

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Deep Dive | What to Do When Your Purpose Starts to Suck (Episode 205)

Whether it's a job that fulfills us, a calling that compels us, or a craft that inspires us, we're all looking for those goals and experiences that give our lives true meaning — a purpose.

But when your dreamy purpose gets challenged by the tough hurdles of reality, your entire life — your choices, your values, your very sense of self — can suddenly take a hit. So how do you keep going when your purpose starts to suck? What do you do when the one thing that gives you meaning also makes you miserable? Listen, learn, and enjoy as we find out together [in this episode!](#)

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Meaning Doesn't Equal Happiness

“Doing something meaningful does not automatically create joy,” says Gabriel. “And happiness isn’t required to create meaning. Meaning and happiness are two different concepts.”

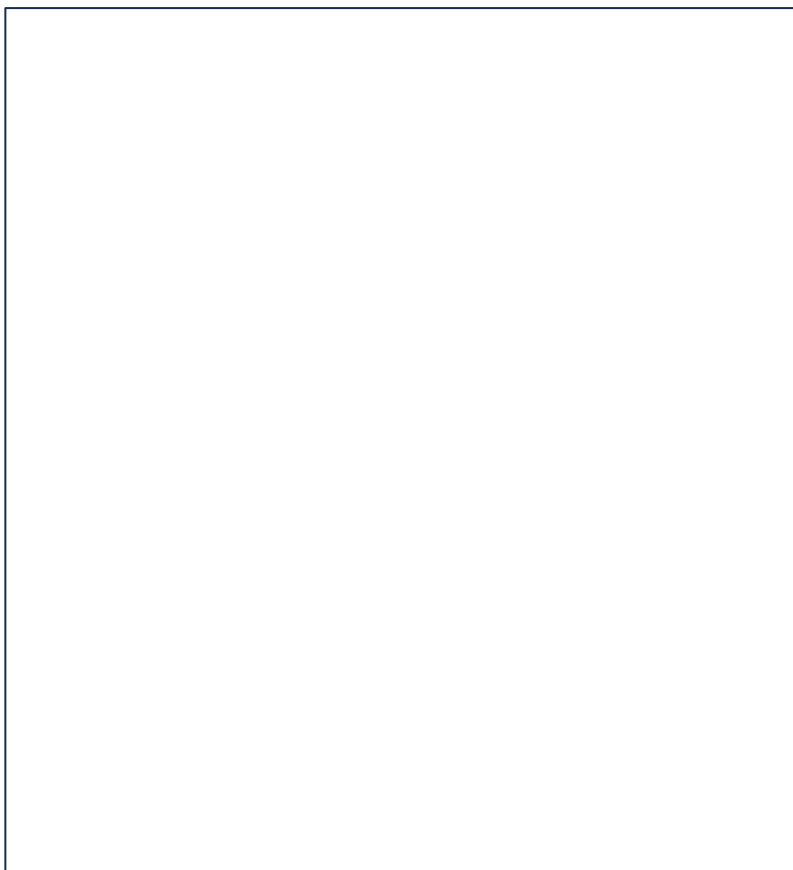
You might think finding and following your purpose means you’ve discovered the magical “x” on your map that marks some kind of cognitive easy street. But purpose doesn’t exempt you from the bumps and potholes you’ll find on any other path — in fact, you’re likely to find it even more treacherous than what you’d experience by aimlessly meandering *without* a purpose.

But having a bad day (even a lot of bad days) pursuing your purpose means you’re likely doing something right — because it means you’re probably doing something difficult, which always requires enduring a certain level of discomfort.

I love doing this show and I can’t think of any other job I’d rather have, but I learned early on: it’s a lot of work. I don’t enjoy every minute it takes to prepare for it, and sometimes I just want to tune out and do something brainless instead of reading my fourth book of the week. But because I care, I do it anyway.

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The more you want to win, the more it hurts to lose. When you think of how you spend your time, how much of it is driven by what you'd consider purpose? How would you compare the discomfort you feel in pursuit of what you find meaningful to the discomfort you've experienced from something you couldn't care less about (like a job you've hated)? Even if the meaningful discomfort *hurts* more, how much more are you willing to put up with it?

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The Upsides to Difficulty

Aside from getting better at whatever it is you're spending time doing, there are a few other key upsides to embracing the difficulty of your purpose.

Gratitude for the good days. There's nothing like living with the suck to make you appreciate the days that are fun, inspiring and productive. If a purpose weren't hard, we just wouldn't understand how precious the good days really are.

Appreciation for the craft. The pain created by your purpose is a function of the complexity of the craft. People who find their purpose painful tend to appreciate the depth of what they're trying to do. In some ways, pain is the price you pay for that appreciation, which separates the dilettantes from the professionals.

Resilience in the face of struggle. We don't develop grit when life is easy; we develop grit when life is hard. Every purpose will, at some point, require resilience — in the face of failure, rejection, and criticism. When those moments come, you won't be equipped for them if you've found your journey easy. You will, however, take them on with more confidence and determination if you've embraced the difficulty of your purpose.

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Take this time to consider the struggles you've encountered along the path of purpose and reflect on the advantages they've given you — in contrast to what the path of least resistance would have offered.

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Go Micro, Not Macro

When a purpose becomes hard, it becomes hard on two levels:

On a day-to-day level, it gets difficult to execute, to focus, and to produce good work. This is the difficulty of the craft.

On a broader level, it also gets difficult to commit, to keep going, and to stay connected to your mission over time. This is the difficulty of the journey.

On the worst days, pursuing your passion gets difficult on both levels. It's hard to execute and it's hard to remember why you're trying in the first place. In those moments, a powerful technique to stay connected to your purpose is to focus on the micro over the macro.

When you focus on today — on what is in front of you right now — you force yourself to simply do the next thing, and ignore the more disorienting questions about the bigger picture.

Instead of worrying if you have enough to make it as an author, you finish that paragraph.

Instead of questioning whether the cottage will look okay, you finish sanding that piece of wood.

Instead of wondering if being an athlete is worthwhile, you finish that set of sprints.

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Deliberately focusing on small, concrete tasks has a few major benefits for your purpose.

- Going micro forces you to execute even when you don't feel like it.
- Going micro forces you to compartmentalize.
- Going micro reconnects you to your purpose.

What seemingly impossible tasks related to your purpose could be brought back into the realm of the possible by thinking of them on a micro, rather than a macro, level?

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Discipline vs. Denial

Is there ever a time when we do need to question the bigger picture? Can burying ourselves in the micro ever become a way of sticking our heads in the sand? The answer is yes. There's a very thin line between discipline and denial, and it's important we know where it is.

Discipline is knowing when to think about certain issues. Denial is refusing to think about them at all.

When you choose to finish your day's work by focusing on the tasks in front of you, you're being disciplined. You're recognizing that there might be bigger questions about your purpose, but that obsessing over them will not move you closer to your goal in that moment.

When you only focus on your work, and refuse to reflect on the bigger questions you have about your purpose, then you might be slipping into denial. If the tasks become a way to avoid those bigger questions — as opposed to a way to find the answers to them — then it's probably time to check in with yourself.

Of course, the line between discipline and denial is slightly different for everyone. The boundary between compartmentalization and delusion can shift from person to person, life to life, project to project, and that's why self-awareness is so important to this process.

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In my experience, you have to move between these two views — the micro and macro — so that you can continue to execute even as you reflect on why you should. The best technique I've learned here is to make execution a commitment, and then carve out a practice — say, one hour a week — to reflect on the bigger picture. This way, you quarantine your macro reflection to a specific time, and prevent it from holding up your work day-to-day, where progress really gets made. **This could be a conversation with a friend, a journaling session, or time spent alone in reflection.**

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Reminding Yourself Why

In the early days of pursuing your purpose, your exuberance will sustain you through the difficulty. That fuel protects you against frustration and boredom, and creates a floor for any dips you experience at the start. Over time, though, that excitement naturally wanes.

You lose that buffer, that floor. You don't have as much raw hope and pure enthusiasm. At the same time, the day-to-day grind of your goal eclipses the deeper reason you committed to it — once that happens, it's crucial to remember why you're pursuing your purpose in the first place.

When you lose sight of that deeper motivation, you can always return to a few different activities that will help reconnect you.

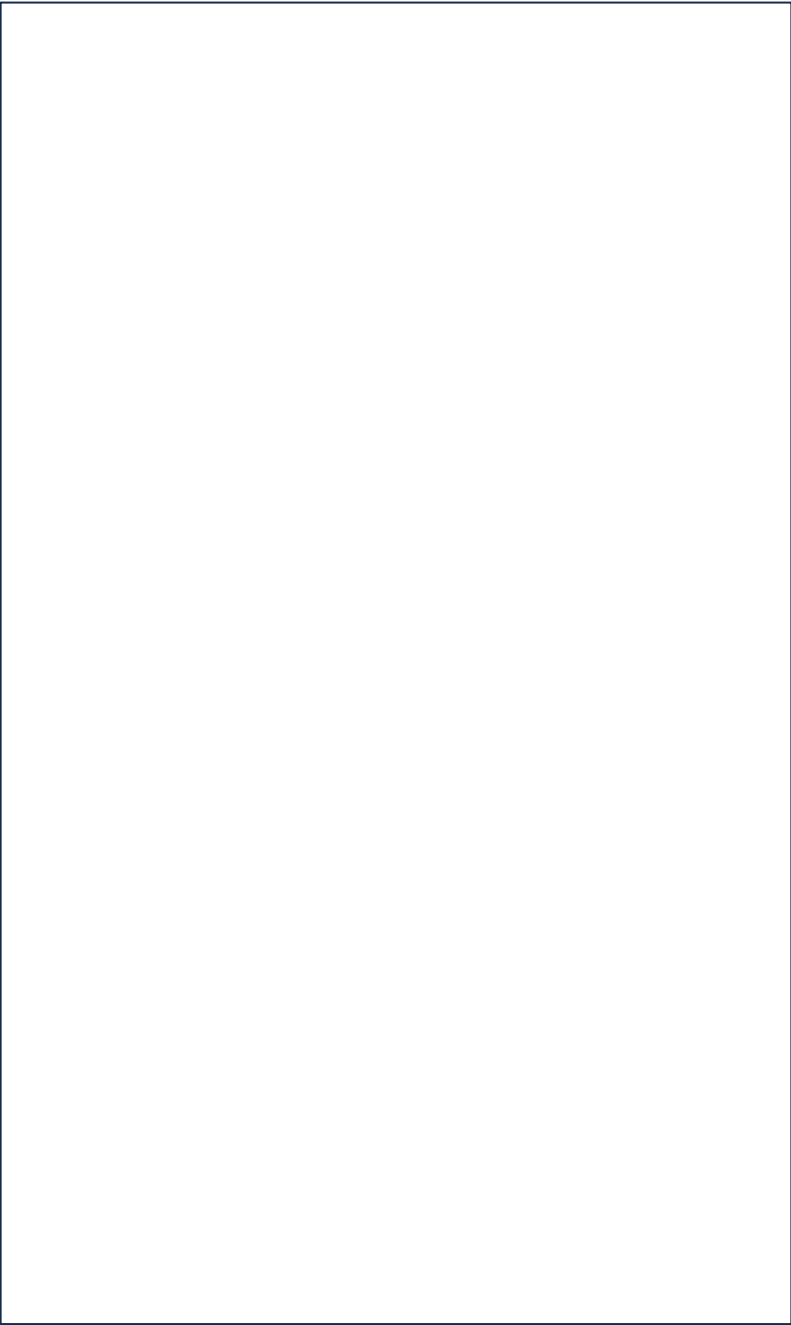
Talk to someone. When I used to feel disillusioned or stuck, I would sit with those feelings and internalize them. Over time, though, I noticed how helpful it was to discuss my work with other people. When I articulated my motivation to them, I was able to revive that motivation for myself. Saying it out loud — and having an audience for that explanation — suddenly made it real again.

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Write about it. Another powerful technique is to write about your journey. This is another form of talking to someone, and it's especially helpful when someone else isn't available. When you commit your reasons for pursuing your purpose to paper, you create an objective record of your motivations, your process, and your goal.

Track your story. When you lose your connection to your purpose, it's often because you've lost sight of the larger narrative — the story — of your purpose. It's important to see how that story is unfolding in moments of frustration or despair. Whether it's in conversation, on the page or in your head, put your tasks aside for a moment and ask yourself a few key questions: Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Are you improving? Are you learning? Are you growing as a technician and as a person? Are you moving closer to your goal? Do you understand the substance of your craft and industry more than you did before? How is your life changing as a result of your goal? The answers to these questions will reveal a larger story — a story that is very easy to lose sight of when you're hard at work.

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Recalibrate Your Purpose

Sometimes the difficulty of your purpose isn't just a normal struggle — it's a sign that you need to revisit, recalibrate or shift your purpose. When you hit this moment in your purpose, you have a few options.

Pivot. Deciding to pivot in your purpose means that you are connected to the right source of meaning, but that you're going about it the wrong way. For example, you love writing and want to say something original, but you're not meant to write a novel — you're meant to edit a platform for a number of different writers. Whatever the specifics, a pivot allows you to continue pursuing your purpose, but in a more effective, practical, or meaningful way.

Set it down. “Quitting” — which has taken on a pejorative meaning over time — can actually be the smartest decision in the face of challenge. All of the greatest entrepreneurs talk openly about the passionate ventures they gave up on, the promising projects they ditched, the lucrative opportunities they walked away from. If they didn't know when to give up on one passion, would they have pursued the more meaningful one? Is their quitting a sign of weakness? Or is it a sign of discipline?

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Shift priority. Recalibrating your purpose could mean figuring out what role that purpose should play in your journey. This means that you still feel connected to the passion in question, but that it's taking up the wrong space in your life. Imagine, for example, a guy who loves craft beer. After years of geeking out about it, he decides to start his own microbrewery. The business limps along for a while, draining more and more of the founder's time, money, and energy. Eventually, he finds himself falling out of love with brewing, and wonders why he ever tried to make his hobby his passion.

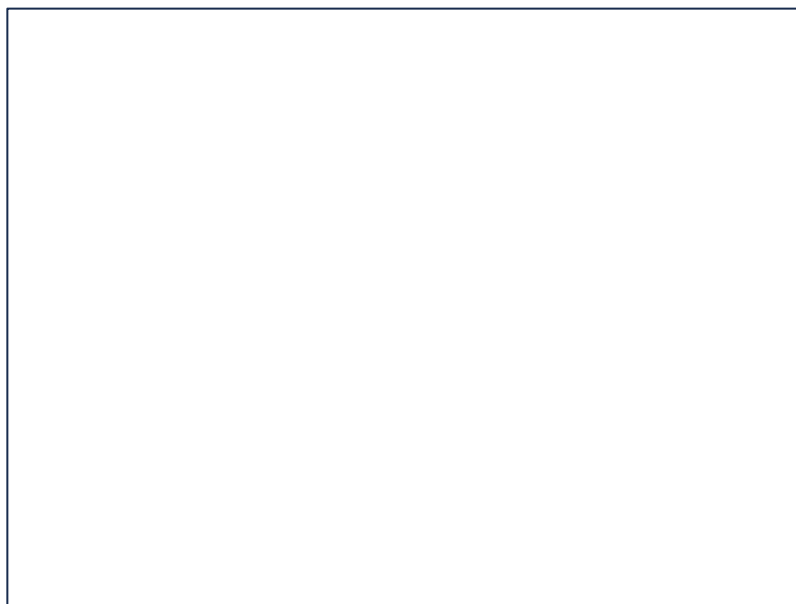
He could quit and never drink beer again. Or he could reconsider what role craft beer plays in his life. He could decide that beer is meant to be a hobby, a passion, and an activity to share with his friends — which is how it derived so much of its meaning to begin with. Shifting the priority of your passion often means hanging on to it — protecting it — by giving it the right place in your life. You preserve the joy that the project gave you by not forcing it to become something it shouldn't.

We can experience a ton of meaning in life when we know how to access that meaning. But that often requires us to recalibrate the priority and position of that purpose in our lives.

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After 15 years of pursuing my purpose, I've learned that the best strategy is not to deny or minimize the pain, but to make meaning out of it.

All of the techniques and principles in this piece are a handbook to dealing with the struggle. But the ultimate answer to this question — what do I do when my purpose starts to suck? — is to allow it. Embrace it. Study it. Let it teach you. Know that you're not exempt from that struggle — because no one is — and trust that if no one's exempt from it, then it must be fulfilling its own purpose: to teach you more about yours.



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

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About



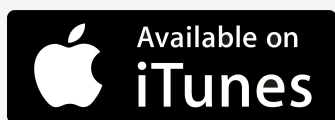
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We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth — and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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