

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

*The Roundtable is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
Resident at GPC International*

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Notes For Remarks

By

Bill Wilkerson  
Co-Founder and CEO

To

The Provincial Forum – “Making It Happen”  
Mental Health Implementation Task Forces

**BUSINESS REINVESTMENT IN THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF ITS PEOPLE**

*We saw dramatic evidence that people are an invaluable asset of business.  
Something we may have known all along. But also something that needed to be said  
before September 11<sup>TH</sup> and that needs to be said – and embraced – most certainly since.*

Royal York Hotel  
Toronto, Ontario

September 24, 2001

*Check Against Delivery*

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Bill Wilkerson, Co-Founder and CEO

Donna Montgomery, Administrator

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Mental Health Implementation Task Forces  
Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Ontario  
September 24, 2001

I am pleased and honoured to be here and to serve under Michael Wilson’s leadership as a member of the Toronto-Peel Task Force.

The whole “Making It Happen” initiative is an important one and I am richly impressed by the energy and dedication which everyone associated with it is bringing to this historic effort.

I have been asked to review the Roundtable’s business strategy aimed at reducing the impact of mental health disorders on business and economic performance. I am pleased to do that and in the course of my remarks, will:

- Spell out the stakes business has in mental health issues;
- Discuss a 12-step business plan to defeat depression plus a slate of “quality of life” business practices needed for the times in which we live;
- And demonstrate, I hope, the proposition that business can and must invest in the emotional wellbeing and mental health of the labor force in its own self-interest.

In doing so, permit me a brief word on the Roundtable’s purposes and how we feel we can contribute to the management of mental health concerns in this province, this country and points beyond.

The Roundtable is a network not an organization voluntary in nature.

Broadly, we have two purposes. One is to develop management and business practice standards which help equip business to defend and protect its investment in its people at a time when mental health disorders and addictions are provably on the rise and affecting business and economic performance in material ways.

The second broad purpose is to mobilize the most powerful information we can to defeat the stigmatization of mental illness around the world.

Our Senior Chairman is Michael Wilson.

Our Co-Founder and Chairman is Tim Price, Chairman of the Board of Trilon Financial Corporation.

Our Co-Chairman is Dr. Paul Garfinkel, President and CEO of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, world-renown and an essential partner in our efforts.

In fact, this year the Roundtable and CAMH enacted an affiliation agreement through which we will collaborate over the next three years on these matters.

We enjoy an association with other great educational and medical institutions in Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

We enjoy the leadership of Dr. Marten deVries, Founding Director of the Centre for Collaboration in Public Mental Health at the University of Maastricht, The Netherlands.

An outstanding figure in world mental health circles, the retired Secretary-General and past president of the World Federation For Mental Health and a creative force in seeking innovative solutions in mental health, Dr. deVries is our Chairman in Europe and we are very proud of the fact.

On the business side, some of Canada's leading corporations are represented on the Roundtable's list of associates. Roundtables for Atlantic and Western Canada were recently born and we aspire to Roundtables in several U.S. and European locations by 2002.

I wish to acknowledge the role of GPC International in sustaining the Roundtable's efforts. Well-known to the Ministry of Health, GPC International contributes office space, technical support and financial assistance. We are most grateful to the Company and its CEO Hershell Ezrin.

This year, the Roundtable entered into its first partnership with the Province of Ontario. We are pleased to be part of the Ministry of Citizenship's "Mental Health Works" initiative and recently commended Premier Harris and Citizenship Minister Cam Jackson for their Government's initiative in tackling mental health disability through the workplace.

Let me turn, then, to the subject I have been asked to address – and in doing so, I must note the dramatic change in circumstances.

Our national security has been threatened. A sense of danger has taken hold in a rather personal way. In Toronto, for example, one army surplus store reports that people are buying gas masks at a record clip – prompted no doubt by the vivid TV pictures of New Yorkers running for their lives from massive and suffocating clouds of dust and debris.

The buildings in New York that fell symbolized the free market system.

The majority of people who died there represented the true assets of business.

We saw CEO's grieve and mourn their people. We didn't see them weep for their computers or office space. Let's hear the message in that.

We saw the faces of business covered in thick white dust – but alive; we also saw the faces of business smiling from “missing person” photos – probably dead.

We saw supervisors and managers leading their staff down stairwells and going back for those slumped in injury.

We heard the owner of one investment firm look up before the collapse, shouting into the smoke – “my people, my people.”

We read corporate ads in the New York Times talking about the human spirit that lived inside the places of work housed by the buildings that fell.

We saw companies suffering a loss to which their leaders testified publicly and emotionally. A loss of people.

We saw dramatic evidence that people are an invaluable asset of business. Something we may have known all along. But also something that needed to be said before September 11<sup>th</sup> and that needs to be said – and embraced – most certainly since.

It is no revelation that people not machines, do the value-added work of business. They make the sale. Keep the customer. Generate the revenue. Improve the product. We have known all of that for a long time – but have we, in business, acted as if we understood its meaning?

Have we protected our investment in people – in the face of what the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve calls an “unforgiving capitalist system and often irrational stock market” – or have we abandoned that investment too willingly, too quickly?

Mr. Greenspan – no bleeding heart in such matters – says this: “For good or ill, an unforgiving capitalist process is driving wealth creation.” This most important American economic policymaker adds this: “It has become increasingly difficult for policy makers who wish to practice a more “caring capitalism” to realize the full potential of their economies.”

Ditto for company leaders. But surely now is the time to try.

The unforgiving form of capitalism which Mr. Greenspan talks about began with a flood of business cost reductions and restructurings through the nineties to protect the value of company shares traded on the public exchanges. It became a bloodless culture of downsizing.

As the volatility of the stock market deepened, routinely – business leaders routinely re-classified tens of thousands of employees suddenly expendable – a cost to be cut not an investment to be protected.

We know this pattern of choice and behavior must change if for no other reason but to reduce the enormous shortage of skilled and computer-literate workers facing companies competing in the economy of mental performance.

But the reasons go beyond that. From the early nineties to the present hour, like no other time in our modern industrial history, business is fundamentally dependent on the capacity of its labor force to think – to think clearly, to concentrate, to be creative and alert, to have good relationships at work.

On the wing of the revolution in micro processing, we entered – without fanfare, but unmistakably – the economy of mental performance.

This is an economy where business and economic productivity will continue to lag as long as people face constant doubts about where they stand with their employer, whether their job is safe this week let alone this year, let alone longer than that.

The economy of mental performance was spawned by the information revolution.

The information revolution – in commercial terms – dawned around 1993 when, for the first time, corporations worldwide spent (in aggregate) more dollars on telecommunications equipment – the bloodstream of human contact in a global market place – than oil, the blood of machines.

A shift took place. Our way of doing business changed.

Information and innovation became the keys to competitive success. And to use these keys, business need skilled, motivated, reliable and available people. And lots of them.

Information and innovation are delivered through digital technology. But their application for strategic business purposes is a human mental function.

Innovation is not pure invention done in a laboratory. It is the process of making good products better, using today's knowledge to produce new knowledge, it is the job of every employee and manager throughout the business organization in one way or another.

The economy of mental performance is fed not by financial capital alone – or even mainly – it is fed by human motivation, knowledge, perspective, judgment, the ability to communicate, share ideas and have relationships. Innovation is almost always a team effort.

Information in this environment, according to the CEO of Citibank is more important than money. And information, as a commodity, depends on the quality of people and the quality of the work life they experience.

In a nutshell, industrial innovation is defined by many of the things which define human mental health.

In the economy of mental performance, the underlying value-added of new products and services is the “thought content” employees put into them. Consider these two examples:

- In the automotive sector, the dollar sales value of the “thought content” built-into cars coming off the production line – in the form of design, efficiency and safety features – exceed the dollar of the steel housing those cars.
- In the steel industry, it takes less time to produce a ton of steel today than it did a few years ago thanks to innovative thinking by people using the latest in computer technology.

In these terms, the corporate asset value of people – and the collateral provided by their mental health in an economy which pays a premium for mental performance – is well-established.

In these terms, the commercial value of human “thought content” in products and services is well-documented.

In these terms, we see the tremendous stake business has in the state of mind of its people – let's be clear, in this competitive environment, the minds of individuals – not their backs or arms or legs – will do the heavy lifting for business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In these terms, we see the guts of the business case for mental health. But – if we look – we see something else as well. We see a cloud not born of a terrorist's attack but created by another kind of destructive tyranny.

A pandemic of mental illness and mental distress has unfolded across the world – a pandemic documented by the International Labor Organization, World Health Organization, Harvard University and other institutions of equal stature.

It is a pandemic going largely unnoticed by nations, policymakers and populations at large and as such, is described by the Harvard University School of Public Health as an “unheralded crisis in world mental health.”

I can report this evening that it is a crisis with jarring relevance to the prospects and plans of business.

Mental health problems are the leading source of human disability in the world today. Human disability is public health enemy number one in the eyes of business.

Stress and mental health-related problems represent 40 to 50 per cent of the short-term disability claims among employees of some of Canada’s largest corporations.

Since 1994, depressive disorders have grown 100 per cent as a percentage of STD and LTD claims, 40 per cent as a percentage of workers compensation claims and 55 per cent across all categories of disability-related absences from work.

The Canadian Bar Association reports escalating rates of depression and addictions among lawyers – alcoholism three times the rate of the general population. Excessive hours, relentless competition, an unyielding demand within law firms to grow billable hours are the apparent carriers of this explosive distress.

In the Toronto Drug Treatment Court – where a treatment oriented kind of justice is rigorously meted out – we see clear evidence that drug abuse is as prevalent in the financial towers of King and Bay as it is in the rooming houses of Parkdale.

Meanwhile, depression and heart disease are projected to be the greatest sources of workdays lost through disability and premature death over the next 20 years. An eventuality we simply can’t let happen.

Depression and anxiety attack 20-30 per cent of the population at any given hour – mostly people in their prime working years. Depression attacks the young. The average age of onset is 27 – and 20 in nearly half the cases.

In Alberta, mental illness strikes more people than breast cancer or diabetes. There is no reason to believe the proportionate impact is not the same in Ontario and everywhere in Canada.

Depression and other stress-related mental health disorders are robbing our places of work – and the people in them – of huge tracts of productivity and impairing the sustainable economic performance of Canadian companies.

The price tag of depression is about \$60 billion (US) a year in North America alone. Two-thirds of these costs occur in the form of economic and business loss.

In Canada, the cost of mental health disorders is \$16 billion representing 13.8 per cent of all the profits earned by all the companies in this country.

Depression – combined with addictions and anxiety disorders – has replaced the historical threats to worker health associated with air quality, unsafe plant sites and dangerous manufacturing practices.

Employee, managerial and executive despair – serious depression – is today a greater cost to business than strikes or product defects.

Depression and anxiety disorders are detected and properly treated in a small fraction of the actual number of cases existing in the world today – probably less than 10 per cent.

Suicide rates are equal to one jumbo jet falling out of the sky every month for a year, killing all on board.

The dollar cost of mental health disorders constitute a “business crisis” in its own right – as noted, business pays two-thirds of all costs associated with mental health problems in the form of lost productivity, absenteeism, disability, wage replacement costs and employee group health premiums, specifically the cost of prescription drugs.

In fact, today, employers and employees pay just under two-thirds of the entire cost of prescription drugs dispensed in this country – and let us also recognize the boom in antidepressants as they replace antibiotics as the most frequently prescribed form of medication.

The Business and Economic Roundtable has released an analysis showing that by increasing the earlier detection of depression among employees at work from less than 10 per cent to about one-third would save the free market system in Canada an estimated \$7.5 billion (CDN) over five years.

Synchrude Corporation, an oil producer, estimates that undetected mental health problems within its employee population costs the company about 11 million barrels of lost oil production a year – or \$200 million in net revenue.

These figures reflect the disabling effect and impairment powers of mental health problems which now dominate the top ten sources of the world’s burden of disease. In fact, as a percentage of the global burden of disease, psychiatric disorders are growing faster than cardiovascular disease.

The world before September 11<sup>th</sup> was an intense, stressful and uncertain place for many if not most breadwinners. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, that much more so. The imagery – and headlines – of danger are all around us.

- *“Terrorism In A Test Tube”*
- *“The Face of Growing Defiance”*
- *“Markets In Historic Decline”*
- *“Losses In Attacks Catastrophic”*

And the job cuts continue to pile up. Business executives and managers are again reacting to a volatile, emotional and even irrational investor market place by reducing jobs as the most immediate route – it seems – to protecting share value. But the upside of downsizing is transient, feint, maybe illusory.

Those firms which engage in massive job cuts do not, by and large, realize the financial gains they expected in the investor market place. And their deficits in skilled employees grow.

Business pays a high price for perpetuating job uncertainty on a massive scale in the labor force.

And in the face of the undercurrents of fear and danger spawned by the impending war on terrorism – and the acts which precipitated it – the impact of job insecurity, economic turmoil and weak or ambiguous business leadership will take an even greater toll on the state of mind of breadwinners in all walks of life.

This will be expressed in familiar, preventable and expensive trends, among them:

- Even higher rates of short-term absenteeism and soaring wage replacement costs;
- End even greater numbers of stressed-out employees known as the “walking wounded” – people whose capacity for innovation, teamwork and service is seriously compromised.

This has been called a time of transition between the world before September 11<sup>th</sup> and the world after. And in making that transition, it falls to business to protect its strategic interests in the economy of mental performance. Which means protecting its investment in the emotional and mental health of its labor force.

In doing so, there are three specific forces afoot in the global economy of mental performance we must contend with:

**First**, the tyranny of mental illness growing on a large scale most especially among working age people and the young of society. Business can open a new front in this old war.

**Second**, pervasive and toxic workplace stress. This has badly damaged the employer-employee compact.

**Third**, conditions producing a culture of anger and rage especially in our places of work and on our highways. Unfairness – both perceived and real – is a trigger of this phenomenon. And a predictor of illness and injury at work.

In this context, permit me to review briefly a business approach to the issues bound-up in this cluster of effects on the wellbeing of working people at every level of business organizations today.

If we are up to a war on the invasive threat of terrorism, we are up to a war on the invasive reality of depression. Business has a direct and self-interested role in both wars.

The Roundtable, therefore, calls for the development and implementation of management practices which will ultimately contain the growth of depression – recognizing, as we must, that the social and economic dimensions of work can promote the health of people or make people sick.

In that regard, we offer a 12-point business plan and action toolbar to combat this and other mental health disorders at work.

The 12-steps cover a lot of territory.

We propose steps to use the workplace as an important venue through which to improve dramatically the rates of early detection, diagnosis and treatment of depression and anxiety – plus the addictions they intermingle with.

We propose financial targets to give incentive to managers and executives to root out the conditions of work, which produce toxic stress and mental illness.

We propose comprehensive reforms of employee and family assistance plans by customizing them for mental health purposes.

We advocate clear-cut employee referral systems to connect the workplace with mental health professionals in a more coherent way.

We call for managerial and supervisor training to help our front-line personnel deal with the earlier or advanced behavioural symptoms of someone experiencing a mental health problem.

We are working on models of managerial and executive performance reviews which forge the doctrine of fairness into the culture of the business.

*(We know that unfairness produces seething and rumination among those on the receiving end. There is evidence both of these are predictors of depression.)*

We say organizational health – work climates – predict mental distress as much or more than employee behaviour, lifestyle or health status. We need “workplace designs” and “work organization models” to supplement our armaments in this war.

We call – most vigorously – for office protocols which regulate the excessive use of e-mail systems. We call for e-mail ceasefires. We call for preventative measures to forestall the customary acceptance of 200 e-mails as a normal feature of the workday.

We are working on specific recommendations to business to help facilitate the return-to-work of employees off work through depression.

We call upon business leaders to become informed about the physics of mental illness.

We will do what we can to defeat the stigma of mental illness.

We believe business must chronicle and eliminate emotional work hazards which predict lateness, absenteeism and mental distress.

We call for steps to root out the corrosive effects of office politics.

We will offer business a tool to differentiate employee performance problems driven by attitude or skill and those which are health-related.

We hope to articulate a health index to govern and control unhealthy productivity practices. Call Centres are the sweatshop of the future and they will get our attention.

We ask business most particularly to target the top ten sources of stress. (Copy attached)

In the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world, we believe even more – much more – what must be done to protect the investment of business in its people.

I will close on that.

In the course of the months ahead – as the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> spreads – I believe we must introduce a series of business-savvy “quality of life” management practices which supplement – and go beyond – the 12-step plan I have just described.

I believe:

- Places of work must become fully-outfitted centres of information in the management of personal anger (on the one hand) and employee distrust (on the other).
- Places of work must become centres of information in the management of parental anxiety relevant to the fears of their children in the face of television, movie and Internet imagery flowing from the war on terrorism.

- Business leaders must make their views known to provincial and municipal governments in the management of gridlock in the Greater Toronto Area. This is becoming a divisive social issue and major health concern.
- Business must put a new premium on clear communication with its employees about the future.
- The fundamental principles of business planning must be reasserted by shareholders and boards of directors alike to reduce the high incidence of 11<sup>th</sup> hour business decisions which produce huge layoffs in a so-called defense of share value.
- Specific jobs must get additional emotional support – such as nurses, teachers, long-haul truck drivers, call centre operators. These people are especially vulnerable in a climate of high demand and low reward.
- Business human resource managers must be called upon to declare war on verbal abuse and what I would call “deadline harassment” born of the intensity of work environments and severe time compression.
- Using the Internet, business webs can become – must become – a decisive weapon in the defeat of stigma in the war on mental illness.

I will stop there except to add this. The early capitalist Adam Smith recognized at the dawn of America’s free enterprise system that only healthy workers – justly-treated people – did good work consistently. Let his words ring out today.

And let the next voice we hear pronouncing the benefits of a mentally-healthy place of work be our voice.

A message I need not deliver to this group. But one, I trust, we can deliver together to those who might hear it for the first time.

Let us agree to do that resolutely.

Thank you.

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*Bill Wilkerson, President and Co-Founder*

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## **TOP 10 SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS**

10. The treadmill syndrome. Too much to do at once, requiring the 24-hour workday.
9. Random interruptions.
8. Doubt. Employees aren't sure what is happening, where things are headed.
7. Mistrust. Vicious office politics disrupt positive behaviour.
6. Unclear company direction and policies.
5. Career and job ambiguity. Things happen without the employee knowing why.
4. Inconsistent performance management processes. Employees get raises but no reviews or get positive evaluation, but are laid off afterward.
3. Being unappreciated.
2. Lack of two-way communication up and down.
1. Too much or too little to do. The feeling of not contributing and having a lack of control.