



قودوا
Q U D W A
QUDWA 2017

MEET THE MENTOR—Daniel Lerner

Saturday October 7th, 2017

Speaker: **Daniel Lerner**, Bestselling Author, Clinical Instructor, NYU, USA

Moderated/Facilitated by: **Becky Anderson**, Managing Editor, Anchor, CNN Abu Dhabi, UAE

Summary Paragraph

Daniel Lerner believes that passion is the key to integrating excellence and wellbeing. The catch? We need to choose right type of passion. In this Meet the Mentor session, Lerner will discuss how to distinguish the healthy from unhealthy, and how to put the fascinating emerging research in the field of passion into action for the benefit of both teachers and students.

Keywords: Professional Development

Key Points

To begin, Dr. Lerner told the audience about his previous profession as an agent for up and coming opera singers, and how he noted very early on a strong contrast between happy, talented people and those that were equally talented, but depressed. Both groups were passionately devoted to their art, but in different ways. He deduced that there were two major types of passion, an observation that drove him to study positive psychology.

He explained, “the science is supporting that when we put wellbeing at the centre of our drive, we think more effectively and have less stress. Passion ends up being a factor in happiness, regardless of success.” To illustrate the differences between the two groups of opera singers, he turned to other examples of successful people. He pointed out that the late Steve Jobs was indisputably very successful, but had an unhappy personal life,





whereas Richard Branson has always said he is successful *because* he is happy, not the other way around.

The two major kinds of passion are harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion is an intrinsically motivated passion, like the happy five year old who knows what he or she wants to do right at that moment, and can fully engage in whatever that is. The key is to nurture that kind of passion in students.

Obsessive passion is when someone is motivated by others' drive to succeed, usually a parent. It is not about the activity, but about the reward, be it praise, prestige or a paycheque. These people tend not to make time for other things in their lives, such as friendship or other kinds of enjoyment, and they feel guilty about not working.

At this point, a question came from the floor as to whether someone is happy because they are successful, or successful because they are happy. Dr. Lerner responded with the example of lawyers. Although most are highly paid, they are number one in alcohol or nicotine abuse, at a similar rate to doctors. However, he also stated that the lawyers who make the least money are the happiest, because they are usually working for non-profits and have meaningful jobs. Similarly, doctors who spent the most time with patients were the happiest, but those that are forced to cycle through many patients and spend less time with each are less happy.

In traditional measurements of success, happiness comes first. And when we are happy, we are more likely to recognize success.

A Qudwa delegate asked, "how can positive thinking and passion be promoted in schools, particularly if the environment is not supportive, or even positive?"

"The smallest prompts can bring the biggest changes," said Dr. Lerner. For instance, it was found that if children are asked to think of their happiest moments, even for five minutes, it changes the way they relate to others and perform. Also, how is feedback given? While criticism is important, noting the things that students are doing right is also helpful. Raising their hands, working with classmates—these are all things children can control, even when the material is frustrating them.

He continued that when students find something they are harmoniously passionate about, and practice it, happiness spreads throughout their lives. Quoting a study that followed high school football players, he said that students who practiced their harmonious passion in the morning enjoyed the rest of the day much more. However, obsessively passionate students who practiced in the morning had a worse day the rest of the day.





Dr. Lerner addressed the question as to how teachers can introduce passion and measure it by saying, “happiness and data are not mutually exclusive. Introducing data on the positive impact of growth mindset and positive psychology can be incredibly motivating to teachers. The evidence shows that students do better when they are primed with positive emotions. It helps diminish their stress.”

He is optimistic that happiness can be measured and used to inform policy, as for instance when the Kingdom of Bhutan introduced the measure of Gross National Happiness, which has spread to the United Kingdom and the UAE.

A teacher in the audience from the United States spoke to lack of motivation due to burnout. Dr. Lerner responded, “teachers are stressed out. They are dealing with anxiety and depression. Not because of the teaching, but because of what happens around that.”

He suggested that teachers first ask, ‘what happened to my passion, and what am I passionate about now?’ He continued, “what would you look forward to introducing to the classroom that you haven’t done before? What are your strengths, and how can you pick one or two and bring them to the classroom every day?”

When asked if a teacher should quit if they are not passionate about teaching, Dr. Lerner said, “passions are not like lightning bolts. They take about 3 years to develop, and in many cases they start with interests...Find something that you look forward to. Don’t expect to be head over heels. Just find something you are interested in and it will lead to something else. That being said, if you’re not looking forward to getting up and going to teach, and there’s no spark of interest, maybe that’s not your path.”

The last question addressed how teachers could incorporate these teachings in working with refugee children who have suffered extreme trauma. Dr. Lerner said, “if we are to talk about thriving in life, we must talk about the challenges as well. It’s not just happiness. We must also address challenges like distress and PTSD, so that we can find ways to teach resilience and help these students begin their journey back from trauma.”

Main Takeaway: The key to happiness is intrinsically motivated, or 'harmonious'- not a quest for outward validation.

