

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for David Smalley | Why You Should Challenge Your Beliefs (Episode 186)

If you're honest with yourself, you probably hold beliefs that would wither under the light of reasonable scrutiny. Maybe they were instilled in you as an impressionable child and never since questioned. Perhaps you picked up some casual indoctrination along the way that you haven't been able to — or willing to — shake. Don't feel bad — we all hold such beliefs. And while these beliefs are often religious or political in nature, they can present themselves in countless forms — and we should always be ready to challenge these beliefs so we can defend them if they truly serve us or shed them if they don't.

[In this episode](#) we talk to [Dogma Debate](#) host David Smalley, an actor and comedian who's no stranger to challenging his own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. As someone who's made the journey from true believer to atheist, David is well-versed in seeing both sides of an argument and engaging in civil discourse with people who hold opposing points of view — something the world may need now more than ever.

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Beliefs: Intrinsic or Inherited?

When we're children, our parents or guardians instill beliefs in us to make us behave and/or carry on family traditions — like religion. As adults, beliefs may be instilled in us for more nefarious reasons — and this is why it's imperative for us to tell the difference between beliefs we choose to hold and beliefs that are chosen for us.

“Car salesmen get trained to manipulate the way you think,” says David. “When they want to show you the car, they’ll start talking, and then walk away from you. You will naturally follow. When you get in the car and you’re driving, you feel like you’re in control — what do they say? ‘Turn right here.’ The idea is they’re conditioning you to do exactly what the salesman says, line by line, so when he says, ‘Sign here,’ you do it.”

In the same way, we may be conditioned from an early age to trust the word of religious authority figures as gospel — which makes conditioning by others (like the aforementioned car salesman) all the more natural. “I firmly believe you’re more likely to get taken advantage of — quicker — if you have a preconceived religious belief,” says David.

Consider at least three beliefs you hold and ascertain if you really believe them, or if you were told that you believe them by someone else. Do your findings loosen or tighten the grip of these beliefs?

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Know Thy Enemy

“There’s a thing called [Rapoport’s Rules](#),” says David. “The only one that really matters to me is: You’re not ready to form an argument against someone until you can reword their argument back to them in a way that they would go, ‘Yes! Exactly! I wish I could have said it that way.’ Then you’re ready to tell them why they’re wrong. That rarely happens in today’s society.”

David makes a point of familiarizing himself with his opponent’s side before entering a debate. He’s read the Bible twice and often knows more than the Christians he faces. He listens to political media on the extreme sides of the spectrum.

Consider the position you most disagree with. Find someone who holds that position, and then state their position back to them as you understand it, and see if they agree with it.

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Reconciling Beliefs

“Christians are very smart people,” says David, “And smart people are really good at justifying really bad ideas. They will take a concept that sounds ridiculous — they know it sounds ridiculous, but they use enough words and talk themselves into the situation. But what they’re doing is they’re sliding in a bunch of non-sequiturs...I remove all of their non-sequiturs [between A,B, and C] and go, ‘How do you reconcile A with C?’”

While debating a police officer who believes that every word of the Bible is literally true, David said, “It bothers me that you believe a man and a donkey had a conversation and you carry a gun for a living.” His response was, “When you put it like that, I sound ridiculous.”

“You put it like that,” says David. “I just removed all the fluffiness that you tried to stuff between it.”

What beliefs of your own might be difficult to reconcile if you honestly appraised them in this way? What excuses, non-sequiturs, or “fluffiness” do you use to prop them up?

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).

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