



## Making a Difference: LEAP Offers Students a Head Start on Life Skills

July 17, 2020 | Darlene Donloe



Thousands of high school and college students will take a virtual leap when an annual weeklong summer program begins July 20.

**Founded by Dr. Bill Dorfman** 13 years ago, LEAP, which stands for Leadership Excellence and Achievement Program, helps high school and college students gain a head start in life using seminars, workshops and mentor roundtables. It's a full week dedicated to helping young adults uncover the "real-life" skills needed to achieve great success.

Due to the current COVID-19 crisis, this year's LEAP, which is normally held on the UCLA campus with about 400 attendees, will take place virtually, allowing for thousands of students to participate. This year's program is free for all participants.

Although it's not being held in a physical location, Dorfman, 61, promises the program will not miss a beat.

"We have the ability to do almost everything we did in the live program," Dorfman said. "We are going to put the students in small chat rooms and have them talk to coaches and try to make it as close to the live program as possible."

The online seminar will allow more mentorship video calls from business leaders, philanthropists, motivational speakers, and celebrities, including Olympian Apolo Ohno, Paula Abdul, actors Jason Alexander and Dennis Quaid. Students receive helpful mentorship and knowledge speakers versed in technology, entertainment and design from the comfort of their home.

“I have a wide variety of speakers,” said Dorfman, who was a contributor to ABC’s ‘Extreme Makeover,’ and has appeared on numerous television shows, including “Oprah,” “Dr. Phil” and “The Doctors.” “Some teach skills, how to apply for jobs and public speaking.

“Some are motivational speakers, some talk about the challenges they’ve overcome and the successes in their life. Some are very successful business people,” Dorfman added. “The goal is to give kids the skills they will need in life. At LEAP we don’t reinvent mediocrity.”

While all of the programs are important to Dorfman, an unexpected situation turned into a program and thus opened his eyes to yet another need he didn’t see coming.

“We have all kinds of students coming to the program,” Dorfman said. “I realized that some of our young men don’t have positive male role models in their lives, so I’ve had to become one. We had an event where the students had to dress up and I realized that none of the boys knew how to tie a tie. It became part of our ‘How to be a Gentlemen’ seminar.

“We also teach how to eat and exercise right,” he added. “We cover things no other leadership program covers. We also do a whole thing on appreciation, drugs and alcohol.”

During the weeklong program, students are presented with a core curriculum that helps them with goal setting, time management, interviewing skills, effective communication, college prep, gratitude, becoming transformative leaders, goal setting, self-confidence, mentorship, positive self-talk, speechwriting, test prep, and how to land a job.

Participants must be between the ages of 15 and 27, although some participants as old as 30 have been accepted.

Pre-COVID-19, the program was split down the middle with 50% college students and 50% high school students, 50% male, and 50% female. Blacks make up about 15-20% of the event’s population.

International students make up about 25% of the participants. About 80 students come from Perth, Australia, while others come from Israel, Europe, Asia, Canada, and from Johannesburg, South Africa, through the Tomorrow Trust program.

The program is open to any student, according to Dorfman.

“We screen students,” he said. “We talk to students and parents. There are some who I don’t think will get anything out of it. They have to want to be here.”

“About 90% of the kids whose parents want to pay will get something out of it. This year because we’re doing it online, it’s free to all of the students.”

Pre COVID-19, the program cost was \$449. Dorfman said a number of scholarships are given to “A and B students who come from low-income families and want to excel.”

“LEAP is literally a program unlike any other program in the world,” said Dorfman, who graduated from UCLA. “We engage these kids. They come as students, then they can come back as coaches and then they come back as speakers.”

Dorfman, a successful businessman and dentist, believes his curriculum should be taught in high schools and colleges.

“Heck yeah, it really should,” said Dorfman. “The stuff we teach you don’t normally learn in school but successful people have told us this is what everyone needs in order to be successful.”

The idea for LEAP started 30 years ago after Dorfman attended a boot camp for dentists who needed guidance on how to successfully run their practices. The event was so effective a camp was started to help the children of dentists prepare for successful careers.

Each year Dr. Dorfman was asked to be a mentor at the children’s camp and share the secrets of his success as a dentist.

“About 15 years ago, the guy who led the program passed away,” Dorfman said. “I thought to myself, ‘This program is too good to die with him. I’m going to revamp the program and make it a nonprofit.’ The goal was that 60% of the participants would come from disadvantaged families. Some of the students would come on scholarship because we wanted everyone to be there.”

Dorfman has advice for anyone who wants to be successful.

“Don’t wait for opportunities in life, make them,” he said. “And when you get an opportunity in life, don’t take it, master it.”

The most satisfying part of the weeklong event for Dorfman is at the end of the program when he gives his final farewell speech.

“As I’m finishing, I look out in the audience and see kids as they hold up their hands and make a heart,” Dorfman said. “That’s when I know I’ve succeeded.”

Students interested in participating in the free program can register at [www.leapfoundation.com/drbuild](http://www.leapfoundation.com/drbuild). The deadline is noon July 18.

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