



Venessa: Today on the Love Right Unplugged podcast, we're interviewing Donna Richardson, celebrity fitness instructor, clothing line owner, and motivational speaker.

All right. Good morning, Donna. How are you?

Donna R.: Good morning, Venessa. How are you?

Venessa: I'm doing excellent. Thank you for taking the time to be on the show with us today. We're excited to have you on here, and excited to have our listeners hear about you, your life, and a little talk that we're gonna have today about just love and relationships, life after divorce, and all that other good stuff.

Donna R.: Wonderful. Are you doing great this morning?

Venessa: Fantastic, fantastic. Thank you so much.

Donna R.: Excellent.

Venessa: I think first, I just want to talk about just you and who you are.

Donna R.: What would you like to know, Venessa? There's so much. I've had an extraordinary life and still am having it.

Venessa: You have, you have, you have. I know that you are a celebrity in your own right as it relates to fitness. You've got a clothing line and all those things. Maybe we talk a little bit about the things that you've done in your life and how you got to this point in your fitness journey.

Donna R.: Gosh, I started over 25 years ago. I had grown up participating in sports all my life, but no idea that I would be participating in a career that combined my love for sports with being healthy mind, body, and spirit. I can honestly say that when I started my plan, my program back in the day, I had a plan, but along the way, God showed me a plan. I think I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but that all got thrown out the window because at that time I didn't even know that there was a career in fitness and health. He actually just revealed that to me.

I was mentored by a young man named Charles Little in the health and fitness industry who took me under his wings and showed me the ropes, and then eventually, as I continued the journey, I had to realize that I was so young, very naïve, self-absorbed, a little growth, but after you have a lot of challenges in your life, you go through hell and high water, you learn to decrease yourself and increase him. As I continued the journey, I definitely had to get quiet to listen to His voice. Because when you're young, you're trying to do it all and you're listening to all these other people telling you how to do it. I will have to say, you have to be aware of those people that say, "Child, this is what you can do," and their life is a complete and hot mess.

After a while, you just gain a little bit more wisdom. I think my big break came when I

starred in the Buns of Steel. Yes, that was me, Buns of Steel. Platinum videos, and I can honestly say now I've got buns of AARP. It's all good. At that time I also starred in the ... ESPN started their own health and fitness shows, so I was part of the ESPN Fitness Pros, where I co-hosted that. Those were really my two big breaks. I am a witness to his mercy and his grace because I had no idea I was gonna go into a health and fitness career, and here it is over 25 years later, I'm still going. It's still my heart. It's my passion. It's my purpose.

I'm about taking care of our father's business, and I believe that this is the platform he's given me to do so. Even though I'm in fashion now, it's still about empowering and uplifting and inspiring young girls and women. Because at the end of the day, even if I sell you a cute outfit, a cute dress, the best outfit you'll ever wear, Venessa, is your self-worth and your self-confidence. I'm still out there being that motivational speaker, traveling the world, writing books, being a TV correspondent, all of that, but it's still under the platform of the greater assignment that he has for me.

Venessa: Excellent, excellent. I remember some years ago now thinking to myself when I had seen your videos before, and that you were this individual who had this incredible lifestyle and when you had gotten married, like wow. I was like, "Wow, she's older, not necessarily the traditional age," at that particular time when you had gotten married. Like, "Wow, she found love at this time. She's had a child," and for a lot of people, you were really very much an inspiration like, wow, okay, if she can do it, I can do it. I remember thinking about that at that time.

Fast forward then from that place till who you are now, and what we really want to talk about today is you how you have come out on the other side of a divorce, and I am sure that was a traumatic experience because I have been through it and divorce is traumatic whether it's amicable or not because it's a loss. What I want to get to, and I think this is important, is you, even as a celebrity, you are showing that you have rebuilt, you are strong, you can still endure after such a traumatic experience. I think that is really key as it relates to love and relationships. Talk to me a little bit about your process and the things that you went through coming out of a marriage to the place that you are now.

Donna R.: Let me just go back for one second because it all starts with changing your mindset. Because even back then, when I chose to do that career, there were no African-American mentors for me. I had to learn on my own, and it really started with me changing how I think. It's this transferring and renewing of your mind, and part of that energy and that inspiration, I have to say, came from I was sick and tired of seeing loved ones suffering and dying from preventable illnesses. Back in the day, people died of old age, but now people 30 years old are having a heart attack or a stroke or diabetes complications. That was the driving force, because I'm traveling all over the world and I'm seeing and I'm helping people transforming lives, changing lives, saving lives, but my biggest challenge was at home. It was my family. It was my church. It was my community.

I had to change my mindset and say, "What can I do? How can I be a change agent to help people live a healthier lifestyle, mind, body, and spirit?" That same mindset had to come back. I had to dig deep inside. When they say you have that inner voice, I had to grab onto that inner voice in my face, because when you go through a divorce, it doesn't

matter if it's a divorce or a breakup, it takes so much out of you. Yes, I've climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and that was one of the greatest challenges I've had before in my life, but I will have to say that even though I climbed 9,340 feet, nine days, seven days up, two days down, oh my God, it was so crazy and it took so much out of me, but it was a spiritual walk.

I thought that that was my greatest challenge, but it wasn't. I conquered that mountain, only to maybe a year later have to now be faced with the greatest challenge, which was my divorce. When you've been together for 15 years, married for 12, you have family and your businesses and you're out in the public's eye, and it was a lot. I'm gonna be real. I felt broken at that time, degraded, insecure, betrayed, fearful, all of that. I think back to, what's the movie? Dead Man Walking. Remember that movie? I was dead woman walking. Everyone thought, and I put on a good act, I was this Energizer bunny rabbit. Here, I was having the life just sucked out of me, just zapped out of me. My job, obviously, was to help and motivate others, and I couldn't even help myself at that time. I could not help myself.

It really took me to get stronger in my faith and know that no matter what I was facing, there's nothing too big. There's no mountain too high. There's nothing that is too big for our God. For all the mental and spiritual toughness I had, I had to really learn, I can say this, the key to changing how I came out of that divorce was I had to learn the grace to forgive. Because anytime you're going through anything, it just takes you off your feet. I remember just being on the floor crying in that fetal position. I remember not being able to go and speak, but I had to push myself out the door. Going on the stage and speaking and then I get to the hotel room and I'm crying my eyes out.

There were times when I just could not even eat. You go through these stages of looking at yourself and not feeling worthy and not feeling like you are loved. You've just gone through so much and you're like, "God, can you just pick me up and turn me around again?" A lot had to do with me learning to forgive because when you learn the grace to forgive, you can let go. I had to forgive him, but I had to forgive me. I would say the biggest part of that forgiveness was to forgive me because I felt like a failure. I had been successful with everything else in my life. How could I not be successful with being a wife? But it takes two people.

Even though you go through the divorce, if you're still not forgiving, then you hold onto the bitterness. You hold on to being resentful, and it's very ugly and negative energy. If you keep that going, then that person has power over you. It's like being in jail. You're stuck. You can't get out. Mentally, you are in jail. You cannot move. Everything stays right where it is. He's moved on and maybe even had another girlfriend or wife, and there you are, just sitting there, still crying your heart out. I know. I've gone through it all.

Venessa: Absolutely. Been there.

Donna R.: I had to every day practice. It was a long time. I would say a year. Every day I had to work on me. I had to get therapy. I had friends who were prayer warriors and they helped me get through it. You gotta fight, you gotta pray. You gotta pray, you gotta fight. You gotta work that thing out. I remember a book that Bishop Jakes had. It said, forgive and

let go. That really, really helped me because you have to forgive or it carries such a dead weight on you. Anything negative or dead, you have to remove it from your life. Once I was able to forgive, then that healing process started. I had to learn from that past relationship or I was gonna repeat it again. All those things, I had to write down what is it that I can improve about myself? What is it that I can improve about myself in a relationship? What does a healthy relationship look like for me?

You have to, every day, go through the work and work. I can pray all day long on this, but I had to do the work.

Venessa: You gotta do the work.

Donna R.: Faith without action is dead.

Venessa: Is dead, absolutely.

Donna R.: I remember every day working through it and time became my friend instead of my enemy, but what I had to learn was I had to develop, and I still teach women and young girls this. I had to develop a new self-love, a new self-care, self-confidence, self-worth. I think part of that was pushing through my pain and getting to my new purpose in life. Once that started to happen, I was getting my mojo back, I was getting my swagger back, I was getting my sexy back, all of that, but it took time. I still, to this day, am working on me because God is always molding us and helping us to evolve and grow into the women he wants us to be. That's always happening. It's never gonna stop unless you stop growing. You're always transforming and I'm excited to be where I am because I can help other women. I can help young girls, and if I went through that just to help one person, then it's all good.

Venessa: Absolutely. Just going back to a couple things you said, I think your experience is universal. The pain of divorce, the trauma of it, when you said the being in the fetal position, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I remember that."

Donna R.: We all been there.

Venessa: Yeah, but having to put on that face and still do everything that you need to do to work, to survive.

Donna R.: Take care of your family. Yeah, it's a lot.

Venessa: It's a lot. I think that a lot of women have been in that place, and they're now at a place where they're trying to figure out what's next. The other thing that you said I think is really critical is about loving yourself. Because what happens is you do feel like a failure. You do feel like you're unworthy, and no matter what the circumstances are, if you can do everything else in your life and you're successful but you can't be a successful wife and a good wife and make that marriage works, it is something that really and truly breaks your spirit, and you have to be rebuilt from the inside out.

Donna R.: Inside out, because once you're broken, nothing that you can put on, no hairdo, no outfit, nothing can dress that up. Work has to be done from the inside. Yes, I definitely would fake it on the red carpet and be out in public, but it's like a double life. You're not being true and authentic to who you are, and eventually it wears you down. A lot has to do with when you don't have that self-love. If you don't have self-love, you will accept anything because you don't value yourself. You don't have that self-worth. A lot of times, women want so bad to be loved that they go out and chase the love because they want it so bad. They don't have it, and it has to start with you.

Venessa: Yes, that is the key.

Donna R.: If you don't have it, you chase it because you want to be loved. You have to think about, like you said, in that self-love, you have to do some homework. You have to define who you are. You have to, just like I did, turn my misery into my ministry. I had to don't let my circumstances define who I am. I had to look beyond my brokenness and see that gosh, if you just keep pushing forward, if you keep persevering, and if you keep working hard, then I can obviously push towards something that's great, something that's greater, something more fulfilling and meaningful for my life, but you've got to get past the brokenness and that takes a lot of work.

Venessa: You're absolutely right. I think, a lot of times, if you do not go through that process where you take the time to focus on you, then ultimately you repeat whatever issues or whatever mistakes that you had previously in the next relationship. The thing about it that's really critical is when you repeat those things, you're trying to figure out, "Why am I still getting the same result?" That's the definition of insanity, because the definition of insanity says that you keep doing the same things and expecting a different result. It just doesn't make sense.

Donna R.: It is. I remember Bishop saying ... My bishop is Bishop TD Jakes. I go to Potters House here in Dallas and he always talks about the most powerful thing is changing your mind. You can't conquer what you're not willing to move forward with. A lot has to do with if you don't change your thinking, your actions don't follow. You have to change that voice inside your head. That's just so critical because nothing will happen until you change your thought process. Nothing will happen until you change your attitude.

Venessa: You're absolutely right about that. I think it's really critical because one of the things that we talk about in the Love Right brand is really rewriting your own script on love. That means that you cannot have a successful relationship unless you focus on yourself first, unless you love yourself first, unless you are full and complete before you bring someone else into your life.

Donna R.: I totally agree, and a lot of times, we are caring, everybody has baggage, but it's important for you to be healthy and whole. Part of being healthy and whole, like you said, is loving yourself. Making sure you are healthy mind, body, spirit, emotionally, financially. I remember speaking at a church at Potters House for the God's Leading Ladies program. We were talking about dating, and 70% of the women in there were single, and I was telling them what I was gonna do on Valentine's Day, how I was gonna treat myself

to flowers and take myself to Miami, buy a dress, go to dinner, salsa dancing, and then end up on the beach having a little coffee and a croissant.

They're like, "Who are you gonna do that with?" I'm like, "Myself." I was like, "You all can't be waiting on someone else. You gotta buy your damn flowers. You gotta love on you." You want to go out on dinner on Valentine's Day, take yourself or get with a girlfriend, but you cannot wait for someone to do what you can do for yourself. One of the exercises I did with them was I had them just write down on a piece of paper, because everyone has this idea of this extraordinary man who they want to marry.

Venessa: Who they want, yes.

Donna R.: Who they want. I said, "I want you to write down everything you want him to bring to the table," so they did, and it was front page and back page. Then I said, "All right, another sheet of paper. What do you bring to the table?"

Venessa: What do you bring? Right.

Donna R.: Okay, Venessa, often we didn't get to that other side, and we maybe got to just half a page. I said, "Look, there's something wrong with this. You're expecting him to bring to the table everything and you're only bringing one quarter of it or half, so even if you do get with him, he's gonna look to other women for what you don't give to him. You have to come complete. You have to come whole. Work on the things that you are strong at and what you're weak at, strengthen those, but if you're expecting him to come loaded, you gotta come loaded too. Come on now. You can't be faking that you are half empty and then he's gonna fulfill you. No. He wants someone that's whole and got it going on too."

Venessa: Complete. Exactly.

Donna R.: Yes, and you all should be able to take each other to the next level.

Venessa: To the next level, mm-hmm yes. That is so true.

Donna R.: It was an eye opener for them, and they were like, "Oh Donna, that's not fair." I said, "No no no, we're just dealing with life here. Our expectations should be high. No, you shouldn't lower your level, but at the same point, you have to step up if you're wanting a better person the next time around, a better boyfriend, a better husband, you still gotta do some work on you and present the best you."

Venessa: At what point do you feel like an individual can say, "Okay, I'm ready to go out here and I'm ready to start dating?"

Donna R.: I don't know. I think it happens at a different point for each person, but I know with me, it took probably about a year before I went out dating after my divorce. Even in dating now, it's so different. Because at the time I got divorced, I was 50. I'm not thinking ever that I would be divorced, first of all, so after you get through all that, then it's changed completely. You have online dating. You have dating through referrals. You have

meeting.

Venessa: Matchmaking.

Donna R.: Matchmaking, spontaneously meeting. It's a different dance. I know some people say game. I'm gonna say dance. You have to learn. I'm gonna be honest. First time I met this guy in a mall and he was handsome, European guy. We were talking and he was like, "Can I get your number?" I was like, "I can't give my number out to some stranger." I said, "But here's my website," and he said, "Okay." I went back and told my friends and they're like, "Donna, you gave your website? Oh my God, you are so out. We gotta help her. We gotta hold her hand." That was hilarious, and he did contact the website, and then eventually we did connect.

I have to be very guarded. I always say to people, open heart, open mind, but I was just coming out of a relationship for 15 years, hadn't dated in a long time, obviously, and I also had to be careful as I was dating that men weren't dating me for who they perceived me as being in the public eye, but who I was truly at the core being of myself. I think that drew some caution, but in the same breath I think when I started dating, it was at the time that I really felt good about me. I was just enjoying the essence of who I was. I felt like my health was in good health. I had my business was going again. I had emotional and spiritual strength. That's when I felt, wow, you're out there now.

You gotta make sure, though, when you're out, that you just enjoy yourself because one time I went out with a group of girlfriends and we're all out at a place where they had dinner and dancing. I'm just dancing up a storm and they just looking around checking out everybody. I come back to the table, guy comes over to talk, I go back out dancing. This repeated like three times. They're like, "Dang, how do you do this?" Because every time I came over, a different guy came. They're like, "What is it about me?" I was like, "It's nothing about me. This is just who I am. I'm having a good time. I'm not out here looking," and it comes down to they were looking, they were chasing. Men are supposed to chase. They're the hunters. They acknowledged that hey, they're looking. They look and go, "Wait a minute, she's looking for me." He should be looking for you.

Men came over because they just saw me dancing, having a great time. Wasn't worried about them, whereas my friends, they had an agenda. They were on a mission.

Venessa: They were on a mission.

Donna R.: They wanted to find a man. I said, "You know what? I do too at some point want to get married again, but he'll find me." I'm that confident in me that says I don't have to go out and chase, and it has nothing to do with who I am, how I look, none of that. It has to do with what I expect and want, and I feel like in my role as a woman, it is not for me to chase him. If he really wants me, he's got to do the work.

Venessa: Yeah, absolutely.

Donna R.: I had to say it. It's that clear to me. There's a lot of women that do chase and that's their

thing. For me and just representing who I am as a young lady, he has to come and he better come with it, just like I'm coming with it. I don't go out looking. It's usually, I can be honest with you, two times that I've dated, had a boyfriend. It was when I wasn't looking. I wasn't looking at all. I just happened to be, one was in the Air Force and one was working, and it just organically naturally happened. I wasn't looking and I don't think you should look. You'll be seen because you've got that light. You're vibrant. You got in you shine bright like a diamond.

Venessa: That's it.

Donna R.: C'mon, it shines through. They'll see it.

Venessa: Here's the thing. A lot of people don't realize that men are attracted to happy, confident women. The light in you shines so bright that they saw that light in you and wanted to be next to you. They wanted to be a part of you. A lot of women don't understand that. They're out here, they're pursuing men, and like you said, no, the man should be either, I don't say pursuing, I say wooing. Because the whole idea of pursuing is we don't want him to catch you and then let you go. We want this man to really to woo you, to see the light in you, to recognize ...

Donna R.: Appreciate you.

Venessa: Yes. To adore you and say, "Hey, this woman is just incredible and I see all those things in her and I want to be with her." For our friends, and I've got a lot of friends like that too, who they're out here, on the hunt, looking, and they're like, "Venessa, I don't understand. You always got a man."

Donna R.: My friend, she's had five boyfriends in one year and I haven't had one, but that's because she has to feel like she needs to be with a man. She needs to have that love and I'm like, that love starts with you. It just takes us all a while to get there, but I'm praying that we all do. It really goes back to your self-confidence and your self-worth.

Venessa: Absolutely, absolutely. If there were any words of advice that you would give women who are coming out of a marriage or of a breakup, what would you say to them in terms of what they should do next and the work that they should be doing on themselves?

Donna R.: First, I'm gonna say you can do it. I am a living witness that you can and you will. You just have to focus on what's important in your life. I did. My misery turned into my ministry, and I'm still out there helping women and helping young girls hopefully have healthier relationship not just with themselves, but with other people. Because that doesn't just come into the personal. It also comes into the business life. How you feel about yourself, it really transfers over your entire life because if you ain't feeling good about you, it's gonna play a role in your business life or in your job and your family, everywhere. That's the part we're talking about. You've got to work on you. Every day, if it's about spiritual strength, finding God, having a stronger relationship, going to church, having prayer groups. Whatever it is that's gonna strengthen your spirituality, you work on that.

Even mentally, if you just are that giving person, which I am, sometimes you gotta learn to say no and give to you. Be what's feeding you. If someone's always taking from you, then you need to cut it off, everything that you were giving to that person, get back to yourself. Be what's feeding you. Then the other part is when you are taking care of your kids, the family, so many other people, if you stop taking care of yourself, you won't be able to take care of them. Taking care of you has to be number one. Yes, it's selfish. Yes, it's about you, but guess what? You deserve it. You should own every fabric of your being. You should celebrate and love on you every day. You should every day not just love on you, but do something good for you.

You want to go back to school, then go back to school. If you want to get a job promotion, then work on whatever it takes to get you to that next level. If you want to have more romance and love and a relationship, then just strengthen you. Be you. Be bolder. Be better because that will come, but it all starts with you. You can't go looking for it, you can't wear it, you can't buy it. It's all about you.

Venessa: Yes, that's so true. That's so true. You just hit on so many nuggets of wisdom here in your own path, and I think a lot of our listeners and our audience can really relate to. Loving yourself...

Donna R.: Loving you is the most powerful thing you can do.

Venessa: Absolutely. Completely agree. Completely agree with you on that. Then not only that, but finding your purpose in your pain. I think there's something to be said for that as well. I know I found my purpose in my pain and built a business and have now come to this place where I am realizing the things that I learned from my marriage, from my relationship to really help other people be in healthy, whole relationships, and it all starts with you.

Donna R.: It really does, and I'm so proud of you and where you are. It's just you have to get to that place where you just go, "I am ready to take back my health. I am ready to take back my life. I am ready to take back my power, take back my courage, take back my strength, take back me tenacity, take it all back," because that power is within you. Yes, I want to take back and get my sexy back. Yes I do.

Venessa: Absolutely.

Donna R.: Just like Stella got her groove back, you can too.

Venessa: That's absolutely it. That is so key. Donna, in our last couple of minutes, where can folks find you if they want to follow you and they want to see what you're up to? Give us your website and your Twitter and your social media handle so they can check you out and follow you.

Donna R.: Thank you, and first, I just want to say thank you for having me on and I just hope that what we've shared is going to be a blessing to people listening. It's all about us sharing

and helping each other out. They can reach me at donnarichardson.com. The clothing line is just amazing. I'm just so blessed to have it. It's called Clothing With Confidence, because it goes back to that whole self-worth and self-confidence. Then on Twitter, I am iamdonnarichardson and iamdonnamite. On Facebook, it's Donna Richardson, and on, what's the other? Instagram, it's Donna Richardson Joyner. I've got it all. And LinkedIn is Donna Richardson, so that's how they can contact me. I do posts inspirational daily, of just keeping your mind, body, and spirit healthy. I've been posting because I've traveled a lot travel tips for you and lifestyle tips.

I'm excited to be in this part of my career. Just came back from Paris and ran the Paris Marathon.

Venessa: Nice, congratulations.

Donna R.: Yes. You gotta keep challenging yourself. You gotta keep doing things and always expanding your territory. Because even though we're talking about finding yourself in terms of loving you and wanting to love and find that relationship, he ain't gonna maybe walk up to your door. You gonna have to get out and expand that territory and travel and go to events that are not normally in your realm. Challenge yourself to do different things, learn different things, but you're gonna have to get outside of your comfort zone if you're interested in meeting different people and doing different things that will help you to grow and evolve.

Venessa: Oh, absolutely. That's really critical. We have to constantly be evolving and growing and transforming ourselves.

Donna R.: Amen.

Venessa: That's so key.

Donna R.: I can tell you, traveling has helped me. For the past 25 years, doing it professionally and personally, I have met people from all over the world and I keep in touch with them and I have amazing relationships. I always say to people, they're like, "Donna, why won't you date anybody here" in my hometown of Dallas? I go, "Oh, that's because I can date men in other cities and other countries." Global woman who believes in global love, okay?

Venessa: Right, right. Love has no bounds is what I say.

Donna R.: Amen.

Venessa: Has no bounds. That is fantastic. Donna, thank you for taking the opportunity and as always, we will definitely be in touch with you. For our listeners, this podcast drops every Tuesday at seven a.m. and Donna will be dropping next week at seven a.m., so make sure that you listen to her. The Love Right Unplugged on iHeartRadio and also download us on iTunes. Thanks again, Donna, and we will be in touch.

Donna R.: Thank you. Pumped up, powered up, and prayed up.

Venessa: Absolutely. You have a fantastic day. Take care.

Donna R.: You too. Bye bye.

Venessa: Bye bye.