

## Social Impact Heroes: Celebrity Dentist Dr. Bill Dorfman aims to heal the isolation and loneliness epidemic

Yazi Weiner | August 12, 2019



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As part of my series about “companies and organizations making an important social impact, I had the pleasure of interviewing **Dr. Bill Dorfman**. Dr. Dorfman is not just a famous cosmetic dentist, he is THE famous cosmetic dentist. Affectionately known as “America’s Dentist,” Dr. Bill is widely recognized world-wide as a leading dentist who is responsible for creating smiles for many of Hollywood’s brightest stars, such as Usher, Anthony Hopkins, Hugh Jackman, Michael Strahan, Eva Longoria & many others. In fact, Dr. Dorfman has become a star in his own right as the featured dentist on the hit ABC series, “Extreme Makeover,” as well as a recurring guest co-host on the Emmy Winning daytime talk show, “The Doctors.” Beyond his exceptional career in dentistry, Dr. Bill’s name has become synonymous with giving back. One hundred percent of the

proceeds from his New York Times Bestselling book, *Billion Dollar Smile*, were donated to children's charities; he has been included in the Guinness Book of World Records for his philanthropic efforts and was recently inducted into The Royal Order of Constantine as the first dentist to be knighted; he has traveled the globe to help raise money for children in South Africa; built a dental clinic in the Dominican Republic; donated his services to restore the smiles of women who have survived domestic violence; and helped raise more than \$40 million for Smiles for Life. But his greatest accomplishment, which he feels has had the greatest impact is his LEAP Foundation.

Thank you so much for doing this with us Dr. Dorfman! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?

It's basically two stories — one story leads to the second story. Back in 2003, ABC asked me to be the featured dentist on the show, "Extreme Makeover." For years I practiced cosmetic dentistry, but it was always a very intimate setting — I was in my office and it was usually me changing a patient's smile and often their life and maybe sharing that with a family member too. When ABC selected me as the featured dentist, they had no idea how expensive cosmetic dentistry was going to be. When we did our first three patients, I basically just did Zoom! whitening, which didn't cost me anything, since I was an owner in the company. However, the first patient of the first season needed well over \$30,000 in care. When ABC asked me if I could do less cosmetic dentistry on this patient, I told them that it wasn't possible. So, going forward, I did all the cosmetic & general dentistry needed for free. As the show became more and more popular, I started getting invited to do lectures for different groups & societies. One of the groups was a motivational, leadership program for high school & college kids. They asked me to come in and speak because my career in dentistry had been so unusual. Not only was I a featured dentist on a primetime TV show, and New York Times Bestselling author, but I was also an owner in the largest tooth whitening company in the world, called Discus Dental — we were the manufacturers of ZOOM! and BriteSmile and several other products.

The profound impact that this leadership program had on the students was really moving to me, and I continued to come back to the program for several years. Fourteen years ago, the founder of the program (who was in his 80s) passed away and with him the program also perished. I felt that there was a huge void in my life, and in the lives of many of the students who were not able to yet attend the program.

So, 12 years ago, I created the LEAP Foundation as a non-profit motivational, leadership program for high school and college students. LEAP is a program that not only changes student's lives, but in rare instances saves their lives. Students attending the program come from all walks of life and their emotional well-being is all over the map. We bring in amazing speakers, like: Mark Wahlberg, Anthony Hopkins, Eva Longoria, Usher, Jonathan Bennet, Michael Strahan, Paula Abdul, Kathy Bates and many more. Seeing what a radical change these student's lives take after we are able to equip them with the tools they need to be successful in life, is one of the most rewarding things I have ever participated in my life.



Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company?

Probably one of the most interesting stories involves a young man who I met at the very first program. He came from a remote city in the Midwest. He called himself a total outcast. Throughout his childhood, he had always been bullied and teased for being very effeminate, and as far as he knew, he was probably the only gay student in his whole community. When he first came to LEAP, he confided all of this in me and told me that he had considered committing suicide the week before LEAP. However, his parents had already paid for the program and he did not want to give them another reason to be disappointed in him, so he attended. It was the first time a student actually told me that attending LEAP didn't change their life, it saved their life.

I called a good friend of mine to come and meet this young man. This friend was a very successful gay musician and he agreed to mentor him, and he show him how much more there was to look forward to in life. It has been over 10 years now and this young man is a happy, well-adjusted professional working in the music industry.

Can you describe how you or your organization is making a significant social impact?

LEAP gives students a seven-year head start in life by sharing the secrets of success from many well-established entrepreneurs, businessmen & women, celebrities, politicians, and other various leaders. One of the lessons that we try to teach at LEAP, is to "Copy Genius." And we

accomplish this by introducing these students to successful men & women who can mentor them and help them shorten the path to success.

Are there three things the community/society/politicians can do to help you address the root of the problem you are trying to solve?

I think the biggest problem that students in our age group face today is isolation. Even though many of them are very active in social media, several of them lack tangible support from their peers, relatives, and potential mentors. This electronic age tends to isolate people and one of the things that we do at LEAP, that is so profound, is to give them the skills to interact with other people who want to help them succeed.

The BEST thing the community can do to help solve this problem is to send students age 15–25 to our LEAP Week summer program.



How do you define “Leadership”? Can you explain what you mean or give an example?

I think the best way to realize what a true leader is, is from the quote: “Leaders don’t create followers, they create more great leaders.” To be a real leader, you need to lift others up by their bootstraps and help them become successful.

What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why. Please share a story or example for each.

1. There will be times when life will be “rough”. That’s life. But remember it’s how you handle the stress of life that determines success. Having a negative attitude and being pessimistic will not resolve anything. Take a deep breath and have an optimistic attitude

and a strong character and remember that failure is not an option, and you will go a lot further in life than you will with anything else.

2. Be careful who you associate with. IF you want to be a 10 in life, you can't hang out with a bunch of 2's. One of the things I tell kids at LEAP is "Birds of a Feather Flock Together" — be careful who you flock with.
3. Be nice to yourself. We typically say meaner and nastier things to ourselves than we would allow most people to ever say to us. It's really important to have positive self-talk. I think it's hard, especially today, because we continue to compare our insides to everybody else's outsides.
4. Pick your battles wisely in life and be willing to lose a few. It's winning the war that matters most. Keep your eye on the ball and focus.
5. Never give up. Failure is not an option. You only fail when you give up. If you do something and it doesn't come out the way you want it to, I don't consider that failure, I consider that practice. Do it again and again and again, if you need to, but don't ever give up. Because when you do, then you fail. Otherwise, it's just a lot of practice getting to the goal.



You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. ☒

We spend a whole year putting together our LEAP Week. I know how impactful it is for students. If I could start a movement, I would get wealthy individuals and large corporations to

help sponsor as many students as possible to come to our program and then scale the program so we can be in several different cities every year.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

It’s actually two quotes that relate to each other. The first is: “Don’t wait for opportunities, make them.” And the second is: “When you do get an opportunity, don’t take it. Master it.”

It’s so frustrating for me to see young people sitting around waiting for things to happen — things don’t just happen in life. Every time I was fortunate enough to be successful, it’s because I made an opportunity happen. And when I did get those opportunities, instead of just casually taking them, I did everything I could to maximize the opportunity and master the skills needed to make it as successful as possible.

A good example of this is ABC’s “Extreme Makeover” — When I watched the first 3 or 4 episodes, I was appalled at how horrible I was. I wasn’t meant to be on TV, nor did I have any training. However, I did see what a huge opportunity it was, so instead of just sitting at home and being miserable, I went out and I started taking classes. I took acting classes, hosting classes, teleprompting classes, so that I could be the best version of myself on the show and make as big an impact as possible.



Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. 📌

So many of the people that I admire are patients of mine and I actually get to interact with them, which is a real honor. But, one man that I have never met, and I would love to meet, is Jeff Bezos. I think what he has done is incredibly phenomenal and I would love to find out more about him and what makes him tick.

How can our readers follow you on social media?

@DrBillDorfman on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter

<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/social-impact-heroes-celebrity-dentist-dr-bill-dorfman-aims-to-heal-the-isolation-and-loneliness-epidemic/>

<https://medium.com/authority-magazine/social-impact-heroes-celebrity-dentist-dr-bill-dorfman-aims-to-heal-the-isolation-and-loneliness-317fa56b6383?sk=96e97b62349a21fedc4c914efe899cc0>