



EPISODE 785

How Optimism Impacts Your Health & The Truth About Your Emotions

With Guest Dr. Sue Varma

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Did you know that our habitual emotions are deeply tied to how long we live? A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2019 found that people who are exceedingly optimistic live longer, healthier, recover from stress, injuries, and illnesses faster. The researchers found that optimism significantly decreases the risk of cardiovascular events and also decreases the risk of early death from all causes. Now, what about the other end of the spectrum? Well, another long term study found that people with a strong history of depression can have up to 50 % increase in premature death from all causes. essentially reducing projected lifespan by 10 to 12 years on average. Being more optimistic isn't something that's fanciful or idealistic.

It's something that's very practical for our health. Now, being a practical optimist is the key. A cookie cutter, don't worry, be happy mentality is not all that it's cracked up to be either. There are fascinating steps to being a practical optimist. And that's what we're talking about today. Now keep in mind in this conversation with our special guest today, that so much of our mental health outpicturing, our expressions of things like depression, anxiety, or on the other end, optimism has a lot to do with how we interact with stress. Do we have mental tools, do we have skills that we've developed to be able to reframe things effectively to be able to ask better questions that keep us empowered. And also keeping in mind that part of our mental health Individuality has to do with our genetics as well and our special guest is going to share with you that it's only a small percentage of our mental health blueprint is based on our genetics, but it does play a role. Most of our mental health and our predominant emotions are based on the choices that we make in our day to day lives. And again, this episode is very rich in insights and also practical tips to help us to be more empowered and to develop more of a practice of being a practical optimist.

And by the way, how our bodies express stress can be very diverse as well. Some folks can have aches and pains like we tend to hold up stress in certain parts of our bodies. But I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but our skin is the outermost part of our nervous system. Our skin can easily display what's going on internally. It can easily display the stress that we're experiencing. Some folks when they're under a lot of stress have different outbreaks, different things going on with their skin. This can be outbreaks of acne. This could be outbreaks of things like cold sores. This could be outbreaks of things like rosacea. But all of these things are rooted in inflammation. And yes, we absolutely want to have psychological tools to help us to manage stress better. But also we can look at things that we're utilizing with our nutrition to support a healthy stress response as well.

Well, a recent review of 20 studies published in the journal Skin Med revealed that green tea is effective in reducing acne, dermatitis, warts, keloids, rosacea, and many other skin issues. Now you might've noticed that a lot of skincare products are now adding green tea extracts to their ingredients. But this study concluded that the biggest benefits are seen when green tea is consumed, versus when being utilized topically. But topically is great too, but drinking green tea is where the magic is really at. And the very best source of green tea is matcha green tea. And there's only one matcha green tea. That's triple toxin screen for purity and 35% higher in L theanine to reduce stress induced skin irritation. The only matcha green tea that I drink is sun goddess matcha green tea from peak life.

And right now peak is giving you up to 15% off plus a free rechargeable frother. All right. A mixer that you can utilize to mix up your delicious beverages. I travel with this bad boy as well. I keep the frother on me. All right. I'm strapped up with the frother. So they're going to give you one of those for free and also other bonuses as well. So check out their incredible bundles over at pikelife.com/Shawn. That's P I Q U E L I F E.com/SHAWN. And I highly suggest their radiant skin duo bundle. that has matcha green tea plus their amazing BT fountain beauty blend that has clinically proven ceramides and hyaluronic acid to reduce fine lines, boost skin elasticity, and provide deep hydration for visible science backed results in less than 15 days. Again, head over to pikelife.com/Shawn, and now let's get to the Apple podcast review of the week.

ITUNES REVIEW: Another five star review titled "It Was Excellent" by Andre M43. Thank you, muy gracias, Shawn and Dr. William. It was an excellent episode. Some of us are here listening and sharing with our friends and family. You are making a difference. God bless you. Take care.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome! Thank you so much for leaving that review over on Apple podcast and shout out to Dr. William Lee, my colleague at Harvard university, heading up the angiogenesis society, looking at how. So, food and specific nutrients found in real food is able to reduce the onset of cancer through the process of anti angiogenesis properties. And Dr. Lee is one of the people who really inspired me to look more into the science of green tea as well to look at the benefits for not just on the nervous system and skin health but the impact that it has on cognitive function. on reducing the risk of cancer, in particular, breast cancer, and so much more. It's a really, really special beverage that's been utilized for thousands of years. And again, shout out to Dr. William Lee. And if you happen to miss that episode with Dr. Lee, we'll put it for you in the show notes. It's definitely a classic. But with all of that said, we've got an amazing episode lined up for you today with Dr. Sue Varma.

Sue Varma, MD, is a distinguished psychiatrist and cognitive behavioral therapist based in New York City. With over two decades of private practice experience, Dr. Varma has made significant contributions to the field of mental health. Notably, she served as a pioneering

medical director and psychiatrist for the esteemed 9 11 Mental Health Program at NYU. Dr. Varma also holds the position of Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at NYU, and her accomplishments have been recognized by the American Psychiatric Association, where she was honored as a Distinguished Fellow at NYU. The highest honor bestowed upon its members. Dr. Varma can frequently be seen on all major media platforms, including the Today Show, CBS Mornings, Good Morning America, the list goes on and on. She's also now achieved the title of bestselling author and she's here to share her incredible insights. Let's dive into this conversation with the amazing Dr. Sue Varma. Dr. Sue Varma, it's good to see you. Thank you for coming to hang out with us.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you for having me, Shawn. I'm so excited to finally be here with you in person.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes, me too. Me too.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, a big part of our experience as human beings is our emotions. We kind of live through our emotions and our emotions are really underlying our mental health picture. But I don't think we ever stop to think about what are our emotions? What are these mysterious things that we're living through? Can you talk a little bit about that? What are emotions?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. So you know what's so interesting is that emotions are, you know, whether you look at it, physiological responses sometimes, sometimes they're not even conscious, but they have influence on everything that we do, on our thoughts, on our behavior. And we know that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors collectively influence our habits and our habits influence our health. And so that's why I would say never dismiss emotion, even if it is fleeting. Right? It could be, and, and, and different emotions last a different amount of time. So sadness can be five minutes, 10 minutes. If you find that it's persistent, then you're getting into a mood. And if that low mood stays on, then you can start to think about depression, but, you know, emotions vary, you know, from a variety of things. But the interesting thing is that they're often sort of a physiological non conscious response to things. And what I want people to do is bring it into conscious awareness because it has so much influence and so much power over what we do.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. In your book you shared that emotions serve a purpose and this was very profound even that statement in of itself. Emotions serve a purpose. They're intimately connected to our motivation and drives. So our emotions help us to prioritize

plans and focus on what needs our attention and influencing our thought processes. And again, this is directly quoted from your book. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, so, you know emotions inherently aren't good or bad And I think that so many of us are afraid to sit with them. You know I've had patients tell me that I'm in the shower and I have to have you know Netflix on or music on because I don't want to be alone with my emotions. I don't want to be alone with my thoughts. And sometimes I'll ask someone, do you feel anxious? And they're like, I don't know what you're talking about. I'm going through my day, I'm doing my thing. And then when my head hits the pillow, all of the emotions kind of like unleash. And I always ask people, how do you sleep? Because sleep is a window into a person's mental health. And it tells me so much about unprocessed emotions that are going on throughout the day. And I look at emotions as important ways to organize our, like steer us, right? Like if they're unprocessed and left unchecked, you're going to feel like crap about yourself and you're not going to know why. But if you're able to find the antecedent, the trigger when you're feeling bad about something and say, what happened today? Why am I feeling so unsettled? And then if you can connect that to the emotion, and often one of the most powerful emotions is shame. And we don't talk enough about that, right? Because what I hate about shame is that it keeps us inward instead of motivating us outward to change the behavior that's causing that. So to me Motivating and you in harnessing the power of emotions which can be extremely beneficial in our favor But only if we understand them.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, what I got from your book was that our emotions are kind of like an internal compass. You know, it's like a guidance system and it's giving us feedback on what we need to address oftentimes. But like you said, if we're not able to sit with them, and today we're living at the golden age of suppression.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And, you know, being able to deflect and not pay attention, not be able to look inward. And, you know, this was something again, throughout our evolution for thousands of years, you were going to spend time with yourself. Today, you can find yourself, you know, getting lost in a number of things and not really pay attention to that and then seek out professional help when it becomes too unbearable.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. And what you're doing is working, giving people the roadmap to start to pay attention to these things before it gets too bad. And also when things do go wrong, having some tools to process things better.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. And language. Right? To have language and words around it to say, I feel X, Y, and Z. Because it's so hard. You know, a lot of the people that I work with are like superstars in their career, super intellectual, academic, smart people, but they're not used to labeling how they feel. And it's so hard because I'll be like, how do you feel? And they're just like, you know, there's a lot of grunting going on or, then they change the topic or they start to rationalize or intellectualize. And I'm like, no, no, no, just, you know, and I can see how they feel, cause I, I can see the tears coming in the eyes, you know, and sometimes I might say, all right, you know, this is what I'm hearing, you know, help me, help me understand better. Is this accurate? I'm seeing your body language change. I'm seeing your face. I'm seeing some tears. I hear your voice, you know, and then that helps them finally admit almost as if they're so afraid to say i'm sad, you know, i'm hurt. I'm angry and I think anger is really hard for some people especially I think women to sit with. It feels they a lot of women will say I would rather cry, you know I cry when i'm angry, which is fascinating to me

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, this is, this is true. This is true and I'm not even gonna say I think you know, this is well, this is like cultural conditioning.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you shared that in the book as well and giving the example of self expression in the Japanese culture versus here in the United States. Can you talk a little bit about that?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. So it's so fascinating to me, like when we think about emotions and facial expressions, like, you know, there's literally like, you know, thousands, you know, almost 7,000 different expressions that people can make and different combinations of like, you know, the facial expressions and the face. But, you know, in, in the United States or in certain Western cultures, we have, we feel comfortable expressing a range of emotions. In front of anybody, you know, and versus, in Japanese culture, it's very restricted. And it depends on who's in the room and sort of hierarchical and with authority figures, you're going to suppress some of the more extreme emotions and you're going to keep them in a very tight range.

And what we don't realize is that it takes a lot more energy and effort to suppress our emotions than it does to express them. And so a lot of people who seem so tightly calibrated, right, they are experiencing emotions. They're just handling them differently. And sometimes

it's not always positive. So I respect and understand the cultural conditioning that we have expectations, like the way, like if you're in a classroom or if you're at a meeting or you're giving a talk, you might just have gotten a really bad phone call of something happening, but you still have to show up and put on the face, right? So in certain cultures, there's a lot of that putting on the face, you know, in front of, especially authority figures.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, what was so interesting about the study that you shared on that was that folks who were in the study in Japan, they were expressing the wide range of emotions when the authority figure was not present.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? And it was just, again, this peek into how our culture, and I've been talking a lot about this the last year, and our culture is influencing our behavior whether we understand it or not because we're born into it. It's kind of like an invisible hand.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And some of our cultural influences whether this is influencing what we're eating How we relate to one another, how we think about ourselves and our place in the world. If we're not aware of these things, sometimes we might have even the idea of freedom Right, but it's really, it's freedom based on the choices that you've been presented with.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, right. It's so fascinating.

SHAWN STEVENSON: A book like this. Can you? Is like an open invitation to inner exploration. That's a bar right there. All right, that's a bar.

DR. SUE VARMA: I love that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But you know, I love that you mentioned this too, which was that was the next thing i was going to ask you about So you shared that some scientists found humans have over 7,000 different facial movement combinations. And it seems we wouldn't have this array of expressive capacities if emotions didn't have an important role to play right, so Human emotion isn't this thing just to be put on the shelf or to be hidden. It is a deeply ingrained part of who we are as a species.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And our face literally says it. It says so much that we have so much capacity in our face to express Thousands of potentially different expressions of how we feel.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, and often our face betrays us, right? We don't want someone to know how we're feeling. i'm I'm in tune now because I'm doing this a number of, you know, a number of years where I'm watching someone's facial expression and they, I'm, let's say I've made a request, you know, and they'll say yes, but I'm seeing on their face, there's a hesitation, there's a suspicion there, you know, and so I'm fascinated by the, the facial display, you know, and, and the variety of ways in which we express emotion. So, you know, I think a lot of us, we're not curious enough and so we don't pay attention to the nuances. Okay. But if, if, if you really want to learn, right, like it's the less talking, the more listening and the more observing. And I think, you know, to your point earlier is that there's a million ways that we can avoid.

I feel like, you know, technology or whatever it is the fact that there's so much going on. It's so easy to turn outward when it comes to When we're experiencing pain. So whether that's like suppressing emotions through food or you know technology or avoidance. Emotional avoidance is where we're headed and I really want to say and I love that you said that this is an open invitation to introspection to welcoming. You know in eastern philosophy, there's an idea of like bringing Mara to tea and it's this idea of like inviting dark parts of yourself, you know, that you would rather never have to deal with and inviting them as a guest into your house, you know, and in Eastern culture giving somebody tea is giving them a place in society and say, welcome, please sit with me, let's talk. And that to me was such a strange the first time I heard that I'm like, you want to, you want me to bring back these memories that I would rather never deal with or never have to think about. But really that's what you do when you're processing grief or trauma, is you do need to relive some of these things before you can integrate them. We're not saying move on, we're saying integrate them.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SUE VARMA: Into your person because they are a part of you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And that's the thing. We don't realize oftentimes. We're operating with those frameworks like you might have had an experience when you were 12. And there are parts of you and how you're showing up in your life and in relationships. That's kind of stuck in that 12 year old...

DR. SUE VARMA: A hundred percent .

SHAWN STEVENSON: Frame of mind and you see this all the time.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally, and I and I and I can relate to it, you know on my own level Like just when I think about my own upbringing. And I absorb so much of the cultural conditioning. You know growing up in a south asian family in terms of like what you're supposed to do and the family Responsibility and dharma which means obligation and duty. And so I've always operated with this You know, even though I was born and raised in the United States, but my home culture was this one way of thinking. And it was not just the South Asian culture, but the family culture, because that can also be a little bit more nuanced and different. So, you know, for me it was service, you know, service and you do other things, you think you do things for other people, you come last, right? So I've kind of operated with that.

And I think about how is that serving me now, you know, and so that's the key is that, It's okay to shed some of those narratives, the cultural conditioning, and I give people, you know, a series of questions to say, it's okay, like, embrace who you are, right? And some of those things that brought you here, maybe they no longer serve you, but maybe they helped you, you know. And maybe in some ways they did make you who you are. And if you're happy, more or less with that, then it is what it is, you know, to make room for acceptance.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You talk about service in the book as well, and how that contributes so much to mental health and optimism and things like that. And, you know, I'm a big fan of the perspective that it's a both and world, right? Your self care matters immensely, and so does mental health. Having a sense of purpose and being of service. But if you're caring for yourself, you could show up better.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In your service. You could show up better for the people who are depending on you that we tend to sacrifice ourselves for.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, absolutely. And people don't realize it that you know, they can coexist but it's hard I think like a lot of times I see like somebody, you know. Men and women who are so called either by the work that they do outside or the work that they do in caring for their family. That the idea of taking time for exercise, for sleep, I mean, it seems ridiculous. Like, what are you talking about? Like, how is that possible? And so, you know, that's where the juggling act comes in of like saying no to more things so that the things, the few things that you do, for me at least, that's kind of how I look at it, that you do it like 100%, you know? Like, I want to show up sometimes 150%. And what I realized is, Then I that might mean saying no

to some things and then like making peace with that, right? Because I think we're also living in this world of FOMO and you're constantly feeling.

SHAWN STEVENSON: What'd you call me?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. Like the fear of missing out like you're always thinking that there's something better happening. And when I did a lot of research into what FOMO is and it was like a combination of anxiety, anticipatory anxiety. But also anticipatory regret like this thing that I'm not doing. I'm already regretting it even though I haven't even done it yet.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, yeah.

DR. SUE VARMA: And irritability and like anger, it was all, all these nuances of like random emotions put together. I'm like, I had no idea. I thought it was just like, I didn't go to a party, you know? And then I'm, and it's not just fear of missing out. It's fear of being left out.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right.

DR. SUE VARMA: You know? And that hits at one of the core human features of belonging, and mattering, and sort of like relationships. So I can see that it's not that easy to say no to things.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, of course, you know, on the other side of that, of course, we have the revolution of JOMO, the joy of missing out and finding the opportunity to, you know, say no to things and say yes, say big yes to the things that you truly want to do and invest your time and energy into. And the thing is like, there are so many things to do now and social media reminds you of that instantly. Yes. And this is something that our brains are simply not evolved to handle. Just thinking about how we evolved, you know, we've all evolved in a tribal Construct so there might be maybe 50, 100, maybe 150 people who you might care about their perspective. Today, you can have hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands millions of quote followers.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And now you're suddenly throwing yourself in a position where you're caring about the perspective of all these people. I just saw a post today from Julia Roberts, and it was really beautiful. It was a beautiful picture of her, and I think it was her niece, and they were like playing cards or something. Did you see this?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, I saw this.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Maybe that's why it popped up to me because it's something like, you know, in your universe. And, you know, she just shared it because it was just a beautiful, genuine moment. It was like in the morning, maybe they just had brunch or something. And she went back and looked at the comments and she was just shocked to see. Because she hadn't been that versed at using social media, how many people were saying how she didn't age well. And she looks like a man. And she's, you know, you know, she's let herself go and like, why would she post this and all this stuff? And then she sees people on the other side saying, hey, be nice. You know, you don't know her like that and defending her. And then she just saw people fighting. Right. And it's just like bringing out all of these lower You know, root chakra, maybe activities and seeing really the, the worst of humanity showing up in a platform where it's kind of nameless, faceless, and you can be nameless and faceless.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, yes. Yes, absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But it's moving away from that, that humanity piece.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now before we got going today, we talked about the right use of social media, which is connection like the one that we have.

DR. SUE VARMA: D.S: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. It can be a bridge for something real.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it can also be a bridge for something that is incredibly abnormal and hard for our mental health.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so I want to ask you about this because obviously, You know our kids are being born into this now. We know a time when this didn't exist.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, we might have had a telephone at the house that everybody shared.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you know, but today kids in elementary school and my son's school have phones already. Right. And so this landscape with social media, what are you seeing? What are some of the things we should be aware of?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, so, you know, I think that just like any other Toxin because it does have the it's an it's an input right? It's a mental input and it's an environmental input and so we can look at it as having potentially for young developing brains toxic effects. Because they don't really have a sense of reality because for them this is like okay, but I this is an influencer that I follow and this is their reality. There's something called parasocial relationships where we feel like we're friends with the people that we follow. And so it becomes blurred lines of what's real and what's not, you know And I have a son the same age as yours and you know thinking about you know He might be telling me. Oh, I saw this new trend and this new fad and I want to buy this thing. And Without even questioning, is this good for my health? What is this product or understanding that? This is a marketing ploy, you know, like you have to understand that and do the research. So there can be opportunities for conversation to say, let's do our due diligence.

Don't take something at face value just because somebody is selling it. Yes. Like that's their business, but it's our job and our business to do some research. But also that what we're finding is, especially for young girls, that the cutoff is around three to three and a half hours, like of, of use a day, is related to anxiety and depression. And we're seeing a lot more suicide a lot more antidepressant use. And look antidepressant use in and of itself in this age group doesn't necessarily mean like oh my god They have depression. It could also mean they're getting help. The depression is there but we do know That there's escalating rates of mental health crisis in young people today And what's happening is the social media in and of itself.

Yes, it is causing harm in the sense that they, the body image issues the cyber bullying but what research has shown is that they're not exercising, right? They're not seeing their friends young people are only seeing high school students less than 40 minutes a day of in person interaction. They're not sleeping. So it's, it's like a double whammy. It's bad enough that you're consuming all this content that is negative and harmful and making you feel bad about yourself, cause I feel bad about myself. Like, like sometimes on, on social media after an hour, I'm like, why, what am I doing here? Like, I've set that reminder for the day.

But if you're and and what the point to what you're making about Julia Roberts is she's like I'm a grown ass woman I'm like 50 plus like why am I? This is making me feel like crap and all I was doing was posting a sweet picture of me and my niece Hanging out and then you all went crazy. And I'm like, do people really have nothing better to do? Like she's an American icon You know, I look at her and Brooke Shields and these were women who are celebrating their profession have given us great entertainment over the years. She's a phenomenal Celebrity actor, talented artist, and this is what she's getting, right? So, and she's like, I'm a grown woman. So looking at the sleep, the exercise, the in person connection, and trying as much to fill our kids lives with real life in person connection, community leadership, sports, and then limiting. I actually found limiting the use. I actually found that there is an app and I have to look into it myself. It's called Bark.

Don't quote me on it, but I'm gonna, I'm gonna check it out because a woman last night shared this with me. She's like, I monitor everything. She's like, I know I sound like big brother, but these are my kids. And it said, sends me alarms when there's any kind of incentive, you know, bullying, sexual content. I'll, I'll find out about it. So I love that. So I feel like we need to be on it. And parents collectively can band together to be like, you know what, we're not giving our kids phones until this age so that there's none of this. Well, Tommy has one and I don't.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now with this. New social media terrain that we're dealing with and if you think about it if we're on social media, what are we not doing? We're not moving. Right and we're just looking at the tie in This is I'm so grateful that this is finally happening, but the connection between our metabolic health and our mental health. It's not like our mental health is existing in a vacuum or a silo somewhere outside of our bodies. It's all feeding into each other, you know. And so, looking at how can, and we just had this happen actually this past weekend. My son was on spring break and you know, he's just been outside shooting around the basketball and there's some kids at the end of the street that came by that, you know, they haven't really seen the kids very much, but I think they can hear the basketball outside because my son's like, it's three days in a row. He's like, how do they always know when we're outside? And the cool thing is that the kids are coming outside and wanting to hang out. And I believe the kids, one of the kids just moved here, Like two years ago from another country. And so he's got a little bit of an accent. He's just trying to hang out yeah, and He brought some this the second day or maybe a third day that they came they came bearing gifts

DR. SUE VARMA: Oh, wow.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So they came with some seaweed snacks like who offers seaweed snacks, but I think they know, you know I think he's they mentioned that their parents maybe Watch me on YouTube.

DR. SUE VARMA: Wow.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, there may be watching this right now. So what's up neighbors?

DR. SUE VARMA: I love that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But you know just seeing the impact that we could have of course.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And also you know that neighborhood culture that we don't have anymore because I would imagine if it was similar to me.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We'd go outside and play with our friends.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And today honestly, the street is quiet. There's kids that live in a lot of these houses, but they're just not outside as much.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, yes. You know, it's so fascinating what you're bringing up on every level. First of all The concept of teen and young adulthood has now extended to 25 to 30 years old because so many young people for a variety of reasons. Debt from college inflation, Housing prices can't afford to live outside. So youth is getting extended and dependency on the family for financial reasons or otherwise You And they're missing a lot of these key milestones of being able to negotiate conflict, to be able to ask each other out on dates. They show that the rate of sexual activity in young people has dropped, and in terms of the number of people that have had partners in the last year. And, you know, any parent would be like, well, that's a good thing. I don't want my kid doing anything with anybody at a certain age. But it's also reflective of, you know, Things that were part of our childhood growing up, the exploration, health, safety, within boundaries, having conversations at every stage, right, talking about consent, all of those things.

But so many aspects of things, like a lot of young girls are at home scrolling on their phones, or boys, or they're playing maybe video games, but they're at home alone. And even when they're together, they're on the phones together, right? Yeah. And so part of it can be the opportunity to connect. I'm not saying there's plenty of great stuff with technology. If you're sitting and you're talking about what's the video and you're laughing together and then you put it aside and you go out and play. But it's so fascinating to me what's happening is that there's in my mind, a stuntedness, in our youth culture, right? Like even when I look at the text messages that my kids are sending to each other everything is in like three letters, Max four. And it was hysterical. We were, we had a family group chain where my dad who's in his 80s is on it and then we just got a phone for the younger for the kids and then they're talking and My son responds with idk And my dad's like what? What is that and it's so fast?

SHAWN STEVENSON: He probably put a question mark on it. Yeah You know? Yeah. Forget punctuation also, you know? Yeah. But yeah, I, I see that as well. Yeah.

DR. SUE VARMA: It's hysterical. I'm like, you know, my dad grew up nine, born in like, you know, the nine, late 1930s didn't have electricity, you know, when, where he was when growing. So it's so fascinating to see the meaning of these two minds that are from such different worlds.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, man. It's, it's, it's concentrated today. Never before because we see this transition of generations that are still here.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes. And we have the most number of generations in the workforce, almost five generations spanning from you know. Let's say alpha or gen z to the greatest generation. Which has also never happened because people are living longer than ever, and good for them for not retiring.

SHAWN STEVENSON: One of the really kickoff moments in your book, and this is something that motivated you to, you know, really work deeply in this field and to learn and to practice, and you asked this question that I think a lot of us think about, and I know that I definitely do, but you asked How do some people survive, even thrive, despite profound challenges? because even your dad, for example, coming from a circumstance where he definitely didn't have the same resources that other people had and being able to create a life of joy and a thriving career and a family that he loves. You know, me coming from the inner city of St. Louis, highest murder rate in the United States and losing friends, losing family members, you know, growing up during the crack epidemic. And, how do I make it out of that circumstance, not just survive, but being able to create a life of, of value and of joy and of

service, you know, through these circumstances, like how do some people accomplish those things while others kind of fall victim to the circumstances?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. And I love the fact that you use the word victim because I would say that victim mentality, right, exists in the people that allow themselves to be enveloped by pessimism. And what I mean by that is pessimists fall prey to these key things. They call them the three P's of pessimism, and I've added a fourth one. They think that when negative things have happened to them that they're permanent. They're never going to go away. They think that these negative things are pervasive. They think that they're personal. So if I didn't get a job promotion, it's because I suck. It's because people hate me. It's always going to be like this. And it's not just this aspect of my life, every aspect of my life. So that mindset to take things very personally, very negatively. And then I added the fourth P, which is to become passive, to become paralyzed.

So it's one thing to think negatively, but then to ruminate, to stir, and rumination is been studied in medicine and psychiatry as kind of like the slippery slope to depression. If you find yourself ruminating, it's a risk factor for depression, and that's kind of how doctors know that maybe somebody who had, Previously been treated might be having a relapse because one of the first symptoms is rumination. And if you are a pessimist left unchecked a little bit of pessimism is good. It's healthy, protective, and a little bit of skepticism. You know, let me do my research. Let me learn a little bit more about this person before I open up my bank account to them, right? So healthy skepticism, but pessimism being mired in negativity is a slippery slope to Everything sort of bad. So I feel like the difference between the sort of, you know people who survive and potentially even thrive is some of us are naturally predisposed to optimism. But the reality is that even though it is genetic Only 25% of optimism is genetic. The 75% is learned and nobody tells you that right and I didn't even know when I started studying optimism.

It was really something I did. I dismissed it and put it aside initially. When I was my first job after my residency training was working as a medical director of the 9 11 mental health program and everybody was fascinated by trauma and this concept of resilience and resilience is great. Resilience is about bouncing back from adversity. But I wanted to go one step further. I said, how do we thrive in the face of it, right? And that's flourishing and optimism is a key feature because it says great We want to we don't want to just take somebody from dysfunction to function We want to take them from functional to optimal. And so much of our health care, it's not health care. It's sick care. It's disease management, right? Nobody is talking about it. How do we live a flourishing life of joy when you go to the doctor? You're not saying doctor, I want to flourish. They're like, what's wrong with you? That's the first question. What's wrong? Give me your symptoms. And I want to talk about everything bad. So we've created these two separate worlds of disease management and

wellness and never the two shall meet. And we have to create a bridge and that's what practical optimism is, is that it is a concrete, actionable tool set, skill set, mindset that helps you change and helps you convert.

Positive outlooks into positive outcomes. Optimism is the idea that you see things on the bright side, right? But practical optimism says, how do I change? How do I take that outlook and make it into an outcome, right? Because you're telling someone, look on the bright side, just get over it, everything will be okay. That's toxic, right? Extreme optimism, that's also not good because that's called the ostrich effect. Blind optimism, extreme optimism, where you bury your head in the sand and you think everything will go away and work itself out. And both those extreme optimists and the extreme pessimists, believe it or not, from the outside, they look kind of similar.

Because neither of them are doing anything about the problems in their life. The optimist, the extreme optimist is like, eh, I'll figure myself out, I'm good, I'm good, I'm not doing anything. Extreme pessimist is like, I'm too scared, or nothing's going to work out, so they don't try. And what you want is that middle road. And one of my favorite quotes by George Bernard Shaw, he says that the world needs both optimists and pessimists. The optimists are inventing the airplanes, the pessimists inventing the parachutes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right.

DR. SUE VARMA: And we need both. And each of us has a tendency to be optimistic, and we also have a tendency to be pessimistic. But here's the thing, you have to maximize. Your optimism and they're both, they're not both, you know, two sides of the same coin. Optimism and pessimism are not two sides of the same coin. They're actually separate constructs.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love this because again, we swung to one side of the pendulum as well in our awareness of this as a culture. Looking at there was a time and probably when we both were in college where genes were everything right? You're genetically predisposed to fill in the blank Depression obesity heart disease, whatever the case might be. But even and it's great to know that we do have some of this encoded in us And a lot of it is actually passed down from our parents And we have several studies affirming this, we'll put one up for everybody's watching the youtube channel, And looking at how trauma in laboratory animals exposed trauma changes the genes that are passed down to their offspring And altering their behavior and their mood. But these researchers found that exposing these laboratory animals to enriching environments actually helped to alter these kind of epigenetic inputs, their gene expression, and then pass down these more, quote, positive genes to their offspring.

DR. SUE VARMA: Wow. Amazing. Right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so we know that our genes do have a template, as you shared with depression, for example, 25% with optimism. Right? 25 % of our optimism is determined by our genes, but epigenetic input is going to determine our life expression. And then we're going to pass that down.

DR. SUE VARMA: Exactly. Exactly. And I'm so glad that you said that because I think for the parents that are listening, for the kids that are listening, it makes us feel empowered, right? That we can be agents of change in our life. But I'm really big on trying to be a cycle breaker, right? Because I just think that we have to change things upstream because every generation is going to pass things down. And I remember, you know, in college and after, after graduating college and during medical school working with, you know, different folks from, you know, inner city, you know, and. Everything has to change in terms of the mentality of how do we provide resources, how do we empower people, and we were talking about this when you take kids who maybe came from disadvantaged neighborhoods, you put them into, surround them with people who've got resources and advantage, and all of a sudden that kid develops self efficacy and says, Hey, I can be just like them.

That idiot somehow managed to get a great job at a great company. I'm no different, you know, I'm not qualified. So we have to be able to see success right around us. We have to be able to perceive and have really great role models, but definitely the point of intergenerational trauma and how our parents might've been exposed to abuse or violence in the home or incarceration, all of the adverse childhood events, not just for us, but they had it. And then if not only are their genes now affected but also their mentality and the way that they relate to the world. And do they come into life our parents with having an abundance mentality or do they teach us to feel paranoid. And I know that sometimes immigrant, you know, parents had very little and so they had to stay insular or they were scared of interacting with the world or taking chances or they were not familiar. So just understanding that's where the cultural scripts come in of being able to have empathy for our parents. Cause I think so many times some people get stuck in anger and resentment and blame, rather than saying, you know, maybe they didn't know any better, you know, and how can I help them? And then how can I help myself?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, and we also have a choice. You know, you get to choose how you look at this. And, you know, from my perspective, one of the things that I did, and sometimes this stuff, as you're moving into a healthier place, you kind of automatically make some of these mental changes. But I just started to really focus on the good that my mom did for me. I just actually went on a hike with my wife and my youngest son.

And, you know, usually sometimes I'll make a joke about how I grew up and, you know, didn't have the advantages that he had. But this time he, I said something, he was like, Oh, let me guess. I was like, no, no, no. I wasn't gonna say anything negative. Like my mom actually did things to make me feel special because I grew up in a, in a really volatile environment. You know, my mom. It was a, it was a violent household, you know, very aggressive and, you know, and just in the neighborhood, you know, she was working at a convenience store.

She was stabbed multiple times, you know, living in poverty. She would sell her blood, you know, whenever, as frequently as they would let her sometimes, you know, to buy us food. We got food from charities, like all kinds of these. Wow. At the time, and again, looking back on it, I look at it with a new lens of like, you know, that's, What an incredible, altruistic thing she's doing to take care of her kids. She's making sure we don't go without, whatever is necessary. But I was sharing with my son that when she was working at the convenience store, she would bring me back, because I live with my grandmother during the week, but sometimes I'd come over there on the weekend, and She would bring me a pack of baseball cards, right? And it had the little bubble gum in the pack. And I was like, she did that for me. You know, there's like this little sweet thing.

DR. SUE VARMA: That's so sweet.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I can look at all the stuff that I think she didn't do.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Or I could see those little moments of like, she really does care about me. You know and I get to pick And you know having siblings I see that they get they choose different things to focus on and you can see the outcomes In their emotions and their life structures as well.

DR. SUE VARMA: That's so beautiful. Shawn Thank you so much for saying that because it just it's warming me. I'm getting shivers and goosebumps when you're talking about I can choose right because there's so much hardship. So you're being compassionate and recognizing these circumstances that were outside of everyone's control like it's a system and sometimes we are a product or caught up. But then you're able to say, I can choose, and that's exactly what my dad did, you know, when I talked to him about his childhood. And I joke about it and, you know, the way he recounts it, anybody else would be like, that does not sound like fun, you know, but then he's like, but we had camel rides and rooftop slumber parties and hurricane lamps. I'm like, that's because he had no electricity, dad. And he's like, he's like, what do you want?

He's like, I can laugh or I can cry, you know? And so I loved what you said of like, this is how I'm going to choose. And, and I think, you know, that's really important for a kid to, or even like the kid in all of us as adults is. That feeling of being loved, you know, because I think of it as like the sun shining on you and I love the sun. I'm a sun worshipper. Yes, I put my sunscreen on but I just love the warmth and that's what I love about coming out here. And I'm like, it's so sunny and it's powerful and radiant the way a parent's love is for a child, you know and to feel enveloped and I talk about the idea of secure attachments and insecure attachments and All of us need to feel held, you know. I have a great mentor and She's in her 70s and she was my supervisor in, in, in family therapy training and she lost her mom when she was somewhere between four and six years old and to cancer and she's like, I know my mother loved me. And I'm thinking, you know, like, if it was four, I'm like, that's so young, like, what memories could she possibly have?

Like, I have some memories, right? But not a ton. But the fact that she held onto that, you know, and she's like, it allowed me to be who I am today in terms of giving to the rest of the world, because I remember being loved, you know, so I feel like that's the key of holding. And so to me that's practical optimism. Shawn is like, this is what my mom did for me and I feel loved, and I feel seen and appreciated. Now that has filled you, because I always say, you know, it doesn't matter, is the glass half empty or half full? Right. Practical optimists know that there's always free refills. Yeah. And the glass is refillable. And that's what you're doing is that you are filling your glass with these powerful, beautiful, potent memories so that you then have something for other people to be able to fill their pour, pour into their glass.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, I love this. I want to keep talking with you forever because there's, this is life, you know, this is what life is all about. And we get to choose. We have so much agency, but we feel victims, you know, like victimized by our own thinking and we don't realize it because, you know, even as you're sharing that, I just, you know, to, to reiterate this, there are thousands of things that I could focus on that were terrible about my experience growing up. But I'm choosing even in those things to view them like you said this earlier, you know that you know Your parents oftentimes are just doing the best that they can. You know, I'm choosing to focus on myself. And this is the key and you also share this as well. It's not negating that these things didn't happen. You know bad things happen in life, but we have to take Control of our own thinking.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know and part of, and this is what I love, it's in the title, Practical. It's very practical. It's good for you.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's good for you to do that. But so often we're attached to that blaming and the victimization.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That we just like, no, you don't understand. And you know, if we could, I want to talk about this because just having you here is really important. And a part of this practical optimism is. This idea, well, this truth of how good it is for you as a matter of fact you really illuminate that in sharing how being more optimistic is correlated deeply with better health and longevity. Yeah a little bit about that.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah, so optimism head to toe has endless benefits, like whether it's brain health, like less anxiety and depression to cardiac health. We know that they did a study with 200,000 people and you know, 30% of these folks who were optimistic, they were 30 % less likely to not only have less heart attacks, less strokes, but really to die prematurely of any causes. People who are optimists enjoy exceptional longevity, 20% more. They live longer and not just longer, but in good health. The definition of exceptional longevity being people living well into their 80s. And we know that lifespan is increasing, but healthspan is not. And so what good is living an additional 20 years if you're, you know, dependent in the nursing home and immobile and have lost your cognitive function? So, We know that optimists have five times more productivity at work. They're more engaged, six times less burnout and get this, 40% more likely to get a raise at work in the next year.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Show me the money, Gary.

DR. SUE VARMA: Oh yeah, that was a great movie. So, you know, it's all about like, if, if you're going to do it, like I, I say, It doesn't matter what road leads you to optimism, but I gotta be honest, all roads lead to optimism. And I feel like if you want to achieve anything, any question you want you have in life, anything that you're struggling with, there are eight pillars of practical optimism. You start with having an intention and then having a purpose and it's sort of you move through all of them and the last one is practicing healthy habits and to me that's the outcome. So the purpose is the intention and your outlook and then you can turn that outlook into an outcome by processing your emotions, by problem solving and very tactical, tangible tips. One, two, three. Have you asked yourself this? Have you tried this? If, if Plan A doesn't work, you know, have you tried plan B? You know, I say with purpose write your this is a saying. I didn't come up with this but write your purpose in pen but your path in

pencil so to be flexible and to have alternative routes to achieve the same thing and it's so important.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love that I want to ask you about a specific example, and I know a lot of people deal with this and especially today. Again when there's so much consuming our time and energy and not having time for the introspection. But we want to, again, remind folks that pessimism or, you know, being “negative is not putting ourselves in a box”. Some of these feelings of even being a little bit more pessimistic at times is very helpful, very practical, you know, to question things, that kind of thing. And we don't want to get caught in a loop to where we are. For example, let's say a person is stuck in ruminating on a thing. Like you said, laying their head down on the pillow and they're just consumed with this particular thing that happened, right? So maybe something happened with, you know, a situation with their kid or a family member or something that happened, you know, to them personally, whatever the case might be. I know that people, we can get into this loop of rumination. What can we do? To help to break out of that when, because it can really be difficult to move and just to live when we're ruminating on a thing.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes, so great question. And it's so common. So, you know, breaking the cycle can be a variety of things. So there's a four step technique that I call name it, claim it, tame it, and reframe it. So the naming is naming the antecedent and the trigger. What is causing this? What can I put my finger on? We know that people who can name the antecedents and the triggers have a much more granularity, emotional granularity, and that's really good for your mental health to be able to point to. And we know that, for example, and this is kind of dark, but people who come in with suicide attempts, And let's say they survive the next day, if they're able to say, this happened because X, Y, Z. Granted, we want to give people options so that it doesn't get to that place. But being able to point to something and say, this caused me to act this way is very helpful.

Then you want to be able to claim it. Where in the body are you feeling it? There's always physical symptoms. They say that the body expresses what the mind cannot. So where are you feeling it? Clenched jaw, tension in the shoulders, fists. IBS, you're going to the bathroom a lot, you're peeing in the middle of the night, all sorts of things, headaches, and from unprocessed emotions. Then this is the taming, the next step. Name it, claim it, tame it, reframe it. The taming is, these are the tangible techniques. Journaling. Number one, I would say if you can start getting in the habit of twice a week, 15 minutes, it could be anything that you talk about, but we know that people who journal, have left less inflammation, better immune systems, less cardiac problems, but this is doing it religiously, like as a intervention, twice a week, 15 minutes writing about what's on your mind.

And then there's something called a worry diary where instead of ruminating in your head park it. And you, you Plan 10 minutes a day just to worry and somebody might be like, why would I take time out of my life to start thinking about all the negative things that can happen? But there's power in that because you see time and time again that the things that you worry about never happen. 85% of the time the things that we worry about never happen and the 15% of the time they do we're better equipped to handle them than we gave ourselves credit for. So the worry diary, worry diary, you become desensitized, you see the bad things never happen, and then you start to see a trend, actually the best thing happened, right?

So, worry diary, journaling, and walking. Walking is free, it's, it's, it's accessible. If you can do a quick loop around, you know, your block. EMDR therapy for trauma came from walking in this idea of optical flow when you have to leave your house and you're looking left and right, I want to get hit by a car or by a bus. It's taking you outside of your own thoughts. Calling somebody up and ask them, how are you doing? Seems so counterintuitive when you're feeling sad. You're like, no, I don't want that. I want someone to call me and ask me how I'm doing. Anything that'll get you out of your own head. Right? Whether it's service, whether it's showing up to a party, and I work with people in the depths of darkness of depression, right?

So, I have been to the darkest of places with people. I've spoken to them on their bedside, you know, the day after an attempt at suicide. And they'll often say to me, I don't want to die. I just wanted the pain to stop. And I feel like there's so many things that we should do where we don't let it, we shouldn't let it get that dark or that heavy. That help is always available and accessible. You know, tell people like, you know, 988 CALL US. National crisis hotline, but I always say prevention, an ounce of prevention is, you know, just worth a pound of gold. So, walking, exercise, one session, 45 minute session a week can be so powerful as an antidepressant.

So I'm a big believer in any form of movement, specifically for mental health. Yes, you want to live cardiac health, all of that, but as you had talked about metabolic relationship to depression 100%. And one thing that people don't realize when they have cardiac disease or metabolic illness is that all of this causes changes and inflammation in the brain to the point where they get microvascular changes and they might be having many many strokes and people don't realize it because they might just be showing up as personality changes or depression and it's found out after the fact. So you know if someone has a history of cardiac disease or metabolic disease you know there's a very high likelihood that they will develop depression so even to be more mindful of that from a preventative point of view. And then the last One is reframing. Your outlook and asking yourself a question like what advice would I give to a friend?

Because we're usually more compassionate to other people. What is an alternative perspective from how can I rewrite the situation? Is there any silver lining? How am I going to feel about this five years from now? And one thing I say to people when we were talking about victim mentality if you're saying No, there's no silver lining. There's nothing good that came out of this. I just want to stay in my negativity. I'm going to ask you this question: What is the utility of staying in your negativity, you know? And when I was working with trauma survivors, they would say to me, but Dr. Varma, there could be another terrorist attack. And I can't refute that because I don't know the answer to that question. And it happened once, so who knows? I don't want to think about it because I wouldn't leave my house if that was the case. So, but I then would say, what's the utility of feeling as if it could happen tomorrow? And then they were like, well, you're right. And then I'm paralyzed, right? So if, I would say there's a, Saying I grew up with, is this a problem to be solved or a truth to be accepted? You know because sometimes we can't change reality.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, you know, this is reiterating again from your experience, this incredible breath of experience working with real people in the real world and teaching for so long and your education. Sharing this important fact about life is that questions are often the answer. You know, being able to ask better questions, and I love one of my favorite parts of this conversation is taking time to worry. That's so again kind of counterintuitive. Yeah, but it's just like you're doing it. Anyways, you're worrying and it's messing up your day in your life anyways. How about you just take that time, take that 10 minutes in the morning or whatever the case might be? To worry and to focus on it, get all the things out and express those things.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And here's the crazy thing and i've experienced this as well when you're able to offload it tends to lighten the load for the rest of the day and potentially Longer term.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, but it's just being able to get exercise.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? Get some of these things that are just haunting us out into you know on the paper and also being able to ask better questions, right? I love the question, you know, and this is something that I've made a little bit of a habit is When a challenging situation happens and this isn't necessarily like you immediately do it. Sometimes you're just

in the suck. But asking what is the gift in this? You know, what is the blessing in this challenging situation? Yeah, what is this trying to teach me?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? Because it's usually some kind of capacity or changing the way I look at something. Maybe there's something for me to do. Sometimes there's not. But just asking the question instead of just letting it sit on my shoulders is so much more practical.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. I love that. And you know, the power of acceptance. I think that in the Western world, acceptance has been equated with the resignation, right? That if I accept some hardship, then I have failed and that I'm surrendering and that I've lost. I, I think like the, the Eastern upbringing part of me, acceptance was strength and it was courage, right? And even in like the 12 step, which is something I grew up with because my father was a psychiatrist working with folks in addiction, the first step was admitting powerlessness. And I think that that's so hard for so many people to do because once you start from there, once you start from rock bottom, it's only up, you're only going up from there.

So I think if you can embrace the lowest part of your life. And to know, you know, what people don't realize is that, you know, in physics they talk about potential energy and kinetic energy, and when you're taking a rock and you're moving that rock up a mountain. It's gaining in potential energy. And so when it's at the pinnacle, right, that's when it has the most amount of energy, and then as it starts going downhill it gains kinetic energy. And so you're not realizing that hardship and moving up is strength. Getting up from a seated position and moving up is gaining potential energy, so that you're then in a position to have acceleration and forward movement. Because when we talk about worry, there's unproductive worry, which is like a rocking chair.

There's motion, but there's no acceleration. If I said, come over here and you're in a rocking chair and you're like, I'm trying to get to you, Sue. But you're not because you're fixed, right? So it's like the wheel spinning in the mud, but there's no movement. There's no versus the productive worries making that list and like what can I do? What's the best possible scenario? What's the worst possible scenario? What's the most likely? And that's something I learned in my own therapy, you know Which took me a long time to get to but thank God I did because it made me the practitioner that I am, which is to be kinder, to be more compassionate, to be more loving, to be more accepting, because I'm just like, who am I to judge, you know?

So there's no experience that any, there's nothing somebody can say to me where I would judge because I'm like, yeah, I haven't been in that situation, but I can relate to something

else that made me feel. And so I think it's so important that people find common ground because they're so quick to be like, I would never do that. You know and that would never happen to me and I'm like really? You know So just this situation may never have happened to you But think about the common denominator, which is this the situation made you this person feel shame. Have you ever felt shame before? Great Well, then you should understand. So we're so quick to be like, you know, my SHIT don't you know, don't stink.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. This is so awesome. I love just the overall approach to this which is not pumping up positivity. But just for the sake of positivity, you should be more positive. But the practicality of it.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And we know that it just feels better. It feels better in our bodies when we're in a more positive disposition.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And we also know that some of our emotions that we label as negative and part of the problem is the negative positive framing. It can be offering up valuable insight, you know, compass, giving us direction on some things that we need to pay attention to.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And in a world that is fighting, viciously, for your attention to grab your attention away from you. We've got to take that back.

DR. SUE VARMA: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And Practical optimism is one of these resources for us to do that And if you could can you share a little bit more about hey What do people have to look forward to in the book and also where they can pick up a copy?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Thank you. So practical optimism is available wherever books are sold and it'd be so grateful for you for people who read it, engage with it to, you know, take the time to, to leave a review because that means so much and that drives people to want to get the book. And I say this is not a one and done, you know, it's something that you're going to come back to. And I want people to share it with their friends and their family in the

beginning of the book that there's a quiz, you know, 40 question quiz and it kind of, I want people to take it. I don't want to spoil it, but it maps out in a way to each of the eight pillars and it gives you a sort of roadmap of which areas of your life, you know, you're excelling in and which you may want to pay some attention to. And I always say that, you know, even if you find yourself an optimist, an optimist sometimes optimists also have blind spots. And so this is a way to take a snapshot come back to. Sometimes people are like I want to have a practical optimism book club. So we can all hold each other accountable or even a partner a practical optimism partner, a friend, a spouse, a parent. That you're like, how are you?

Which pillar are you working on this? What are you struggling with? How can I help you? But there's so many quizzes that are kind of interactive and engaging. You know, this was fun because I wrote the book that I know I needed. I wrote the book that I wanted my patients to have because for so many years People had been asking me like what can I read and I was always offering them There's a lot of great things. But I wanted to create one stop shopping like the manual I've been told it's the manual on mental health or brain health or whatever it is and there's a lot of great Researchers that i've included in here like me standing on the shoulders of other giants, you know other people's work so I, I, I didn't want to leave not any one sentence. I was like, don't just take it from me. Yes, I have 20 years experience, but don't take it from me. Take it from the science. And so I did the due diligence to do thousands of hours of research, going digging deep in every field of medicine and, you know, science and neuroscience philosophy so that you don't have to do the work. You just, you have it all neatly packaged. And I, you know, I wanted to give a piece of me, a piece of my heart, you know, as a gift. And to my fellow travelers, to my fellow practical optimists in the world.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Let's use this time as an opportunity to heal. You know, we are struggling right now and we're not talking about it. And there are some great resources. There are wonderful practitioners who are sharing their insights. And, you know, to be able to learn from somebody like you is really invaluable. You know, and that's the cool thing about today is we have platforms like this to get tapped into this education and also resources like practical optimism to give us a roadmap. So, you know, I really appreciate you putting your time and energy into creating this and.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Pick up practical optimism anywhere that books are sold dr. Sue Varma, this has been amazing.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you. Thank you so much. And thank you for all that you do. Like, you've created a safe space for science and for inquiry, you know, which I really just scientific

inquiry, which I really have a lot of respect for. So thank you for sharing your journey as well. Amazing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I receive that. Thank you so much. Everybody, Dr. Sue Varma.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I appreciate you so much for tuning into this episode today. If you got a lot of value out of this, this conversation is so important and is one of the most pressing issues of our time. Please share this out with somebody that you care about. Of course, you can send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on, or of course, take a screenshot of this episode and share it on social media. Tag me, I'm @shawnmodel on Instagram and tag Dr. Varma as well. Look her up. She would love to see the love I know it. I know it and also, you know, There's so many great insights from this conversation and just something that really stuck with me is the expression that we have in our face alone as a human being. We have the ability to express so many different emotions. And yet we don't talk about our emotions and oftentimes our emotions are relegated to certain pockets of whether or not they're even acceptable.

We have a whole host of emotions for a reason. All of them are valid. All of them matter. But we need to talk about these things. We need to express ourselves. But we need to do this in a way that is healthy and feeds back into our well being. Because as this conversation concluded, number one, having a chronic state of depression is directly correlated with a reduction in our lifespan. And being in a state where we have more practical optimism is correlated with a longer lifespan. It's very practical to be more optimistic, to be more positive, not to be airy fairy, wishy washy, or idealistic, but truly it is a thing that, and we know this experientially, we feel better when we're in a better mood. And we have to give ourselves permission to feel good. Especially today and also to know that we have agency if sometimes we find ourselves in a place where it's difficult to feel good. And that's okay But how do we get from there to where we want to be? That's what this is all about and we're going to keep this conversation going, of course. And again, I appreciate you so much for tuning into this episode today.

We've got some amazing master classes and world class guests coming your way very very soon So make sure to stay tuned. Take care. Have an amazing day And I'll talk with you soon. And for more after the show, make sure to head over to themodelhealthshow.com. That's where you can find all of the show notes. You can find transcriptions, videos for each episode. And if you've got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well. And please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that the show is

awesome. And I appreciate that so much. And take care. I promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.