

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Ozan Varol | How to Think Like a Rocket Scientist (Episode 338)

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to think like one. The same strategies that put Neil Armstrong on the Moon can also help you make your own giant leaps in work and life. You just have to make sure you're not stuck in the all-too-common rut of trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions.

In this episode, we tap into the expertise of former rocket scientist **Ozan Varol**, an award-winning law professor and author of *Think Like a Rocket Scientist: Simple Strategies You Can Use to Make Giant Leaps in Work and Life*. We'll discuss reframing questions to generate new insights, the benefits of consulting amateurs, brainstorming failure, and much more.

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First-Principles Thinking

“First principles is a way of questioning outdated assumptions as if you’re hacking through a jungle until you’re left with the fundamental components,” says Ozan. “So when you apply first-principles thinking, you leave behind the baggage of history. You almost force yourself to unlearn what you know and then you relearn. You clear the path to create a better tomorrow.”

Elon Musk used first-principles thinking to deduce that building new rockets from scratch would be far less expensive than buying old rockets from Russia, and Jeff Bezos challenged the long-held belief that rockets could only be used once and created reusable rockets. What long-held beliefs of your own are ready to be whittled down and rebuilt with first-principles thinking?

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Consulting External Expertise

You might have trouble channeling first-principles thinking because you're so close to the problem you're trying to solve that it's never occurred to you there might be other ways to approach it. This is where bringing in an outsider's perspective can pay off. "Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos were both outsiders to rocket science," says Ozan. "Elon Musk came from the Internet world. Jeff Bezos was a finance guy ... [they were able to] challenge a lot of the assumptions that industry giants had taken for granted." People who aren't experts aren't afraid to ask "dumb" questions.

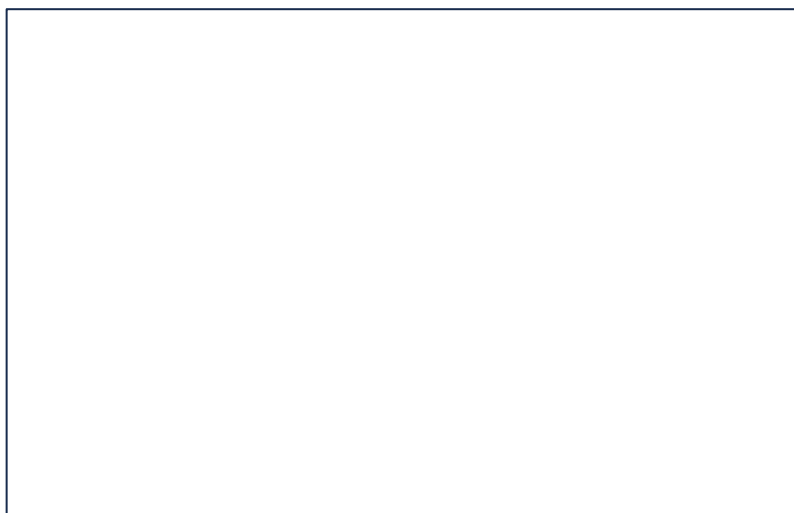
When you're really banging your head against the wall in search of a solution to a problem, consider who among your friends or colleagues might already be standing on the other side of the box you're trying to think outside. Make a short list of the smart people in your life who might offer their external expertise to the questions that keep spinning in your head like treadless tires in the mud.

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Ditching Yesterday's Solutions

“A lot of our processes and habits are backward-looking,” says Ozan. “So if you pull up the standard operating procedures of a typical company, you’ll find a lot of processes that were implemented in response to problems of yesterday, and those problems no longer exist. So it’s important to question them.”

With each commitment, each presumption, each budget item, ask yourself: “What if this weren’t true?” “Why am I doing it this way?” “Can I get rid of this or replace it with something better?” If you’re in charge of a business, you could also ask: “What if you had not already hired this person?” “What if you had not already installed this equipment?” “What if you had implemented this process or bought this business or pursued the strategy — would you be doing the same thing that you are doing today?”



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The \$5 Challenge

“Tools can be the subtlest of traps.” -Neil Gaiman

“A strategy is a plan for achieving an objective, whereas tactics are the actions you take, the questions you ask, the tools you use to implement that strategy,” says Ozan. At Stanford University, **Professor Tina Seelig presents her students with a \$5 Challenge**: What would you do to earn money if all you had was five dollars and two hours?

Ozan points out: “If you can walk away from the tactic and ask yourself, ‘What is the five dollars here to achieve?’ which is making as much money as possible, and you’ve reframed the question more broadly to focus on that broader picture, it becomes easier to walk away from a flawed tactic and see other possibilities lurking in plain sight.”

How many ways can you think of to make money with \$5 and two hours? In what ways might you sidestep the distraction of the stated parameters to create inobvious solutions?

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The George Costanza Lesson

What do a rocket scientist and Seinfeld's George Costanza have in common? When faced with minimal success in pursuit of a desired outcome, they each dared to ask: "What if we did the opposite of what we've been doing all along?" One discovered GPS by way of Sputnik, and the other got the number of an attractive stranger who, it could be argued, was way out of his league.

If you've been trying to wrap your brain around how to navigate the path to a desired outcome, try to imagine what might result by taking the opposite approach. The simple process of thinking through the opposite will make you question your assumptions and jolt you out of your current perspective.



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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