

**MAN ON FIRE PRESENTS**  
**THE COMBUSTION**  
**CHRONICLES**

**EPISODE ONE**  
**COMPASSION IN THE CRUCIBLE**

**HOST: SHAWN NASON**  
**CO-HOST: MICHAEL HARPER**  
**GUEST: ARIANNA HUFFINGTON**

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## EPISODE ONE **Compassion in the Crucible** WITH **ARIANNA HUFFINGTON**

On this episode, Shawn speaks with Arianna Huffington, founder and CEO of Thrive Global, a corporate and consumer well-being and productivity platform with the mission of changing the way we live and work by destroying the delusion that burnout is the price we have to pay for success. Arianna explores the role of creative disruption in her work, dreams about a disrupted post-pandemic future, speaks boldly about the challenges of compassion, and even poses the question, "Is Shawn a mutant?" Come combust with us as we dive into these topics and more.



ThriveGlobal.com



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AriannaHuffington

### THEMES & INSIGHTS

1. You're never too old to create something great and disruptive.
2. Knowing that we need to live healthier isn't always enough. Platforms like Thrive Global can help change our mindsets and integrate new healthy behaviors into everyday life.
3. Practicing kindness and compassion is like exercising a muscle. It requires repetition and practice throughout one's life. Compassionate people are made, not born.
4. Learning to let life unfold without our total control allows us to operate from a place of creativity and abundance, rather than scarcity and fear.

### COMBUSTION QUOTES



"I collapsed from exhaustion, burnout, and sleep deprivation in 2005.... I just simply did not have the luxury of taking care of myself. And after I broke my cheekbone and had to go through multiple tests to find out what was wrong with me, basically, recognized that this was not just my problem, that burnout was actually a global problem."



"[My disruptive mindset] really goes back to the way I was brought up by my fearless mother who made me feel that anytime you want to do something new, there are no guarantees of success. But her point was failure is not a problem. In fact, she used to say to me, 'Failure is not the opposite of success, it's a stepping-stone to success.'"



"The crucible has become metaphorically to mean a time of trial, a time that tests us. And I think we're going through this time, there are incredible losses of loved ones, of jobs, of a sense of normalcy. And at the same time, there is this huge opportunity to imagine a new world that's more compassionate, that's fairer, that's not full of all the things we didn't like about our old world..."

### RESOURCES

[ARIANNA'S BOOKS](#)

[SLEEP RESOURCES](#)

[TED TALK](#)

**Shawn:** Welcome to "The Combustion Chronicles" podcast, where bold leaders combined with big ideas to create game-changing disruption. I'm Shawn Nason, founder of Man on Fire, and your host for "The Combustion Chronicles." Throughout this series, we're bringing together the most unique and influential minds we could find to have honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, blowing shit up, and working together to influence our shared future. We believe that when bold leaders ignite consumer-centric ideas with passion and grit, the result is an explosion that creates a better world for all of us. I'm here with my co-host Michael Harper, chief of radical experiences at MOFI.

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On this episode, we're speaking with Arianna Huffington, CEO of Thrive Global and founder of "Huffington Post." In 2016, Arianna launched Thrive Global, a corporate, and consumer well-being and productivity platform with the mission of changing the way we work and live by ending the collective delusion that burnout is the price we must pay for success. Founder of "The Huffington Post," author of 15 books, including most recently "Thrive" and "The Sleep Revolution." She is also named to Time magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people, and the "Forbes" most powerful woman's list. Welcome, Arianna Huffington.

[00:01:25]

**Arianna:** Thank you so much. Great to be with you.

[00:01:28]

**Shawn:** Thank you, Arianna. So, Arianna, I wanna dive right in. In 2016, you launched Thrive Global, a corporate, and well-being productivity platform with this mission of changing the way we work and live by ending this delusion that burnout is the price we must pay for success. How did you identify that that was a need?

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**Arianna:** Well, the hard way, Shawn. You know, I collapsed from exhaustion, burnout, and sleep deprivation in 2005. And I basically realized that I had bought into this collective delusion that that was the price we had to pay for success. That in order to be a super founder and a supermom, I had two teenage daughters at that time. I just simply did not have the luxury of taking care of myself. And um after I broke my cheekbone and had to go through multiple tests to find out what was wrong with me, basically, recognized that this was not just my problem, that burnout was actually a global problem. And in fact, interestingly enough, last spring, the World Health Organization acknowledged it as a medical syndrome. So I started covering these issues on "The Huffington Post." By the time I left in 2016, over 50% of our traffic came from issues about how to live our best lives rather than politics. But the reason I left is because I wanted to help people move from knowing what to do to doing it. It's not enough to know what to do, as you know, Shawn, it's really hard to change behaviors. I left "Huff Post" to launch Thrive because I wanted to help people build sustainably healthier habits.

[00:03:33]

**Shawn:** Yeah. Arianna, we could have a whole episode around behavior change, right, and how to make people do it. And you know, you didn't just look at the why but you looked at the how. And you walked away from, you know, and left your journey at "Huffington Post" to start Thrive. And it's really been a culmination of disruption as you've launched Thrive and the platform is getting more and more exposure every day. We have this term that we call "Creative disruption." And what role does creative disruption play in your work and in how you have moved through your career in life?

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**Arianna:** You know, Shawn, it really goes back to the way I was brought up by my fearless mother who made me feel that anytime you want to do something new, there are no guarantees of success. But her point was failure is not a problem. In fact, she used to say to me, "Failure is not the opposite of success, it's a stepping stone to success." So I think once you see your life that way, it makes you not be afraid of disruption. Because the truth is that anytime you look at the world and see a need that's not being met, it involves disruption. In my case, leaving "The Huffington Post" a very successful global company to start again, you could call it, um, something that definitely disrupted my own life. But I was so passionate about it. I felt this was something we really needed. And now with the coronavirus crisis, everything we've been working on is actually more urgently needed than ever because every company is prioritizing health and wellness. Because these are no longer warm and fuzzy optional issues, they're like at the heart of a company's success and the bottom line.

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**Shawn:** I love that perspective that it's no longer an option, even more powerful is what your mother said to you. You left a very successful career and started Thrive, and most people probably said, "Why are you doing this?" (Arianna laughs – yes) And I won't expose at what age you did that at.

[00:06:00]

**Arianna:** I always talk about my age. I'm 69. And I launched "The Huffington Post" in my 50s and Thrive Global in my 60s. And I kind of love the fact that launching companies is not just a young person's game.

[00:06:18]

**Shawn:** I love that. And I love the fact that two very successful companies, as you said, you did in your 50s and your 60s, and that should give every one of our audience members this hope that failure is just that stepping stone as your mother told you, right? And so Thrive Global is meant, Arianna, to go beyond just raising awareness. You said that you wanted to create something real, something tangible that would help improve well-being and performance and unlock our greatest potential. So how do we create lasting change in people's health and well-being, or in health and wellness?

[00:06:59]

**Arianna:** I'm very excited by all the elements we're bringing together, which are a combination of the latest science-backed micro-steps. Because as you know, Shawn, behavior only changes through tiny, daily incremental steps. Again, too small to fail, but also bringing together inspiration, music, touching people's hearts as well as their minds, and building all that on a powerful scalable technology platform. And you can't really build that without the tech platform. And that's what we are focusing on. We, we've launched this platform...we call it a platform rather than an app because apps conjure a point solutions, like you have a meditation app, a sleep app, diabetes app. And we believe that to change behavior, you have to approach the whole human because everything is interconnected. Like, if we don't get a good night's sleep, we're going to be more stressed the next day, we're going to not eat as well. We're not going to be as productive or empathetic.

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So in our platform, we bring everything together in four journeys. The first journey is recharge, which is all about sleep and 60-second recharging breaks during the day, very tiny breaks that can release the cortisol hormone from our bodies and help us course-correct. The second journey is fuel, which is nutrition and movement. The third journey is connect. And, you know, we know, especially now during the coronavirus, how important connections are. And for us, connections are with our own selves first before we can truly deeply connect with others. And the final one is focus. So this is key, you know, especially at a time when we are also easily distracted by constant notifications and social media, etc.

[00:09:17]

**Shawn:** Wow, I love the connect on the focus part that you talked about and that I've seen on the platform and how I've even started to use it in my life. And you actually, you touched on a pretty heavy topic, I think that we're facing in the health and wellness journeys of a lot of Americans but globally. And your book, "The Sleep Revolution," shows that we are actually in the midst of a sleep deprivation crisis that's having profound consequences on our health around here, and our job performance, our relationships, and our happiness. What have we gotten wrong when it comes to sleep?

[00:09:56]

**Arianna:** It goes a long way back. It really goes back to the Industrial Revolution when we started revering machines. And, you know, the goal for machines and the goal for software, too, is to minimize downtime. But for human beings, you know, downtime is not a bug, it's a feature. So that's what really all the modern sleep science teaches us that, again, sleep is not optional, it's foundational for our immunity and our mental resilience. And that's why we have so many simple micro-steps to help people get the sleep they need, especially at a time like now, when...because of stress, it's harder than ever.

[00:10:49]

**Shawn:** Yeah. So what is your advice to us, Arianna? And how do we create this sleep revolution as your book is called, and change the patterns of ingrained behavior of potentially millions of people? I am one of these people that you are speaking to right now, Arianna, like, if I get four or five hours of sleep a night, I feel blessed. I heard it said this week around our sleep hygiene process, 8 to 10 hours. What would be your words of advice, wisdom, steps to bring the sleep revolution to life?

[00:11:22]

**Arianna:** First of all, let me explain that maybe you have a genetic mutation, 1% to 1.5% of the population has a genetic mutation and they don't need a lot of sleep. If you feel recharged when you wake up after four or five hours, then you have that genetic mutation. If you don't, that means you are like the majority of us who need seven to nine hours. Where we are in that spectrum is individual, like, I am an eight-hour girl and I have totally made it a priority. But you need to figure that out. So it's a very individual number of hours that everybody needs. What is not questionable is that if we don't get all the sleep we need, it means our brain cannot function at its best because we haven't given it enough time to clear all the toxins that accumulate during the day.

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**Shawn:** What I'm glad to hear and you confirmed, Arianna, is that I am in the 1% of weird people in the world, I think people already believed that anyways. And so now I can say that Arianna Huffington officially diagnosed me into that space so.

[00:12:44]

**Arianna:** But you are in charge. You have to self-diagnose, do you feel [crosstalk 00:12:48]?

**Shawn laughing.**

[00:12:50]

**Shawn:** Arianna, regarding COVID-19, you were talking about that and we all are trying to figure out what this new norm is. Do you believe that positive disruption can come from times of crisis, and what the positive disruption could be right now in our new norm?

[00:13:06]

**Arianna:** Absolutely. In fact, I wrote a piece in my Sunday newsletter. I don't know if you get it, but if not, I'll send it to you. Where I talked about a metaphor that I've always loved, you know, in medieval times, alchemists who used the crucible, which is a vehicle in which they mixed base metals to turn them into gold. And the crucible has become metaphorically to mean a time of trial, a time that tests us. And I think we're going through this time, there are incredible losses of loved ones, of jobs, of a sense of normalcy. And at the same time, there is this huge opportunity to imagine a new world that's more compassionate, that's fairer, that's not full of all the things we didn't like about our old world including growing inequalities, including what

we talked about earlier, Shawn, the burnout, and stress epidemic, and the skyrocketing increases in chronic diseases and the mental health crisis.

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**Shawn:** You've been talking about positive disruption coming from COVID-19, and you were just sharing around compassion and compassionate people. And I've been exploring, MOFI's been exploring in our ecosystem the idea of empathy versus compassion. And we have seen so many individuals' acts of compassion and kindness throughout this pandemic. Take, for example, the heroic actions of our first responders and the movement that you have been deeply involved in, Arianna, around this First Responders Movement. And so I'm curious, what do you think it is about moments of crisis that bring up the really compassionate acts in our fellow humans?

[00:15:03]

**Arianna:** I really believe that in those moments, we connect with something deeper in ourselves. And that deeper place is where we are all really interconnected. And, um, most of the time we live kind of on the cell phones. And when we are confronted with a crucible time, a time of crisis like this, we really have to dig deeper. And you know how often we say that a time of crisis brought the best out in someone. And then we are less kind of obsessed about the little things that tend to worry and preoccupy us, and focus more on what is essential and what matters. And from that place, we recognize, you know, our power to be compassionate, and that it is a power. And that it actually makes us feel more abundant and less fearful. And that's really what we're seeing here with so many people who are doing these acts of service for others.

[00:16:16]

**Shawn:** We've come alongside you with this movement with First Responders, as a thought leader, as a disrupter in this world as you are, Arianna, what do you really think, though, that distinguishes those who are driven to act and help, versus those who are kind of living in fear and who are not doing that, right? So we see a big movement of people helping but then there's still this fear that is overwhelming to some people. What do you think distinguishes those?

[00:16:47]

**Arianna:** I actually think, Shawn, that giving is a muscle you need to begin to exercise through micro-steps. There was a lot of research done in the Second World War about people who ended up putting their own lives at risk to save others. And what the research shows is that they were made not born, that they started with small acts of compassion service and kindness, and then that muscle became stronger and they did more and more. So that's how I see it. That's why I think it's so important to get children giving early on in their lives. It becomes like a natural part of our lives and of what we do. And then that muscle gets stronger and stronger and we begin to live our lives in a way that is much deeper.

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**Shawn:** I wrote "Giving is a muscle," what a profound statement and then you're talking about if we do it with children, how it goes through life that. That's pretty powerful. You know, we, uh launched this whole campaign on disruptive giving, and how, you know, giving is not just about dollars, right, Arianna? Giving is about time, emotional space. So have you been surprised about anything that you have observed during this crisis, like, just had this mind blown moment where you're like, "Wow, that's really happening?"

[00:18: 21]

**Arianna:** Right now, during this time?

[00:18:24]

**Shawn:** Yes.

[00:18:24]

**Arianna:** You know, the mind-blowing moment for me, actually, Shawn, has been how much more of an introvert I really am. Because I find that, you know, a lot of the ways I was living my life pre-COVID, you know, on airplanes, constantly with people is not really necessary in order to be effective. You know, all I care about is the impact we're having at Thrive with our work. And I find that we are actually so much more effective right now because I have no distractions, no planes, no airports, and just really doing the work I love. And I think coming up with my best ideas and being able to execute much faster is so ironic. And I'm hearing that from a lot of my friends, too, who've also been living their lives on airplanes.

[00:19:21]

**Shawn:** I 100% agree. My team would probably also say to you. It's kind of scary because it's given me space to live in that creative moment and to also be really real with ourselves, right? So it's given us time as thought leaders, as disruptors to really reflect. I don't know that I've completely come to the conclusion that I'm more of an introvert. **(Arianna laughs)** You know, mine's probably a little bit more of the opposite of, like, after two weeks at home I'm like, "Okay, I've got to go do something, right?" Like, Arianna, you have millions, millions of people that look to you, and are inspired by you and the great work, you know, that you've done starting your own business and walking through that. If you were speaking to Arianna Huffington when she was 30, what would be the advice you would give her right now in what you've learned over your lifetime?

[00:20:18]

**Arianna:** Oh, I think the biggest advice I would give her is to recognize that life is a dance. That's how I see life now between making it happen and letting it happen. And some of the best things that are going to happen to her in her life, she didn't make happen. That doesn't mean that I don't believe in hard work and I wouldn't suggest anything else, but also to acknowledge, you know, the kind of mystery of life. And to be in the flow means that um, you are open to what life brings you and not just what you make happen. Which takes a lot of that breathless

making it happen approach that brings so much stress to our lives out of it, and puts us more in a place of creating from our abundance instead of from scarcity and fear.

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**Shawn:** Did you just read the blog that I posted on Thrive? Because I just talked about living from the abundance mindset versus that scarcity mindset. And that if you don't do that, right...and I look at that term as with generosity, I made a very conscious decision with my wife, and children, and family, and businesses this year, that I was going to live through a spirit of generosity and that's not always easy. But I love what you just said there, making it happen versus letting it happen, right? And how do you live in that risk, high risk for high reward in business, in your own personal life? So just great nuggets, great, great nuggets there. So thankful for that. And hearing, hearing you talking to the 30-year-old Arianna was talking to the 47-year-old Shawn today (**Arianna laughs**). So thank you for that. So, you know, Arianna, as we get to the close of the podcast, we're starting a tradition called the combustion questions. And uh, we use these amazing algorithm, Michael on our team, it's pulling is algorithm out of his brain to come up with three random questions. So you are actually gonna be the first person to be tested with this algorithm to hear three combustion questions. So I'm gonna actually turn it over to Michael and let Michael um, ask you these questions, Arianna.

[00:22:56]

**Arianna:** Great. Thank you, Shawn.

[00:22:58]

**Michael:** All right, Arianna, are you ready for your combustion questions?

[00:23:01]

**Arianna:** I'm ready.

[00:23:02]

**Michael:** All right, here we go. Number one, what's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?

[00:23:08]

**Arianna:** The first thing I do...

[00:23:10]

**Michael:** The very first thing.

[00:23:11]

**Arianna:** ...is not go to my phone. The first thing is to take some deep breaths for 60 seconds and focus on what I'm grateful for.

[00:23:25]

**Michael:** That is amazing. I'm gonna start that tomorrow maybe.

[00:23:28]

**Shawn:** Starting tomorrow. Starting tomorrow. Thank you. I love that.

[00:23:33]

**Arianna:** Just 60 seconds.

[00:23:35]

**Shawn:** Sixty seconds.

[00:23:35]

**Michael:** Sixty seconds.

[00:23:37]

**Michael:** Awesome.

[00:23:38]

**Michael:** All right, question number two, beach or mountains?

[00:23:41]

**Arianna:** Beach, I am a Greek immigrant girl. **(Shawn laugh)**

[00:23:45]

**Michael:** What do you love about the beach?

[00:23:48]

**Arianna:** Oh, I love the sea. I love the sea so much. I love swimming in the sea. I love uh snorkeling. I love uh just lying on the sand, but there's nothing like the Greek beach.

[00:24:04]

**Shawn:** Well, I can't wait, Arianna, for you to have to take my wife and I over there to experience those Greek...

[00:24:09]

**Arianna:** Absolutely. We are going to Antiparos, my favorite Greek island.

[00:24:14]

**Shawn:** Ah, can't wait.

[00:24:16]

**Michael:** We are in. All right, your final question, question number three. What do you think about campfires?

[00:24:23]

**Arianna:** I love campfires because campfires are a place for stories and I love stories. So the idea of sitting around a campfire, I love the smell of the campfire, what happens around campfires absolutely, everything about it.

[00:24:42]

**Michael:** We will have to do that on the beach.

[00:24:43]

**Shawn:** On the beach, that's right, on the island in Greece on the beach we'll have a campfire area. Arianna, I can't thank you enough, you know, you are the kickoff to "The Combustion Chronicles" for this new podcast. So thank you for being a part of it. I pray for you to stay safe and be well, and can't wait to see you as soon as we can.

[00:25:06]

**Arianna:** Thank you so much. Give my best to your family. Stay well, stay safe.

[00:25:11]

**Shawn:** All right, love you. Bye.

[00:25:13]

**Arianna:** Bye. Love you.

[00:25:16]

**Shawn:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of "The Combustion Chronicles." None of this is possible without you the listener. If you'd like to keep the conversation going, look up Man on Fire on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and at [manonfire.co](http://manonfire.co). Give us a shout. Let us know what you think. And please, subscribe, rate, and review if you like what we're doing and if you don't do it anyways. And remember, always stay safe and be well.