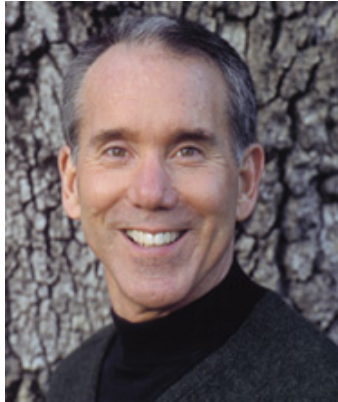


Secrets of the Masters: Dan Millman



Dan Millman is a former world champion athlete, university coach, martial arts instructor, and college professor. His books have inspired millions of readers in 29 languages. His fictionalized autobiography, *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*, has been made into a movie starring Nick Nolte as Socrates, Dan's mentor.

Dan on...

Dan and *The Peaceful Warrior*

I was a successful college gymnast at Berkeley in the 60s, did fine in my school work, and did socialize (but maybe not quite as wildly as depicted in the movie). One night, after a late night date, I was walking home back to my apartment from where she was staying, and I passed by this old Texaco station I had probably passed by many times before. On impulse, I turned into the station to get a snack, and I met this unusual old guy.

He wouldn't tell me his name. He said it didn't matter, but he reminded me immediately of the old Greek sage. I just started calling him Socrates. He served as my mentor, but he also served as an archetype, because from the time that I met him and spent some time with him in that gas station learning more about the bigger picture of life, which really pulled me out of where I felt confident, the world of the gymnasium and the college's arm, and he showed me there was a different kind of knowledge, more wisdom than just knowing facts.

He taught me a lot of fundamental life lessons, perennial wisdom that's been around since before Socrates or Plato. He had a way of delivering that was very practical. He was not a member of any church or religion, more esoteric and eclectic in his approach to his life as I am. Thirteen years passed before I wrote my first book, and in that time I met other masters and mentors in different places in the world, studied in-depth wisdom, and I wanted to share everything that I had learned.

Now that book has been adapted to a story on film, and though the movie Dan is in many ways not the real Dan, the essence of my story is still there.

Awakening

I had a number of wake up calls. One was a motorcycle accident. I suffered a shattered right leg that is covered in the book, and also covered quite accurately in the movie. It was painful. It was disappointing. It was depressing, and it changed my life. Whenever adversity hits, and it's always going to hit, depending on how we respond to it, it's a small gift or a big gift. I do not recommend fractures as a method of personal and spiritual growth, however.

Accountability

I was complaining about something to Socrates, some professor's hard on me. He doesn't seem to like me, or whatever. Socrates looked at me in an amused way. He said, "You know, you remind me of a guy I knew once. Every day at noon, he'd open his lunchbox, and say, 'Not another peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I hate peanut butter and jelly.'"

The next day, he'd open his lunch box and say, "Oh, no peanut butter and jelly, again? I just can't believe it." Every single day was the same thing – same sandwich, same place. One of his workmates finally had enough and said, "Mac, you don't like peanut butter and jelly, why don't you ask your wife to make you something different?" Mac scratched his head and said, "What do you mean my wife? I'm not married. I make my own sandwiches."

We all make our own sandwiches. We're all accountable. The choices we make, and we make choices not in our heads. Nobody makes a choice in their head, nobody. We think we do, but we don't make a choice until we act.

Ego

Ego gets a bad rap in the spiritual tradition and in the psychological one to some degree. Though, many psychologists recognize you have to have ego strength before you can kind of transcend it. The ego from the Huna tradition, the Hawaiian tradition is simply the conscious self – one of three selves that comprise who we are, the higher self-conscious self and basic self or body instincts and body wisdom.

We don't have a developed ego when we're born. Little babies don't know what anything is. They don't know they're separate from anything. They learn it quickly enough when they're hungry and they don't get the milk right away. Gradually we develop this ego, this personality, and it's designed to learn things like look both ways before you cross the street, and how to function in life and have a career.

Emotions

Emotions are like the weather. They pass like the weather. They come and they go. Sometimes our emotions are sunny, and sometimes stormy and sometimes dark and grey. It's perfectly normal. It's not a problem. They do pass. We are better off focusing on behaving constructively despite what we are feeling.

Thoughts

The way you tame the mind is not to knit your brows and meditate so hard that you can clear the mind of all thoughts. That's idealistic. Thoughts come and thoughts go like emotions. Instead, let those thoughts be whatever they are. You can notice them, nod to them in passing, and again, come back to "what do I need to do?"

One of the biggest blocks to learning, to really learning is to go, "I know that already," because we may think we know it, but it has to penetrate deeper until it hits our core, and then life changes.

Life

The paradox of enlightenment has been described as going from the heights of bliss to the depths of despair alternating at the speed of light, rather interesting definition. I think a transcendental statement that could be useful to remember sometimes is life is a game we play, a gift that matters.

If we play life as a game, as if it matters, then we have a certain transcendental approach to it, but we can still dive into life, and go for the gusto and all that. Conventional life, good things happen, bad things happen, accidents happen, all that's conventional truth. Part of our everyday reality as human beings, vulnerable mortal people on the planet earth, bang your foot, it really hurts.

Change

All things change. We want change when things are going bad, but when they're going well, we want to cling to it. It could get worse again, and I hate to tell people this, but you and I are probably going to experience more pain in our life, really unpleasant pain. I hate to say that, but that's a fact of life. But we are also going to have a great deal of pleasure in our life. We have no idea what's up ahead. I wouldn't want to know. I think it's a wonderful mystery. Don't you?

For more information about Dan, his books,
and the movie based on his first book, go to:

<http://peacefulwarrior.com>