



# Christina Egelunds tale ved Trivselskonferencen

**Taler**

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## Everyone can do something

When I was 18 I moved to Paris.

I didn't have a cell phone. My parents had no way of contacting me. I didn't have a plan. Or a job or a place to live for that matter.

What I did have was a considerable amount of that special 90s carefree "happy go lucky"-attitude. And I've been thinking about that attitude prior to coming here today.

Back then it seemed like most of us had an underlying belief that everything will probably work out just fine.

## Distinguished company

But before I start reminiscing about my past too much I'd like to welcome you all to this conference about the wellbeing of students.

We are in very competent and distinguished company today. And I would like to thank our keynote speakers - Richard, Urmila and Gregory - for joining us all the way from the States.

These three experts are going to share with us their takes on how support through the tough transitions, a sense of belonging, and designing the right curriculum can create environments where students can both learn, grow and thrive.

I would also like to thank our innovation centers in Boston and Silicon Valley for their help in facilitating contact and making this all happen.

### **The youth of today**

As I mentioned, I feel like the 90s by large was characterised by a certain kind of optimism.

I don't think younger generations grow up with quite the same outlook.

It seems to me we have the most responsible and ambitious youth generations right now. Which is great. And admirable.

There are probably a lot of people in my own generation who could have done with a bit more awareness and social responsibility in our teens and early 20s.

But I do wonder if we also lost some carefreeness and some playfulness along the way.

Your youth is the time to rebel. Time for that special mix of big feelings, big opinions and big ideas. It's the time to fall over and get back up. And do it again and again.

It seems to me the youth of today... And by the way, I know how I sound when I start with a phrase like that. But bear with me.

Young people today seem to be very concerned with the future. And to carry a lot of pressure on their young shoulders.

### **A heavy decision**

Choosing what to study when I was young was largely a question of "what are my interests?", "what are my talents", "what do I want?".

We made fun of the few classmates who cared a bit too much about their grades. Because why would you waste your time on that?

The overwhelming idea was that it was important to study and to learn. And it didn't really matter too much if you had top grades or if your passion was philosophy, teaching or rocket science. As long as you did something.

Today, choosing what to study seems to be a very heavy decision for many. It involves big questions like: "Who am I?", "what is my dream job?", "does this fit my life goals?".

That is a lot of stake in a decision you make when you are in your late teens or early 20s. And it creates a lot of pressure. Pressure that follows the students when they start this carefully selected study program of their dreams.

What if it can't live up to it? Or worse, if you can't live up to it?

If your degree is your identity and life plan, then what happens when you stumble? Or even fail? It might feel like your whole life is over.

### **Political responsibility**

And I know politically we carry some of the blame for this pressure.

We've been very busy trying to get young people through the education system more quickly and more productively. Talking about career opportunities and what society needs.

We are currently trying to rectify some of this.

For instance, by making the education system more flexible. Making it easier to return later in life to retrain or change direction.

And in August the government launched a commission whose main focus is to prevent mental health issues in children and youth and to promote strong communities, relationships and wellbeing.

### **Everyone brings something to the table**

For decades we've told young people that they can be or do anything they want. That the perfect life is attainable.

We've done this with the best intentions. We want all young people to feel confident in their abilities.

But I think inadvertently we've created a lot of pressure. If all options are open how on earth can you choose just one?

And furthermore, I believe it's a lie. If everyone could be anything they want, we'd all be Lionel Messi, Taylor Swift or Barack Obama.

The Danish writer and poet Carl Scharnberg has a quote that I really like. He said:

“No one can do everything. Everyone can do something. Together we can do even more.”

I think this quote wonderfully sets the tone for talking about wellbeing and mental health in students.

The importance of self-awareness as well as self-confidence. The importance of an unwavering belief that every single person brings something to the table. And last but not least the importance of a strong social network.

### **Community is key**

About a month ago I had the privilege of handing out awards to seven amazing educators from the higher education institutions in Denmark.

These seven educators were chosen based on nominations and recommendations from their leaders, colleagues and students. And what struck me was that even though these were 7 different people from 7 different institutions the motivation for selecting them was the same.

They were all described as present and engaging. They create a safe environment and support the students in finding the courage to speak up, ask questions and grow. They create a sense of community in the classroom.

Studying and learning is ultimately about growth and development. And it's

hard work. It needs to be driven by interest and want.

You need good educators to challenge you. Classmates and friends to pick you up when you stumble. And you will stumble. And to cheer you on when you succeed.

### **Everything will work out just fine**

When I was 18 I went to Paris without a plan, but with the firm belief that no matter how much I'd stumble along the way – and I did - everything would work out just fine.

This is the feeling I wish for students to experience. Not necessarily the Paris part – even though a bit of French culture never hurt anyone.

But when we create safe and inspiring learning environments.

Cultivate strong and respectful relationships between students and professors as well as among the students themselves.

Then we help create a youth life where stumbling is okay. Where there's room to fall and get back up again. Where they can relax their shoulders knowing that everything will probably work out just fine.

So, thank you for being here. To our keynote speakers. And to all of you who have come here today to learn.

I hope you come home with a suitcase full of new tools and perspectives.

And I hope you will use them in your respective educational institutions to strengthen the effort to promote wellbeing and mental health among your students.

I wish you an interesting and inspiring day.

Thank you.

**Kilde**

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