

Face 2 Face

with Mrs. Devorah Lieberman, President of the University of La Verne

Simple words cannot define a woman of such humility, valor and devotion. President Lieberman is driven by purpose, and she finds reasoning in everything she does. As a young girl, Lieberman was told she should only pursue a community college education - become a wife and a mother. Believing that she had the potential to achieve much more, she changed the direction of her life.

One of Lieberman's favorite quotes is, "What you believe, you can achieve." She encourages others to find their purpose so they can achieve beyond what is presumed. President Lieberman stated, "Having purpose is your reason to be". Keep reading our interview with President Lieberman. It is quite compelling.

1. For those that may not know your background, share with our readers who you are and your journey into becoming a valuable community leader.

I grew up in Covina, Calif., never really knowing where I was going or what I was going to do. I have two older brothers; I was the baby, the only girl. I was put into a very apparent 'box' and told I should go to Mt. Sac, get married, have babies and take care of my family. I always wondered why I had to follow that path. Why is that script written for me? Don't I have a say?

As a young girl I always believed I had the potential to achieve, but I felt self conscience about articulating that publicly. I went to Covina High School, and my high school counselor assumed that I was going to go to community college. He never asked what I thought I wanted to do. Because of this, I never want to make assumptions

or set limits on what my students can or cannot do.

2. At what age did pursuing communications as a career choice spark?



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-Devorah Lieberman

At the end of my freshman year at Mt. Sac I remember saying, “I don’t feel this is a good use of my time. I’m going to college but I don’t know what I am doing.” What was the purpose? I’m all about purpose! What was the reason?

Today I’m very purpose oriented. I know exactly why I’m doing what I’m doing. Back then, I didn’t know why. I went to the Jewish Federation in April and asked them if they had any programs in Israel where I could learn and work at the same time? They said yes. The program was a one-year program where I would work four hours a day in the fields and then go to a class 4 hours a day. I drove home and said, “Ok! On June 1st I’m flying to Israel for a year!” I had saved up money from Red Devil Pizza and the Eastland Theatre.

When I was in Israel, I began to observe the relationship between the Israelis and Arabs. I realized that the issues between the Israelis and the Arabs had to do with politics, not the people. I was 18. I believed if I could just work with the people, I could help resolve some of the issues that the politicians were having (which were bigger than the people).

When I came back to the States, I finished up at Mt. Sac very quickly because I had a new found purpose. I knew what I wanted to do. I went to Humboldt State and majored in Communications with an emphasis in Intercultural Communication. I wanted to make the world a better place. It is communication that makes people have disagreements. They don’t communicate, and it leads to misunderstandings. I went to San Diego State and got my master’s in Intercultural Communication. Five years later I went to Florida and got my doctorate in Intercultural Communication and Gerontology because I was interested in older adults. I think that’s another area that needs attention.

3. Who has been the most influential person on your career path? Why?

My mother, of course, because she was always the quiet force behind everything I did. I think the best of me comes from her. The three people who have had the most influence during my adulthood are my husband and two children. They keep me humble and motivated. My husband and children are my heroes, they allow me to have passion, and they show love. We’re the type of family that says if it’s important to you it’s important to me.

4. How does it feel to be recognized as the first woman in leadership to transform the higher education system at the University of La Verne?

I feel honored. I feel humbled. I feel an enormous obligation to the students. Being the first woman with this honor makes me feel like a role model. I am the first woman president. The 17 presidents before me were all men.

5. At what point did you decide to start writing and co-authoring books, such as “Success Models and Practices”? Why?

It started a long time before that. I was writing many articles on international communication, and my first book came out in 1990. It was the first introductory reader for International Relations in the country. My reason for writing is not to publish. My reason to write is to make a difference to others so they can improve their work.

6. How do you motivate youth to continue in their education and excel past adversities?

I taught a leadership course this semester. I think you always have to lead by example. I’m on campus as much as possible. I’m with the students as much as possible. I’m very active in the Interfaith Youth Counsel, which I believe in deeply. They work together in the community to build gardens and make changes. The best way to motivate is to participate! Lead by example. Words don’t make it [a difference], your actions do.

7. Significant portions of our readers are teens and young adults gearing up for college and/or beginning their career. What advice could you give them?

Never, Never, NEVER give up. Never! I never give up. If you believe in something, do it and stick to it. Don’t let anyone tell you that you cannot do something. If a problem happens, don’t wonder how you can solve the problem. Sit down and be a part of the solution!

8. What legacy would you like to leave behind?

When I go back to Portland State University or Wagner College, I see that they are much more successful today than they were when I was there. That makes me feel so proud because they may not remember what I have done, but they have gone beyond whatever it was that I did. It makes me feel successful. I want to feel the same thing when I retire and go back to the University of La Verne. People are not going to remember everything that you do, but they will remember how you made them feel. On an individual basis, if I can have people feel great about themselves, and if I can have students feel that they can accomplish anything – I have left my legacy.

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