

Dr. Oz Letting Intuition Lead the Way



Michelle Bouchard has worked with nonprofit groups for more than two decades, following her heart and intuition, always looking to connect her passion with purpose. This intuitive lifestyle finally led Michelle to her dream position spearheading a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering America's young adults by giving them the education and motivation they need for health and mental well-being.

"I've heard it said that purpose is where your talents meet the need in the world," Michelle said. "I can honestly say that HealthCorps is my dream job, where all my talents meet up with the need. Plus I now work with a friend I've known since college who is like a brother to me. It's the crossroads of purpose in my life that I've been waiting for."

HealthCorps is a proactive health movement founded by heart surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz. The organization's mission is to fight the obesity and mental-resilience crisis by getting students and communities across the United States to take charge of their health.



Like a Peace Corps for health, HealthCorps is a national health educational/peer-mentoring program up and running in 50 high schools in nine states. This year, the program will impact 25,000 students and 50,000 community members. By 2013, HealthCorps expects to have a presence in all 50 states.

The heart of the program is the HealthCorps coordinators, recent college graduates who defer entry into medical school or graduate health programs to participate in public service through a two-year, full-time assignment at a designated public high school. The coordinators conduct about 10 classes a week and lead after-school and community programs.

Michelle has never been one to turn away from a challenge. “One of my mentors told me once, ‘Never take a job that doesn’t scare you,’” she shared. When she was asked to join HealthCorps as its president, she felt that this was just the sort of position her mentor had talked about.

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“It’s a great joy and privilege to work with Dr. Oz,” Michelle said. “He has the most energy of anyone I’ve ever met. It’s fun, but it’s challenging, working with him. He has set the bar so high for himself and all that he does.”

“When I started, HealthCorps was involved with seven schools with a budget of \$600,000,” said Michelle. “Within the next 12 months, we were at \$3.2 million with 32 schools – an incredible leap.”

Michelle’s experience includes acting, making her no stranger to the experience of appearing in front of a large audience. The scariest stage she’s ever been on, she said, was when she appeared in front of the U.S. Senate last year to speak about national service. Invited by Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, Michelle and Dr. Oz represented HealthCorps as they discussed wellness policy ideas and HealthCorps’ mission and achievements in front of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in March 2009.



Dr. Oz and HealthCorps advocates for policy shifts that put health and physical education back into the core curriculum of the U.S. education system. They target policy shifts that move toward safer environments affecting health (food systems, transportation systems, public space and nature) that encourage and enable people to be more physically active.

“We’re feeling a terrible void in the education system right now, because there is not a lot of health education being taught or physical activity in the schools,” said Michelle. Combining the focus on mental resilience with health and wellness is a unique aspect of HealthCorps’ mission. HealthCorps saw the connection between teen physical and mental health and set out to empower young adults to improve both their physical and mental well-being.

“I think mental resilience is the most important aspect of what we do,” said Michelle. “We are teaching kids to have positive thoughts, to know that they can be agents of change and can make a difference in the world. Change must be embraced.”

HealthCorps’ message, mission and success impressed Oprah so much that the organization has been invited to join her as one of 10 nonprofits to be a beneficiary of O, The Oprah Magazine’s “Live Your Best Life” Walk in May.

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Michelle, a single mother of son Alex Elmaleh, 19, and daughter Liberty Robson, 6, has found that being a parent has given her skills and insight for success in both work and life.

“My greatest challenge in the last 19 years of life is balancing motherhood with my aspirations and purpose driven professional life,” she said.

“Motherhood has helped me become a multitasker. A great talent to bring to the workplace is the ability to balance and multitask,” said Michelle, who also loves to sing opera and get her hands dirty with a little gardening on her terrace in her off time.

“I've had to develop little tactics for balancing work and family that probably drive my staff crazy,” said Michelle, who consistently finds herself working late hours, from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m., to allow her more flexibility during the day.

“You always have to be prepared. Luck is a great thing, but when it knocks at the door, you have to be ready,” Michelle advised. “Dr. Oz considers every interaction in his life as an opportunity,” which she considers a beautiful approach to life.



FIVE INSIGHTS FROM MICHELLE'S PASSION-DRIVEN LIFE

- 1 Live life passionately.
- 2 Sometimes life balance takes creativity. Michelle often works 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.
- 3 Every interaction in life is an opportunity.
- 4 Purpose is where your talents meet the need in the world.
- 5 Never take a job that doesn't scare you.

BY DAWN MENA

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