

**GLOBAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE  
ON ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH**

*The Roundtable is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*

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**AND**

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**“MENTAL HEALTH – THE ULTIMATE PRODUCTIVITY WEAPON”**

**TO**

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**MENTAL HEALTH – THE ULTIMATE PRODUCTIVITY WEAPON**

***Mental Health – A Business And Economic Issue***

I wish to discuss mental health as a business and economic issue. This is the proposition which occupies the Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health founded two years ago as a network of business, education and health leaders with three main objectives:

1. To define and quantify the effects of mental health disorders on the performance of corporations and the economy.
2. In this context, to advise business decision-makers of their stake in the mental health of their executive, management and labor groups.
3. And to identify the kinds of business investments which will promote mental health as a corporate asset in the information economy – or, as we like to call it, the economy of mental performance.

***Era Of Mental Performance***

It is the dawning of the new economy that has set the stage for the advancement of mental health as a business issue. For, it is the information economy where mental functioning is all-important to corporate performance beyond the obvious givens of the need for people to use their head in doing their job.

Minds will, in fact, in this economy, do the heavy lifting and not our backs, arms and legs. Innovation will determine corporate success in the global information economy and innovation is a mental function.

We have entered the era where the “thought content” of products and services has greater dollar value than the plastics, steel or bargain basement pricing which may enclose those products or accompany those services.

### **More Investment In Telecommunications Than Oil**

Consider the impact of “thought content” along these lines.

- Today, it takes about 45 minutes to produce a ton of steel. It used to take hours. The difference is innovation invested in the process. The difference is in the application of information through computer technology – and these machines, unlike robots which prowl the plant floor, or computer-aided design and manufacture equipment that emerged in the 1980s, depend hour-to-hour on human input and direction.
- These machines don’t replace people, they depend on us. On our skills and judgment and creativity. This defines innovation in the information economy.
- A car coming off the assembly line today has more microchips than sparkplugs. More thought content than steel in terms measured by commercial value. Corporations worldwide spend more money per annum on the instruments of human communication, telecommunications, than they do on oil, the blood of machines.

### **Skillsets And Mindsets**

The war for talent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a war for skillsets and mindsets embodied by people adapted for and to the knowledge-based economy. It will accentuate training and development, it will emphasize human relations over labor relations.

The private sector and the public sector will, for the first time, compete for new talent from the same pools of labor emerging from universities, colleges and life generally.

They will look for the invaluable source of “thought content” in the labor markets of the near and mid-term future and in doing so will put a premium on:

- Mindsets, mental resiliency, and the capacity to innovate and cooperate;
- Creativity and flexibility and the ability of job candidates to live with, and adjust to change and even ambiguity as a normal feature of life at work during the extended transition the world is now navigating from an industrial-based economy to an information-based economy.

### **Mental Health: Essential To Human and Business Productivity**

Let us consider for a moment, therefore, what mental health is – it is the state of wellbeing that is essential to the successful performance of mental functions which result in productive activities. It is the state of wellbeing that is:

- Essential to the realization of fulfilling relationships with others.
- Pivotal to our ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity.
- The springboard of thinking, communications skills, learning, personal growth, resilience and self-esteem.
- The foundation for the sustainable performance of individuals and in the terms I have already described, it is the state of wellbeing in the ranks of both labor and management as a condition, even pre-condition for the sustainable performance of the organization itself.

In the new economy, mental health is the ultimate productivity weapon.

### **Mental Health Sharpens Competitive Edge**

Mental health is the prime source of “thought content” in everything from VISA customer services to home appliances and aircraft design and safety.

In the automotive sector, “thought content” provides the edge for carmakers who now compete through the operational efficiencies, safety features and convenience they offer their customers.

All are computer-based from the design stage through to manufacture. All represent commercially-strategic “thought content” which, in turn, defines the era of mental performance and mental health as a business and economic issue.

The advent of the economy of mental performance is the key to unlock the closet where mental health has been hidden for these many generations as a matter of public awareness, public policy and public acceptance.

It seems logical to assume that if we can make the business case for mental health to business people nose to nose, a tough test, surely we can make the case of acceptance to the rest of the population heart-to-heart.

## **Mental Health of Global Executive, Management and Labor Force Under Attack**

But then again, life is chock full of ironies. And so we face one in this case.

Just as an independent and powerful argument for mental health – as a public priority – emerges on the wing of new realities constituting the new economy, the mental wellbeing of people in the hundreds of millions – right around the world – is under attack.

A pandemic of mental health disorders – largely unrecognized and certainly unheralded – is underway, a public health challenge as destructive as AIDS or cancer and even more so when we calculate the consequent rates and impact of human disability it afflicts on every walk of life in every known society.

### **Depression Is Getting Younger**

Consider some of the facts:

- According to studies, clinical depression – by far, the most common mental health disorder – is growing in absolute terms. And it is getting younger – striking people in their prime working years.
- The average age of onset is 27, in forty per cent of the cases, it is 20. The prevalence of women contracting this disorder is one-in-five; among men, it is one-in-ten. The experts can't explain the variance.
- Depression is the leading source of disability in Canada at a rate slightly higher than the world average.
- Over the next 10-20 years, depression is projected to become the leading source of workdays lost through disability and premature death in the richer, developed economies. Ischemic heart disease will be number two.
- Depression has physical or biological implications and even origins. It has the potential to:
  1. Hasten the death of cardiac patients;
  2. Impair the immune system;
  3. Cause blood clotting;
  4. Slow recovery from cancer.

The neurological causes of depression are not known to science, but what triggers the onset of depression is better known. Stress triggers the disorder in some people, an important consideration in today's intensified workplace.

### **Beatable Because Its Treatable**

Depression is beatable because it is treatable in 75-80 per cent of the cases.

Tragically, though, the rates of detection, diagnosis and proper treatment are very low – only about 6.5 per cent of the total projected number of cases in Canada are properly treated. This translates into less than 200,000 people getting treatment out of the projected three million Canadians who need it.

The curse of mental illness is not the illness itself. It is the stigma we attach to it. And the defeat of stigma through information, understanding and informed action is critical to reducing the effects of depression on work and everyday life in this country and throughout the world.

### **Like Ten Jumbo Jets Crashing Every Month Of the Year – Killing All Aboard**

Depression has a mortality rate of 15 per cent. By far, depression is the leading cause of suicide. Four thousand Canadians kill themselves every year.

***Perspective:** the number of people who kill themselves every year in this country because of a disorder that is treatable and beatable 80 per cent of the time is like 10 jumbo jets going down almost every month of the year -- killing all aboard.*

***Perspective:** Canada has the third highest rate of teenage suicide in the world and suicide is the second leading cause of death in this country for 11 to 15 year olds.*

***Perspective:** 50,000 young Americans lost their lives in Vietnam. In that same period of time – 1964 to 1973 – 100,000 young Americans lost their lives to suicide*

### **New Front In An Old War**

The Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health wishes to help open a new front in an old war by making the business case for mental health. Depression costs the North American economy an estimated \$60 billion (U.S.). In NAFTA and the European community economies, the number soars to nearly \$150 billion (U.S.) a year.

Most of these costs materialize in the form of economic loss. Mental disability is mostly a business cost not a healthcare cost borne through public taxation.

### **14 Per Cent Of Canadian Profits**

In Canada alone, the Roundtable estimates that all forms of mental illness costs the country \$16 billion a year which represents just about 14 per cent of the net operating revenue of all Canadian businesses combined.

About half those costs take the form of lost opportunity costs – a censorship, in fact, of the production of innovative thinking and value-added attributed to the thought content of products and services so necessary for companies to compete in the information economy of mental performance.

### **11 Million Barrels Of Oil Lost Through Mental Health Problems**

At Syncrude Canada, CEO Eric Newell measures productivity in the form of the production of barrels of oil per employee. He estimates that the impact of mental illness translates in his company into the loss of 11 million barrels of oil production a year or \$200 million of annual revenue.

At Royal Bank Financial Group, more than a third of all short-term disability stems from mental health issues and that rate is the “new norm” for large employers. It is not the exception.

The Roundtable foresees the percentage of disability insurance and group health claims related to mental health climbing to more than 50 per cent of the total number of claims administered through business-employee plans over the next three to five years and perhaps the “new norm” will entrenched faster than that.

### **Disability Akin To Blindness**

As a source of disability, the power of depression is formidable – akin, it is said, to blindness and paraplegia.

In this, we see the effects of another kind of “brain drain” – one which has received zero public attention – one which drains the labor force and its leadership class of efficient and productive mindsets through a pandemic centred on the biochemical composition of the human brain and invading every aspect of the human being including one’s sense of identity.

### **“A Very Serious Economic Crisis” – Former Finance Minister**

So let the word go out –

- *Honourable Michael Wilson, our former Minister of Finance and the Honorary Chair of the Business Roundtable – “this is a public health crisis, no doubt about that – but it is also a very serious economic crisis.”*
- *Tim Price, Roundtable Chairman, and Chairman as well of Brascan’s Trilon Financial Corporation – “depression is a business problem we better get our arms around.”*

- *Bob Lord, Chairman of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, and a founding member of the Roundtable – “mental health disorders represent the greatest business and public health challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must understand that. And in a hurry.”*
- *Hershell Ezrin, Chairman and CEO of GPC International and first Roundtable business affiliate – “we believe business must advance the cause of mental health for business reasons ... it is good for our customers, our suppliers and our employees whose wellbeing we are fundamentally interested in.”*

### **Saving Health Care Dollars**

And let those voices be heard by those concerned about the cost of health care in this country. For it is well known that persons suffering mental health disorders use the health care system three to five times more frequently than others. By reducing this multiplier effect – through improved detection, diagnosis and treatment rates – we are destined to save the health care system itself tons of annual expenditures.

U.S. estimates believe that if behavioral disorders were reduced by even 10 to 15 per cent, the healthcare system generally in that country would enjoy windfall savings in the ballpark of 30 to 40 per cent of the total. More than 70 per cent of healthcare costs in America are attributable to human behavior not acts of God.

### **Mental Health Issues Drive Heavy Use Of Primary Care System**

Let's also note that:

- Stress and mental health-related complaints represent nearly half of all visits to family physicians in Ontario. The heavy utilization of emergency wards is undoubtedly influenced by these same factors.
- The head of the Addiction Medicine unit at Homewood Health Centre estimates that one-third of all the hospital beds in Ontario are occupied by drug addict and alcoholics not being treated for their disorder.

Despite all the evidence, the subject of mental health – in strategic terms – is on the agenda of no government in Canada. Which is a pity. We must change that. And we mean to.

### **A Business Plan Of Action For Mental Health**

The new front in an old war centres on our places of work, our reasons for work, our need for work. Employment is no longer just the job we go to, it is the community we belong to.

Employers and employees have a strong incentive to better understand these matters and work is an appropriate venue through which to improve detection and treatment rates for a couple of reasons:

1. The family setting is not effective as a venue for getting mental health issues out in the open and acted on accordingly;
2. In the economy of mental performance, relationships at work are crucial to the individual and the organization. In this light, the symptoms and effects of depression – early and later on – become apparent and with education, training and enlightenment, supervisors and co-workers can help identify those at risk and assist them to secure the professional help they need.

### **12 Steps To A Business Plan For Depression**

The question is how. The Roundtable offers business “12-steps to a business plan to defeat depression” and as we work with business decision-makers to flesh out the specific “how to’s” of these 12 steps, we remain mindful of the bigger picture they represent in terms of protecting and promoting the value of an asset vital to:

- Sustainable business performance in the global information economy of mental performance;
- The value-added “thought content” necessary for products and services that will attract the interest and loyalty of customers in an era of mass customization.

Recognizing the principal sources of stress and the non-medical triggers of depression among the vulnerable, these 12 steps call for:

1. CEO leadership as critical step one;
2. Financial targets for reducing the effects of depression on productive output;
3. Efforts to improve the detection rate of depression from 6.5% to 35-50%;
4. Reforming Employee Assistance Plans to target depression at work;
5. Producing an inventory of emotional work hazards at work and correcting them;
6. Battling office politics to elimination;
7. Eliminating the “treadmill” effect in the workload among people at various levels giving employees a sense of control over their work including their liberation from the treachery of e-mail;
8. Maximum clarity for employees when priorities change;

9. Eliminating the isolation some employees experience because of poor communications;
10. Establishing policies to foster work-life balance among employees;
11. Providing encouragement and emotional rewards for employees day-to-day.
12. Targeting the ravages of “burn-out” at every level of the company – described by one of the world’s largest insurance companies as “America’s newest epidemic.”

### **Chronic Illness – The Health Challenge Of The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The interests of business in these matters – from a Canadian standpoint, not to mention elsewhere in the world – centres on several salient facts:

For one thing, disability in Canada is mostly a business affair when it comes to paying the costs. Mental health issues are the pre-eminent source of disability.

For another, chronic disease generally – including mental illness – is, in my judgment juggernaut health issue of the next 20 years. Our healthcare system remains built around the acute care needs of the population and the real action is moving elsewhere.

In this context, the cost-shift that will occur in Canada will be inevitable and it will have nothing to do – zilch – with public policy concerning Medicare and its privatization.

Rather, it will have everything to do managing disability and the huge future impact of the massive utilization of prescription drugs – by far a private sector health cost – in the management of chronic illness.

### **Ultimate Case For Business Action**

Therefore, it is in the context shaped by three converging forces where we will find the ultimate incentive for business to take strategic action in the health field in defense of its own interests:

- ***Force one***, the threat of chronic illness, including mental health disorders, as a source of massive worker disability in the economy of mental performance;
- ***Force two***, the rising tides of depression and other mental health conditions;
- ***Force three***, the absence of public policy – even in the idea egg-hatching stage – which business or society can turn to for leadership or enlightenment let alone results in this dynamic area of concern.

In business, the past decade has been characterized by downsizing structures and numbers of employees. The jury has returned. This has not produced a more productive economy and more competitive corporations. So, the answer to issues of output – both innovative and efficient – must rest elsewhere.

In the Roundtable’s judgment, we must now make a decisive turn to the development, protection and advancement of human capital in the age of mental performance. A number of initiatives are underway – among them the first-ever Global Corporate and Labor Advisory Committee on Mental Health to oversee a worldwide public education and business action plan under Canadian leadership.

**Tradition of Leadership**

That these initiatives are led by Canadians should not be surprising. Our country has a tradition of leadership where matters concerning the human condition intersect with broad social, economic and political trends. Peacekeeping, public health, land mines are examples of this.

Perhaps, therefore, we will decide – perhaps we have already decided – that in the matter of mental health, work and the economy, a trinity profoundly touching all of us – we will lead there too. Thank you.

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