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# An Interview on Education with Steven Roy and the Importance of Motivation, Expectations, and Care

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1 VG: Alright well we can get goin. Well so the first one is, what led and or inspired you to  
2 become a teacher to begin with?

3 SR: Um the answer I can't keep simple relatively but I started teaching uh at university um in 75  
4 at the university of um at Oregon state university first and I um I was basically asked to lecture  
5 there because um I was in sports medicine and it was an area at that time that was not well  
6 known there were very few people doing it in fact I think I was the only one in that area doing it  
7 and uh there were a lot of students who were interested in physical education and wanted to  
8 know more about becoming a trainer and such things so that's where I started teaching and uh  
9 that continued for the next um what uh 15/16 years and then I went to India and I taught at the  
10 medical school there I taught there for two years. Then went on a different course, but um my  
11 different course was also teaching in a way because I became a consultant so I was doing a lot  
12 of workshops and a lot um sort of of business education you could say.

13 VG: ok

14 SR: And Waldorf came up just out of the blue where suddenly I felt that that was something  
15 that I became interested in. Some experiences that friends of mine had had with their children.  
16 And then I I was in Hawaii then and I spoke with some of the teachers there, visited the Waldorf  
17 school and said this is really resonating I think I'm going to do this to do this.

18 VG: yeah, yeah haha

19 SR: So that's what I did.

20 VG: Yeah yeah that was that actually led in, you know, perfectly into you know tell me a little bit  
21 more about yourself and your personal experience as a whole and that kinda tied into what led  
22 you to the Waldorf school which you kind of already answered but yeah I guess more of your  
23 personal experience like as a whole just you know whether it started as your schooling when  
24 you were young and then possibly more into the experiences you just talked about.

25 SR: Well, yeah I I guess um at 12 I decided I wanted to be a professional tennis player and uh so  
26 actually what I did I did very little schooling,

27 VG: haha

28 SR: I played tennis all the time-about 6 hours a day. And um did that until I needed to get into  
29 medical school. Even at medical school I was playing for awhile but uh couldn't manage both  
30 just because the days were too long.

31 VG: yeah

32 SR: um but yeah so my interest was very much in sports and mainly tennis but also in track and  
33 um I played semi-professional for awhile but nothing major.

34 VG: uh huh

35 SR: um so then I went to medical school I became a doctor I was a doctor for 25 years um was  
36 teaching you know as part of being a doctor and then I became a management consultant in  
37 India and um and as part of that was asked to um take over hospitals that were bankrupt or  
38 about to close and try to resurrect them and this was one of the most fascinating things I did I  
39 mean it was, I've done it with three hospitals and um really good results um the first hospital  
40 was just about to close it was a hospital that was about um nearly a hundred years old and was  
41 considered one of the best in Delhi and then went downhill financially because of private  
42 practices coming in.

43 VG: OK

44 SR: and when I went there it was in really bad shape and it was pretty awful and um but the  
45 experience ive had in management consulting really fit perfectly into what I needed to do then  
46 because I basically had to get people inspired and interested and see something that made a  
47 difference in what they were doing. A lot of the workers sort of saw nothing in their future and  
48 those workers tended to be um tended to be people who had no choice in life, they lived on the  
49 property. If the hospital closed down they had no idea where they would live because they had  
50 no money at all, their income was just pennies and um and they actually opened my eyes to it  
51 in a very strange way cause one day I I just thought I'm gonna ask them this question. I had all  
52 the employees then, none of them looked at me caus they thought I was gonna fire them all,  
53 and um and I said um "what do you see when you get out of bed in the morning?" which is a  
54 strange question perhaps and most of them looked at me like "what on earth are you talking  
55 about?" But the one guy, a young guy, stood up and said, "I see a big black hole" and  
56 immediately when he said that, I knew exactly what needed to happen and they just needed  
57 some purpose in their life, some meaning.

58 VG: yeah

59 SR: and um so that's what we worked on and they had so few patients in the hospital at that  
60 time that we took three hours every afternoon and just did workshops.

61 VG: wow

62 SR: so for six months we just did that.

63 VG: Workshops on sort of like self-motivation?

64 SR: That, to some extent, but you know the first question I asked them, who's the most  
65 important person in the hospital? And they all said, "oh the CEO", and I said "no no that's not  
66 the right answer".

67 VG: hahaha

68 SR: um "well then the board? (unintelligible)" "no no no". And then eventually I had to tell  
69 them that it was the patient and they looked at me like, "the patient? Why is the patient  
70 important?" you know. So that sort of attitude changed and it sort of became a mantra in the  
71 hospital that, you know, the patient's the most important person.

72 VG: yeah

73 SR: And we worked on that and we worked on systems and we worked on ways to make the  
74 hospital viable yet fulfill the mission of being a charity hospital.

75 VG: ok

76 SR: and um so we saw both private patients and um charity patients and it had to be good  
77 enough that the private patients were willing to come.

78 VG: yeah

79 SR: And then we started getting people being interested in donating and now it's the only  
80 hospital, only eye hospital in North India that is internationally accredited.

81 VG: wow

82 SR: And part of that is because there were 3 or 4 or 5 doctors that I hired who were just perfect  
83 for the, for the job, and they're still there now, and we still connect. Um so that was one place,  
84 and then I went to, then I came to Waldorf, and um then I went back when I left Waldorf in  
85 2010, I went back to a very different type of hospital in India. They wanted me to come back,  
86 and for various reasons I needed to go back. And so I went to probably one of the finest eye  
87 hospitals in the world and it was totally different to what I'd had before which was, you know,

88 very low standard, um and after about a year, I realized, “you know I can’t really make a big  
89 difference here because they’re doing everything the way they should do it”. And at the same  
90 time I was being asked by one of the um not partner hospitals but a hospital that used to come  
91 and learn from them, they said, “Why don’t you come to Bangladesh?”, and run this hospital  
92 which is a very big eye hospital, and also an old one. It went back to the 60’s I think. And this  
93 was again quite different because this was a dynamic hospital that just was dysfunctional. Um,  
94 they were seeing thousands and thousands of patients and really not treating them well. And  
95 the doctors fought all the time, and there was a lot of dissatisfaction. And, um, but I saw the  
96 potential and I would’ve stayed there longer than I did but the climate, well not so much the  
97 climate, but the air pollution in Dhaka was actually literally killing me. And sometimes I couldn’t  
98 even walk across the room. Um and as soon as I went away for a few weeks I was fine and then  
99 I would come back and (unintelligible).

100 VG: hahaha yeah

101 SR: So I realized I had to leave before it became permanent. I thought I had cancer, you know, I  
102 went to clinics in New York and Singapore and London and um but it was the air pollution. It  
103 was air pollution and the food, they put preservatives in the food there. You know what  
104 formalin is?

105 VG: No

106 SR: It’s used to preserve bodies. Well they use it on the food.

107 VG: wow

108 SR: so any food even health food stores, sold foods that were covered with formalin. And my  
109 body didn’t like it very much.

110 VG: yeah haha

111 SR: And so it was literally killing me. So after about three years I left there. But it was a very,  
112 again it was a situation where I was doing lots of workshops. I would do a workshop at least  
113 four times a week for two hours. And trying to again, get them interested in things, changing  
114 the way they approached the patient, and the result was just everything went up. I had to put a  
115 cap on the number of patients because there were too many coming in, we were doing about  
116 120 surgeries a day. It was working really well.

117 VG: Yeah

118 SR: And I think it’s still working well to some extent, but I was, you know, after the board saw  
119 that I was actually moving in the right direction, they gave me a lot of leeway and said basically  
120 “you take it and run it”. So I did that and then when I changed they had a CEO that came in and  
121 really wasn’t the right guy and he messed things up quite a bit. I went back there a few times  
122 they asked me to come back and visit. So it slowed down. Um and then I went to an  
123 organization, an eye organization, in New York, which is a pretty unique organization. It has a  
124 plane, a DC10 what is now an MD10 that flies around teaching surgery, eye surgery. And it’s a  
125 pretty large organization. Two hundred million dollar budget and so I was in charge of global  
126 programs. So I spent 80% of my time flying around the world. Which is really fascinating, and I  
127 loved it but I also felt it wasn’t right for my family, and so I decided to, to come back to Waldorf.  
128 So I guess, I guess um that’s my story.

129 VG: Yeah. Were there any specific places that you’d fly to again? Like bankrupt hospitals that  
130 needed more help?

131 SR: No the way it worked was, you had two things, you had the plane flying, um, for say two  
132 weeks in a place or three weeks in a place, which is very expensive. I mean, we're talking a  
133 million dollars a flight. Or more. And then you train maybe 30, 40, 50 doctors, depending on  
134 where it is how many doctors there are. And you train them for the two or three weeks. But  
135 then there was also an in-country program. Most of the countries had offices which had a local  
136 CEO and a staff that would go out and work with hospitals individually. And basically improve  
137 the quality of care. And so my job was to work with each of the countries, mainly the head  
138 office, and also I visited around. The biggest one's in China, and so I spent quite a bit of time in  
139 China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, um, and then in Africa there are quite a few places, Ethiopia,  
140 Camaroon, Ghana, Zambia, South Africa, and then South America just a small one in Peru. And I  
141 probably missed some on the way. But yeah Asia was really the focus.

142 VG: Next question is, I guess,

143 SR: Is this helpful for you?

144 VG: Yes. Oh yeah. Everything that you're saying is perfect. Uh, so yeah what is your personal  
145 philosophy on education? And I guess we could tie that into, what was kindof your philosophy  
146 also approaching I guess, your employees that you consulted on how to keep themselves  
147 motivated, and just their mindset to be more efficient in their work?

148 SR: So, my focus has always been on non-profit organizations. I never worked for a full-profit  
149 and I hopefully never will. Um and so there's reason not just about shareholder value or  
150 something like that. There's a human reason for this organization. And so the idea is to give  
151 maximum quality care, no matter what we're doing. And by chance I found myself in eye care,  
152 which I think was perfect. But the same applied when I was actually running my own practice,  
153 that it was about quality of care over money. So I never became rich you know. Hahaha.

154 VG: HAHAHA. And do you think that that type of philosophy, did you carry that type of  
155 philosophy teaching as well?

156 SR: Oh absolutely yeah.

157 VG: Um, what do you think led to that specific philosophy?

158 SR: Good question, I don't know. I'm sort of a humanitarian type person. You know, it goes back  
159 to the question that the patient's the most important person. I don't think there's any one  
160 thing. It's just you know, the way I think about life, my personal philosophy. And it's sometimes  
161 not conscious, its unconscious. And then, just life has led me in a way that's taken me to those  
162 places. So...yeah. Ok, why don't you move on.

163 VG: What is specific and different with your Waldorf experiences as a teacher with your other  
164 experience whether it be in education or as a consultant or anything else?

165 SR: Ok well actually I was going to, what I was thinking about talking about but you've just  
166 pulled my back there. So yes. So what I want to talk about it is, you know, what happened in  
167 establishing the school in Cambodia. Do you know that story?

168 VG: Yeah yeah yeah

169 SR: So I thought you would. So that to me was about sewing seeds in seventh graders that just  
170 were starting to think about how do we make a difference to the world, and getting them  
171 engaged in it, and, um, and awakening their consciousness to what other cultures might be like  
172 and what the social situations may be that are very different to ours. Um, so in terms of  
173 Waldorf, it's about, I guess again it's the same sort of thing in a way, it's about allowing the full  
174 potential of the individual to come out. To me that's such a, a motivation. I mean right now at

175 school I've got one student in the class that, well actually more than one, but one in particular  
176 that is, doesn't know whether they want to be in school, doesn't know what they want in life,  
177 and so I'm trying to find a way to-how do you find a right button to push to help that student  
178 become enthusiastic about what they're doing. So that's the sort of thing that, I guess, makes  
179 me tick.

180 VG: Yeah, haha, yeah. Do you have a certain, I guess, methodology approaching it, or is it just  
181 everyone's different?

182 SR: Well everyone's certainly different. There's a different story-. But you know, I think one of  
183 the things I learned in Waldorf training, well I'll give you two or three things. And the first thing  
184 that I picked up, I was in this workshop where they were talking about the foundations of  
185 Waldorf education. And at that time I knew a little bit about Waldorf but not much. And there  
186 were about 30 of us in the classroom and there were a lot of public teachers in the classroom as  
187 well, public school teachers. And so the lecturer said, "what is it that Waldorf teaching wants to  
188 accomplish?". And so the public school teachers said, "oh you know, to get a good job". And he  
189 said, "no I don't know about that". And after awhile he came up with the answer that he saw,  
190 and his answer was, to allow the child to breathe. And that resonated with me so much  
191 because I think as a student at school I always felt like this, and not like that. And I immediately  
192 thought, "yeah, that's it". And so that's my job, to allow that expansion to take place. So that  
193 was one of the really powerful moments, when I sort of realized I really wanted to do this. Um,  
194 and I guess Waldorf is about the child as a total entity in the universe, you know, their soul,  
195 their spirit, and their physical body, and their relationships, all that. And to me that's a lot  
196 different than somebody thinking, "how do we get them to pass an exam", and things like that.

197 VG: Yeah

198 SR: So that, that's why I do Waldorf teaching and I don't go to a public school or something.

199 VG: Yeah, and do you think when you felt constrained, or when other kids feel constrained, its  
200 usually because they have the pressures of "oh I have to get a perfect score on this test or I  
201 have to get this job or please something outside of me" or...

202 SR: I think with me, and it's different with every person but, and I never thought of it that way  
203 until this person mentioned it to me and suddenly there was this flashback, but yeah that's  
204 what I felt and I think it was more just being scared of teachers. I used to hide all the time, I  
205 used to sit in the back and hide under my desk, even in my final years.

206 VG: And you think, finding a way to relieve that pressure as you said, is just trying to find  
207 something that motivated the particular student, whatever they want to do, or to find what  
208 they love, to find their passion...

209 SR: Yeah, yeah, that's it. You know, this year when I took over seventh grade, parents said to  
210 me, "ok, what is your goal for this class within two years?". So I said yeah there's the obvious  
211 goal getting them ready for high school, but there's also the goal of helping them develop a  
212 love for learning. And so I look at it that way. And also with that love for learning, and I'm sure  
213 you experienced this with me, but, I like to see if we can raise the bar. And this year I've been  
214 with them you know five weeks or so, and there are one or two students that suddenly are  
215 doing stuff they've never done before, and they never knew they could do it of course. But I  
216 think that's so rewarding for them, and for me, but for them in particular to see what their  
217 potential is.

218 VG: Yeah, yeah that's definitely something that me and all my classmates definitely  
219 experienced. The bar was definitely raised but, it's definitely very satisfying knowing that, even  
220 if we don't get to that bar, we got a lot higher than we thought we would be. Um, so I mean,  
221 you tied into exactly the next question is motivating your students and helping them become  
222 lifelong learners. And, would you say letting the students know that they know that they can  
223 reach those expectations and give them confidence, you think that's probably the biggest thing.  
224 SR: Absolutely, yeah. There's no question about that. You know a lot of students along the way  
225 get labeled as not so smart and so on, and they tend to keep holding that label up to  
226 themselves. And again, I've got one person that, since he was in first grade, he was told he was  
227 stupid, and he just, he believes he's stupid. And in fact, he told his parents, "I really don't like  
228 Mr. Roy because he thinks I'm smart".  
229 VG: HAHAAH well I've never heard that one before.  
230 SR: Yeah well I hadn't either. But then, but then, he starts doing this really good work. And so  
231 when he sees he can do the good work...Looking six weeks ahead, I don't know what is going to  
232 happen with him because he's a very conflicted young man, but it's quite possible that in six  
233 weeks he will think, "gee, I really can do this".  
234 VG: I saw that a lot definitely. Um, so what is, and has been, probably the most difficult aspect  
235 of teaching? You keep bringing up, you know, the more conflicted students that you have, its  
236 more difficult. What do you think is the most difficult...  
237 SR: well, there's no question that the most difficult is, students who have issues, and it comes  
238 out in the class. And in your class there were two people in particular who had issues and it  
239 was, it was, less than perfect with them. Um, but, and to know how to deal with those issues.  
240 Yeah. The thing is to find, what is the thing in the person that will...and the one person that was  
241 really difficult in my first class, I think it was before you, no I don't remember now, maybe you  
242 were in tenth grade...were you there when they gave me this Michael Award?  
243 VG: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah, I was there.  
244 SR: So anyway, Eli stood up, and he said, "if it wasn't for Mr. Roy I wouldn't be here". Well we  
245 fought, head to head for two years, three years! He was a master disrupter of the class. I mean,  
246 every class would start off, "oh this is going a bit better today", and then he would say "Well I  
247 don't get that" and he would take the class off somewhere over there, and I had to bring them  
248 back, and, but those are challenges.  
249 VG: So it was a challenge just the student itself or just keeping the whole classroom...  
250 SR: Well, its both. But I felt with your class, you were the most talented group that I could  
251 imagine. And you may remember you did the orchestra thing at the end, and...  
252 VG: Oh yeah I remember that.  
253 SR: Yeah that's never been done before, or since. And I came up with that idea because I  
254 realized, "this class can really do things" and "let's do something that allows them to do more  
255 than the usual stuff".  
256 VG: Yeah.  
257 SR: In fact, I would put that concert down as one of the highlights of my life.  
258 VG: Really  
259 SR: Yeah. And I remember you were playing drums with Ezekiel.  
260 VG: Yeah, I was playing the timpani with Ezekiel. That was fun.

261 SR: And, or percussion is a better word. And it was just such a highlight for me to see. And I  
262 remember one or two of the students as we were coming to that last, BOOM, they looked at  
263 me like, "ok, tell us when".

264 VG: Yeah that's definitely, I mean, I guess I'll get more personal, but I remember you, especially  
265 just going to Waldorf was already just making me open to so many experiences that I never  
266 had, but I think, yeah you definitely raising the bar, for me, I guess led me to where I am today  
267 for sure. Whether it be, taking my studies seriously, thinking a little bit broader, more than just  
268 my immediate life, and I think you see that with a lot of people in our class, with what they're  
269 doing, what they want to do is, I think, you...

270 SR: Well, as I said, they were super talented, and all you had to do was really just open the door  
271 a little bit, and



272 the talent poured out  
273 VG: Yeah, but, I mean, would we have had the door opened without you. As open as I think you  
274 opened it up for us or raised the bar for us, that's definitely something that helped us.  
275 SR: Well it's nice of you to say that, thank you.  
276 VG: And, everyone still says it, everyone can attest to it, I promise you that for sure. So kindof  
277 gets to that, what personal goals get you motivated to teach? I guess, what kindof gets you up  
278 in the morning? What gets you ticking?  
279 SR: You know, my responsibility to look after that group. They, that's my duty. Indians love  
280 saying that. What is your duty. And it's my duty to do that. Of course it's more than, the word  
281 duty in English is not a very good word. It sort of suggests a reluctance, "oh I better do my  
282 duty". It's not like that, it's more my inspiration to know that I can make a difference to their  
283 lives. And I need to, I need to be on top of things. So even now I've done seventh grade three  
284 times, I work til 10 or 11 every night because it always needs something a little better or a little  
285 different.  
286 VG: Well that kindof wraps things up. Is there anything you'd like to add? Is there anything  
287 more you'd like to talk about?  
288 SR: Well no, I think I've done a lot of talking. I think that if this is helpful for you that's great.  
289 VG: Yeah of course. Thank you, thank you very much  
290 SR: What is it? Sort of a thesis that you're doing?  
291 VG: Yeah, we're just interviewing an educator that's been in America, that's been in the United  
292 States. Obviously Waldorf is different, I tell people back in school about the Waldorf education  
293 and its....  
294 SR: but you can bring in the university side, ...  
295 VG: Yeah  
296 SR: and I've done a lot of, in terms of teaching, when I was in medical practice, I was invited to  
297 teach all over the world. So I traveled to Korea, China, where else did I go, India, Bangladesh,  
298 South Africa, England. I was invited to New Zealand, but I couldn't make it. So, a lot of my time  
299 in medical practice was teaching to different audiences, very different audiences.  
300 VG: what type of audiences?  
301 SR: well some of them were sort of super-specialist doctors, you know who were all very  
302 arrogant and know-it-all, and, "who's this young guy coming along to tell us things?", and...so  
303 that was challenging.  
304 VG: well we can wrap the official part up, thank you very much for coming.  
305 SR: Yeah of course, it was very nice seeing you  
306 VG: of course, as always, so appreciate it.