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## SuperCamp:

# Revealing the Genius in Our Teens

**An interview with SuperCamp co-founder  
Bobbi DePorter by Liv Kellgren**



Bobbi DePorter is the author of eighteen books including *Quantum Learning: Unleashing the Genius in You*. She is president of the Quantum Learning Network and co-founder of SuperCamp, a seven to ten-day summer camp for kids ages twelve to twenty-two. SuperCamp has over 50,000 alumni and courses are currently held on over nine campuses across the US, and more internationally.

SuperCamp is world-renowned for its academic skills and life skills training. Their summer program can help your son or daughter increase grades while building their confidence, motivation and the drive to break through barriers that can hold them back in life. SuperCamp uses the proprietary method of teaching and learning called Quantum Learning™ that Bobbi and her influential team of educators have developed and refined over the last 30 years. Courses continue through August. For more information, visit [www.SuperCamp.com](http://www.SuperCamp.com). To listen to an expanded version of this interview see Editor's note below.

### **Liv Kellgren: Bobbi, what are you really excited about for this summer season?**

Bobbi DePorter: We're going into our thirtieth year; it's hard to believe. We're actually in the second generation now. But the basis of the program is the same, and that is teaching kids how to learn. Every year we're always getting feedback and making small changes, so it's always interesting how it evolves and so we're going into the summer with new strategies as well.

### **What are some of those strategies?**

It's something that people probably wouldn't notice, but there's ways of making stronger connections, or different stories that reach deeper. So it's a constant improvement, and we're always learning ourselves. "What works? What do you want to see?" And we do that, so over the first few years of SuperCamp was just getting feedback, and we've never stopped, because it's all about reaching the kids and engaging them, and having them get excited about themselves and what they're learning.

## **Have you noticed differences in each group of kids, their expectations or what they're capable of?**

I'd say there's more independence now, especially with all the connection and technology that's going on. I want to say from our very first SuperCamp thirty years ago 'till now, the program connects with kids.

In the late 1970s you were a cofounder of the Burklyn Business School in Vermont. What were the teaching methods that you implemented there?

One is a turning point in my life, and that was hearing about Dr. Georgi Lozanov from Bulgaria. He's considered the originator of Accelerated Learning. His methods are so engaging, and we applied it to the business school, then we had adults taking the business classes, but they didn't remember learning being this engaging. We taught speed-reading, memory, and Mind Mapping, which is note-taking. So here we're teaching them how to learn, we're teaching them very engaging methods.

## **And why did you choose teenagers?**

Well, it was during that first program for kids and seeing the results that came out of it. I remember there was someone who had difficulty in school. That person was around a table of some very bright students who get straight A's, and they were working on a math problem, but the only way to work out the problem is to physically maneuver some structures on the table. The kids around the table were not getting it, and I'll never forget watching this student just move some things and come up with the answer. You could see the shift in the attitude of the person who'd struggled to get so much acknowledgement for "Wow, you figured that out." It turns out he was a very tactile kinesthetic student.

We talk about all kids are bright, all kids are smart, and they have different ways of learning. When kids learn about their own learning styles, they get excited because when they have struggles in certain areas, they think they're the problem versus, "Wow, I need to find a different way to learn."

And so I got hooked on kids. That's really what it was. I just saw them light up and I saw the difference, and it felt important. So it went in that direction.

## **You mentioned the kinesthetic learner. What are the other learning styles that you'll teach at SuperCamp?**

They learn about the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic tactile learners. It's a way we take in information. Everyone has some of all three, but most of us have a preference. My auditory is very, very low, and I sure wish I would have known that when I was in school. I'll never forget being in middle school where I took a foreign language, and I couldn't get it. And I had no concept of why my friends were doing well, getting good grades, and here I'm an A student, and I'm flunking Spanish. Of course, then I felt it's all me. I'm the problem. If I had known then about different learning styles and different strategies – I need to see a word, not just hear it.

We start out as natural learners. We like to talk about the baby and the toddler, and how a toddler starts to learn how to walk. What do they do? They keep falling down. And when they fall down, do they lay there on the floor and say, "I'm so embarrassed, did anybody see me?" No. They don't do that. They get up and try again. And that's what we want for all kids. We have our Keys; one is Failure Leads to Success.

Kids feel like failures when they make a mistake. Like they're not supposed to make mistakes. I like to say learning is messy. You want to take risks. And when you take risks, you fail. We teach kids three questions and it really reframes failure, as we tell them to go through the

steps of what happened. What are the facts? What did I learn? And what will I do differently next time?

### **That really gives us a new definition of failure.**

Yeah. And to know that the most successful people in the world are the ones that have failed the most. So coming from that place, it's okay, I successfully learned how not to do something.

### **What are the other Keys?**

We have Eight Keys of Excellence, and they are so impactful for people of all ages. The keys are Integrity, Failure leads to success, Speak with good purpose, This it is, Commitment, Ownership, Flexibility, and Balance.

### **How is it that we can take more ownership?**

By just knowing that the power is in taking responsibility. We describe ownership as taking responsibility for actions. And that when we be responsible, we say, "Own the choices you make and the results that follow."

I just made a mistake on an airline ticket with the wrong time. It was one I booked myself, and I got stuck because I had booked the wrong time. And I didn't know it till I was at the check-in counter. And so I thought, "Well, own the choices you make, and the results that follow." It's like, "Oh yes! I'm the one that did this."

### **It sounds like that took away a lot of the negative self-talk.**

Yes, it's so easy to blame somebody else, or to deny that it happened. We have what we call Where are you Living? And there's a metaphor of a line, and above the line is about responsibility, and freedom and choice. Below the line is denial, labeling, quitting, and justifying your actions. All you have to do is look at them and say, "Where are you living?" If it's something they weren't supposed to do, they get it, and move above the line. Or it can be an acknowledgement, like, "I'm living above the line. I took full responsibility and I'm accountable for what just happened."

### **The SuperCamp curriculum is academic skills and life skills, and then you integrate physical challenges. Would you talk a little bit about that relationship?**

We work with the whole person. What you believe your strengths are. Your talents. Your capabilities. And so we teach it—everything's integrated together. There might be one of our Keys that integrates into what we're teaching. So we feel that it really makes a difference to view them together so that the student doesn't feel that they're going into, "Oh, now I'm just learning this piece. It doesn't relate to the rest of my life." That they really get to see how everything that they've learned is integrated, and they can apply it to everything that they know.

### **And how do physical challenges come into that relationship?**

It's about the can-do attitude, and it creates an anchor. When we learn something, it's really powerful to have a physical anchor with it. Like, "What do I want to achieve? What's a challenge for me?" And then relate it to the activity that they're doing in that moment. We really focus on the effort. It's really important that we focus on the effort that students put in, and then the gains that they make, no matter what they are.

### **You teach about learning styles and thinking methods. There's so many different ways that we can learn.**

Each person is unique, and really knowing who you are, that's an important part as self-discovery. When you really know who you are, when you know what your values are, you know what your talents and strengths are. You know what your dreams are. You know what you want

to do in the world, or how you want to contribute. And with those values, you look at what are good positive values that are really important to me? And they build up strong inside of you.

And we talk about building up this core inside of you of really knowing who you are, and what you value. Then kids are willing to be themselves and do the behaviors that serve them best, because they know who they are. And they're not just like a wind in the willow. They feel like, "I know who I am." In fact, when we talk about the core, sometimes they'll talk about how scientists take core samples of rock and other elements. And so I ask the students if someone was to take a sample of your core, what would they find? What qualities would they find?

They start feeling proud about who they are as a person. That's a big haul for kids when they have the courage to drop their mask and just let the world see who they really are. The surprise is that the world responds favorably when you're just being yourself. People want to be with you when you're your true self.

### **If walked into a room full of your SuperCamp students, what would I notice?**

First of all, it would be the energy that goes on. You feel it. People walk in and say, "What is going on here?" And then one of the things that we learn from Dr. Lozanov is that there is no neutral. Everything is sending either a positive message, or a negative message. So we strive to make everything a positive message.

We fill the space with music. When they first arrive it's upbeat music, and they see lots of colors, affirmations and positive statements on the walls, and they see the staff. The staff is so well trained. We hire people who are just quality people. They're people that are secure in who they are, show their best self, and want to contribute to the world. We have teachers who just have amazing skills and ability to engage and connect with kids.

### **What kind of music and why is it so important to the experience?**

If kids are writing, focusing, or even lightly behind when an instructor's talking it would be Baroque music. This is what Dr. Lozanov is so famous for, discovering the affects of Baroque music on learning. The music is sixty beats per minute more or less, so it's similar to the heart-beat. Particularly with the Baroque music. Your shoulders go down, you breathe a little deeper, and you're more focused. You're relaxed, but you're not going to sleep, and that's important. But we don't just put it on nonstop.

But then also when we take breaks and we're to signal a break, we always have a certain song that comes on. When we want people to come back in the room after a break, we play the same music. So it's an anchor where students will hear this song, and they naturally know that by the time the song is over they need to be in their seat. So it's much better than saying, "C'mon - come on in. You're going to be late."

### **You're not just sitting in chairs getting a lecture, but it's really a transformational experience.**

They almost don't realize what's happening. When learning is fun and you get immersed in it, and learning is so exciting, and when they get curious about things and they have ah-hah moments, and they learn things about themselves, or they learn something - "Wow, I can use that, that's useful information" - They literally lose track of time and get immersed until they come out the other side and say, "Wow, something's different here."

### **Tell us about the schedule.**

The seven-day program as for the middle school students and the ten-day is for the high school students. All students are in a team of about twelve students with a male and female team leader.

They'll Mind Map the day's schedule. Mind Mapping is note-taking with the way the brain works starting with the central image and drawing lines out, and using color so that they get used to Mind Mapping every day. And then there's some type of topic or game, or activity that's a learning game that they will do. It might be about how to look at themselves as a learner. Or what do you do when mistakes happen? Or it could be more of a trust-building exercise between them.

Then they'll break into groups and one group in high school might be focusing on prep for the ACT and SATs, or test taking. One might be note-taking. One might be what we just call general study strategies where they learn how to focus their attention. Later in the week, they have reading, writing and academic strategies session.

And there are afternoon activities that they can sign up for. And whatever's available on that particular campus depends on what kind of activities they'll do. Then an evening session, and the evening sessions tend to be more on the life skills. It might be on relationships or communication. They're pretty tired by that time. They are full of information, full of learning, and physically ready to hit the sack.

**What did Jeannette Vos-Groenendal's doctoral dissertation find?**

It involved over 6,000 students and took over seven years. We looked at results six months after the program, and also up to five years after the program, and we found that 68% increased their motivation, and 73% improved their grades, and that even counted the straight A students in there that had nowhere to go. 81% increased their confidence. 84% increased their self-esteem. And this was five years later. 98% continue to use skills that they learned at SuperCamp. So these are lifelong skills. They're not something just for the ten days. It's investment over their lifetime.

**Absolutely. Have you been in touch with many of them since then?**

Yes. Yes, I have. In fact, our very first SuperCamp thirty years ago there were sixty-four students, and there's quite a number of them I'm still in touch with. They're the parents sending their kids, and still using these skills.