Introduction to Dr. Stephen Sideroff

All right, everybody, welcome back. Reversing Heart Disease Naturally 2.0 Summit is underway again. And you remember him last year. Hopefully you were at our first summit.

Dr. Stephen Sideroff beaming in. I'm in Michigan. He's in Los Angeles. He is a big Kahuna. And he was really, really well received last year. So get your notepad out and you're going to write some really important stuff.

Dr. Stephen Sideroff, I'm going to spell it S I D E R O F F, internationally recognized psychologist, executive and medical consultant and an expert in resilience, optimal performance addiction, neurofeedback and stress management.

He's a professor at UCLA. Founder and former clinical director the Stress Strategies program of UCLA/Santa Monica Hospital former Clinical Director of Moonview Treatment and Optimal Performance Center He has an absolute amazing book, “The Path: Mastering the Nine Pillars of Resilience and Success” I've read it. It's been wonderful.

A Bible of living in balance and spirituality and probably most of us right now need to get that book if we don't have it already. I do have it. So rest of you, get off your duffers and order the book.

The Path. Dr. Sideroff, thank you for joining us again. Joel it's my pleasure to be here. And I believe when we chatted last year and I have the pleasure, as I just mentioned you, of following your very, very helpful post on social media.

You also were close to another book. How's how's that going? Well, it's going very well. Interestingly enough, I've finished another book, but I've decided to actually revise and bring up to date my original book as it's now about eight years in in press.

And so that book is going to be released in June. And as of next week, it'll be up on Amazon for people to preorder. Wow. All right. Good timing. Excellent.

And people will enjoy.

Why Stress Accelerates Aging

So, you know, in this summer, we talk a lot about Reversing Heart Disease in nutrition. And we have had a wonderful conversation about Reversing Heart Disease in sleep, Reversing Heart Disease in fitness with certain athletes and instructors and Reversing Heart disease in hormones and on and on.

But we haven't really tackled stress per se. We haven't recognized the roles. So. Talk a little bit from your very many years of expertize. Why should the audience care about what stress is, how they can monitor it, what impact it has in their arteries, their heart, their sexual health?

And and then we'll have to get some clues what they like to do about it. Yes, sure. Well, you know, last year during this past year, I've done a number of talks on longevity and factors that impact longevity.

And in the field of longevity, we talk about the variously labeled 9,12 or even 14 hallmarks of aging factors that are significant in terms of what causes aging.

And when I give my talks on stress, I identify stress as the master hallmark of aging because it impacts all the others and stress throws the body out of balance.

It's almost like if you think of a car that is no longer in tune and has to work harder to the same amount of work, and when it starts to go up a hill which we could equate to stress, it has to work even harder.

More waste product, more exhaust. And we can think of this happening as well in the body that the body works more, works harder when we're under stress.

Because what the how does the body prepare for stress? It mobilizes for fight or flight. So every little cell in the body becomes a its own factory producing energy, using up resources of the body, producing waste products in intercellular space.

And so it's creating more wear and tear on the body. So it's for these reasons that it's so important to get a handle on, to get a handle on stress. Other factors that are also important is it impairs cognitive functioning.

So when we're under stress, the brain has a tendency to shift from the cortex, most advanced part of our brains, down to the more primitive levels, because we go into survival mode.

And when we do that, we lose some access to the cortex, prefrontal cortex, our creative ability, our behavior becomes more stereotypical. Many people find that their they get cloudy, cognitively cloudy.

So, again, stress is a factor that everybody should be having a lot, putting it putting a lot of attention into how you deal with it now. I mean, that was a masterful overview of why we should pay attention.

You know, people have a sense when they're stressed, they have an ill feeling. But, you know, we're in the generation of wearables and we've got to quantify it.

Is there anything you use your clients a wearable an app, phone app that puts a number to it or we should just, you know, use our intuition and assess how stressed we are.

So when you bring that up, which is a very good question, I think in terms of awareness. So a wearable is one way of becoming more aware of what's going on in our bodies, which is always very important.

I, I wear a ring that monitors my physiology, but I also have other devices, biofeedback devices that I can literally put on my ear lobe that monitors my heart rate patterns.

Tracking Stress with Wearables and HRV

And I could monitor that and go through a relaxation exercise and see if I'm going in the right direction or wrong direction. And it serves as a as a teaching tool as to how well I'm going into a place of balance.

But I think the overall issue is our intention to be aware of what's going on in our bodies throughout throughout the day, because we're bombarded by stressful experiences moment by moment.

And not only that, we'll deal with the stress. And before we give our bodies the opportunity to recover, to be in balance, we then look for the next stressful experience to deal with to it, to address.

If we have if we have a stressful, difficult childhood, then we're conditioned to expect danger. And that magnifies our focus on danger, a focus on threat in our bodies and our brains don't gamble.

If there's any possibility of danger, it shifts into that fight or flight mode. So can we use so many patients? Ask me about their heart rate variability because they do have a watch or a band or a ring.

There's also a patch actually you can wear on your heart that monitors your heart rate variability. Is that a physiologic marker that people can use and track to assess and then, you know, hopefully improve upon their stress?

Definitely heart rate variability training is a very useful way of literally bringing the two branches of your nervous system sympathetic activation, parasympathetic recovery into balance.

That's what it's really designed to do. In fact, right now I'm training the clinical staff at UCLA who work with their clients how to do it for themselves, but then how to do it for their clients.

So there are optimal protocols for helping get into this place of balance. For example, Joel, if you breathe at approximately six breaths per minute, you bring into alignment the number of physiological patterns in the body that facilitate this balance.

So you can literally be training your nervous system into going into this balance much better. Using the device and using it as a biofeedback tool, you can detect moment by moment when you're moving in the right direction or not, and that becomes a learning protocol for getting better and better at optimal heart rate variability, which is variously referred to as coherence.

That's where when you breathe in your heart rate speeds up. When you breathe out, your heart rate slows down in that rhythm is a sign of coherence or optimal, optimal balance.

Right. So it sounds I think we have the inside track here that your experience and relatively a fan of heart math perhaps. Yes. Yes. I used. You know, those that are listening and aren't familiar one of the wearables and devices you can use to assess stress and actually a tool you can use to monitor, follow up and lower your physiologic markers of stress is called heart math.

It's available. It's not expensive.

Breathing, Coherence, and Daily Practice

It has years of use and research and something I share with you as being a fan of, because I think in today's world, we we need a tool, you know, and again, some of us need to see psychologists and get biofeedback.

Some of us need simpler tools at home that are perhaps usable almost every day at work and the rest. So art math isn't the only one, but I think it probably has as much research as anything else.

Yeah, it does. Let me add one very interesting fact about when you do heart rate variability training and that's that if you if you think about something positive in your life, if you think about someone in your life that you have gratitude toward, if you focus on love and positive emotions, you enhance that optimal rhythm that I was just talking about.

On the other hand, if you are frustrated or angry and having regrets and negative emotional states, your pattern becomes chaotic. And so we we see through this process a direct link between our emotions and our physiologic magical state.

It's fascinating, but it's very important because it tells us that there are physiological dangers to negative emotional states. And if you are experiencing anger, I mean, it's a normal reaction, but you want to make sure you work through it and let go of it as quickly as you can.

I've heard a lot of people I think you're going to be capable of answering this question, as you know, say to me, Doc, what's the big deal? I took transcendental meditation training.

I tried to do it 20 minutes twice a day, but I figured if my math is right, 1440 minutes a day and 40 minutes don't really cut it. And I know you talk about healthy neurogenesis, so how does a habit, whether you use your heart math for ten or 20 minutes a day or your transcendental meditation or box breathing, hey, know you can't do it all day long, but how does a habit of 2040 minutes a day, 30 minutes a day translate around the clock?

Yeah, that's a very good question. And in fact, I do get that question quite often. It's like, hey, I'm stressed throughout the day, so what if I relax for 15, 20 minutes?

I'm going to go right out and get stressed again. Well, you know, if you want to build muscles, you're not lifting weights 24 hours a day. You're you're lifting of weights for 20, 30 minutes is an investment and it's training your muscles.

And here it's the same concept if you're training, for example, your nervous system into a healthier, balanced place. But you're also learning what it takes to go into that state so that it then can translate into being used throughout your day.

If you apply it. So it has the benefit of helping you be better at relaxing so that you can engage the relaxing process whenever you need it. So it's not just the 20 minutes or 15 minutes or you know, I have a lot of people that I work with who have resistance to the process.

And so I say, okay, you know, they'll tell me, you know, I didn't have the time to do it. So I say, Well, do you have 5 minutes to do it? And they'll reluctant, reluctantly say, Yes, I have 5 minutes.

Great. Do 5 minutes a day make a commitment to 5 minutes a day. And what that does is it begins establishing a pattern. It begins establishing a habit.

It begins establishing the notion of going to a relaxation process. And pretty soon people begin to notice, oh, you know, I feel better after those 5 minutes, even though it's only 5 minutes.

So any way I can get people to engage in the process, this is my notion of helping people get on the path. You know, it could feel overwhelming all that we need to do to counteract all the stresses in our lives.

But we all have to start somewhere and we all want to. I encourage people to think about what is optimal. Any time you are working toward the optimal, you're on the path, even if you're still trying to get there.

Okay. So and do you think I mean, are we actually laying down different neurons, different axons, different neural connections?

Neuroplasticity and Rewiring Old Patterns

So a year after a consistent practice of breath or heart math or biofeedback or meditation, are we literally rewiring our brain in a more positive way?

So our brains have tremendous potential for what you're referring to, neuroplasticity, literally the rewiring of our brains. But I like to to say that we have two major forces at our that that we are dealing with on the one hand, there's this neuroplasticity in which we can literally rewire the brain based on engaging in new behavior with new intention.

But juxtaposed, Joel, to that, neuroplasticity are what I refer to as our primitive patterns are old patterns, and these are the lessons of childhood that because they go in very early, their survival learning approaches, they get imprinted in our brains and our brains literally develop based on those childhood lessons.

We're very good when we're born to adapt, adapting, but we adapt to our childhood environment and then to some degree, that ability to adapt gets frozen to that childhood environment.

So we have these two powerful forces and we have to engage the neuroplasticity to ultimately set us free from those childhood patterns. We have to reboot our ability to adapt.

And so it's so important to develop a process where you're doing something every day, such as five or 10 minutes of relaxation to break free of those childhood patterns.

Wow. And I mean, just give us from your perspective, you've counseled so many people. You've taught so many people. I mean, what are some of the outcomes of not that scare the audience a little bit?

If you don't recognize you're stressed and find a tool and apply it to, well, what are some of the consequences? What, you know, kind of a hard focused summit here.

But you can go beyond that if you want to. Know that it's well, it it runs the range. I mean, for some people, the consequences are chronic disease, chronic illness.

From this the dishrag relation of the nervous system that I'm referring to, there are all kinds of potential physical symptoms, illnesses that derive from too much, too much stress and not handling stress properly.

But the pattern that I just referred to affects all of us in our difficulty to break away from the stuck places in our lives, wherever we're at, if we want to get to the next level, we have to break away from some of the lessons of childhood that really hold us back.

Being too self-critical, too self judgmental, and being hard on ourselves. All of those ways of thinking about ourselves and treating ourselves or undermining and will hold us back.

So in my approach, this is where I engage in the process of helping people establish healthier patterns by identifying their internal voice. That could be credit to critical, to judgmental, and then finding a place inside themselves and maybe teeny tiny where they love themselves, where they want good things for themselves.

And I refer to that as their healthy internal voice, healthy internal parent. And the goal is to nurture that and keep coming back to that. And that's a place where you come from love toward yourself, compassion toward yourself, acceptance, support, care and joy.

And so we begin to identify how that positive voice will speak to you. And whenever you're feeling bad, it's because you're giving yourself negative messages, and that's the signal.

Okay, come over here and let's hear from the positive voice juxtaposed to counter and counterbalance what you've been hearing.

Resilience, Longevity, and Biological Age

Now, that's a pretty powerful call to not just focus on your kale salad and your treadmill, but get in touch with your past, get in touch with your president, assess your stress and learn some techniques.

And for those, again, there were listening. We talked a little bit about breathing. We talked a little bit about a tool you could purchase called heart math.

Neither doctor consider offer. I own that company. They've been around a long time. I kind of like their research. It's good. Follow the actress singer of an Instagram and I know there's tips that I look at all the time and read one minute breathing exercises you should not ignore.

So I think we've gained a lot that all people trying to stabilize, reverse and improve their heart condition need to put on the list. I mean, I just give us the last little insight before we take a break.

But in your own life, on a daily or weekly basis, what's your favorite? You have strategies. You know, you've got a full schedule. So what do you do? So it's important to say and let people know that stress is not good or bad.

It's your relationship to stress that's important because there are a lot of good stressors in life. As a result, we all have resistance to dealing with stress, so that's important for people to realize.

So how I deal with it, how I become more resilient in my life is it's always important for me to start my day with a focus and an intention. I don't rely on automatically being able to do that, even though I focus on this in my work all the time because we lose sight of this.

So I start my day with the intention to be more resilient, and I'll typically focus on two or three things for myself to do. Right now, I'm making sure I do 5 minutes of biofeedback every day.

And so that's that's one of the things that that I do. But I encourage people to realize that what I'm asking you to do about becoming more resilient is very doable.

It just is a consistent process of engagement that will lead to success. That's why I've kind of had this construct of the path so that at any one time you can ask yourself the question, Am I on the path or off the path?

And if you're off it, there are simple steps to take to get back on to it. So you want a simple approach but a consistent approach. Steven Sidorov, talking about stress and the hard stress in the life.

And we got just a few more minutes to go, but you made a comment right at the beginning that, you know, a lot of people are interested in longevity. People are inquiring about certain diet strategies, exercise strategies, sleep strategies.

Everybody's inquiring about supplement strategies. But you introduced this topic with a statement that kind of the central path to longevity has to involve resilience and stress management, stress awareness, stress, you know, control.

So take that a little bit in terms of know longevity and our need to focus on stress. Yeah. Thanks, Joel. Right now I'm about to start as a research study.

So, you know, and you may have other guests talking about biological age assessment of biological age. I will be doing a study shortly in which people who have gotten their biological age are going to take my resilience questionnaire.

And so what we're looking the hypothesis and what we're looking for to see if there's a correlation. Do the people who score highest in my model of resilience turn out to be the people who have the slowest eight biological aging in the greatest discrepancy between their biological age and their chronological age, which I expect we're going to we're going to see.

I took my biological age about a year and a half ago, and it came out 20 years younger than my chronological age. And, you know, I do eat right and exercise, but I think a lot of it is how I deal with stress and how resilient I am, because that's what I believe makes the biggest difference in how, you know, we're all we can think of ourselves as instruments, you know, the energy that we use that we metabolize, it all depends on how well our instrument is tuned.

And so when I talk about, for example, a balance between the activation sympathetic branch of the nervous system and the parasympathetic recovery branch, that's an aspect of being tuned.

If you notice tension in your body, that's an indication that on the musculoskeletal level you're out of tune. The better your body is in tune, the better it metabolizes, the better it uses, the most efficient and effectively it uses the energy that we produce and the results that we get.

And so to me, this is a key to why resilience allows our body to function at its best. And when our body functions at its best is less wear and tear and we have the longest longevity.

Wow. If I may ask, it's a technical question. There's a number of tests out there. What did you use to assess your biologic age? So the company that I'm using and that's going to be part of this study is true diagnostics.

Okay. I've done that test to the pace of aging, and I think it's an excellent test, a true age test through diagnostics test, if I remember that one's a little bit of a blood sample.

Some of them are saliva, some are blood. So, yeah, a lot of signs are good. So if one has had a yeah, how does

one enter that study? They get the test and they do it and then they do the resilience scale.

Or you're looking for people who happened to have already done that test like me. I did the true age test. Right? So all the people who have taken already taken the true age test will be invited to participate, I see.

And do a resilience assessment. And there's some statistics on it. They'll you'll get three different resilience questionnaires as well as a questionnaire on on symptoms.

And we'll look at the correlations. Wow. Yeah. Very, very interesting because, you know, we we will hear about Blue Zones and we hear about my good friend, Dr. Valter Longo's research at USC down the road from you and Nir Barzilai in New York doing research.

But, you know, we hear a lot about food and a lot about, you know, other aspects. We don't hear as much about resilience and stress management, you know, for people that are healthy 95, 98, 102 and you know, you don't know if it's something.

They just learn something that's genetic, something that's in their community. But I'm glad you're digging into it. We need. Yeah, well, I will suggest that one of the reasons you don't hear a lot about it in the longevity arena, which you don't, is because we all have resistance to dealing with stress.

And even the people who are studying longevity, I would suggest as ambitious and stood towards stress. And that's part of the reason why it's not a common area of focus.

Yeah, well, thank you for leading the vanguard to make this a part of longevity science because it is an exciting field. So thank you for your time and thank you for your contribution.

And once again, we can go over to the bookseller's. We can get the current edition of The Path. but you also said June 2024, there'll be an updated version, which sounds exciting, but you're giving us a free guide so everybody can start there.

We thank you so much for that. You're welcome. All right. You have a wonderful day, doctor. Thank you. Yeah, the title of the new book that will be available for pre-sale probably next week is The Nine Pillars of Resilience: The Proven Path to Reduce Stress, Increase Vitality, and Slow the Aging Process.

Excellent, excellent. Look forward to that. Thank you so much for writing it. You're welcome. Welcome.