



Awake the Warrior

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR HELPS MEN TAP INTO THEIR FEELINGS

By Nelia Raposo

When traditional talk therapy wasn't working for him, David Lawson started looking for other solutions.

Now he wants to share those lessons with other men. "I was 15 years old when my dad died. That had a huge impact on my life, obviously," Lawson says.

As a boy and man, he pushed down his feelings of grief and loss, focusing instead on excelling at hockey as a teenager, and then later, persevering in the business world as an entrepreneur.

But one day, his entire being refused to cooperate. "I came home and told my wife, 'I can't do this anymore.'" That week, instead of going on yet another business trip, he booked a ticket to a self-help retreat in California.

That trip was his first of eight healing retreats with Deepak Chopra, a world-renowned pioneer in integrative medicine and personal transformation, and author of more than 90 self-help books. "The main idea is to take care of yourself before you get sick, whereas here in the west we get sick and then take pills," Lawson says.

Western medicine techniques often involve

pharmacological and surgical interventions but don't address the underlying issue of stress that may be causing the disease. The Western approach to medicine is a reactive response to symptoms rather than a preventative approach.

Lawson also went to India in 2019 and 2020 to learn more. There he dove deeper into his learning and practices. He describes his experience in India as "intense. It's like you become a dishrag. They rinse you out and you feel incredible afterwards."

These days the entrepreneur is pumping the brakes on his role at his other businesses to focus on Awake Warrior, a life-coaching business that assists men in all areas of their life. "I've delegated a lot of work at Icegreen," says the 53-year-old owner of an international manufacturer, wholesaler and supplier of reusable bags and other environmentally responsible packaging solutions in Oakville and the United States. "My main goal is to help others. Men are struggling. We're conditioned to (live in the) ego. We evaluate ourselves on external factors. It's a never-ending treadmill. You have a big house; you want a bigger house, but the real true joy is peace on the inside." This male conditioning to "suck it up" or "muscle through" tough times is evident in popular culture, Lawson says.

For instance, take these lyrics from Shawn Mendes' song Wonder, released in 2018: "I wonder, when I cry into my hands, I'm conditioned to feel like it makes me less of a man." The Canadian singer told an interviewer "I was coming off the back of a couple of really big songs and was just so driven by my ego." During an interview with Apple Music, he explained that he'd become laser-focused on cranking out hit singles. "It's addictive... It's destructive. You miss out on the most beautiful part, which is the process." Through meditation, journaling, and self-care, Mendes reconnected with the joys of making music.

Similarly, Lawson dived into learning about ancient eastern health practices to manage stress and anxiety. He learned about healing practices. He learned about living in the moment and experiencing emotions as they →



→ happen instead of ignoring them. “Women are better at reaching out to people for help than men. Men tend to suppress feelings and that leads to addiction and all sorts of crazy things,” Lawson said.

Males account for more than 75 per cent of suicides in Canada. That’s an average of 50 men per week, according to Statistics Canada.

Similarly, surveys indicate that Canadian men are around three times more likely to experience addiction and substance abuse compared to Canadian women. This includes alcohol, cannabis, and opioid abuse.

Lawson explains the reasons for these alarming statistics are many, but his view is that mental health services are typically offered in ways that do not appeal to men. “Guys tend to prefer solutions to problems,” Lawson says.

They are doers. They want informal action-based or group-based mental health services as opposed to formal one-on-one talk therapy. He says Awake Warrior is for men who are looking for the tools to apply to their

own life. “As men, we’re very good at solving problems, but we need to have tools to be present. True intelligence is in the body and heart. The truest intelligence is in the heart. You can call it intuition.”

Lawson teaches embodiment practices. Embodiment practices use the body as a tool for healing through self-awareness, mindfulness, connection, self-regulation, finding balance, and creating self-acceptance.

Embodiment explores the relationship between our physical being and our energy. It involves the interaction of our body, thoughts, and actions. “Men don’t know how to feel. Once men learn how to feel the full range of their emotions things begin to change. We must embrace our feminine side. You should cry, you should let it out. When men connect with an open heart, that’s when the healing journey takes place,” Lawson says. “Otherwise, they run around staying busy as a distraction from emotions or they get addicted to stuff. Bottling emotions is an awful thing, that’s

why the suicide rate for men is going up. Listen,” he says, matter-of-factly, “I know this is Oakville and we have a lot of high achievers in the community. I am an ambitious guy too, but it cannot be your only focus. We’re taught to become successful. Success is based on material things but that’s not all there is.”

Awake Warrior offers one-day retreats at a canoe club in Oakville and Sherwood Inn on Lake Joseph in Muskoka.

There is also an online option. For \$499, clients have access to six modules to guide the healing journey. Each video module has a downloadable file with instructions for self-mastery tools. He opted to share a pre-recorded online course so people all over the world can connect and learn the skills and techniques on their own schedule from any location.

Dr. Christina Hyland, who has a PhD in social work and has worked with Lawson, says he has so much real-life and professional experience. “As a therapist, I’ve referred clients to David who’ve benefited immensely from his support in deepening their healing journey, she says. “David can really assist in making mindfulness, meditation, self-love/compassion and healing tangible and attainable. He has a kind and compassionate demeanour and having gone through the journey to his own awakening, he understands the roadblocks that can surface along the way.”

Frank Dunbar, a client of Lawson’s says, “My experience working with Dave was incredibly helpful. His holistic approach to stress management was very powerful yet easy to adopt.”

On the Awake Warrior website, Matthew Wright recommends Lawson saying, “Over the years, David has taught me Qigong, meditation techniques, breath work, mantras, and continues to inspire me to up my game daily, to do the work that offers real value in life.”

While these testimonials are uplifting, Lawson insists the secret to real success is to “discover what your gift is and share that with the world.

“Now that I’ve learned it, I feel like I need to share it.” **W**

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