Podcast: Educators Thriving is Key to Students Thriving

The authors of, "*High Five to Thrive: 5 Proven Practices to Unleash Your Passion for Teaching*" share their strategies to assist teachers to experience thriving in teaching. Their strategies tackle these issues:

- **A loss of purpose** – Is the passion that once fueled you fading?
- **A feeling of hopelessness** – Have you ever felt like no matter what you do, it's not enough?
- **Unhelpful mindset patterns** -Do you ever notice that your automatic thoughts negatively shape your view of yourself, your students, and your classroom environment?
- **Neglecting the mind-body connection** – the essential link between your thoughts, emotions, and physical well-being.
- **A feeling of being disconnected** – from work, students, and colleagues

Consider the importance of these areas for your own thriving

as well as those educators you support.

Find the book, "High Five to Thrive: 5 Proven Practices to Unleash Your Passion for Teaching" here.

Visit authors' website here or find them on LinkedIn here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.300] – Steve
Hello and welcome to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud. Together, we'll explore ways to support teacher growth, elevate your coaching practice, and boost student success. Each week, I'll share my own insights as well as conversations with inspiring guests to help you lead with confidence. Thanks for listening.

[00:00:30.000] – Steve
Educators thriving is key to students thriving. Joining us today are the authors of, "High Five to Thrive: Five Proven Practices to Unleash your Passion for Teaching." As I read through the needs that they discuss, focusing on teachers thriving and the strategies that they explore, I sensed a strong connection to the work of coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators to empower thriving for teachers. I'm pleased to explore those connections today with the authors. Viki Kelchner is a licensed professional and national board-certified counselor. She has national and international experience working in the areas of mental health, wellness, and community-based interventions. Her research interest and publications focus on families, individuals and families with neurodivergence, and supporting youth and families through school-based family services and intervention programs. Currently, she is a counselor educator, focusing on providing trauma services and intervention for high-need families and school children. Debbie Simoes describes that she has

navigated the challenges of bureaucracy as a teacher, principal, and director of a university lab school, and understands the difficulties that educators encounter.

[00:02:03.220] – Steve
Those experiences drive her passion to empower educators from the classroom to the boardroom, equipping them with the mindset and skillset to foster communities of belonging, connectivity, and achievement. Her mission is to equip educators to transform the school experience to ensure every teacher and student feels valued, connected, and and positioned to thrive. Dr. Donita Grissom is an associate lecturer at the University of Central Florida, providing courses in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Her courses are not just about teaching, they are also a reflection of her belief in the power of language to bridge cultures and empower individuals. Donita inspires her students to embrace innovative methodologies rooted in empathy and understanding, and she provides rich cultural proficiency, which she deems of utmost importance for educators. Donita guides and mentors future leaders in the field, instilling in them a deep sense of purpose and responsibility towards English learners, research, teaching methods, and teacher training. Welcome, Viki, Debbie, and Donita.

[00:03:26.260] – Donita
Thank you.

[00:03:26.630] – Debbie
Thank you.

[00:03:28.520] – Viki
Thank you for having us.

[00:03:29.400] – Steve
I'm I'm excited to jump in here. So Donita, can you share how you and your co-authors there arrived at a plan to write the High Five to Thrive?

[00:03:42.540] – Donita
I would be happy to. All three of us have national and international experience training teachers and counselors and educators in various different places, in schools and districts and different platforms. And as I was out at a school coaching, and then also working with some international teachers, I would just layer out the strategies and tools I was teaching them. Until one day, I had some teachers say, please don't add any tools to us because we were so overwhelmed. They'll expect us to do this, and we can't handle anything else. So I went back to my partners and I said, Whoa, wait a minute. We need to stop now. And before we write anything else, we need to write something that will help our teachers. They are stressed. They're burning out, they're leaving the field, and it's not more tools they need. They need to take care of themselves. But we're forgetting that in our formula for optimal learning environment, the teacher is the person in the room who sets the tone. And if they are walking in stressed, even if they're smiling, the students feel it. And then their amygdala in their brain is not happy, and so learning is not happening.

[00:05:15.460] – Donita
But the teachers are the ones that are getting the blame and all the pressure. So we can't take the stressors away. We say that in certain ways in the book, but we can help teachers deal and cope with the stress and with the anxiety so they don't carry it in the room. And then the students are happy, their brains are happy, and optimal learning can occur. So that's why we have a Southern expression to "back up and punt." So that's what we did. We back up and we're punting because we want to help.

[00:05:51.640] – Steve
Got it. Thank you. Debbie, as I was listening to Donita with the thrive, what was going through my mind is some people talk about moving from surviving to thriving. So I wondered, would

you talk to us a little bit about what the word thriving means, why you use that phrase thriving?

[00:06:18.820] – Debbie
Well, I think we can all agree that we're always chasing those better outcomes for students as educators, but it has to start with with what we're coming to the table with. And if you're going to position students for the best outcomes, they have to be thriving. They can't just be doing okay. You as a teacher, you can't just be doing okay. You have to be thriving as a person. And that means you have to be growing, you have to be feeling healthy, feeling like you're in a position to be the best you that you can be. And we need that – we all need that as a human being. And that's really the essence of thriving, because that's when you're living on fire and not just existing and getting through a day. And we want our teachers and students to be living on fire, like living out their highest self, the highest version of themselves. So that's what thriving is about. And that's why we came up with our title, that we have five practices that we you high five about because it positions us to thrive.

[00:07:34.860] – Steve
I want to check that against a Steve Barkley statement. I describe that every teacher at the start of the school year has to be expecting that their best year of teaching is in front of them.

[00:07:52.600] – Donita
I love that.

[00:07:53.720] – Steve
If you reach the point where you're looking back on your best year of teaching, it's probably time to move on. So that's what I'm hearing in thriving is that expectation of I'm going to be new and different because of what's happening to me, and my kids will benefit from that.

[00:08:16.080] – Donita
I love that. Always growing. That's good.

[00:08:20.640] – Debbie
Growth has to be. That's really an essential piece of it is that you're growing.

[00:08:26.240] – Steve
Yeah. You probably can't be thriving if you aren't growing. Those two go together. We can almost take it back to – I'm a farmer from my youth. So if we were thriving, the crops were growing. Those two went together. Viki, there's a statement I pulled from the introduction to your book that I wanted you to expand a little bit further for us. And the statement was this, "Teaching is more than a career, it's a calling. But it is also one of the most demanding and emotional, exhausting professions."

[00:09:05.300] – Viki
Yes. So teaching really goes way far beyond just being a job. It's deeply personal, it's purpose-driven, and often, it's emotionally taxing because educators and teachers invest so much of themselves into their students. So they're trying to balance these academic expectations, faculty, administration expectations, also the systemic pressure that they're feeling. And then they also want to support students' well-being, and that's a lot. And then we talk about the parents, too. So it's not just like a regular job where you go in, you do your job, and you're done. You're cultivating this environment that you're helping will grow that child into a healthy adult, a happy adult, and a happy child at the same time, right? And they have so many demands. It's hard to balance at all. And I think that this is one reason we see a lot of compassion fatigue. We see a lot of burnout. We see a lot of emotional overload from teachers because it is a calling, and it is deeply rooted in what that person's purpose is as teaching. It's not just a job. And so it's in their fiber, their being of who they are. So balancing all of that and making sure that

they support students and themselves and everyone around them in the system can be really exhausting.

[00:10:29.760] – Steve
Thanks. As I work through your book, you have it divided to address each of the five practices for thriving. So I thought we could take them one at a time and explore it in a little detail. So the first one was purpose. Would somebody jump in and talk to us, get us started with a conversation about purpose?

[00:10:59.260] – Debbie
So I think that one of the characteristics of teachers that anyone knows is that teachers don't just decide to become a teacher because, well, they're going to make a lot of money and it's an easy job. Nobody just falls into teaching. People become a teacher because they have a calling for that, like Viki was saying, and that is their life purpose. So that purpose becomes like your compass, your guiding light in your life. It's the driver of everything. And when you're living on purpose, that is really part of thriving. I feel bad for people who do fall into some job and their job is okay or worse, like they hate their job because they can never thrive. You can't be thriving and getting up every single day going in to work to do something that is meaningless to you. When it's that deep meaning and purpose that creates that sense of fulfillment. So that's something that I see it a lot in the Facebook and social media chats that teachers get mad sometimes that they don't want to be told to tie in their purpose or lean into their purpose. And I feel bad when I read that because it's indicative of a disconnect between that and everything else.

[00:12:42.140] – Debbie
And I think where the rubber meets the road is when the people can see, the teachers can feel and see how everything is connected. I think sometimes teachers have so many frustrations that they're not feeling supported. Of course,

they’re not happy with their pay. They’re not feeling valued and respected and all of those things. And then that makes them feel they don’t want to be told, well, lean into your purpose. Because I do understand their point, but at the same time, it’s that purpose that can really create the sense of fulfillment and keep them going and sustain them through all of the challenges that they have to face every day. So there needs to be a connection always in place between that purpose and everything else. And not forgetting or minimizing their challenges. Tying into your purpose and leaning into it and being aware of it and having it at the center of who you are and what you’re doing, that doesn’t replace the other challenges and supersede them. It just helps you navigate through them. So I think making those connections is really a vital piece for our educators.

[00:14:13.020] – Steve
I talk about teaching being a team sport. I think what makes it a team is that you find those connections in your purpose. And it’s what drove my work in coaching and in in teaming is that teachers working in isolation don’t get that reinforcement of their purpose the way that teachers working as a team – if you’re having a struggling day, one of the things that teammates is going to do, one of the things that coach is going to do is say something or do something that brings you back to that purpose that’s driving you.

[00:14:55.120] – Debbie
Yeah, I couldn’t agree more. I think that’s why the other chapters in our book about the mindset and the connections and the hope and finding hope agents. All of these things go together because if you are trying to reach out and connect with your colleagues and your school community to stay on point like you were just talking about, and you’re finding people who are negative, you know those ones that you think of, I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty sure, for most of us, when you walk into a teacher’s lounge, it’s not usually a

place of joy and bliss as it should be. And that's not to say that we can't lean on each other and share something difficult we had to go through that day or frustrating. We have to be able to connect and be authentic. But at the same time, that teacher's lounge or your colleagues, that is the undercurrent and the foundation of the school culture. And so it is really important if you're trying to stay connected to your purpose, it's really important that all of those things are in place so that when you are trying to connect with others and be part of a team, that you're getting positive reinforcement and you're not getting drug down into the mire.

[00:16:27.940] – Steve
How about somebody move us from that into hope, which was the second one you guys were focused on?

[00:16:34.820] – Debbie
Donita, where are you?

[00:16:36.250] – Donita
I was going to say that will be me. If you don't mind, I'd like to add just something to the conversation, and this will segue into hope as well. The way we designed the book, when you first talk about teacher wellness, things like that, we've had so many… The initial thought is they don't have time for that. There's not money in the districts to fund that, even though that's the most important thing from our standpoint for teachers. Everything that we did in our book, we explained the problem, then we explained the tool that we were going to use. We didn't do 25 things. We're talking about five things. And then we add the science behind it in a very practical way because we don't want it too heavy. But we wanted to be sure that all educators, regardless of their position, understand what it is, why it's important, and why it will help you, that it's not fluff, that this is the thing. If you spend time here, it's going to make everything else flow better for you and your students. So I wanted to point that out. And for example, with the purpose, we talked about visualization, and

Viki can probably…well, not can. She will help me with this one.

[00:17:56.760] – Donita
So there is something that happens in our brain whenever we visualize something. So for example, the one thing that we have them do, or one of the things is we have them close their eyes and we have them think about that moment that it occurred to them that I'm a teacher. I have to teach. This is what brings me joy. And so whatever you thought, whatever feelings you had, whatever endorphins went off, I call it the happy juice, whatever you could smell and feel and think, your brain doesn't know that that happened, say, 20 years ago or 10 years ago or five years ago or five minutes ago or it's happening right now. Those feelings come back with that. So I teach the teachers to put their hand on their heart as a cue. And just I say, when you're having that day and you need to calm down, just quickly, close your eyes, think about that moment and let that physiological, neurological thing happen to give you some gas to get through that day. So I wanted to add that because it's not just some woo-woo thing.

[00:19:16.430] – Donita
It's a real thing. Viki?

[00:19:19.300] – Viki
I think it's really important to reconnect because like Donita said, then all those endorphins, those feelings, they come back to you. It's something we also do in couples therapy. Is you ask them when they're struggling to re-imagine or imagine again how when they first started dating, what that felt like, right? Because it reconnects them. So it's the same thing with teachers. That's reconnecting them through all their senses and their entire being to why they did this in the first place.

[00:19:51.220] – Steve
So connected to hope for me because I'm feeling a connection,

but I'd love to hear the words.

[00:19:56.080] – Donita
Okay. Connecting to hope. So that's my thing. That's what I did on my research for my dissertation. And now I read anything and everything I get my hands on. And Viki and I write about it, and now the three of us are writing more about it. So hope. Hope is more than a wish. We stand on the hope theory by C. R. Snyder, the late C. R. Snyder. And it's a critical thinking, positive psychological construct that has three components. It's goal setting or problem solving. It is strategies like, how am I going to do this? How am I going to solve this problem? How am I going to reach this goal? And then it's the agency factor, which is, to me, I spend the most time there because that's the mindset. That's the celebration, which helps us keep going. It's the gasoline we put in our tank that keeps us going, especially when the days get rough. And so that is hope. So when you're thinking about your problems, your situations, your feelings, anything, in that hope chapter, we talk about how to work on your goals. Like, what exactly is it you're trying to do?

[00:21:14.620] – Donita
How do I set this? What strategies? Who are you going to ask to help? Those are our hope agents. And so that goes back to the faculty. Who are we going to ask to, hey, remind me, when I'm having one of those days and you see that look on my face, will you remind me to just put your hand on your heart and remind me that, hey, I need to think about my purpose again. So it's building the connections, which that comes later in the book. But as Debbie mentioned, all of our practices really work together. But we wanted to take a deep dive into each one of these. And then we devoted a whole chapter to flip the script, the mindset, because that's the inner critic, and that's our hope hacker, we call it. And we have to do something with those thoughts because all of our actions, all of our emotions are driven by the thoughts in our head. So

chapter two and chapter three go together, but they're deep. We go deep with that. And in turn, once the teacher learns how to flip the script and how to work through the teaching, their personal lives, lives, their teaching goals, whatever the case may be, just literally framing those things in life through the hope action plan that we have in the book.

[00:22:42.860] – Donita
And how do I make strategies. Well, if you don't have strategies, you can ask a friend, phone a friend. Because some people may have the motivation, which is inside of that agency component, but they may not be able to think of so many strategies. Like, I really want to do this, but I just don't have any idea. And then the mindset part is the part that takes the longest. But I tell teachers or whoever it is I'm working with, yeah, it's hard, but it's a choice. If we do nothing, we get nothing. But if you do something, you get something.

[00:23:22.800] – Steve
Can I try where my brain is going?

[00:23:26.380] – Donita
Please.

[00:23:27.660] – Steve
I use purpose and to build my mindset.

[00:23:32.560] – Donita
I love that.

[00:23:35.720] – Steve
I'm listening correctly?

[00:23:37.740] – Debbie
That work? Yeah, I love that.

[00:23:39.020] – Donita
That absolutely are.

[00:23:40.340] – Debbie
It’s like all the pieces of a car.

[00:23:43.580] – Donita
They got to all work together, right?

[00:23:46.800] – Steve
Take us on to mind-body harmony.

[00:23:50.620] – Viki
With mind-body harmony, it’s what it sounds like. We need to make sure that not only are we in in sync with our students and that we’re harmonizing with our students, we have to make sure we are doing that personally for ourselves. When we are in sync with our mind, body, and spirit, then we are able to attune with students much better. We’re able to be less reactive with students. We also take things less personally. If a student is externalizing behaviors in the classroom that aren’t exactly wanted, in Instead of thinking that that is personally targeted towards me, I think, okay, what’s going on for that student right now? What are they struggling with? So having that mind-body harmony helps us regulate ourselves, which then in return helps our students regulate themselves.

[00:24:49.120] – Debbie
I love that. That really simplifies it. I know when I was in the classroom, I never got any training on this stuff. Have you ever heard about if you have children acting out, you hear teachers shouting, or parents, too, shouting at the kids in their frustration, but that really escalates the behaviors that you’re trying to extinguish. I think all of these things are things that we need in part of our teacher training that somehow universities aren’t preparing teachers in these practical ways that are going to really sustain them in their career and allow them to thrive and love their career and really be their best for their students. So I feel like this work has been so important for us that we’ve really just been on fire about it because it’s so fundamental for our teachers

and our students.

[00:26:03.060] – Donita
And I will say that universities, our university, where I teach, we're doing this now. I've inserted this book into two of our graduate courses as a pilot last semester. Oh, my gosh, you wouldn't believe the feedback that I'm getting. I mean, I'm just getting emails just voluntarily from the students. "Thank you for writing this book. Thank you for putting in our course. I thought I was a terrible teacher because my graduate students are already teachers. But I'm putting to practice these things this last four months of our semester." Because I just got all these comments from my student inventories. But this was from an email I'm telling you about. And she's like, "I thought I was a terrible teacher, but I've been putting these things in place. I went to my administrator and had a discussion because my last evaluation, I thought was not good. And I was carrying that guilt and shame around with me. And so after doing some of the exercises in High Five to Thrive, it gave me courage to speak to my administrator. And the administrator said, Oh, that's not what I meant at all. I must be not a good communicator."

[00:27:19.100] – Donita
Anyway, it literally flipped her own story and feelings about herself as a teacher. And she said, I'm even putting all these practices in practice in my home with my daughter. All around, I just feel lighter, I feel better about myself, and I'm going to continue this work in my life.

[00:27:41.320] – Steve
My wife is an elementary counselor, and I'm really connecting here to the amount of times working with parents and teachers that they're being triggered by something that their child said or did, and they're responding before they realize that they're responding out of the trigger. They're not responding in a way of being helpful to whatever has to happen for the child to change. That's what I was hearing in that mind-body

harmony.

[00:28:17.820] – Viki
That's exactly right. And if you, as a teacher, or a parent, or administrator, if you could just take five seconds and just breathe deeply, you're letting your own body to respond in a more appropriate way, a more helpful way. When you think about, if you see a dog with the hair sticking up and they're aggravated, you're not going to put your hand in their mouth. Well, kids are the same way. If you spend that couple of minutes trying to just de-escalate, then maybe the whole day won't be ruined for that child or for you. And that happens. We can have kids and teachers that start out in the morning and sets everyone off. And so everybody's reactive the rest of the day. But taking even a few seconds can really reshape that. So then if you think about academic outcomes, well, if you're regulated, you're going to learn a lot more. And you're building that connection and that relationship with the teacher. And your students are going to be able to be more vulnerable and ask more questions and learn so much more and feel safe in that environment.

[00:29:26.680] – Donita
So a couple of strategies really quick. They're not in the book, but the three of us are constantly putting our practices into place in our own lives. I mean, we've done these things, but we have to remember and remind ourselves. But it's not a one and done. This is a lifetime of working on ourselves. Sometimes I'll call Debbie and I'm like, Debbie will tell me something she's dealing with. Debbie, I think you need to go read Chapter 3. Or she'll say the same thing to me. I think you need to go back and read Chapter 4. I think you need to go do some yoga or something.

[00:30:04.700] – Steve
There are two strategies that I've learned since the book that when we're doing our workshops, and by the way, we do professional developments and book studies and whatever anyone

needs, we do that because we're so passionate about these topics and we know this helps.

[00:30:23.950] – Donita
But anyway, I have been reading some research about laughter and what laughter does. So it's like when you can feel the atmosphere tense, one of those hairs are sticking up on our students, there's some of the funniest videos of babies laughing. And just think about, going on a video really quickly and just putting those babies. There's nobody that can't laugh, probably won't laugh at that. They're hilarious. And then all of a sudden, everybody's laughing. And now you've got a room full of people who are high their happy juice, their own happy juice. And it changes everything. I've been working with some teachers in Asia, and they've been putting these practices in place. And in Asia, they're more serious minded. I had them practice these techniques because they weren't so sure about it. When they came back for the next workshop, they were like, Oh, my gosh, it changed the whole rest of the day. Then one more I'll tell you about, there's some research about smiling, even if it's a fake smile. Everybody smile for 30 seconds. You may not feel it, but then everybody usually burst out in laughing. My teachers I'm working with, they tried that one as well.

[00:31:46.400] – Donita
And the same thing, they're like, these sound so simple, but they're so wonderful. They work. So instead of being all serious and being reactive and exploding and fussing and all these things, it's just a different way to connect yourself to your own self and to others through laughter, through smiling. It changes you, and it changes you and it changes the students and the whole environment.

[00:32:17.120] – Steve
You hit the word connections there. Is that the piece in the last chapter that pulls the others together?

[00:32:24.280] – Donita
It’s a very rich one. Debbie, this is her cup of tea right here.

[00:32:30.340] – Debbie
Yeah, this is my cup of tea. And I wanted to say that I guess my drive for that topic of connecting, it really hit home for me and crystallized everything. When my goddaughter, she was just a wonderful little girl. She had some difficult parents and a lot of turmoil in her home life. Now, the three main mentors in her life, her grandmother, she calls her a grandmother, her aunt and me, were all three teachers. And we could not get the help that she needed. She didn’t have one friend at school. She was in the AP classes. She did dual enrollment. She graduated with honors. She was a good girl. She was not in any trouble, but she never had one friend. I think that is such a failure of our schools, especially when you have adults in that child’s life advocating and saying she needs to get connected with other kids and nobody’s doing anything because the teachers were all overwhelmed with other things. And that really motivated me and made me realize we can’t have these ghost students in our schools. The kids that are acting out and misbehaving, they get a lot of attention, and they don’t fall through the cracks so much.

[00:34:08.810] – Debbie
But the ones that are well behaved and performing well, those students can easily be disconnected. And so bringing an awareness to the significance of connecting. We are social beings by nature. And the science tells us, research tells us, that we, as human beings, must be connected to thrive. We cannot be at our best when we’re not connected to other human beings. And how do we do that? For some people, it comes very naturally. For other people, it doesn’t. But for any of us, I’ve always been a very good connector. I love people, and I’ll talk to anybody. I will make friends with anybody. I once had to sit – there were no seats on this bus in Costa Rica, so

I had to sit up by the gear shifter, up by the dashboard of the bus. I made friends. I knew all the whole story of the bus driver, and he had five daughters and no sons. And he said he had a big toilet paper bill with these five girls. And by the end of it, I knew the man's whole life story. And that is how I am. It comes very naturally to me.

[00:35:30.320] – Debbie
But when I joined the John Maxwell Leadership Team and I went through my training, my certification training, that is when this whole concept of connecting, when I started understanding it at a deeper level, I just grew so much as a person and as a person who can help others and add value to others. And I think this is a tremendous easy way that anyone can learn and improve, whether you're already good at it or whether you're not a good connector. Maybe you're somewhere on the spectrum and you have some challenges with social skills. Mostly anyone can improve. And we've seen that… I have a friend that I helped. She's a functional medicine physician, and she started the Autism Foundation, and I served on the board for that. And she started because her own son was autistic. But she learned that even her autistic son, she could help him improve in his social skills and his ability to connect with others. And we worked on that with him over the course of his life. And he's now in his 20s, and he went to college and had roommates and had a college experience. Fun times as a college kid.

[00:36:58.080] – Debbie
So anyone can improve, but it all has to start with awareness. And a lot of times we take things like that, like hope and connecting and our mindset and our purpose. These five things that we have in the book are not rocket science, and they're not things that no one's ever heard of. They're all things that we take for granted and maybe don't always realize their significance and how just tuning in a little bit and making a small pivot. We call them small biggies, that we don't have to throw the baby out with the bathwater and change everything

we're doing. We can just make a small pivot in ourselves and who we are and how we're showing up. And I think connecting is definitely one of those things that there's very small changes that you can make that are going to facilitate a whole different level of connecting with your students, connecting your colleagues, with your parents, your administrators, your school community. And when you can do that, you're just ushering in a whole different culture that's much more conducive to you and your students and everyone to really show up as their best self.

[00:38:24.820] – Debbie
So these five things are really simple, but not simple.

[00:38:29.500] – Steve
So as I came into the conversation, I mentioned that as I looked through your book, I saw an opportunity for coaches and teacher and administrator leaders. So let's wrap us up here knowing that many of the listeners to this podcast are in those roles. So while I could tackle your book as a teacher, finding opportunities for myself or a group of teachers working through it together, it seems to me that you lay out many open doors for people who are in those coaching, supporting teacher roles to consider which one of these spots might be the area that I'm stepping forward to assist a teacher with.

[00:39:21.740] – Donita
Yes. As we go to conferences and we connect with people, we talk to people, we're finding out that superintendents, principals, front office ladies, counselors, they're all saying they're experiencing burnout, too. So any profession, any title that you have, you need to first work on yourself before you can help others. We're putting in a call out to all sorts of people in education because it's critical. It's a critical time. I think that's one of the things, the reasons why teacher well-being has not been funded and been such a big part of education is people really don't understand that

important impact.

[00:40:17.960] – Steve
We don’t have an understanding of that word well-being. It’s got too shallow an understanding.

[00:40:24.640] – Donita
Yes. We share stories a lot. As you notice in our book, we have teachers talking about their particular issues and then trying the strategies and then their teacher memoir because people connect to other people’s stories because they’ve been there and done that. And so it was, whoa, wow, okay, that was pretty cool. And one thing I want to say before I forget it, when you’re talking about connecting, I’ve just been thinking lately as I’ve been talking to teachers, I was talking to some yesterday. And with the technology we have, all the students online, TikTok, and children have their head in a screen. I mean, pretty soon babies are going to come out, I think, with a screen. A laptop from their belly or something. And I’m not saying those are bad things, but we’ve lost, we’re losing connections. They’re connecting with screens and not real people. And so I think the more that leaders and teachers can stir up this value and let the students experience real connections which they need, it’s going to be better for our children in the future. And so that’s something I wanted to point out. It could be a real game changer.

[00:41:45.040] – Donita
But if we don’t do something, then nothing’s going to happen.

[00:41:48.320] – Viki
Well, and when we’re talking about administration and how this book can apply to them, it’s the same thing we’re asking teachers to do. We’re asking them to model how we want students to thrive. Admin needs to model how they want teachers to thrive. So it’s very important. It’s top down. So if they’re doing this, then their teachers will do it. If their teachers are doing this, then the students will do it.

[00:42:14.840] – Donita
Viki, I love that. That was magical.

[00:42:17.880] – Debbie
Yeah. I think it's really worth noting that these all boil down to leadership. And I think sometimes we think of leadership as a position, and it really has nothing at all to do with position. John Maxwell always says, leadership is influence. It boils down to influence, nothing more, nothing less. And as a teacher, you have a calling and a purpose to make a difference. Well, making a difference is influence. That's what it really is. Yet teachers don't see themselves as leaders, but influence is leadership influencing your kids, making a difference in the lives of students, that is leadership. I think instilling those leadership skills in teachers and helping teachers transform their own self-image as what it means to be a teacher, that they are a leader, that they're a classroom leader, not a classroom manager. And that's the difference between pushing a rope and pulling a rope. Nobody wants to go to work every every day and push a rope when you can be pulling the rope and influencing the students. So these are all ways you do it. You cannot influence anyone without connection. And you can't connect with people and grow your influence if you don't have your mindset in check, if you're not able to be a hope agent, nobody wants to connect with somebody that's a downer.

[00:43:56.000] – Debbie
And bringing them down, we want to connect with people that give us a little boost. Those are what we call hope agents. And people who are disregulated, like that mind-body harmony, that allows you to connect. So all of these things come full circle, and it just becomes part of how you can be your best self and help others be their best self. And that's really at the heart of what our book is about.

[00:44:29.500] – Donita
And Debbie, I'd like to just add one little thing to that. So

the hope science, neuroscience says that our brains are primed to follow people who have high hope levels. So in one of my workshops, I have a mother duck and little ducklings following. So just what you're saying and what Viki said is all so true, and it's backed up by neuroscience.

[00:44:55.000] – Steve
Well, I want to close this out with connecting. What I was looking for the best way for listeners to be able to connect with the three of you. I had a chance to jump on the bestquesters.com website. Is that the easiest way people can find all three of you there, find out more about your book?

[00:45:18.740] – Debbie
It's actually bestquesters.net But yes, we have a website, and that's a great way to connect with us. We also have a LinkedIn LinkedIn page, a business page. It's bestquestors on LinkedIn. We have Instagram and Facebook. I don't think we're on X, are we, ladies? I don't think we are. We have a goal of getting on TikTok because like we said, we always have to be going. We're not TikTokers yet, but we're making that one of our goals for 2026 so that we can connect with more people.

[00:46:04.300] – Steve
We'll put the bestquesters.net into the podcast lead-in, as well as a link to your book and make it easy for folks to find.

[00:46:14.220] – Debbie
Thank you.

[00:46:14.600] – Steve
Thanks so much for spending this time with us.

[00:46:17.820] – Donita
It's been wonderful. Thank you, Steve.

[00:46:19.520] – Debbie
Thank you so much.

[00:46:22.600] – Steve [Outro]
Thanks for listening, folks. I’d love to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley, or send me questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.