

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Shane Snow | Cognitive Self-Defense Against Intellectual Dishonesty (Episode 202)

Discourse and debate are more effective when we learn to be honest with ourselves and curb the subtle behaviors that get in the way of trading real ideas. Iron sharpens iron and when we argue with one another in the right way, we get smarter, we hone our ideas, and we make ourselves and the world around us better for it.

[In this episode](#), Shane Snow returns to the show ([check out his first appearance here](#)) to talk about his recent in-depth blog post, [How to Debate and Make Progress by Curbing Intellectual Dishonesty](#). We'll go over intellectually dishonest tricks of the trade that can confuse the issue, distract us from the real conversation, and are ultimately used to control the way we think and behave. Consider this your cognitive self-defense dojo against intellectual dishonesty.

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What Is Intellectual Dishonesty?

If you're intellectually honest — as Shane Snow outlined in his book [*Dream Teams: Working Together Without Falling Apart*](#) — you're able to collaborate with others in a way that welcomes the cognitive diversity of different viewpoints, stir up ideas with the cognitive friction that results, and have the intellectual humility to change your mind if these viewpoints turn out to be persuasively more truthful than your own. Intellectual dishonesty, on the other hand, is the opposite. Your own viewpoint supersedes whatever truths are uncovered during discourse or debate, so you're willing to protect it in ways that aren't quite on the level.

“Like saying things that don't make sense as if they make sense — knowing that they don't make sense,” says Shane. “Engaging in conversations where you're dodging answering the question or you're using some tricky tactic to avoid telling the truth. Those are examples of being dishonest, but it's shaded differently than blatant lying.”

Think back to a time when you've convinced yourself that your version of the truth is more important than someone else's. Did you defend your position in a way that, in retrospect, you see as intellectually dishonest? How did it manifest?

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Six Recurring Discourse Problems

The modern political debate is an excellent example of how intellectual dishonesty is not considered a bug, but a feature of an arena where opponents are more concerned about looking good in front of an audience than dispensing verifiable facts. Shane lays out these six recurring problems in discourse:

- **Dodging:** The topic at hand is unaddressed or avoided at all costs.
- **Logical Fallacies:** People say things that don't make sense.
- **Deception:** People sneak around the actual truth.
- **Dirty Debate:** You can “win” a debate without a good argument.
- **Little Accountability:** Intellectual dishonesty goes unchecked.
- **False Endings:** Debates are over when time is up or people get upset — not when positions are clear and issues are resolved.

In a debate of your choice from any source online, see if you can spot any (or all) of the above recurring problems. Detail what tipped you off and in what ways real issues were displaced by intellectual dishonesty.

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Getting Discussions Back on Track

Here's the script I recommend for when you spot a fallacy in a non-moderated debate:

- **Stop them.** "Let me stop you for a second."
- **Gently point out the fallacy.** "I'm genuinely interested in understanding your point of view. But just because an authority type figure said something, doesn't mean it's true."
- **Rewind.** "Is there another way you can back this viewpoint up so that I understand?"

For both moderators and participants, I recommend the following script when someone dodges a question:

- **Stop them.** "Let me stop you right there."
- **Acknowledge them.** "I hear what you're saying."
- **Rewind them.** "I'd like to hear your answer to the question: [Repeat the question]?"

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If they proceed to dodge again, I recommend a more firm script:

- **Stop them.** “Let me stop you again.”
- **Point out what they’re doing.** “You’re not answering the question.”
- **Firmly rewind them.** “Let’s rewind and address the question.”

It’s harder to police deceptive statements in an informal debate setting. Here, I recommend using a script like this:

- **Stop them.** “Let me stop you right there for a second.”
- **Identify the deception.** “You just said [x]. However, I believe that’s inaccurate.”
- **Clarify the real fact and its source.** “The truth, according to [source], is [state it accurately].”
- **Give them the chance to explain themselves or recover.** “Can we rewind to where we left off?”

Make sure to read Shane’s own mega-post for a deeper dive into the nuances of intellectual dishonesty: [How to Debate and Make Progress by Curbing Intellectual Dishonesty.](#)

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

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