

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Ben Horowitz | What You Do Is Who You Are (Episode 270)

Charting the course of a business toward certain success might seem simple to someone sitting on the docks, but the view's a lot different from the captain's quarters. The only thing you can count on is rough seas between here and where you're trying to go, so you'd better assemble a crew suited for the task ahead — and the culture to ensure they're as invested in getting to the other side as you are.

[On this episode](#) we talk to someone who's assembled many crews and formed many company cultures: **Ben Horowitz**, cofounder and CEO of the venture capital powerhouse Andreessen Horowitz and author of New York Times Best Seller [The Hard Thing About Hard Things: Building a Business When There Are No Easy Answers](#) and his latest, [What You Do Is Who You Are: How to Create Your Business Culture](#).

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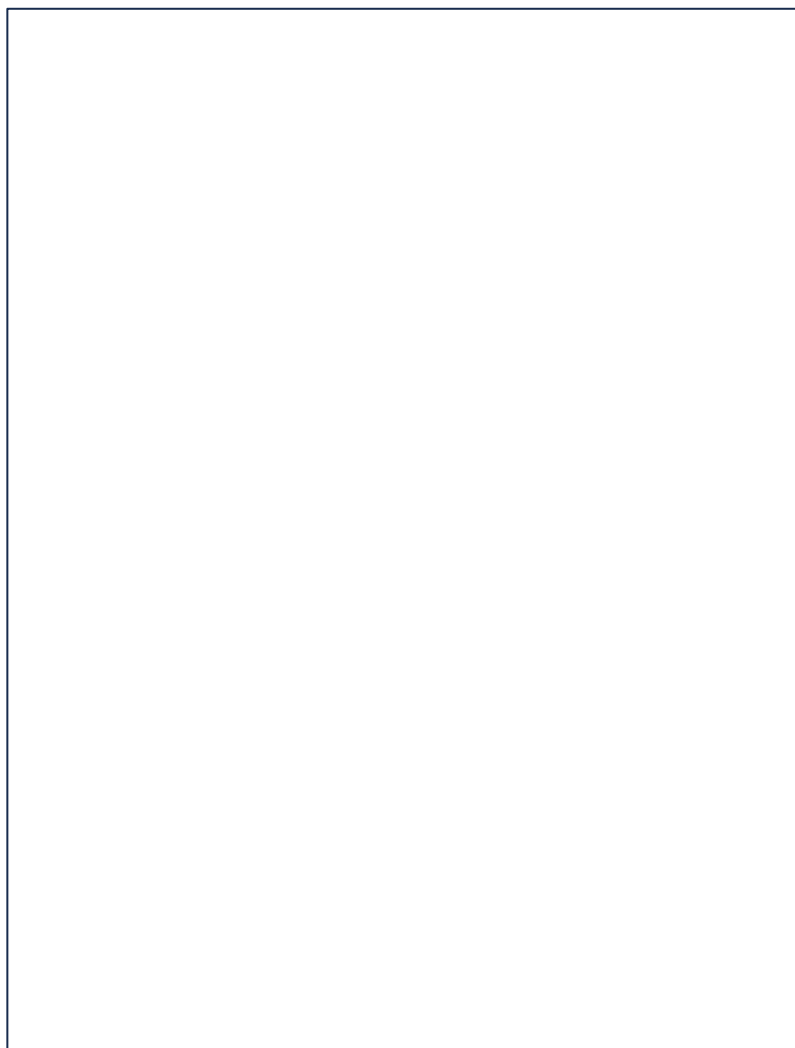
Unexpected Perspectives

It's really easy to look at somebody in the tech sector or investment sector and just say, "These are some pretty square guys that only look at spreadsheets and numbers all day," but that's not really what people like Ben do. He began as an entrepreneur before he became a finance guy, so he looks at things through a lens of culture and leadership, which grants him a perspective many might not expect. Something else you might not expect: Ben's a huge hip hop fan.

"[Hip hop] is a really great example of the power of culture," says Ben. "It started with parties in the Bronx and a very underground kind of thing; nobody in the music establishment thought it was a good idea. MTV didn't want to play the videos. The radio wouldn't play the songs. The record companies wouldn't make albums. There was no infrastructure to support it at all. The kids were all poor, they were all black, and so they're coming up and you'd go like, 'Well, how are they going to succeed against the system?' And then you fast forward to 2019 you go, 'Wow, this is the biggest musical art form worldwide by far.' So how did that happen? A lot of it was the culture they had and there were a lot of elements in it, but the idea that you were going to create something from nothing, the idea that that you were going to get no help and you were going to figure it out...they were all entrepreneurs because they had to be."

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What lessons might your own cultural — or even subcultural — background offer in the way of unique, unexpected perspectives that can be applied to how you — whether in your personal or professional life — get things done?



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Changing Culture: The Haitian Revolution

Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture did what was seemingly impossible at the end of the 18th century: he recruited from low-trust slave culture in which the future was uncertain to build a high-trust military that bested the world's elite of the day — the French under Napoleon, the English, and the Spanish.

“They were the most disciplined army,” says Ben. “They were the one army that didn't rape and pillage. In fact, one of my favorite stories in the book is because he was changing the culture, he said, ‘Look, you can't rape, you can't pillage on the way because we're fighting for liberty, and you can't take away liberty and fight for liberty; they don't go together. We have to be focused on liberty,’ and that adjustment got him the support of the white women in the colony. They supported him over the white armies. They actually called him Father. That's how much they loved the guy.”

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L'Ouverture knew that, in order for the revolution to succeed, he had to militarize and mobilize people who had never seen beyond their own short-term welfare to understand the world from a long-term perspective. First, he had to define that long-term goal: liberty. What is *your* long-term goal? If you're trying to change the culture in your workplace or at home, how might you incentivize the people who look to you for leadership to consider the long-term goal of the whole over short-term considerations?



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Changing Culture: Bushido

The samurai of Japan lived for generations by a code of Bushido, and one of its most important tenets was to “keep death in mind at all times.” But it wasn’t intended so much as a grim reminder of one’s mortality as it was to live as one would want to be remembered if their next moment were their last.

“That, I think, is the most fundamental thing when you’re talking about designing a culture,” says Ben. “Because you really want to say to your people, ‘Look, people 30 years from now aren’t going to remember if we made the quarter. They’re not going to remember if this product had a bug. They’re not going to remember any of these things we’re so focused on. They’re going to remember what was it like to work here? What was this time like of my life? What was it like for the people who touch us and do business with us? What was it like for them? And that all comes from your culture and how you conduct yourself on a daily basis.”

Whenever you’re in a crisis situation, take a cue from the samurai and ask yourself these questions: Is this a good place to work/live? Do people like doing business/interacting with us? Are we proud of the quality of our work? In 30 years, how will we be remembered?

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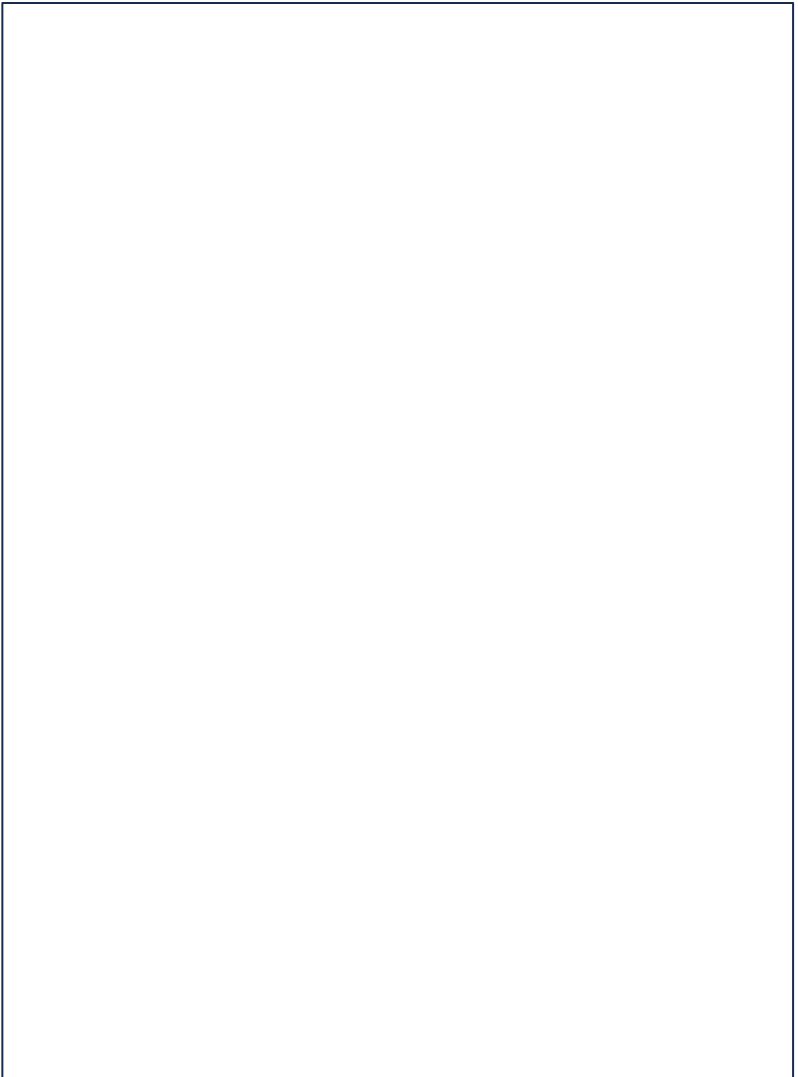
Changing Culture: Genghis Khan

Sure, westerners like to point out that Genghis Khan and his Mongol Horde had an insatiable thirst for blood and power that eventually resulted in history's largest contiguous land empire by the 14th century, but they're really missing the nuances of what made this empire prosper beyond the bloodshed. Contrary to first glance, Genghis Khan wasn't committed to eradicating the diversity of the lands he conquered, but by learning from it. He recognized the value in bolstering his own culture with what made other cultures strong, and this is why Ben had to write the chapter *Genghis Khan, Master of Inclusion* in his latest book.

“He was like, ‘Look, if we’re going to beat these guys,’ says Ben, ‘we’ve got to understand them. We have to understand their way of thinking. We have to adopt what they’re great at and incorporate that into our stuff.’ And I think that if you’re going to sell to Federal Express or The Home Depot or JPMorgan Chase, people in Atlanta and people in Memphis aren’t the same as people in Silicon Valley. You have to understand those cultures if you’re going to do business with them, and you’re not trying to kill them, you’re trying to help them. But you can’t help them if you can’t communicate — if you don’t understand where they’re coming from. The willingness to kind of adapt enough of their culture so that you understand it and can solve their problem, it’s something a lot of entrepreneurs are unwilling to do and I think you see a lot of failure on that basis.”

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How does the work or home culture you're trying to cultivate deal with outsiders? Do you treat them with suspicion and shun their differences, or do you welcome them and learn from how they differ? What might you do to better understand and communicate with them?



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The Leader Must Follow, Too

Cultures always reflect the values of the leader, so you have to be the example of the culture in your own home or office. Basically, you have to walk the walk. For instance, if you want to instill a culture of punctuality, you can't waltz into every meeting and appointment 10 minutes late.

"A lot of the problem is, if you build a culture by consensus, then the leaders themselves may not even be willing to follow it," says Ben. "The correct way is a combination of *who* is the leader, and then *what* is the strategy of the organization, and does the culture *support* that strategy? Apple's products will never be as cheap as Amazon's, and Amazon's products will never be as beautiful as Apple's. They have different strategies and different cultures that support those strategies."

In your office or home culture, who is the leader, what is the strategy, and does your culture support that strategy?

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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