

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

## Worksheet for Susan David | How to Improve Your Emotional Agility (Episode 311)

Do we let our self-doubts, failings, shame, fear, or anger hold us back, or can we be determined, persevering toward key life goals with the insight and courage to recognize when these goals are not serving us, and adapt? What if we could understand what our emotions are trying to tell us and learn how to navigate them — even the ones we think of as unpleasant or negative — rather than trying to pave them over with an unrealistic sense of what we think happiness should feel like?

In this episode, Harvard psychologist and *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life* author Susan David helps us find our way around life's twists and turns with insight according to our values rather than knee-jerk "hooks" in which our thoughts, emotions, or stories drive our behavior.

"Emotional agility is the set of skills that we, as human beings, need in order to deal with ourselves and others in a way that's healthy," says Susan. "It enables us to respond effectively to the challenges that life throws at us."

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## The Four Hooks

Susan identifies these four rather unpleasant hooks that commonly intrude on our thoughts, emotions, and stories to dominate our behavior in ways that are often contrary to our well-being.

### The Four Hooks

- **Thought-blaming** (treating thoughts as facts)
- **Monkey-mindedness** (imagining scenarios rather than experiencing them in the moment)
- **Old, outgrown ideas** (relying on obsolete patterns to get us through current problems)
- **Wrongheaded righteousness** (proving ourselves right at any cost)

**Can you identify any of these hooks you've experienced recently? Were you aware of them as they were happening? How did you deal with them then?**

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**Are you prone to any hook in particular? Can you pinpoint what seems to be its cause? Do you usually deal with it in the same way?**

**By reflecting on these hooks now, do you think you'll more easily identify them in the future? How might you process them differently going forward?**

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## The Sad Cost of Chasing Happiness

Happiness is great when it's experienced as a feeling in the moment. But it's a lousy goal. Susan explains:

“People who become overly focused on becoming happy — what we know from the research — is that they become paradoxically more unhappy over time. There's almost this idea that they set expectations about what their lives *should* be about and yet the reality is that life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility. We are baked into a contract with life that has difficulty — that has bad experiences. So when we become overly focused on happiness, we don't allow for the reality of life as it is.”

The second problem is that rejecting the negative emotions we feel and trying to fake happiness is like telling ourselves the red light signaling us to stop at an intersection is actually green: sooner or later, a crash is inevitable. We can't grow (or get to the other side of town) if we ignore what the warning signs are trying to communicate.

Susan shared an example from her own life as a parent of two young children who sometimes feels a sense of guilt when work travel separates her from them for extended periods of time. She knows she could try to ignore the guilt and focus on the things she enjoys about traveling, but then she misses out on the opportunity of learning from what the guilt is trying to tell her: that she cares about presence and connectedness with her children, and there's a lack of those things in her life at that moment. This then allows her to consider adjustments she might make in the future that allow her to realign her life with what she truly values.

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**Think of an unpleasant emotion you've felt this week. How did you deal with it at the time?**

**By understanding this emotion as a form of communication rather than simply an unpleasant intrusion, what do you think it was trying to tell you?**

**What changes might this emotion prompt you to make once you've separated the message from the messenger? Would you deal with this emotion differently today?**

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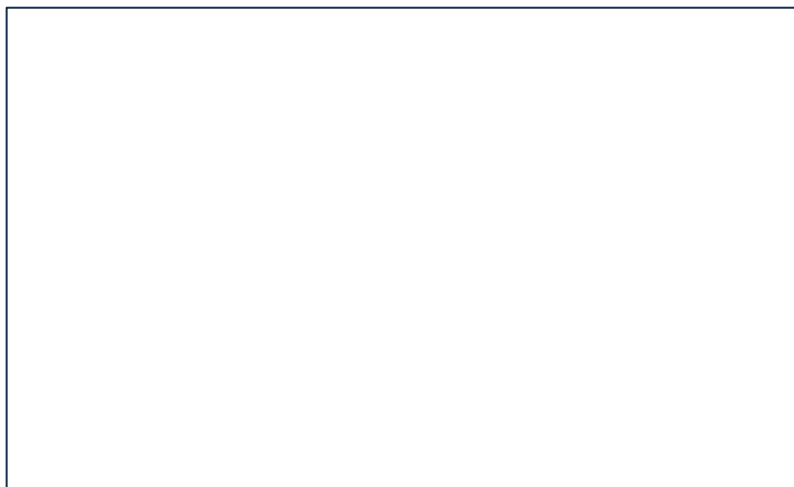
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## Readiness Potential

“Often we use these very broad brush strokes to describe what it is we’re feeling,” says Susan. “If you label your emotion more accurately, ‘I’m stressed’ becomes ‘I’m disappointed.’ This accurate labeling [enables] what is called emotion granularity. Emotion granularity actually allows us to start saying, ‘Oh, I’m feeling disappointed. *Why* am I disappointed? *What* support do I need? *What* do I need to do about this?’

“So accurately labeling our emotions allows our brains to activate what’s called the readiness potential. And it’s this potential that literally starts to prepare us to take concrete steps to change the situation.”

**Instead of treating an unpleasant emotion as a general obstacle that’s keeping you away from feeling “good,” try to pinpoint its purpose as a gauge that’s trying to lead you toward solutions. If you more accurately label it, you can better understand how it can help you.**



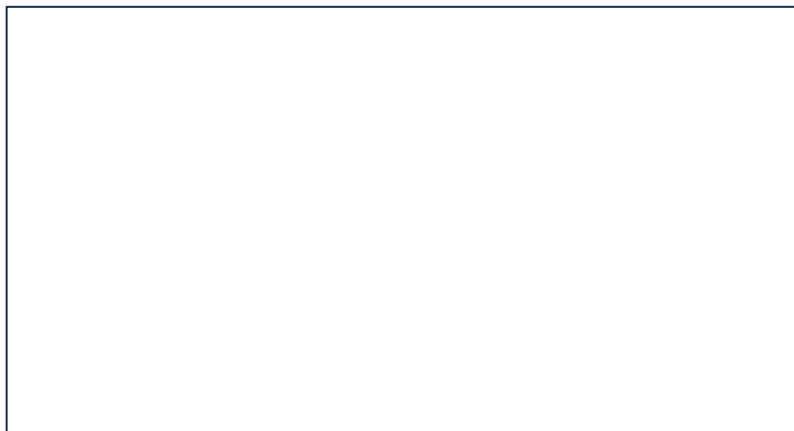
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## Stepping Out

“What is it that likely differentiates us as human beings?” wonders Susan. “We’ve all had this. It’s this ability to experience an emotion and to step out of it at the same time. This is our human skill. It’s our human superpower. It’s this ability to experience an emotion and to also rise above that emotion. Why is it so important? It’s the cornerstone to empathy. What is empathy? Empathy is about being able to experience our emotion, but also to move into the emotional space of another human being. It allows us to get perspective on our emotions and their different strategies we can use to develop the skill. Being able to notice a thought, emotion or story for what it is.”

**Next time you’re emotionally charged and about to make a decision (or a snarky comment) you know you’ll later regret, try stepping out of the situation and separating the emotion from the course of action before you. Remember that the feeling will fade, but the consequences of what you do in that moment may not.**



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## What to Take Away

Susan David explained why expecting happiness at every turn is a surefire recipe for repeated disappointment because life is never going to be perfect — and positivity is not the cure-all it's cracked up to be. Ignoring the feedback we're trying to send ourselves by way of an unpleasant emotion robs us of the opportunity to learn and make changes that allow us to grow — simply because we don't like the looks of the messenger.

Developing emotional agility helps us overcome the hooks that commonly intrude on our thoughts, emotions, and stories to dominate our behavior in ways contrary to our well-being. Rather than ignoring them and pretending we're always happy and that everything is fine, emotional agility gives us the resilience to identify and accept the feelings that stress us out and put strategies in place that use them to our advantage.

As Susan says, "Discomfort is the price of admission to a meaningful life."

**Make sure to [take Susan's free Emotional Agility quiz here!](#) Over 120,000 people have taken this free, five-minute assessment. The answers are analyzed and respondents receive a 10-page personalized report that describes their various Emotional Agility strengths and development areas.**

*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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