

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Ryan Holiday | Stillness Is the Key (Episode 271)

If you've listened to this show for more than a minute, you've certainly heard of today's guest, author Ryan Holiday. Not only has he been a guest on the show before, but he's been referenced by multiple guests, and he was even mentored by the one and only Robert Greene. He wrote eight books and ghost wrote another six by the time he was 30, and shows no signs of slowing down. He's been cranking out bestsellers for years like a machine, with titles like *Trust Me, I'm Lying*, *The Obstacle Is the Way*, *Ego Is the Enemy*, and *Conspiracy*.

On this episode, Ryan returns to the show to touch upon his latest book, *Stillness Is the Key*, but we tried to have a conversation that was a little more free-form and casual than he usually gets to have when he's making the podcast rounds on a book tour at the behest of his publishers.

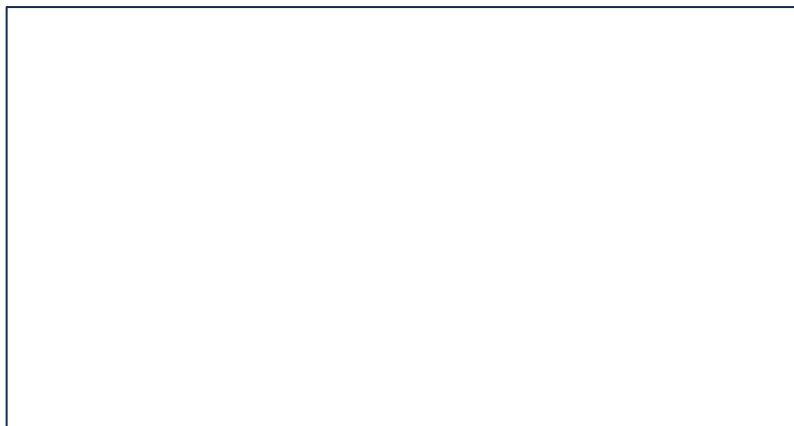
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Not a Zero-Sum Game

When we compare our progress in life against the progress of others, we often forget about the variables that make such comparisons moot. But perhaps the most egregious thing we forget is that other people don't have to fail in order for us to succeed.

Ryan says: "People are like, 'I'm 28. I want to be an author,' or, 'My book came out; it didn't do well.' When I was 28, I had nine years of experience. You have to compare yourself against people who are in your peer group and your age bracket for the amount of years you've been doing it or reps you have, because that's the only measurement that really counts."

By what metrics do you find yourself most commonly comparing yourself to others? When you more closely examine your own timeline against someone else's, try to be kinder to yourself and what you imagine as your shortcomings — there are countless reasons you might be a late bloomer, and none of them should be taken as evidence that you're somehow less than anyone else.



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Yesterday Is Embarrassing

When I listen to podcasts I did 10 years ago, I'm embarrassed. Heck, when I listen to podcasts I did two weeks ago, I'm embarrassed. It turns out this is pretty normal — if we're not a little embarrassed about what the level of our skill looked like at some point in the past, it's a good indication that we're not growing or getting better.

"I wrote my first book in 2011 on my own," says Ryan. "Then I worked with an editor to reshape it. It came out in 2012. Then in 2013, I did an updated, revised, paperback edition, in which I changed some stuff. Then in 2016, I did a third edition of the book. So I've had this weird, unique experience of basically rewriting that book four times. And each time is a horrendous experience because it's mortifyingly embarrassing. I published this!"

What past skills or works of your own from the past make you cringe in retrospect? Remember: growth isn't possible if you remain planted firmly in your comfort zone. If you're embarrassed about what you did yesterday, it's probably because you've grown since then. It's a good thing!

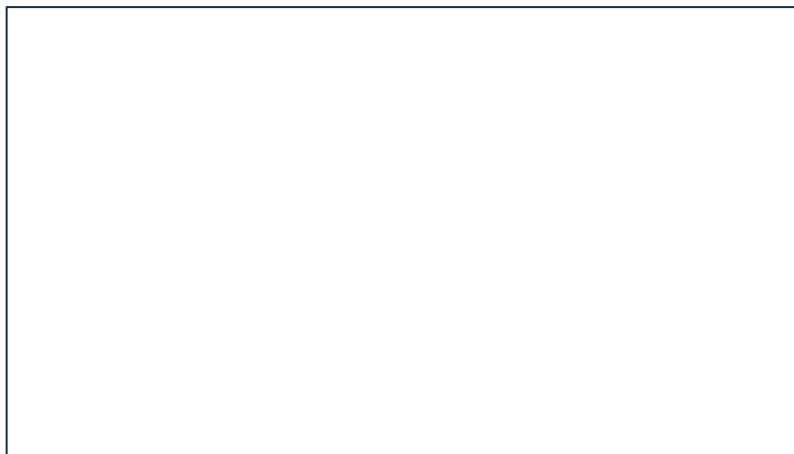
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The Right to Be Wrong

We've all tackled negative — or simply errant — commentary from people on the Internet who we don't actually know in real life. It can show up on social media or in your email inbox, and it can take every shred of self-restraint not to tear into the people who send it our way. I know I don't always succeed, but Ryan reminds us why it might just be better for us to step back and let people be wrong.

"I'll get emails and the person will just be totally wrong about something," says Ryan. "They'll be like, 'Why'd you say this? You should have said this,' and I'm feeling I'm more confident when I can just not respond. 'Cool.' It's okay, but there's the younger part of me that has to make sure to let this person know that they're wrong. I think the less you have of that, the better decisions you make and the less trouble you get yourself into."

The next time you encounter this kind of feedback, try to keep your ego in check and remind yourself what you have to gain by not correcting, lashing out, or otherwise leaning into online negativity.



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This Is Enough.

Ryan and I share a problem: we find it difficult to be satisfied in the moment with work that others tell us we should be proud of. And as I already mentioned, looking back on past work is usually embarrassing. So when can we ever find the time to be satisfied about what we're doing without constantly looking toward the next thing?

Ryan says: "Just going, 'This is it. This is enough.' That's a kind of mantra I try to repeat to myself. And the reason I think it works is that doing a great interview with Malcolm Gladwell or trying to write a book or trying to give a talk in front of this audience is hard enough. How arrogant is it to think you can do that while also using five percent or 10 percent or 50 percent of your mind over here to think about how you're going to get more subscribers? It's not just a waste. It's just like you're cheating the performance."

Sometimes it just takes a reminder — like Ryan's "This is it. This is enough" mantra — to keep us tethered to the present and address the now instead of the later. Whenever you find yourself unable to appreciate what's going on around you right now because you're too busy thinking of the future (or the past), what mantra can you use to snap yourself back into the present?

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Phone on the Range

“My thing is I don’t check my phone in the morning. I don’t use it as an alarm clock, and I try not to check my phone when I’m at home,” says Ryan. Though he grudgingly does use his phone as an alarm when he’s staying in a hotel because the first thing he does when he checks in is unplug the room’s clock. “You have no idea what horrible time some idiot set it to!” he says.

What benefits might you enjoy by not relying on your phone as much as — let’s face it — most of us do today? What exceptional circumstances (like staying in a hotel) might make this reliance unavoidable?

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Up to Date, Out of Touch

Ever feel like you're consuming a lot of news, but you're not really sure of how it's benefiting you aside from being able to talk about current events around the water cooler as if they were plots from your favorite sitcom? You might do it because it feels like you need to stay informed about what's going on in the world, but Ryan has another angle.

"There's no money in making you feel like everything's okay in the world," says Ryan. "I think people just consume way too much news about everything like financial news, political news, celebrity — why are you consuming this information? People think, 'I follow the news to be informed,' and it's like, meanwhile, how many books could you have read about history or the human experience or wisdom or spirituality or whatever that would have actually made you informed in some sort of lasting way?"

Do you feel like you're consuming more useless information at the behest of the media without really feeling like you know anything substantial about what's going on in the world? What alternatives might better serve your desire to understand current events? Might I recommend a certain podcast?

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Finding the Ballpark

Because he began his career path so early in life, people often ask Ryan how they might best determine their own path. For this, he defaults to the wisdom of his mentor Robert Greene.

“What would you do for free?” asks Ryan. “What do you stare out of car windows and think about? I’m not saying that tells you the job, but it should give you a sense of the ballpark of where this career thing is. ‘I read lots of books. I really admire writers.’ Okay, probably something in publishing. And then where do your skills overlap with this? You’re obsessed with baseball. You could be a GM, you could work in the marketing department, you could be a professional baseball player, you could be an agent, you could be the guy that takes care of the field. There’s a lot of different things, but your subconscious told you that baseball was it.”

If you’re similarly seeking clarity on your own career path, what’s the spectrum of jobs that exist on the horizon of your interests? What related skills do you possess — or would be willing to learn — that would point you in the right direction?

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Mr. Rogers and Ritual

Ryan and I discuss the otherworldly power of Mr. Rogers, Cesar Millan, and his toddler's daycare providers to calmly persuade others — whether they're children, animals, or adults. These are people who seemingly operate on a selfless wavelength with an unlimited reservoir of patience and attention that borders on mystic sainthood. They have a disarming earnestness that motivates everyone they encounter with a desire to be better. How do we even begin to understand where this comes from?

“Well, habit is a great place to start,” says Ryan. “What does Mr. Rogers' day look like?” He gets up early. He has some quiet meditative practice. He swims. He eats the same thing. Just even that he's doing the same thing, it's like he's simplifying. He's not picking up energy from, ‘Where do I have lunch? What time does the show start? Should I work out today? Yes or no?’ He could have changed [the intro to his show] up, but he's like, ‘No. Routine.’ You do it for a couple of months. it's a routine, but you do it for 30 years, it's like a ritual. You almost become entranced by it.”

In what ways can you simplify your own daily routines to free up the mental bandwidth for more important things? You might not become Mr. Rogers overnight, but you can certainly harness some of the calm sincerity that governed the way he interfaced with the world.

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“Winning” at Hobbies

When you live a life purely in the pursuit of your profession, it's easy to become bogged down from the stress of always having to be “on.” That's what's so therapeutic about hobbies: nobody (least of all you) is expecting you to be world-class at them. You don't have to “win” your hobbies.

“Winston Churchill after the First World War, he's in the worst sort of spot in his career,” says Ryan. “And his sister-in-law gives him this children's paint set. She goes, ‘My kids seem to have fun. Why don't you try having fun?’ And he falls in love with painting and he painted something like 500 paintings in his lifetime. And he's not good. The paintings don't belong in museums because they're good. They belong in museums because of what the person who painted them was able to do through painting.”

What hobbies distract you from your daily grind? If you don't have any hobbies, what skills or distractions have always aroused your curiosity that might pass as hobbies you don't have to “win?”

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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