Yitzi Weiner

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Social Impact Heroes: Why & How Devaa Haley Mitchell of The Shift Network Is Helping To Change Our World

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As part of my series about "individuals and organizations making an important social impact," I had the pleasure of interviewing Devaa Haley Mitchell.

Rev. Dr. Devaa Haley Mitchell is the co-founder and Chief Impact Officer of The Shift Network, where she guides and oversees Shift's social change initiatives as well as its philanthropic activities, leveraging its educational and network assets for the greatest public benefit. She is also the host of the Shift Network's "Awaken and Heal" podcast. Devaa is a transformational leader who supports people in reconnecting with their spiritual depths, unleashing their leadership gifts, and stepping into their full potential. She is a key player in leading and supporting the ongoing evolution of Shift's transformational culture, both inside the company as well as with customers around the world.

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Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?

I grew up in Northern California, with a relatively privileged life and having a somewhat sheltered upbringing. But when I was a sophomore in high school, an opportunity appeared that unexpectedly changed the trajectory of my life.

Yitzi Weiner

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I was invited to apply for a service trip destined for Kenya, Africa. A student at my high school was from Kenya. Wangeshi was the daughter of a tribal leader in Kerugoya and had medical issues, so her guardian, Jean, had brought Wangeshi to California for treatment.

Jean, who was also an anthropologist, assembled a service trip to bring a small group to Wangeshi's village to help support a girl's school there. I applied to be part of the group and was accepted. Our group studied this area of Kenya, raised money to help build a library at a local girl's school, and traveled to Kenya over the summer to build bookshelves for the school library.

Wow! For a girl from California, this trip opened me up to a totally new world. It was enriching and soul-expanding to journey into the heart of such a vibrant and rich culture and be so widely embraced by the community there. Being in Kerugoya opened my eyes to a totally different reality — to extreme socio-economic differences, a language very different from my own, an entirely different way of life. It also seeded my desire to become a global citizen, broaden my understanding of people and nations, and offer my own gifts in the service of others.

I went on to study anthropology and spent more than a year living with Indigenous groups in the Brazilian Amazon, supporting their cultural and economic initiatives. After getting my master's degree from Stanford, I moved into the world of venture philanthropy, looking at how business principles can also be used to support and enhance important public service initiatives.

And now, years later,I have the deep privilege of exploring how The Shift Network can use our platform, educational assets, network power, and philanthropic dollars to co-create a healthier, and more peaceful, sustainable, just, and prosperous world.

Can you share an interesting story that happened to you since you began leading Shift?

Ever since my first visit to Kenya back in high school, I've believed that traveling is one of the best ways to truly expand one's consciousness and worldview. So a few years ago, we created a Shift Trip, bringing leaders from our company, along with customers, to Rishikesh, India.

The trip was designed as a deep dive into yogic philosophy and practice, cultural exchange, and community service. The service component included distributing water filters to remote areas that lacked clean water, training those communities to use the filters, and sharing basic kitchen sanitation and personal hygiene practices.

What transpired when we arrived in some of these villages was truly remarkable. We hadn't required participants in our group to be healers, but some happened to be highly skilled, with nursing skills and other healing modality expertise. So when the local villagers stepped into the makeshift clinics that we set up outdoors, a flood of healing gifts were unleashed!

People received much needed and long-sought medical attention and care. Though we didn't share a common language, our hearts and spirits connected. Those in our travel group who were able to share their healing gifts were truly touched and moved that they could be of service in that way — it lifted their spirits and gave them each a renewed sense of purpose. It was quite a beautiful exchange.

Can you describe how you or your organization is making a significant social impact?

At Shift, we are dedicated to co-creating a world that works for all.

So how exactly do we do that?

We are committed to using all the tools in our social change toolbox.

A primary tool is always finance. This year, we've made a pledge that 3% of our gross revenues will be set aside for Impact Activities, which is three times the bar that was set by Marc Benioff with his Salesforce.com Foundation.

Shift has also designated two million shares of founding stock for charitable groups, so that our chosen organizations can share in any future success we have.

Shift generally focuses our donations and impact initiatives in the areas of Peacebuilding, Racial Healing & Indigenous Peoples, Sustainability, Women's Empowerment, and Democracy 2.0.

Peacebuilding was our very first impact area, and we offered healing programs each summer under the banner of "The Summer of Peace." We've consolidated those programs into a free World Peace Library which features 375 free interviews with leading peace builders from around the world, covering peacebuilding in 26 different sectors of society.

Racial healing includes themes of equity, inclusion, and diversity. To stand firmly in this commitment, we hired a Chief Inclusion Officer, Aliah MaJon. Aliah, who is on our executive committee, ensures that we offer an inclusive perspective in all of our programming and business practices. Aliah also leads the company's R.A.C.E project, which aims to dismantle racism by helping individuals become true allies, activists, and bridge builders through a series of events, courses, and unprecedented racial healing training programs.

This year, we added Sustainability to our key impact areas We kicked off this initiative by partnering with TreeSisters and its founder, Clare Dubois, to co-create this year's *Shift Music Festival and Visionary Summit*, which centered on a commitment to plant one million trees — an idea we'd like to see spread to other music festivals and other companies.

We will soon launch an initiative called "Tree +" (pronounced "Tree Positive"). Shift will plant 10 trees per month for each employee, inviting employees to match us. We hope to seed this initiative with other companies as well, so it eventually becomes a "new normal" company benefit.

In addition, many of our summits and courses select an inspiring charitable organization to receive a portion of the proceeds from that program. For example, last year's *Indigenous Wisdom Summit* directed its donation support to First Nations Covid Relief Fund, which received more than $20,000 to support Covid relief efforts for native peoples.

But for Shift, our commitment to social impact goes beyond making philanthropic gifts.

The core of our offerings at Shift is our transformational programs. We seek to embed elements of sacred activism into each of our courses — especially those at the Certificate level, which are in-depth programs that take time and dive deep. We ask course participants to explore how they can "pay it forward" and make a contribution to the broader world using what they learn in the program. This is also an important component for individuals who receive scholarships for Shift courses; we offer more than $300,000 in scholarship support each year.

Shift also identifies individuals and organizations that we feel are having a powerfully positive impact, and we support them in a variety of ways. We offer a **spotlight**, giving them opportunities to speak at our numerous online events and share their stories in our widely read online newsletter, *Catalyst*. This spotlight helps raise awareness about their work and garner them new fans and potential donors.

We **build connections,** personally linking folks to influential networks, so they can expand their own network for good. We help **raise money**, in addition to our own company's contributions, to support the expansion of their key programs and projects. We offer **pro bono visionary coaching or strategic consulting**, supporting social entrepreneurs as they flesh out their visions and create innovative ways to achieve their goals.

Can you please tell us a story about just one individual whose work has been helped by your mission?

Shift made a deep commitment to support the sustainability work of Clare Dubois, founder of TreeSisters. When my husband, Shift's CEO Stephen Dinan, met Clare a few years ago, he was deeply inspired by her vision to reforest the global tropics in a decade.

Stephen offered Clare a seat in his exclusive Visionary Leadership Mastermind program, worked closely with her to expand her vision, and helped create the roadmap to get it done.

Since that time, we've featured Clare in online and in-person events, giving her keynote speaking slots to highlight her exemplary work. She's been featured in *Catalyst*, and I recently dedicated an episode of my *Awaken & Heal* podcast to her story.

This past September, we invited TreeSisters to be the featured organization at our *Shift Music Festival and Visionary Summit*, which was attended by 22,000 people. Every speaker and every musician was enrolled in supporting this campaign to plant one million trees, and so far we've already planted more than 250,000!

Behind the scenes, we continue to introduce Clare to high-profile donors and collaborators who can help accelerate her work to the next level. And as our Tree + campaign gains momentum, so will the speed with which she will have funds to replant the tropics.

We are offering a full-spectrum suite of support to Clare and her TreeSisters work, and she deserves it. We are proud to stand beside and behind her. Clare is a true servant of our Earth.

Are there three things the community/society/politicians can do to help you address the root of the problem you are trying to solve?

There are so many things that can be done to address the problems we face as a society!

1. **Upgrade the consciousness of our leaders and communities.** The root of most issues facing society today is the level of our consciousness. As Albert Einstein aptly said, we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.
   -The more we uplift our consciousness — by accessing and applying the best of the world's wisdom — and the more we understand the inherent interconnection of all peoples and our planet, the deeper the insight we will be able to access. We will thus be perceiving and making decisions from a deeper and wiser space within ourselves. And that will help us identify the most innovative, holistic solutions that are needed, and engender the collective will and policies to enact them.
   -That's precisely why The Shift Network is focused on raising consciousness through our summits, our courses, our events, and our app. We offer our participants a constant flow of inspired wisdom and a guide for what conscious lifestyles can look like: more fulfilled, more meaningful, more connected to others, and having a greater sense of purpose through giving back to our planet. As folks consume this high-vibe content, many seeds are planted for new and improved ways to navigate life and live in harmony with the Earth.
2. **Raise awareness about root problems and the most promising solutions.** The good news is that many brilliant humans have already identified the underlying causes of the biggest issues facing humanity today, and others have identified the solutions. Many of these solutions are already available, and they need to be highlighted and broadcast through all channels possible.
   -We each have the ability to use our own social media platforms to spotlight inspiring and innovative solutions to the biggest challenges of our day, helping these ideas to become well known.
   -Then we need to adopt these solutions en masse. This requires extensive public education about root problems and their solutions. From there, we need to spark both the *individual desire* to enact new behaviors and the *political will* to enact new policies to create significant and systemic change.
3. **Promote more women into leadership positions and public office.**
   For too long, we've lived in a system that is overly patriarchal, that favors competition over collaboration and "power over" rather than "power with." While this is changing, the best way to encourage swift and systemic change is to *shift who is actually making the decisions*.
   -Generally speaking, women take into consideration not only those in power positions, but those whose voices are often not heard. This is essential to help heal our world. We also need more leaders who identify as non-binary and transgender to create a truly representative leadership structure.

How do you define "Leadership"? Can you explain what you mean or give an example?

For me, a transformational leader possesses three key components. The first is having a **compelling vision** and the ability to inspire and engage other people so that their vision becomes shared. Second, the capacity to **breathe life into this vision**, attracting and managing those who have the skills needed to **manifest** it, allowing it to grow and evolve along the way. Third is what I call "**full-spectrum embodiment.**" In addition to visioning and manifesting, an inspiring leader "walks the talk" and lives in alignment with the vision.

I am seeing more and more of these embodied visionary leaders who are skilled at worldly manifestation, each creating a whole world of good. What a gift to us all!

What are your "5 things I wish someone told me when I first started" and why. Please share a story or example for each.

1. **Believe that you are a world-changer!** We all have the ability to make a

huge difference in this world, but many people don't believe they have what it takes to have true impact. I suffered from this belief myself until a powerful visionary elder, Jean Houston, told me she believed that I "vastly underestimated myself." I was a bit taken aback — but when I explored what she said, I realized that she was right. I had imagined that the big important things of the world got done only by certain special people who had certain special gifts. For some reason, I didn't count myself as one of those people… until she set me straight. Now when I see through the lens of being a world-changer *myself*, I find myself daring to step out in new ways that I wouldn't have considered before. And it's making an impact

2. **Recognize that how you show up is as important as what you achieve.** Sometimes what people most remember about you is how well you listened to their ideas, and if you treated them with kindness and respect. How you are in the world matters.
3. **Forget perfectionism and remember the 80/20 rule.** Which is: 80% of the value comes from 20% of the work. Concentrate on what's truly important and don't get overly bogged down in the details.
4. **Focus equally on people and product.** A new employee recently told me that Shift was the first workplace where she felt others actually cared about her as a human, rather than as just someone to get the work done! That actually shocked me. At Shift, we put a high priority on creating an enjoyable, supportive work environment. We seek employees who will have great rapport with others on the team and will be a great cultural fit. In addition, our people-focused culture generates greater productivity, less sick days, higher staff retention…as well as an overall "higher vibe" ambiance that our staff truly love. Ultimately, we know that better products will flow as a result.
5. **Be willing to fail.** If you don't fall down some of the time, you probably aren't stretching far enough!

You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea might trigger!

Over the years, I've been struck by the pervasive lack of self-confidence among women. I've had the honor of leading many thousands of women through empowerment courses and retreats focused on the Sacred Feminine, and I listened closely to them. Their feeling that they are "not enough" — not smart enough, not talented enough, not influential enough, not old enough, not young enough, not wealthy enough — is nearly universal.

Couple that personal lack of confidence with a social and cultural environment in which women often feel competitive with each other, and women find it challenging to shine their brightest light.

And so… I'd love to inspire a movement that counters this cultural norm of female insufficiency and competition. I'd create a movement in which women are encouraged in a weekly practice to lift each other up, celebrate each other, highlight each other's talents and gifts, and find ways to support each other.

With this sort of support, providing wind beneath one's wings, I believe *so many* women can contribute their own bright, bold visions and unique contributions to create a more thriving world for us all.

I began publicly uplifting other women on social media this past March during Women's History Month. My own social media feeds were filled with stories and videos about other women who inspire me in various ways. I highlighted these personal sheroes and their amazing offerings, turning others on to the magic these amazing women put out into the world — and hoping those sheroes feel our support.

But why not do it year round? And I'd certainly *love* to have others join me in this endeavor.

We could use #SheroesSpotlight… and I have a sense that together we could unleash a tidal wave of feminine celebration and support, leading to more and more women having the confidence to *shine* ever brighter, inspiring millions with their world-changing visions.

Are you game to join me? Let's do this!

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

While I was growing up, I heard the phrase: "To those to whom much has been given, much is expected." It struck me deeply and stayed with me through time.

In school, someone asked me why I studied so much and worked so hard instead of goofing off with the other kids. This quote was my answer.

After spending time visiting Kenya in high school, I realized that I wanted to learn, grow, and make something of myself so I would be able to truly give back and leave this world somehow better than it was when I arrived. And that's still a driving force in my life!

Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would like to

have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)

There are *two* women that are current sheroes of mine that I'd love to invite to lunch.

The first is **Michelle Obama.** She embodies the sort of feminine leadership so needed in the world. She has incredible vision, amazing charisma, and has done many incredible things in her life — while she's also so warm and personable.

I also honor that she, like me, is mother to two girls. It can be incredibly challenging to fully show up as a Mom while simultaneously enacting big work in the world. I'd love to get her tips for how to skillfully balance those roles!

The other is **Oprah**. I am inspired by all she's created in her life, coming from being a single teenage mother with very little financial means to now being one of the most powerful women in the world.

I'm also inspired by her deep spiritual nature, and her Super Soul Sundays. The depth of the conversations she convenes is exemplary.

Oprah's philanthropy moves me deeply. I love that she focuses on inspiration, empowerment, and education of women, children, and families around the world. The world could use a *lot* more philanthropists with a similar mission!

How can our readers follow you on social media?

Instagram (The Shift Network)

Instagram (Devaa's personal account)

Facebook (The Shift Network)

Facebook (Inspiring Women With Soul)

YouTube (The Shift Network)

Twitter (The Shift Network)

This was very meaningful, thank you so much. We wish you only continued success on your great work!

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