

## Healthy Entrepreneurs, Healthy Societies: Why Entrepreneurial Health Must Be a Global Priority

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### Introduction

Entrepreneurs are the architects of innovation and the backbone of every economy. They launch companies, create jobs, and build solutions that shape the future. Yet behind the glossy headlines and the perception of relentless success lies a silent crisis: entrepreneurs are experiencing alarming levels of mental and physical health challenges. Studies show that up to 88% of entrepreneurs report at least one mental health condition, including anxiety, depression, or burnout. This is not just an individual issue; it's a societal one. When the leaders who drive economic growth and job creation are chronically stressed, overworked, or burned out, entire ecosystems suffer. Companies falter, employees lose stability, innovation slows, and the next generation inherits a culture that normalizes unhealthy work patterns.

In the modern era, long working hours and the inability to deal with chronic stress can no longer be justified as trade-offs for financial results. Healthy entrepreneurs are not a luxury; they are a necessity for building sustainable businesses, thriving communities, and a healthier world. This essay examines the urgency of prioritising entrepreneurial health not just for the individuals themselves but for the collective good of society, and argues for systemic changes inspired by pioneering initiatives such as Singularity Academy's Mind-Body Program and the Verus Bonifatius Klinik.

### The Global Scope of Entrepreneurial Health Challenges

Entrepreneurial health issues are a global epidemic. According to WHO and OECD data, entrepreneurs work longer hours than most professionals, often exceeding 60–80 hours per week, and are more likely to experience burnout and chronic illnesses. Poor sleep, unhealthy diets, and a lack of time for preventive care compound these risks. In Asia, especially in China, Japan, and Korea, cultural work norms like the notorious '996' schedule (9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days per week) and the concept of 'karoshi' (death from overwork) continue to devastate lives. Multiple high-

profile suicides among Chinese entrepreneurs in the past three years have shocked the nation and raised questions about how far founders must push themselves.

The United States is not immune. Silicon Valley's 'hustle culture' glorifies sacrifice and relentless work, often at the cost of mental and physical well-being. In Europe, although universal healthcare systems provide stronger safety nets, entrepreneurs still face stigma around seeking help and can succumb to financial pressures during economic downturns. The consequences of this crisis ripple far beyond the entrepreneurs themselves, affecting their employees, investors, families, and ultimately the stability of the societies in which they operate.

### **Asia: The Epicentre of the Crisis**

Asia presents some of the most extreme examples of entrepreneurial health crises. In China, the '996' work culture has become a symbol of productivity at any cost. Tragically, this culture has contributed to the suicides of several well-known entrepreneurs in the last few years, with cases widely reported in outlets such as the South China Morning Post and BBC. In Japan, the phenomenon of 'karoshi' remains a grim reminder of how chronic overwork can literally kill. Entrepreneurs, already under immense financial pressure, often choose not to seek help due to cultural stigma. In South Korea, one of the most competitive startup ecosystems in the world, founders face relentless pressure from investors and societal expectations. Recent high-profile suicides among Korean founders have prompted calls for greater mental health support.

Other Asian countries, such as India and Singapore, are also grappling with rising levels of entrepreneurial burnout. In India, long working hours and inconsistent access to healthcare compound the risks, while in Singapore, urban entrepreneurs face unique stressors tied to the high cost of living and hyper-competitive market conditions. These realities show that entrepreneurial health challenges are systemic, not isolated incidents.

### **The United States: Hustle Culture at a Cost**

The U.S. startup ecosystem is synonymous with ambition and relentless growth, but its culture often glorifies unsustainable work habits. High-profile entrepreneurs, including Elon Musk, have publicly admitted to working 120-hour weeks, sacrificing sleep and personal well-being to meet investor expectations. Arianna Huffington famously collapsed from exhaustion while leading the Huffington Post, an experience that transformed her into an advocate for workplace well-being and led to the creation of Thrive Global.



Unlike in Europe, U.S. entrepreneurs often lack affordable access to healthcare, making it even harder to address mental health and chronic illness early. The absence of systemic safety nets combined with the competitive nature of venture-backed startups creates an environment where founders feel they must endure extreme stress to succeed. But this approach is not sustainable and has led to numerous burnout-related failures.

### Europe: Stronger Systems, Persistent Stigma

Europe's healthcare infrastructure and labor protections offer entrepreneurs more safety nets than those available in Asia or the U.S., but challenges remain. Economic crises have driven some founders, particularly in Southern Europe, to despair and even suicide. In Germany, innovative programs like those offered by Verus Bonifatius Klinik provide holistic care for entrepreneurs at risk of burnout, demonstrating how early intervention can save lives. However, stigma around mental health persists across the continent, preventing many entrepreneurs from seeking help until it's too late.

### Society's Sickness: How Entrepreneurial Health Shapes the Future World

The health of entrepreneurs is a mirror reflecting the health of society. When the leaders who set cultural norms and drive economic growth are chronically stressed, the impact extends far beyond their own lives. Employees internalize the idea that long hours and stress are the price of success, perpetuating unhealthy work environments. Families suffer as entrepreneurs miss out on critical time with children, and young people grow up equating self-sacrifice with achievement.

This generational impact is perhaps the most concerning. If we normalize the idea that founders must destroy themselves for their companies to thrive, we pass down a toxic legacy. The next generation of entrepreneurs and employees will inherit a world where health is secondary to profit, and society will pay the price in higher healthcare costs, lower productivity, and weakened communities. The sickness of society is not only reflected in the inferior health of the population at large but is magnified when its entrepreneurial leaders are unwell.

### The Myth of Sacrifice: Why Long Hours and Stress Are No Longer Acceptable

For too long, the entrepreneurial world has celebrated sacrifice as a badge of honor. Working 18-hour days, skipping vacations, and neglecting mental health have been normalized. But research shows that this approach leads to poor decision-making, reduced creativity, and toxic company



cultures. Companies led by burned-out founders are more likely to fail, as leadership instability undermines team morale and productivity.

In the new era of global business, we must reject the false dichotomy between financial results and founder well-being. Sustainable success is built by healthy leaders who can inspire teams, foster innovation, and model balanced work habits. Founders' health must be treated as a strategic asset, not an expendable resource.

### **Positive Models: Building a New Vision of Entrepreneurial Health**

Encouragingly, pioneering initiatives are showing a better way forward. Singularity Academy's Mind-Body Program (<https://www.singularityacademy.ch/mindbodyprogram>) is explicitly designed to help entrepreneurs develop mental resilience and physical well-being. By integrating neuroscience, mindfulness, and fitness, the program equips founders with the tools they need to manage stress and lead sustainably.

Similarly, the Verus Bonifatius Klinik in Germany offers tailored interventions for entrepreneurs (especially for female entrepreneurs) on the brink of burnout. Through holistic care that addresses the mind and body, these programs demonstrate that early support can prevent crises and enable founders to return to their ventures healthier and more focused.

### **A Call to Action for Society**

Entrepreneurial health is not a private matter; it is a public good. Governments, investors, incubators, and communities must recognize that supporting founder well-being strengthens entire ecosystems. This means embedding health education into startup programs, offering accessible mental health services, and changing the cultural narrative that glorifies overwork.

The cost of inaction is too high. Every entrepreneur who loses to burnout or suicide represents not only a personal tragedy but also the loss of jobs, innovation, and societal progress. We must build a world where founders can lead without sacrificing their health, ensuring that future generations inherit a healthier, more balanced entrepreneurial culture.

### **Conclusion**

Healthy entrepreneurs build healthy companies, and healthy companies build healthy societies. It is time to move beyond the outdated belief that success requires self-destruction. By prioritizing



the well-being of founders, we can create resilient businesses, vibrant communities, and a future where innovation thrives without costing lives.

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