

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

Unlocking Adult Development for a Peaceful Life

David Lowry: 0:36

Hello everyone and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio. I'm David Lowry along with my good friend, Don Drew. So glad to see you today. And Don, we got a great show lined up.

Don Drew: 0:47

Well, I sure hope it is.

David Lowry: 0:49

We're going to be talking about adult development and peaceful living. And I've never heard about this concept of adult development before, and I'm excited to learn more about that today. Don, I saw this drawing one time, it's a drawing of an adult and inside is a little teeny person inside. And the whole concept was that many people who are adults have this small person living inside of them, and they act that age. I've heard that the average age of Americans emotionally is around 15 years of age.

Don Drew: 1:23

Wow. Well, I guess there's nothing more to say then.

David Lowry: 1:27

This is why a program on adult development can be very important because actually we don't stop developing in life. We continue on, don't we?

Don Drew: 1:36

You know, that's true, David. It probably, for all of us, we do spend a part of our lives as 15-year-olds, but hopefully there's a little bit more to it than that. Today, I want to talk about the work Jennifer Garvey Berger and what she calls a form of mind and when she's talking about this, she's talking about underlying cognitive structures or ways of thinking that characterize each of three stages of adult development. And all of these forms of mind as we progress, become more complex and sophisticated and allow us to have a greater depth of understanding to better adapt to different situations. So, it's important to note that not everyone progresses through all these three stages at the same rate, nor does it necessarily mean that all of us progress through all three stages.

So, what we're going to do is look at each one of these discuss what they mean and how they might lead to a more peaceful life.

David Lowry: 2:27

I think that's important for us to do because we are always growing. You've heard about the wisdom of senior people, it happens, if you allow yourself to grow. And hearing today's podcast will help many people to know where they are, in their own development, and set a goal for where they want to be. I guess we should start with stage number one.

Don Drew: 2:49

Let's start with that. That's the socialized mind. Now, in this first stage, people are largely focused on fitting in and conforming to norms and expectations. This could be what they are told they should be or do, how they should act. People in the socialized mind tend to seek approval from others and they oftentimes have difficulty challenging the status quo and what they're being told, how they should be, and how life is.

David Lowry: 3:15

Now, I may be mischaracterizing it, but I think of this as the young professional area of life. Early in your career, you're wanting to be somebody, but you don't know exactly who you're going to be just yet. So, you hang on to the coattails of somebody important. And if they say this is what you ought to be doing, then that's what you do. You're always taking cues from people about you, about what's good, bad, and appropriate at work, or how to be the good parent, or how to be the appropriate person in your church, and so forth. And we really buy into all of that, don't we?

Don Drew: 3:50

Yeah. And a lot of us think of young people as they graduate from high school and college, and they quickly become their own person. And the reality is that it takes time and it's a gradual process. Some people get more stuck in the socialized mind than others, but we all are trying to find our way and finding a way requires challenges. It requires responding to those challenges in effective ways and learning from that.

David Lowry: 4:15

Right, and you mentioned that part of this first stage, this socialized mind, is seeking approval. Part of that seeking approval is approval in the way you look, the way you dress, being in the right place at the right time, and eating at the right places. Some people who may be further along in their journey or a bit older may look at a young person or somebody in that stage of life and look down upon them and say they're so shallow but they're perfectly normal. They're right where they ought to be, right?

Don Drew: 4:44

One of the things that we can mistake here is pushing back from this kind of control or expectations and so forth can be misunderstood as growth and development when in

fact, it is just what it is. It's pushing back. It's not actually moving toward anything, which actually leads us to our second stage, and that's the self-authoring mind.

David Lowry: 5:03

What is that?

Don Drew: 5:04

The self-authoring mind is going to be questioning and critically reflecting on our own beliefs and values. One of the things we talk about a lot in higher education is critical thinking and the importance of developing critical thinking. So, we're trying to teach 18- to 22-year-olds to learn how to critically think when they're stuck in the socialized mind and are struggling to grow out of that and to start authoring their own lives. So, it's during this period of the self-authoring mind that we define our own identity and start making decisions based upon our internal principles and values, rather than all these external influences.

David Lowry: 5:37

I know a lot of people in this area are deconstructing. Deconstructing is a fancy term for saying, Well, I was taught this, but I'm beginning to think that maybe what I was taught isn't exactly the truth or doesn't work for everybody or certainly isn't working for me. So maybe you have attended X church all of your life and suddenly it's like, I don't know that's the right church for me anymore. Maybe it worked for your family, and you got to rethink that. Or maybe it's a job. Maybe you thought that you always wanted to be working in a certain career and the more you do it, the more you realize this is really not me. It's more of my parents or my friends or what other people encourage me to do. I can remember being in a sales career and doing reasonably good in it but not enjoying any of it. I went from that socialized mind and one day I realized I'm not happy in what I'm doing.

Don Drew: 6:30

Right. You reminded me of a situation I experienced when I was probably in my mid-twenties. Up until that time, I had been raised in a family and church. Divorce was something that you just didn't do. There was no excuse for it. No good reason for it. Until I had a very dear friend of mine show up at my door one night. Her husband had been beating her and she was trying to seek shelter with my wife and me.

David Lowry: 6:52

There are times when you absolutely have to say, wait a minute that's not for me. I heard a really great saying one time, Don, that you honor your parents best by not repeating their mistakes, and so if you've been socialized a particular way, it's best not to repeat those same mistakes.

Don Drew: 7:09

So, the self-authoring mind, though, is a way of critically looking at your life, deciding what works for you and not just accept things the way you were told. Now, the third stage is what we call the self-transforming mind. This is a little bit different. In this case, people tend to have a deeper understanding of themselves and therefore others as well, and they can more effectively navigate complexity and ambiguity and are more comfortable with paradoxes and contradictions in their life.

David Lowry: 7:36

There's this thing called a dialectic so let me give you one. Like, we want to belong, and we like to be with our friends, but sometimes we need to be apart and have moments of solitude. You may be a person who enjoys being around people, but then you need to be by yourself for a while and not around people. And that may seem paradoxical. But from a dialectic point of view, it's a continuum of needing to be with people to needing to be away from people. So, we learn how to navigate the paradoxes and situations where we may act one way, but in another situation, we don't.

Don Drew: 8:15

Right. And in Jennifer Garvey Berger's book, *Changing on the Job, Developing Leaders for a Complex World*, she focuses largely on leadership and organizations, but a lot of what she has, a lot of the principles that she identifies are really important, both at the individual and interpersonal level as well. So, let's take a look here at some of the principles that relate to adult development and effectiveness.

David Lowry: 8:38

I'd love to do that. What's the first one we should look at?

Don Drew: 8:41

The first one is focusing on developmental growth and it's happening through challenges. We develop when we have something to push against. Think of a muscle, okay? Or going to the gym. David, I know you do it all the time. Yeah,

David Lowry: 8:54

Gym

Don Drew: 8:54

rat. Can't ever get him out of the gym. So just think about how you exercise a muscle, and that muscle gets bigger and stronger. That's the basic principle here. It takes challenges to provide opportunities for learning and adaptation.

David Lowry: 9:06

This growth happens through challenges, or do challenges happen through growth? I'm not sure. Which one is it? It's sort of a chicken or egg thing, isn't it?

Don Drew: 9:14

Right. And you need both, frankly, you need both. The second principle I want to point out is increasing complexity leads to greater effectiveness. You would think that greater complexity would frustrate and create stress, but actually we find that further development into self-authoring and self-transforming is increased by the complexity that allows us to be more effective in our roles. A paradox, and it requires us to recognize that complexity makes us sharper.

David Lowry: 9:42

Sometimes I find that situations are a bit ambiguous. We have to study them out. We don't have all the facts and information we need, and that makes a problem a bit more complex. Somebody says should I buy this house, or should I buy that house? Should I put my money in this form of investment, or another form of investment? So, this increasing development as we learn how to handle it makes us a more effective human being and a part of our development as well. The more things you see, the more cases you work through, the more times you see a problem, the better you get.

Don Drew: 10:20

The third area is what Jennifer calls the subject-object shift. Now think about it this way. People in their socialized mind tend to filter anything that happens to them through their own thoughts and their own self. What is suggested here is that we learn how to observe from a more detached perspective. And again, it adds to our growth and development. It gives us some perspective that we perhaps can't take with just the socialized mind.

David Lowry: 10:48

Perspective means that over the years, we come to see that there are many points of view and that all of points of view have something to offer us. It might be in the way you raise your children, or how you live your daily life and what becomes important to you going forward. So subject-object shift is really important. What's the fourth one, Don?

Don Drew: 11:10

That's what she calls action inquiry. Taking action and then reflecting on the outcomes. This goes back to the idea of critical analysis, our ability to learn from our actions and to take it upon ourselves to take action, then to learn and analyze and reflect on those outcomes and make adaptations as necessary.

David Lowry: 11:30

I love it when people learn from their mistakes, but also involved in this, I believe, is a concept called double-loop learning. And why don't you explain that to us?

Don Drew: 11:41

Okay, I will keep it really simple here. Double-Loop learning simply means you learn from feedback and correct. Single loop learning, you stop after the action without making the kind of changes necessary to correct action in the future.

David Lowry: 11:55

I like to do a little baking from time to time, and the proof is in eating that muffin I make, right? So, if I eat the muffin and it's really good, I think, okay, I think I may have done something, but if I eat it and it's like, wait a minute, that's not exactly the thing I had in my mind. The ability to learn from what I did to reflect on it and that action inquiry step is really a beautiful thing.

Don Drew: 12:20

The fifth item is creating developmental cultures. Now, remember that Garvey Berger is talking specifically about organizations, but you can also apply this to any family or important group that you're a part of. And that has to do with developing cultures that support and encourage individual development. Creating developmental cultures means creating a space where it's safe to take risks, learn from failure, be more open in your dialogue and communication. And so, in these ways, we actually can create an environment in which individuals can thrive and grow.

David Lowry: 12:56

If we could transfer those same sorts of things to our jobs, to the people we know, to our families, to our marriage relationships and so forth, our lives can be so much better. Making it safe for us to experiment. Don, sometimes I come into a classroom, and I think this will either be the best class I've ever taught, or it'll be the biggest flop I've ever taught. But I have to do it because I have to keep growing and trying new things. So, I'll try this exercise and if the students seem to like it, we'll go forward and try more of them. If they don't, let's think about why it didn't work and maybe we won't do it again or maybe we'll tweak it a bit or do something.

Don Drew: 13:36

Okay, the next one is what Garvey Barger calls leading with humility and curiosity. Now, the socialized mind, they tend to go along, if you will, or try to meet expectations without necessarily allowing their curiosity to push them beyond. The self-authoring and the self-transforming mind are going to recognize that they don't have all the answers. And knowing they don't have all the answers gives them a certain kind of humility with which then they can learn.

David Lowry: 14:07

I really have found that the older I get, the fewer answers are the certainty of those answers. I become a lot more suspect of that. Don't you?

Don Drew: 14:16

I'm still learning that. I'd like to tell you I'm really a self-transforming mind person, but I spend an awful lot of time hanging out with the socialized mind as well.

David Lowry: 14:25

I think we all do. I think there's some areas where we're really out there transforming ourselves and others where, let's face it, we've got work to do.

Don Drew: 14:32

The last one has to do with embracing complexity and ambiguity. It is a tendency of the socialized mind to be satisfied with simplistic solutions because you go with what you've been told. It's only when you move into the self-authoring and the self-transformational areas of growth and development in your lives that you learn that simplistic solutions really rarely exist.

David Lowry: 14:55

I have found that when people are really certain of the outcome, that sometimes it blows up. There's just not much guarantee in life that things are risk free, a sure deal, or the thing you think is going to happen is going to happen. You have to deal with a little more ambiguity.

Don Drew: 15:12

So, David, let's see if we can match up what we've learned about adult development and relate that in meaningful ways to peacefulness and peacekeeping.

David Lowry: 15:21

I'd love for us to do that. I think I see one here called complexity and conflict resolution. What does Garvey Berger's model say about that?

Don Drew: 15:30

She suggests that that as individuals form higher forms of mind, they become more adept in handling complexity and ambiguity. This increased capacity for complexity can be valuable in conflict resolution and peace building efforts, where the issues at hand are often multifaceted and nuanced.

David Lowry: 15:46

Every time you think you're going to help somebody make peace, you learn that it's a lot harder than you thought. I have a respect for those people who catch on fast. They've done it so many times and they've seen situations come and go and they know exactly what they're doing. It's really great. And we can become that way too if we're open for it. The second one is moving from that subject-object shift to empathy. And that's an important part of peacemaking.

Don Drew: 16:09

Yeah, David, I know you've in the past talked about empathy quite a bit, and I was taught that empathy means to feel with, not to feel for, but in order to feel with somebody, you have to make an attempt to understand them and understand their feelings and their way of viewing the world and so forth. And we tend to focus on our own thoughts, on our own ways of being and our own perceptions, our own judgments and it really helps us in living a peaceful life to keep a more objective view of the world and being open to understanding.

David Lowry: 16:40

I hope so. What we're going for is empathy, putting yourself and in your perspective, imagining what it's like to be in another person's situation. Well, what about this third one? Humility and curiosity as a part of our interactions with others?

Don Drew: 16:56

What it specifically has to do with is humility and curiosity in dialogue in our interactions with people with which we may have conflict or differences. One of the parts of becoming self-authoring and self-transforming is that you're moving away from a way of being that you had assumed, and you're exploring and investigating and growing into new ways of being. And at times, that is going to create some conflict if the other person is holding to a fixed position. It really helps to remain humble about the fact that we may not know something or may not fully understand it yet. For several years now, I've used a phrase when somebody asked me about what I believe about something, I usually say, this is what I'll answer their question. And I say, this is what I believe. And then I'll conclude that with, that's what I believe today. Ask me again tomorrow.

David Lowry: 17:50

I like that. One of the things I always say is that's the story I'm telling myself. Because so much of what we believe is based upon the latest story you've heard, the latest piece of information you've got, but it could be incomplete. There's another thing that goes along with this particular thing that you're talking about here, Don, and that is, people have to reinvent themselves, I think is the common way of expressing it. When I was into My early career, being a DJ would just be the best thing in the world. It was wonderful, I loved every moment of it, and then later on, I loved teaching. And then later on, I loved doing administrative work. And later on, I loved doing other things. And we always have to be willing to reinvent and transform ourselves, never stopping your transformation.

Don Drew: 18:37

I think it fits really well with the idea of adult development, because when we talk about the socialized mind, we're talking about people who are basically are reflecting or being the way they are supposed to be or should be, and then the self-authoring person is trying to move from there to somewhere else, that's the authoring part, trying to rewrite our lives into something that works better for us. And the third level of mind development, this self-transforming mind, is moving from that point to a way of being,

one that's open to a constant learning, constant reinvention, in multiple directions, perhaps.

David Lowry: 19:14

I'd like to think that moving into that last category you talked about is a great way of describing how we should look at philosophy, faith, peacemaking, all of it. We can be so sure when we're in that socialized mind that we have all the points down and we've learned all the book learning and maybe we've been to college, or we have a degree, or we've studied with the best person. But later on, we understand that there's way more to learn than we can possibly learn and that we're always going to have to be reformulating what we thought we knew about something into a different and newer present reality.

Don Drew: 19:50

The more we reflect on ourselves as individuals and what's important to us and so on the more it helps us to adjust to those things in our lives that might be creating conflict, whether it be people or situations and learning how to adapt, how to reflect on the negative things that happen in our life, how to better respond and learn from that response. Overall, these adult development models suggest that fostering higher forms of mind characterized by increasing complexity, empathy, humility, and reflective capacity can contribute to creating conditions conducive to peace at both the individual, relational, and organizational levels.

David Lowry: 20:33

That's what this show is all about, helping people create a space where they can learn more about peace. And if you want to have a peaceful life, then this is where you start.