

Mental Health In The Workplace

Michael Wilson Led Canada, Canada Led the World.

Bill Wilkerson, LL. D. (Hon), Executive Chairman, Mental Health International, reflects on his 20-year partnership with the Late Michael Wilson in workplace mental health and, with acclaimed University of Toronto physician-scientist Roger McIntyre, projects Mr. Wilson's legacy into the future.

Enduring Milestone

A great Canadian, Michael Wilson's smile lit up every horizon he crossed. He was a man of his nation whose memory and legacy now belong to all Canadians.

Michael was the chairman of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health, succeeding Co-Founder, Tim Price, Chairman of Brookfield Funds. Tim is a powerful mental health advocate and a great Canadian in his own right.

This is the 20th anniversary of the first Business Plan to Defeat Depression that Michael signed and took to the world on July 20, 2000, setting in motion a chain of events resonating across decades.

International Leadership

In Michael Wilson's words: "We are poised, as Canadians, to show international leadership by opening a new front — the workplace and economy — in the old war against mental illness."

The Business Plan to Defeat Depression was rooted in CEO leadership and top Canadian executives stood with Michael, putting mental health where it had never been before. That is, on the agenda of big banks and major companies across this country and eventually beyond our borders.

Through these corporate pioneers:

- Canada brought North America the US/Canada Forum on Mental Health and Productivity.
- Canada introduced a series of CEO Mental Health Summits hosted by our major banks whose boardrooms became, symbolically, original housing for a new era of workplace mental health.
- Canada produced CEO, CFO, investor and boards of director Guidelines for Mental Health and Productivity, innovations exported to target depression in the workplaces of Europe
- Canada was home to the first website devoted to strategies, guidance and tools for employers to manage mental health in the workplace, the initiative of Great West Life Assurance Company, now Canada Life.

Into the Future

As noted, the Business Plan to Defeat Depression, was an act of corporate leadership. The question: is that leadership energy still there? Some say it is not. If true, it must be rediscovered. Here's why.

- Scientists (McIntyre et al) have linked unemployment rates with suicide. One percentage point up, one life lost. Companies continue to end the employment of people as the first not last resort of adjusting to economic pressure. Michael Wilson decried this publicly.
- Loneliness is now a public health concern fast-forwarding into millions of lives including young people entering early adulthood more stressed and depressed than generations before them.

Michael Wilson 2020

Looking to the future, might we see a new 'Business Plan to Defeat Depression' and might we call it Michael Wilson 2020 to capture the spirit of aspiration and action that Michael embodied.

In years past, there were obvious mental health and workplace issues for business to target — issues affecting business costs, productivity, innovation and lost work time. But these are different times — the pandemic, job loss, climate change, pursuit of justice in the streets. In this context, the mental health goals of business must serve broader societal purposes.

For this reason: the environments in which we live and work are part of the "gene + environment" dynamic causing mental disorders across whole lifetimes from one generation to the next.

Michael Wilson pointed to the "flesh and blood of capitalism" as the property through which business can help reduce these environmental risks.

From this vantage point, business leaders can help achieve a series of **Great Societal Goals** leading toward the prevention of human misery and economic cost associated with mental illness.

- To prevent suicide including children coping with despair delivered by social media;
- To prevent depression's dangerous effects on the course of heart disease, cancer and diabetes;
- To prevent workplace and marketplace spread of misogyny, racism, hate and chronic stress;
- To prevent abuse of the elderly in all places at all times;
- To prevent eco-anxiety among youth apprehending a future of climate change;

And

- To declare and explicitly and value inherently all people of colour as stakeholders to whom business is accountable.



The Unmet Need of 500 Million People

In his efforts to embed mental health in the workplace as a corporate priority, Michael Wilson expressed a strong view that business and science must work together in common cause.

Michael envisioned "an international, workplace-centred, business + science alliance to reverse the tides of brain-based mental disorders and to press for new science to be translated more quickly into innovative clinical care to meet the unmet needs of a half billion people."

A formula was developed 'brain health + brain skills = brain capital' to unify business and science, advancing Michael's vision.

Flying on the wing of closer synergy between business and science are these clinically-significant priorities for the next three to five years brought into view by Dr. Roger McIntyre:

Priority: strengthen human resilience: our capacity to deal with life.

Priority: discover treatments that alleviate depression symptoms in a day.

Priority: develop treatments specifically aimed at preventing suicide.

Priority: make mental health care accessible for all.

Priority: advance 'precision medicine' to identify who will respond to treatment, and who will not.

Priority: expand technology for early detection, improved treatment and medical home care.

These clinical priorities and the societal goals for business will enhance the asset value of human capital in the workplace and in the marketplace — that is, the productivity of employees and the purchasing power of consumers.

An acutely well-timed revolution. Today, so-called 'intangible' assets — people — constitute 80% of the reported asset value of corporations. Not technology. Not things. Human beings.

The priorities and societal goals set out here, therefore, will sustain these vital human assets and, in doing so, represent an historic opportunity for business.

A Moment in Time

When Michael Wilson passed away, a large cloud rolled-in from another place. But it didn't last all that long. In death, as in life, Michael's optimism shone through. He would have loved the findings of a recent survey:

Even while they contended with the effects of COVID-19, young people — more than any other age group — "feel the most hopeful about the future."

Let this nourish our soul. Just as Michael Wilson would want us to.

This Tribute Paid for by Mental Health International

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