

**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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Text of Plenary Speech

By

Bill Wilkerson
Co-Founder and CEO

To

A National Summit on Best Practices for Mental Health in the Workplace
Sponsored by US Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services

“SINCE SEPTEMBER 11TH – THE BUSINESS STATE OF MIND”

***Mental Health: The Ultimate Productivity Weapon In The Global Economy Of
Information, Innovation and Mental Performance***

Steps To An Action Plan To Defend The Investment of Business
In Executive, Managerial and Employee Mental Health

Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center
Washington, DC

October 9, 2001

Check Against Delivery

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The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health is a network not an organization. It is voluntary and non-profit and supports the deployment of business capital in the war on another kind of terrorism sweeping the world – mental illness.

Broadly, the Roundtable has three purposes.

One is to develop management and business practice standards which equip business to defend and protect its investment in its people at a time when mental health disorders and addictions are on the rise.

The second broad purpose is to defeat stigma. It is a barrier to the early detection and treatment of mental health disorders worldwide

The third purpose is to pre-empt what I call the 2020 scenario.

The Harvard School of Public Health has projected that unipolar depression and ischemic heart disease will become – according to current trends – the leading sources of workdays lost in the global economy through disability and premature death.

We must not let this happen. There is time if there is will. Heart disease and depression feed off each other. Both can breed and multiply in work environments polluted by toxic stress.

The Roundtable is comprised of leaders in business and science – mostly, so far, Canadian-based. This is changing.

WHO Centre of Excellence

Proudly, we are affiliated with one of the world's leading psychiatric research, treatment and teaching hospitals. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health is one of only four World Health Organizations Centres of Excellence.

With them, we are searching for new combinations of research which will unify business management and scientific knowledge to fight mental illness as a business and economic imperative.

GPC International

GPC International, our principal business affiliate has offices right here in Washington. GPC is part of its worldwide family of Fleishman-Hillard, one of the largest public relations firms in the U.S. and Omnicom Group Inc., not only the world's largest advertising and communications organizations – but, in fact, one of America's best-run companies as declared by Fortune Magazine.

We are proud of this association.

Wide Range Of Sectors

In supporting the Roundtable, GPC keeps pretty decent company. Our friends in business represent a range of sectors from oil and gas to real estate and financial services.

Notably, the Honorable Michael Wilson, former Minister of Finance of Canada, and former director of both IMF and World Bank, is Senior Chairman of the Roundtable. Mr. Wilson is President and CEO of Brinson Canada Co., formerly RT Capital, a world-scale asset and pension management firm.

Brinson, in turn, is owned by Brinson partners in New York – part of Swiss-owned UBS Asset Management Group, one of the largest in its field.

Roundtable founding members also include board chairmen and CEOs of Canadian firms who felt the effects of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. We have common cause in the wake of these events.

In all, the Roundtable's friends represent Canadian and U.S. corporate assets in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

I mention this not to indicate size – but to note that our starting point in delivering our message on the stakes which business has in mental health is well-placed.

We will expand in 2002 beyond Canadian companies with U.S. and other international interests, and U.S. companies with Canadian interests, to homeland-based corporations in the United States, Europe and Far East.

A Global Issue

The reason for this expansion is clear. Mental health is a global business issue. We live and work in a global economy. We must have global reach.

Let me turn, then, to the subject I have been asked to address.

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 Pentagon attack symbolized an attack on democracy and freedom.

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

Just as you mourn the loss of valued friends and colleagues here, the majority of people who died in New York are mourned as human beings and the true assets of business.

Grieving For People Not Computers

We saw CEO's grieve the loss of their people. We didn't see them weep for their computers or office space. In the face of massive layoffs of people and continued investments in technology hardware, 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 in melancholy “missing person” photos.

Reflecting the courageous actions of those confronted by the Pentagon disaster, we saw the supervisors and managers of business organizations in New York leading their staff down stairwells and going back for others.

We heard the owner of one investment firm shout 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. It was a loss of people. The loss of the true assets of business.

People Not Machines

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 know all that. But as business people, do we act as if we understand it?

Do we adequately protect our investment in people or routinely squander it through 11th hour business decisions which produce downsizings on a mass scale?

In the face of what Chairman Greenspan of the U.S. Federal Reserve calls an “unforgiving capitalist system and often irrational stock market” – do we – and I include me, over 30 years in business – all too abruptly, all too often decimate that investment in the interests of protecting share value in the short-term against the often irrational behavior of an emotion-driven stock market.

Mr. Greenspan says that “for good or ill, an unforgiving capitalist process is driving wealth creation.” He says it has become increasingly difficult for policy makers who wish to practice a more “caring capitalism to realize the full potential of their economies.”

If we were to care more about the investment we already have in our labor force, is that a proposition we should allow to be rejected by irrational institutional investors who regularly over-value some stocks while under-valuing others – creating chaos in the job market along the way?

Consider the emotion afloat on the stock exchange floor. Brawling. Shouting. Is that the environs which will inform business decisions which, in turn, produce mass job cuts in defense of share value?

Unforgiving Capitalism

The unforgiving form of capitalism which Mr. Greenspan describes became a flood of headcount reductions and restructurings through the nineties aimed ineffectually at protecting the value of company shares traded on the public exchanges.

As business people, we have created, fostered and functioned in a bloodless culture of downsizing. A culture in which a whole generation of human resource managers were born and bred, with little else than large-scale job cutting as their defining role.

As a result, the human resource profession, in my judgment, has grown increasingly inward, simplistic and disempowered.

As the volatility of the stock market deepens – as irrationality becomes the norm – business decision-making that is driven by it becomes more emotional and less rational itself. In the storm that ensues, jobs – and people – become more and more costs to be cut not investments to protect.

This is happening even as ATT CEO Michael Armstrong warns us of the effects of a growing shortage of skilled workers in the contemporary market place.

This pattern must change if for no other reason than to reduce the enormous shortage of skilled and computer-literate workers facing companies all over the world.

“Thought Content” Of Products And Services

But the reasons for change 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, concentrate, be creative and alert, have good relationships at work.

With the revolution in micro processing, we entered the economy of mental performance.

This is an economy where business and economic productivity will continue to lag as long as people face constant uncertainty about their jobs, huge stress at work and soaring rates of depression and anxiety.

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 more money on telecommunications equipment – the bloodstream of human contact in the globalized world – than oil, the blood of machines.

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

Innovation: A Mental Function

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

Innovation is the key to competitive success in the global economy. Innovation is delivered through digital technology. Innovation is a human mental function.

The economy of mental performance is fed not by financial capital alone – or even mostly. The CEO of Citibank once said information is more important than cash money in this environment. My own bank manager won't agree with that, but on a strategic level, Citibank is right.

Information is a dead asset without people communicating, interpreting and using it.

In this context, we see that human capital, human motivation, knowledge, perspective, judgment, the ability to communicate, share ideas and have relationships drive the global economy of information and mental performance.

But we also see the continuing carnage of massive job loss draining the economy of the source of that brain-power – massive layoffs which are often a corporate reaction to the kind of stock market irrationality which Mr. Greenspan describes.

Innovation And Mental Health

Consider this: industrial innovation defines competitive success in the global economy. It also consists of many of the things which define human mental health.

In the economy of mental performance, the 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 supporting this asset known as mental health – is well grounded.

The economy of mental performance pays a premium for thought content. And therefore, it pays a premium for mental health. But business has yet to record, register and act on that fact.

Minds Will Do The Heavy Lifting

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

This is the guts of the business case for mental health.

But looking beyond the horizon of our self-interest – we see something else – we see a cloud born not of the smoke from a terrorist’s attack, but one bred by another kind of tyranny.

The economic and social tyranny of mental illness in a global economy of mental performance.

A pandemic of mental illness and distress is unfolding across the world – a pandemic going largely uncalculated by nations, policymakers and business leaders and described by Harvard as an “unheralded crisis in world mental health.”

This crisis has jarring relevance to the prospects and plans of business.

Mental Disability: Public Health Enemy Number One

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

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

As a percentage of the global burden of disease, depression is growing faster than cardiovascular disease.

Lawyers And Depression

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 particular virus.

Depression and anxiety attack 20-30 per cent of the population at any given hour – mostly people in their prime working years. Depression targets the young. The average age of onset is 27 – and 20 in nearly half the cases. Mental illness strikes more people than breast cancer or diabetes and yet receives a fraction of the research dollars.

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 illness equates to 14 per cent of the combined corporate profits of all Canadian companies, most American-owned, and four per cent of our national debt.

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.

At the same time, 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.

The Scale of Suicide

Suicide rates in Canada alone are equal to one average-sized jumbo jet falling out of the sky every month for a year, killing all on board. The number of people in the United States who kill themselves in any one year exceed the entire U.S. death toll of the Vietnam war. But who has built a wall for them?

In fact, in this country, driven mostly by depression, the annual number of people – so many of them children – who take their own lives is equal to the World Trade Center death toll five times over.

Despair Cost More Than Strikes

Despair among people in the private sector likely costs business annually more than strikes and product defects.

Call centers threaten to become the sweatshop of the information economy.

Business pays two-thirds of all costs associated with mental illness in the form of lost productivity, absenteeism, disability, wage replacement costs and employee group health premiums and prescription drugs.

The world before September 11th was an intense, stressful and uncertain place for many or most breadwinners. Since September 11th, that much more so.

Era Of Homeland Danger

As the era of homeland danger enfolds, pervasive job insecurity, economic turmoil and weak or ambiguous business leadership take an even greater toll on the state of mind of breadwinners in all walks of life.

This has been called a time of transition between the world before September 11th and the world after. In making that transition, I submit that it falls to business to protect its strategic investment in its people – its vital asset – and, therefore, by definition of the economy of mental performance in which we compete, in their emotional and mental health.

In doing so, we, as business people, must recognize and contain certain forces now afoot in the global economy of mental performance:

First, the tyranny of mental illness. Business has it within its power – and in defense of its own enlightened self-interest – to open a new front in this old war.

Second, toxic workplace stress on a mass scale. While we apprehend the effects of chemical warfare on our population, so too must we understand the invasion of workplace stress now attacking human biochemistry and physical and mental health on an unheard-of scale.

Third, anger and rage in our places of work and on our highways. Unfairness – one unto the other of us – from positions of power to less power – is a trigger of this phenomenon and predictor of illness and injury at work.

In the context shaped by these forces, let me review briefly a business the Roundtable's recommended approach to emotional distress and mental illness as business and economic issues.

Vision 2020

First, the target.

Twenty years out, depression and heart disease, if we let them, will destroy more economic productivity through disability and premature death than any other source in developed or developing nations alike

Let it be our goal to prevent that calamity. And it is preventable.

We propose a business plan to combat mental health disorders in an environment intensified by events on September 11, 2001.

Venue For Earlier Detection

We believe the workplace must become a primary venue through which to improve dramatically the rates of early detection, diagnosis and treatment of depression and anxiety – plus the addictions they intermingle with.

Depression is treatable and beatable in 80 per cent of the cases. But it is diagnosed and treated in only a handful.

Stress Buster Bonus

We propose financial targets to incent managers and executives to root out the conditions of work which produce toxic stress and mental illness. A stress-buster bonus.

EAP Reforms

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

Business-Health Treaty

We advocate clear-cut employee referral systems to connect the workplace with mental health professionals in a more coherent way. We call for the U.S. and Canada's psychological and psychiatric associations to join business in a treaty of enlightened and effective response to the threat to human health posed by the 2020 scenario.

We call this treaty **Vision 2020** – a state of high alert and informed action to protect the mental health of the continental labor force in the face of a potential work and health disaster two decades hence.

Training

We call for managerial and supervisor training to help our front-line personnel deal more effectively with human behavior and the symptoms they may represent.

Fairness

We know that unfairness produces seething and rumination among those on the receiving end. Both of these may be predictors of depression.

We need models of managerial and executive performance assessment which promote the doctrine of fairness. Well-run businesses already do this.

Work Climates

Organizational health – work climates – predict mental distress as much or more than employee behavior, lifestyle or health status. Therefore, we need “workplace designs” and “work organization models” which promote both healthy lifestyles and healthy work climates.

Lack of control over one's daily job is a bigger threat to the cardiac health of employees than smoking.

Email Ceasefire

We call for email ceasefires across the global economy.

We call – most vigorously – for office protocols which regulate the excessive use of email systems. We call for preventative measures to modify the custom of accepting 200 emails as a normal feature of the workday.

We call for interventions to intercept the emergency of the 24/7 workday.

Staged Return-To-Work

We visualize specific protocols to guide the return-to-work of employees disabled by mental illness – specifically depression and anxiety.

Staged return-to-work policies – formalized within bargaining agreements where necessary – and without reference to diagnosis – are called for under the broad heading of work and health.

With doctor-patient confidentiality intact, heart disease and depression are worthy targets of such a protocol.

Physics of Mental Illness

We call upon business leaders to become informed about the physics of mental illness. Beyond heart disease, the risks extend to infectious disease, thyroid disease, blood disease, respiratory disease and cancer recovery.

End Stigma

The stigmatization of mental illness must end.

We call for a world wide web education campaign to eliminate the ignorance, mythology, prejudice and plain public inattention which has engulfed mental health and rendered it virtually voiceless and friendless from one generation to the next.

This global fight against stigma should start in earnest in 2002, by coordinating so much good work already going on in so many countries and aiming to declare victory by 2006.

Emotional Work Hazards

We believe business must chronicle and eliminate emotional work hazards which predict lateness, absenteeism and mental distress – starting with the Roundtable's top ten sources of stress.

End Office Politics

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

Healthy Productivity

We call for qualitative indices to design and measure healthy productivity practices.

Call Centers are a priority.

Quality of Life Management

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

We envision a series of business-savvy “quality of life” management practices which supplement – and go beyond – the plan I have just described.

Managing Anger And Distrust

Places of work must become fully-outfitted centers of information in the management of personal anger (on the one hand) and employee distrust (on the other).

Very Young And Very Old

Places of work must become centers of information in the management of parental anxiety relevant to the fears of their children and elderly dependents in the face of television, movie and Internet imagery flowing from the war on terrorism.

Let the needs of the very young and the very old be a barometer of our wisdom in calming a society in which hundreds of millions of everyday people are hurried, worried and rattled by change.

Clarity

Business must put a new premium on clear communication with its employees about the future.

Moratorium on Mass Layoffs

The fundamental principles of business planning must be reasserted by shareholders and boards of directors alike to rein-in in the unbridled spread of mass layoffs – where they occur – in the so-called defense of share value.

Just as we in business endorse passionate belief but devalue emotionalism, so too, in the era of irrationality in the stock market, as described by Chairman Greenspan, must we resist informing our business decisions by the emotionalism of investors trading in erratic ways.

Should we not draw down on the equity of Chairman Greenspan’s concept of “caring capitalism” and for a period (say, one year) place a moratorium on mass layoffs to facilitate a mobilization of health, business, education and government leaders worldwide to stabilize the emotional turmoil now engulfing the global workplace.

Most Vulnerable Jobs

In this way, we could work to truly defend our investment in the “thought content” of our products and services and the human asset where that content originates. We could truly mobilize to roll back the pandemic of mental disorders confronting the global economy.

The Most Vulnerable

In this quest, specific jobs must get additional emotional support – such as nurses, teachers, long-haul truck drivers, call center operators. These people are especially vulnerable in a climate of high demand and low reward.

Deadline Harassment

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.

The early capitalist Adam Smith – no bleeding heart – recognized at the dawn of America’s free enterprise system that healthy workers – justly-treated people – were more likely to do good work. Let his words be heard today.

Personal Note

A final word and a personal note, if I may.

I have lived all my life near the Canadian – US border – Niagara Fall, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

I am Canadian.

But since September 11th, like millions of other people of other nationalities, I now know I am more than that.

In grieving the loss of America, in my heart, I am American, too.

In bearing witness to America’s courage, and wishing to be nourished by it, I am American, too.

In observing America’s vivid sense of national identity in the face of momentous crisis – and being inspired by it, I say – modestly, humbly, respectfully – I am American, too.

And I thank you for that.

Bill Wilkerson is Co-Founder and CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. He is also a business man, crisis management expert, former chief and senior executive in banking, broadcasting, and health services. He has done three tours of duty in government. Wilkerson is an author and consultant serving as Senior Counsel to GPC International.

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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.