



## **Learning and Healing**

An interview with Renee Poindexter  
on Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom

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## Renee Poindexter - Learning and Healing

Tom Masters: Hello everybody, and welcome back to another episode of **Back In Control Radio** with Dr. David Hanscom. I'm your host, Tom Masters and our guest today is **Renee Beth Poindexter, founder of Living the Potential Network and author of the book entitled Living the Potential: Engaging the Wisdom of our Youth to Save the World.**

David Hanscom: Thanks, Tom. Renee Poindexter is somebody I've gotten to know over the last six months. We're working on a collaborative effort on nutrition, but I want to talk to her today about creating change. She's a founder of the Living the Potential Network. She's an author of a book called **Living the Potential: Engaging the Wisdom of our Youth to Save the World.** And the kids are one of the main driving forces in my particular efforts with chronic pain because chronic pain has a terrible effect on children, families and trying to give kids the tools to cope with some of the things around them is really critical.

I'd like to welcome Renee to our show.

Renee Poindexter: Hi, David. Good to be with you.

David Hanscom: Nice to see you. We've been working together through a nutritional network, looking at very well researched data on the influence of nutrition on chronic pain, inflammation, wellness, energy, et cetera, which introduced me to your work. Of course, nutrition is part of your book, **Living the Potential**, tell us how you started focusing on nutritional influences on the body and mind. I know you were a high school English teacher starting out.

Renee Poindexter: Okay. Well, thank you, David. I was not your typical English teacher. I taught school in Ohio and I was this out of the box thinker from the very beginning, and I really taught from a perspective of relationship, because learning comes through relationships. And I had six classes and four preps and 180 students. It was drill team advisor, senior class advisor, my day was full. And over six years, I just noticed that a lot of kids—I had advanced, what they call *baccalaureate learners*, and I also had kids about ready to drop out of school. And they were all segmented into different groups. I realized that everybody was jumping through hoops—the ones who wanted to excel were doing everything to get straight A's. There's a lot of pressure, a lot of anxiety, and the kids who weren't doing so well were labeled, and they were bullied—there were all kinds of problems.

And I kept thinking, **"There's something wrong with this environment that's encouraging these behaviors. I wonder what we could be doing differently,"** but no one else, none of the other teachers and none of the administrators were questioning the system. So I left after about six years, and I thought there must be a better way. And as a result, I got involved in business, mostly business development and marketing, and I worked in five or six different industries from healthcare (one big one that really woke me up), as well as financial services, technology, and construction. I started to see how business gets things done. But when I was in the healthcare system, I was working for a company that

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manufactured life support systems. So I was in oxygen systems, ventilators, cardiopulmonary docs are my specialty.

This was occurring simultaneously with changes to *fee for service*, when doctors could spend as much time with their patients as they needed, turning it into *managed care*, in which the whole healthcare system fell under the control of the insurance industry and the pharmaceutical industry. And I went, "This feels familiar," because when I think back on the education system, the issue was the control of the teacher's union, the publishing houses, and today it's the testing, the multibillion dollar testing industry. I became aware that I was a systems thinker. I was recognizing two very broken systems in our society, and after my time in healthcare, I decided to move to Oregon and create a learning community model with the charter school movement. Unfortunately back in 1995, the charter school bill didn't pass, so I started to look around for ways in which to partner with other holistic conscious learning models.

Renee Poindexter:

And I found one out of Canada, which at the time was called the **Wonder Tree Foundation for Natural Learning**. Well, now we call ourselves a **Transformative Learning Foundation**, and I'm the chair of that foundation. The book I wrote is about a group of kids out of Vancouver, Canada who started a company when they were all 10 years old. *They had learned from age five how to manage and grow their own learning environment as project managers. They learned how to work as a team.* They were just getting into HyperCard and the Macintosh computer when it was coming out, and *they were programming all their own learning.* They were getting written up in the newspaper, and one day BCHydro, the big utility there, read about what these kids were doing and said, "*Let's have these kids work with us. We want to design a game that teaches energy conservation.*"

They got back to the kids. The kids treated them like, "Hey, let's project manage this. Let's put up the Gantt charts. What do you need?" And they were going, "Oh my God, these kids are amazing." So they wrote a check for \$75,000 right on the spot and the kids took about a year to design a game.

I got to be part of that project, and what I saw was that kids are more capable than the system allows them to be. And that learning really unfolds through curiosity and discovery and when they are engaged and knowing that they're part of something that makes a difference, they bring forward their strengths, their skills, and they get stuff done. So teachers then become like mentors and guides on the side, rather than the sage on the stage.

Kids are more engaged and there's no bullying. There's no anxiety. The whole idea of learning being fun is alive and well. So that's how I got to creating **Living the Potential**. Right now, this book is a calling card, **Living the Potential: Engaging the Wisdom of our Youth to Save the World**. It's got five steps, a five course outline on how to create an organic, natural learning environment whether you're in a company, whether you're in a school or another kind of organization. That's how I got where I am right now.

David Hanscom: This is what you do. This is pretty much your full time work now.

Renee Poindexter: When people ask me what I do, I say, **"I help people bring all of who they are to everything they do and get paid to be themselves."** And part of the process is creating these *conscious learning communities, learning organizations*, in which people like you, with your amazing awareness about how the body can rebuild and repair and the importance of emotional wellbeing, is transforming the way people look at healthcare. Your book, **Back In Control**, is a fabulous paradigm shift. ***You're a paradigm shifter, I'm a paradigm shifter, and I just want you to know that no big change happens without wellness at the center.***

David Hanscom: Right. I mean, the thing about chronic pain is ***you don't actually solve chronic pain because your attention is on the problem, not on the solution.*** And so you have to look forward and actually move towards what you want your life to look like. Can you tell the audience and me what a learning community looks like? ***If you have a group of people who want to make a change, how do you actually make that happen? What do the process look like at the end of it? How do you get short of consensus? How do you get that moving forward?***

Renee Poindexter: Okay, great question. Well, the first thing is, if you think about it, the student is the customer. The patient is the customer now, right? I offer *a framework for the organic learning model for life*. We had a student panel for our "garden experiment" *We called it the garden experiment because it's an organic learning model for life*. For more, go to [www.livingthepotential.com](http://www.livingthepotential.com). We started off with a group of students, a panel; there were two high school graduates, two college graduates, and a young man who was being funded to go to college by a major corporation that really wanted him to be on their cyber security framework.

So I interviewed them and asked them what was working well for them in their education? What wasn't working well? What did they feel their gifts were that were never really able to be unfolded in the system itself? And what were their biggest concerns that they're looking at when they look at the world that they're inheriting? And what did they want the adults in the room to hear? So we took pages of notes, like flip charts on the wall and the adults in the room, and the adults in the room were parents, teachers, entrepreneurs, business executives, nonprofit executives. It was a collection of people who are concerned about the future and how the youth can actually grow their leadership. And what we learned is that these kids have the ideas of the system that needs to change what they needed for themselves.

They would like schools to be open 24 hours a day. You'd be able to pick the mentors they want to work with and be able to do projects that matter. Be able to bring their skill sets, be able to build portfolios and their two primary issues that they were most concerned about because the day was a workshop. And we said, what are your two main issues? And we listen to them for 45 minutes. ***They said, "We're concerned about climate change," and they said, "We're going to change it to climate survival. We're concerned about climate***

**survival.**" And then the other one was about community bonding and belonging; isolation and polarization within society is not the world they want inherit. So those are the two issues. So the rest of the day we took the framework and we worked out kind of brainstormed in workshops the next step for both of those key issues.

One was cultivating those fertile seeds and what kind of fertile learning environment do we need to address these two issues? The next one was how do we cross pollinate domains? In other words, what is business and technology and healthcare, all of the different domains that are normally separate, how do we align them together to solve these issues? The next one was regenerative systems for long-term change for in sustainability. What are the systems that need to change? And then the last one was, what does technology have to do with it? And I call it the solar technology. So we **workshopped** all of these things, and the kids had the answers, and the adults worked together with them. **It was intergenerational learning at its best.**

That's what a learning community is. And at the end of it, the kids were like, "I'm seen and heard." Some of them at the beginning had no hope. **They were thinking, "What kind of world are we even inheriting? We don't have a chance," but when the intergenerational learning energy came together, they were amazed.** Your work with the DOC Project and a few other things that you talk about here on your podcast fits into the category of **regenerative systems**. And that's the place where I believe that people start to look at wellness differently. That's how I tie in the Univera work because I coach people into recognizing that their body is a vehicle; they can integrate mind, body, spirit, and heart in the work they want to bring to the world. And everyone has a soul calling. It matters whether or not they are in an environment that will help witness that for them. So I hope that answers your question.

David Hanscom:

Well, it does. You pointed out something I hadn't thought about specifically before. I think one of the biggest factors in our societal disruption is simply that medicine has become a business. And **the number one factor that helps people heal is to be heard, time with the patient.** I actually quit my spine surgery practice because of this. We were spending 15 minutes to half an hour with the patient **on the first visit** to come to major decisions on 10-12 hour surgeries. And then the success rate of back fusions for pain, for instance, is a dismal 20%. The work you're doing and I'm doing are on similar trajectories to help people feel safe and calm down. The body's chemistry changes and takes us from stress chemicals to oxytocin, the love drug, and dopamine, the reward drug.

As you cause the body chemistry is shift, and again, nutrition has a big part to do with this also, you just feel better. And when you feel better, you're more creative, more productive, and life starts moving forward, whereas if you're always constantly fighting anxiety and frustration and you're upset, your body chemistry is way off. I'm excited about your work in a school system and I know we probably will do another podcast on the school system, but you wrote a website post called *School or Prison: What's the Difference?* A lot of kids want to

be at school, but a lot of them don't. If you're being bullied, you certainly don't want to be there. There's no way of really stopping that process because it's so much below the teacher's radar. So you're forced to go to situation where you're treated badly every day. How does that make our society better? It doesn't.

Renee Poindexter: Exactly. ***I don't think enough people question how learning happens.*** The basis of our school system in the early days is based on the Prussian army and it's the idea of we have to stuff all this information over 14,000 hours in people, because if we don't do that, they won't be successful. The problem is there's no meaning making in the stuffing process. So if there's no natural curiosity that drives the learning process, like project based learning.

These kids needed to design a game that taught energy conservation, so they had a mind map everything that's related to that. And with technology, you can do all kinds of animations and tools. You actually can build things. It demonstrates your thoughts and you do it in teams of people just like in the real world. And they learn their social skills. I actually have an assessment that when you go to my website, you'll learn how you can figure out your core essence of how you're wired. This is for everybody, and it's not your behavior, it's not your personality. I've done this with fifth graders all the way up to 80 year olds and people go, "Wow. If I would've known this when I was younger, I would have designed my life completely differently."

David Hanscom: Quick question, I'm on your website right now, which part of the website, you said there's a spot on your website where you actually tell how you're wired or figure out how you're wired?

Renee Poindexter: It's called the ***Core Value Index***, and it's part of my website [www.reneebethpoindexter.com](http://www.reneebethpoindexter.com) as a coach and a consultant. You can go to the website and look at the ***Living the Potential Change Maker Course***, and you'll see us *trusting the seeds of change*. During that course, ***people learn how to bring who they are, the real essence of who they are, to their life.*** And you know what, David? What comes up is a lot of trauma because so many people realize, ***"Oh my gosh—I never got to be the real me. I was so busy trying to prove to other people that I was valuable or that I could be what they wanted me to be, I never was me."*** And then they start to realize, "I can't do that to my kids." And if they're teachers and parents, this is what you got to do. ***Cross-pollinating the domains of teachers and parents working together, because I don't think the school system can change on its own.*** It's a societal mandate for us to create a new model. ***And that's including parents and teachers working together where the kids have a voice, just like you said, for people to be heard is so important for healing.***

David Hanscom: I'd like to point out one thing, a couple of things. One of them is that I always remind parents how old Alexander the Great was when he started to conquer the world—he was but 13 years old.

I actually did this with my own child. I sat down for a couple of hours, and just thought about what I knew when I was 13. I knew enough to take care of myself and that changed the way I related to my child in a huge way. ***Can you give us some concrete things that we can do personally to start understanding who we are, who our authentic self is?*** How maybe we access some of your resources, and ***what are some of the takeaway things that we can actually put into action today?***

Renee Poindexter:

Thank you for that great question. I think the ***first step is to take a look in the mirror and recognize that you are a unique being. There's no one else like you.*** And that if you really did some personal exploratory writing, reflective writing, to allow questions like: *Who am I? Why am I here? What's my soul's calling?* Just ask the question. You don't have to have the answer. *Just ask the question and put pen to paper and see what comes out.* The ***second step is go out in nature and if you have a family, take your children with you, play in nature, get on the ground, do stuff, hug a tree,*** recognize that the natural world is constantly changing and unfolding and that there's a system to it.

And then the ***third thing is to recognize that your body is an amazing vehicle.*** Your heart is beating right now. You're breathing. Your eyes see the world. ***There's so much depth to who we are as beings.*** And I think as we're in a new year and the new decade is who am I? What do I love? And what's the best use of my time right now? What are the issues that I'm most concerned about? Who else cares about this?

The thing I would suggest, if you're open, is to come and check out ***Living the Potential***, our ***Change Mastermind*** program that we've got going. We have ***Trusting the Seeds of Change***. I'd love for you to be a part of it because it's for parents, teachers, entrepreneurs, young people, it is intergenerational learning. And what we're doing is clarifying our unique contributions. ***We're identifying our conditioned default programming and assumptions that we need to release and forgive. We're leveraging and maximizing our strengths. And then we're learning how the love the change in the people we work with. Peak systems will change, as you know; systems will change when people change. So let's be the change you want to see.***

David Hanscom:

I agree. They just have to start from the ground up. And I want to go back to the first part of our conversation where you pointed out there's two factors. One of them you pointed out was that people are socially isolated, and by creating these networks, of course you engage with people. And there's a study from Cigna done about three years ago on 20,000 people. They surveyed the entire country. They found out that 53% of Americans are socially isolated. And what you're talking about on this system is people working together, being creative. And when you're creative and moving forward, it can make your body chemistry optimize, you just feel better and you act better.

All of us, not just the kids, are upset about the reality of our planet not surviving. Most people want to know what can I do to help? My thing is that

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each one person has to change. It's all you can really change is yourself. And it does make a difference to people right around you. And if enough people in the ground floor can change, things start to really change on a systems basis. It's not going to come from the top down. But so I like your concepts about networking, collaboration, creativity. You mentioned that on January 21st, you have a course [inaudible 00:22:35] you starting, and could you tell us what that course is?

Renee Poindexter: Sure. It's called **Trusting the Seeds of Change**. And we're going to meet once a week for seven weeks and meet 90 minutes and online and using a Zoom platform. It's very simple. And the first course is people are going to be able to clarify their unique contribution. They're going to get connected to other people who have unique contributions. There'll be some collaboration. Ultimately over the project, over the courses, as people design the projects that they want to bring to their community and leveraging their gifts and talent to do it, and they learn how to live from a hope rather than despair. Because the bottom line is the answers are in the room if we're asking the right questions. This is a powerful time for change, and I'm optimistic, I'm very optimistic that we can create and design a better world together.

David Hanscom: I agree. I mean, look at the course of human history. It's based mostly on power and control. But if you look at the way we evolved from homosapiens without much consciousness who developed language, we still are really run by our behavioral patterns, which are about survival. And you look at human structure in general, it's about power and control and big hitters, et cetera. Democracy is a relatively new, fragile experiment, but there's a lot of power behind it. People understand that each person is unique and equal, even though we don't always act that way. I do think the efforts you're putting forth represent an evolution to the next stage of the human experience.

Renee Poindexter: Thank you.

David Hanscom: Well, but we either make this jump or we don't.

Renee Poindexter: Exactly. ***The youth today are seeing Greta Thunberg on the cover of TIME magazine and it says youth power.*** It's like, we have the answer. It's a matter of what are the questions and we don't need to hold the teenagers back in these holding tanks because society's not ready for their contribution. For me to bring their contributions sooner rather than later, that's why cross pollinating the domains with entrepreneurial businesses that go, "I've got a creative idea. How do we work together? Who has got juice on this idea?" And then we create those networks and projects and get them funded where youth are involved. So it's a very exciting time. I really saw what happened with a group of kids when they were 10. And they designed a game that taught energy conservation and every one of them turned out to be a healthy, thriving entrepreneur. They're now in their thirties. So I've got a good example of how this works.

David Hanscom: Right. Well, the bottom line is really creative. I mean, we talk about awareness and when you're angry, I have a little saying, if you take the word reactive, in



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other words, when you're anxious or frustrated, you're reactive, right? And so anytime you're reactive, take the letter C out of the middle of the word reactive when you get the word creative. You have to see first or become aware first before you actually make some choices. When you're reacting only, you have no choice; you're just trying to survive. If you're finding anxiety, you're finding anger; that's the antithesis of awareness. Awareness is the first step in creativity. ***What excites me about your project is that people want to create a better future, but they don't necessarily have the structure and the skills to do that.***

Renee Poindexter: Exactly.

David Hanscom: You're teaching them those skills and giving them a structure. Going back to the social isolation factor is that 53% of Americans are socially isolated. Emotional pain and physical pain are processed in the same part of the brain. People who are socially isolated develop the exact same symptoms as people in chronic pain. It is chronic pain being that isolated. And so things that bring people together to collaborate as opposed to working and/or living solo is a huge, huge contribution.

Any final thoughts, Renee, on what you're doing? I'm very excited about your project.

Renee Poindexter: Yeah. Well, here's the thing that... It's so amazing that we're in conversation, in collaboration, because I always imagine holistic healing and holistic learning coming together. And in the middle of it, the concentric circles and in the middle of it, that's aware, conscious humanity thrives, and it's like they go together. And then systems change when people change. I love all your stories of people. I've never had back surgery. I was almost scheduled for it, but I realized that it was emotional on my end. I did the writing that you talk about in your book, and I realized that the regenerative quality of food and how we move and all the aspects of how we think, the whole holistic whole person approach, when we get into the driver's seat of owning our health and wellbeing and purpose, in community, we thrive as humanity. I'm excited to be a part of it. I'm excited to be working with you on multiple projects. I thank you so much for having me on your show today.

David Hanscom: Well, thank you very much for being on the show. I do see a few future shows coming up because we are the same track from different perspectives. I appreciate you being on the show.

Renee Poindexter: Thank you.

Tom Masters: I'm your host, Tom Masters, and I'd like to thank our guest Renee Beth Poindexter for being on the show today and sharing her fascinating insights about the power of collaborative learning networks. I want to remind our listeners to return next week for another episode of **Back In Control Radio** with

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Dr. David Hanscom, and in the meantime, be sure to visit the website [www.backincontrol.com](http://www.backincontrol.com).

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**Notes:** The original transcript of this episode of Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom has been edited for readability.