

The Next Frontier of Empowerment is Letting People Pause

By Xinyi Zheng

For years, issues like fair wages, equal opportunity and access to capital have sparked conversations around empowerment in the business world. We've measured progress in percentages and pay gaps. But when we look toward building the resilient economies of the future, I believe we are missing a critical and also more human-centric component. We all ignore the empowerment to rest.

In today's culture, burnout is a kind of silent epidemic. This not only depletes our employees but also kills the creativity and resilience we need (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). At The Coca-Cola Company, our work with women entrepreneurs across our global value chain by 2020 has taught us a lesson. The 5by20 initiative covers women from smallholder farmers to retail store owners ("Coca-Cola's 5by20 initiative", 2021). We provided access to business skills, financial services, and peer networks. And we got stronger local economies, more resilient supply chains and thriving families as a result. However, we found that the mental load they carry is immense. The concept of "clocking out" is a luxury they can rarely afford.

This insight is forcing a shift. The true modern empowerment should include both financial well-being and physical and mental well-being. In other words, creating an environment where a pause is not seen as a lapse in productivity is important. A pause is an important investment in sustained performance. Such an environment should exist both inside our corporations and throughout the communities we serve. Knowing how to recover, reflect and return with clarity can help us to be the most resilient business.

This principle applies to our employees, our partners and the consumers we serve. The future of work and the future of wellness are converging. People are actively seeking tools and moments that allow them to transition mindfully from one state to the next. People want to transit from professional to personal, from stress to calm. They are looking for ways to intentionally reset (Mallinder, 2025).

Our role as business leaders is to champion this new ethos. It means building cultures that respect boundaries and designing products that facilitate mindful moments. People should have a broader understanding of what it means to be "productive." It's about recognizing that the energy to build a better

future doesn't come from relentless activity. The energy is from the quiet and purposeful spaces in between. Empowering people to fully own those moments without any guilt is the next frontier of smart business. Because a world that can pause is a world with the clarity and energy to truly move forward.

Strategy Note

This thought-leadership piece doesn't focus on a product-centric narrative, but on a values-based one. We want to establish the brand as a visionary on well-being. The rationale is to provide a foundation for "The 5 PM Reset" campaign. We championed "the empowerment to rest" and "a pause" as an important social and economic issue. We want to use this article to reframe the campaign's core idea from a simple consumer benefit to a more necessary cultural shift. By showing an understanding of our audience's modern pressures, the messaging aligns with the brand. It positions Coca-Cola not only as a beverage provider but also as an advocate for mental refresh and sustainable performance. Then, our brand can build immense goodwill and show our understanding on a profound level. Also, when we introduce our subsequent product, it can feel like a natural and thoughtful solution to a problem.