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Living A Life of Significance

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Living A Life of Significance Interview

When considering the different people I could interview, Dr. John Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A. immediately came to mind. Dr. Dorsey is a psychiatrist and the founder and executive director of Project Horseshoe Farms which is a nonprofit organization that works with students, mostly between college and medical school, to provide an opportunity for them to learn about community involvement. They work with children, adults with mental illness, and elderly people within schools, nursing homes, housing programs, and in the community. It is truly amazing what Dr. Dorsey has managed to do for a single community. I have always found his work so inspiring and think he is a great example of a person who lives a life of significance. Since I am planning to major in psychology, I knew that he would be the perfect person to talk to. I interviewed Dr. Dorsey in the courtyard of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church where we are both members. He was able to tell me about how he got to where he is today and some great advice on how he has managed to find a life of significance.

Dr. Dorsey has held many different jobs before finding his current work path. For his first job, he worked in a fast-food Mediterranean restaurant and made a dollar an hour at fourteen years old. He also worked as a valet Parker and a teller at a bank in high school. After high school, he went to Pomona College which is a small liberal arts school in California. Dr. Dorsey was not set on a certain career path and did not really know what he wanted to do when he first entered college. Both of his parents were psychiatrists, so he was considering going into the medical field. He took some science classes like biology but was not very interested. He ended up taking a neurosciences class that caught his attention and really interested him. “I think the issue was that the sciences seem very much detached since I am such a people-oriented person. Neurosciences was just really an interesting intersection between the basic sciences and the humanities and social sciences, and I think that is the area where I am most interested” (Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.).

He ended up majoring in neurosciences and went to medical school at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He thought about being an orthopedic surgeon since he was interested in sports. However, when he did his clinical rounds, he found that he really liked psychiatry and was really interested in the mind. Dr. Dorsey explained a piece of advice that was told to him that really stood out to me:

“I got good advice along the way. When I was in medical school, one of the attendings told me to not pick my specialty based on whether you had a good experience, because that could be affected by whom you work with and other things like that. She said to pick something that, if you were on a deserted island, you could get one journal, and that is the only journal you can read. If you get excited to read it over and over, that tells you where your intellectual interest is. Also, pick something where you want to fight the hardest for your patience and the people you work with, and that will tell you where your heart is. If you can find something that is really intellectually interesting and resonates through your heart and your commitment then you will do really well. Psychiatry was that for me.”

I feel that this is a great way to really narrow down what career path truly interests us and could help many people discover the best career path for them as an individual.

Project Horseshoe Farms is based in Greensboro, Alabama, which is my hometown. Greensboro is very small with fewer than 3,000 people, so I have always been curious how he found the town, being from California. When I asked him about this during the interview, I found his story very fascinating. He finished his residency and got a job at a university in southern California and was running a program called Assertive Community Treatment Program. They would go out into the community working with housing programs and homeless people to help them live on their own and give them psychiatric care. “I really liked that I was living near the beach. But, I have always done better, even as a little kid, in more personal, smaller environments, so I started to explore the idea of maybe being in a smaller town where my work would be more connected to where I lived” (Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.). He ended up running into a man from Jackson, Alabama at a conference in San Diego. The man told him that if he wanted to live in a small town, then he should move to Alabama because there are plenty of them.

He got a job at Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa. His goal was to get himself grounded and figure out where he wanted to be. He wanted to work part-time to do this and to be able to explore the state. “I drove across the country to figure out I lost my job because they found someone who wanted to work full time. I was kind of lost because I did not have a job and did not know anyone here. I got here right in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and my first thing to do was to find a place to live which was hard because everyone was coming up from New Orleans” (Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.). He went to Moundville, a small town between Tuscaloosa and Greensboro, to buy a mobile home, and they directed him to Greensboro. “I came down here, and it was amazing how people were helping me find housing. It was this really cool mix of a rich, complex, small southern town combined with young people doing interesting things. I settled down roots here seventeen years ago, and that’s how I ended up here” (Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.). His story is so fascinating to me because, even though his original plan did not work for him, he was able to pick himself up and find a completely different path that allowed him to not only be successful, but also very happy and content. “It’s funny. I think a lot of times we think we have a plan. Even when you think you know what you are doing, you don’t really. It kind of unfolds in ways that there is no way to predict, and I think that was an important lesson in my life. You go to a place, and you do the best that you can to hope it works out” (Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.).

I feel that a lot of people find it difficult to juggle work with the family, friends, activities, and interests in their life that they enjoy. I asked Dr. Dorsey how he manages to do this. “People talk about work-life balance. I have actually read and heard a lot of people talk about how it is not really about balance, it’s about choices. You have to prioritize and know that every choice you make has a trade-off.” We all have to make sacrifices in our lives to do the things we love and to be successful. Though we need to find a good balance, we should also be aware that we have to be honest with ourselves and have to figure out our priorities.

When having experienced roadblocks and failures in his life, Dr. Dorsey has always tried to learn from those incidences. The main setbacks that he could think of involved Horseshoe Farms and learning how to be a leader for the organization. According to Dr. Dorsey, “Leadership is something that can be taught, but it also has to be learned through experience. I think it relates to context and relates to what organization or group you are leading. Some of the areas that were challenging were the things that I did not really like and the things that I had to reflect on and say, ‘What is it that I need to do better to avoid or make sure that this doesn’t happen again?’” An important part of developing as a person is always working to improve ourselves, and Dr. Dorsey is a great example of someone who is constantly working to be the best person he can be and make Horseshoe Farms a better organization.

To find a successful career that you love, Dr. Dorsey had a few suggestions. “At a certain point, maybe through your twenties, you need to experiment with different things and find what things resonate with you and what things don’t. But, you have to take your experiences and think about how you can use the talents you were given and your interests to pull them together towards doing something that is worthwhile and has a meaningful purpose.” Finding what you love to do is a key part of being happy in life, and taking time to experiment to find what you are truly passionate about is so important. “For some people it’s family, some it’s professions, some it’s a calling to serve, but once you figure it out you have to figure out how to organize your life towards effectively pursuing that purpose.”

Works Cited

Dorsey, M.D., M.B.A, John. Personal Interview. 25 September 2022.