

B U S I N E S S

# TRIP

THE EXECS ARE NOT ALRIGHT,  
AND AN INCREASING NUMBER OF THEM ARE  
TURNING TO PSYCHEDELIC TREATMENTS TO HELP  
THEM COPE WITH THE CHAOS

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Victoria (not her real name), the CEO of a small not-for-profit, arrived at the edge of Ontario's Maple Lake in the autumn of 2023 with the intention of getting blitzed out of her mind on cannabis. In joining the "Ascend" program offered at Dimensions, a luxury wellness retreat about an hour east of Muskoka, Victoria was hoping to shake off some of the "small T" trauma she had been carrying in her body since childhood, when she says she grew accustomed to tiptoeing around volatile personalities. As an adult, she felt like her nervous system was still clinging to that fear and anxiety, the sense of powerlessness and lack of safety.

For years, the trauma manifested in chronic back pain and a hyper-driven Type A personality. She was stressed all the time and overly reactive with her team. When problems emerged, she felt unable to navigate the conflict with confidence. Victoria hoped that taking cannabis under the care of a psychotherapist—as part of a five-day wellness retreat (plus pre- and post-care) that cost \$5,000—might help her let go of the pain and become a better, more grounded version of herself.

It wasn't just the cannabis that Victoria was drawn to. The cabins at Dimensions offer upscale Scandinavian minimalism, with white walls and crisp white sheets alongside blonde wood

accents. Guests are quizzed on personal preferences prior to arrival, including bathroom-floor temperature, and whether they prefer dark or medium locally roasted coffee beans. The views over Maple Lake are indisputably tranquil, with more ducks and dragonflies than Sea-Doos. And the culinary program is indulgent. While Dimensions does not typically serve dairy, gluten or refined sugars, they do serve meat. A four-course dinner might include a bacon empanada, roasted cauliflower taco with avocado crema, chicken tostada with charred scallion salsa, and Mexican chocolate pudding topped with cinnamon-candied pepitas.

Ascend participants are expected to engage in significant prep work before they arrive. There's a process intended to screen out contraindicated psychiatric conditions, plus a "bio-psycho-social" intake meeting over Zoom where participants are asked to describe their childhood traumas and honestly assess the quality of their adult relationships. There are also solo and group sessions with a psychotherapist.

When they arrive at Dimensions, guests engage in a range of treatments, from yoga and Thai massage to nature therapy, reiki and qigong, a traditional Chinese movement meditation practice. The experience culminates in a three-hour cannabis ceremony, where participants sit in a circle in a large geodesic dome and vape cannabis (anywhere from three to 10 puffs) while doing breath work and listening to a "sound bath" of a dozen instruments, including singing crystal bowls, French chimes and a crystal harp.

Victoria was asked by Dimensions to source her own cannabis, advised of a proprietary therapeutic recipe that mixes various strains. Under the guidance of a local Indigenous Elder, along with Dimensions' clinical director, Donald Currie, Victoria took several hits from a vaporizer and then laid back on a linen-covered futon. A guided meditation encouraged her to be in her body, starting with the feet and then moving up. "When they got to the chest, I felt this intense pain like a sword going through my heart," she says. "I was gasping for air." Currie instantly moved to her side, encouraging her to keep breathing through the experience. It was like every heartbreak she'd ever had in her life—all the agony and fear and disappointment, most of it tied to her family—was happening simultaneously. The floodgates opened, and she found herself sobbing and unable to stop. And then, she was free of it. "It was like years of crying happened there, and I left feeling so much lighter," she says.

She emerged from the experience with a stronger sense of the boundaries she needed to set for herself and clarity surrounding her desire to let go of the past. When Victoria came home, her husband commented on how much better she seemed, how much calmer. But the benefits extended beyond her personal life. Victoria was less high-strung at work, able to sit with problems rather than panicking, and she found she no longer took things so personally. It culminated in a greater sense of ease—both for her and her colleagues. "I really reflected on how to let go of ego," she says, "so that I could be a better person to myself and those who know me."



Dimensions, an hour east of Muskoka, offers gourmet food, yoga, Thai massage and three-hour cannabis journeys under the guidance of a local Indigenous Elder

might struggle to find sufficient, coordinated mental health supports: According to the Fraser Institute, the average wait time from referral to treatment by a psychiatrist is six months.) "We've seen a steady influx of executives, especially over the past four or five years," says Dr. Ben McCutchen, chief of psychiatry for The Residence. "I believe there are growing demands on professionals, whether it be related to staffing challenges, the economy, COVID—the multitude of effects that professionals are dealing with that impact their well-being."

Luxury rehab isn't new or rare, and more conventional avenues might include psychiatry, psychotherapy and addictions therapy, which can include a mix of prescription medications, individual or group talk therapy, and lifestyle directives. In addition to Homewood's The Residence, there's Muskoka Recovery's detox and rehab services with gourmet meals; the Canadian Centre for Addictions' stately manors in Port Hope and Cobourg; and Edgewood Health Network's quaint centre in Lawrencetown, N.S., near the Bay of Fundy. Clinic Les Alpes, near Montreux, Switzerland, specifically works with Canadians "seeking solace from the strains of everyday life" and in need of "recovery and renewal" in a traditional chateau with sweeping views of the Alps.

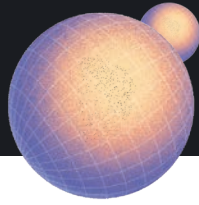
But increasingly, illicit (or just recently decriminalized) substances are seen not as the problem but part of the solution. Consciousness-altering drug use has entered the mainstream discourse, whether it's Elon Musk's much-discussed ketamine use, or food guru Michael Pollan's Netflix documentary about the benefits of psychedelics, or random TikTok videos about putting micro doses of psilocybin (also known as magic mushrooms) in your morning coffee to enhance focus and maximize productivity. Whole Foods founder John Mackey credits an MDMA-psilocybin trip with his graceful exit from the company in 2022, calling each trip "a revelation" and crediting the drugs with helping heal relationships as he moved onto the next phase of his personal and professional life. He now plans to open a chain of wellness clubs that will one day offer psychedelic therapy (once it's legal, of course). A few years ago, the U.S. National Park Service put out a statement begging people to please stop licking Sonoran Desert toads, which secrete a potent hallucinogen known by some as "the God molecule."

Research is nascent, but psychedelics have been linked to all kinds of potentially positive outcomes, including relief from anxiety, depression and PTSD. Many psychedelics are considered broadly safe with the appropriate dosage and particularly under the care of a knowledgeable practitioner, but there are risks. According to the Cleveland Clinic, adverse events can include everything from dilated pupils and excessive sweating to

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DIMENSIONS RETREATS

**DIMENSIONS** is just one of several luxury options for stressed-out executives and entrepreneurs looking to heal in a world that sometimes seems to be spinning out of control. Still recovering from the fog of the pandemic, and now grappling with the impact of a U.S. president hellbent on remaking the global order, the vibe is chaotic; it's the end of predictability combined with a sense of impending doom. According to a May survey by the Business Council of Canada, more than 60% of Canadian CEOs expected the economy to weaken in the near term, largely citing global uncertainty. And while present circumstances might be uniquely terrorizing, the problem isn't new: In 2019, a survey by the Canadian Mental Health Association found that 62% of entrepreneurs were depressed at least once a week; almost half reported that their mental health issues were interfering with work. In a more recent poll, 31% of managers who have left or are planning to leave their jobs attribute it to mental health issues.

Insights gathered by Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ont., which offers a range of treatment programs for mental health and addiction issues and has been in operation for 140 years, indicates that high-level executives and entrepreneurs are increasingly presenting with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), imposter syndrome, burnout and "exhaustion from constantly delivering in high-pressure scenarios or environments." They often find themselves at The Residence, Homewood's luxury nine-bedroom in-patient option. (Less deep-pocketed clients, meanwhile,



nausea and vomiting, seizures and even death. But many are prepared to overlook any potentially nasty side effects to indulge in micro- and macro-dosing galore. Around the world and in Canada, options range from ayahuasca retreats with shamans in Peru or the jungles of Costa Rica, to psilocybin vacations in Jamaica and the Netherlands. There are discreet domestic offerings of all types, including retreats and urban clinics that administer ketamine, a dissociative anesthetic that's become a party drug popular with Silicon Valley titans and celebrities (it was implicated in the overdose death of *Friends* actor Matthew Perry). A ketamine-derived nasal spray was approved by Health Canada in 2020 to treat depression.

At home, there's been a push toward decriminalization of all kinds of psychedelics, including an effort last year to turn Prince Edward Island into an ayahuasca retreat hub that might draw both celebrities and wellness influencers. "It helps you see the bigger picture: Money's just an illusion, but the true currency is the relationships we have with each other," says Jamie Larkin, a Charlottetown real estate broker and former financial adviser who spearheaded the effort. Larkin told me he has done ayahuasca about 150 times.

As the global economy flashes warning signs all around us, and when the scourge of emptiness persists even once the mountain of conventional success has been scaled, a generation of C-suite seekers now has an increasing array of options to temporarily zap their brains out of reality in the hopes of beating depression and improving focus, discovering a path forward and healing their childhood wounds. And some insist they're becoming not just better people, but better leaders.



met with Donald Currie, Dimensions' clinical director, on a warm July day. We sat in the retreat's Maple Lodge, which was outfitted in soothing tones of beige and had views over the lake. Currie, who has a man bun and glasses so fashionable they verge on being deeply uncool, has a calm vibe and piercing wide eyes. Twenty-five years ago, he was working as an investment banker for BMO Nesbitt Burns in Toronto but felt unhappy and unfulfilled. He went to therapy and, finding it powerful, decided to retrain and open his own practice, which included hypnotherapy and somatic psychotherapy, which he describes as "bringing the body into the therapeutic process."

In 2018, Currie met the founders of Dimensions, Christopher Dawson and Andrew Galloway. Dawson worked in private equity at Bain Capital before serving as a vice-president at Homewood and then starting Edgewood Health Network, which now operates a dozen addiction recovery and mental health centres across the country. There, he recruited Galloway, who had emerged

from the fog of his own crack cocaine addiction while working in venture capital in Vancouver and went on to work in addiction treatment, including 14 years with the NHL's substance abuse program and as one of the interventionists on *Slice's Intervention Canada*.

But the pair became disenchanted with conventional mental health and addiction services, and they both spent time separately exploring alternative healing options—including doing ayahuasca under the care of shamans in Peru and Ecuador. They started to formulate a plan for a holistic healing centre located in nature, including the use of cannabis as a therapeutic psychedelic and potentially other psychedelics if they're eventually decriminalized. "Psychedelics accelerate the brain rewiring process," says Dawson.

Currie was on board with the retreat plan immediately. He spent six months working with neuroscientists at Queen's University, as well as exploring best practices related to nutrition, massage and other forms of healing. "Trauma gets stored not only in the brain as a memory, but also in the body and the nervous system as an emotional charge," he says. "When we utilize cannabis in ceremony, we see somatic releases happening. The body may start shaking or trembling or kicking as a means of discharging that trauma. We see emotional breakthroughs."


When Dimensions opened in July 2022, it was focused on therapy for veterans, police officers and other PTSD-prone segments of the population. Over the past several years, the mandate has shifted, broadening out to wellness more generally (the site recently installed a cold plunge alongside an eight-seat cedar sauna), and to professionals struggling with burnout and anxiety. The resort has hosted 1,500 guests in the past three years, including executive teams.

Unlike the drugs of their youth, perhaps hastily scarfed in a parking lot before entering a concert venue, executives are now indulging under the watch of a guide in the form of a shaman or psychotherapist or, at least, noted enthusiast—often



Dimensions' co-founder and clinical director, Donald Currie, is a former investment banker at BMO Nesbitt Burns

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DIMENSIONS RETREATS



drawn from the corporate world themselves. Personally acquainted with the pitfalls of ambition and the crippling agony of burnout, this new generation of psychedelic proprietors understands how to speak to their executive or entrepreneur clients, peppering sentiments with the tech-bro language of “downloading” knowledge or regulatory systems that need to be brought “online.”

They also know how to sniff out a potentially lucrative business opportunity. In addition to the Ascend program, Dimensions offers two-week options that cost up to \$20,000. Other luxury retreats can cost even more per day. In Canada, a single administered dose of intranasal ketamine spray can cost as little as \$250 or as much as \$800, not including associated therapy, according to research by Field Trip, which runs ketamine therapy clinics in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and, soon, Saskatchewan. For all the expressed concern about dysfunctional workplaces, unresolved trauma and inequitable care, these services generally act as an expansion of private health care, typically offering only those with deep enough pockets a chance at enlightenment.

The Journeymen Collective’s four-day psilocybin retreats (with months of pre- and post-care) take place at an estate on the outskirts of Kelowna, B.C., with chef-prepared vegetarian food. Founders Rob Grover, a former petroleum geologist with Dassault Systèmes, Norwest Corp. and CAE Mining, and Gary Logan, a “healing touch” energy therapy practitioner, describe themselves as “human potential experts,” and they told me they wanted to create a space for burned-out entrepreneurs and executives looking to clear professional blockages and restore meaning in their lives. “There’s a little bit of an awakening going on,” says Logan. “The CEOs who are working 15 to 16 hours a day for 20 years are finally realizing that they’ve gone so far in their organization, but they need to bring something more to the table—and that something more is connection to their hearts and actually learning how to listen to others.”

Grover and Logan declined to confirm their fee, but it has been repeatedly reported as \$15,000. “We provide immense value through the deeply intensive energetic work and the exchange is known as the currency and vibration of money (\$),” notes their website. “We only present the invitation to work with the Journeymen Collective to those individuals who are prepared to take on the personalized luxurious purpose-driven intensive experience.” (The website also notes that the fee is non-refundable.) They told me they’ve guided more than 300 people through psilocybin journeys over the past decade.

One of those people is Peggy Van de Plassche, a French former VP of innovation at CIBC, and director of banking and investment services at CGI. Van de Plassche, who is based in Toronto, found that the pandemic exacerbated her anxiety, frustration and stress. She experienced significant “emotional relief” after two psilocybin jour-

neys in Kelowna, a process that includes Grover and Logan’s help with “integration”—making sense of what happened while you were tripping and how to apply it to your life in a productive way. “Otherwise, it’s not really different than the recreational, where you take a bunch of drugs and go somewhere for a few hours,” she says.

Realizing she’d been carrying baggage related to the death of her brother, Van de Plassche peered into her childhood while being guided by the Journeymen. Over time, her grief had become this “big rock” in her life. But the journeys not only helped her dislodge that rock in the days and weeks that followed; they also shone a light on the unrelated low self-esteem and self-blame issue she didn’t know she’d been carrying. She was so inspired by the experience that she wrote a book about the benefits of psilocybin: *The Microdose Diet: The 90 Day Plan for More Success, Passion and Happiness*.



**WHILE THE CASH** is almost certainly a bonus, exec-turned-proponents say that psychedelics create their own paradigm shifts, and they’re now mostly driven by the opportunity to spread the gospel. Murray Rodgers, a former oil and gas executive who’s now co-CEO and chair of Kingfisher Energy, lives in Diamond Valley, in the foothills of the Rockies, 40 minutes southwest of Calgary. For years, he was guided by conventional metrics of success: money, power, ascending a well-worn ladder and racking up external validation while neglecting personal relationships. Then he and his wife divorced. A decade ago, on his 60th birthday, he found himself sitting alone in his big house. “I hit the wall,” he says.

Rodgers started to re-examine the story he’d been telling about his life. He wondered if, even with all his conventional success, he had been a failure. His doctor told him to go on antidepressants, but Rodgers decided to look elsewhere for answers. He took yoga teacher training and attended wellness retreats. He started reading about psychedelic plants and how they’re used for healing. While standing in line at a coffee shop one day, he ran into an acquaintance who told him that she was going to Costa Rica to do ayahuasca. When she got back, she sent him a one-word text: *Go*.

Over two weeks in Costa Rica, Rodgers did ayahuasca eight times. Each trip gave him insight into the wounded inner child that had been motivating his actions without any conscious recognition. “It was really quite profoundly life-changing,” he told me. His consciousness had been expanded, and he had a different perspective on how to heal. He also thought about how many late-career executives were in the same boat. They were rich, successful, unhappy, stuck and seeking answers. And Rodgers realized that ayahuasca and other psychedelics might offer a great leadership development tool.

Rodgers dove into the leadership development literature—and wasn’t impressed. “Most programs aren’t very effective,”

he says. “They don’t create self-knowledge and address the deeper issues. So people come out and repeat the same patterns.” Rodgers thought he might be the perfect guy to change that. “I’ve been through the whole corporate thing and raised a couple billion dollars. The most effective way for me to get to self-knowledge was psychedelics.”

Now, Rodgers spends a lot of his time talking about the benefits of getting high (though he prefers to say “using psychedelics in a safe and intentional way, with support”). He wrote a book, *The Psychedelic CEO*, which counsels that we need healthier leaders who are less wounded and more self-aware. “Maybe they develop a broader perspective on why they’re doing what they’re doing,” he says. “And that theoretically could have an impact on the world around them.” If he could get execs to expand their minds, could that lead to positive gains not just for their bottom lines but for the world? (I asked several proponents if anyone ever emerges from the fog of a psychedelic high and denounces capitalism, and they all lol’ed.)

Rodgers now runs psilocybin retreats around four times a year out of a log house in Diamond Valley and periodically hosts ayahuasca retreats in partnership with a shaman in Costa Rica. Robin Ashmore, CEO of All Purpose, a B Corp creative agency in Vancouver, met Rodgers through a network of like-minded CEOs and attended one of

his retreats with five other executives. They talked about letting go of greed and envy and anxiety, about trying to be joyful and loving and equanimous. Then they listened to music and did a little yoga and took a bunch of mushrooms while tucked under blankets and wearing eye masks.

Ashmore told me that he emerged from the journey—where some clients had an “interstellar kind of visual experience”—with a deep sense of responsibility. “It just enforced the idea that each of us has to be stewards of this planet,” he says. He was thinking about the broader environment—B.C.’s mature trees, in particular—but also about the smaller, more specific work world he was responsible for and how to do better for the people around him. “If you’re the head of the organization, the fish rots from the head, right?”

**F**or Victoria, the knowledge she gained at Dimensions—which she describes as an “unlocking”—continued to unfold over weeks and months. She returned to the retreat in spring 2024. Once again, she did qigong and spent time in a float tank and ate caramelized peaches and poached eggs with avocado while staring at Maple Lake. She participated in a cannabis ceremony, setting an intention to live in the moment. For a busy executive, it was a rare chance to focus on body and spirit, to pause the constant chaos and take inventory. “For people with high-stress jobs who are finding themselves at an intersection of taking their potential to the next level, this kind of investment is a win-win personally and professionally,” she says. “I wish I could afford to send my whole team.”