

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Dennis Quaid | Sharks, a Bear, and a Banjo (Episode 279)

If you've watched a movie at any point since the '70s, I have no doubt you've seen Dennis Quaid delivering at least one — or maybe 100 — of his groundbreaking performances. He was Mike in *Breaking Away*. He played astronaut Gordon Cooper in *The Right Stuff*. He was Davidge in *Enemy Mine*. He was Doc Holliday in *Wyatt Earp*. He was Nick Parker in *The Parent Trap*. And this is just a very short list. Additionally, he's been fronting a band — *Dennis Quaid and The Sharks* — for nearly two decades. Now, he's a fellow podcaster on *Bear and a Banjo*. Oh, and did I mention he can also fly planes?

In this episode, Dennis opens up about how he taps into his own experiences to play a role, what character research was like in the time before Google (and how it inadvertently led to him learning to fly planes), how his process has changed between now and when he began, the motivating power of fear, what parenting has taught him, and much more.

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The Best Quaid Schemes

Did Dennis simply *follow his passion* to become an actor in his older brother's footsteps, or was there more to it? As [Neil Pasricha said last week](#), "The advice should not be 'Do what you love.' It should actually be 'Do you love it so much that you can take the pain and punishment too?'" Well, Dennis moved to Hollywood from Texas with the purpose of becoming an actor. He slept on his brother's couch until he found roommates willing to split the rent on a small apartment and sleep in shifts. He spent nine months of daily cold calling and interviewing to find an agent. Then he played smaller roles around town for a few years before landing a lead in 1979's *Breaking Away*, which really launched his career in earnest. Even in the decades since then, the work's had its peaks and valleys — but he's still at it.


If you're looking for a new direction to take your life, consider what Dennis put up with to get where he is today. He didn't so much follow a path as cut one through the weeds where those with lesser dedication would have given up and turned back. What do you want out of life that would make *you* cut such a path?

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A Whiter Quaid of Pale

“Fear is a great motivator,” says Dennis. “Probably the best one we have. Especially when I’m doing something new. So just right before going on stage — I [still] get stage fright — I just take that fear, put it right down, because it really makes you focus. Take a breath, maybe a prayer, and just let go and step out.”

Do you find fear to be a great motivator, or does something else drive you? What compels you to focus on the task at hand? Where does the inner voice that tells you to excel originate?



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Live Quaid

“I don’t learn lines,” says Dennis. “I mean, I know the script. I’ve read the script maybe three or four times and really thought about it, but going onto the set that day, I really don’t know the lines. Because it’s film, you’re going to shoot a two, three-page scene. So I listen to the other person, what they’re saying, and that kind of tells me where they’re going, what I’m going to say. It makes you a better listener. It’s not improvising. It’s just listening. After about two or three rehearsals of going through it, you’re blocking and stuff like that. You’re listening to what they say, then you react, because acting is reacting.”

In any given conversation, are you thinking of what you’re going to say next while pretending to listen to the person in front of you, or are you present and conversing in the moment — able to adapt and react naturally depending on which way the “script” goes? Are you a line reader, an improviser, or listener?

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And the Band Quaid On

When Dennis — already a well-known Hollywood actor — wanted to branch out and make music with his band, he was known for performing on stage in bare feet.

“That was probably, looking back, a device I used because I didn’t feel all that confident up there,” says Dennis. “I figured I would try to be anonymously as bad as I could be. I didn’t really want to bring it to record; that’s the reason we waited like, 18 years to record a record. Yeah! We waited 18 years to record it because I wanted to give myself time to be bad and make mistakes, and I did. I’ve been wearing shoes now for a good 10 years on stage; I could tell you that I have more confidence up there now.”

When you’re nervous about entering unfamiliar territory in your personal, professional, or creative life, do you have any similar devices that help you stay anchored when raw confidence alone doesn’t do the trick? If not, what might do the trick?

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

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About



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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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