

The Daily Helping Episode 295:

Dr. Srikumar Rao

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:00:00] Have you ever turned on the television not because there's something there that you really want to watch, but because it's a way to distract your mind so it doesn't bother you? Not some of the problems, all of the problems that you are facing are created because your obstreperous mind is bossing you around and it will not let you be.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:00:32] Hello and welcome to The Daily Helping with Dr. Richard Shuster, food for the brain, knowledge from the experts, tools to win at life. I'm your host, Dr. Richard. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, and whatever you do, this is the show that is going to help you become the best version of yourself. Each episode you will hear from some of the most amazing, talented and successful people on the planet who follow their passions and strive to help others. Join our movement to get a million people each day to commit acts of kindness for others. Together, we're going to make the world a better place. Are you ready? Because it's time for your Daily Helping.

Thanks for tuning in to this episode of The Daily Helping Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Richard. And our guest today is nothing short of extraordinary and brilliant. And I am so honored to be sharing his wisdom with all of us today. His name is Dr. Srikumar Rao. He's an elite coach who works with a select group of entrepreneurs, professionals and senior executives. His clients are already successful, but they seek his coaching because they need his help to have an outsized impact in the world, to make a dent in the universe.

Millions, and literally millions of people, have listened to his TEDx Talk and his recordings, have attended his workshops. He's got only one goal, to help you experience life in exponentially better way. He's been featured in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Financial Times, Businessweek, Fortune, Forbes, The London Times, Huffington Post, so many others. He also has a PhD from the Columbia Business School and has taught at other top business schools, such as Kellogg, Berkeley, the London's Business School. And he's conducted workshops as well for alumni of Stanford and Harvard Business Schools. It is my pleasure to welcome Dr. Rao to The Daily Helping. It is amazing to have you here.

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**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:02:29] Thank you, Dr. Richard. I must say it's my pleasure to be on your show. And I've greatly enjoyed the conversations we've had before, and I look forward to this one as well.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:02:41] Now, this is going to be great. There are so many different things we could talk about. We could talk about your TEDx Talk, your new book, and we'll get to all of them. But one of my favorite things to do on my show is to jump in a time machine and go back and discover your origin story, your superhero origin story, if you will. Dr. Rao, could you tell us what puts you on the path you're on today?

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:03:05] Okay. So I got my PhD from Columbia Business School. I joined Corporate America, and I got a couple of lucky breaks and was hugely successful. In my early twenties, I was Head of Corporate Research for Warner Communications, reporting directly to the president. So heady days. I got burnt out by corporate politics. I said, I have a PhD, let me go to the universities where there is no politics. I was sadly mistaken, but I went there, and I was stuck. And all my colleagues who remained in the corporate world went on to great financial success and I was feeling sorry for myself. I had such a wonderful education, such a great early start to my career, and I blew it all. Oh, woe is me. Pity party of one.

Now, all my life I'd been doing a lot of reading. Spiritual biography, mystical autobiography would take me to a wonderful place. And I came back to the real world and it sucked. And I remember thinking of all of this is useful only if you're sitting quietly thinking peaceful thoughts, but not when you came to the hurly burly, then it's useless. Somehow, I knew that wasn't true, that this was very valuable. Maybe even the only thing that was valuable. I just hadn't figured out how to make use of it.

So one day I got my bright idea, which is why don't I take the teachings of the world's great masters, strip them of religious, cultural and other connotations, and adapt them so that they were acceptable to intelligent people in a post-industrial society. And the thought of doing that made me come alive. So I created that course. It did well. I moved it to Columbia Business School, where it exploded. It was the only course at Columbia, which is a university wide draw. I had students from law school, business school, school of international and public affairs, journalism, teachers college, all over the

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place. Columbia is one of the world's top schools, and students from many other top schools came there in exchange. They took my core program and went back and said, this is a great course. You've got to get it here. So I taught it at many, many top business schools. And I got a ton of publicity because I stayed in my syllabus.

This course will profoundly change your life. If not, we both failed. It's a business school course, for heaven's sake. What do you mean it's going to change my life? But it really does. And consider the sources where I draw my material from, the world's greatest masters. So the question isn't, will this change your life? Question is, how could it possibly not change your life? So because it did deliver on that promise, media was very, very intrigued and they got written up all over the place, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Forbes, Businessweek, London Times, Financial Times, Independent. You name every major business publication in North America and the U.K. covered it at one point or the other. So that's how we did it. Then it simply spread organically.

In 2009, I took it away from all business schools and started teaching it privately in New York, London and San Francisco. And since the pandemic, of course, we've been entirely virtual. And it's going so well that I don't know if I'll go back to life courses again. And in the meantime, I became an executive coach by default. People came up and said they wanted to work with me. And I tried to tell them about my course. And they said, "No, doctor, you don't understand. I don't want to take your course. I want to work with you personally". So I became a coach.

I now have a global coaching clientele and I coach in a very specific niche. I coach primarily entrepreneurs who are very successful, who want to have tremendous impact on the universe. But at the same time, they also have an explicit spiritual quest, and they know that life isn't all about gathering the most toys or the biggest toys. But in the back of their mind is the notion I can sit down and meditate eight hours a day and grow spiritually, or I can become a business titan. And my job is to tell them it's not or it's and, becoming a business titan is your spiritual path. And what does that entail? That's my coaching niche. To the best of my knowledge, I'm the only person playing in that particular sandbox. There may be others. I'm just not aware of them. And it's worked out very well for me personally, because I get a tremendous charge out of doing what I do, and it's such a pleasure to see people flower.

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**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:08:02] I love this. There are so many things I want to ask you, but what I am most interested to ask you, you essentially did a meta-analysis of all of the major religions and broke them down. You stripped away, as you said, the cultural nuances, you stripped away those things that were specifically germane to the religion. I'm curious, what were the overarching findings and tenants that you found when you looked at all organized religions?

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:08:36] Okay. I must tell you that I read very widely in all of the major wisdom traditions of the world. And I've had multiple members of all of them take my program, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, James, Muslims, Christians, Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Baha'i, you name it. They've all taken my program and all of them felt that they understood their particular tradition better as a result of having taken my course. I want to emphasize very strongly that I have read widely, but I am not an expert, nor do I claim to be an expert on any one of them. But I am always picking up the essence of what they are saying, away from the ritualistic part of that tradition. And they all come down to the same thing. Your problems are between your ears. Your mental chatter is driving you away from who you really are. And once you recognize that the hell you are living in is something that you have created because of your unbridled monkey mind stream of thoughts, when you truly recognize that and start tackling that issue, it's amazing how quickly your life will turn around.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:10:10] And this is essentially what you addressed in your TEDx Talk, plug in your hardwired happiness. And we're going to link to the TEDx Talk in the show notes, but I'd like you to just share. You mentioned the monkey mind, and a lot of people might be taken aback by hearing that all of the distress, all of the discomfort, the unhappiness in your life is a product of our own creation. Tell us what you mean by that.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:10:41] Okay. Tell me if you can relate to something I'm going to share with you right now, Richard. You had a hard day at work. You go home and say, hey, you know, I need to watch a movie to relax. So you turn into your Netflix queue and try to decide which one you want to pick. You scroll through your list, you look up reviews, you see what the ratings are. And at the end of half an hour, you still haven't

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decided what movie to see. And then you say, it's too late, I'm never going to finish anyway and we're going to do it some other time. Can you relate to that?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:11:19] I think we can all relate to that. Yeah.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:11:21] We can all relate to that. See what is happening here, Richard. Your monkey mind is running your life and it's telling you, hey, that's a thriller. Do you really want to watch it? Is it going to be a good thriller? The last two you watch were all terrible. It's got lousy ratings. Let me go to the next one. This one seems to be adventure. But, you know, these adventure movies have so much action and they're so fast and you need something more calming. How about this one? That's a rom-com. And rom-coms are only good if there is chemistry between the stars. And I haven't heard of either of these two. Maybe this is not it. And you go on and on.

Your mind is forcing you. It's bossing you around and you're supinely listening to it, and nothing gets done. I use that as an example, because that situation is true of a great deal of your life. Your mind tells you something, you believe it, you go on to something else and you'll do anything you can to distract your mind. Have you ever turned on the television not because there's something there that you really want to watch, but because it's a way to distract your mind so it doesn't bother you? I rest my case, Richard. Not some of the problems, all of the problems that you are facing are created because your obstreperous mind is bossing you around and it will not let you be.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:13:00] I think everybody listening to this appreciated that example and can relate to it. So with this understanding now, what are some of the steps we can take so that we can gain control over our monkey mind and fix those issues that, as you said, are between our ears?

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:13:19] First thing you got to realize, Richard, is this is not something that's going to happen in a day, week or year. This is a rest of your life undertaking. Let me repeat that. This is a rest of your life undertaking. But you will detect a significant improvement in your experience of life very fast within a matter of weeks if you conscientiously do what I'm about to share with you. And what I'm about to share with you is start watching your mind. Start watching the mental chatter you have.

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Mental chatter is not a problem. Let me repeat that. Mental chatter is not a problem. It exists.

Let's say it's a beautiful sunny day and you go out and you lie down on the grass and you look at the sky and it's beautiful. The temperature's just right. There's a pleasant breeze. And you look up at the sky and there are clouds there. You take a nap, and you wake up 20 minutes later and those clouds are gone, but there are fresh different clouds there. Mental chatter is like that. They are like clouds in the sky. They come and they go. Your problem is not that you have mental chatter. Your problem is that you identify with your mental chatter. And when you identify with your mental chatter, it takes you to all kinds of places. And many of those are places you would rather not go. You don't have to identify with your mental chatter. You identify with it as a matter of habit because everyone else around you is doing it. That's what you've been doing your entire life. But you can step back and observe your chatter rather than be your chatter.

So the core starting exercise and all of my programs is for you to observe your chatter. Don't be your chatter. Observe your chatter. And it's very easy for you to start. You can say, yeah, I can sit down. Oh, there are these sexual thoughts arising in me. And now they are power thoughts and now there are why aren't I as rich as he is thoughts. And I'm envious and I'm jealous and I'm angry and all the rest of that. You can label those emotions as they arise, but you'll find it's very difficult to remain a witness. You start off by being a witness, and in seconds, you've lost it, and you are the emotions as opposed to the observer of the emotions.

Keep practicing again and again. And gradually, you will find that it's easier and easier for you to be the observer, especially when there's high drama going on rather than being the participant. And when that happens, you will find that you are in a place of calm, which always remains with you. And from that place of calm, you take whatever action is necessary, but you're not a puppet being jerked up and down by these passing emotions. It's not easy, but it can be done. And the first requisite is you've got to decide I'm sick and tired of being jerked around the way I am.

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**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:16:41] I absolutely love this, Dr. Rao. There's little parts of my clinician brain lighting up saying that this has some tenets and cognitive behavioral therapy as well.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:16:52] Yes.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:16:53] And you're essentially, once you become the observer, it's interesting. It moves us from having an external locus of control to an internal locus control. That is by saying that all these bad things are happening to me, these negative feelings. It's the onus, it's the awareness that you have control over those thoughts and research. We know this for research going back forever. Empirical research shows us that those that have an internal locus of control, that have self-efficacy, those people that believe that they can make change in their life are overwhelmingly so much happier than those that believe that things happen to them. So this is great.

Dr. Rao, I wanted to spend a little time. I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about your latest publication, your latest book, *Modern Wisdom Ancient Roots: The Movers and Shakers Guide to Unstoppable Success*. First, tell us a little bit about what was your motivation for writing this book? And then I'd love to take a deep dive.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:18:06] My primary motivation was, what is it that I can do to help people? I have tons of followers, tens of thousands. More than a million people have watched my TEDx Talk. Now, the problem that everyone faces is I have no time. You know, there's so much you have to do and so much you think you need to do, you don't have time. You feel stressed out. I even have people who get stressed out because there's such a long list in their Netflix and Amazon prime queues that they'll never get to finish them all.

So my idea was, why don't I come up with brief nuggets? Each of the stories, articles, and that book is anywhere from two pages to four pages, will take maybe five minutes or less to read, but the ideas are very profound. And if you read it and don't just read it as a story, but read it from the point of view, does this apply to me? Where in my life is this relevant? Then all of a sudden you find that in little bits and pieces, there is a dam that is being built around the desperate importuning of your monkey mind. And eventually you enclose that mind in an unbreakable wall and you're free of that

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particular affliction. And you can do it gradually, bit by bit. Caveat, don't just read it, read it and think about it, but it only takes a few minutes a day.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:19:45] I love this. And I know that you have a ton of these curated chapters, over 60 of them. I know you love them all. Give us a couple that are top of mind that you would love to share with us today.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:20:03] Sure. Let me begin with the very beginning, at the very start. And I want to ask you a question, Richard, and this is a serious question. In the last 24 hours, how much time have you spent thinking about your left little finger?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:20:24] Zero.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:20:25] Okay. We have the answer. During the past 24 hours, you have spent no time at all thinking about your left little finger, correct?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:20:33] Correct.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:20:34] If you had to polish the nail or clip it, your attention was on it for a few seconds and then you moved on, correct?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:20:41] Right.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:20:43] Now, let's assume that somebody slammed the car door on your left little finger. Would it be fair to say that your left little finger would absolutely dominate your thoughts, that you'd be thinking about it all the time?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:21:00] Right. It's the kind of thing you pick up a pen and it hurts. Right, you're reminded of it frequently.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:21:06] You're always thinking of your left little finger. That's because your left little finger is unwell. It is deeply unwell, and it is calling attention to itself. If your left little finger was well, it would be doing what left little fingers do. It would be doing its thing in the background, not drawing attention to itself. Now look at your mind, think about how it will not let you be. It is always calling attention to itself.

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Am I too fat? My diet isn't working. Can I afford that slice of pizza? Oh, she's really good looking. I wonder if she is married. Oh, I shouldn't be thinking that, I'm married myself. What can I do to get more listeners for my podcast? Did they like it? Why didn't they like it? They're idiots if they didn't like this episode. I can find somebody better. Look at how your mind is constantly drawing attention to itself. It will not let you be for a second. Right? That's because your mind is deeply unwell. And we have a peculiar way of dealing with this unwell mind. We simply call it normal. Everybody around us is like that. And some are worse off than I am. It's not normal. Your mind is unwell. And what I am trying to do is help people recognize that their mind is unwell and begin the journey of making it well again.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:22:58] So we're going to make our mind well, which is great. And I know that all of your chapters are designed to be short. There's one I want to ask you about a particular. It was Chapter 43, Something Better Than Hope. What's better than hope?

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:23:18] What's better than hope is complete acceptance of where you are. Hope, this is something that you're going to get a lot of pushback on. I have received a lot of pushback on, but I want you to think about what I am saying carefully. When you say there is hope, you're doing two things. You're saying my situation as it exists right now is unbearable, terrible, bad, whatever, and tomorrow will be better. In fact, one of my favorite movies after Casablanca is Gone with the Wind. Do you remember the closing lines of Gone with the Wind, Dr. Richard?

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:24:12] Franklin My dear, I don't give a damn.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:24:14] Yes. And after that, what does she say? There will always be tomorrow.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:24:20] Yep.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:24:23] Built in the very notion of hope is today is back to tomorrow will be better. And you really don't know if tomorrow will be better or not. You just anticipate it will in your hopes on that. But the moment you're doing that, your

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automatically removing yourself from the present. And labeling the present as this is bad, this is terrible, I cannot bear this. And it's a much, much, much better strategy to say today is what it is, and I will enjoy it thoroughly. And I do have a preference for how I would like tomorrow to be, and I will work to make that happen. I may succeed, I may not succeed, but I will work to make tomorrow fit into my preference for what I would like tomorrow while I am completely accepting today and being happy, fulfilled, content today.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:25:34] As I'm sitting here hearing this, I love this. And I actually think the last line in the movie was, I think Scarlett said, "After all, tomorrow is another day". I think that was the actual line. But this is so true. This is such great wisdom. And all of these things you've been sharing with us are simply ways. And that's the beauty in this. It's ways of reframing the way that we view the world, the way that we think about our life circumstances. I know that you have a section on gratitude, and that's important.

And so I do encourage everybody to get their hands on this book and read about this. But this has been such an enjoyable conversation, and I do wish we had more time, but we are at the end. And Dr. Rao, as you know, I ask my guests one question. The biggest question that I can ask you is what is your biggest helping, that one most important piece of information that you'd like somebody to walk away with after hearing our conversation today?

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:26:40] What I would like anyone who listens to this Dr. Richard walk away with is the following knowledge. You do not live in a real world. You think you live in a real world, but you don't. You live in a construct. You created it with your mental chatter and your mental models. It's like we're all living in the matrix, but this is not a matrix created by an alien civilization out to enslave us. It's a matrix that we created with our mental model and our mental chatter. And having created it, we experience it exactly as we have created it.

This is actually a highly liberating notion because if you live in a real world and you don't like it, you're screwed. Grin and bear it. But if you don't like it and you're living in a construct, you can deconstruct the parts of it that are not working for you and build it up again. And you can do this over and over again. It's the rest of your life process that's

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hugely liberating. And that's what my coaching, that's what my programs are all about. If you don't like the life you're experiencing, here's how you deconstruct the parts of it that are not working and build them up again.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:28:06] I love it. Tell us where people can find more about you online and get their hands on your latest book just released everywhere.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:28:15] The best way is for someone to go to my website. It's [www.theraoinstitute.com](http://www.theraoinstitute.com), [T-H-E-R-A-O-institute.com](http://T-H-E-R-A-O-institute.com) and they will find information about my programs. They can see my blog. They can see the syllabus for my course. And it's a great starting point. They can also watch my TEDx Talk. All you got to do is go to [TEDx.com](http://TEDx.com) and put my name in the search engine and it will pop up. Oh, and I forgot to mention it. If they go to YouTube and put my name in the search engine, several pages of videos and talks by me will pop up.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:28:54] Beautiful. We will have everything Dr. Rao in the show notes at [thedailyhelping.com](http://thedailyhelping.com), including his TEDx Talk and links to get the book as well. Dr. Rao, this has been such a wonderful experience. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with us today on The Daily Helping.

**Dr. Srikumar Rao:** [00:29:12] My pleasure entirely, Dr. Richard. And I look forward to carrying this conversation both online and offline.

**Dr. Richard Shuster:** [00:29:18] As do I. As do I. I also wanted to take time to thank each and every one of you who listened to our conversation. If you like what you heard, if you gain something from it, go give us a follow on Apple Podcasts and leave us a five-star review because this is what helps other people find the show. But most importantly, go out there today and do something nice for somebody else, even if you don't know who they are and post it in your social media feeds using the hashtag #MyDailyHelping because the happiest people are those that help others.