

HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh



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Guest: Bruce Van Horn

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(Intro Music)

Debra: Hello this is Debra Ruh and welcome to human potential at work. Today I have a guest that I have become friends with and recently, over the last year, I have known his work for many years. I also love that he happens to be a neighbor; He lives in the same town that I live in, so I'd like to welcome Bruce Van Horn to the program today, thanks for joining us Bruce.

Bruce: It is absolutely my pleasure Debra it's always a joy to be with you whether it's on Skype or meeting in person.

Debra: I agree and Bruce I've followed your work and I am one of your many fans. I have your book, I follow you on social media and I am always very impressed, not only with your story, but what you're doing to really change the world in a more positive way. So I have always been really drawn to your work so thank you for joining us today.

Bruce: I appreciate that, my pleasure.

Debra: So Bruce do you mind telling our listeners a little bit about who you are? Tell us about Bruce and tell us what you do, just tell us a little bit or tell us as much as you want about your work.

Bruce: Sure, ok and we probably have like five hours to have this conversation.

Debra: That's right.

Bruce: So the today version of Bruce, Bruce is a constantly changing, constantly evolving being as we all are. But in my current state I am a writer, I am a life and business coach and consultant. I do a podcast called The Life is a Marathon show. Which is, as you experienced through your podcast, has been just a beautiful and wonderful way to connect with people all over the world and one of my favorite things to do. I discovered some things about myself and my journey of life is that; I not only have a gift and an ability to help people maybe just gain a different perspective on their life and their situation, but in the doing of that I feel more alive than when I do just about anything else and so that is one of the ways I help people tap into what is there purpose, their calling is by paying attention to how they feel when they think a certain thing or

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do a certain thing. Because we can get, I spent most of my adult life doing the things that I was competent at, but those things turned out to be very energy draining. I spent the bulk of my adult life as a software developer and I was very, very good at it and started a company thirteen years ago. It still exists, I am still a silent partner in it, but when I think about it and when I do software development it is just like ugh. I get no joy out of life in doing it, so I have transitioned this. Mostly what I do is I help people get un-stuck or help people break through to the next level of their lives and when I say people; I include businesses in that because it's often a shock when people hear me say that businesses, companies, corporations don't really exist. They're just imaginary; They only exist on paper. Ultimately businesses are just people and so if the business is struggling it is because the people in the business are struggling and more than likely they're not all telling the same story. So there is this breakup in synergy that is holding the business back and ultimately there are issues with the people who are running the business because they are not living as their fullest expression. So that's in a nutshell what I do and what I am about so we can go anywhere you want with that.

Debra: Well you know Bruce, I have actually interviewed several coaches on my program and the word, you know, coach is becoming such a diluted word these days.

Bruce: Oh, it is, yes.

Debra: It is interesting sometimes when and I know you're so much more than a coach, As I said I am a very big fan of your work. Your work reminds me a little of Dr. Wayne Dyer's work who was.

Bruce: Well that is an honor. He was so instrumental in the way that I think.

Debra: Yes, beautiful work and one of the many things I loves about his work is he was an individual. He was a human being that was very flawed and very amazing and powerful at the same time and I think his life journeys, walking these hardships, made him the really amazing teacher that he was; But he always stayed very human and I loved that.

Bruce: I am so glad that you just used that word teacher because a lot of people have gone into the field of coaching and used the word coach because they're somehow or another afraid of that word teacher. A lot of people call themselves motivational speakers instead of teachers. Really at the core of what I do I am a teacher. I am a gifted teacher and one of the things I love and you may know about me I love words and word origins and real word meanings. The word education is a really interesting word when tied with the fact that I am a teacher and my goal is to educate you. The problem is that we think in terms of well I am going to receive an education. Meaning that we think that the teacher has something that the student does not already have and it is the job of the teacher to give that information or that knowledge or that wisdom to the student. However, if you break the word education down it comes from a Latin word which means educari or the Latin word educari. Which is actually where we get our English word educe which means what, do you know? Not to put you on the spot. So the root of education is educe which literally means to draw out of.

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Debra: Ok.

Bruce: So for me I help people learn things about themselves, things about the world and ultimately a teacher draws out of them or makes you aware of that which was already in you. So when I teach you a way to do something, your body already knew how to do it, you just did not have this conscious awareness of it. So that is one of the things I love and Wayne was beautiful at that, to dove-tail back into where you were going with Dr. Dyer, but he had this beautiful, soft, winsome way of drawing peace and love and insight out of people to make them aware of that which was always in them to begin with.

Debra: So do you think Bruce, it's a remembering?

Bruce: Well, in a sense it is. I believe that we could ultimately have this really deep spiritual, theological conversation about it. I believe that we are made in the image of god and god permeates and penetrates every atom in our body. So I believe ultimately, that we have everything that we need, we have everything that we were created to become already within us and so it literally is just. There is that aspect of remembering and I've gone through periods of that, but a lot of the epiphanies that we go through in our lives, this clarity that we gain as we realize, oh you know what, that gift that I have has always been with me and now I'm just more aware of it. So it's more of a revealing of that which is already there.

Debra: Ok.

Bruce: The problem is we listen to so many voices. There is so much noise in the world that we hear so many different stories from other people and we adopt other people's stories about who we are and what we can achieve and what we can become in our lives that we lose sight of our own story.

Debra: Right, well said, well said. As we go through this election process in the United States, I remember, of course because it was not that long ago, I remember when Obama got into office the first time and thousands of people came out to see his inauguration and I, as a Caucasian person, I knew that this was big. I knew that it was a very important thing for our country to elect the first African American to our country. I knew it was big and beautiful and I felt it was really adding to our evolution.

Bruce: Sure.

Debra: What I was surprised by though was the joy. The joy on the faces of the African American people on the lawn and just the pure joy and I realized that even though I knew it was a powerful moment, it almost was it was a deeper powerful moment. It bigger than I realized and now as I watch the current election cycle and Hillary Clinton and you know, Donald Trump. Donald Trump of course is famous for making fun of a journalist with disabilities and other people with disabilities as well as other people, as well and it of course, was very discouraging for me to watch. No matter what my political affiliation, I don't think we should make fun of each other and I understand there's harsh realities affiliated with our elections. I was just

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discouraged and saddened to see that and one thing yesterday, Hillary Clinton had a town hall meeting focused on disabilities and there were people with disabilities from all over the country there. Many of the people there had physical disabilities, so visible disabilities and I'm sure a lot had invisible disabilities. But I sort of witnessed the same thing. I am a global disability inclusion strategist, I've worked with this since 2001, but the joy on their faces. I got a letter from an attorney, I think he is in Maryland, who has a physical disability and he said: as I listened to it I cried, I cried, I felt so validated and I've been saying this stuff for years but I finally felt like somebody was listening. I sort of experienced the same thing I experienced when Obama got in office; Yesterday when I watched these individuals, young, old, every age, every disability, people with and without disabilities just find their joy because someone was listening to them. It just felt, it was very strong to me and as I have these conversations about how do we not always have to have outside validation to prove that we are valuable people and I know a lot of the work you do is tied around that, how do we. But at the same time accept that when we do get outside validation like happened yesterday or it might have been the day before, but it can be so powerful when society helps validate the possibilities of we bring to the table.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Debra: So I feel that we are evolving, but I know we all have a lot of work to do.

Bruce: We all do.

Debra: Bruce do you mind telling us about your personal story? It is a pretty dramatic story and I will warn my listeners that there are parts that make me, you know sad, but you know life is about contrasts. So tell us more about your story Bruce.

Bruce: Well my story is, so many people are able to relate to it because it's not a unique story. When I was young probably by the time I was about 14 or 15 years old I had a pretty clear vision of what I wanted to do and who I wanted be and all I ever wanted to be was a writer. I loved reading novels, I loved writing, I just felt very connected with the world when I was writing and creating. It is what I studied in college and I did very well at it. I won several national writing awards and really thought that that was going to be where I was going to go in my life. I made a decision upon graduation to do what most people do. If you went to college and studied English creative writing and that's all you ever wanted to be; Of course it makes sense to go into the world of high tech, I went to work for IBM selling main frame computer systems to large corporations, right? That's what I did, but I had this notion in the back of mind that I would be making more money than I'll make as writer and that will be able to fund my creativity. I won't be the starving artist. Well, the short version of it is that I get trapped in the American dream and the great American dream is make as much money as you possibly can as fast as you possibly can by whatever means necessary because when you have money that equates to happiness. So I was trying to make money, I was ultimately seeking validation, is really what it was all about. When I had, when I was making money people were pleased with me, but ultimately it was a mask for a very low self-esteem and a very poor self-image and I got married; Marriage was not what I'd hoped it would be and certainly there were issues within the marriage that she had that were completely independent of me, but I was ultimately asking her to do and to be something

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that no human being could be. I was wanting her to be the constant validator of Bruce. Constantly telling me how awesome I was and that is just not fair. So I own that entirely, but marriage was difficult, she had some health and mental issues that made it even more difficult for her joy and peace. We wound up having kids and you know the joys of raising kids are, you know, you have to search for the joy in a lot of days because it can be challenging. In the middle of all of that I started a business, I wound up filing bankruptcy 2 years later, which was another huge blow to my ego. We lost a daughter in the year 2000, so 16 years ago, our daughter died tragically and I wound up filing bankruptcy a second time because I was woefully underinsured and the hospital expenses were just way more than I could cover, my portion of it. So I wound up filing bankruptcy again. So by the time I was 42 years old I was done. I had nothing left and the problem was that I had built my self-esteem around all of these things outside of me. So as those things outside of me fell apart, so did Bruce and I really reached a crisis point where I didn't see, because of the difficulties of my past, I equated that to this is how the rest of my life is going to be and when a person sees no hope for their future there really is no reason to continue living we are hoped shaped creatures. So where we have hope and we have a clear vision of what we want and what we believe we can be we can have the endurance to go through difficult times, but when we lose hope that is where we fall into despair and I was in that place when I was 42 years old. I was looking at bridge overpasses and wondering is that high enough to do the job and how can I get there without attracting too much attention. So that's really where I was and my life did take a miraculous turn through a weird series of events, which miraculous turns often are weird series of events.

Debra: True, true.

Bruce: My older brother challenged me to run marathon and I thought that was the stupidest thing I'd ever heard in my life, but I accepted the challenge and marathon running literally changed my life. Because it made me realize you can't run, you can be in a really grumpy, pessimistic, surly mood and run a fifty-yard dash. You can think that the world stinks and do a hundred-yard dash. You can't run a marathon that way because you have to completely eliminate any self-talk that says you can't do it because your body is subservient to the mind. As soon as the mind says: "You know what this is just stupid there is no way I can do it," the body screams: "Hallelujah, I've been telling you this let's go back and sit on the couch and watch Oprah, It's where we're happy." But I had trained my body to obey my mind and I had trained my mind to tell myself that I can do this. I held a clear vision of me crossing the finish line at my first marathon. Now I still hated every aspect of my life, outside of marathon training at that point, but I had an epiphany deep into training for my first marathon that said: "Bruce you don't have all of these other problems, you don't have marriage problems, you don't have financial problems, you don't have anything other than a thinking problem and the same thinking principals that you have applied to running a marathon, you can apply to the rest of your life. Stop criticizing yourself, stop being the victim." I was a full blown victim and Debra if you had asked me on that morning I had the epiphany what my problem was I could have rattled them off for you like a machine gun, firing them out and I had an equally long corresponding list of exactly who was to blame for all of my problems and nowhere on that list was there a guy named Bruce Van Horn. I was in total victim mode and the problem with being a victim is that if you are not responsible for the situation that you are in, then you are forever dependent on other people, governments.

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You are dependent on external situations to change in order for your situation to change and I discovered that I was 100% responsible for every aspect of my life and maybe there were certain events of my life, like I wasn't responsible that my daughter died, right? But, I was 100% responsible for how I choose to respond to that and I could choose a response that moves me forward. I could choose a response that empowers me and makes me a greater person rather than a lesser person, rather than a victim who has had this horrible thing happen to them. So now I look back over my life and I see these difficult situations. I see the death of my daughter, I see bankruptcies, I see the divorce and I say those were amazing experiences because they have made me the man that I am now and they have given me the insight. They have given me the ability to relate to so many other people who are going through the very same things. I can use these difficulties. So I don't say that I am anymore a person that has triumphed over adversity, I am a person who has triumphed because of my adversity and that's a major energy shift. Rather than moving against it, rather than fighting these things, rather than saying oh these were horrible things; I look at it and I say you know what I am a much better person in so many ways for having had those experiences. So now I move with the flow of those things and they can carry me to a life of joy and happiness and a life in which I see an amazing future for myself.

Debra: Very wise words and I know you've also walked some health issues that actually identify you, you could be considered a person with a disability under the American's with disabilities act. So do you want to explore that a little bit?

Bruce: Sure, just when I thought my life was going exactly where I wanted it to go. I was at the top of my game when I turned 50 years old, I had started my life coaching practice, I had already written one book at that point and it was selling very well. So I was feeling very, very good about myself and the direction of my life and then on February 17th 2014 at 9:34 in the morning. I got a phone call and I looked at the caller I.D. I was eating breakfast and I knew exactly who it was, partly because of the caller I.D. But I knew I was expecting the call, but I was expecting standard your lab-work all came back ok and it wasn't a nurse. Even before I answered the phone, I knew exactly who it was, I knew exactly what he was going to tell me and I knew eating breakfast that morning was going to be the last normal thing I'd do for a very long time. So when your doctor is on the line and you can tell he is holding back tears, you know it's not good.

Debra: Yeah.

Bruce: So he said Bruce I have no idea know how to tell you this. I thought everything was going to be great, but you've got stage 4 prostate cancer and its aggressive and this is not good and we've got to move. So all sorts of thoughts whirled through my head. I sat at my kitchen table and I cried for a couple hours. Because at this point I'm a single dad with full custody of my boys, my boys are 100% dependent on me now for their wellbeing, for their livelihood because of situations that happened with their mom. She can't be around them and so I had all of these thoughts going around my mind and for a few minutes there, for a few hours, I lapsed back into this idea that says, "See never celebrate the good things because they never last. Bad things are going to come." But then I reminded myself of who I was now and I reminded myself that I don't want to be that person anymore and we can choose in any given moment who we want to be and how we are going to respond to these events and just like I was able to process the events

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of my past to now see the blessings in them. I had to apply that very same principal to what I was about to go through. So it took me a couple days to figure out how I would sit my boys down, but I did I sat them down and said boys here's the situation and I don't know how it is going to turn out. Yet I know how I am going to go through this and we are going to tell ourselves a story of complete recovery. We are going to trust that in this situation there is blessing. That the universe is conspiring to grow us and to prosper us. We might not understand the circumstances and we might not understand the situations and there's all kinds of metaphors we can draw from the scriptures, you know. Joseph didn't understand that it was going to be a good thing that his brother sold him into slavery and he wound up in prison in Egypt.

Debra: Right.

Bruce: Yet, it turned out to be an amazing experience for everybody. So I said I don't know what the gift is, but there is one and that is how we're going to go through this and so I went into, I wound up having surgery for it. It was way too advanced to use other forms of treatment and just like breast cancer or just about any form of cancer, if it is caught early enough it is very treatable. Lots of treatment methods, but mine was not caught early so I had to have radical surgery and even the surgery did not go the way it was supposed to. It was going to be an hour and a half surgery. I was going to spend one night in the hospital. It wound up being a five-hour surgery and six nights in the hospital before I was able to go home and even then I wasn't really able. They sent me home too soon, but the insurance company says he's got to go. So I went home, but during my operation; I don't believe Debra that anyone almost dies, we either do or we don't, but we need to have some kind of vocabulary to talk about these things. To describe the seriousness of the matter. So the doctors and nurses afterwards told me what had happened during the operation and I did nearly die. I lost almost, 70% of my blood, they lost my blood pressure during the operation. Which made recovering from that very, very, very difficult and now I'm two and a half years outside of that and my surgeon still shakes his head in disbelief at how well I have done because he sat down next to me a couple days after the surgery and said, "Bruce this recovery is going to be hard. I can't say it any way other than that and I also know that you really, really like running and you like running marathons." and he said, "The amount of cutting that we had to do and the damage that was done to your body, we might, within a year be able to get you back to jogging and you might be able to at some point get out and enjoy a neighborhood five K or a ten K, but I think the days of your competing as a runner and I think your days of marathon running are over." He said those things to me with love and with well and good intentions and very often people speak into our lives well-meaning, but yet they're placing their limiting beliefs upon us and I chose not to accept that. Exactly one year after my surgery about the time he thought I was going to get ready to just start maybe jogging again, I ran the Boston marathon. To which he still can't believe that I did that. Now it was my slowest marathon ever, but it was still the Boston marathon and it was just an amazing thing. Going back to the power of belief in what our future was and not accepting other people's versions of reality as our own. Tapping into this inner knowing that we have that regardless of what our physical situations are we are always capable of living in joy and peace and abundance within ourselves. So that's really my story and the beautiful thing about that is I really interpret, I see what the gifting was in that. Again, it just adds more to my story and the proof that I have, I walk my talk. These things that I share on stages when I speak publicly, these things that I share with people all around the

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world on my podcast; I didn't just make these things up because they sound good in front of a microphone. This is my story and I've been able to work with people in recrafting their story from a story of regression, looking back on the past and focusing on the pain and the loss and then projecting that into the future and foreseeing limitations and difficulties and not achieving the life of their dreams and we can re-story that and we can move. We can literally do this shift where the events haven't changed, you know. There is still a gravestone in Clarksville Virginia with my daughter's name on it. So I'm not denying the fact that it happened. There was still a day, there's still hospital records on April 7th 2014, Bruce underwent radical retro-pubic prostatectomy. So the events aren't changed, but the story about why they happened. So I'm no longer a victim, I'm now, this is something that I went through for a purpose and that there was meaning to it and I think part of the gifting that we all have is we have all been given the gift of choice. We can choose for ourselves to determine what the meaning or what the purpose is. So there is the short version of it.

Debra: But it's a beautiful story and it shows why your work is so powerful. Bruce tell our listeners about how they can find out more about your work.

Bruce: Well I am easy to find, Brucevanhorn.com is the easiest thing you can do or you can just go to Google and type Bruce Van Horn it is V-a-n H-o-r-n. There is another Bruce Van Horn out there and he writes books about yoga, that's not me.

Debra: That's funny.

Bruce: I love yoga, but not nearly enough to write books about it. Yeah, Brucevanhorn.com is really the hub of everything I do people can, there are links to my social media accounts. I have an amazing Twitter flock of 442,000 people.

Debra: Amazing.

Bruce: I'm literally the mayor of a mid-sized city, so they elected me to that. Instagram has been fun for me too. There are links to my "Life is a Marathon" podcast that are there and on brucevanhorn.com you can see some various public speaking that I am doing if anyone would like to come participate in any of these live. I do live workshops and retreats. So that's the best place to find me is brucevanhorn.com.

Debra: Great well, thank you so much for sharing your story and your life's work with our listeners. You continue to be a teacher to me and I thank you.

Bruce: Well, I appreciate that, thank you.

Debra: So let's all celebrate and accept ourselves and others so everyone can reach their full human potential. So, thank you again for listening. Thank you again for watching Human Potential at Work with Debra Ruh. If you'd like to know more about my work you can visit us at www.ruhglobal.com I'm available to speak, to do training, to do strategic consulting and I would really be honored to work with you and you can also visit my speaking website which is

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www.debaruh.com and you can find both of my books on Amazon and other channels. Thank you again for listening, bye-bye.

(Outro Music)