

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Gabriel Weinberg | How Mental Models Boost Super Thinking (Episode 214)

[DuckDuckGo](#) founder and [Super Thinking: The Big Book of Mental Models](#) co-author Gabriel Weinberg joins us to discuss how we can leverage mental models to easily examine and understand complex concepts, solve problems, and identify cognitive biases, giving us a more accurate and comprehensive view of the world around us.

It might sound complicated, but it's quite the opposite. [By the end of this episode](#), you'll be making better decisions more reliably and seeing through smoke and mirrors when someone is intentionally trying to deceive you — and *that* is a skill set worth tucking into your arsenal.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Critical Mass

Initially conceived to describe the amount of material necessary to set off a nuclear chain reaction, critical mass can be converted into a mental model to strategically gauge how much effort and energy you need to pour into a project to make it self-sustaining. For instance: If you've got a podcast, at what point does your audience tip from friends and family who feel an obligation to listen over to an enthusiastic fan base that happily spreads the news of your existence without even being asked?

"If you can recognize that this is a critical mass situation, you can immediately realize that it's going to have a snowball at some point and you can start to ask questions like: 'How many people do I need to reach critical mass?' or 'Can I do it earlier?' or 'Is there an easier way to reach it?' These are effectively shortcuts of how to think strategically," says Gabriel.

How might you apply the mental model of critical mass to one of your own projects to more efficiently reach a desired effect? This can be anything from a product launch to a blog to a birthday party.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Foolproofing Intuition

While the gut feeling of intuition might be the first stepping stone along the path of making a decision, it shouldn't be the last. "There are a lot of mental models about how your mind works that explain why your intuition fails you," says Gabriel.

For example, confirmation bias colors the way you believe in something and lines up even unrelated "evidence" to support that belief, contrary facts be damned. And an influence model like reciprocity can be used to sway you toward making a decision that "repays" someone's gift or favor out of intuitive obligation over pragmatic self-interest.

Consider a past scenario in which you made what turned out to be a bad decision based purely on intuition. In retrospect, was your decision influenced by the manipulation of others? In the future, how might you better evaluate a similar scenario in the future and make a decision that *consults* rather than *relies on* intuition?

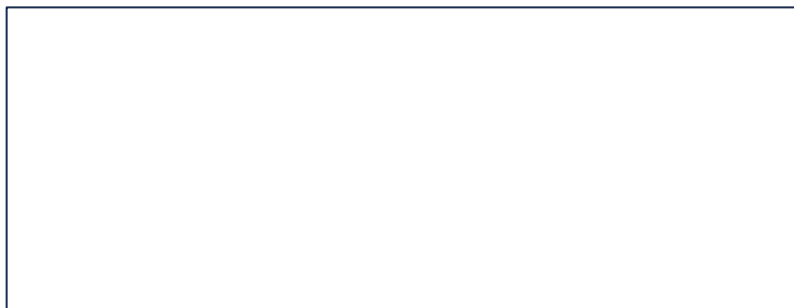
THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

First Principles

We all have assumptions about the way the world works, handed to us and developed piecemeal over time — some scraps of information more valid than others, and some worthless altogether. “What first principles thinking does is start from scratch and try to verify that those assumptions are correct,” says Gabriel.

You may go into a job hunt believing the salary range is set in stone because you heard your friend mention it once, or you may believe you’re not qualified because you didn’t take a certain curriculum in college you assumed was a prerequisite. But by applying the first principles mental model, Gabriel says: “You could go all the way back and say, ‘What kind of career do I really want? What are the attributes?’ and try to build up from the bottom, or you could say, ‘I want this job, and here are my reasons why; I’m going to check those reasons are accurate.’ You can go from the top down or the bottom up, but either way, you’re listing your actual assumptions and you’re going to test them.”

Pick anything from a job to a hobby to a skill you’d like to take up or learn but, for some host of reasons, you’ve decided is beyond you. Apply first principles, do some research, and make sure you’re not just telling yourself stories about why it can’t be done — or dreaming about something you don’t even really want to do.



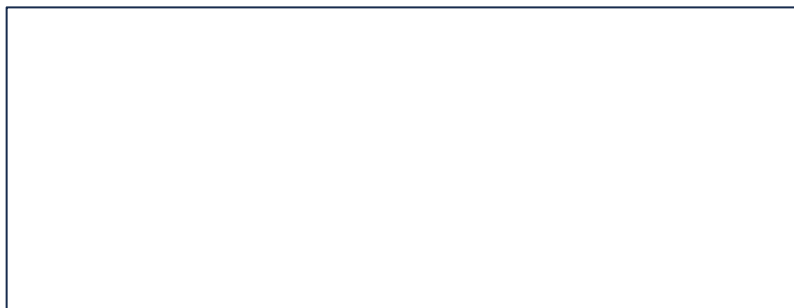
THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Hanlon's Razor

You might be familiar with Occam's (or Ockham's) razor, which states that the simplest answer is most likely to be the correct answer — which is a concept the conspiracy theorists on the weird side of YouTube should take to heart. But there's another cutting implement from which we could all benefit, called Hanlon's razor.

"Which is: 'Never attribute to malice which can be explained by carelessness,'" says Gabriel. "Most people aren't out to get you; they're just being careless." For instance, if your friend texts you a message that seems more terse than usual, give them the benefit of the doubt and assume they're short on time rather than being intentionally hostile — it's probably a more accurate assessment.

Think of times when you've assumed the worst of someone's intentions and it turned out that unseen variables were really to blame. Then flip it around and remember the times when others have misinterpreted your intentions and assumed the worst about you. These memories should serve as a reminder to keep that Hanlon's razor nice and sharp and ready for use at all times.

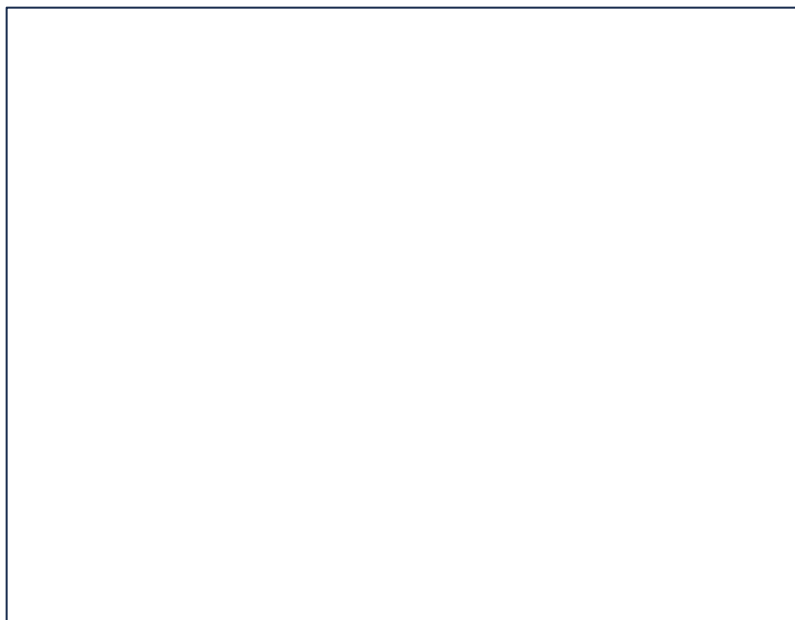


THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Nudging and Anchoring

“Restaurants use a lot of influence models,” says Gabriel. “Nudging is just little queues that nudge you into the direction people want you to go in — like specials. Other things restaurants do often is anchoring, so they’ll throw out really high-priced items that not anyone really buys, but it anchors you to higher prices for the rest of the menu.”

Next time you’re in a restaurant, pay attention to the menu’s layout. Your eyes may gravitate toward the places intended by management, but being aware of attempted nudging toward making some selections and anchored into a price range by overly expensive items you’d never buy should help you resist such tactics.

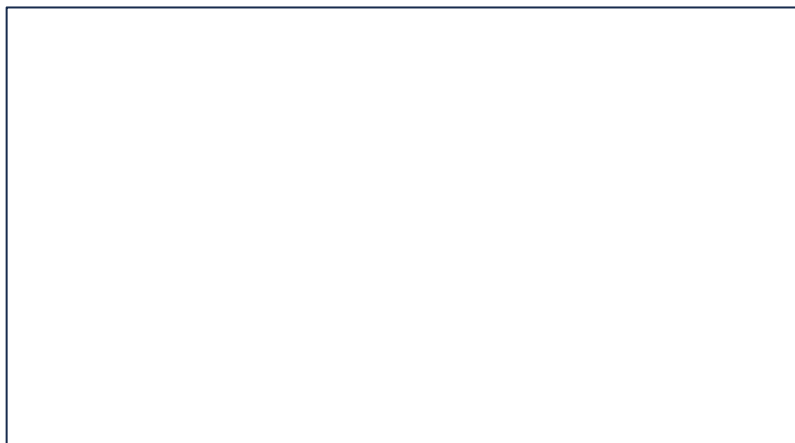


THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Forcing Function

“A forcing function is any task, activity, or event that forces you to take action and produce a result,” says Gabriel. This could be scheduling mandatory trips to the gym on your personal calendar every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday with obnoxious reminders that jar you out of whatever distractions generally keep you from going. This could be taking your laptop — without a power cord — to a cafe once a week to answer emails and take care of minor tasks only until the time it takes for your battery to run out. This could be setting your alarm clock on the other side of the room so you’re forced to get out of bed to shut it off every morning.

In what creative ways can you force function toward your own life? If you’re completely stumped, [Dan Martell has some excellent suggestions here.](#)

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their creative forcing functions.

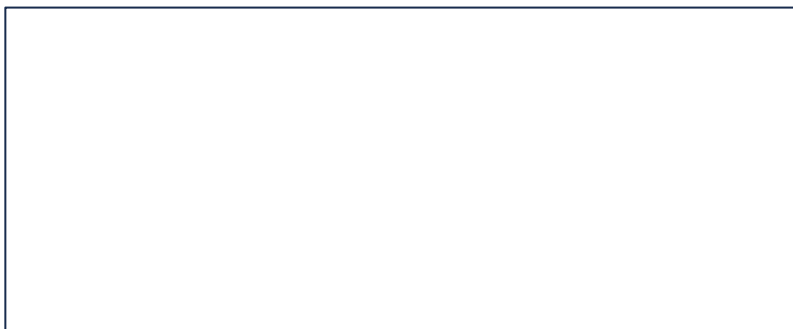
THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

The Five Whys

Anyone who's ever had a five-year-old probably knows the game of the eternal whys, but the five whys is a technique used to determine the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a problem, and five is not a hard limit if the problem's causes run deeper.

"It really is asking a series of whys and digging into what they call a root cause," says Gabriel. "You might ask for a postmortem because a site went down. You ask 'Why did the site go down?' Well, the server broke. 'Why did the server break?' Well, it got overloaded. 'Why did it get overloaded?' Because we didn't have good enough scalability; we didn't have enough servers. 'Why didn't we have enough servers?' Because we didn't plan ahead of time enough. So you get down to the root cause and then you can say, 'Okay. The real answer here is not adding a little more capacity. We need to have a better planning mechanism for the next five years and build out so we don't have this problem again.' You ask this question again and again until you get to the real reason."

The next time you're faced with finding the real reason (or reasons) behind a problem, try using the five whys to get to the bottom of it.



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

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

About



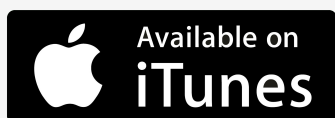
Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers — from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

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.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

support@jordanharbinger.com

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW



Share This With
Your Friends!



Share This