

**Ep #06: Investing In The Future Through International Education with Dr. Nasrine Shah-Abushakra**



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Welcome to Net Worthwhile, Do More with Your Wealth, a podcast designed to explore financial topics from a broader perspective than just the numbers. We'll look at the emotional impact of financial decisions and how you can use your wealth to live a great life. Thank you for tuning in.

Crystal Cooper: Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Nasrine. I'm so glad to have you on.

Dr. Nasrine: Thank you. I'm so excited to be here and grateful for the opportunity.

Crystal Cooper: Awesome, awesome. And today we have with us Dr. Nasrine Shah-Abushakra, and she is part of a family business that works with the American International Education called ESOL Education. Is that correct?

Dr. Nasrine: Yes, that's right.

Crystal Cooper: Awesome. And she's also is an academic and has taught at the University of Michigan, done some workshops with MIT, she does corporate trainings, she's spoken at various different speaking opportunities including TEDx of Dubai. She is a jack of all trades. I'll let her tell a little bit more about your journey, but we are so excited to have her on. And so please tell us a little bit more about you and what you do.

Dr. Nasrine: Sure. My first induction to international education was when I served under the US Department of State, and I served as the Director of the Fulbright Teacher Exchange orientation program that was inducted by the late Senator Fulbright. I've always carried his vision within me. I've read his book and I

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would recommend everybody read his book, the Arrogance of Power. It was written many, many decades ago. However, that was my first induction into the American International Education arena, and I was also earning my PhD at the time in Technology and Education. After that, I was asked to come join American University of Sharjah, which is in the United Arab Emirates, to help create curriculum, help launch a school of business, be part of their primary team. And I moved overseas actually, after I earned my doctorate. I'd been in the arena of international education officially since 1997.

Crystal Cooper: Oh my gosh. Wow.

Dr. Nasrine: Right, I know. I went to school in DC, I grew up in Boston, and was always around a very global population of demographics. As , the East coast and a lot of big cities have a lot of international people, are children of immigrants or children third, fourth, fifth generation. We tie into that. We tap into that in certain communities. And now serendipitously, I joined a family business my father-in-law started over almost 60 ago in Kuwait. He was one of the first people to launch an American university. I mean, American education program in Kuwait that was catered to people that were allowed to take the exam and be enrolled.

Dr. Nasrine: At that time, the only schools that were available were the schools that Department of Defense or the embassies created. And my father-in-law is a huge fan of American education. He was educated at the American University of Beirut. He's quite older than ourselves. He's close to in his 80s, and at the time, Beirut, this university was incredible. Huge, huge supporter of American education, whether it's international or back home in the US. Now, I'd been in it for a while now because I joined the family business. I married into the family business actually in

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2005, and my primary role is working within the family group, whether it's networking, whether it's working with students creating workshop or overseeing curriculum, inviting guests, serving as a liaison with high-impact individuals.

Crystal Cooper: When you say high-impact individuals, what do you mean by that?

Dr. Nasrine: In the sense of, for example, when I served at the US Department of State, I was able to work with Harriet Fulbright. I'm able to still be in touch with her on certain elements. I've always worked, even when I was in high school and growing up in Boston, although I believe I was raised in an arena of privilege, like having access to incredible resources, libraries, the Boston Pops and so forth. We were probably middle class, upper-middle class. However, the biggest impact my parents had was working. Like, "You have to work. You have to earn. You have to do something," so I was intertwined with many, many organizations.

Dr. Nasrine: I serve in the liaison capacity in certain ways with my contacts still in the United States. And then also there are people that we serve here, like students that come from families that are, whether they're from the US or the UK or France, they're here. They're children of ambassadors or children of high-wealth families. We also cater to a lot of children that are obviously middle-class children. Children can be children and teenagers are teenagers, but sometimes there are issues that can be very challenging, because I am... Our headquarters are in Dubai, so sometimes it can be a little challenging from time to time. I can have a mom call and be very, very nervous about something. I heard there's a student that's visiting from China right now, and that happened recently with the virus impact, or there could be some kind of instability. We're one of the largest

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employers after Department of Defense with the State Department of American Educators in the MENA region and now also Hong Kong. We have over 12,000 American educators in our group. That's the whole thing as well, right? They're a very passionate group, incredible group. We're very blessed.

Crystal Cooper: Now one of the things I keep hearing in your journey, talking now and even in the previous times we've talked and we've spoken, is that you sort of keep being attached to this education and being able to invest in our future and in our youth. And I truly believe that the universe kind of ensures that we are going to be attached to our passion. Why do you think that it's so important that education plays a part in how we build our future and build our wealth, and why do you think that is such an imperative piece of how we do this?

Dr. Nasrine: I believe that most of it is investing in our future. So many young people that we cater to in our many campuses across the world... We're in five countries, so we also have a lot of American students, whether you want to call them ex-pats or army brats or there's a lot of different terminology, third-culture kids and so forth. Now these students, these children have an international bird's eye view of the world. So do children in the United States. However, the message and the passion for me personally is we really are at a state right now where the climate is an issue. As I mentioned, I'm from Boston. There's an abundance of water, clean water, but still we have issues. Correct? Imagine here in Dubai, we have issues with climate as well.

Dr. Nasrine: I think it's so important to serve locally, but also have that global bird's eye view and being able to adjust a child's perspective in that idea of, "Okay, we have a lot of work to do."

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We have to finish what we need to finish." And I think there's so many sayings about, even one with the Navy Seals. The pain is good when you're in a project. You want to get it done and get home.

Crystal Cooper: Right.

Dr. Nasrine: Right? Sometimes it's not an easy career choice generally. I mean, I'm not in the south of France and there's issues there too, but simultaneously, it's just having this idea of what a lot of folks may or may not think what the United States is culturally and being able to invest in that. I mean, it really was profound to me when I moved overseas interacting with someone that had never been to the United States. That took a lot for me to absorb, and they've become a very good friend of mine. They speak English, but they might be from the UK and half Japanese and half Lebanese and a quarter Italian. You have these kinds of demographics now. It's very prominent and these children are incredibly... They speak three or four languages, and it's so wonderful to see the American children that we serve involved with that cohort, and they're so at home.

Dr. Nasrine: And it relates back to this idea that the Fulbright program always taught me that education is the best form of diplomacy. We spend less-

Crystal Cooper: I love that line.

Dr. Nasrine: Right? We spend less money on international education or even in our curriculum. I almost feel that junior year abroad in high school is too late. I almost feel that we have to do it younger, because children are malleable and vice versa. We need to have our children going overseas and our overseas kids coming to the United States. Because at this point in time, diplomacy is very important, and having that skillset, whether

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it's online or offline, there's so many things that are happening in the virtual world as well. I'm very passionate within that track of international education within the American arena and the subculture within the digital world as well, because that is the world they're growing up in. I mean, I'm not a gamer, but apparently that's a culture. That's a whole practically a country. Correct?

Crystal Cooper: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Dr. Nasrine: Right? It's also how do we maintain this diplomacy in this culture online and offline, because sometimes the way children may or may not behave online is very different than in reality. And making sure there is a balance, because a lot of children too now, they don't have those social skills. So I think this is a lot of work we adults need to tune into, just making sure that we're doing the right thing with our youth, and it's such a huge investment. The parents among us, we all want to see our children do well and do good in the world, right?

Crystal Cooper: Yep.

Dr. Nasrine: We want them to speak another language, or you can throw them in any situation and they're going to be able to survive and thrive. They're able to do, whether they're at Harvard or they go to a community college, whether they're in Boston or Kansas, whether they're in Japan or whatever it is, even within the arena of the military, it's... I've met so many people that are part of the military and maybe they didn't get this Ivy League education, but wow, they're so sophisticated in their readings, in their feedback, because they've had that international experience. They've lived overseas.

Crystal Cooper: Well, I think what I love is that you're talking more about experience and not just about another language. Because I

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think what the focus has been up until recently is around, "Well, just make sure you can speak another language. That's all we need you to be able to do." Right? But now it's more about, "Be able to speak the language, but also be able to understand the culture, the experiences of that culture that speaks that language, what they've gone through, the history." Can you talk a little bit about what ESOL is doing to help the students understand what they're going through and the cultures that they're experiencing? Is them being in the environment that helps them get that?

Dr. Nasrine: Yes, absolutely. Our teachers are from the United States. They've already have a proven track record from the US, most of them at North America. They've already taught in schools in the United States. Most of them, if not all, have a master's degree. They've already had two years of teaching in the United States. When a child from a developing world country... For example, we serve 5,000 students in Egypt across three campuses. Now, many of them have been to the United States and/or Europe, but interacting with a director that's from Tennessee and has a Southern accent is worth its weight in gold. Just so kind, so good. It kind of contradicts what they see on television and that's what we want. We want them to think outside the box.

Dr. Nasrine: There's also children where they're third generation American and they've lived overseas because they're children of the people that have served in the US government in some capacity, and they just liked the international lifestyle and they decided to stay overseas. They obviously still come home for summer and holidays and to vote and pay taxes, but simultaneously they don't really understand what Thanksgiving is. They get it, but they don't. And we do that at our schools, and we make sure people understand what that is, or what



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Martin Luther King Day is, or what certain things that are very close to my heart in the United States and vice versa. Now we're planning an International Day at all of our schools. Each of our schools will host an International Day.

Dr. Nasrine: The parents will have a table. We'll call the US Embassy, whichever consulate or embassy the parent is from, and they'll send over a little package with the flag and all of those things. The children get a passport and they go around to the different tables and try the food and there's dancing. It provokes joy and curiosity and lessens the concept of the other. Because we're moving so fast with the technology right now that they have holograms of one another. I'm not that generation where it's so... I didn't grow up that way having friends that I'd never met before because I game with them. The closest thing that I've had to that was like that old-fashioned pen pal, correct?

Crystal Cooper: Right.

Dr. Nasrine: But now so many young people have friends that are virtual and they don't have an issue with that.

Crystal Cooper: They never meet. They might never see.

Dr. Nasrine: Right, right. I think the numbers are quite high. I think it's over 50 percent when you ask a young person. I'm thinking more like eighth grade and above. They'll say, "No, this is really my friend. They're in Romania. I game with them every day. They're my friend." And I'm like, "How do you know that?"

Crystal Cooper: Right. Have you ever seen them in real life? Would you know them if you passed them on the street?

Dr. Nasrine: Not at all.

Crystal Cooper: Right, right.

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Dr. Nasrine: Right? But they're very passionate about that, we can see this where someone on Facebook is seeing something or meeting. I mean, people meet each other, they get married.

Crystal Cooper: Oh yeah.

Dr. Nasrine: We've all become international in some ways through technology, so it's just refining, like you said, the culture too. I remember there was a movie, and I can't think of the title, but I think it was Brad Pitt was in it. And one of the soldiers, the Nazi soldiers asked him, "How many people are you with?" And he said the number was three, but the way he raised his hand with the first three fingers of his hand, and then they knew he was not telling the truth. He was pretending. Brad Pitt was pretending to be someone that he wasn't, because in Europe you use the thumb and the first two fingers, and that's the case in many parts of the world. That was like a giveaway clue in this movie. We see a lot of that where I think even Puma launched this great sneaker, and what they thought was great in the United Arab Emirates, but it had the flag of the country on it which is A-OK in a lot of parts of the world, but was not okay for this part of the world, and they lost billions of dollars doing that.

Crystal Cooper: And that's what happens when you don't have the immersion that you need or the people that are at the right table.

Dr. Nasrine: Exactly.

Crystal Cooper: Exactly.

Dr. Nasrine: Exactly. Right? Respect the culture.

Crystal Cooper: I love that. I want to shift a little bit to some of the conversations you and I have had in the past around wealth

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and money. And you said something to me that was actually really compelling. We had a conversation around the past hippie culture, for lack of a better term, and how there's this idea of wanting to be able to change the world and money being the root of all evil. But you made this comment that I thought was really powerful, that at the end of the day, money isn't the root of all evil. It's not inherently evil, and money has power. And there is a very big difference between being rich and wealthy, and that difference is in how you use it. And I just thought that was just really, really powerful. Talk to me a little bit about what you meant by that and how you anchor in that.

Dr. Nasrine: I believe innately that money has power and it could be used for good, and we see that all over the world. Everything has energy. Atoms, gasoline. This is the point in physics. My desk is made of atoms. My Ikea desk is made of atoms, but it still has energy because the atoms have energy, correct? Money has so much. Money, how we made it, how we earned it, how we spend it, how we maybe took it in a way that was a bad way. That is really important to me in the sense of the difference between being rich and being wealthy. Wealth is quiet sometimes. Because wealth is like three generations, four generations down. If my intention is to be wealthy, what's my intention?

Dr. Nasrine: What's the foundation of that intention? For me, to build wealth is to give it back, to recreate wealth. Correct? It would be like philanthropy, setting up a scholarship, helping someone with an angel investment. I want to be able to do that more. I can't do that if I'm rich, I don't think, because rich is so temporary and it's so flashy. It's a little different than creating wealth. We see this all over the world with different types of individuals that are high income and so forth that you see. Is it Warren Buffett that left, I think he left \$5 million to each child,

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and the guy is worth billions. And he's like, "Really, this is a lot of money. You have my last name and you have this money. If you can't make it..." That's wealth. That is so enchanting to me when I think about he's giving it back. The rest he's giving away and he thinks more people should give it away. Right? When you have so much, I can't wrap my mind around \$100 billion or \$17 trillion. I'm like, "What does that look like?"

Dr. Nasrine: And I'm not saying I'm aiming for that, but having said that, we always want to make sure that that was earned in the right way. Grit, hard work, being kind. I mean, I think there's something about... I've been reading a lot about heart-centered leadership and what that looks like, right? Even with Oprah Winfrey being this huge mega-mogul, I heard a story of the first time her show was before very sensationalized, and she had a gentleman come on who was cheating on his wife, and the wife was already sitting there and Oprah had already talked to the wife and didn't say, "I'm bringing on your husband and his mistress." And from an interview I read, she said, "When I did that and I saw the wife's face, I thought to myself, I can't do this anymore. There's no way I can do this anymore, because I just hurt someone and I sensationalized my media."

Dr. Nasrine: And people said, "You can't do it the way you're going to do it," because now she has all these other feel good, do good type of arenas. Her book club, her SuperSoul Sunday, all of these things, but traditionally we were used to the sensationalized... That was the track she was on, and you can see this even with Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, Meg Whitman. There's many people that we've seen this shift in, where they're like, "No." And people said, "No, you have to make money. You have to sensationalize. You have to create drama. You have to do this. You have to do that." And there's an element of corruption and greed in that, and then the person who has the

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integrity will step back and say, "No, I'm not going to do that. That doesn't feel right to me and it's not right to me, and I'm going to do something else." Right? And then they do-

Crystal Cooper: But what it is, is it's not the money. It's the action, really.

Dr. Nasrine: No. Correct.

Crystal Cooper: What ends up happening is there's a connection that is inherently made to the dollars, but it's really not the dollars. It's the action behind the dollars. And you said something that was actually really pointed. It's that rich is temporary, but wealth is intentional. And I really love that, because I think that as we talk about on Signature FD and on this podcast is that wealth isn't just the dollars. It is... And you said something else. It's the grit. It's the hard work. It's the being kind. It's the education. It is all these things that you can be intentional with, and so I really love that.

Dr. Nasrine: Yes, it's so important. It's so important.

Crystal Cooper: Yeah.

Dr. Nasrine: Especially now, we're all looking for fast money. I have a friend that got rid of some stock recently and I was horrified. I was like, "This is a blue chip stock. You own so much of it." And he said, "I made my money." He's like, "I tripled my money in the last 10 years." He's like, "It's enough. I don't need to quadruple it. It's enough. I'm getting out now. I've read. I've done my research." He's somewhat of a conservative investor, but I remember thinking, "My gosh. He's nuts to dump this stock." And sure enough, he was right, and he made his money. His intention is to build wealth. His intention is not, "I'm going to keep it because it's a blue chip and I'm going to ride it out." No. He's like, "I invested in this stock 10 years ago. I've tripled my

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money. It's enough for me." That motivation is very different than, "No, it's blue chip. I'm going to hold onto it. I made three times my money. That's good enough. Now I'm going to invest in something else."

Crystal Cooper: Because what's his intention? His intention might be, "I wanted to do X with these dollars." Maybe he wants to take the money he has tripled and do something else.

Dr. Nasrine: Exactly.

Crystal Cooper: And I think that's what's so beautiful about this message that money isn't inherently the root of all evil. And what happens when you get rid of that mindset, which is something else you and I have talked about previously is that it's all a mindset shift. When you get rid of that, you can start to think about changing the world in a different way. Because some people tend to shy away from this idea of, "I don't want to go into any type of working," or "I just want to be away from any technology or anything that allows me to get into success, because money is the root of all evil." And that's really not the case. It is how you choose to use the tools that are given to you. And so I love this idea of once you shift that mindset, then you are able to start using some of the things you just said here. Grit, hard work, being kind, education, to use the wealth that you will build to do whatever it is that you want that changes the future of the world. I think that's the message.

Dr. Nasrine: Absolutely. There's nothing glorified in being a martyr or dumbing yourself down. We're all deserving of a good life. We're not entitled to it, and I think that's also the difference between that mindset of creating wealth. It's like, "I'm deserving of it and I'm not entitled to it." Right? It's such a different mindset. I'm deserving of eating healthy food and being mindful when I eat. When I go out to eat at the nicest restaurant, I'll still

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take home whatever I didn't eat and give it to the valet or I give it to, if I'm in the States, a homeless person, or if I'm here, or give it to someone who's less fortunate than I am. Why wouldn't I do that? And sometimes, people kind of look at me like, "What are you doing?" Because we'll be at this very elaborate place or a networking event and so forth, but it's just we have to kind of pass it on, because there are so many that are less fortunate. And I don't want to quote Jay-Z here, but it's like, "How am I going to help the poor if I'm one of them"? Right? You're not.

Crystal Cooper: We can quote Jay-Z on this podcast.

Dr. Nasrine: You're not going to help them.

Crystal Cooper: I am always down for that.

Dr. Nasrine: Okay, good.

Crystal Cooper: Either Jay Z or Beyonce. We can do that here.

Dr. Nasrine: There you go.

Crystal Cooper: I love it. I love it.

Dr. Nasrine: But it's true. It's like, how are you going to help them? You can't. What are you going to do? Just protest and not work? And I mean, that's great. I'm glad that you're going to show up and be... That's a beautiful thing in the US. We can have activism, and in lots of places, we can have that. And we can have that and we see that every day, but it's also the idea of also giving back and going to work every day. You can do both.

Crystal Cooper: Yeah, because money does have power.

Dr. Nasrine: Of course.

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Crystal Cooper: That was one of the things that you said to me, that I was like, it is a short statement.

Dr. Nasrine: It's a fact.

Crystal Cooper: It's bold, but it is a fact. It is an absolute fact.

Dr. Nasrine: It is a fact.

Crystal Cooper: It's not evil. Power is not evil, and it's just how you use the power. It is how you use that.

Dr. Nasrine: Exactly.

Crystal Cooper: I love that.

Dr. Nasrine: Absolutely.

Crystal Cooper: This is so amazing, Dr. Nasrine. I really sincerely appreciate the time that you have given into this, and the work that you are doing in the world, not even just in our country but in the entire world. It is incredible work.

Dr. Nasrine: Thank you.

Crystal Cooper: If you are interested in hearing or reading more about what Dr. Nasrine and her family is doing, it is [www.esoleducation.com](http://www.esoleducation.com). That's E-S-O-L-E-D-U-C-A-T-I-O-N.com. Or reading more about Dr. Nasrine, it's [www.dr-nasrine.com](http://www.dr-nasrine.com). Thank you again so much for your time, Dr. Nasrine. Really appreciate it today.

Dr. Nasrine: Thank you.

Thank you for tuning in to Net Worthwhile, do more with your wealth. If you want to learn more about how to build your own net worthwhile, visit us at [www.signaturefd.com](http://www.signaturefd.com).

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