

## **DAVID ESSEL 2017 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY S.U. GRADUATE, 1979, HEALTH SELECTED STUDIES**

Thank You Dr. Joanna Osborne Masingila and the School of Education.... Heather Waters and everyone here for inviting me to be a part of this really important day...

First congratulations to each of you!... The graduates of my alma mater, Syracuse University!

Probably the most important piece of information I can give you... Would be for everyone to tap in to your own inner "Lady Gaga" in the world of education... Be strong enough to be yourself, be unique, and you'll make the biggest difference in the world in whatever career path you choose.

40 years ago in this gym... In Manley Fieldhouse I lived here... I love this place... As a member of the junior varsity basketball team... This was home.

(As a sidenote... 40 years from now you'll be about 60 years old or so... I know at your age we don't never think that's going to happen... I sure didn't... so make sure that you take full advantage of every breath for the rest of your life!)

40 years ago in this very gym with coach Roy Danforth and Jim Boeheim

Coach Danforth called me into his office ... We have a spot for you on the varsity team do you want it?

Yes sir this is all I live for!

We want you to push our seniors in practice so that they're ready for anything are you ready Essel?

Yes sir.

There's only one catch... You'll never get in a game

Never?

Never.

Ever?

Never.

24 hours later I return and tell coach that I can't do it.

I ended up leaving school and going on a one and a half year search to find out what my purpose in life was.

I finally returned to Syracuse and enrolled in the School of Education and had one of the most incredible advisers ever, Dr. Carl Shantzis

One day on campus he asked me how things were going.

I told him "Not very good ... I just finished an internship at a school and I'm not cut out to be a teacher."

He tells me to take this list of classes home and circle the ones that excite me.

I returned the next day with the list... He looks over and says "Essel you're an educator!"

"But Dr. Shantzis ... I told you I just did this internship, and did not like it!"

"Essel...he says...Teaching isn't the only way to educate. I'm going to proposition the School of Education so that you can have your own degree in areas that are of your interest."

I couldn't believe it... Dr. Shantzis did not know that I was contemplating dropping out of school again... But now I was excited.

Within a few weeks, I'm sitting with Marie Sarno... School of education... Marie is still here 40 years later!

Signing papers for my new degree... entitled "Health Selected Studies"...

My grades finally improved... It might have had something to do with the fact that I actually liked my classes, attended classes and even did my homework. LOL

After graduation... Several people told me that I would make a great doctor. Something that I had never considered.

So, I applied for an internship in a program at a hospital in North Carolina... Dr. Carl King was my director...

After my interview he tells me that I'm accepted into the internship and he believes I could make a very good doctor... And he'll help me get into med school once the internship is over.

I'm extremely excited and begin the program... But halfway through I start to have huge doubts... Dr. King must've known that and called me into his office.

I shared with him that I loved working with the patients... But I took all of their pain and agony home with me every night.

"I just don't think I have the temperament to be a doctor ", I told him. ... Dr. King told me not to quit... There's something in the program that's going to work out for me, that doors will open. Hang in there

The very last portion of the internship was in cardiac rehabilitation... And one of my duties was to take a phonograph, put it in the middle of the gym with records and to get the cardiac rehab patients exercising to music with me... I had no idea what I was doing but I loved it!

I also had no idea that this would turn into my first true career... A number of years later I'm recognized as one of the top male fitness and aerobic instructors in the US

Soon I'm featured in Shape magazine... Then the cover of Men's Fitness with a four-page spread on fitness education... And then the greatest gift was to be featured in GQ magazine... another spread ...this time giving tips on how to stay fit while you travel.

Life was blooming.

My next mentor... Now look at the pattern here all of these mentors...starting with SU....

My next mentor, Dr. Richard Gerson said to me at one point, that I may outgrow the world of fitness ..... what do I want to do next?

... I tell him I have a dream to become a top motivational speaker.

He immediately tells me I must return for my Masters Degree... In Fitness Management which will include Sports Psychology, Exercise Physiology, and Marketing

He tells me after getting the degree... He wants me to Speak 200 times for free... WHAT? Speak for free?

Within a few years following his advice I'm traveling 40 weeks a year as a motivational speaker all over the world... Living a life I could've never imagined... That all began with Dr. Shantzis and the School of Education

After a number of years I start to feel burnt out coming on... One of the last trade shows I'm speaking at a gentleman approaches me and says...

"You have a great way with people and you're a fitness expert and we're looking for a fitness expert for our television show in New York..."

Within a week I fly in as a guest on the program... And then sign an agreement to be their fitness expert.

From there I switch over to Fox TVs Good Day New York as the health and fitness segment reporter.

From there I go to Lifetime Television as a motivational expert... And in 1990 Lifetime calls me "The Top Life Coach in the USA"

My career once again is booming... In the world of education. Maybe not the traditional path for educators, but the one that began with Dr. Carl Shantzis.

After being on TV for number of years a friend approaches me who's heard me do multiple speeches and asked if I'd be interested in cutting a radio commercial for his company..... he says all they can afford is \$25.... and I say yes.

I go and cut this commercial in one take... As I'm getting in my car the sales manager comes running out and says..." hey are you the guy that just did that commercial in one take? "

I laughed and said yes... She then asks if I can speak on a variety of topics?

I tell her I'm a motivation and health educator to which she replies...

"Great! How would you like your own show? "

I laugh and say of course... she says ..."fantastic you start Friday at 11 AM... Be here at 10."

I could not believe what I was hearing... I asked her how much it pays... She says zero

I laugh and say... I'll take it

I had no idea within 12 months I'd be signing a contract to be the host of a nationally syndicated radio talk show.... that went on for 26 years.

Think right now.... Follow your heart in the world of education..... follow your heart.

While all this is going on a friend of mine decides to visit and she sits on the couch while I take a shower

As I come out I see her crying hysterically...

I thought Essel this is not good... You can make a woman cry and not even be in the same room!!!!

She looks up at me and says... "David this must become a book... This isn't your story it's everyone story."

I looked down to see what she's talking about and she has my diary! Filled with thoughts on pain... Addiction... Divorce... Bankruptcy... Fear... Hope and love.

I follow her advice and these writings become my first book... "Phoenix Soul: One Man's Search for Love and Inner Peace."

Our ninth book was just released this year... Where I'm following my own advice and rocking the boat in my own industry...

The title... "Positive Thinking Will Never Change Your Life..... But This Book Will! ... The Myth of Positive Thinking, The Reality of Success.

I'm 'rocking the boat big time...as an educator....

I was taught here through the school of education to follow my heart and I'm doing that... A publicist just told us that she believes the book will hit the bestsellers list around July 1.

I have no training in radio, TV, or journalism... Yet as an educator I've reached millions of people through all of these areas.

What about you? Where is your heart, in education? You've got to follow your heart.

My final story is about a friend of mine named Scarlett Lewis... As I continue to do what I love I meet the most amazing people and you will too...

Three years ago I interviewed Scarlett on radio for the very first time... Her story is mesmerizing. Sad. Painful. Real.

The year before, she was called into her son's school... Six-year-old Jesse... She was called in to Sandyhook Elementary School one afternoon... Because a tragedy hit... After waiting for hours she was brought into a room and told the worst news a parent could ever hear...

Your son Jesse was murdered in a massacre today by Adam Lanza...

I asked her on my show if she could ever forgive someone for killing her son... ????

"I have forgiven him by 75% David... And it's not about turning the other cheek... Or forgiving because you're supposed to... You have to go into the pain, your resentment, your rage, your anger and your sadness day after day after day to release it."

Just a few months ago I featured Scarlett at one of my seminars and asked her how she was doing in front of the audience... She says " I'm 90% there David...I've forgiven Adam Lanza almost completely... And I had to do it .....while he took my son Jesse... I could not let him take the rest of my life nor the rest of my other son JT's life..."

Scarlett Lewis has become a great friend... And she's one of the most incredible educators in the world on the power of forgiveness.

The life that I'm living could not be possible without the power of open-mindedness, demonstrated by the school of education, right here at Syracuse University.

I want to leave you today with four powerful tips on how to live a dynamic life:

1. The only security that you will create in your career in education is by following your own internal voice... if you do what you truly love... You always find work.

2. Surround yourself with people who are smarter, more creative and more determined than You are.
3. Get a mentor today! My first mentor Dr. Carl combined with the School of Education has led me to this very stage today... I owe the School of Education so much that I would like to offer everyone here in attendance today a 30-minute session on the phone... If I can help you in any way to create the life that you so desire I want to do that... Contact me via my website which is simply my name.
4. And last, and this may be the most difficult to believe... More often than not... Your parents are correct. Follow their advice!

Thank you to the school of education...

Be bold. Be powerful. And tap into your own unique power to become the most incredible educator that you can be.

Thank you