

Dandapani: You're awake 16 hours a day. Out of that 16 hours, how many hours are you truly practicing distraction? If you're practicing distraction for 12, 13 out of that 16 hours, seven days a week, then you're going to become really, really good at it. If you want to be good at something you have to practice it. And people are masters at practicing distraction.

Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth, and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer and I chat with world-class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others to do the same.

Robert Glazer: Welcome to the Elevate podcast. Our quote for today is, "Where awareness goes, energy flows." Our guest today, Dandapani, shared that quote with me. He's a Hindu priest and entrepreneur who studied as a monk for 10 years. He now teaches people around the world how to live a life of purpose and joy and how to use the principles of discipline, focus, and energy management to live a better life. He has also worked with leaders from companies like Nike, trivago, and his TEDx talk, Unwavering Focus, has been viewed nearly 3 million times. Dandapani, welcome. I'm very excited to have you join us on the Elevate podcast today.

Dandapani: Thank you, Robert. Thank you for having me on your podcast. Honored to be here.

Robert Glazer: Yes. And I've had the privilege of learning from you and hearing you speak several times and each time I get something more out of it, so looking forward to the same here.

Dandapani: Thank you. The quote that you shared is a quote by my guru and something that I hold very dear to me and I learned that from him when I lived with him in the monastery where where awareness goes, energy flows encapsulates a lot of what I teach about focus and managing energy.

Robert Glazer: Well, we're going to get into both of those topics, but before we do that, you've had a very interesting journey. You graduated from university with an electrical engineering degree, decided to become a monk after graduation. How did you make that decision and what did that transition look like?

Dandapani: Yeah, I wanted to become a monk since I was about four or five years old and ever since then, it was really a quest to find the teacher that could teach me and I could train with and it wasn't until I met my guru that I actually found someone that I wanted to dedicate my life to and study fully with. So even though I'd wanted to be a monk since I was four or five, I never found the right place I could go to. So when I met him, I realized that he was my teacher and he was the one I wanted to study with, so I gave up everything and joined his monastery. It was a Hindu monastery, traditional Hindu monastery, cloistered

monastery that is on the island of Kauai in Hawaii. And it's been there for almost 50 years now.

Robert Glazer: Wow. I'm curious, what was a typical day like when you were studying in a monastery?

Dandapani: Obviously, we led very disciplined lives. To just give you a quick rundown of the day, when I was there, the day would start at 5:30 in the morning with the traditional Hindu ritual ceremony in the temple that went on for half an hour. The monks would meditate for an hour after that, would exercise a little bit. The monks were then divided into five groups and one group of monks would work on the publication of books and digital products that we had in terms of digital books, content online, we had podcasts. One group of monks would take care of the finance. Another group of monks would take care of the land and buildings.

Dandapani: So the monks were divided into those groups. Everybody went into their various groups, worked. We obviously took a break for lunch. We spent a little time cleaning the monastery because there were no moms, no dads at home. We were the moms and dads so we had to clean. And kept our place tidy and we worked in the afternoons. In the evenings, we kind of relaxed. And we usually went to bed around 9:00 at night. Most monks were up around 4:30, I would say, in the morning. 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning.

Robert Glazer: And I know you've talked about having to give up everything when you became a monk. What was the most difficult thing that you had to give up during your study?

Dandapani: The most difficult thing to give up was probably my family because I'm pretty close to them and I'd lived with them my whole life and when I joined a monastery I only spoke to them maybe twice a year on the phone. At the most. So not being able to see them year after year, not speak to them, not know what's going on, that was extremely difficult in terms of giving up. The other things, yeah, I mean, they were difficult as well, but not as much as the people that you love and knowing that you potentially will never see your mother again or your dad.

Robert Glazer: And so how long were you in the monastery?

Dandapani: 10 years. Yeah. It was 10 years in the monastery. Our vows lasted two years and every two years we could renew them. Usually monks take vows, at least in our tradition, for two year cycles until about 10 to 14 years and then you take lifetime vows. So I decided not to renew my vows after 10 years and I left. I left Hawaii and I moved to the mainland US. I grew up in Australia [inaudible 00:05:28] decided not to go back to Australia, so I decided to move to the mainland US and after about a year or so of traveling, I made my way to New York City and made that my home.

Robert Glazer: So a monk in New York City. We were joking about the background noise and ambulances and stuff. It's not the typical place of serenity. So at this point you transitioned into teaching and coaching others and really settled on this message of focus, concentration, and purpose in the place, maybe intentionally or not intentionally, where these probably exist the least. Tell me a little bit about that transition and your practice and what it is that you focus on with individuals and companies.

Dandapani: Yeah, for sure. I am no longer a monk any more. I am a Hindu priest and in the Hindu faith, monks and priests, they're two paths, basically. We could say there's the path of the monastic and the path of the householder, and the monastic community within Hinduism lead a celibate life and monks live in cloisters with each other or by themselves. And then when you follow that householder path, the householder path is where you can get married, have a family, work, earn money, and Hindu priests fall under that category. So I'm no longer a monk now, even though a lot of people quite often still refer to me as a monk. I'm not. I am a priest and [inaudible 00:06:50] married. I live with my wife and daughter in New York City.

Dandapani: When I left the monastery, obviously I needed to earn an income to survive and one of the things I wanted to do was to also share what I had learned from my teacher. I do that now. I work primarily with entrepreneurs around the world and a couple of athletes, as well. And I share basically teachings primarily around the topic of understanding the mind better, learning to develop that focus, learning to develop that willpower, getting clarity on your vision for your life, your purpose in life, and also really learning to manage your energy. It's something that a lot of people don't really talk about and for me, I find that we have a finite amount of energy. How do we learn to manage that, harness that energy and channel it to what we want in life or want to manifest in life?

Dandapani: And I find New York City to be great because one of the things that, Rob, when I lived in the monastery was that people would come there and monks would share things and teachings and quite often, I would here people say, "Well, it's so easy for you to practice all of these things that you're teaching. You live in a cloistered monastery in Hawaii. How hard is it to be Zen?" And I couldn't argue with that statement. I'd go like, "Yeah, you're right. It's not hard." And they would say, "You don't know what it's like to live in New York. You don't know what it's like to live in London or Beijing and have a business or have a family, this or that." So now I live in New York City, which is noisy and busy and, you know, it's New York City. I have my own business and a family and I have countless opportunities to put all these tools into practice.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. You gave a great TEDx talk and one of the things you mentioned in there is you suggested the idea that people are actually never taught how to concentrate. And I've heard you say, "We get good at what we practice and we're practicing distraction." So is it something where I'm just expected to know? I mean, how do you teach people to concentrate?

Dandapani: Well, like you said, I think it's something that people are expected to know. When most people are growing up, they're told to concentrate. Kids are told by their teachers and their parents, "Hey, focus. Concentrate on your homework. Concentrate on eating your food. Concentrate on what you're doing." They're told to do it, but they're never taught how to, so people assume that people naturally know how to concentrate, but they don't. It's a skill that needs to be learned and that needs to be practiced if you want to be good at it. And we just assume people know how to do it. I mean, it's so easy to look around when I'm out of my apartment, I'm around and I see parents with kids and it's amazing how many times I hear parents say to their kids, "Hey, can you just focus for a second?" They tell the kid to do that but they don't teach them how to. And nor do they help them to practice it once they teach them how to do it.

Robert Glazer: So what's the secret?

Dandapani: It comes down to understanding the mind. It comes down to understanding the mind, how the mind works, and then learning to be able to focus that mind. And that really is what it is. In the TEDx talk I go into it quite a bit, obviously, it ended up an 80 minute talk. And I have an online course on that conversation, on that whole topic as well. One thing that I try to avoid is to give people the quick tidbit that they can get. Because everybody is fishing for that, right? Tell me how to [crosstalk 00:10:26]-

Robert Glazer: Everyone wants the hack. What's the focus hack? Yeah.

Dandapani: I'm just not going down that road because people are lazy and they don't want to do the hard work.

Robert Glazer: No, it's true.

Dandapani: [crosstalk 00:10:35] the honest truth.

Robert Glazer: But the framework that you shared, which I'd love you to walk through because for me that really crystallized the problem, maybe not the solution, but can you talk about the distinction between awareness and the mind and how they relate to each other, but they're different?

Dandapani: Yeah, for sure. The way I was taught is that we look at the mind and awareness as two completely different things. The mind doesn't move but it's really awareness that moves within the mind. So quite often you hear people say things like, "I have a monkey mind. My minds are all over the place." And technically that's a false statement. Your mind doesn't move. Your mind doesn't travel, but it's your awareness that's moving within the mind. And you can take your awareness to a happy area of the mind, a sad area of mind, you can hold your awareness on one person for an extended period of time, you can hold your awareness on one thing for an extended period of time, but the key is to understand the separation between awareness and the mind and that's really

what you want to know. And once you grasp this, to me, it's life-changing. It's a game-changer. Intellectually understanding it is one thing, but then actually experiencing it and then being able to control where your awareness goes in your mind, that's where the magic is.

Robert Glazer: I wonder, and we can experiment on this, the exercise that you've done in the classroom, could you do it, would to work now, to do with people in terms of actually showing them a little bit of what that would look like?

Dandapani: I'd rather for them to decide they go listen to the TEDx talk rather than to do it on this. I feel like, yeah, I have people like, "Oh, let's do a guided meditation on the podcast." I'm like, "No." People are driving when they're listening to the podcast. They're going for a walk. They're in the gym.

Robert Glazer: I was thinking about that. I'm not trying to get anyone hurt.

Dandapani: I know. And not only that, it's just like, how many people do you know sit down on their couch, maybe with a drink in their hand, listening to a podcast without doing anything else?

Robert Glazer: Not a lot.

Dandapani: Yeah. Probably zero.

Robert Glazer: This is an interesting discussion in itself. The way that people consume a lot of podcasts is when they're running, biking, in the car, otherwise. Is that something you recommend? Is that focusing or are they really only able to give their attention to one of those things at a time?

Dandapani: Well, two questions here in that statement. One is, what is the podcast? If the podcast is a comedy show where somebody is telling jokes and entertaining you, totally fine because it's not something that you really have to process so much. If it's an educational podcast that's talking about business management or focus or finance or strategy, then your mind has to engage with that. And if your mind has to engage with that, how can you engage with that and drive at the same time?

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: So then your awareness is switching between one thing and the other so rapidly, it gives you a sense that you're doing both at the same time, which is multitasking, which ultimately is teaching you how to be distracted. When I want to listen to something that's educational, I sit down and I give it my undivided attention so I can truly consume and get value from it.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, talk to us about practicing distraction, because I loved hearing you talk about that. How we're learning to master it.

Dandapani: Yeah, because that's what people do all day. We have to define distraction first and distraction is basically allowing your awareness to get pulled from one thing to another by an external source and that external source could be a person or it could be something outside of you. A noise, a beep on your cellphone, a notification on your computer. Everything something goes bing or ding, your awareness gets dragged to it. And if you allow that to happen, then you allow yourself to get distracted, and if that's what you're practicing all day, then that's what you're becoming really good at. If I wanted to play in the US Open or in Wimbledon, I'd have to practice hours a day to be able to get into the competition and possibly even get to the final, right?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: And the more I practice, the better I get. When I ask people in my workshops and I say, "Hey, if I want to play for the San Francisco 49ers, if I want to play in Wimbledon against Nadal, how many hours a day do you recommend I practice tennis?" People go like, "Oh, six, seven hours a day, seven days a week." That's a lot of practice. I go, "Okay, I'll do that. After six months, will I play in Wimbledon?" Everyone says no. So if I'm practicing six, seven hours a day, seven days a week at tennis and I still can't be good enough after six months to be at that level, imagine how much I would need to practice to be really, really good at tennis.

Dandapani: But if you look at how much people practice distraction, they all practice six, seven hours a day. We're 24 hours in a day. Most people, if they're lucky, sleep seven to eight hours a day and so you're awake 16 hours a day. Out of that 16 hours, how many hours are you truly practicing distraction? If you're practicing distraction for 12, 13 out of that 16 hours, seven days a week, then you're going to become really, really good at it. So if you want to be good at something you have to practice it. And people are masters at practicing distraction.

Robert Glazer: Do you have recommendations for people about not having any of the notifications on their cell phone? I mean, I have some friends and they've got, I see it's every news item, every basket that's scored, and then they've got the watch and that thing is just, it's going off all day and I don't know that people know what this costs them. Because if you asked them what was most important to them, I promise they wouldn't say that news or that score or otherwise, but I don't know that they understand what it's actually costing them in terms of losing focus and/or awareness on what it is they want most. They're just used to it. The thing beeps, it goes off, the score, the this, that, and it seems that it's probably both unhealthy and unproductive.

Dandapani: Totally unhealthy, unproductive. How much time is wasted, how much energy is wasted every time you have to switch from one task to another and then switch back again. You got to get your mind refocused into what it was doing previously, get back to the point of where it was before it left it. I mean, it's just an ultimate time waster, but people do this all the time. And like you said, they're just unaware that this is costing them time, energy, and money. So much

money is spent and wasted, especially in companies where most companies, if not all companies, don't teach their employees how to concentrate. They teach them everything else, but they don't teach them how to concentrate. And tell me one company that doesn't want to be more efficient and more productive.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. So there's some interesting as you say this about getting into business and one of the things I've been fascinated by is that the whole kind of open office space movement has been debunked recently because apparently the goal was to create all this communication and conductivity but people are so distracted by other people all day long that now they're wearing noise-canceling headphones and trying to get away from each other. So in the email Slack world, how do managers or leaders or people need to communicate? I know you know Warren Rustand, who's a mentor of mine, and I mentioned this recently, but he says, "I have an open door policy, but I'm not always available."

Dandapani: I love that. And my guru was the same way, too, in this monastery. He had an office and he had an open door policy. When his door was open, you could come in any time.

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: When his door was closed, you couldn't interrupt him. And that's the way to be and I think with the open office plan, it's that, well, the biggest problem here is that nobody has been taught how to concentrate. Nobody's taught about the value of concentration and what it actually brings to an individual, the value it brings to an individual, the value it brings to the company. So this sense of, you know, having Slack messagings and all of these different messengers and phones ringing, people texting each other all the time without any policy set in place, it's just terrible because it's just such a waste of money. Waste of money, waste of time, waste of energy. If I ran a company with 30 or 100 people or 500 people in it, I would absolutely not allow that at all.

Robert Glazer: How would you communicate that? Pretend you're coaching a leader who has a large team. How would you encourage them to set boundaries around what immediacy and availability and urgency meant? Because I think that everyone thinks that everything is urgent these days or people should be available. Part of the problem with, I think, where Gen Z struggles with this is they're used to an immediate answer. So when someone doesn't answer immediately, oh, what's wrong? Are you mad at me? So how would you coach a leader on how to establish this with their team and how to communicate that and how important it was that people have this space to concentrate?

Dandapani: I think the first thing, like you said, is to convey to them what's the cost. I mean, I work with entrepreneurs. Those are the people that I work with, and-

Robert Glazer: They're not very focused, so that's a good base to start with.

Dandapani: Right. It's interesting because they're focused in certain areas.

Robert Glazer: They're distractable. They're focused, but they're distractable.

Dandapani: They're distractable. And then there's some entrepreneurs that are hyper-focused and they're really, really focused on what they do. But I would say the first thing is to really make the case to them. And by making the case, saying, "Here's the cost to your company in terms of time, efficiency, productivity, energy, and also dollar cost. You have a team of 20 people or 50 people that are working for you, and if they come to work for eight hours a day, how many of those eight hours are they actually doing things? And how much time is actually spent doing things they don't need to be doing or they're distracted with?" And so many companies say to their teams, "Hey, guys, we've got this project that's due in two weeks or in a month. It's super big. This account, we want to close it and want to do it really well. We need everyone to focus." Now, you tell your teams to focus, but you don't teach them how to focus.

Dandapani: So I think the first person that really needs to be won over is the leader. The leader needs to be sold the fact that distraction is costly to him or her. And when they can understand that and grasp that concept, then the next step is teaching the leader how to concentrate. Because there's no point teaching the team if the leader's distracted. Teaching the leader how to concentrate, teaching the leader how to practice concentration, and then training the team how to concentrate and how to practice it so they can become more efficient. And not only more efficient, but a much more rewarding life.

Dandapani: We work so hard to earn money so that we can use the money to have the kind of life that we want. I know an entrepreneur who sold his business, did it really well, who made lots of money, went on a vacation, was on a boat with his family going somewhere, and then he shared it with me, "Yeah, on the whole time on the boat, I was on the phone."

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: And I go like, "What's the point, then, of working so hard to earn the money so that you can be on a boat in a nice, tropical place, and then not be there?"

Robert Glazer: Is part of the problem, though, that people don't, I feel like we've lost the ability to differentiate between urgent and important.

Dandapani: Yep. For sure. And for people, everything is urgent, right? And I don't think anything is urgent at all. I think the only people who have, not the only, but one of the few people that have urgent jobs are the people that answer the 9-1-1 calls.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: Yeah. Answer that call. But everybody else, no. And I worked with a bunch of different freelancers, with developers that are building my app and this and that. Sometimes I'll get a message like, "We need this right away." And I'm like, "Why? Why do you need it right away? And I can't get this to you right away. I can get it to you at this time. Or tomorrow."

Robert Glazer: Right. No one is going to die.

Dandapani: No one's going to die. And if everything is urgent, then life just gets chaotic. Then you're constantly, then, switching from one task to another, because in a space of one hour, if you have five things that come into you, all of them have been labeled urgent, then what are you going to do? There's only one of you. So for me, I think it's getting the real clarity of what's important and I think that also comes down to leadership. If leaders don't define to their teams what's truly important and what truly is a priority, then the people on the team end up getting anxiety and stress because they think everything's urgent and it's physically impossible to do all those tasks.

Robert Glazer: And people need to know how to sit with stuff. I think that a lot of things that I've been reading in some of the stuff on distraction and technology these days is that as soon as you have the discomfort or you have the ambiguity, you ask a question, you look up something. We're losing the ability to sit with ourselves and think and process, which is, I think, where a lot of learning happens.

Dandapani: What is sitting with yourself?

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: I think people don't even know what it means any more.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: Yeah. Sit by themselves without picking up a phone or doing something. Reading a book. Writing in a journal.

Robert Glazer: Waiting in line.

Dandapani: Waiting in line. Just be by yourself. Very hard. Because if they have to be by themselves, the first thing they encounter is their subconscious mind and that's not a pretty place to look into. So rather distract yourself and keep your awareness out in the conscious mind so you don't have to be distracted by what's inside of you.

Robert Glazer: Well, we're going to get into that in a minute, but there's just these huge disconnects going on because you have people, and maybe you can explain this to me. I think you're the right person for the job. But I read something last week that 20-something percent of millennials say they have no friends and there is

all this online conductivity, yet people are saying in record numbers that they are lonelier than they have ever been and there's just some missing part of that equation. And it may be, as you said, is it that they don't understand what lonely is? Is it they just don't know how to be alone or that being with themselves is lonely? It's confusing.

Dandapani: I think there's multiple issues here. One is that people aren't taught how to communicate any more. I can send someone three sentences in a text message that shares in detail an expression of gratitude for something they did. It's maybe 40 words or something in a nice text message that I spell out how much I appreciate them and what they did. And I get back a namaste emoji. And I'm like, "What the?" You know?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: And this is how people communicate today. You know, with an emoji, with an LOL or this or that. Everything is quick, so then why would you not have any friends? Because you don't know how to communicate, first of all. Second is you can't even concentrate long enough to even have a conversation with another person. You know many times that, it was like a week ago, I was upstate in New York with my wife visiting one of her friends. And the lady we were visiting, she asked me a question. She asked me a question. Four words into my answer, she turned around and started looking at her phone.

Robert Glazer: Ugh.

Dandapani: And I stopped talking and she didn't even realize.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. People talk about it. Social networking is making us antisocial. Well, we're going to take a quick break for a word from our sponsors, and we'll be right back with Dandapani and we're going to talk little bit more about these three states of mind which we started to get into here.

Robert Glazer: You can have your favorite restaurants come to you with DoorDash. Ordering is easy. Open the DoorDash app, choose what you want to eat, and your food will be delivered to you wherever you are. DoorDash is a regular go-to in our household. When we have a group of hungry teenagers who all want to eat something different, my kids use DoorDash. My wife and I also use it when we want a good meal, but don't have the time to cook. Some of our favorite restaurants now have delivery available for the first time. In fact, there are over 3,400 restaurants in 3,300 cities now on DoorDash. Right now, our listeners can get \$5 off their first order of \$15 or more when you download the DoorDash app and enter promo code Elevate. That's \$5 off your first order when you download the DoorDash app from the App Store and enter promo code Elevate. Don't forget, that's promo code Elevate for \$5 off your first order from DoorDash.

Robert Glazer: All right, and we're back. So we started to get into this a little bit more, but I'd love for you to sort of explain this to everyone. This was another framework that was really helpful to me, but we've talked about the three states of mind. The superconscious, the subconscious, and the conscious. Talk about the distinctions between those states.

Dandapani: Yeah. The conscious mind, you could say in a simplified way, is your external mind. It's tied to your five senses. It's your waking state, your eating, interaction, walking, talking, external mind. The subconscious, you could say, is your hard drive. Everything you've ever experienced in your life is stored in your subconscious, whether you remember it or you don't remember it. And your superconscious, you could say, is your spiritual, intuitive, creative area of the mind. And most people function in the conscious mind. They're externally functioning. So when you're on the phone, when you're talking to someone, you're walking, you're driving, you're in the conscious area of the mind.

Dandapani: And when you meditate, for example, the first thing you encounter is your subconscious mind because when you meditate, you're starting to close your senses down. You close your eyes, you still your physical body by sitting down quietly, trying not to move, so then your body is, so to speak, not pulling your awareness out. Your eyes are closed, you're regulating your breath, and now you go from the conscious mind into the subconscious and then you start to see what's in the subconscious. And that's why most people are always picking up their phone or doing something. Because they're afraid to see what's in the subconscious mind. Or if they see what's in the subconscious mind, they don't like it and that just makes them leave there and go out.

Robert Glazer: Right. So is it in those moments, they're going to negative thoughts, they're going to self-doubt? Where are they typically going with that?

Dandapani: Well, just look at the subconscious as a basement, and if you're 30 years old, you have 30 years of baggage stored in the basement. So if you have nothing to do and you open that basement door, you're just going to see what's piled in the basement. Some of the bigger items might be laying in front. All the most recent, bigger items could be laying in front, and then when you see that, you go, "Oh, I don't want to see that. That was the argument I had with so and so which I never resolved. And it's still in the front of my mind." Or, "This happened to me and I just pretend it never happened, so I don't want to talk about it."

Dandapani: And that's why people constantly distract themselves. Because going within, and you mentioned just now, have sitting with yourself. When you sit with yourself, that's what you're going to experience, is your subconscious. And people don't sit with themselves. They put headphones on. They listen to music. Even when they're meditating, they have music on. Or something, they're journaling, they're reading a book, they're listening to a podcast. People are always doing something. They never truly give themselves their undivided attention.

Robert Glazer: Again, this having no friends number was just fascinating for me, given how much the terms friends are used online and connections and all this stuff. Is it that they really have no friends or that they're uncomfortable with themselves? I'm curious as to your thought on that. And maybe not an answer, but I'm still struggling with this statistic, for the most connected generation in history to feel that they have no friends.

Dandapani: I think in a lot of cases it's true. I think people don't have friends. Because friendships are cultivated through spending time with someone, right?

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: I remember when I was growing up. In my early years I grew up in Malaysia and I would go to school. We obviously had no cell phones then. I would spend time with my friends in class and then during recess and stuff, we'd hang out, we'd talk. We'd just have conversations because there was nothing else to do. So we had conversations while we would play. And then even in the afternoons, we'd come home from school around 1:00. In the afternoon sometimes I'd call up my best friend. We'd talk on the phone for a half an hour, chat about whatever. Movies or this or that or sports. You know?

Robert Glazer: Not namaste emojis.

Dandapani: No namaste emojis. It was all full conversations. We would have reactions, we would have emotions expressed, and that's how friendships were built. And now, people don't have time for each other. I can't tell you, Robert, I don't call many people and not many people call me and it's how I've set up my life, but the friends that I do, that call me, I can't tell you, actually, it's impossible for me to tell you how many of them do not give me their undivided attention. All of them, even though they've heard me say this a thousand times, are always doing something when I'm speaking with them. They're driving a car. They're going for a walk. They're cleaning their house. I'm the only person that sits down, doing absolutely nothing else, and gives them my undivided attention. Because I value their friendship.

Robert Glazer: What I'm hearing you say is that this is costing people. It's doing the exact opposite of what they want, but they're not able to get themselves out of this death spiral.

Dandapani: No. And some of those friends, I stopped talking with some of them because [inaudible 00:33:38], you know?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Dandapani: It's just not worth my time. If you can't put aside 10 minutes or half an hour to give me your undivided attention so we can have a conversation, just you and I,

all right? If our friendship is valuable, then what's the point? I don't want to call you while you're driving. That's not entertaining for me.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. Well, this is a perfect segue. One of the most impactful, and you alluded to this before, about four or five years ago that I heard you say, and it went on to become a big part of my book that's coming up, Elevate and the Concept of Emotional Capacity, but was this concept of energy vampires and that the people in your life either give you energy or take away and I think when people talk about, a lot of these relationships are friends and family that are just, people walk into it and they feel terrible and they walk into it and all this obligation. And one of the things you said was about that there doesn't have to be this blowup or this breakup, but how to start moving away from that.

Robert Glazer: So I'd love if you could kind of explain the energy vampire concept. You know, the permanent versus temporary, and then what people should do there. And for me it's actually not only been the negative, it's been the neutral ones. It's been the ones where, you know, kind of like we were saying, I like this person but I walk away from some time with them and you have dinner once a year and you're like, "Eh." Is this how I want to spend my time? They're a great person or whatever, but I, this was hugely impactful for me. It has probably been one of the biggest changes I've made in my life the last couple, three years, so I'd love to really have you unpack this for people listening so that they can get that same lesson.

Dandapani: Yeah. I'm glad that it's helped you a lot. I think you're right. It's the neutral people also that quite often say, "Let's catch up." And for what? I had somebody message me recently, someone I knew from the past and I haven't spoken to in years and said, "Let's catch up." And I'm like, "For what? Why? What is there to catch up on? There's just absolutely nothing to catch up on. I haven't spoken to you in years. Over 10 years. There's really nothing to catch up on. Obviously if I was important in your life or you were important to me, we would've stayed in touch." And I think it's just a habit thing to meet with people, because that's what people say. "Let's catch up. Let's get together." And people say these things without actually thinking about them. And there's no need. "I'll call you." It's like, "Why? Don't call me."

Robert Glazer: Talk about the concept of energy management. Because I think the directness, how you explained to me and how you answer these things and the discussion was, again, for a former monk, the shock value of it's great, but walk people through this because people are terrible at this. Particularly with family. They go back and get themselves dragged down and dragged down again. And they say, "Well, they're family." But it's a choice. So I'd love, what is an energy vampire?

Dandapani: Yeah. I would say an energy vampire is someone who is not uplifting and the simple way you could say is that if you were chatting for someone for 10 minutes or 20 minutes and you walked away, how do you feel? Do you feel uplifted? Do you not feel uplifted? If you don't feel uplifted, then potentially that person could be an energy vampire. Not necessarily, but if, obviously,

they're having a bad day and they're feeling down and then you talk to them and you don't feel great afterwards, then that's understandable. We all have crappy days. But if this is persistently happening to you with that one person year after year, then you could potentially classify them as someone who is inherently an energy vampire, who's been this way for decades. And I think learning to identify that is crucial. But the energy vampire is one topic, but I think, stepping back even further, Robert, it's like all of this is not helpful and at the end of the day, you don't even know where you're going in life.

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: Right. And most people don't have the clarity of what they want in life. Who they want to spend time with. I sometimes feel like these tools are just little things that don't really make a difference because at the end of the day, people just don't really know where they want to go or what they want in their life. And so then how can you make a small or micro-decision if this person is the right person for you or not?

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: And I think that's why people struggle with family members. And you talk about people that go back to the same situation again with a family member who might be toxic, who might be an energy vampire. Why do they do that? I mean, obviously, there's just not one reason. It could be guilt. It could be a bunch of other reason. But a lot of times it's because it's driven by the unclarity that they have. I have a family member, a relative, that I haven't spoken to, I don't know, in 15 years or 17 years now. I'm really clear what I want in my life and where I want to go, so I know she doesn't play a role in it. She can if she changes her ways, but if she doesn't, she doesn't play a role in it. So for me there's no impetus to go back to that relationship, to her. But for most people, when you say they keep going back into it, why do they go back into it? It's because they have no idea what they want. If they're clear what they want, then it's so much easier to make that decision that this person is not uplifting, I don't want to spend time with them.

Robert Glazer: But if they don't see that that's blocking them from getting somewhere that they want to be-

Dandapani: But they don't know where they want to be, right?

Robert Glazer: Right. Then they don't understand the cost.

Dandapani: Exactly. Yeah. There is no cost because if you don't have somewhere to be or a goal to you that you want to get there, then there is no cost, and the cost at that point is if I let go of this family member who's an energy vampire, then I don't have that family member in my life. And then what do I have? I have nothing. So let me keep the family energy vampire so I have something rather

than not have anything, because there's no other pursuit in life. There's nothing else to focus-

Robert Glazer: But let's pretend that people know what they want or they're going to work on it and figure out what they want.

Dandapani: Okay.

Robert Glazer: Can you explain how, again, because it's not a blowup, it's not a burn a bridge, can you give them some practical examples of how you kind of move away from an energy vampire?

Dandapani: Yeah. So I would say once you've identified someone as an energy vampire, one of the first things to do, especially if it's a family member, then you really want to be clear. The first step is making that decision. What is the damage being done? All right, if the damage that's being done is pretty serious, I assume. Someone's physically abusing you or verbally abusing you or emotionally abusing you all the time, you go, "Look, I don't want this any more in my life." Then the first step is to pull yourself away.

Dandapani: One beautiful phrase that my guru coined was being affectionately detached. So you can be kind to the energy vampire that's [inaudible 00:40:51]. You can be kind, loving, and gentle, but you do not engage with the person. You don't make appointments to go have dinner with them. You don't make appointments to go have lunch with them, to catch with them. You just don't engage with them, period. And if they confront you and ask you, then you tell them they're not uplifting to you. Obviously not in just those two words. But you want to be clear to them and tell them that they're not an uplifting presence and they're welcome back in your life. And this is not a shunning. You're not shunning someone and saying to them that you'll never talk to them again, but it's more you're saying to them, "You're welcome back in my life, but you need to play by these rules, and the rules are that you need to be an uplifting person or at least, at the bare minimum, to be a neutral person. And if you can't be either one of those, then we can't hang out."

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and a lot of it, too, I've heard you say, is you don't have to, it's just that not engaging. You don't have to be in a negative place with them, you just remove the perfunctory, "Hey, how you doing? Want to catch up?" These are the things we just say even though we don't mean it, right?

Dandapani: Yep. People say that all the time and I'm really careful about saying those things because if I say to someone, "Let's catch up," then I'm screwed. They want to catch up and I don't have time to catch up. So I won't say that. I'll say things like, "Have a nice day."

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: Which, I hope for them to have a nice day, but I don't want to catch up with them.

Robert Glazer: Was it that you that said, "Just don't ask people how they are if you don't want to know," or am I misattributing that?

Dandapani: No, no. That's what I always say. Don't ask people how they are. And people ask that all the time. I grew up in Australia. When you see someone, you go, "Hey, how's it going, mate?" And that's what Australians say all the time. "How's it going, mate?" And I don't say, "How's it going, mate?" And I don't ask people, "How are you?" Because I don't want to know. Not that I don't care.

Robert Glazer: Right.

Dandapani: It's just that I need to be in a place where that, I'm a priest, so if people start telling me their problems, then I got to listen. And people feel the need to tell me their problems all the time.

Robert Glazer: Yeah and I think, to bring this home for people, it is by doing these perfunctory things and these things that you could do, and it's not that you don't have the time, you don't want to allocate the time. Right? I think that's probably the-

Dandapani: Yeah.

Robert Glazer: It takes away from the other stuff that you really want to do and where you can make a bigger contribution, right?

Dandapani: Yeah.

Robert Glazer: Because you know that.

Dandapani: Yeah. And I only have a finite amount of energy today. So I'm going tonight, I'm exhausted and I'm going to go to bed. So I have so much energy in the day and I want to invest it. I want to invest it into the people that I love, the people that are investing back in me. I want to invest it into things that I'm passionate about, that I'm driven about, my work, my vision, my mission. And once I've put all that energy into that, I don't have very much left to spare. And I think people have to realize that you have to earn someone else's energy. And you have to work for it. It's not something you just give out. And I think there's a lot of New Age people out there that probably disagree with me, and that's fine, and that's why their lives are where they are. It's because if you're like, "Oh, yeah, just give energy to the whole world." I mean, that's such a bullshit concept. Nothing good comes out of that.

Robert Glazer: Right. That's a million little pieces, right?

Dandapani: It's a million little pieces. It doesn't work. The [inaudible 00:44:27] focus the energy to people and things in a very thoughtful, clear way creates the greatest impact.

Robert Glazer: Well, think about a laser, the analogy of a laser.

Dandapani: Exactly.

Robert Glazer: Focus light and it can cut glass, and if you break it all up, it can't do anything.

Dandapani: Or even the sun. Put a magnifying glass, you can burn a paper. Focus the sun's energy. But just on its own, yeah. Not the same impact. And I think learning to manage your energy that way, identifying what priorities are, I think that's a really big thing. Going back to the focus conversation earlier about the workplace and identifying what tasks are important, what are top priorities, I think that needs to be applied towards each person and how they plan to invest their energy. What's important in their life? What's important in your life? And can you list them, excuse me, list them in order of priority?

Robert Glazer: I'd love to hear a little about what you're working on next. I know you have an app coming out. We've talked about a bunch of different concepts at high level, but as you've said, this is not the podcast hack on focus and awareness. This takes real work and discipline and I'm guessing this has to do with a lot of the tools you're coming out with and the app you're coming out with, so I'd love to hear about it.

Dandapani: Yeah. Thanks for asking about that, Robert. I have an app that's launching in a couple of weeks and the app basically is a platform where we can share courses on. One of the first courses, actually, the first course on there is called Unwavering Focus and it's a 10 chapter course on learning about what we talked previously about awareness and your mind, learning how to develop willpower, learning how to develop concentration, and then using those three things, the knowledge of those three things to actually handle and overcome fear, worry, anxiety, and stress, because once you can learn to control awareness in the mind, it's not too difficult, then, to handle those four things of fear, worry, anxiety, and stress.

Dandapani: I think one of the best features of the app is the ritual section. In the monastery, when I lived there, our whole day was filled with rituals. It's about learning the tools and then applying the tools. So learning the tools is one thing, but unless you apply them in your daily life throughout the day, you're not going to make progress. So what we did was we created a ritual section where the day is divided into four sections, morning, afternoon, evening, and night, so in six hour segments, and in each of those quadrants, we created rituals for people to do. So like make the bed in the morning or give someone your undivided attention. And then every time you do one of those rituals, you rate yourself zero, one, two or three. Zero I didn't do it, three I did to really well. And then the app

keeps track of how well you're developing your willpower, how well you're developing your concentration, and how well you're doing at controlling where your awareness goes in your mind. And after a week, after a month, after three months you can see a lot of data on how well you're doing. The idea is to help people cultivate consistent practice of the tools throughout the day, but also be able to just track their progress.

Robert Glazer: Well, that's awesome. And we'll provide links, I'll get the links from you where they could find that. I assume it's in Apple Store.

Dandapani: Yep. In the Apple Store and the Play Store as well for Android, yeah.

Robert Glazer: Okay. So we'll include links to the listeners on that. And I wanted to end with a final question here, and I always preface this by saying that it could be singular or repeated, based on my experience, but what's a mistake you've made personally or professionally that you've learned the most from?

Dandapani: That I've learned the most from? Well, that's the toughest part. I can list you a number of-

Robert Glazer: Or cost you the most. It could be either way. You might not have learned from it, but it might have [crosstalk 00:48:22].

Dandapani: Yeah. I'm still learning from a lot of my mistakes, but I would say one of my biggest challenges is learning to manage my energy. And even though this is something that I talk a lot about, how well you do it is all relative, and I think I do it well, but I think in a lot of times, I don't manage it so well. I feel like I'm quite driven and I put so much of my energy into my different passions and things that I want to do, but it comes at the cost where I don't take care of my health probably as well as I should be. And that's probably the biggest part that's been affecting me. I do spend time with my family. That I don't compromise at all. So my family gets my time, but I think my health could use more of my undivided attention. I mean, I'm not out there getting drunk, but I haven't been getting enough sleep or probably exercise.

Robert Glazer: That goes in the least expected answers for me, but I think everyone will appreciate that we are all a work in progress.

Dandapani: And I think that's a big thing to note and I think it's an important thing for listeners, your listeners, every listener to kind of keep in mind when they're hearing a podcast and if you're talking to a person, then don't assume that that person, when they are sharing something that they are an expert at it. Unless they claim that or they practice that every moment of their life. I never claim any of those things. I just share with you what I've learned. I never ever said that I practice that every single moment of my day, but I think that the big assumption is that when you hear someone share tools, you think that they practice it perfectly, and that's a very wrong assumption to place on a person.

Robert Glazer: They've identified the problem and the tool. Doesn't mean they've solved it.

Dandapani: Exactly. Right. Or that they practice it perfectly, flawlessly. To assume that would be erroneous. That burden of perfection should never be placed on that person. That's an unfair thing to do. I get people placing that burden on me constantly, thinking that, "Oh, your life must be just all in a little bento box and everything is just put away perfectly." And then it's not. I learned the tools and I'm constantly applying it to my life as my life changes. And with every change comes a new opportunity to apply the tools in a different way, to adapt to those changes. And that comes with trial and error.

Robert Glazer: Great. Well, how can people get ahold of you and your work?

Dandapani: They can't get ahold of me, but they can definitely check out my stuff.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. Where do they find you, maybe not specifically, but-

Dandapani: Yeah. They can go to dandapani.org. That's D-A-N-D-I-P-A-N-I dot O-R-G. That's my website. And from there, they'll be able to find everything about me. I have tons of free content as well if you want to listen. The app that we're coming out has a whole library of free audio and video talks that you can download the app for free and listen to all that content for free. And obviously the courses as well. I'm most active on Instagram, so if you want to follow me on Instagram, I do post on there somewhat regularly. But yeah, that's where they can find out more about me.

Robert Glazer: Great. Well, Dandapani, thanks so much for taking the time today. As I said before, your work has really been inspirational for me and a huge help on my journey to focus and improve and I hope everyone who's listening can really learn from your experience and wisdom and I appreciate you taking the time to share with us today.

Dandapani: Well, thanks for having on Elevate podcast as well, Robert. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Robert Glazer: All right, to our listeners, thanks for tuning in to the Elevate podcast today. We will include links to Dandapani's website, his TEDx talk, and his upcoming app on the detailed episode page at robertglazer.com. If you enjoyed today's episode or any episode, I'd really appreciate if you could leave us a review as it helps new users discover the show and get the same value from the content. If you're listening on Apple Podcast, it takes two seconds. You can just click on the library icon, scroll down, find Elevate, and scroll down and leave a review at the bottom. If you're listening in a browser or different app, we've got a bunch of links to leave reviews under the podcast link at robertglazer.com. Thank you again for your support, and until next time, keep elevating.