conscious Company*, *Experience Life*, *Coaching World* and *Thrive Global*. Her latest innovation, the *Be Well Lead Well®* Pulse leadership assessment, empowers leaders to make thriving a game-changer in their teams and organizations, starting with themselves.



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