

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 110- The Unknown And Surprising Power Of Physical Touch: Dacher Keltner

I have some breaking news, and no, this is an emergency.
I've spent the last two years writing a book, and I've written 33 laws for business, marketing and life that I derive from all of these conversations I've had here.
I traveled the world to write this book.
I interviewed some of the most incredible people.
I did six months of extensive research on scientific studies and principles to co-operate everything that I wrote into these 33 laws.
And ladies and gentlemen, that book, called The Diary of a CEO, The 33 Laws for Business, Marketing and Life, is now available for pre-order.
And there are 5,000, only 5,000 signed copies, and it's first come first serve.
The link is in the bio right now, so if you want that book, honestly, it's the best book I've ever written.
It's the book I always should have written.
It's the book I also wish someone had written for me when I was starting out on my career.
I'm really proud of it.
I'm really, really proud of it.
Really, really proud of it.
And I can't wait for all of you to get to read it.
It's out in August.
I couldn't be more excited about this as you can probably tell.
I don't know what to say other than the words I've said to emphasize my excitement, because I think it's important and I think it's really valuable.
Link in the description.
I was blown away when reading your work and watching videos that you produced about so many things.
One of the real startling things is the power of touch.
I read that if you pat a kid on the back in the classroom, that child is three to five times more likely to try hard problems on the blackboard.
And that touch can make you live longer and be less stressed.
Just someone touching you.
Yeah.
Is that true?
Yeah.
I mean, touch in a lot of mammalian species, including humans, is just connection.
It's identity.
I'm with you.
You think early in life we are constantly being held and in skin-to-skin contact with our caregivers.
It's foundational.
It's where my sense of me and you connection emerges.
The physiology of touch is mind-blowing.
Our hands are incredible.
There are spectacular evolutionary adaptations that can do all kinds of things, including

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touch.

Our skin, eight pounds, billions of cells, our immune system is in the skin.

It registers touch in many different ways, from the sexual to the friendly to the cooperative, goes up into the brain and says, man, you're being touched in this way.

And that has direct effects on your immune system and your vagus nerve and your heart rate and the health of your body.

And so early discoveries, you have premature babies, they're going to die.

They used to just put them in these little units that warm them and had them be comfortable and fed and they would die.

And then they figured out you've got to hold the premature baby.

They needed skin-to-skin contact, they need food.

And they live.

They gained 47% weight gain.

And then there are just studies time and time again, nice hug, lower cortisol, nice embrace with somebody, elevated vagal tone.

The studies that you referred to of patting kids on the back, they do better in school.

And it's so interesting, parts of English culture, Victorian culture, Western European culture, they came up with the idea like touch is sexual, you've got to get it.

And it is, but only certain kinds of touch are sexual.

There's a lot of friendly touch we need, right?

And it just shut it down.

And now it's coming back.

It's, thank goodness, it's good for us.

We talked before, we started filming about the study with the resus monkeys.

Yeah.

I can't remember who the researcher was, but I was saying to you that.

Harlow.

Harlow, that was it.

Yeah.

How that was mind-blowing to me at 16 to learn that they put these monkeys in these cages.

They had like a pretend wire mother, so a mother made out of like metal.

And then they had another one made out of cloth, like a mother made out of cloth, which was essentially a teddy bear.

And there was huge variance between the outcomes of those kids, right?

Yeah.

I mean, if you deprive those monkeys of the nice touch, they don't learn how to behave socially effectively.

You know, if you give them a choice between a wire monkey mother and that provides milk and then a terry cloth one, they always hang around the terry cloth one, right?

They just love the social contact.

If you deprive non-human primates of touch, they are almost schizophrenic or psychopathic or they're just like aggressive, they can't handle social interactions, you know, orphans deprived of touch, famous orphan studies, you know, in humans, same thing.

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They just like, they don't become human in some way or they are human, but they have trouble with social contact.

Yeah.

You know, I mean, part of the questioning that you're engaging in Steven or the literature is like, well, what can I do just to live a more meaningful life?

And you know, from gratitude to kindness to find some, ah, man, you know, if you're not hugging people you love, if you're not, if you don't have a rich language of touch with your friends, you know, I learned it playing pick up basketball, basketball, which is the, I believe the most fascinating sport in human history, it has this amazing language of touch, you know, and it's, it's unique to the court, right?

Your fist bumping, chest bumping and the like, if you're not doing that with your friends, you're missing out on one of the great languages of humankind, which is to be in contact with each other.

So you know, parents, you know, when you have kids, and I hope some of your listeners are doing that, you know, it's this mystery, like, should they take naps on my body?

How should I hold them?

Should I carry them in public?

Am I indulging them?

And I think the more friendly, kind touch, the better.

So we're moving back to where we began evolutionarily, and I think it'll be a good thing.

What if I'm touching a dog?

Because I have the same, same effects.

Yeah.

I mean, dogs evolved because we love them and they love us.

And there's all this new, amazing dog science where this is one of my favorite studies and touch releases oxytocin, which is this little chemical that floats in your brain and your blood, and it helps you be kind to other people and cooperate.

And they're now studies from Japan showing, you may do this with your dogs, Steven, where if you look into the eyes of your dog, you, your dog will have a surge of oxytocin and you will have a surge of oxytocin.

So it's like all of this social stuff that's so simple of eye contact and touch brings us good things, even with our dogs.

It makes me kind of realize two things.

The first is that men tend to be stereotypically much worse at that.

Much worse at touch.

We don't, we do the like the macho hug where you like on the back, you know, like when you pat them on the back, it's like get the fuck off me.

We're less good at even things like eye contact and sort of emotional engagement.

And then you look at the stats around male suicides and all of those, you know, drug addiction and all those things and it's significantly higher.

I believe the stats say that the biggest killer of men under the age of 40 is themselves in this country by suicide.

And there really need to feel this like there needs to be a reversal of that.

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The adjacent point is just the one we talked about earlier, which is just loneliness. And now it kind of makes sense as to why if you are lonely, you have a significantly worse health outcomes and a shorter life expectancy because you're not getting the compassion, the touch.

You're not, you're probably experiencing less or gratitude, et cetera.

And I feel like we have to, we have to talk about how we fix that.

Like, you know, because some of the saddest moments I can, I think about when I've had private conversations are men coming up to me after like a talk on stage and whispering to me that the part I said about me being lonely when I was like 23, 24, and I'd given everything just for this business, coming to the office every day, sacrifice friendships, family relationships, I'll have men come up to me and whisper to me that that was the part that they needed to hear the most, but then asking me what they can actionably do to fix that.

As if they don't want the group around me to hear that they are lonely and they want to do something about it.

They are sat on their computers often playing video games or on the internet struggling to attract, you know, maybe the opposite sex or the same sex or whatever, whatever they're interested in.

And it feels like it's going in one negative direction generally.

I mean, the stats kind of support the fact that we're getting lonelier and lonelier.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean, those are such deep insights and really worth thinking more concretely about what to do.

I think that the, you know, kind of the gender complexities here are really striking, right?

Men live significantly fewer years than women in most Western globalized cultures.

And, and I think you're on a really interesting hypothesis, Steven, which is that, you know, if the gender stereotypes and these rigid concepts and then the lies we lead, don't allow us to hug and feel grateful and feel empathetic.

It, it countervails that.

And there, those are gender stereotypes, right?

Oh, if I practice compassionate work, I'll be weak and I won't rise.

That's not true.

That's a gender stereotype.

And it, it denies men this proportion of this opportunity for these emotions, right?

And that's that, you know, with new conceptions of gender, new ideas about work is changing dramatically, that will shift.

And I think it'll be good news for the health of men.

And, and then loneliness, loneliness in some sense is the deprivation of everything we've been talking about.

It's that you don't get to hug somebody like you would like to every day.

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And that you don't hear the words of appreciation.
William James, you know, the deepest craving we have is to be appreciated by other people.
You don't hear it.
You don't hear the thank you.
You don't get to go out and feel awe with somebody or feel kindness.
You know, so I think we have to think very actively about building these emotions into those contexts.
In the United States, there are 35,000 long-term care facilities.
The elderly in the United States, a lot of them live alone, you know, uh, if when people from India see how we treat the elderly or people from Mexico, it's just like the unhoused or like, what are you guys doing?
You know, you're taking the vulnerable and, and sort of shunting them off alone.
But the, but these emotions point to really direct actionable things to do, right?
With all practices and compassion.
So it gives me hope, but we've got, you know, I think in part historically, we took these pro-social emotions out of our lives, right?
And now we got to build them back in.
And if we do, it's good for not just ourselves, but it's good for the recipients of those emotions, you know, hugging, hugging my dad or hugging my mom or hugging anybody is, is a mutually beneficial behavior in terms of all the, you know, life expectancy, happiness, reduction in stress.
And not only that, but, you know, I just heard 50% of US healthcare expenses are on the last five years of life when a lot of those people are living alone and feeling lonely.
And there are simple ways to address that as we've been talking about.
So it's, there's a bottom line that's really relevant here too.
And then the really, the bit I imagine a lot of people will, especially those that are much more spiritually inclined will love is the idea of that karma and how, you know, if I hug one person or if I'm kind of some person or express that gratuitous compassion, it has this sort of cascading knock on effect and how they go through the day.
So like in that sense, karma is a very real thing.
It's very real.
Yeah.
In every respect, even in the concept of gossip, where how you treat someone more spread, I think you said in your book that when we treat someone badly, people on average gossip that bad treatment to 2.5 people, yeah, something to it, which is, you know, which is quite terrifying, but it's, but it makes sense.
Um, yeah, you know, it's in part of our theme and our conversation is how we're all connected and united in these, these super organisms.

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Some people call them through practicing gratitude and sharing resources that spreads through, uh, these social networks.

And then the compliment is also true, which is, you know, and, and as much as I don't like gossip and I didn't like being gossiped about, it's a human universal, it can be horrifying and, and we've got to worry about it. Like online catfights and it escalates, but we study these social groups. And, and the thing that people really gossip about is when you're not kind, right?

They're like, look at what that, that person just said, these harsh things, that spreads through the network and it, it tries to keep those problematic tendencies in check.