



Episode 516: Matt Beaudreau on Why Your Kids
Should Quit School Plus a Better
Model of Education

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellness with an E on the end. And this podcast is going to have a little bit of a controversial title and that was intentional. I'm calling it "Why Your Kids Should Quit School, Plus a Better Model of Education." And this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. You might have heard me talk about Unstitute, which is the curriculum I developed for my own children. And today, I'm talking to someone who has developed and worked with a school doing a similar system, but they have locations all over the country and all over the world, as well as resources for helping people start these schools.

And I've gotten so many questions as follow up to talking about Unstitute, I wanted to provide this as a practical resource. And we also go in-depth on how you can apply some of these same things at home, should you decide to consider homeschooling your kids. I'm here with Matt Beaudreau, who is a keynote speaker and Tedx speaker. He is the founder and president of Acton Academy, creator of Apogee Strong Mentorship Program, and the host of "The Essential 11 Podcast." And as a keynote speaker and a consultant, he has spoken to over 250,000 people all over the world, from massive companies to educational facilities, and so much more.

And his experience working with Fortune 500 companies has helped him design the network of K-12 schools under the Acton Academy place or umbrella. And his Apogee Strong and "Essential 11" were both born from the Acton philosophies as well. The idea that the top leaders from around the world can pour into these young people in multiple countries on a weekly basis, and those same leaders answer questions directly on his "Essential 11 Podcast."

I'm a really big fan of his work. And we talk about some important concepts in this episode, things from why he turned down a job at the White House. Why I dropped out of college. And then he goes deep on how the current educational systems aren't actually addressing what kids need and are zapping motivation. Why education has become a religion of sorts in our country. How character development is much more important than bookwork. What Acton Academy is, and why they focus on requiring all kids to run a business even from a young age. How students learn at Acton to drive their own academics, and how to apply the same ideas at home if you choose to. Their structure for character, civil discourse, problem-solving, and other skills. How and why we can create a better system from the ground up, versus trying to fix the existing system. How to nurture motivation in our kids, so they want to self-learn. Why the need for discipline goes away when kids learn self-discipline. The fascinating paperclip challenge and how they use it with kids, and so much more. I absolutely loved this episode, I think that you will too. Matt is such a wealth of knowledge, and he's doing so much good in the world. And I think this will answer a lot of the questions I've gotten from a lot of you guys about how to start something like this, either in your own area or even in your own home. So without further ado, let's jump in. Matt, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Matt: Katie Wells, the pleasure is mine.

Katie: I'm so excited to chat with you. I have followed your work for a long time. And I think this conversation will be especially relevant to a lot of the things going on in the world right now, and especially for parents. But before we jump into education, I have a note that you turned down a job at the White House, and I would love to hear this story.

Matt: So I was your typical come out...you know, I came out of high school with all my straight As. I never got anything less than an A, right, so I was like, I guess I'll go to college now because that's what everybody's supposed to do. And I was doing the same thing in college and got all my straight As. But as I'm going through, I really have no idea what I actually wanna do with my life. You know, and so, my senior year, 9/11 happened.

And so, you know, it was, obviously, in September in the fall there right at the beginning. And so I just went, "Okay, maybe that's what I wanna do." Maybe I wanna fight back somehow, someway. I had a family friend that was part of the Secret Service. And so I went, "You know what? That's what I'm gonna do." So I applied to the Secret Service and went through that entire background process, and was offered the job at the White House, and initially signed a provisional contract. All I had to do was finish and graduate within a couple of months from college. And so I'd signed that provisional contract. But that same gentleman who worked for the Secret Service actually talked me out of it. So I went back and turned the job down, and then graduated right after that, and had no job, and no idea what to do with my life. But yeah, kind of cool.

Katie: As some of the best stories start, I can resonate with a lot of that. I was that straight-A kid all the way through high school, and actually, most of college, and then very close to being done with college, walked away and decided I wanted to start a family, instead. I was on full presidential scholarship and walked into the dean and said, "I quit." And he said, "You can't." And I said, "Well, I just did."

Matt: I just did. There you go.

Katie: I didn't finish. But that actually was the start of a lot of research, especially when I started having kids into the difference between education and schooling and what actual true education would look like. And when our oldest was 5, I was in that place of do I send them to some kind of private school or Montessori school? Do I homeschool and I realized none of the options were spectacular, even the homeschool ones, they all were basically teaching for an outdated system. And that's led to a basically 15-year research project on my end. And I know you speak extensively about this, especially the difference between school and education. So let's start there. I know you have so many thoughts on this, but let's start there.

Matt: So many ways to go on this. Yes. And so first of all, good for you. I think that is fantastic. And anytime I talk about school and education, and the difference there, and I always wanna make it very, very clear because we have a lot of, you know, public school teachers and private school teachers and administrators that listen to your podcast, listen to my show, listen to everything we're saying. I always wanna make it very clear. I support them 100%. They're phenomenal humans. I am not downgrading or bashing anything they are doing. But the understanding of the game of schooling is a very specific system. It is a system that we have that has been culturally engineered to produce a specific outcome. And so that is what I'm always speaking out against is this system that we have been trained and conditioned to put our young people through telling ourselves and telling them and telling the parents kind of this lie of like, look, as long as you go through this system, then you're gonna be prepared for life. And that's gonna be provably false, right?

Whereas education is something that you can't help...education is something that as long as you are willing to move forward in an area, you're going to get there. When you're a baby and you're learning to walk, you know, there's education there. When you're going to the store, there's education there. When you're starting a business, obviously, there is massive education. Anything you are doing is education. And so, you know, my anti-system is anti the school system as it's designed because it is not designed for human development. It just

is not. And that's something that we can get into. And you probably got into with, you know, reading guys like John Taylor Gatto and Ivan Illich and, you know, Ken Robinson, and there's so many pioneers that have laid this out. So that's why I always differentiate between the two.

Katie: Yeah, I think that's a really important distinction. And I made a similar one with the medical system. Every doctor I know personally is an amazing person and wants to do good in the world, and they're also struggling with an outdated system that isn't necessarily always best for the patient or for the doctor. And I'm seeing that in education as well. Like, to your point, I've talked to so many educators who are so frustrated with the restraints of the current system and how it's not preparing kids for the current world. And I know like when I was looking at this, I thought, "Well, what do my kids actually need to be successful in a potentially uncertain future?" Because we don't know what that's gonna look like. My current career didn't exist when I was starting school. How do you prepare them? And to me that led to a skills up versus knowledge down. We need to give them these core skills that let them rapidly adapt in a changing world, things like critical thinking, and creativity, and willingness to ask questions, and tolerance for failure. And those aren't things typically that are nurtured in a normal school environment.

Matt: They're not at all. Intentionally, by the way, that system has been designed intentionally to create people who aren't able to or willing to do that. So you're right, the need to be able to adapt, the need to be able to learn what I wanna learn when I wanna learn it, the need to be able to unlearn, at this point, is rapid...I mean, you and I connected on social media, right? We connected on this, you know, iPhone right here. Ten years from now, this thing may be as good as a pager, right? Depending on what...we don't know. And so we'll need to unlearn utilizing this to utilize a different tool to...you know. And so that's a microcosm of everything else, too. So, yeah, their ability to do that, their ability to communicate, their ability to have that antifragility, right, the resilience to be okay with failure, to be okay with, you know, not having something go their way and be able to adapt and figure something out.

Like, all of those things are those skills that will never go out of style no matter what. We've got, you know, young people that are coming into kindergarten this year, theoretically, would retire somewhere around like 2083. So why on earth are we still utilizing this experiment of this public school system? And again, when people go, "Okay, well, you're talking about crazy alternative kind of stuff." This public school system is the alternative.

Since the dawn of history, we have learned by doing, you grew up, you helped your parents, you helped your family, you know, maybe you got into the family business early on, you learned to farm, you learned to cook, you learned to...you know, maybe you were an apprentice and your dad was a welder. And so you learned how to weld and you became an expert in that because you learned by doing. It's only been the last 120 or so years that we've had this experiment of public schooling that was designed to create factory workers in a cog that were able to think well enough to follow directions, but not really to, you know, challenge the status quo. And you take all the...you kind of outsource thinking and then we kind of designed this system, and then anything outside of that, we've now been trained to say, well, that's alternative. Well, no, that's the alternative and it's an experiment that's not working.

Katie: Yeah, that's such an important point. And I've made the controversial argument that I think most kids would actually be better just being pulled out of public school at home in an unstructured environment versus...because I know I had to unlearn some of those things to your point. Like, I, in school, internalized that there's only one right answer to every question on the test and failure is harmful. And I had to unlearn a lot of those things. What does a better system look like in your mind?

Matt: Yeah. So, you're right, you had to unlearn all that because we have been emotionally attached to this. We've been culturally trained. I tell people schooling, as that system, it's a religion in this country. That's the best way to put it because I can intellectually walk somebody through exactly what you just said, how it'd be better to completely be pulled out of that public...So I can walk you intellectually through that and what that could look like. But emotionally, people have a hard time detaching from that, right? So something that's going to be better, it's gonna follow the natural progression of what a human does. And so one of the examples that I give and I actually had...I just gave another TED Talk a few weeks ago and it should come out any day.

And I give this example of my own 5-year-old who recently came up to me and he said, "Hey, Dad, I wanna learn Jiu-Jitsu." Like, he's starting to get really excited about martial arts and he's like, "I wanna do..." He knows that was a big part of my life. And I'm really excited about that. And I kind of make fun of the fact that from a traditional schooling standpoint, we'd go, "Oh, okay, you wanna learn about Jiu-Jitsu, that's great. Well, let's crack open a book. I'm gonna give you a lecture about Jiu-Jitsu. You're gonna read this about Jiu-Jitsu. You're gonna watch this video about Jiu-Jitsu. You're gonna start memorizing the names of techniques. You're gonna do an oral report and make a trifold board on Jiu-Jitsu and..." Right, that's what...traditional schooling would do that, whereas education goes, cool, do Jiu-Jitsu. You actually get on the mat. You start rolling. You get your butt kicked. You have to figure it out in real-time. You go compete with people that are better than you and further along, right? It's that simple distinction that is ridiculously profound. And that goes for everything, right?

So, you know, if you're basing things on human development, young people need to play. They just need to play. They need to be around an environment and they need to learn character. They need to learn that being a good person matters and there's, you know, certain rules of the game to being a good human being. That's what they need, they need those kinds of experiences. Then as they get a little older and they start to get into, you know, their middle school, high school years, then they need to start learning how to set goals, and set timelines, and to take on real-world projects, you know, and give themselves some challenges and some hardships, some hard things to do so that they can raise the bar and expectations for what a young person can do, right? Like, you can walk through all these things from a developmental standpoint but the key component is you learn by actually doing it.

Every student on our campus, from 5 years old to 18 years old, runs a business. They either start a new business every year or they take their existing business into perpetuity. And it's not because we think

everybody should be an entrepreneur, because we do not. I don't think everybody should be an entrepreneur. But it's because the doing, the learning process by doing, not outsourcing, and teach me, oh, MBA professor, about what a business looks like, even though you've never run one, the actual doing is where the learning takes place. It's really a simple concept. It's really simple. You just have to emotionally get there.

Katie: Absolutely. And I'd love for you to talk more about Acton. I love...This is one of the things I've seen you talk about on social media. That was one of the reasons I was so excited to have you on because the way we do this with our kids, and the curriculum I built is also very entrepreneurship-focused. But the same idea, they might not all become entrepreneurs. And that's great. But you learn so much. So many of the life skills I learn when I teach them are naturally cultivated through running a business. So, with our kids, we have contracts that they have to have a profitable business for a year before they can have a phone or a car. And that way, they're learning these skills. We're, of course, mentoring and helping them. But I think to your point, this is a really applicable hands-on way. So talk about Acton a little bit and how you guys built that.

Matt: That is an applicable way. I love that. I love that you said that too. And I always tell the story of...I'm gonna talk about Acton, but I always tell the story of, you know, my own girls. My girls are 10 and 8 right now. And we have horses out here on our ranch in California. I always talk about the fact that my girls came to me two years, three years ago, and they said, "Dad..." So, I mean, you know, they were 5 and 7 at the time. And they're like, "Daddy, we want horses." And I was like, "That's fantastic. So you guys gotta figure out how to buy horses. If you figure out how to buy horses, I'll make sure we have a place to put them. I'll make sure we have a ranch, but you guys are gonna need to figure it out." So they worked together to start multiple businesses to raise the money, to earn the money to buy the horses. We have horses because they bought them. That experience of having to earn something you want, of having to work to figure it out, to not feel entitled to anything but to figure out that anything is possible. Think about the mindset of my 10 and 8-year-olds where they went, "Yeah, I wanted something, so I figured out a way to earn it by putting in all the hard work." That's a vastly different human being. And those are the types of human beings that we're building at Acton.

So the big, you know, pillars for us is we understand that character matters, being a good human matters, having a strong work ethic and being a good human. So we've got all kinds of systems in place, that is first and foremost on our campus. If you are not going to be a good person, it doesn't mean there's never any kind of, you know, conflict that takes place. Of course, there's people. Any good organization, any marriage, any relationship, there's conflict, but you learn how to deal with that conflict. So we've got an entire system that is built around, first of all, having good work ethic and being a good person, and we've got contracts in place for them to be able to tangibly speak to how that works, and those contracts are in place for them to be able to tangibly talk to one another about maintaining those high standards of work ethic and character. So that's the foundation.

After that, Socratic conversation is a giant part so that they learn how to eloquently speak to what it is they believe and why they believe it. They learn how to genuinely listen to somebody else's point of view that is different than their own and learn to still be able to have relationships with those people. It's called civil

discourse. It's something we used to be able to do in this country and we're not doing a good job of it now. And by no means do I think public school is the only reason for it. But it's a huge part of it. It's a huge part of it. So, they learn to actually have a conversation. We don't tell them what to think. They don't know where I stand or any of the guides stand on any subject because that's not our role. Our role is to push back on why do you believe that and what's your evidence around that? So, that thinking component is huge.

On the academic side, they learn to drive their own academics. And that encompasses goal-setting in all forms and fashion, so they're learning to go, "Okay, by the end of this week, by the end of this day..." depending on how old they are and what makes the most sense for where they are cognitively, they go, "Okay, this is my goal. This is what I'm going to accomplish by the end of the day or end of the week," whatever that looks like. They're setting those goals, they're checking off those goals with one another. So they're able to go at their own pace. And when I say academics, I don't mean they've gotta take traditional courses. If they want to, they're able to. But many of our students would rather take on an individual project.

Again, my oldest daughter, not a huge fan of traditional math courses. But what she does like to do is, you know, she'll run a mock business that she has to incorporate a P&L, you know, and kind of do some cash flow projections for 3 years and run a mock P&L at 10 years old. That's math, and that's math that matters. I don't care if she's good at algebra or Algebra II. I don't care, yes, she's gonna get through that component for the graduation piece of that but that's not the stuff that matters. Learning how to run those kind of things, understanding how taxes work, and how to set up a family trust and run things through a trust, you know, a business trust and a family trust and a foundation and to be able to legally move tax...like, if she can understand those things, I don't care if she's done calculus and I can't make a good argument as to why she would.

So, you know, from an individual standpoint, they're driving those things at their own pace. And then from a collaborative standpoint, they're learning to take on work that matters. Every five or six weeks, they're taking on a big project in collaboration with other humans. And then they're presenting that to parents in the community. So, you know, for example, we did an electricity quest earlier this year. And so all of our students were tasked with building out a specific part of a city and running electricity to that city. And so some of the youngers built out...you know, out of clay and cardboard, they build out these various buildings. And as they got older, some were 3D printing some of the buildings. Some were actually doing hammer and nails. We had this huge scaled-out building, but then they all had to learn how to run electricity to it, whether they were doing it with water wheels, whether they were doing it, you know, in any other fashion. And then we brought the community together, and all of the students come together and go okay, three, two, one, flip a switch, and let's see, what happens. Do we have lights? Do we have running water? Do we have all of this stuff?

And whether they did...by the way, they did. They did it. But even if they hadn't, that's okay because then we can go back and go, "Okay, why? What are we missing," right? That's real learning. To have some sort of false rubric that we're just going, hey, here, we're gonna dangle this carrot, you go over and flick this carrot, you go over and check this box, you go over...all we're doing is sucking the drive, the motivation, you know, the zest for life out of these kids, which is what's producing the 17 and 18-year-olds that are like, "I have no idea who I

am. I have no idea where I wanna go. I've outsourced everything. I feel entitled to everything." I mean, that's a big part of that. So, in a nutshell, people are like, "Give me the 30-second pitch for Acton." I can't. I can't because it's so vastly different, because you wanna hear about a private school and what I'm gonna tell you about is a workspace for young people that build superheroes. Those aren't the same.

Katie: I mean, I feel like that's a pretty strong pitch. But to highlight some of the things you just said, the idea that math is best learned in real-world application, I think of all the kids who enter adulthood who have no idea how to do taxes or manage their own finances. And there's that running joke of, "Well, another day of adulting without using the quadratic equation." Like, we're not teaching them the actual math that would be helpful to them, and then it's applied so it makes more sense. And we live in a world of constant access to technology and to knowledge. So should a child want to learn calculus or need it as an adult, there are endless resources to do that.

Matt: And by the way, they can do it really, really fast if they want to do it. They can do it super quickly. This whole idea of you gotta have 12 years to build upon...no, you can go from just learning about numbers to really proficient in algebra in probably about 100 hours total, total, right? So you can do that. So to think that, oh my gosh, they can't do it when they're 6 is going to have any impact on them doing it at 11 or 12, or 15, or whatever it actually matters is ridiculous. And then again, this is part of that intellectual versus emotional, right? I got straight As all through school. I went through calculus. I did all of that. I run multiple seven-figure businesses now. And I went back and showed my parents, you know, a few months back, I took an Algebra II tests just to make a point. I got straight As. I got my A in Algebra II when I was in high school. I went back and took that, I got a 19%. I guessed on almost all of it, right? Because it doesn't matter to me in what I do. It just doesn't. Now, if I needed to go back and reteach myself I could also do that. I could, right.

And, you know, again, to further illustrate the point too, I mean, I've had...This is how strong the emotional tie is for humans. I had a public school teacher mom, who had her son, she had the wherewithal enough to know, okay, look, I don't want that for my son. So she had her son with us. She came into my office one day, and she was upset, and on the verge of tears, and she says, "Look, I don't understand how finances work, but I'm in charge of kind of taking over finances for our family. I think we're gonna have to go bankrupt. I have made some really poor decisions." Things are really, really, you know, hard. So I'm not exactly sure how we're gonna be able to afford, you know, coming to Acton. And so I just wanna let you know, you know, that this is the case." I said, "Okay, I understand, you know, let's work with you on this. Your boys are amazing."

So she's like, "He is doing amazing, you know, and like, it's so cool to see him. He's happier than he's ever been. He's more productive than he's ever been. He's nicer at home. He's taking on more responsibilities, taking on more chores. It's amazing to me that, you know, he's in what would be considered, you know, seventh grade in a traditional school environment and he's making like \$2,000 a month right now in his business, like, that's amazing. But I'm actually kind of worried because he's only a sixth-grade, you know, grade level on math. And that's another thing I wanna talk to you about." I just went, "Are you kidding? Did you hear anything you just said from the fact that you bankrupted your family to the fact that he's doing better than he ever has and he's making more money right now than some adults, but you have this arbitrary

theoretical grade level that you're working...?" That's how strong the emotional tie is to conventional schooling. It's amazing.

Katie: I have a lot of follow-up questions related to the actual education side, but on the note of that emotional tie, how do you think we start to shift that societally? Because you're right, it truly has become a religion of sorts. And I came from a family of Ph.D.s and academics who still struggle with me running businesses and not having a Ph.D. So how do we break those emotional ties?

Matt: It's gonna be...It's only time, I mean, it really is. So it's gonna be time in two respects. One, the people who will not let go of it because they just won't give themselves the opportunity to think through the logical portion of it because they're so emotionally attached to how it used to be. They've just...you know, eventually just gonna have to get...those generations, they're just gonna end up fading away, right? And so that's part of just the reality. The other way is organizations like Acton, this continuous shift in our culture to homes, you know, homeschool, there's been a huge increase in homeschoolers over the last few years, and seeing that all of those young people are coming out ridiculously successful, and in most cases, more successful overall. That's the only thing. You know, we can't tear down the building, public school won't change, government schools won't change. So you don't have to waste my time anymore just talking about where they're ineffective. You know, we're just gonna build a better model. And over time, people are just gonna go, okay. Clearly, there is something to that. And that's what's gonna create, you know, the ultimate shift. It's just gonna be time.

Katie: Yeah, it makes sense. Exactly. Instead of working within the system that already has its challenges, just build a better system and let it speak for itself. And...

Matt: You can't change the old system anyway. You just can't. It's like going in and changing the Vatican, right? There's so much power, money, politics involved in keeping it the same way, you're not gonna change it.

Katie: And you mentioned a couple of minutes ago the mindset piece, and for kids that that idea that anything is possible. And also, I would say, understanding they can learn anything that they need to, I think that is a key shift. And I'm seeing that play out in my kids. I've seen this play out in other kids. But I think for parents who aren't used to that model, that can be a hard thing to grasp. And also the idea of how do we...? I hear parents ask, "Well, how do I get my kids to be motivated to do these things? If they're not in school with all this structure, they're not gonna want to do anything."

Matt: Yeah, that's garbage. So, first of all, here's part of what people need to understand. So, again, we're going back to what human nature actually is. You know, I talk about the term teenager wasn't even invented until the 1940s. That didn't even exist. It didn't even exist. Before that you were, you know, 12, happy birthday, you're 13. You're now essentially an adult, right? And we had all these cultural...you can see all these

cultural things, you know, from the bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs to, you know, the agoge of the Spartans to whatever, like we had all these cultural things where it was like, okay, cool, now we are bringing you into adulthood. What we lost by taking those out of our society was the expectation that young people could take on adult things very, very early because they can, and they want to, and they will when the expectation is set for them to do so.

We've essentially lowered the bar to this ridiculously low level of our expectations of what a young person could do and wanna go into the whole...you know, we wanna use all these excuses like, well, the brain is not fully developed. Okay, cool. The brain wasn't fully developed 100 years ago for 13 to 14-year-olds either, but they were still out, you know, being surveyors, living, you know, in the wilderness for a week. They were still 13, 14 starting their own businesses. They were still bleeding men into war. And I'm not saying that's what we need to bring back, but what I'm saying is our expectations need to be raised.

So when parents are going, "Well, my kid's just not motivated," okay, there's two things, there's many things, but there's two huge parts of that. One, you're probably sending them to school, that sucks motivation out of them. School is designed to suck the motivation out of a human being. Your 5-year-olds that come into school, they're super pumped. They're super motivated. They're fired up. They're happy. They love to be there. They love to...Like, it is very rare to find a 5-year-old, 6-year-old who's not at least kind of like, "Okay, cool, what is this? This is exciting." But by the time they're 7, 8, 9, we've sucked that excitement out of them as far as school goes. So that's a piece of it because of that system.

The other part of it that makes people very, very upset to hear but it's the reality is it's partially on you as a parent. If your young person is not excited about something that's going on, not excited, they're not motivated, you've often put them in a scenario that is helping to suck that motivation out. One, you're often not leading by example. So if you're bummed out about your life, if you're living in fear, if you hate your 9:00 to 5:00 job, if you come home and you just are scrolling on Instagram, or you just are Netflix binging and you're complaining about the way your life is, right, all of those things that adults get sucked into, you are projecting that as the reality for your young people, right? One of the biggest pieces of advice that I always give is that your kids will do what you do before they ever do what you say. "I wish my kids would read more." Cool. Read. Read with them. Read in front of them. "I wish my kids would exercise." Cool. Exercise with them. "Gosh, my kid only wants to play video games." Cool. Who bought the video game for them? Put some parameters around that. Who's controlling the schedule?

You're gonna have to parent. You gotta actually put some work in. And that's really the big thing. And I know that's a tough thing for a lot of parents to hear, but that's the reality. What do you need to do on your end to create a better environment for them? Because we don't have video games in our house. We are very intentional about any kind of screen time. There's a very small window of time. And in order for them to even earn that time, there's a whole list of other chores and things that they've gotta get done, things around their business, whatever, before they even get to have that downtime because we're creating habits. People go, "Oh my gosh, your kids, oh my gosh, they're so, you know, well-behaved, and well-adjusted, and they're so friendly, and they're so confident, and they're so outgoing. What do you do to discipline them?" Nothing. We

teach them to be disciplined. That's different. We're disciplined humans. They've grown up in a disciplined household. So they just act with discipline. They've got disciplined habits. That's a different thing. And you can change that and make that the reality anytime you want. But it takes work.

Katie: Yeah, I think what you just said is probably the core important thing for all of this. And I've always said, you know, parents, we are always the primary educators of our kids. Even if they're going to school, we are still the primary educators. And I've seen that play out with my kids over and over. I could tell them to read but if I sit down on the couch and read, the likelihood that four or five of the six of them are gonna come right next to me is pretty high. If I sit down and draw or paint, they all want to join, or if I go work out, I have all these workout buddies. And it's because that exactly, they do what we do, not what we say. And one thing I've had as a kind of guideline for myself as a parent is that I won't do anything for them that they're capable of doing themselves, period.

Matt: Good.

Katie: So as soon as they're capable of doing their own laundry, that's now theirs to manage. And we do a similar system as you of like if/then, like, if you do these things, then you can get on your computer and work on projects. You can...And it's naturally built-in so I'm not disciplining or governing or nagging at them. They already know the system and it's built into our family culture. And to circle back to kids starting businesses, I would guess there are parents listening who think like, well, that's a great idea. But that sounds so overwhelming, and not even possible. I'd like for you to speak to that point. But having seen it play out with my kids, I'm like, actually, I think kids have an advantage in that because it's still so uncommon that when they start a business and go to anyone in the community or other parents, doors open because people are so excited to help kids on this journey. But I'd love for you to speak to that because I know this is a big paradigm shift in mindset for a lot of parents.

Matt: Totally. So it's so funny to me when parents will think like, "Oh, of course, my kid can sit for six, seven hours a day and listen to lectures and then come home and do a bunch of homework and get through a bunch of stuff that they really, really don't wanna do..." which they can do that, by the way. They're that adaptable. They can do that. But it's amazing when they think that they can do that, but not be super excited about something and figure out a way to make money around it. That's crazy. Again, that just goes back to what our expectations have been trained, you know, to believe about kids. We don't trust them. We don't trust their instincts. We don't trust their ability to make these things happen. And a lot of times, it's parents that are putting this concept because they've never started a business.

And usually, they have a self-conscious, you know, nature around that where they think, "So if I couldn't do it or I was too scared to do it, then, of course, my kid can't do it." Because you don't have a lot of entrepreneurs that are scared of their kids starting a business, right? You've got more people who have never started a business who are scared of their kids starting a business. The entrepreneur parents that we have here are like,

"Hell, yeah, they should be starting a business. Of course, they should." And there's a huge advantage to them to be young, right? It's like this compounding process.

I'll give you an example of just last week. So, this isn't directly related to...it's not starting a business, but it is directly related, I guess I should say. So we took a group of middle school kids over to a local mall. And we did the paperclip challenge with them. We've done this a number of times with young kids, right, where we're like, you, here's your paperclip, you've got two hours to come back with something better. You can't spend any money. You just have to connect with strangers, whether they're strangers in a store that are people that are working there, whether it's, you know, people just walk around the mall, whatever it is, you're gonna connect to strangers and you're gonna flip this paperclip into whatever you can get. You're gonna trade with them, you're gonna go make a pitch on, here's who I am. Here's what I'm doing. Right? And you're gonna make this pitch.

In two hours, they came back with thousands of dollars worth of things, like, worth of stuff. Like, we've done this before and we've had students come back with working cell phones in three hours. I have a young man who took this challenge on in the Apogee mentorship program. He has a truck. He's 16, he has a truck right now that he got starting out by flipping a paperclip. He has spent no money and he has his first truck, right? The young person who is taking initiative, who is communicating goals, who is coming out saying, "Hey, look, here's who I am, here's what I'm doing, here's where I wanna go," the world wants to support that young hero. The world loves that because, again, the world has such low expectations of young people, when they see somebody doing that they're like, "Oh, my gosh, this is the next Elon Musk, right? Because you're taking initiative and you're communicating with me and you're shaking my hand and you're looking me in the eye and you would..."

You know, our adults come to these campuses and our kids look them in the eye and they shake their hands and they say, "Nice to meet you. My name is...Let me show you around." And you would think I introduced them to Jesus. Like, you know, they lose their mind. And it's just young people taking these things on. And it is so powerful when they do that because if you think about me as a 42...how old am I? A 42-year-old man with gray hair and his beard, and if I go next door, you know, or down the street and I'm like, "Hey, I'm selling cookies," somebody's like, "Cool, man. I'm calling the cops, get off my property." Right? But when it's a 10-year-old adorable little girl or, you know, 8-year-old adorable little boy and they're like, "Hey, here's what I'm doing, this is my business," "Yeah, how much money do you want? What is it? It's five bucks a cookie? Cool. I'll give you 50."

Like, people wanna support that, right? So they've got a massive advantage early on and it just helps to build that confidence. And it's like a compounding effect. You know, it's that whole concept of, like, investing money when you're 5 versus investing it when you're 40. And then when both of those people are 60, how much more money that 5-year-old has because he invested early. Starting a business early on is the exact same thing. Exact same thing. That compound effect still takes precedence.

Katie: You've also...somewhat controversially, online I've seen you say that COVID was actually a net positive for education. And I know there are a lot of parents who went through like, "Oh my gosh, my kids are home for like a year and I'm so stressed out." And I very much agree with you on this, but I'd love to hear you explain why.

Matt: It was, man. It was a net positive for education. It was a net negative for schooling but it was a net positive for education in a number of ways. One, parents started actually seeing some of the things that were going on. Right? They started seeing some of the things that were happening in the classroom and they could see it on some of these Zooms. And you know, we were sitting back from this, you know, "alternative world" going, "Yeah, this is what we've been telling you about this whole time." This isn't something weird that's happening over Zoom now because of where we're in." No, this is what has been happening. And I mean that from, you know...And again, there's a lot of great teachers out there, I get it. But there's also...you know, systemically, you've got some of this garbage that's being perpetuated, some of the critical race theory, some of the...Like, you have so many of these things that you are like, "Wait, what?"

Some of these low expectations kind of just check the box, a little rat race, sort of, games. They're going, "This?" They're watching their young people struggle and flounder and not be excited and be sad and be, you know, not emotionally resilient. They're seeing all those things, which, of course, that breaks my heart for those young people. But what the positive was these parents are going, "Okay, maybe there's a bigger issue here than I realized. I was just trained to, like, you just send your kid to school." So, there is a huge influx of homeschoolers. There's so many parents that were pulling their kids out or started to look for, you know, "alternative programs." And by alternative, I just mean, alternative to conventional schooling. They started looking at all these programs and pulling them out.

So this huge, massive rush to actually do something better for our kids and keep them more emotionally stable and resilient and not entitled, that I get the shift for humanity was humongous. And I think we're continuing to see the fruits of that.

Parents are getting more...you know, there's still some that they're partway there. They're like, "Okay, well, now I see what's going on. So I've gotta go fight at the school board. And I've gotta go..." And I love that they're taking action and they're using their voice. I'm still trying to get that group that's like, I gotta fight, fight, fight, fight, fight to realize they're fighting a game they can't win. And so the next move for them is to pull out altogether. I'm still trying to get people to understand that altogether, but it was a big net positive for the young people in that regard.

And if parents are still going, "No, it's still...This is awful for my...I can't homeschool. I can't pull out. I can't..." Yes, you can. And I'm glad to connect with anybody who thinks they can't do it. I'm glad to help. And I get hundreds of messages every single week from people in that boat that are going, "But you don't understand my circumstance. I can't because I'm a single mom. I can't because..." Cool, there's almost always a way to make it happen. So let's figure out how to make it happen.

Katie: I extend that same offer. Anybody who needs help, message me and I will help. And that's actually been my hesitancy in releasing the curriculum I've built for my kids is that it really is actually that simple. It's so not difficult that I'm like, it's almost funny to release it as an actual curriculum because there's not that much to it when you actually apply. And so I'd love to hear a little bit about the practicality of what day-to-day looks like at Acton just to give context for people who think, "I can't do this."

Matt: Yeah, that's a great question. So Acton, you know, we take...One of the things I was saying earlier is that it's not...you know, we say it's a private school, right? It's a school. But it's not a school, it's a workplace for young people. So, if we start with that foundational context, this will be a little easier for people to understand. So we start our days with a morning meeting. And that is literally them in a Socratic circle in their various studios. And when I say studio, it's just like a mixed age group. So, you know, if you're 10, you're not in there with just 10-year-olds, you know, it's a mixed age group that's together. Now, depending on how big the campus is, you know, you might have everybody together, you might not have everybody together. Our campuses, my campuses that I own are pretty big. So we've got, you know, high school is by themselves, middle school is by themselves. Elementary, which is kind of your second through fifth or whatever, it's kind of by themselves and you kind of your TK, kinder, first-ish grade or whatever are together.

So start in that Socratic circle and they start with a morning meeting. And that literally starts with a standing up looking at each other in the eye, shaking hands, saying, you know, "Good morning. Good to see you." And then they'll turn to the experts and, "Good morning. Good to see you." And so they'll start every day with that. Then they'll go into what we call a launch of some sort. So we'll go into a Socratic discussion, first and foremost. That Socratic discussion could be something based on current events. It could be something that's kind of fun, you know, from a younger standpoint of like, "Okay, you know, we'll put you as a hero in a story, how do you make a hard decision?" You know, for littles, like, "Oh, you know, somebody is getting swept away by some rapids, and they're holding on to a branch, but they can't hold on much longer, and you've got Superman on one side of the shore and you have Batman on the other side of the shore, and one of them is gonna save, you know, that person. You've gotta pick one. Which one and why?" Right? And walk them through this thought process of picking one side or the other.

Obviously, as you get older, you know, we'll take on harder questions. You know, we've shown the Challenger, right, from like 1986 or '87 go up and explode. And then we showed Ronald Reagan's address to the nation and then okay, now you, middle schooler, you guys are...you're now Ronald Reagan. Do you double NASA's funding so that never happens again or do you eliminate NASA altogether so that never happens again? Take a hard stance. And so we're just walking them through these, you know, thought exercises to, again, teach them how to think, teach them how to critically, you know, weigh out options and evidence on both sides of an argument and then eloquently speak to that with another human being. So we start the day with those kind of launches.

Then we'll go into the individual time. That individual time is where they are setting their goals and intentions either for the day or for the week. And then they are learning to manage their own time. As they get older, they're going, "Hey, these are my intentions for the week. So, right now, I wanna spend X amount of time on this, and then a little bit later, I'm gonna spend X..." So they're learning to manage their time, then create their own schedule. And that's when they take on either individual projects, they're taking on individual books, they're taking on individual courses. However they want to take on their individual growth, they'll usually take that on in the morning. Some students are taking classes through Stanford. Some are using Khan Academy. Some are reading, you know, specific books. Some are doing individual projects. Some are working on their individual businesses, whatever that looks like from an individual standpoint.

They'll usually do that for the remainder of the morning, and then a lot of times in the afternoons, they'll put together various clubs that they...You know, if they've got...for this six weeks, we wanna take on a cooking club, we want to learn something about...you know, we wanna learn how to bake, or we wanna learn Jiu-Jitsu for these six weeks, and so we'll bring that in, or whatever that looks like. They'll take on clubs and then they'll take on the collaborative projects as well, usually in the afternoons. And so those collaborative projects, you know, kind of that electricity quest that I mentioned, maybe they wanna build out an escape room that they wanna run the community through. Maybe they wanna, you know, do a biology quest. They wanna do something on marine biology. Maybe they wanna create and put on a play and sell tickets to a play. Every six weeks, they take on something that's a big project that they're doing collaboratively.

And at the very end of the day, they're taking on their responsibilities, their jobs. So, you know, they clean up on campus. They have specific jobs on campus. And to be honest, a lot of that's integrated throughout the day, too, especially as you get older, we've got older students who do all the cooking on campus, right? They cook all of the meals, then they're responsible for getting all the meals out to the younger people on campus, right, or they are responsible for...you know, I've got high schoolers who are teaching woodworking and how to build a birdhouse. And they'll have 8, 9, and 10-year-olds, and they're out there, and they've all got the saws and hammers and the nails, and they're teaching the young people how to build out the birdhouse. And they're taking on responsibility of giving back to the community.

And at the end of the day, everybody's working together to clean up. And they'll have an end-of-the-day meeting too, how'd it go, pour into each other, you know, congratulations on...you got this accomplished and then just kind of build community around that. So, that's a very basic overview of kind of the flow of the day because there's so many systems and things that play out in there that they've created that just makes this a microcosm of the world that we actually live in. I mean, it really is this microcosm of young people running an organization. It's amazing to watch.

Katie: I love that so much. Where's Acton Academy located for people who might geographically be close?

Matt: Yeah, so we have currently over 200 globally. So, you know, the ones that I have that I own here are here in Northern California. I've got a few campuses out here near Sacramento, but we're in, I wanna say, like

30-ish states right now. We're in 30-plus countries with a couple hundred of us globally. So one of my big pushes for 2022 is finding people that I can help open...and I don't get money from it. So I wanna make sure that that's clear. It's not a sales pitch. Like, I want to find you and bring you into my network, or my MLM, or whatever. Like, it's not that at all. I just wanna perpetuate this mission. So, you know, if we've got somebody that is interested in opening some, you know, I'm connecting with entrepreneurs around the world that are interested in doing this for their own kids, for their own community. So a couple hundred of us now globally. You can go to the actonacademy.org website and do a search to see if there's something near you. If not, I'm glad to help people talk through how to build one in their community.

Katie: And are there systems within Acton Academy that people could also replicate somewhat at home? Or if not, what would be some good starting place resources for families who are maybe considering that switch to homeschooling and wanna create this kind of environment?

Matt: Yeah, that's a really good question. Because we're essentially running an organization on campus, it's really hard to replicate it exactly at home, right? That is difficult. But the understanding of how to run the day and your family more like a business, and that sounds cold to a lot of people, but it's the understanding of having them have to be able to earn, you know, certain things by taking on responsibilities is really what we're talking about is something that you can absolutely recreate at home. And then there's free resources out there from, you know, your Khan Academy to even, you know, to your, even, like, small payment things on IXL and Dreambox if you wanna really get some traditional academic courses. There's so many of those things available that you can utilize at home and then find, you know, small project kind of things for them to take on. I mean, there's a million ways to do it, but I always say resource-wise, figure out where you are first in terms of that intellectual and emotional pull to traditional school.

So resource-wise, go read John Taylor Gatto first. Go read "The Education of Millionaires." Go read anything by Ivan Illich. Go read "One World Schoolhouse" by Sal Khan. Go read "A Thomas Jefferson Education." Go read...my friend Kaleena wrote "5-Hour School Week." Go read "5-Hour School Week." Go read some of these things first to detach from this thought that there is only one way to learn and one way to make things happen. Detach from that first and then trust yourself to be able to figure it out and get creative. There's no necessarily, like, this is the got to, go-to resource right here. Figure out who you are. Pay attention to who your kids are. What are they excited about? Make sure they're good humans. Start there and go from there and then be able to...Like, you will figure it out. But you got to have your own stuff together.

Katie: That's great context. And to echo what you said too, even for the single moms or for families that have logistical considerations, I just echo what you say, there is a way to figure this out. And another great adult lesson in life is don't ask if, ask how. There's a way to figure it out.

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And for me, at least homeschooling is so much easier. Because I don't have the logistics of getting kids up early, we get to keep our family culture and our school culture together. Having them all at different ages actually lets them do that teaching mentor model with each other, which is much more applicable to adult life than we're gonna be in this homogenous group of people our age and not allowed to have conflict. So there's so many advantages. I know it seems overwhelming if you come from the traditional academic model, which I did. But I've also seen the other side, I just like to really encourage parents that there are so many things that are easier when you make this switch, that it doesn't have to be as hard as it might seem when you're considering it.

Matt: For sure. I mean, think about what you just said too because we come out of this convention...and as I did too, you come out of this conventional school system. Think about this. You come out of this conventional school system that has now left you feeling incapable of raising and teaching your own children. So what you do to feel better about it is send them back into the same system that made you feel incapable. From a logical standpoint, that makes no sense. And you didn't have them going to school for the first couple of years of their life, right, but you figured that out. You figured out a routine. You figured out how to make sure they

were fed and healthy. And they learned to walk. They learned to...They did all of those things. You didn't have to go somewhere else for them.

But I'll bet you, I don't remember who said this, but I agree fully, I remember somebody saying, you know, it would only take one generation of sending...government mandates of sending kids to school at 6 months old. It will only take one generation before people believed your kid would not learn to walk unless they went to government schools. And I fully believe that. I fully believe that. The only reason you don't believe it now is because you don't do it now. It's the same thing. So you can untrain yourself, your kids will learn and get to where they need to be just fine. But again, you just got to be intentional about making sure you are leading by example.

Katie: It definitely does all go back to that. And as we get close to the end of our time, a few shorter, kind of, rapid-fire questions I would love to hear your answers to just from having followed you on Instagram for so long. The first being, what is a popular opinion that you completely disagree with?

Matt: That college...oh gosh, yeah, I'm gonna go with that college is necessary. Not only is it necessary, but it's actually a net negative for almost everyone, and I've got master's degrees. I worked at Stanford University for a long time. I'm speaking very specifically about a college game that I know about better than almost anybody on the planet. It is a net negative for almost everyone.

Katie: Strong statement, and I agree, coming from a similar background. What's one thing people often get wrong about you?

Matt: That I hate teachers. People think that I have no respect for teachers or for the administrators, whatever it is, could not be further from the truth. I am very much against the system, I am very much for all the beautiful human beings that are in the system, and they're there for the right reasons.

Katie: Are there...I'm guessing there are, a book or a number of books that have had a profound impact on your life? And if so, what are they and why?

Matt: Oh, my goodness gracious. There's so many. And I read, you know, one or two books a week, so it just I continue to add to that list. I will say the one that was the most transformational probably 20-ish years ago, maybe a little more was "Fight Club." And I know that's a weird thing to say. But as a young person, you know, in my early, late teens, early 20s, at that point, the concepts...really has nothing to do with fighting. The concept of not wasting time in your life. This is your life and it's ending one minute at a time, right? Like that, for me, was profound. I was like, man, okay, yeah, this is like every day I'm closer to being done. What am I wasting my time for? And not wasting your time on the opinions of other people, not wasting your time not

pursuing what it is you think you really want to do and what impact you really wanna have on the world. Like, that was a really big mindset shift for me was that book.

"Pursuit of Happyness," around that same time or a little bit later, was another one, a lot of people saw the movie with Will Smith. The book goes an even greater depth to the struggles that Chris Gardner faced. And even before having kids, at that point, that movie impacted me a great deal on the father that I wanted to be, and what I wanted to do to lead by example for my own children. So I didn't even have them at that point, but I knew...I mean, I almost had this emotional, visceral response to that book because I'm like, "No, my kids will never have to go through that. I'm gonna make sure my kids are the most, you know, prepared that I could possibly make 'em. I'm gonna do the best job I can." There's no such thing as being a perfect parent, but I'm going to do the best I can. And so those two had a profound impact on me many, many years ago.

Katie: And then, I think right now, many people have a pretty grim outlook on what comes next in the future. And I'm curious what yours is because I see a lot of hope in a lot of these changes that have happened in the last couple of years, especially related to education and children. But I'm curious what your outlook is for the next few years ahead.

Matt: Yeah, the reality people face will be whatever they want it to be. So the sad thing that I figured out is that most people do live in fear. And they're pessimistic around that fear, right? I am so ridiculously optimistic. I'm not necessarily optimistic about the way the country is going or the world is going. I think we're going to have some more, kind of, illogical things that are gonna kind of take place and I do foresee some, I think there's gonna be some crazy stuff that I don't personally agree with. But I also know I can't control that. I can only control the way I look at it and the way I move forward myself, with my business, with my family, with my friends, right. And when I look at that, what I can control, I am perpetually optimistic because I'm the happiest person I know. And that is gonna be maintained no matter what's going on in the world. So that's my perspective on the world, is I worry about my perspective with myself and my family first. The world is different circumstances that I can't control. So for the world, there's going to be some good things that come out, there's going to be some craziness that I think happens, you know, prior to that, but we're gonna continue to move forward, day in, day out.

Katie: And I think that's sage advice, no matter what comes is if we're happiest when we focus on the things within our ability to control and let go of the things we can't. That's been a life lesson for me this last decade.

Matt: Absolutely.

Katie: On that note, any parting advice for the...there's usually a couple 100,000 people that listen each week. Any parting advice? Could be about education or not.

Matt: Yeah, you know, I really just want to go back to one of those things that I said earlier, is your kids will do what you do before they do what you say. So a lot of times when we're having conversations about how to raise kids, we're asking questions out of fear and we're asking a second-level question when the first level is how do I get my own stuff together first? Right, so for you parents out there getting your own stuff together first, pursuing your hopes and your dreams, pursuing something that brings you joy and puts, you know, peace of mind between your ears and eliminating the thoughts of other people and not parenting based on what your mom or your dad or your neighbor, you know, thinks that you should do as a parent, parenting based on who your kids are. Like, all of those things, get yourself out of that fear first, then focus on raising those amazing superheroes to just mimic you, be the person you want them to be, and they will. Have those expectations, they will. So that's the biggest thing that people get out of that, out of that fear and out of that worry about other people's opinions about how they should do stuff.

Katie: And what's ahead for you, what future current projects are you excited about? And where can people follow you online and keep learning more?

Matt: Man, 2022 is gonna be an amazing year, we're gonna open more and more Actons. I may open some more myself here in Northern California. But I'm going to help entrepreneurs open more of these all over the world. So that's gonna be a big push. I'm shooting to add, you know, another 100 or so campuses to our network. And again, that's just purely mission-driven. Apogee Strong is gonna continue to grow that mentorship program we have for young men around the world. So it's gonna be a big focus there in connecting a lot of those young men with a pipeline to working for organizations that they're excited for working for. So both those things are gonna be on the radar for us. And so people can, you know, I think, on most platforms, I've just under my name @MattBeaudreau, and they can check out Acton Academy or Apogee Strong and the podcast "The Essential 11" is also geared towards young people as well. So everything we do is geared towards those young folks. You can find me in any of those places.

Katie: I love it. I'll make sure all those links as well as the books we've mentioned, and resources we've mentioned are all at wellnessmama.fm for all of you guys listening. Matt, I would love to do a round two one day, but I hope we've given people a lot of food for thought today. And I'm so grateful for all the work that you're doing. You're an inspiration to me and thank you for being here.

Matt: Back at you, my friend, very much appreciate you.

Katie: And thanks, as always, to all of you for listening and for sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did and I hope that you'll join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama" podcast.

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.