

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

## Worksheet for Tommy Caldwell | The Push for the Path Upwards (Episode 255)

On June 6th, 2018, *The Push: A Climber's Search for the Path* author Tommy Caldwell and his climbing partner Alex Honnold scaled the sheer granite face of Yosemite's El Capitan in one hour, 58 minutes, and seven seconds. It was a record ascent by way of The Nose, El Capitan's nearly vertical route of 2,900 feet — once considered an impossible climb, typically taking days for most who have succeeded since it was first conquered in 1958. Tommy also ascended El Capitan's Dawn Wall in 2015 with Kevin Jorgeson in a then-record 19 days, and has undertaken numerous solo free climbs and other feats of strength over the years — the majority without the use of his left index finger, which was mostly severed in a table saw accident in 2001.

**In this episode** we talk to Tommy about how an extreme childhood with a father who also climbed mountains prepared him for this life, what happened when he and three other climbers were kidnapped and held for six days in Central Asian Kyrgyzstan in 2000 before making a daring escape, and how an obsession with a craft and pursuing it to mastery makes Tommy world class (if not the best in the world) at what he does.

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## Types of Climbing

There are **quite a few types of climbing** (and subtle differences between them), but these are the main three you'll hear about in this conversation.

- **Sport Climbing.** A wall that's between 50 and 150 feet in length with preplaced anchors. "Essentially what that does is it makes it so you get all of the physical difficulty of climbing with none of the danger," says Tommy.
- **Free Climbing.** "It's actually a terrible term because [everybody] thinks it means no ropes," says Tommy. "What it means is you are climbing the surface in front of you and you have the ropes that are only there in case you fall."
- **Free Soloing.** "[This] is when you climb without any ropes, and if you fall, you die. You have to do everything perfectly," says Tommy.

**If you're a climber, which one of these do you favor? If you're not, is there one you aspire to try? If you're me, you'll be watching from the ground with sweaty palms (and that's just fine)!**

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## Getting Better at Scary

Tommy says: “A common question I get is ‘How do you get better at these scary things?’ You just expose yourself to minorly traumatizing experiences on a slightly increased level, day after day. At some point, you get better at doing things that most people would consider majorly traumatizing.”

**Around what scary thing would you like to be more comfortable? For instance, if it's heights, you could try sitting on the second story of your building's fire escape for 10 minutes, then the third on the next day, and increasingly higher levels as you can tolerate over the weeks ahead. What's scary to you, and how can you incrementally increase your tolerance for it?**

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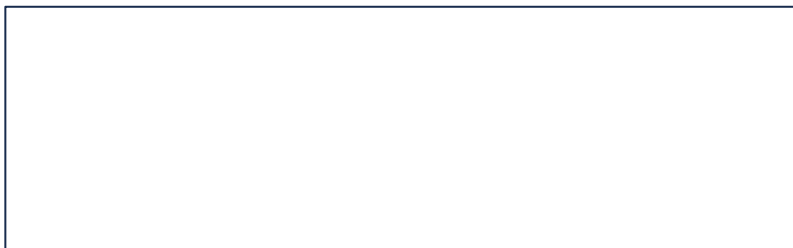
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## Building Confidence

“One really cool thing about climbing is you take things that seem really dangerous or deadly and you figure out ways to make them safe,” says Tommy. “Oftentimes there are ways to make them safe, and that’s kind of an empowering thing. If you can do things that seem improbable or impossible and make them doable in climbing, that opens up the world in so many ways. You start to wonder how it applies in other places in life.

“I was really shy and didn’t like to be social; I got good at climbing because I was so deeply into it. It did bring a lot of confidence into my life, and because of that I’ve been able to take the opportunities that climbs like The Dawn Wall presented and run with them: write a book and be on this podcast right now. This is never the kind of thing that I would have had the confidence to do if climbing had never been there to help me get there.”

**You don’t have to climb thousands of feet vertically up a sheer granite wall to build confidence, but there’s probably something just outside your comfort zone that beckons you in some way — maybe it’s taking an improv class, learning how to play drums, or committing to walk five miles a day. Whatever it is, the odds that it will increase your confidence significantly are pretty good. So what’s it going to be, and when are you going to start?**



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## Relentless Dedication

“A lot of adventure sports, you can take a season off — like snowboarding, for instance — and you still have all those skills and you come back and still operate at a relatively high level,” says Tommy. “In climbing, if you want to climb well, you have to constantly be at it, training, three, four, five days a week. And if you take a week off, you lose so much. Strength, coordination, and the feel of it. You have to be relentlessly dedicated to do it.”

**Is there any craft to which you feel a sense of similarly relentless dedication? It can be anything in which you want to excel — from rowboating to writing to rapping. Practice may not make perfect, but it'll take you closer than anything else. What's going to get you up early on your days off and vacations in order to get or remain in good form?**

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## A Kerfuffle In Kyrgyzstan

In 2000, Tommy and three of his friends were kidnapped by rebel extremists while climbing in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. They were held for six days, experiencing hunger and various stages of hypothermia, until Tommy pushed the one captor who remained to watch them over a cliff and they were able to escape.

“That experience reset my bar for pain and suffering in a way that’s very useful in climbing. When I’d go up in the mountain after that trip and things would get scary or painful, I’d always be able to think back to Kyrgyzstan and be like, ‘This is nothing!’ That gave me this curiosity behind what we can endure as humans. My curiosity to explore that has fueled so much of what I’ve done since. When you see something that dark, the rest of life looks real sunny afterwards!”

**Even if you’ve never been kidnapped, what hardships have you endured from which you’ve emerged stronger as a result? Given the chance for a do-over, would you wish these hardships away at the risk of losing their rewards?**

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

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## 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.

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