

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

## Worksheet for John Tierney | Harnessing the Power of Bad (Episode 312)

It's strange when you think about it. You might get 10 adoring compliments on a post you made to social media, but it's the one derogatory comment made by some anonymous troll that draws your focus and sticks forevermore in memory. You remember all the crappy things your boss has said over the past 10 years, but you forget that — on most days — he's nothing but encouraging. Why do we do this to ourselves? Well, it's called the negativity bias, and we've evolved this way to keep out of danger and stay alive. But is the negativity bias just a relic of our cave-dwelling past? Does it still serve a purpose? How can we harness it and get it going in our favor?

In this episode, science writer and *The Power of Bad: How the Negativity Effect Rules Us and How We Can Rule It* co-author John Tierney explains not only why we have this bias, but how it's being weaponized against us by media and news outlets, and what we can do to reverse and even win the battle of the bad.

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Negativity Bias Is Natural

We know these two things about default human behavior:

1. People value losses more than gains.
2. A bad first impression is a lot stronger than a good first impression.

“My co-author Roy Baumeister got kind of intrigued by those two little things, and then he started looking around,” says John. “What he discovered [is] a bad emotion or a bad event had much more power than a good emotion or a good event. And so that’s the negativity bias or the negativity effect. We realize it intuitively to some extent; people know that if someone gives you a lot of compliments and one bit of criticism, you go home obsessing about the criticism and you forget the compliments. But people don’t realize — and social scientists didn’t know it either — just how widespread this is, that it just extends across all domains.”

**In what ways can you identify how negativity bias has colored your impression of the past week? How has it colored the most memorable events of your life?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## The Rule of Four

John says: “To conquer the bad, we have to overwhelm it with good. Many studies — of spouses’ interactions, workers’ moods, and customers’ ratings — have shown that a negative event or emotion usually has at least three times the impact of a comparable positive one.

“To come out ahead, aim for a ‘positivity ratio’ of at least four to one. This Rule of Four has wide applications — in business, parenting, relationships. If you do something to upset your relationship partner, don’t think you can make up for it just by doing one positive thing. If a customer has one bad experience, it’s going to take a lot of good to make up for it. In short, if you always tell yourself to aim to do four positive things, that has a better chance of erasing the bad one.”

**Think of an action from your recent past that you find regrettable. You can’t change the past, but how might you apply this Rule of Four as a way to sincerely right the wrong you’ve committed?**

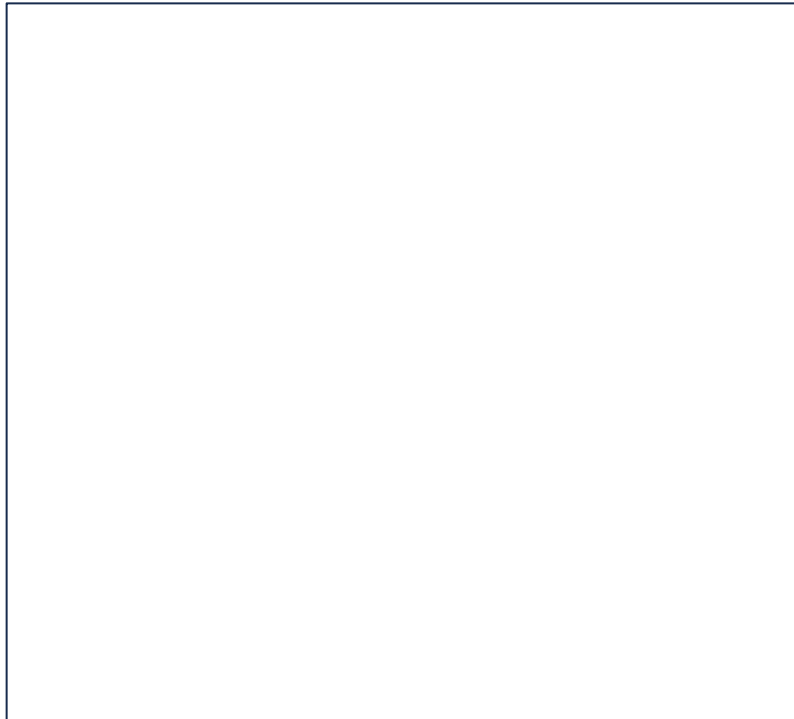
# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## The Low-Bad Diet

When you're surrounded by media outlets spewing out bad news 24/7, it's easy to believe the world's going to Hell in a handbasket. So if the consumption of negative news stories is getting you down, apply the Rule of Four to what John calls the Low-Bad Diet.

**Aim to read or watch four positive stories for every one bad. Work on curating your newsfeed if you see too much negativity online. Silence or hide friends who share too much negativity. Seek out positive stories to drown out the negative. Instead of obsessing about one snarky comment on social media, scroll down and reread the four compliments. (One resource we recommend: [Tank's Good News](#).)**



# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

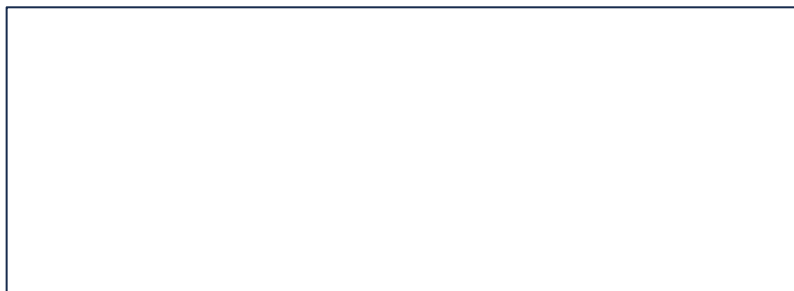
---

## The Safety Addiction

There are plenty of examples of sports professionals who will make what their gut tells them is the safest play — even in situations when a clear-headed statistician would advise their chance of success to be greater going for the riskier play.

“In golf, they’ve done really interesting studies of the way Tiger Woods and other pros putt, and they care much more about avoiding a bogey than making a birdie, and they putt differently,” says John. “If they’ve got two strokes to make it, they’re so fearful of overshooting the hole on that one putt by so much that they’ll end up making a bogey because they’re so far away that they don’t putt as hard and they don’t try as hard to get it in the hole. So they end up avoiding bogeys. They ended up getting more pars, but they lost chances to get birdies. They figure that this costs the average pro \$600,000 a year, if he would just putt normally, instead of having this safety addiction that he’s so afraid of bogeys.”

**It’s better to follow a rule instead of your gut. The rule is to do what someone would do if they were not going to suffer the loss themselves. So pretend you’re a disinterested party — this dampens the emotional impact of making the decision.**



# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## The Negative Golden Rule

What makes some marriages succeed and others fail?

“What they find over and over again is that the good stuff is not what keeps marriages alive,” says John. “What is important is avoiding negativity and dealing with negativity calmly and not letting it spiral. We like to think of all the good stuff we do for people, about going the extra mile, but what really matters is what you *don't* do unto others. That's the negative golden rule. It's what you do *not* do unto others that really matters.”

**Think about the last disagreement you had. Can you imagine how a disinterested third party would look at that argument? What would they think about it? What would they suggest?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Regaining Control from Anxiety

We didn't get to this in the show, but I felt it was an important enough discussion we had post-recording to be included here. If you ever find yourself losing control to anxiety, try these steps to regain that control — as the claustrophobic daredevil Felix Baumgartner did to deal with being cooped up in the pressurized jumpsuit required for his record-breaking skydive from 127,852 feet.

1. **Talk about the fear.** The “bad” loses its totemic power when discussed out in the open.
2. **Map the runaway train.** If, say, you're a claustrophobe who panics in an elevator, the anxiety begins before you get into the elevator — likely when you enter the lobby, or get near the building. Plot the anxiety waypoints in your mind.
3. **Throttle the train.** Once you have the waypoints, don't proceed beyond any of them until you've given yourself time to calm down.
4. **Recite your mantra along the way.** “An elevator is one of the safest places in the world. It's getting me where I need to go.” The lines may sound silly at first, but they're true and will work over time.
5. **Breathe.** Press your hands and feet together for thirty seconds, then relax, and take slow, deep breaths.

*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](mailto:support@jordanharbinger.com)

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW



Share This With  
Your Friends!



**Share This**