DAILYGOOD
News that Inspires

Edmund Benson: Constructive Aging, Positivity Cards and More by Awakin Call Editors

Florida businessman Edmund F. Benson, together with his wife Susan, declined to rest on their laurels when their well-earned retirement began. Instead, the energetic and service-committed couple in some ways just began (again) their service journeys during their golden years. They devoted their retirement to establishing the ARISE Foundation in 1986, a global skills-teaching program for at-risk youth. The Foundation has had a remarkable history and impact, from its initial focus on environmental education for young people to now addressing a range of needs for the young, the elderly, and many populations in between. What follows is the edited transcript of an Awakin Call interview with Edmund Benson. You can listen to or read the full interview here.

Rish Sanghvi: Dr. Venkataswamy (Dr.V.) of the Aravind Eye Hospitals, one of the largest eye care networks in the world, didn't start his career until he was 58. Civil rights leader, Mahatma Gandhi, didn't return to India until he was 40. Our speaker today, Edmund Benson, is of similar ilk. He worked 16 hours a day on his business until he was 52, and then during his retirement stage, he began pouring his energy into a myriad of initiatives he began. These initiatives ranged from working with at-risk youth, to environmental stewardship, to constructive aging curriculums, and spanned a spectrum of things one might find themselves passionate about. Thank you, Ed, for being on call today.

Ed: Thank you for having me.

Rish: Let's begin with your childhood. As a child who grew up in the 1930s, you did not have the benefit of a positive home environment. You shared that you often called, "bad news." Tell us a little bit about that experience. Did you view yourself as being an at-risk kid?

Ed: Yes, I did. I was troubled, as they would say. A troubled youth. I wasn't able to communicate properly with my parents. They were older and had health issues and financial issues, and I was the youngest of four children. I actually grew up to be the black sheep of my family, and I think that was all in preparation for the work I was going to do later in life.

Rish: Which, of course, you didn't know at the time. When you turned 15, you enrolled in the Massachusetts National Guard, and then at 16 on to the U.S. Merchant Marine, and then the Army. All these places threw you into the real world where there's no coddling, so to speak. What impact did that have on you? I ask because sometimes that kind of experience can harden your heart.

Ed: Actually, the Merchant Marine taught me a lot. Most of the people at the end of World

War II who were in the Merchant Marine were not very favorable people as far as their futures were concerned. Many of them had received dishonorable discharges from the military, and this was the only job that they could get. So I learned a lot, and mostly what I learned was what not to do. I was very fortunate, as a young person, that drugs weren't as prevalent in society as they are today. But, I did learn how alcohol and anger, and things of that nature caused people's lives to take U-turns. That was a real learning experience for me. The Army taught me a lot of good things about regimentation and setting goals. Overall, it was really good experience.
Rish: And some of that discipline, no doubt, helped you with your business, which you entered when you were 20 or 21. For the next 30 years, you worked 16-hour days, 7 days a week. Then, fast-forwarding 30 years to 1982, - and after experiencing a lot of success with your business, you said, "Okay I'm going to retire." And then, instead of doing the things that most people do when they retire, like golfing, or gardening, or traveling, you and your wife, Susan, decided to spend 100% of your time helping vulnerable children navigate the world. r. Can you tell us why you chose to spend your retirement years in this fashion?

Ed: Well, it wasn't anything that I had planned. It was a kind of evolution. Susan and I had decided to retire in Miami without spending very much time there beforehand. We had homes in Texas and another one in Boston, and when we finally did retire in Miami, we found that the county of Miami-Dade had built the world's largest incinerator about a mile away from our front door. The smell of burning garbage was horrific, and white ash covered the entire neighborhood. One morning, Susan, who was a school teacher and still much too young to retire, said, "Ed, isn't there anything you can do about this stink?" And that was a Call to Arms for me, actually. I spent the next seven or eight years battling to improve that garbage incinerator, or what I referred to in marketing and public relations materials as, "the Miami Monster." I spent a great deal of time taming that monster so that the neighborhood wouldn't have to deal with toxins like dioxin, the deadliest chemical known to humankind, pouring out of its tall chimneys.

Rish: Yes, I was reading about your "Miami Monster" work, and when I first read about it, I thought surely you must have been politically connected to affect that level of change. Because, in retrospect, it seems like a lot has gotten done since you first started. But, as it turns out, you were actually not at all politically connected in any way during that time. You worked from the ground up at the Grassroots level without the benefit of any connections or special access. I believe large-scale garbage disposal like that involves political actors, so how did you mobilize? What did that actually look like when you were starting out as a mob of one?

Ed: I come from a marketing background in business, so I created marketing tools, postcards, and posters, and branded this environmental disaster as "the Miami Monster." I showed what it was doing to the neighborhood, and what toxins were pouring out of the smoke stacks. And I didn't do any of this work in a confrontational fashion. We did picket the facility once, and some of the state representative's elected officials were part of that demonstration. I rented a helicopter with an aerial photographer, and we took pictures of what a horrendous mess the company who had built and designed that facility had made of the environment. We then took enlarged versions of those photos, and made presentations that convinced not only the neighbors, but also the county government, and the State of Florida to sue the county to refit the facility. The county spent over a hundred million dollars retrofitting the facility, and I was asked to direct the task force to oversee this challenge. The board of County Commissioners even sent me to Canada to investigate a company as a replacement of the existing operator. It was a

real honor, and a wonderful experience. In 1990 when the battle to tame the Miami Monster was over the Miami Dade Board of County Commissioners named a street in my honor, Edmund F. Benson Boulevard.

Rish: It strikes me that your style was non-confrontational. Today, we see people, and this includes myself, displaying this righteous, almost justified anger in the face of injustice. How did you come to channel your anger, or whatever you want to call it, into this productive and non-confrontational manner in which you weren't demeaning or ridiculing people? You mentioned that you tend to chip-a-way at the problems or goals until there solved, so, how do view yourself from a non-confrontational standpoint? Tell me more about that.

Ed: Well, I wasn't that type of person growing up, certainly. And, getting by in the Merchant Marines and the Army, you certainly couldn't step backwards all the time. I think you say it perfectly in your publication, "By changing yourself you can change the world." I realized that people don't want to listen to people that yell in their face, or call them names and demean their character. So, I actually changed my inner attitude on a gradual basis so that I was able to become more pleasant person. I changed into someone who you could speak to rationally without flying off the handle . After that, things sort of began moving the way I wanted them to.

Rish: And so how did this work? You retired, and you got involved in this large environmental issue, which was largely based on a call to arms from your wife. How did that work grow into the need to work with at-risk youth? You said that it all kind of happened organically, that it evolved. What did that evolution look like?

Ed: Well, at the time, Susan was teaching school. And I was convinced that bringing recycling to Miami-Dade County would reduce the amount of garbage that was going to the incinerator. So Susan, again being the engine of this team, decided to begin an environmental and recycling group in her classroom. And teachers observed what she was doing and thought it was a great idea. After a while, most of the teachers in the school were teaching their students about environmental issues. So we started with that. Then after a period of time, Susan said to me, "I'm concerned these kids are really at-risk if they bring in their recyclables to the curb outside their homes." Young people were being shot on the streets every day. At that point, we were teaching them what a recyclable was, but we realized if they brought them to the curb, these students could risk getting shot too. We wanted to continue the environmental program and understood we needed to stop the mayhem on the streets. And again, Susan has always been the most motivating force for me. We work together. So we decided we needed to help stop the shooting right away. I could obviously relate to these children because I used to deal with many of the same situations they were dealing with. Thankfully, we were largely able to help because of the contacts I had developed in the county by then. With these connections I was able to go behind bars into the prisons and the juvenile facilities, and ask these kids and adults, "How can we help you avoid making the same mistakes that landed you here again?" Historically, once kids and adults find themselves in the system, they keep reoffending until maybe their mid-20s. So I used their answers to this question to create original lessons. Most had issues with anger, so we started there. And that sort of grew until we had developed programs for youth and training for the staff. Our first challenge was in getting the curriculum to the kids behind bars. So we decided we'd needed to train the guards in the juvenile facilities, facilities in how to teach our materials. We came up with a really interesting training program, and by 2014 we trained approximately 5,000 ARISE life skill instructors.

Rish: I read about that. I also read that, in Florida alone, you had upwards of four million documented hours of life skill lessons.

Ed: Yeah, that’s true.

Rish: And that’s not even a dated number. That was in 2010, and only documented ARISE (your non profit) curriculums. You have also written hundreds of lessons specifically teaching life skills to at-risk youth, and caregivers in the community. I would like to read out some of your book titles and curriculums to give people a sense of your range of topics.
First, there’s a curriculum entitled Prenatal Care, Delivery, and Mental Development." Then there’s, Substance Abuse and Guns with an instruction manual titled, Violence and Conflict, Creating a Positive Outlook, Being Safe. [AC1] Secrets of Success, Self Esteem, Anger Management for Adults, and Health & Hygiene are a few others. [AC2] The thing that I was really struck by is that this curriculum is not just available in the U.S.; it has actually been outsourced to Canada, Australia, England, Jamaica, New Zealand, The Bahamas, Mexico, and a list of other countries. So you and Susan have really poured your heart into this endeavor. Then, on your eightieth birthday, as a gift to yourself, you make this entire curriculum open sourced as part of the Creative Commons of Hundred+ Life Skill curriculum.

Ed: I'm sorry; I missed the last word or two that you said.

Rish: I was just saying that on your eightieth birthday, you gave away the entire curriculum. You made it open source. Yet . . .

Ed: Ok, I understand. What we did with the material we created in the Arise Foundation, which is the same name as our nonprofit foundation. On my 80th birthday, I made it open source gift so it could be translated into any language except Spanish which we had already done. The goal was to translate all the life skills material into many languages.

Rish: What moved you to do that?

Ed: The goal has always been to share. To take our material, thoughts, and lessons that we created, and place it in the hands, hearts, and heads of as many people as possible.

Rish: Thank you. One of the articles I was reading on you mentioned that you don't really have a reverse gear. You said that yourself in a conversation on Wednesday. You either go through something fully, or not at all. And looking at all the work you’ve done, it makes sense. But there also seems to be a certain drive behind your work, and an immense clarity of purpose. This is something that, I think a lot of us struggle with, given our competing priorities, nuances, and fears. Where do you think you get your clarity from?

Ed: Well, I think in the simplest terms, that I just let God work his good will through me. He enables me to do what I'm supposed to be doing during my time on earth. So I'm just following directions.

Rish: And do you find that those directions become clearer when you put yourself in certain environments, or in a certain mindset? I think some of us can wait all our lives without finding any direction at all.

Ed: Well, I don't have a particular place that I go to meditate, however, I do

meditate occasionally. I sort of just tune myself in to be available for directions. I think that's really what people say, when they have a muse. I see myself as a messenger. As a matter of fact, I have a little tuning knob on my desk, and what I've come to do is to tune in when I'm looking for a particular answer. Most often, I think that roadblocks come from not trusting your own instinct, and I am one hundred percent in sync with mine. Being in sync means that that, if I wake up in the middle of the night with a thought, I know where it came from, and it didn't come from me. It came from "out there," and I pay very close attention. Recently, it's mostly been about the topics for the positivity cards, which we happen to love and share on a regular basis.

Rish: Can you share more about the positivity cards? I think it's a beautiful concept that we'd love for folks to hear more about.

Ed: Sure. Let me tell you where it originated from first because that's a fun story. Just soon after Susan and I were married, we attended a conference in Carmel, California. It was the second day of the conference, and we were sitting around a table together during break, when a woman came and handed me a card. The card said, and I get shivers every time I tell this story, that she was a member of the "Man Watchers Association of America." And on the back she wrote, "I find you a very attractive man," and then she walked away. That card lived with me for forty years after that.
Shortly after that incident, we were in one of the juvenile justice prisons, which are hard places to be. The guards are tough, and can be very nasty. They're always looking to find fault with the kids. So I thought, wouldn't it be great if we created cards that positively affirmed kids when they were seen doing something good? So we began handing these cards out to the guards and the kids. The kids weren't allowed to keep them, but they could take them with them when they were released. Understand this, as a kid, I never ever received a compliment, lots of criticism, but never ever a compliment.

Rish: Wow . . .

Ed: So that is why Card #1 resonates with me. And I still hand them out on a regular basis, and they still have the same effect. That quote takes no more time to see the good side of life than it takes to see the bad, and this was a quote by Jimmy Buffett. Well sometimes, I think people liked the Jimmy Buffett quote better than they like the side one , but in any case, it works like a charm. People love it. People hold on to them and will tell me even today, "I still have that card."

Rish: That's amazing.

Ed: And that's just for Card#1. We now have 264 different cards and we even have them designed for every ARISE program. Most are available at http://at-riskyouth.org/arise-store/. (except the new Constructive Aging positivity cards) One of the most recent cards that I created, the front side shows beautiful fireworks, and underneath the picture it says, "Living the Dream." Living the Dream basically means waking up, doing exactly what you want to do, and living the type of life you want to live. Believe me, it's pretty awesome. In addition, we at Arise created a free app that contains 55 positivity cards that can be emailed. You can find them in the iTunes store, and also in the Android store under, "Positivity Cards."

Rish: That's beautiful, and you're still living the dream. Now let's talk about your wife, Susan, who I had the pleasure of speaking with on Wednesday. Your relationship is so special. You've always maintained that she has been your greatest

inspiration, and critical collaborator in all of your work. In fact, you were telling me how some of your environmental stewardship work has been inspired by Susan. Can you tell us more about the ways in which you were nurtured and how you've thrived as a result of your relationship, and how it has cemented your common purpose?

Ed: Well, again, I used to be a very negative person, and even back in my thirties when I met Susan, it was miraculous to me that someone would find something attractive in my negativity. But Susan somehow found my personality attractive, and never once did she attempt to change me. I smile at that. I've learned over the years how to emulate her behavior, which is sweet from early morning until late at night. She just has a wonderful personality, and a wonderful way about her. The fact that she never once tried to change me is the reason that I was able to change radically. None of us like having anybody tell us what to do, and that sort of sent the fireworks exploding. It was never, "Why don't you do this, or, why don't you do that?" Never.

Rish: Beautiful. I was struck by how deeply you appreciate each other even in our last talk. It's truly wonderful. Now, recently you have moved to engaging the elderly population. If I understand correctly, you've created "The Constructive Aging" program, which is really dear to your heart. Can you tell us more about this new initiative and what facilitated it?

Ed: First of all, it's my pleasure to do that. And when I retired at age 85, I started attending a men's group. I've never attended any groups before, but figured I would try something new. So I attended this men's group, and came to a revelation. First I want to say, I pity the poor wives who put up with these guys. They were mostly unhappy, and negative. Some would spend the whole day playing some version of Poker, or gambling, or whatever. And I said, oh my goodness! These men didn't have the skills that were necessary to make themselves happy in retirement, let alone the poor suffering woman they were sharing lives with. So I became very interested in what people were doing in this last stage of their lives, and I found that it was dismal. There is only so much golf and so much bridge that people can take. So I began looking into creating a life skills program for At-Risk Adults ages 60 and over. I spent a little over two years analyzing and amassing material, and we now have over a thousand topics that can be used in targeted group sessions. These include topics like happiness, gratitude, memory improvement, positive steps for dealing with worry, and the importance of napping. Napping is really an issue, and also such a delight. Then there's balance, conquering stress, prevention of isolation, and staying relevant. Because here's what happens, grandparents (primarily people sixty and above), lose touch with their grandchildren because they look at them as archaic. So what I've put together is a set of materials that brings this older generation in contact with their younger family members. This makes them feel relevant instead of like a relic. These grandparents want to talk, not text. So we have created ninety-minute guided group discussions that have been really wonderful. Susan, again as the person in the forefront of this initiative, has been leading these programs, and they've just been great. We even include music by artists like Doris Day, The Bee Gee's, Willie Nelson, and Ethel Merman. .

Of all of the older people, there was this man that came to this men's group that I attended, and he had been a Marine Captain in the Second World War. He was hard of hearing and was pretty much ignored by the other participants. This sparked in me an idea to create something where we'd capture the wonderful stories that everybody has. So we created an inter-generational life stories program where high school seniors and college students could go into Nursing Homes or Assisted Living Centers and capture the stories that these older adults have so not to lose them when they pass on.

Rish: That's beautiful.

Ed: It is beautiful. Many years ago we did this for Susan's dad. We sat with him, created and printed out, his life story it was wonderful and then we gave a copy to his children and grandchildren. After this we decided to create the 1440 Club.

Rish: What is that?

Ed: The 1440 Club is a program for people who are undergoing therapy, are incapacitated, or can't move easily. We created activities that they can do while sitting in a wheelchair, or lying in bed. It's called the 1440 Club because there are fourteen hundred and forty minutes in a day, and the goal is to give thanks every minute for the wonderful blessings we live.

Rish: That's amazing.

Ed: Yes. And as a side note, 54% of older Americans lack sufficient retirement funds, and 20% have tapped into their 401K's already. They're also carrying the burden of student loans for their children and grandchildren, and often retirees are still caring for their parents. So running out of money is a huge and and personal health issues are also a major concern. People need a place where they can come and talk and complain because everyone is going through the same issues. Some are better off than others financially, but we all get older. We all at some time or other will need medical help, and what worries me is who is going to care for these people when they need long-term care service. And this ties in to at-risk populations because the people who care for the elderly in nursing homes and assisted living facilities are earning seven dollars and fifty cents an hour, and working part time. They are also lifting people and hurting themselves in the process. That population and those jobs in those facilities are not desirable, but they're necessary for many people with limited education. So we created a program, which is quite similar to what we've done in Arise, in which we train people to train patients to be less rude and more civil. It teaches them why being rude stops people from working together. So these are some of the things that we are currently working on.

Rish: That is a very good and comprehensive overview of your program, and I really appreciate how your definition of "at-risk" is much broader than one might think it is (in including these adults as part of the "at-risk" community).

Now, you entered your first retirement at age 52, but at age 85, you're still working on things. What would you say to people who say, "I'm too old," or, "I've done my piece," or any number of things that imply that there's expiration date to our contributions?

Ed: Well, I guess what I would say is that you can never help another person without helping yourself. So, if you really want to be good to yourself you'll find a way to help others. And that has nothing to do with age, but when you do get to be of a certain age where you are not involved in earning a daily bread, you can begin thinking about how you can help others. And having the constructive aging program in nursing homes, and community centers, and VA hospitals means that there is an unlimited amount of good that people can do if they want to get involved. It doesn't require very much time -we're talking about an hour and a half, and it brings such joy into people's lives to know that they are being considered and cared about. Our first lesson, now understand we have 1200 topics, is on happiness and the power of a smile. That also happens to be card

number 123. On one side it says, “Live Happy,” and on the other side it says a scientific fact that the brain can only hold one thought at a time. The goal is to replace negative thoughts when you are angry, sad or worried, with a smile. In fact, Susan and I were out walking early this morning, and we happened to walk by and a woman. I just felt she deserved this card, so I gave it to her and she said, “How did you know?” And she put her hand over her heart and she said, “This is so important.” Then I said, “Well, there’s a message in each letter of ‘Live Happy.’ The L has horseshoes for good fortune; the I has a candle for birthdays and anniversaries, and celebrations. The V has an apple in it for good health until the very end. The E has an American flag to be grateful for living in this wonderful country. The H, in Happy, has hearts for lots of love in your life; the A has dollar signs for ample supply of money. The first P has a star because you are the star of your own movie. The second P has an ice cream cone in it for sweetness in all of your days. And then, and I always pause for this one; the Y is your very own flower garden. And every good gardener knows you need to get rid of the crabby grass, and the weeds that could impede your growth. Wow!

Rish: This reminds me, we were chatting before the call, and you talked about how you yourself are currently planting seeds in a garden that you may never see bloom. I think it’s fair to say that, after all this time, your life has had positivity at the center of it. You said earlier that one of the sayings you live by is, “When you get, give. And when you learn, teach.” I feel like this is powerful coming from you because this is really how you’ve lived your life, and I’d like to close with my last question before we open up the Q&A session. Is there something you’d like callers to take away from your life experience? Often, in my culture, well will ask the elders for advice, and ask them to kind of sum up their life experiences. We do this to see how we can benefit from what they’ve learned. Not to put too much pressure on you there!

Ed: Well, there’s another good quote by Shakespeare that says, “The meaning of life is to find your gift and the purpose of life is to give it away.” And I think we all have a need to give away that which we’ve accumulated. It doesn’t have to be money. It could be good feelings, it could be concern, or it could be love. It could be whatever you feel, but the important thing is to give it away. Also, and we use this in the program, it’s important to get rid of negativity. I am totally involved in positivity. I don’t watch negative programs, I don’t like to be around people who swear, or are unpleasant. As a matter of fact, I have an Apple Watch that we’ve programmed so that, every 15 minutes, I receive a positive affirmation. So if you decide that you want to live a happier life, you can’t do it around negative people or negative headlines, or images. You need to fill up on positivity. I don’t own any Apple stock, but I think the Apple Watch is a wonderful thing to program so that you can receive positive messages throughout the day. The first one at 12 AM is, “To thine own self be true and it must follow as day to night, that thou then canst be false to any man” by William Shakespeare. And it goes on and on.

Rish: Thank you so much, Ed. Hopefully we’ve given all your accomplishments a little bit of justice here. Thankfully we have more time for callers. We’ll hand it over to Kozo.

Kozo: Thank you. I heard about a study that was done recently where they took two groups of people, and one group was tasked with doing exercise every day, and the other group had to do volunteer work once per week. And I think after six weeks into the study, they measured participant’s health signs. And it turned out that doing volunteer work once a week actually makes you healthier than exercising every day. I know, Ed, that you're eighty years old, and I'm wondering if after all your service and all your creativity, contribution, and gifting, if you've seen any physical side effects, or if

you've felt any health benefits that have given you the ability to live a more healthy and wholesome life later in life.

Ed: Well, there is no question that I'm constantly exercising my mind, and I think that's very beneficial. But, I also exercise the rest of me too. So I don't think it's an "either or" situation. Actually, you're being too kind to me. I was 80 about 7 years ago. As a matter of fact, when someone asks my age, I say I'm 31 months from being 90.

Kozo: Wow. You are doing more than I am doing at age 51.

Ed: I understand. I understand that this is the lifestyle that I chose almost 67 years ago. I chose to work two days in a day. For the first fifteen years of my marriage, I never took a vacation. I am totally, totally dedicated to my work. There is no place I could be that would be better for me right now than working and creating.

Kozo: That is beautiful. My father-in-law is actually a Qigong master, and he told me something a long time ago. He said in America, "Everybody has the goal to retire early, and to retire with a lot of money. But Kozo, I never want you to retire." And you know, I looked at him like he was crazy. I'm like, what is he talking about? He never wants me to retire. I knew I wanted to retire, and he said, "Even if you stop working, I want you to have something you wake up every morning and do. I don't want you to sleep in and do nothing. You need to get up, even if it's just to walk outside and get the paper. You need to have a routine. I want you to continue to be like a person that has a mission." My father-in-law is pushing ninety now, and he is an acupuncturist that has seen so many of his patients retire and die. They don't have a drive or a purpose. I think you are living testament to that.

Ed: Well that was very good advice, and I couldn't agree more.

Kozo: Yeah, I didn't. When I first heard it, I said, "You're crazy old man," but now, after listening to you I see the wisdom behind that and I see a path that can lead to a fulfilling and healthy longevity. So thank you. We've got some callers on the line, so I'm going to bow down and let others share in your wisdom. We have Michelle on the call first.

Michelle: Hi everyone. Edwin, Harvey, and I have just been filled with delight. I can't tell you how delighted we are to hear you speak. I've known you and Susan for over 50 years. In fact, I was twelve years old when I first met Susan, and I'm 69 now. I have learned so much about the service journey that the two of you have taken that I did not know before. I just want to thank you for agreeing to share your story. I'm actually sitting here with tears in my eyes, thinking about how you help people, and how you've devoted so much of your life to helping others. Thank you, thank you, thank you, and a big hug for you and a big hug for Susan.

Ed: Thanks, Michelle. We feel blessed that you felt confident enough to recommend us.

Michelle: Yes, and you did not embarrass me. You made me laugh. It's been wonderful, and I'm just so grateful that you have shared your story with us because it's inspiring. I have deep admiration and that's the end of my tribute. Thank you.

Kozo: Now it's starting to make sense. You are good friends with Michelle.

Beautiful. We will move on to the next caller.

Jane: Hi, this is Jane. I have just had the absolute pleasure of getting to hear my dad speak. So I just wanted to say thank you. I now have a totally different perspective. I have watched the evolution of my dad, and it's so beautiful. There's something about being open to inside direction, and having the willingness to listen to it, and let it be your guide to help direct you. Man, I don't think you need to be 60 to start there. I'm 58, and hopefully I've started doing that. I really do think that it's a path all of us can take, no matter what we are faced with. It is so true that, in giving, and I mean I have learned this by watching my Dad and Susan, comes true joy and happiness. I really just want to say, "Thanks Dad". Thanks to you guys for hosting him. This is awesome.

Ed: You are a chip off the old block, and I can say that with pride that fills me with joy, Jane. So thank you for coming on and sharing your wisdom.

Kozo: Jane, thank you so much. That's so beautiful to share. Not only has your father made you proud, but also he's influenced how you follow your own guidance and start gifting back.

Jane: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you.

Kozo: I want to follow up on that a bit. I have two young children, one is nine, and one just turned 7. And I would love for them to have that kind of service mentality, and to follow their inner guidance. Do you have any parenting tips for us on how to do that? I think it takes a lot of faith and trust to raise your child to follow their own inner guidance, and to have them trust themselves. Do you have any stories or experiences, or guidance along those lines?

Ed: I had two daughters. One was older than Jane, and she passed away. She got her M.B.A, and was going to be a psychiatric social worker. Jane now has her M.B.A., and works as a coach among many other things. I think that it all results from watching and listening to what mom and dad do. We all have what we call "mirror neurons." We basically learn by copying other people, and if you exemplify what you want your children to be like, all they have to do is mirror you. If you want to learn more about mirror neurons, there's a wonderful YouTube video on the topic, but basically, we are all always learning from one another. When you yawn, and if I am around you, I will probably yawn. If you scratch your head, I'll probably do the same. We do things like that just by watching.

Kozo: Beautiful. Jane, you are online. Can you share with us any time where you watched your father and Susan, and mirrored them in your own life or were inspired by them?

Jane: Yes. I was thinking about what my dad was referring to but the willingness to be transparent about things that you believe and not just that you say but you walk and and letting your kids understand that, not assume that they will but you know the willingness to involve them. I mean I think seeing, doing, experiencing for kids in order to really get it; It is one thing to may be understand in your head and is another to really get it in your heart to experience the things with your parents. I used to go to school with Susan and see her work with kids who were deaf. I certainly got a very strong work ethics from working for my Dad as a young kid for I really wanted a great camera and he said, "You need to get a job", sort of instilling these things not just by talking it but by living it,

seeing them live that but also then living it yourself. I mean these are all great ways of doing that and willing to be transparent about those things.

Kozo: Beautiful Jane. I didn't mean to put you on spot, but thank you. We have another caller.

Lenny: Hi Mr. Benson. This is one of your good friends Lenny. Ruth and I have been listening to you speak for the past hour, and just like when we all get together socially, it's always a wonderful experience hearing about you and talking about you and Susan. We've talked about this before, and you know that I practice law and deal with a lot of senior clients. You talked a little bit about clients earlier, about them staying relevant when they get to be a certain age. Could you explain your philosophy on this?

Ed: Well, actually it involves getting out of the daily routine that we've all accustomed ourselves to. For instance, when we're working, we get into the whole system of going to work, and coming home. But when you retire and have free time, it's time to change. It's time to move in another direction, and if you want to stay in contact with the younger members of your family, you have to change or they will find nothing to speak to you about. They just look at elders as being totally out of touch, and that is exactly another reason why we developed this program with twelve hundred lessons. The material is focused on current technology like driverless cars, texting, and social media. So if you want to communicate with your grandchildren, you need to do what they're doing. I don't know that we're going to jump on to Snap chat, but Facebook certainly. As kids start to understand that you're anxious to be in touch with them, and that you're amazed at what they are doing, and how you'd love to learn how to do those things yourself, they probably will be more willing to help. And if you make notes while they're helping you so that you're not constantly bugging them for additional information, or forgetting what they taught you, I think that makes you more relevant to your kids and grandkids. And, again, attending the group sessions and learning about all the different topics that we offer helps too. There isn't anything that is historical. Did I answer your question?

Lenny: You always answer my question. That is exactly the information that I needed and something that I can pass on to my clients. I will also take that to heart with my own grandchildren.

Ed: I am looking at the positivity card right now, and I should say two things. One thing is that as we grow older, our skin gets thinner, not only physically, but also mentally. And I think that as we grow older, it's really important to forgive those members of the family that have made mistakes, and have caused us grief. That is essential for our peace of mind.

Lenny: Forgiving. I would totally agree with that. One last thing, and I just pulled this out of my wallet. It's a positivity card you gave me, and I keep it with me always because it says on the front "I can and I will, no excuses." And on the back it says, "If you want something you've never had then you've got to do something you've never done".

Kozo: Right. That is a good one. It's amazing to watch all the ripples that you've created come flowing back to you just on this one call. Many people taking time to just show appreciation, gratitude or wisdom that you shared with them throughout your life. That is beautiful. I had a follow up question on something you were talking about earlier about replacing negativity with positivity. You mentioned that you had a

child that passed away, and they say that, for a parent that one of the hardest things in life is if your child dies before you. How did you maintain your positivity in such an event that could drive a lot of people into really serious negativity or depression?

Ed: Well, first of all I had Susan to share all of that unpleasantness with, and that made all the difference. That would be number one. My daughter, Ellen, was a diabetic, and she never paid much attention to her health issues. And as a result, she shortened her life. While she was alive, she was a wonderful person, and I was so proud of her. We had a lot in common, and I just know that the time she spent here was wonderful, and that was all she was supposed to have. You mentioned you have two children yourself, and I pulled up a positivity card that says on the front, “Children need patience, guidance and positive role models,” which is pretty much what we've been talking about. And side two says, “They are children, if the right, they always knew, they'd be about as old as you”.

Kozo: Thank you so much.

Ed: Just send me your e-mail and I will send you the card.

Kozo: Yeah for sure, no problem. We are going to share your email if it is ok with you. There is another caller online.

Eileen: Hello. This is Eileen. I want to say that I, unfortunately, came in a little late, but I am just so overwhelmed with pride to have an association with you. And I want to say that the overriding theme that came to my mind while listening to you speak was that you are working so hard to leave this planet a better place than what you experienced when you came into it. And you’re doing this for people that you don't know, and for people whose life you may never touch, but you're still so interested in sharing your wisdom with. I want to say that one thing I really like is that you don't just practice it for other people, but you practice it close to home. You know it obviously showed in Jane in where she's gotten, you shared that with my husband who’s your nephew. And what I really like is that you’re vulnerable. You have so much knowledge and so much experience, and yet, you allow yourself to be open to the idea that there’s still learning to do. You know you’re not perfect, and that makes you very genuine, and very real, and I think that's what has contributed to this plethora of ideas that have come to you all your life.

Ed: Well, I'm far from perfect. I can tell you that, and I do have a lot to learn. I'm just doing my best to learn as much as I can on a daily basis, and it's fun.

Eileen: Yeah. Well you convey that very clearly. You are really enjoying what you're doing.

Ed: Yeah, it's a blast. Eileen, thank you. I just wish that everybody had a collection of positivity cards in their pocket. I wish that, as they spent their days going from one thing to the next, they would run out of these cards, and that the people they handed them to would say, “Oh you made my day.” And, “I'm going to keep that right here.” Waitresses usually keep them in that black folder that they keep the checks in. If everybody could do that, we would have a happier planet.

Kozo: Thanks Eileen. Ed, we have a couple comments on the web forms. Harvey says, “Edmund, amazing. Last time we spoke you were worried about your memory. Well, my friend, we’ve heard quotations across the centuries and you certainly haven't lost a

beat! Cheers.”

Ed: Harvey is a special guy.

Kozo: Amina Rodriguez from Clearwater, Florida says, “I'm very interested in starting an intergenerational program for the elderly to share their stories with you here in Clearwater. Where would you suggest I start to begin this project?

Ed: I think that she should e-mail us at constructiveaging@gmail.com and include her phone number and we'll be happy to help. There's no charge and we are not selling anything.

Kozo: Except for positivity love gratitude and well being.

Ed: Free of charge

Kozo: We always end with one final question. What can we do as a service to this community? What can we do to aid you in your work, or in your mission? I know you are doing so much, but the only thing that we can do as a community, or as individuals, is to aid you in your life's purpose.

Ed: Well, yes, I would say to everybody that’s done something that they’re not happy with to join the 1440 club. Each of us, no matter if you’re rich or poor, only receives fourteen hundred and forty minutes a day. Spend those minutes giving thanks for all the blessings that you have.

Kozo: Thank you for that invitation.

Ed: Yes, being able to flood yourself with positivity, and staying away from negativity throughout the day. There is so much out there today, so much in the way of positive things. Just avoid it and stay with the positive. Here is one last positivity card before we’re finished. It says, “I forgive because it's good for me.” That's actually title of one of the books that we've written. “Forgiveness is not something we do for others, we forgive so we can move on with our lives”

Kozo: Thank you, Ed.

Rish: It’s obvious from the outpouring of appreciation during the Q&A session that you clearly have been making a huge difference in people’s lives, and I personally feel blessed to have a chance to connect with you.

Ed: Thank you. It's been a pleasure, and we thank each and every one of you. You folks have put together a beautiful program that is so professionally done, and I’ve been enamored of it since it was introduced to me. So keep up the good work. Thank you.