

Meet WONE, an AI powered coach for workplace stress

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Reeva Misra, CEO of Walking On Earth (WONE) about putting an end to the stress epidemic and bringing passion to build a new blueprint for the workplace of the future.

Temps de lecture : minute

26 October 2024

What was the catalyst for launching WONE?

My first job was in a research lab at Oxford studying how our brain develops the ability to perceive the world around us. I was fascinated by the study of the brain but frustrated by the pace and ability to impact at scale which led me to move into the tech world. Whilst VP Strategy at BenevolentAI, it shocked me that over 70% of diseases in the world are chronic, with no cure, yet our healthcare system spends so little time on prevention. When digging into the academic literature it was so clear that stress is one of the leading indicators of chronic disease, yet no health solution focuses on diagnosing and treating stress before it becomes chronic. It was then that I decided to bring together my skills across science, technology and ancient practices to found *Walking on Earth (WONE)*. By blending the latest advances in AI technology with the neuroscience of micro moments of recovery, we help employees to regulate their stress and be at their best.

Tell us about the business – what it is, what it

aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

WONE is a Stress Coach. Our mission is to end the stress epidemic and inspire a more preventative model of health.

We have developed a unique methodology called the WONE Method with leading stress scientists, product designers and machine learning researchers, that results in 74% of individuals reporting a reduction in stress and 90% reporting an increase in productivity. Our clinically validated health score blends biometric and self-reported measures to create personalised health plans from hundreds of live sessions and on-demand content, all powered by AI and delivered by world-leading experts.

We've started in the workplace as it's the #1 cause of stress and over 80% of US and UK working adults experience regular workplace stress. By regulating employee stress, we can deliver better performance for both the individual and the organisation. We work with a number of clients across professional service industries, such as Quinn Emanuel, Fidelity, and Arm, as our platform is especially useful for employees in fast-paced and high-stress industries.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

Founded in 2020, WONE's journey has been one of high growth and impact. Our engagement rates are 5-8x those of industry incumbents because of our ability to integrate into workplace culture through leadership buy-in and integration with existing work systems. As a result we are experiencing 3x year on year growth.

As we grow, our technology and dataset is strengthened. We're building the largest and richest dataset on stress, where we collect both physiological and psychological inputs of stress as well as contextual data to understand what's having the greatest impact on relieving and triggering stress levels during the day. We're able to measure impact in this way with 70% of users reporting a reduction in stress from WONE interventions and our breathwork practices seeing a 10% reduction in heart rate. We are starting to produce research with our dataset and have shown that 35% of our user base experience chronic stress daily and GenZ feel 15% less supported by their managers yet engage 2x as much in WONE than any other demographic.

Tell us about the working culture at WONE

We live and breathe by example and are committed to building the best team that walks this earth. We go deep in our domain expertise and are united in a shared passion of wanting to end the stress epidemic.

Because of our mission, we believe we must lead by example and create a new blueprint of the workplace of the future. We want to change the narrative that you must burn out to build a successful company. We genuinely believe that as a tech company, we can grow faster and sustain longer by putting the health of our people first.

We recognise that we're a high-growth tech company with big ambitions, and that hard work, single-minded determination and resilience are necessary ingredients for achieving our goals. Fundamental to our collective motivation is our deep connection to our mission; it drives us to work to our full potential. But crucially, we also believe that balancing those periods of intensity with periods of recovery is the missing and vital ingredient for unlocking long-lasting success.

Whilst we so readily accept that to train for a race or a marathon, we

must balance intense training with muscle recovery, we don't apply the same logic when it comes to training our mind. We're intentional about building in periods of recovery. We offer unlimited holistic health days, quarterly company rest days, an annual retreat and of course, regular 5-minute WONE sessions blocked out in our calendars to downregulate our nervous systems.

We give this a lot of thought and are constantly testing and improving our what, how, why and with whom. I believe those who innovate with not just what you do at work, but how you work, are the companies that will set themselves apart and thrive.

How are you funded?

We are backed by some incredible VC investors, including *Octopus Ventures*, *Notion Capital*, and Wisdom Ventures, and we have raised \$10M to date. Our business model is a B2B2C subscription model, where customers purchase an annual subscription to our base platform, which includes unlimited access to the WONE Platform and data dashboards for employers. Businesses can choose to layer on additional services of bespoke events and coaching.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

We're campaigning for a new way of working where employers take responsibility for employee health and workplace stress levels. Employee wellbeing is still being defined as a market and many business leaders have expressed frustration to us that their existing solutions have low utilisation and limited to no impact on key business metrics, making it difficult to justify further investment. Yet clearly, the need is still there and only getting larger. Last year sick leave in the UK reached its highest

in a decade, with stress cited as a leading cause, and in December 2023, we conducted research that showed 35% of individuals reporting daily chronic stress. As business leaders look to alternatives to existing reactive approaches to combat rising levels of chronic stress, we are seeing an increase in demand for our preventative, data-driven and scientific approach.

Therefore, at WONE, we've focused on showing not just high engagement levels in our solution but also real measurable impact on employee and business health.

How does WONE answer an unmet need?

We have found that while the problem of stress is large and growing, a key barrier for individuals to engage in needed wellbeing solutions is a lack of time during the day. Workloads are high, and spending time finding a way to relieve stress inevitably falls at the bottom of the priority list. By focusing on measurable impact and meeting people where they are, when they need it most, we have created a product that employees love to use.

Incumbent wellbeing apps require individuals to sift through learning management systems and content, to find a solution relevant for them, resulting in low ongoing utilisation: employees simply don't make the time. WONE's AI technology understands an employee's unique stress triggers and can recommend a recovery solution based on their specific needs at the time they need it most. This means the 'thinking' is taken off the individual as micro moments of recovery are automatically inserted directly into an employee's work calendar. The interventions are short 2-10 minute exercises as that's all you need to move from a high-stress state to a calm one. Finally, through our measurement dashboard, we provide employees with the impact of an intervention on say, their heart rate, in real-time and show progress over time. The behavioural science

behind this immediate validation contributes to ongoing habit formation.

What's in store for the future?

Walking on Earth is emerging as the category leader in a market desperate for a better solution. We will advance our AI Stress Coach capabilities to achieve greater impact at scale, building a burnout warning system for individuals, and using our rich dataset to invest in research that better understands the link between stress and chronic disease. We want to expand our target audience beyond enterprise clients to be the go-to solution for managing stress, used by schools, healthcare professionals, corporates and the public sector.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

My most fundamental value when it comes to my business (and personal life) is authenticity - if you act authentically, then everything else will follow. By acting from a place of authenticity, you will not compromise on your values and you will have the courage to stand for what you believe in. By doing so, you can never fail, because you've stayed true to yourself. An example of where

this is key is fundraising. If you ensure that you stand up for what you believe in and do not compromise on your vision just to appease investors, then you will attract investors who truly want to help you in your mission and who believe in you and your business. Building authentic relationships with key stakeholders will benefit you and your company in the long run.

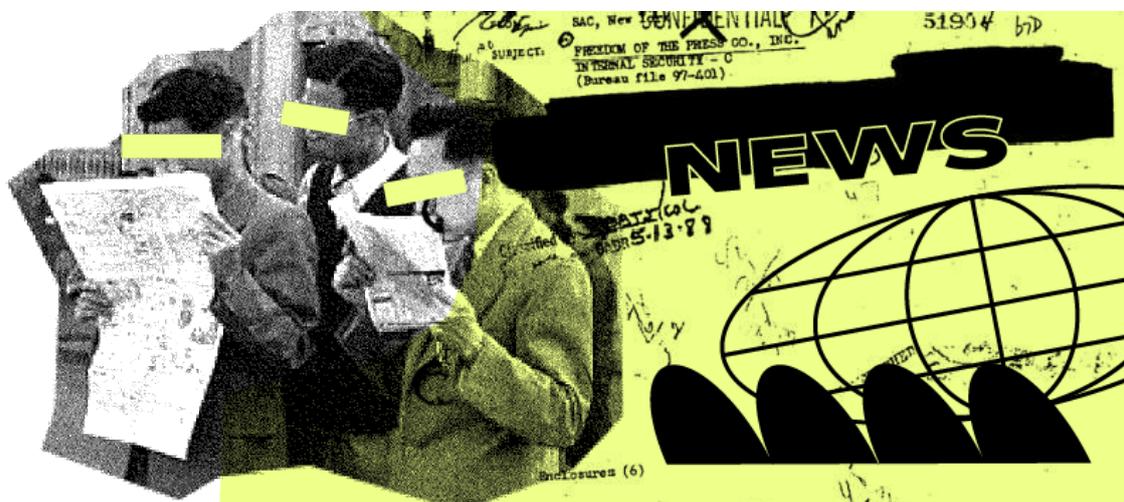
And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I'm a big believer in the power of preventative health practices and as the founder and CEO of a preventative health company focused on stress, it's so important for me to practise what I preach.

I know my own weekly thresholds for maintaining an optimal level of stress across the amount of sleep, exercise, nutrition, meditation, family time and nature I need. I plan ahead to make sure I'm meeting these thresholds, putting blocks in my calendar for wellbeing to ensure they're given as high a priority as work meetings.

I also use micro moments of recovery throughout the day and build it into my routine so if I'm on a plane, travelling for work, or waiting in line, I'll close my eyes and do a 5-minute breathing exercise.

Reeva Misra is the CEO of *Walking On Earth (WONE)*.



MADDYNEWS UK

The newsletter you need for all the latest from the startup ecosystem

JE M'INSCRIS

Article écrit par Reeva Misra