

LISTEN

LIKE A

BADASS

BY JOSH RACE



Listen Like a Badass

Use tactical empathy to resolve your daily crises, (with a little help from the FBI).

Josh Race

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For my family.

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Learn to Listen Like a Badass

Discover your truth and freedom with a conversational listening practice

“Our own thoughts and actions are the jailers of our fate — they imprison, if they are base; they are also the angels of freedom — they liberate, if they are noble.”

~ James Allen, *As You Think*

Why would I want to teach you to *Listen Like a Badass*?

So you can recognize the lonely echo of your prison cell.

And choose to sing your anthem of freedom instead.

Make it so with a conversational listening practice.

Prologue

I have two young boys. One is a just a toddler, less than 2 years old. He has big round innocent brown eyes and muscular legs that start him bouncing at the first note of any music. He also has an unusually loud and deep voice for a toddler. He could be a great singer when he's older. All the women say "aww he's so cute" any time they hear him say yes, because he adds "sh" to the end, "yesh." I chuckle... because they have no idea.... If they only knew the wretched moaning that he produces, the only thing left to say in a moment of cuteness would be, "aww thank goodness he's not moaning."

One day I picked my boys up from daycare and brought them home to make dinner. Everyone was tired, and Henry started to moan as soon as we came into the house. Knowing he was probably hungry, the first move I made was to get him some apple juice and goldfish to hold him over until my wife got home. But when I put the goldfish on his tray, a staccato of "No. No. No. NooAAOH!" blasted out, followed by him throwing handfuls of goldfish. Then even louder moaning.

Ok - that's kind of humorous looking back. But the problem was that it wasn't just one day. This was groundhog day. I started to worry that maybe Henry had some kind of underlying thing that causes behavioral disorders of some sort. This kind of loud protest wasn't normal. His older brother Iroh never did this.

And on this particular day Henry's demanding tone had such an edge, it couldn't really be labeled moaning. It was more like hearing a dentist's drill slip, and saw across your teeth. I quickly became impatient, even surprised at my own irritation, I didn't know how to satiate the moaning, and I

needed to escape.

A few years earlier, I had been standing in the pediatrician's office with my 1st newborn, and the doctor asked me, with a serious look into my eyes, "Are you ready for this?" I was like, "pffft, yea man, I'm 40 years old, I got my shit together man, I'm the Boss when it comes to fatherhood."

But in reality... this moaning... it was shredding apart my confidence. No, I was not ready for this painful groundhog day. I was hot with inner rage, fists clenched, thinking how easy it would be to just slug the little boy in the skull. In a flash image I saw my trouble end in a flex of rage.

Red flags went up. This is not what I was committed to as a father. I didn't know what to do. "I need help!" I thought. I was in a state of shock. The hostility inside me was scary, and in a snap I was criticizing myself, *What's your problem man? He's just an innocent baby!* Other new parents might know this experience.

Let me make this very clear... especially for you Dad's out there. When you find yourself in this situation, reach out for help. Call a friend. Don't just sweat it out, or sweep it away. The impulse to hurt your children is not uncommon, but you don't want to become a statistic either. When you are at the edge, don't wait to talk it out later with your therapist, or complain about it to friends. Just get into conversation with someone you know and trust and let them know what you are feeling.

I'm fortunate to have such a friend. I picked up the phone and called my friend Doug for some of his *heroic listening*. I shared the specific details with him... I had worked a full day and was unusually tired. I was home alone with two whiny and demanding toddlers, and Henry was at the peril

of my anger. I shared how I had managed to avert a couple of impulses to snap, and I feared the image of finishing off the crying with my fists.

Doug listened. Then I listened back. He empathized with me. He played back some of the details about what I was going through. And then he shared with me how he knew I loved my children very much. Doug had heard me. And miraculously, in a few short minutes during the conversation, Henry and Iroh stopped crying and completely chilled out. I was left in awe... “hmmm, could it be that, if I stop *my* inner crying, then my kids stop *their* outer crying?”

This crisis transformed me from nearly becoming criminal, to having a peaceful dinner with my family. The power of a short transformational conversation made a difference that felt like a moment of grace. And I know it was, because I hear the news. There are statistics of parents that ... you know, become statistics.

Thankfully I’ve made friends with people who know how to listen without adding in their judgement or heavy advice giving into the mix. Doug and I were both in a small peer coaching group, practicing listening and active conversation. So when I heard myself say, “I need help,” I immediately knew who to call.

I do love my children... very much. And I’m blessed to have people like Doug in my life to make it possible to enjoy them fully.

Introduction

We human beings on this planet are incredibly diverse. But we share a common operating system of survival, which happens to make it difficult to hear each other. We fight and kill each other over misunderstandings, and fail to notice our common needs.

Not only do we struggle to listen to others, we don't do a great job of listening inward to ourselves. And if we are going to make peace together on this earth, than examining ourselves is a great place to start.

Most everyone wishes self knowledge and mastery for themselves. You probably know a way you can reflect, rejuvenate, and restore in a healthy way - do you? The challenging question for everyone is, how do you put that knowledge of personal well-being into regular practice?

And what if you do but it doesn't work? What if the things you try and practice don't address the root of what's undermining your well-being and happiness?

Research on centenarians has shown that not only do good genes and diet contribute to longevity. Even if you have those, you won't live as long as you could if were to keep close friendships... your real life social network.

And the biggest challenge to our ability to develop friendships is our own inner voice of fear and cynicism.

We are being hijacked by our primitive survival and emotional brains all the time, acting out behaviors of self-preservation, even when those behaviors are in fact *counterproductive*. How often do you wish that you had done or said something differently?... in a nicer way? Or wish you were

more courageous to approach someone with a request... like asking for a raise, or asking someone out on a date?

Not asking the question is counterproductive. But if we tune into our own minds with skillful listening, it's possible to notice when the hijacking is going down, learn to remain calm, and even discover the freedom to consciously choose behaviors that align with our values, and find the courage to act on them.

Skillfully listening in on your own thoughts creates the possibility for a personal *carefrontation* with your inner hijackers. It's a personal moment of truth.

In an emotional crisis, you don't want to trigger rash or forced decisions, but you don't want to run or avoid the situation all together either. You want to calmly influence your usually reactive self into playing along with your higher order, intelligent decision making self.

"With most people, the bark of thought is allowed to drift upon the ocean of life."

~ James Allen

This short book was written to help you accept the reality that your inner world isn't always playing nicely with the outer world of reality. It's a manifesto to acknowledge your breakdowns or crises, no matter how large or small, and get out of your own way. It's also a recommendation to connect with new friends to practice specific conversational tactics together.

Getting out of your own way helps you get out of other people's way, and even contributes to them getting out of their own way too. So this book is not only meant to help you, but it's meant to help you help your loved ones, too.

My goal is to help you develop a conversational listening practice for the long run. And hopefully, you can generate a larger community who value giving an ear for each other, as a clear mirror.

Like the conversation I had with Doug about me with my boys... when I got out of my own way, it immediately affected how they were feeling too. And later Doug shared back with me, he doesn't practice listening and empathy to be a hero for someone else. He jumps in the hell hole with others so he can discover his own true self.

—

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

~ Carl Rogers

Getting out of your own way might feel like holding your breath at first. You have to keep distinguishing fact from feeling, crystallizing your values, and making real commitments to stand by them. When you do, thankfully there's a breath that follows. It's an inevitable experience of freedom.

You have to make it a practice though, because it's human nature to fallback on routines, even when they don't work. We autopilot right through small crises without pausing to reflect.

For example, imagine you get home from work, but the meeting you had at work today is still on your mind. A co-worker quipped about how the company will never change and shot down your idea for improvements with complaints of futility. Now you are stewing in anger towards yourself for not being able to stand up for your own ideas. So you drink a glass of wine and watch some TV. Everything softens, and you let it go. But, is it really *done*?

Or, imagine you are waiting for a delayed flight - when traveling with small children. The gate agent finally announces boarding, beginning first with passengers with small children. But everyone stands up in line immediately. After a few moments of disbelief you go straight to the gate agent and ask, "Are you still just boarding for passengers with small children?" And he says, "Well, that was the idea, but then everyone decided to get in line right away." Then he shrugs, and says, "It doesn't matter really since everyone is going to the same place anyway." You decide to stay calm and not make a scene, despite knowing he didn't manage the crowd professionally.

In either case, what do you do the next day? Do these little paper cuts just self-heal? Or do you work to get closure on them and find new footing in your relationships at work, or resolve your story about the gate agent? What's it worth to you to feel complete with it?

You might be thinking... a little drama is no big deal. Dwelling on spilt milk isn't worthwhile. Agreed... it's not a big deal.

But if you just walk away from the drama, try asking yourself... are avoiding anything? If you keep the story in your head, the milk keeps getting spilled. The goal is learn how to stop spilling the milk after the fact. With a little self care, you

can find some freedom from spilling it again.

Whether your crisis is an oversized drama, or it's a mere annoyance. For simplicity, let's just call it a crisis, large or small.

It's your primitive hind brains job (commonly referred to as the lizard brain) to trigger emotions, and your forebrains job (your center of higher rational intelligence) to make meaning out of them. These two like staying busy.

Your lizard brain is designed to make snap judgements without thinking, and your forebrain is frequently taking mental shortcuts to make sense of the situation as quickly as possible. When you make assumptions without further analysis, you end up getting in your own way.

**With a listening practice, you will start
identifying and undoing the recurring crises.
You feel centered, and engaged with life.**

Diffusing anger is one beneficial outcome. Overcoming the impulse to blame or complain about others is another possibility. Holding yourself accountable to your goals, getting traction with a sense of purpose, staying centered in your well being... these are all outcomes that ensue from your committed practice to resolving the small daily crises.

By using simple tools like meditation, a daily action plan, and focused listening in conversations, there is a way to work yourself out of the recurring crises.

Learning a conversational listening practices gets you to the truth. You learn to consistently tease out new revelations, and transform your heart and mind.

And... we can learn to do this, by studying the ways of the FBI.

The Goal of This eBook

Study the ways of the FBI?

Some books that are specifically about listening include thriller-like scenes of hostage negotiators artfully undoing hardened criminals. Others are about business dealings... you know the kind... how to influence others to get what you want.

I want you to get what you want too. But there are worldly wants and there are underlying motivations that need to be satisfied. Don't you really want the underlying truth? It's a deep truth want. Let's make sure we are starting with a deep truth want.

The deep truth *want* we are after here is freedom from our emotional hijackers.

Our emotions can take us hostage, from the simple rant about slow drivers and slow restaurant waiters, to a complex story of self hatred caused by personal failure in love or career.

This might seem like a selfish endeavor, given the state of world affairs. Clearly we need to get better at listening to one another. But like any flight safety instruction you've heard, put on your own oxygen mask first before trying to help others.

In this book you are going to learn how to identify the emotional hijackers in yourself, and apply tactical empathy. Using the research backed frameworks from leadership coaches, and the field tested tactics of FBI hostage crisis negotiators,

you will learn to consistently hear and transform your inner suffering into freedom.