



EPISODE 899

The Amazing Connection Between Longevity & Purpose

With Guest Dr. Sue Varma

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Today you're going to discover the amazing impact that our mindset has on our lifespan. In particular, you're gonna learn about the connection between having a strong sense of purpose and the protection against our leading causes of death. We're going to dive into what specifically we mean by having a sense of purpose, what the science says. Plus, we're really going to dive into what if we don't have that strong sense of purpose. How do we cultivate that in our lives? Truly, what are the science back strategies to help us to bring that to the forefront in our lives? And I'm telling you, so many of these things that our special guest shared really spoke to me today and really helped to clarify my purpose right now as well.

Because this is the thing, your purpose, many of us have this belief, and she's gonna talk about these different misconceptions that, you know, we find our sense of purpose and we just ride that out to the end of our days. We ride that sense of purpose off into the sunset, but life is dynamic. We have all of these amazing seasons and stages of our lives and our purpose can change, and so really being able to identify. That in this ever changing, rapidly changing world that we're existing in and is so important, yes, for our lifespan, but also for the quality of our lives, and utilizing this precious time that we have here with each other. Now, before we get to our special guest, we're be talking a lot about mental health, absolutely. But a part of mental health is brain health. And one of the most important simple things for protecting and supporting our brain health is minding what our brain is actually yes, made of. But also, what is it running on? In such a critical component of our brain cells being able to talk to each other.

There's this remarkable electrical powerhouse taking place upstairs for all of us and this electrical currency and being able to send data and data actually has to jump from the little dendrites and the synapsis and the synaptic cleft and all this stuff, and it's this incredible symphony of energy that requires conductivity. Alright, this is a key word, conductivity, and what is allowing for this conductivity to take place are electrolytes. These are minerals that carry an electric charge, and in fact, one of the most critical electrolytes for our brains to literally hold hydration, to protect our brain volume when we're deficient. In this electrolyte, our brains literally lose volume. They could shrivel. We do not want shrivel brains out here,

and that mineral is sodium. Now, sodium is so unfortunately misunderstood in our world today, more than ever, and this is for good reason because we've been absolutely demolished. We've been inundated by the sodium found in ultra processed foods, and for most people, upwards of 80 to 90% of the sodium that they are getting into their bodies is from ultra processed foods.

Now, what if you are ahead of the curve and you are dramatically reducing your intake of ultra processed foods, or you're not even messing with that stuff at all? Well, now we're in a place where. We're very likely not getting the sodium that our bodies truly require to thrive, and that's where high quality, intelligent use of electrolytes comes in at. But we wanna look at what is the best ratio? What is the optimal ratio for the majority of people? We've got sodium, potassium, and magnesium being the three most critical when we're talking about performance of our cognitive health, our immune system, and much more. In fact, if we're talking about cognitive function and brain plasticity, a fascinating study was recently published in the journal Neuron finding that Magnesium is able to restore critical brain plasticity and improve cognitive function.

There's one electrolyte that has hundreds of thousands of data points utilized to have the ideal ratios of sodium, magnesium, and potassium for optimal performance, and that's the electrolytes from LMNT. LMNT is a science-backed electrolyte drink designed to support active hydration, cognitive performance, and a healthy lifestyle. No sugar, no artificial sweeteners, no dodgy stuff, just the very best electrolytes and optimal ratios and is being utilized right now by some of the most high performing people in the world, including Team USA, weightlifting entire NBA teams, NFL Teams, Navy Seals. The list goes on and on. LMNT is truly in a league of its own.

Go to drinkLMNT.com/model. Right now you're gonna get hooked up with a free sample pack of all their electrolyte flavors with any electrolyte purchase. So you're gonna get a free gift to try all the different electrolyte flavors when you make any purchase of their classic electrolyte drink mix or their new ready to drink sparkling, electrolyte performance beverages. And I keep these in my fridge all the time as well. So you make any purchase, you get a free sample pack. And right now I'm really vibing with the grapefruit. The grapefruit salt

is definitely my favorite right now, and it changes from time to time. There's a time I was really heavy on the mango chili. There's a time I was really heavy on the raspberry, but right now it's all about that grapefruit for me. So again, head over to drinkLMNT.com/model and find out your favorite salt. That's drinkLMNT.com/model. Head over there right now, get hooked up with that free sample pack with every electrolyte purchase. And now let's get to the Spotify review of the week.

SPOTIFY REVIEW: Another Spotify review from Keir KTM. Good day, Shawn. It's Kiir from down under. I want to just say your show has changed my life. I've been listening to you for a long time and I've implemented many of your suggestions and loved the incredible people that you've had on. I'm still learning every time I listen to your show. Thank you for the guidance. Yours truly, the Aussie bloke from Melbourne.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing, amazing. Thank you so much for leaving me that message over on Spotify. I loved every single word. I truly do appreciate that much love, and this is just how powerful this right use of technology can be and we're connected and yeah, that means a lot. I truly do appreciate that. Please pop over to Spotify and you can leave a comment on the episodes now, and of course you can rate the show on Spotify. I really appreciate that as well. And on Apple Podcasts, if you're listening on Apple Podcasts, you can leave a review for the show. Rate the show. Wherever you're listening, please leave a comment, share your voice rate review. The show really does mean a lot. And without further ado, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day.

Dr. Sue Varma is a psychiatrist and cognitive behavioral therapist. With over two decades of experience, her accomplishments have been recognized by the American Psychiatric Association, where she was honored as a distinguished fellow, the highest honor bestowed in psychiatry. Dr. Varma has garnered national claim as a sought after medical commentator appearing on major news programs, including the Today Show, CBS Mornings and Good Morning America, as well as primetime specials and documentaries. Dr. VARs integrative approach to psychiatry sparked the success of her bestselling book, Practical Optimism. You're about to discover the science-backed keys to great mental health and the power of

purpose when it comes to your longevity. Let's dive in this conversation with the amazing Dr. Sue Varma. Dr. Sue Varma, so good to see you.

DR. SUE VARMA: Great to see you, Shawn. Thank you so much for having me here today.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's my pleasure already. We've got so many adventures that have happened. Oh, yeah. My wife popped in here. Yes, for a moment. So you guys got to hang out.

DR. SUE VARMA: I love to meet her. I'm so glad I got to meet her. We were talking about adult friendships, so we got a lot to say. Midlife adult friendships and women. It's a topic.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm-hmm. Of course. Of course. I'm glad that more energy is going into this and the things that we're really dealing with right now.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And before we get to any of that stuff, I wanna start off with your superhero origin story, because you know a lot obviously about psychology, about psychiatry, about. The role that our mind plays in our lives. What got you interested in psychiatry and eventually leading to positive psychology?

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's talk about it.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm. You know, it's interesting. So I come from South Asian background and my father's a psychiatrist, which in and of itself was an unusual choice. You know, I'm, I'm in town right now for the convention, American Psychiatric Association. And, I remember my dad telling me that when he became a psychiatrist in the United States in the 1960s, he was actually doing a surgery rotation at the time, and one of his rotations was in psychiatry, and he told the surgeon that he's working with, he's like, you know, I know I'm here and I'm supposed to pursue this path, but there's something about psychiatry that really appeals to me. And the surgeon said to him.

But Satish, you don't have tuberculosis and you don't have a mental illness, so why are you going into psychiatry? And the unfortunate part was there had to be something wrong with you if you were pursuing this line of work because nobody did it. It wasn't prestigious, it wasn't fully understood.

And so that story stuck with me of like, wow, like we need a better understanding of what this field is about. Because all I would see growing up was people coming up to my dad in the grocery store. I was really little. Four or five years old and they were like, they would turn to me and they would say, your dad changed my life. And I had no idea what he did that was so magical and so special because we're not allowed in any of the rooms, you know, like as opposed to internal medicine or cardiology where you can shadow the doctor for the day and you get to see what they do. All I saw my dad ever come out from his office was like a paper and a pen, you know, like a pad and a pen.

And I was like, what is he doing? Or people would drop by our house, our living room on a Saturday morning was people in the neighborhood who were just like, I feel too ashamed or too embarrassed to seek help. So I would see the positive influence and change that both my parents had. My mom's background was in special education. She had a PhD. Um, and both of them were working with children. They had started a school back in India for child mental health. And it started from my mom's living room. You know, she was 16. This is a new Delhi in India. She had graduated college at 13, four, bachelor's by 18 and four more masters.

Always studying and. My dad who was in the United States, you know, fast forward 10 years, my mom's now in her twenties. The school has grown from her living room to now a thousand students, four acres, K through 12. And my dad was in the United States thinking about psychiatry. He'd finished his training, decided against the surgeon who was like, you know, you'd make a great surgeon. He's like, no, I'm doing my own thing and I wanna go into this field. People need it. This is where the need really is. But he felt like something was missing. And even though he's also originally from India, he had already planned to settle in the United States. He read an ad in the newspaper that said, we're looking for a child psychiatrist.

We're looking for a medical advisor to this new school. And my dad's like, what an amazing opportunity to create mental health services in schools in India, which was totally unheard of. So he flies back, he takes this job in New Delhi and my mom tells me this story. She's like, the first day your dad was on the job, he's wearing a white, you know, pants and white suit and white Chevy Nova, which was a big deal on American car in India in the 1960s. And she's like his big pearly white smile. I fell in love with him, but all there were these suitors that my dad was trying to. Set her, you know, her dad was trying to set her up with for an arranged marriage and she's like, but I fell in love with him. So I just kept putting off those suitors. We worked together.

You know, initially your dad wasn't interested in me, he had his own thing going on, but they fell in love with these shared values, shared mission, and so, you know, they got married, came to United States, and really I felt like I grew up with this mission spirit in my parents' heart. You know, I was born and raised in New York, but when I was seven, my parents were like, we're going back to India. We're gonna serve. So this service orientation, a real love for understanding human behavior, psychology, but in service, like I think we're all very curious, intellectually stimulated people, but it's like, that's great that you wanna read and you wanna understand, but how are you gonna put it to work in service of other people?

So I feel like that's so much of like the mission and the passion that I grew up with and the satisfaction of knowing that. People don't understand something, but you can shed light on it, you can communicate, you can educate, and eventually in service of other people. So that's kind of how I got interested. And I always knew I wanted to be a doctor, but specifically to go into psychiatry 'cause there was such a demand and need and fully understood.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, a lot of people don't. Know that, that there was a time when psychiatry was kind of like, you are odd.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: If you're even considering this.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You are, you're gonna be working with odd people.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you're odd.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it's just kind of like something that you don't talk about.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so with this being said, obviously it's changed dramatically, especially in recent years, and we're thankful for that because mental health is a big part of our health overall. And everybody experiences a broad array of emotions and temperaments and moods that we can get trapped in.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And having some resources to help us to manage and navigate these things is super important and valuable. Now, as you know, and you could speak to this better than anybody, the common practice right now still in education regarding psychiatry and mental health, is so centered around problems. It's so centered around what's wrong with humans, and there isn't. Nearly as much education about what creates healthy..

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Humans. What's right about us.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: What are the ingredients that create great mental health and temperament. And so the field of positive psychology is really emerging. And what helped you to make that shift to really focusing more on. What can we do and what are the conditions that make humans thrive?

DR. SUE VARMA: Such a great question. You know, I think you're a hundred percent right. Like so much of Western medicine and my own training and education was based on like a deficits model. What's wrong? Fixing disease and waiting for the other shoe to drop before people got help. And this is something that I personally experienced. So I would say that there were like professionally, a few key moments in my life that made me realize we're working with only half an understanding of health, right?

Which is disease, right? It should be called a, you know, di disease-based model. Like this is not healthcare, this is sick care, right? And so I thought to myself when I was a resident, I was working a hundred hours a week, five different hospitals all over New York City. And you know, life was going fairly well. This was back in the day when, you know, I first started blogging. I did a little bit of acting, you know, I had a little, few different hats working out, seeing friends, but mostly working a hundred hours a week and managing fine. And then I get a call that my mom got diagnosed with stage three breast cancer.

And I was like, that sucks because she has underlying heart disease and they're not gonna be able to give her chemo, and no doctor wanted to touch her. They're like, if we give her chemo, it's gonna put her into heart failure so we can't treat her. And then now I'm, you know, in addition to the a hundred hours of, at my own hospitals trying to find her, the care going from doctor to doctor with her afterwards and in the middle of all this stress, right? I grew up with a strong belief that like, you're fine, you'll take care of, your job is to take care of other people. So I started developing symptoms. My legs started giving out. I started feeling really weak. I didn't know what was wrong with me and there was no time for me to get checked out. And eventually my mom's like, you are not coming with me to the hospital today.

You're gonna get yourself figured out. So I went to a neurologist, got a bunch of tests, and they're like, you're fine. And I'm like, but I'm not fine. And I wasn't going to do anything about

it. Just, you know, continue working. And then one day we got a lecture and it was this visiting professor who was talking about cognitive behavioral therapy. And I was like, oh my God, here is a type of therapy that is problem oriented, but solution focused, forward thinking, you're not gonna have to lay down on the couch. 'cause all I wanna do on a couch is sleep 'cause I'm, you know, sleep deprived. But within a few sessions that day I got a referral and I was like, I am now gonna be the therapist who's ready for therapy.

'cause up until that point, while it was recommended, nobody did it. 'cause nobody had time, nobody had money. Right. None of us. And they encouraged it, but they didn't create a safe space and like block out our calendar to do this. So I got a referral and a few sessions later that leg weakness gone completely. And I was like, why is it that we take so long for most people, most people will go 10, 20 years with symptoms and never get treated. Most people will go to five different specialists. I went to a neurologist. Most people will go to a cardiologist, gastroenterologist, because stress obviously manifests physically for a lot of people, right.

Psychosomatic symptoms. And most people may not even seek treatment. You know, only 40% of people will ever get help in their life or ever get a diagnosis. And even a smaller amount, maybe even half, would all eventually get treated. So the fact is that most of us are struggling in silence. We don't know what's going on. We don't realize that the body expresses what the mind cannot. And then I realized what I was learning with skills and I'm like, everyone and their mother should be learning these skills and they are prevention, right? But we're not gonna get it unless you go to treatment, unless you have the resources or the time and luxury.

So that was one key pivotal moment where I was like, everyone should be given skills to prevent. So that was that. And the second one was 9/11. And on 9/11, I was a medical student and I was in, in my third year working at a New York City hospital. And I still remember being in a patient's room and seeing on tv the towers hit and we were like, damn, what are we gonna do? This is, we had friends down there, family members that nobody could reach. And it was one of the most devastating experiences for anybody, you know, for many people, new

Yorkers, but really all over the country. And in some ways, in other parts of the world too, this feeling that I think up until that point that we're invincible, right?

Like, nothing bad can happen. We're safe. And not only, I mean, terrorism chips away at your sense of safety and morale, right? And that's what trauma does, is it destabilizes your worldview. Like anything bad can happen at any time. But, we doubled down on, you know, trauma training. Some of us working at the morgue, we were helping out with Rescue and recovery. But then fast forward a few years, and I was recruited to be the first medical director of the 9/11 mental health program at NYU. Which was based on trauma and recovery, but we were focused on resilience, which is bouncing back from adversity. And I was like, that's great. We need to learn how to bounce back.

But bounce back to what, right? What if you're bouncing back to a baseline that's horrible to begin with. That is full of illness, sickness, disease, unresolved trauma, grief, loss that you've never looked at. And I remember meeting a patient in the hallway who was not part of our program. So even though she saw the death destruction, she barely escaped. The North Tower during the collapse, got trampled on, lost friends and family, covered with blood in the dust and debris she never got diagnosed with PTSD panic, nothing. And I was like, how is it that you're here? She comes once a year as part of her medical screening, but also was in the hallway helping people.

She was always bringing people to their appointments because they had agoraphobia or panic and they couldn't be out in public. They were afraid of another terrorist attack, couldn't get on public transportation. So she was bringing people to their appointments, an activist in the community advocating. And I, I asked her, I said, Theresa, que es tu secreto? what is your secret? And she goes, mi proposito, my purpose. And I was like, there is something about this woman that I gotta learn more about. I spend time with her. I spend time with people who are not in our program to find out what is it about these people. And the common thread was that they were optimists.

So while resilience is about bouncing back from adversity, optimism is about flourishing forward. And that's when I was like, I need to go deep into this science. What's here? And

nobody wanted to look at it. They're like, whatever. Woo, woo thinking, optimism. What is that? Just people who look on the bright side and no one looked at it because it was something that you were either born with or not. And Shawn, it wouldn't be until years later that I would learn that yes, there is a genetic component to optimism, but only 25% of it is genetic. The rest, 75% is learned. And so I was like, you know what? This is something I wanna learn for myself, and if I can learn it, then I can teach it. And if I can teach it, then we can all practice it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes. And her statement, her reply purpose, this is a big ingredient in this. And you've got so much data on how purpose impacts really every part of our life, but even our physical health impacts our risk of heart disease.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And stroke, and our lifespan. Let's talk about why purpose is so impactful on our health overall.

DR. SUE VARMA: Purpose is your, your driving life force. You know, we have in so many different cultures this idea of prana or chi. It is your energy, it is your spirit. It is what gets your butt up in the morning every day and recruits and mobilizes all of your resources. Mental, physical, spiritual. And I feel that purpose is, is beyond I, I think of purposes as your soul's way of engaging with the world in the way that only, you know, how that aligns your own talents, interests, and hobbies. But often in service of others. And I think that that piece is missing for a lot of people because they are really focused. And I don't blame them. I understand that some of us are just trying to get through the day and we're just trying to survive and it takes everything we have to just get out of bed in the morning and they, somebody may say to me, well, you know, Sue, I, I'm just trying to survive for myself. How is it that I can think about anybody else?

And I can tell you that what happens in depression and anxiety is that we become self-absorbed and the brain ruminates and it just goes in circles. It's like the old school, you know, record player. It just gets stuck. And the fastest way to get out of your depression and

anxiety is a small act of service for another person. It gets you out of your own focus. Self-absorbed thinking, rumination, it short circuits that. So for me, purpose is a life of achieving something beyond connecting to something greater. It could be a higher power, it could be nature, it could be our universal spirit, whatever you wanna call it. But it's getting yourself outside and there's so much science behind it.

People who have a sense of purpose, they say that in the next eight years will have 30% less risk of stroke, 30% less risk of heart attack, of death, of all cause mortality. Purpose helps you exercise and exercise helps you give a stronger sense of purpose. So even a 15 minute walk around the block when you're just feeling stuck can go such a long way.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right here in your book, Practical Optimism, which everybody should have a copy of. You share some of the latest data, and this was published in The Lancet. This is one of our most prestigious peer-reviewed journals. Study participants who expressed a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives were 30% less likely to die during the study period, which was about eight, eight and a half years. Also 2013 study published in the Journal of Behavioral Medicine showed that having a sense of purpose led to about a 27% decreased risk of having a heart attack. Another study in the Journal of Psychosomatic Research found that having a strong sense of purpose meant a 22% decreased risk of having a stroke. The list goes on and on. Other data affirming a sense of purpose increases our lifespan.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We do not think about these types of things. You know, we become obsessed with, you know, obviously nutrition matters. Exercise, sleep, all these things matter. But what is the undercurrent of all of it?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: What's the foundation of it all? And having a sense of purpose is, is vital to our life force. And if you could, let's talk a little bit about some of the misconceptions about purpose. You cite one misconception being purpose should come through our job. Let's talk about that one

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. You know, I think a lot of people feel a sense of dissatisfaction because they're like, I don't feel like I'm having impact. And I feel that knowing or feeling as if right, that you have impact, that's a big thing because it's about perception. You may feel like, what am I, I'm doing this at my job, who is this for? I'm just making the company more money, and I think people want, and I get it, like you spend so much time at your day job that you want it to give you a sense of purpose, but I feel like a lot of times people feel like my work is not being rewarded.

I am not being appreciated. I am not seeing the direct impact of what I'm doing. And there's a few different ways of looking at that. One is looking at your perception, right? And asking yourself is in any way the work that I'm doing benefiting anybody, and I am a hundred percent sure you are benefiting somebody, you may say to yourself, well, I'm just making my, you know, the CEO of our company richer. Sure. Right? But let's talk about it. What profession are you in? And you know, I've seen people say, well, I'm a lawyer and I'm doing this, this, this. And I'm like, yeah, well, you are bringing impact. Yes, you're bringing, you're making people in your company richer, right? But you're also changing lives in the work that you do, right?

Teaching healthcare, whatever. It doesn't matter what you're doing. So find the connection between you and who you're serving and how it's benefiting somebody. And make a list, just the way, when we talk about gratitudes, you have to write it down and say, what am I grateful for? Ask yourself, who am I impacting? Who am I serving? Whose life is better as a result of the work that I'm doing? So perception is one big part of it. The other thing I would say is there's, there's an idea of role remake or job crafting. How can you, instead of, you know, you trying to fit your job, how do we get your job to fit you? What are you good at?

Right. So when I, all these years when I was a resident, I was working on, you know, medical student on the side. I did a lot of creative endeavors, right? Some were paid, most were not, right? But they did give me a strong sense of purpose, whether it was writing or communicating or speaking or educating or going on radio shows and doing hundreds of hours of answering calls. People coming in on serious satellite radios many years ago, different health shows I would go on and, you know, whether it was psychiatry, but it could

have been urology or cardiology or pulmonology. And people were like, just so grateful to have someone that they could talk to and whatever. So what, is there a helpline?

A hotline, you know, 9, 8, 8, like, you know, the national health. Like, is there some way that you can donate your time to be of service to somebody, even if it's not part of your day job, but is there something at your job that you can do, alright, I don't wanna get together a 5K race that will build morale and team spirit and we can raise money for a charity. Or maybe people say, well I'm, I'm, I'm super social, right, but I don't, and I don't know how to translate that to make the workplace, you know, better in any way. Can you have a company mocktail hour if you're not drinking? Right? Are there ways that you can bring people together that are in service, that are fun?

Maybe it's writing, maybe it's speaking like, so, you know, I get called to do wellness talks and somebody's like, you know, this is not part of my day job. My day job is something else. But I really believe in health and I believe in longevity and I wanna bring in experts. So think that, are there ways at your current job? I think the first thing that people think of when their job is not satisfying is, and I need to find a new profession and I need to go somewhere else. It's kinda like in a relationship, right? When you're like, this isn't serving me. So I always say, you know. Where they, they say the grass is greener where you water it.

Right? So what are you doing to water your grass where you are right now? Stop looking at your neighbor's grass. Your neighbor's grass is always gonna look greener someplace else. Water your own grass in your job, in your life, in your relationships. Nurture it. Invest in it, and bring soul to it. Right? So you may feel that your job is soulless, and it might be, it may just be a job. But at the end of the day, if there's nothing that you can do through job crafting or role remake the way I described it, I would say it's totally understandable and fine. If your job is just a paycheck, right? But your purpose is way more than your paycheck, that's a take home.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. I love this because many of our waking hours are dedicated to our "work", right? And so having some sense of purpose within that is incredibly valuable. But also, of course, you stress that it's not just about. The work of where you find your purpose,

but if you can and what you're sharing is really is just a change in perspective. It's just a change in perspective because even people who maybe you initially felt a sense of purpose and then you get stuck in the rat race in the day to day.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you kind of lose touch with that. Being able to rekindle in your own mind why you're doing what you're doing, who you're impacting.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Why this matters and why you matter, why this is valuable.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And that can start to reignite that fire and add more kindling.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. To that fire and just building up that sense of purpose. Because as you know, and I know many people experience, when you are moving with that sense of purpose. Everything is just so much more grace, so much more resilience. So much these capacities that are dormant within us.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Are able to activate.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so this is just another, again, really important part about purpose.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. And, and so I wanna say like, one of the thing is another misconception is that purpose needs to be glamorous or it needs to be big, or that other people need to understand it. And I think that that's important because, you know, I have a, a patient I'm working with who you know, is go going to college right now, but is also thinking about, you know, being a professional athlete. But then I was like, you know what else lights you up? What else gets you excited and motivated? And then he told me like, fixing cars. And I was like, what about that? And he's like, no, no, my parents would never allow it. They would never understand it. They would say, why are you gonna college if that's all you wanted to do?

But I really have like a knack and I just, I get these machines and they make sense to me and they're beautiful and I can, you know, revive many of these like old cars. It's a niche. Not a lot of people know how to do it. And I was like, listen. That makes you light up. You, when you said that your eyes just, I saw a look on your face. Everything seemed lighter and brighter, and that's worth exploring and pursuing. So, you know, keep that in mind that nobody, nobody's gonna get it. Nobody needs to get it right. And it doesn't have to be, you know, societally sanctioned.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love that. So that was misconception Two, it doesn't have to be big. And another misconception, this is misconception three that you talk about in practical optimism. True purpose lasts a lifetime. Like that's my purpose. It's my, this is why I'm alive and, and this is, if I don't have this thing, then I don't have a purpose. Let's talk about that one.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. I think people have this idea that I have to wake up every day with the same purpose. And I would say that purpose evolves over time, just like you do. Our purpose changes just like we do. So your purpose yesterday may not be the same as your purpose today, and your purpose today may not be the same as your purpose tomorrow. Our purpose is ever evolving. And I would say that, you know, be flexible with it because a lot of people, especially like midlife will say, up until now, a lot of women are like, you know, I had a career years ago, I put it on hold.

I raised my family. My kids are now becoming more independent and I need something from me. I need something to excite me. That lights me up. And I would say, you know, but, and

then they say it's, is it too late? Right? And it's never too late. I don't care what age you are, your purpose could literally be planting flowers because it gives you great joy around your home and you know that your neighbors are gonna look at it and appreciate it and it's beauty. So, and the purpose can mean the little things. You know, when I'm out in the world and I'm speaking to, to groups of people, I say, your purpose could be the big P in life, or it could be the P here today, in this moment, in this meeting, you're here at this gathering. What do you wanna accomplish? Who do you wanna talk to? Who do you wanna meet?

SHAWN STEVENSON: So simple. So simple. And you provide all these other insights because. You know, it's one of those questions that many of us ask today more than ever because there's so much, it's we're just inundated with information and with things to do and to be, and to explore. And we can find ourselves in a paralysis even, right? The paradox of choice.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so let's talk about some of these inroads into when, when we're asking what is my purpose? What is my purpose? I don't, I don't know what it is.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you give some, some tips and things to consider. One of them is to cultivate curiosity.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's talk about that one a little bit.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. You know, one thing that I'm noticing that's happening, you know, we we're looking at our young people, right? And they're like, I don't feel like I have a sense of purpose. And I would say, are you curious about the world? And to me that is the spirit of youth, right? And you can have that at any age. My dad is gonna be close to 90 in a couple years, and when you talk to him, he has the excitement of, I don't know, like a young kid, you know, he's like, did you see this?

Did you see that? Did you hear this? He's constantly calling me up with, I don't know, articles and movies and podcasts and documentaries and that excitement, that glimmer in his eyes.

Like I couldn't imagine what he was like as a kid, you know? And I would say cultivating curiosity to me will protect you against all of the problems in life because you approach them with a sense of wonder and awe and a quote that I recently heard, and it just spoke to me on such a deep level. You know, somebody who is surviving cancer and she's an author, and she, you know, there was this line that was like, don't approach the world as if it was your last day. Approach it as if it was your first day. And that just changed the perspective of like, let's ask questions. And when I think about. Youth and protecting them against anxiety and depression in this mental health crisis.

What's getting lost in all of the things that you just said? When we're bombarded and inundated, it takes away our boredom and our boredom, lack of, it takes away creativity and takes away curiosity when we are overstimulated. So create a vacuum, create a safe space where there's no devices, where you're not inundated with information and you're just wondering about everything.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. We need that. We need that. It's something we evolved with and now, and just suddenly it's just in a snap of a finger. It's, it's gone. It's gone. It's like, it's rare.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: To, to even have time to be bored.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know? But this is something we can take control of. Give yourself that white space.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And also encourage this in your, in your family members, your friends, just to have some time to just be. This doesn't necessarily, and this could be, you know, meditation. This could be just time to just be still, just to be tech free. Just unplugged from the matrix a little bit. And what tends to happen, again, we start to get a little fidgety, a little itchy. Like, I want to pick my phone up or turn something on, or whatever the case might be. And this is not to negate the value of those things, right. Listen to podcasts. And great shows and doing active things. But one of the most valuable things that I do, and I wanna share this, and I don't stress this enough, it's just going for a walk.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: By myself.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Without my phone. Right. And this is a regular practice that I have. I've processed so many things in my life. I've come up with so many solutions and great ideas just by going for a walk and unplugging and just being by myself. And that's where I find that, that white space.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes. I am obsessed with walks. I, I just think they're the most, like, underrated form of everything from, I don't know, fat burning to mentally finding resolutions. I think exactly what you said, like there's something that people don't realize. There's a type of therapy, EMDR, eye movement desensitization. I gotta look this up again. Right? But it's the idea of like, you're processing trauma and um, when you're walking, your eyes have to look left and right. And there's something about, you know, I'm focused on the street ahead 'cause I don't wanna get hit by a car as I'm walking. And so we end up like, the rumination stops because you're out there, your eyes are processing the visual information and somehow that prevents you from ruminating.

And they use this in trauma processing of helping people deal psychologically. So I do think that you are clearing your mind when you're walking. I'm a, I'm a huge believer in that.

And also the, the, the curiosity, Shawn, when I think of the happiest people I know, they also happen to be the most curious people I know. Yeah. Because it's not about them. They're fascinated by the world around them. And that sense of awe of on my way here, I was looking at all the buildings and I was like, my God, this is so beautiful. I wonder who lives here. I'm curious about the architecture. How is this city planned? You know? And I, you're just you.

You don't have time to think about yourself in an obsessive rum and 'cause I think that's where we are right now as a culture. You know, how do I compare to this other person? Is this person getting ahead of me in life? You know? So I think if you're fascinated by the world, it shuts down that negative self-talk also.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We've got a quick break coming up. We'll be right back.

There's one beverage that rules them all when it comes to longevity. In fact, a study published just last year in The Lancet found that people who regularly drink tea age slower than people who do not. Now, there are so many varieties of tea that come teaming with health benefits and flavor profiles from green tea to ginger tea and more. And speaking of anti-aging and anti-obesity effects, a study published in the journal Clinical Interventions in Aging took 59 overweight or mildly obese subjects to see if the renowned tea called pu erh makes a notable difference in weight loss. The randomized double-blind placebo controlled trial gave participants either a placebo or Pu erh for a 20 week study period.

There were no other interventions noted. Here's what happened, the researcher stated, "consumption of PIR was associated with statistically significant weight loss when compared to the placebo. Fat loss was seen for the arms, legs, and the hip and belly region." The participants who receive, who wear. Loss more overall body fat. And what was especially remarkable was that they maintained more of their muscle mass, and that is the equation for healthy aging. The tea that I personally drink most often is Pu erh, but the only Pu erh that I drink is from Pique life.

It's triple toxin screen for purity and made through a patented, cold extraction technology that makes it as effective as what was seen in this study. It's wild harvested in truly the best

Pu erh on earth. Head over to piquelife.com/model right now and you'll receive up to 20% off plus some limited time free bonuses, like an electric frother to mix your favorite beverages, and you get to try peak tea's risk-free with their 30 day money back guarantee. You'll either love it or you'll receive a full refund. Go to piquelife.com/model right now. That's P-I-Q-U-E-L-I-F e.com/model and get hooked up with all of this good stuff as piquelife.com/model. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now with cultivating our curiosity and really going deeper into uncovering that purpose. What we're gonna find in our lives is that purpose comes with a work uniform as well like you're gonna have to do some work.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And our purpose isn't necessarily gonna be all sunshine and roses and fun all the time. We will find those times as well. But purpose can also mean challenge.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And working through things and figuring things out. And that's another one of these ingredients to talk about is find more flow through challenges of choice. Let's talk about that.

DR. SUE VARMA: I'm so glad you brought this up because one of the biggest misconceptions about when I talk about optimism is this idea that you're just expecting someone to just look on the bright side or like telling someone to, you know, just get over it. And I want to be clear, telling someone to just get over a bad thing in their life, that's not optimism, that's toxic positivity. So we wanna realize that practical optimism is about dealing with adversity. And sometimes that adversity is stuff you're gonna choose for yourself. And I'll give you an example.

Trying to get a promotion, right? Like there's gonna be a lot of work in that and it's a choice. It could be getting married, it could be having a child. There's planning involved, there's work involved, but these are challenges of choice.

So not everything, people always assume that something that's hard, like why would you do that to yourself? Well, because you want to grow. And so flow states are one of these unique states where you pick an activity that you wanna get better at. And it could be anything. It could be a sport, you know, we were talking about table tennis and the longevity behind it. Picking up a new sport, whether it's or a musical instrument or I don't know, taking yoga or learning to cook.

You have a fabulous book on that, right? So learning a new skill, but don't make it so hard that you end up getting frustrated because there is this curve, right, where it's like inverted u-shape curve, that the, the harder the task gets, the more your interest grows. So if the task is not hard at all, you're gonna be bored and there's no interest, there's no flow. If you get to the peak of this, think of like an upside down you. It's this perfect flow state where you have a challenge that's just enough to keep your interest, but you're also doing well at it. So your attention is gonna be completely absorbed in that moment. But if you make the task too hard, you then become frustrated.

So if the task is too easy, you're bored. If the task is too hard, you're frustrated and you give up. But right in this middle is this, oh my God, this is so exciting. I'm getting better. Look at me. I love it, but it's hard, but I wanna do it more. So you need to get that positive feedback. You need to get that reinforcement. Like this is good. And, but you also need to see that there's room for growth. So like, I feel like whatever that is for you, I'm curious, what is that for you? Where like you're trying something 'cause you have a lot of interests. Like, is there anything that you're like, I wanna get better at, but I also know I'm good at it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. I was just talking about this with a friend of mine and I think we talked about it on the show that's coming out. But I talked about, you know, my, my youngest son is a, a great basketball player. He's 13 years old. He's, he, before we took some time off from AA u so he could play at, at his school. But before that he was the MVP to of the tournament and then his team won the championship. All this stuff.

DR. SUE VARMA: Amazing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Great basketball player. And just to, because in between time, like we train a lot, I take him to, you know, basketball court and we do different training modalities. And even yesterday, like we were just standing in the kitchen, he was like, dad, I could beat you one-on-one, you know, and he hasn't beat me yet, but he just said it like, oh, today's the day. You know? And so, also he's ambidextrous, like he writes with his left hand.

DR. SUE VARMA: Oh wow.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But then he throws with his, right, he does all this other stuff with his right. And so he's great finishing at the hoop with layups with his left and his right hand equally. And I'm not that great, or I wasn't that great. I'm much better now with my left because I had to train for it and it was uncomfortable. Right. And so what I did was I held something in my hand, a bottle, like a plastic bottle in my right hand. So it forced me to use my left.

DR. SUE VARMA: Interesting.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I'm up there at the basketball court and I'm sure people are looking at me weird, like, why is he holding this thing? And you know, but over time, like I got better and better finishing with my left hand.

DR. SUE VARMA: I love that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, but I had to get into the discomfort.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And honestly, like weeks would go by of me like going and, you know, shooting and doing different drills where I'd be like. I don't wanna do it. Not today.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I don't wanna feel, I don't wanna feel that discomfort. I feel good doing this thing I'm really good at.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. So, you know, I love that. And I also have a 13-year-old who's very interested in basketball, is always challenging my husband to be like, I bet you can't. You know, and it gets him out there. But you're talking about this idea that in adulthood, I think a lot of us get to a comfort zone where we're like, life is hard enough. Why do I have to add this? And that's why I say challenges of choice, right? Because what makes the difference between what we call eustress, eu and the word stress behind it is one word, eustress, which is good stress and distress, which is bad stress. The difference between those two is did you choose it? Right? So let's say there's something big that's happening. Let's say I have to move.

Why am I moving? Is there a fire going on? Right? Was there a flood in my house? Did something happen that is causing me to move? Or did I move because I chose it? So the choice is an important part because it puts you in the driver's seat, but then it's also about commitment to yourself. Like, I want to get better at make a goal because I think what, what happens as an adult, we, those things, those hobbies get lost. They fall to the wayside. We stop investing in ourselves. If you have a family, it becomes all about the kids. I can only imagine. I know like my kids also doing the A A U and it is traveling and every weekend that is your life, you know? So where do you have time for yourself and your hobbies? And we know that this generation of parents is spending the least amount of time on their hobbies and their friendships compared to like the 1960s, for example.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh my goodness. Yeah. We gotta talk a little bit about that too. But you know, this also can tie into get a mentor. Be a mentor. Which is another one of these tips that you give us. And that we're just, there's so many more by the way, but for my son, even though, you know, we have these roles, these parental roles. You know, we have friendship roles, we have these different things, but also I believe that we are our kids' first mentor. Potentially their first superhero. My relationship with my wife is his first love story that he witnesses, you know. And me being a mentor for him in this particular thing that he's passionate about. The reason that I'm working to better this part of my game, even though like I haven't since college, like I really didn't play basketball like that for years. And I want to

give him the opportunity to see something that he might see, he might come up against, like somebody again. Like what if I don't have this tool?

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. And so me working to have that tool, because he's probably gonna see this in a game somewhere and going up somebody against somebody who's bigger than him, for example. You know, has more size or muscle. Like how do you handle these situations? So I want to get better. So that I could mentor him. Right. And also that brings more out of me.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like when you teach, you learn.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so I think that's a really valuable thing. So let's talk about, get a mentor. Be a mentor. Because it's both. Get a mentor. Be a mentor.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes. And I think that, you know, again, to me, mentorship, when you, when you both get one and, and you are one, you're investing in, in one, you're investing in yourself to get better, there's a, a certain amount of humility that comes with it. Because as an adult, we're like, oh, I don't need a mentor in, we could think of this as peer mentorship, you know, and how you keep alive, like in psychiatry, like whether it's forming a group of other psychiatrists that you can, you know, privately in confidentiality, like discuss challenging cases that you're up against that you need help in.

It basically says, I'm never too good and I wanna get better. Those two things. Yeah. You know, and I think that that idea of remaining humble, remaining hungry, remaining curious, wanting to get better at your field. And maybe it's not always gonna be in the form of mentorship. It could be in the form of like attending, you know, meetings or professional, you know, continuing education or whatever that might be for your field to continue to make deposits in your education.

And I think that for me, if you were to ask me, like, the one value that I always grew up with was the value of education. And that could be just learning. It could be books, it could be podcasts, it could be in the form of listening to meetings, virtual. There's so much great information available. But never stop learning com, committing to your learning. So mentorship kind of falls, and then that umbrella to me 'cause somebody may say, well I don't know anyone who was willing to do that. But if you can, and you may even say, listen, and, and, and people always get nervous about how do I approach someone for mentorship? You know? And I think recognizing the value of their time and saying, if you're reaching out like a cold email to say, I know how busy you are, I only want x amount, like 15 minutes, I'll come to you.

So I think sometimes people who are mentors may get turned off. Like, does this person know how busy I am? How ridiculous is this? So one tip that I learned, somebody shared with me, let's say you go to a meeting, professional meeting. Best way to meet mentors is go to professional meetings or whatever it is. Whatever you wanna go into, go to a meeting or even, you know, afterwards, approach the person if they're willing to be approached. Sometimes people at one tip that I learned, take a selfie with them. Give, have an excuse to keep in touch. Send them the selfie so they remember what you look like and who you are.

If you shared anything personal, recognize the value of their time and maybe even offer them something. And you may say, what do I have anything to offer to this person? But you know, figure it out. What do they, do they have a book coming out? Do you have a way of helping to promote them? Do you have a platform? Maybe you can make a connection. You can offer them, I know somebody who could be really helpful to you in this. So I think like you have to

be smart about mentorship, about how do you approach someone and recognizing the limitations and value of their time and being very clear. I maybe a 15 minute zoom meeting.

So, you know, just being realistic because not a lot of people might be open to the mentorship and then giving back in whatever form, even if it's just once a month. You know, it could be mentorship of your children, it could be in your children's school. It could be in the small conversations that you have with people knowing that somebody's interested in your field and to say, Hey, I know a great whatever podcast, article, book. And it's also about just building community based on that. Are you seen in your community as like the go-to person? You know, I think that has value just even for your own career.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Ah, so good. Well, let's do one more. Again, there's so many, there's 10 in rows that you provide on uncovering your purpose. If you're curious or if you're feeling like I don't quite feel like I'm on my purpose or know what my purpose is. Well, let's talk about one more of them. This one is turn your pain into purpose. Turn your pain into purpose.

DR. SUE VARMA: When I think of people who've gone through tragedies, one thing that helps them eventually is being able to talk about it. And there's this idea of you can talk about it when it becomes a scar. You don't have to talk about it when it's a wound. So when it's a wound, it's still fresh, it's healing. You don't know what it's gonna look like when it's done, but when it's a scar, the idea is that maybe you've had some distance from it and now you're in a better place to talk about it. I know that, you know this book, I couldn't have written it at a, at five or 10 years, you know, let's say 10 years. I started, you know, I wrote it five years ago, but I couldn't, I couldn't write it 10 years ago. I wasn't there yet. You know, I was going through a lot. I lost my mom and it was too fresh. It was too raw.

I didn't have enough perspective. And even though a lot of the personal things that I wrote about the detail that didn't end up in the book, it was a journey, you know? And it was, uh, coming face to face with good things in my life and bad things and hardships and challenges. So I do think that timing is really important. But keep looking back at your life and say, have I gone through something really hard that I think somebody else can learn from? What am I

willing to share? What's the appropriate amount? 'cause I think we're also in this generation or culture of sometimes oversharing. So finding that right amount of what am I willing to put out there and how could this help me? And how could this help someone else at the same time.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's the reason that this conversation is happening right now is my pain became my purpose. You know, going through issues with my own health led to me looking for solutions, finding some things that work for me, and then feeling compelled to share what I learned with other people. Right. And what tends to happen is you're gonna see these moments show up. And I have somebody close to me who's noticing this right now that has gone through some things recently and they're like, people keep coming to me with this similar issue that I, I guess is why I went through that. You know, that's, that's what all those seemingly bad things that happened with me, I'm able to provide so many great insights to these people that need it.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you know, that's a big part of life. Like we are passing down genetic information. And we're also passing back knowledge and insights from our time spent here on this planet. And it's so valuable, you know, like you just said, it could be in the stage where we're feeling the wound is still not healed. And so maybe we're a little bit less or more reluctant to share, but once we get to that place where we feel comfortable and confident sometimes it's still in the healing phase.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's another thing. It's like it doesn't have to be all perfect and figured out.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You could be just one or two steps ahead of where somebody is to be able to provide something that could potentially change their life for the better

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You know, this whole idea, you're making me think Shawn of vulnerability. I think it's really hard for a lot of people to be open because the society wants you to have it figured out. And it's, and, and it's like vulnerability. Even the word. I remember one time after my mom passed talking to a friend about it, and I'm like, I feel really vulnerable right now. And she's like, you're not vulnerable. You're so strong, Sue. And I was like, but you could be both, right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes.

DR. SUE VARMA: And your strength can lie in your vulnerability, you know? And one of the biggest compliments I received recently is somebody that I really respect had heard me talk publicly for the first time. And she's like, you know, you bring such authority, but also authenticity. And that just really like, made me feel so like, that, that was such a compliment, right? Because I'm like, I, I want to be approachable. I wanna be accessible. I never want someone to be like, how do you know, you know, you know you're there in your world of the stuff you're doing. And I'm like, no, I, I can understand people's pain. Because I have also been through it. And even if I haven't been through exactly what you're going through, I've experienced some version of that. You know, I was talking to a therapist friend of mine, and it was interesting. We were having a personal conversation and I said about something, I was dealing with challenge.

And she was like, well, I don't know. I've never been through that. And I'm like, but what a therapist. Right? We don't have to have that exact experience, but we can relate to the human experience, you know, of loss, of pain, of grief. So just put yourself in that position, right? So, I don't know, I just think that that has helped me being on both sides of the couch become a better therapist. Like experiencing my own vulnerability, losses, challenges, but not trying to run away from it, right? Like to be like, yeah, that is who I am. Like I have been through some shit in my life. It's all good. You know? It's made me stronger, but it's also made me humble. And when I think of success, to me, true success is, yes, it's wonderful, all these accolades, but are your feet still on the ground?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Listen, before the show even started, you were hanging out with my wife in the lobby here at the Model Health Show Studios and talking about adult friendships. And you know, this emerging conversation now, a lot of conversations happening online about that whole scenario. Right. And you know, it's so interesting because so many of the things that we do as adults, we're just big kids.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. We still want the same things. You know, people want to be loved and accepted and seen and feel included.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you know, and also feel like we are able to be of service and contribute and all the things, you know, it's just a different version of it and it's a new complexity in our world today, especially today, where communities are so fractured. Like you don't have that same like you kind of grow up around the same people.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, even with your own family. Like families are so fractured as well. Let alone again, so you're trying to put pieces together.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Your own unique puzzle piece with a lot of randomness and trying to, and again, and I want to talk to you about this. Since we have you here. Let's talk about adult friendships. Like how do we navigate. That whole terrain. What are some of the big issues that people are experiencing?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. All the things that you just said. You know, we don't live in the same communities often that we grew up in job prospects. Opportunities have taken us far away from what home used to be. We are working longer hours. So we don't have as much time.

We're fully invested, you know, as helicopter parents, you know, for better or for worse, like scared for our children, worried about their mental health and their happiness, wanting to see them succeed, taking them to a million games and practices all over the country.

So we've invested so much in the next generation, and I think partly out of fear in a way, we wanna protect them, we want the best for them, but we've doubled down and tripled down in terms of our time that goes to them. And as a result, I think our personal lives have taken a hit. Also, competition. Young people are having to have it figured out at a very young age, and so we're trying to give them any advantage they can and how hard it is to get into a good college and all of that. So we're starting younger and younger in terms of how much time and energy that's in getting invested in our children. So there's a million reasons. And also estrangement within families, like you said, like we're not talking, we're not living near, or we've learned for better, for worse through therapy, that we had a toxic relationship with our mom or dad or sibling and we cut people out.

And that wasn't something that happened generations ago, right? Like and, and I'm not saying that we shouldn't cut people out. There are things that have happened that if a person is not willing to take responsibility and there's trauma and there's abuse and there's damage, by all means, I get it. But I'm just saying that this has brought us to where we are, where we're not talking to people that we grew up with or family members and there's a loneliness crisis. And you know, loneliness is not just about how many people you have in the room around you. You can be always surrounded by people, but if you're not feeling the quality of the connection, loneliness is about the mismatch between the social life you crave and the social life you have where you feel like people don't have your back.

Whether you feel like you wouldn't turn to somebody in a moment of need, whether it just be like, I need a ride to the airport, or you know, 'cause now we've got Uber and we've got all sorts of apps. We don't rely on family the same way we used to for childcare, for fixing a broken sink. We have services, right? And so we're outsourcing everything. We're not looking on the community. So these are all the problems and this is why, where, where we are. But I think when it comes to friendships, the number one thing is we need to be intentional about

it and as deliberate about it as we are with an annual screening that we might make for our health, and it comes back to intention and purpose.

So people is actually one of the eight pillars of practical optimism. I start with purpose and it starts with having an intention and you can apply that intention to any goal that you have. And people is one of the goals because people and friendships, because the quality of your life is always gonna come down to the quality of your relationships. And you wanna know somebody's health at 80, look at their friendships in their forties and fifties. And this to me is a period midlife of revival in a lot of ways and inventory of who do I wanna keep in my life? And it's okay just the way I talk about purpose. And we shed our old purpose. It's okay to shed those old friendships, but you have to replace it with some form of a community and you know.

Like-minded people. We're not the same. We're not the same people we are. Midlife life has shaped us. It's changed us. But I do think it's important to be intentional. There's something called the eight minute conversation. I love it. It was in the New York Times and it's about picking up the phone and saying, okay, do you got eight minutes? You know? Or texting a friend 'cause people can usually commit to eight minutes. I think a lot of people don't pick up their phone. They're like. Oh my God, if you're calling me, you know, is your house burning down? Why? Because people don't do voice calls anymore. Voice notes. We've exchanged a few voice notes and scheduling and stuff like that, and it's always nice to hear someone's voice, even if it's asynchronous, even if you're not gonna talk.

But it's just nice to hear how is your day, what have you been up to? What's going on with your family? You know, there's things I know about you and Anne, 'cause you're like, we're doing this. Me and Anne, we're doing this with my kids. And I just love that. And it, it's, it's a personal touch. So do what you can to invest in the community, in the identity that you're feeling now, in the body that you're feeling now. Maybe you're into yoga right now, maybe you're into cooking, whatever it is. But go to the classes. Go to that art and wine night that you've been putting off. And there's something called multiplex ties, which is like if you got a connection with someone, let's say there's a parent that you always see at drop off.

You know that I'm through the school. Maybe you know that I'm through the PTO. Do you wanna take that friendship to a different level to say, Hey, after drop off, I always go to this 9:00 AM bootcamp class. Do you wanna join me? Or maybe there's somebody in your fitness class that you're like, Hey, I'm gonna go to get a green juice after this. I'm gonna get a matcha. Do you want to come with me? So look for opportunities to take something outside of that one context and find multiple other contexts with the same person. Oh, I had no idea that you also enjoy this type of music or concerts. I think it, it takes intention. It takes a lot of courage. I have patients who say to me, well, that's nice, Dr. Armour. That sounds so good in theory, but like people will think I'm a weirdo for coming up to them after class. So you've gotta shed that self-consciousness, definitely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There isn't a cookie cutter way to go about this. We are in a different world, different terrain. And I love that you brought up the voice texting, voice vexing.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah. Oh yeah. I like that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: My, my wife and her friends are, they could do a master class on this. Oh, I love that. And this has been so helpful. And she would share therapeutic for her because, you know, her best friend is in three hours, different time zone, right? Totally different schedule, you know, new baby, all those things. But they each make time and also her other close friends, to leave each other those messages and to listen to messages. Right. And listen to those messages for them. Like I just heard, I wasn't trying to be nosy, but her friend was saying that she was looking forward to listening to her message, her recap of the Beyonce concert when she left work, when, you know, she was looking forward to my wife leaving her that recap.

And she was leaving her a message a little bit, you know, like, it wasn't there when I was looking. 'cause she's used to like listening to these messages at certain times when she has time. Right. And you know, they occasionally make time to like have a, a, a date over. You know, Skype or something like that or travel to see one another. But just keeping that relationship.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And the strength of that relationship through vexing and hearing each other's voice and getting these, you know, they're able to vent.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They're able to share tips and insights Yes. And all this stuff. Voice to voice at their own discretion.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, I think it's like, again, it's the right use of technology.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: To help, to supplement a relationship because we need real world relationships.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: More than ever.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And these tools, new technology can be great supplements for that.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally. And you know, the voice stuff is so important. Shawn, I talk about this in the book that like, they did a study, and this was like years ago, when I guess FaceTime, you know, was just starting out, but they were looking at 11-year-old girls and they were comparing when an 11-year-old girl is stressed out and her cortisol level has spiked. What would be most helpful when she's receiving a message from her mom, like text message versus a voice call. And they actually did test where they measured the cortisol level and

epinephrine, whatever in the urine afterwards. And they found that the text messages didn't cut it, but the voice call really reduced the amount of stress and the cortisol in the body that she had with her mom.

So if you can't call somebody, the best thing you can do is that voice text, because hearing that voice really just brings back, invokes the whole memory of the person 'cause you can kind of see them, you know, in that moment when you hear their voice. Their body habit is the intonations, the fluctuations of the voice, the warmth, the kindness, the generosity of spirit. Things that you're never gonna get from just the written word.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. And humans, we've been, you know, we're very audio centric. You know, like we listen and we learn so much through voice.

DR. SUE VARMA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Passing down traditions.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like there wasn't

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, people like writing out books and things like that.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's, it's listening. It's listening to stories and hearing the voices and creating these images in our minds. Right. And filling in those gaps. And it's just like, it's this kind of coherent.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Learning process and connection.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes. You know, something that Anne said that just really resonated with me, 'cause I can a hundred percent relate to it when we were talking about adult friendships is, you know, she's like, I wanna go deep. And I'm like, that's exactly how I feel. Like, you know, I think so much of the conversations and I get in the beginning and you don't know somebody so well, it's super superficial layer, but go deep, you know, and I talk about this idea of having a balance between these more social snacking, micro connections I call them like, you know, you have the superficial chitchat on the water cooler. But then go deep very quickly, you know, like, what's going on in your life? Like, what's big, what's, what's, what's happening? What are you feeling excited about? What, what are you finding challenging? So don't be afraid to really show somebody who you are.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm. I love that. And there's so many different perspectives about this like, some people, like, I don't like small talk or, you know, people, like, I don't, I don't wanna go deep.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But all of these things have their place.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: "Small talk", these are little unifying points. Right? These are like connective tissue.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. So it might be talking about the game, it might be the..

DR. SUE VARMA: Beyonce concert.

SHAWN STEVENSON: The weather, the Beyonce concert.

DR. SUE VARMA: I wanna know more about.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. But it just, it automatically like, oh, you, I'm into that too. I'm experiencing that as well.

DR. SUE VARMA: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it, and it creates this, it creates this rapport.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? And then that rapport then can lead to.

DR. SUE VARMA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. And so there's, there's a. There's value in, in all of these things and not negating the value is, is super important. And you know, again, the value of something like practical optimism can cannot be overstated right now more than ever. And so I wanna make sure everybody picks up a copy right now. Practical optimism. Everywhere books are sold, it's available. And is there anywhere else for people to get more information to follow you online?

DR. SUE VARMA: Yeah, no, that'd be great. They can keep in touch either through my website, which is, [dr varma.com](http://drvarma.com), the full, full word doctor. And then also on Instagram, Dr. Sue Varma.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. Awesome. Yeah. Final question. What is the model that you're here to create personally with the way that you live your life?

DR. SUE VARMA: Two words, positivity and pragmatism. I want people to know that happiness is about creating habits and, you know, there's, there are four habits that I love every day. The four M'S of mental health. Movement, mindfulness, mastery, and meaningful engagement. And if you can commit just 10 minutes every day to these healthy habits, 'cause

it all comes down to habits we've talked about, right? 80% of our health is about habits. So invest in these habits, and these are my four favorite ones. But that's why, to me, optimism is a philosophy and it's a practice. Some days it's a five minute practice. Some days it's longer, but it is very, very practical and tangible. So it's not up there in the clouds, you know, just look on the bright side. It's teaching people step by step how to cultivate positivity and pragmatism.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love it. Thank you so much for sharing that and sharing your wisdom and just coming to hang out with us.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you so much fun. So great talking to you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: The one and only, Dr. Sue Varma, everybody.

DR. SUE VARMA: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for tuning into this episode today. I hope that you got a lot of value out of this. If you did, you know what to do. Share it out with somebody that you care about. You can send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on, or share it out on social media. I'm at Shawn Model on Instagram. You could tag Dr. Varma as well. I'm sure she would absolutely love to hear from you today.

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