

**Jan Koch:** Hey friends. Thank you so much for joining this session. I am here with one of my favorite authors and I'm not saying this to sugar coat and I told them off camera already. I genuinely mean it. Donald Robertson, the author of how to think like a Roman emperor. You can see it's a little bit worn out already because it's one of the books that I read every single day.

And Donald is a cognitive behavior psychotherapist and authentic trainer Scottish by birth, but then immigrated to Canada. And now he spends half his time in Athens, Greece, you are doing some pretty exciting stuff in, in. And so I would love to, to dive into that today, but your book, how to think, like Roman emperor really set the stage and I'm glad we connected because this book has a big impact on me and how I run the business, how I deal with challenges and all that good stuff.

So thank you so much for being with us today.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Well, it's a pleasure. I'm very much looking forward to our conversation.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, same here. Same here. Um, before we started recording, I said that stoicism comes up in the conversations I have with my entrepreneur friends over and over again. And it seems that there is some magic sauce in the, in this philosophy that helps entrepreneurs and business owners deal with challenges and our love for you to give us an overview of what stoicism really is.

And maybe somebody watching. Already lives by stoicism without even knowing it.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Yeah, well, there's a number of ways of describing it. So first of all, who are these guys? And will this come from? So stoicism is a brunch of Greek philosophy. Um, it was founded in 301 BC and Athens by a guy called . And people may have heard of some of the, there were many Stoics and stoicism flourished for about five centuries, but the, the stories that people are most platelets.

We'll be in the later ones from the Roman period, because it became popular later in Rome. And so they may have had a Seneca, paps, Epictetus, Marcus Sebelius, and also a kind of honorable mention goes out to, or is one of the famous orators of antiquity. Wasn't a stoic, but he was really into stoicism and wrote a lot about it.

So he's one of our main sources and, you know, what did they believe? Stoicism was very hand-foot heavily influenced by a philosopher from an earlier generation called Socrates is kind of the quintessential Athenian philosopher. And so they took a lot of ideas from him and really focused more than the other schools of Greek philosophy.

The Stoics focused on the practical side, the philosophy on philosophy, we can say as a favorite. Of the passions as a form of psychotherapy, I means of developing emotional resilience and their central doctrine, which really our model doctrine. It's the idea that virtue is the only true, good. That's how they phrase it.

Um, but then they'll go on and say the, to explain that takes a lot of elaboration. And, uh, one of the main consequences of their moral philosophy happens to be that it has emotion. Implications, if you accept that philosophy and it seems to lead to greater emotional resilience. So one of the reasons that suits us as popular today is that it's the original philosophical inspiration for cognitive behavioral therapy, which is how I originally got into it.

Because as you mentioned, I'm a COVID behavioral psychotherapy. By profession who happens to have a couple of degrees in philosophy. Um, so I, I can have inevitably wind up looking at stoicism cause that's the, there, there were a philosophy in psychotherapy kind of.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah. One thing that, uh, applies to me or that I appreciate about stoicism is what you've said already.

That the practical implications of this philosophy, I've never thought of myself as being a philosopher or studying philosophy or something. Yet. I find myself with your book on the table. I have Ryan holiday's the daily stoic right next to that on the table. And so at some point. I have to say myself that I'm, I'm a business owner and I'm a philosopher.

And I know that this event is really about email marketing in this building, but I find that. Even when I set out an email marketing campaign, for example, there are so many challenges and so many setbacks that can happen in so many curve balls, dive throws at you. Sometimes that you have to have this resilience that you've mentioned.

You have to know when things go wrong. How do I deal with this? And the one concept that you elaborate in your book, that markets are really originally came up with. I think. Is, uh, the concept of cognitive dis distancing and then looking

at an event by its parts in itself. So rather than looking at an event in a whole, you, you try to break it down and then it's, it's this thing bad or good, or is it indifferent than itself?

And this philosophy helped me personally, quite a bit to deal with challenges.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Yeah, there are many, I mean, I suppose I've been writing about stoicism for a long time though. It's been a quarter of a century, but 25 years since I first became interested in it. And the first book that I wrote, I tried to provide an overview that was in.

Academic philosophers and, uh, professional psychotherapists looking at how stoicism and CBT related. And I try to list all the psychological techniques I could find in the story, what future. And I went back after because they counted them at the time. Funnily enough, I just listed. So have I recently encountered it.

So it was editing second edition of that book and there were about 18 distinct psychological techniques, roughly we can find. So they have not just one or two techniques, but our whole toolbox of. Psychological techniques, kind of cognitive behavioral techniques. We might call them including, you know, some of the ones that you just mentioned, or some of the key ones that the Stoics employed for coping with stress and also managing anger, uh, overcoming bad habits, dealing with depression, anxiety, all those kinds of.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah. Yeah. I think that, especially for the entrepreneurial audience we have here, I think a frustration, depression, anxiety are some emotions that, that we have to go through on a regular basis with the roller coaster of being an entrepreneur entrepreneur. It's not, not, you need to have this framework of beliefs and techniques that you don't.

Don't go crazy about all the things that happened, because sometimes you just feel like a firefighter you're constantly putting out fires every day. Uh, I would love to hear some of the more effective and more practical methodologies you think stoicism gives us entrepreneurs to cope with the situation.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Y I, I simplifies, you know, uh, because, uh, I think what we usually do put themselves out there and, uh, outbreak series that they expose themselves to a lot of risk. They expose themselves to a lot of responsibility, a lot of pressure. So it takes guts and emotional resilience to be, and, and it takes psychological.

To be a successful entrepreneur. I think, you know, one of the things that potentially would differentiate someone who's successful from someone who isn't would be in part their ability to cope with the pressure and to remain focused and, uh, you know, uh, not, not just to lose it, uh, when, cause some things things can get prayed, airy.

My widow of your, your whole life is at stake and, uh, your businesses have stake and it's all on. Um, so that can be a lot of pressure techniques that the Stoics use to cope with stress. There are many, and you've mentioned some already, but, uh, some of the let's start with what's perhaps the most fundamental.

And my view, the single most widely quoted passage from the story comes from a book called the anchor or the handbook of Epictetus and it's passage number five. And it says it's not things Upsetters, but rather our opinions about them. And the reason that's a widely quoted is because it used to be an, almost every book on cognitive behavioral therapy because, um, cognitive therapy.

And the way they do something that is kind of similar to public health, they have to study really kind of intense. Um, psychological research is evidence-based and then they have to sit down with ordinary people like random people, and somehow communicate with them about this syrups. It's difficult to put into words and the fundamental.

Basis of cognitive therapy is what we call the cognitive theory of emotion. It's the idea that our thoughts and our beliefs shape the way that we feel shape our emotions, which may seem obvious, but many people really don't grasp that initially. And if anything, the most what I would say, actually fundamentally I kind of deep level first off, whoever, one of the most powerful things you can do to gain resilience is just to grasp that basic idea completely.

So the way I like to explain it is that Alper ale is one of the pioneers of cognitive therapy. He'd sat down the clients and clients and therapy of coaching, but we usually talk about her anxious or depressed or angry they are and how these feelings are ruining their life, causing them problems at work, damaging their relationships, maybe affecting the sleep fate in the health.

So it sounds terrible. And these are all reasons to change. But then usually the client having kind of talk themselves into a corner we'll express stuckness. So go, I know this is terrible. I can't do anything about it. It it's just how I feel. And Alice would win follow-ups and smile at them at that point and say, yes, but it's not just how you feel as it.

It's also how you think. And that's what they were missing. Right. Because our feelings don't just come from nowhere. They're shaped by underlying values, beliefs, attitudes, and this knew that two and a half thousand years ago. And it became the basis of the philosophy. It's not things that upset us, but rather our opinions about them.

And so really grasping up is what we call cognitive distancing. And the distancing we're referring to is actually the distance between our thoughts or beliefs and the event. The two, which they refer. So it's creating a separation as mark Sibelius sometimes calls it between our thinking and external events.

So a good example would be, if I say, if I lose my job and I say, Jesus is awful, it's a catastrophe, rather than just seeing it as a objectively at the task. As if the catastrophic nature of it is somehow they are. And I'm just describing what I see, um, cognitive distancing. We'd be realizing that I'm catastrophizing the event that nature doesn't give to her.

So, uh, it's a indifferent. My it's just stuff that happens. Right. But I see it as catastrophic and someone else might view it as an opportunity or they might see it. Transient temporary and a setback, or they might see a, is not as bad as it seemed as bad, but not catastrophic. Also my future self, like 10 years from now, looking back on it, I might view it.

Definitely. I might see it actually is a, an opportunity to explore a new line of work or a welding experience or something like that. And not exactly in the same way as. So cognitive distancing is also, there was something called cognitive flexibility as realizing that there might be other ways of framing or looking at the situation and kind of loosening up the GRA the, our values or beliefs have over, uh, the event.

And now ladies, a couple cold therapy. We used to think this was a kind of preamble, like a precursor to doing proper therapy. And then about 15, 20 years ago, the next generation of researchers realized that actually this is almost an entire therapy in itself. It's much more powerful in fact, than, than people originally assumed.

Um, because simply by gaining that separation, it really diverts the emotional life. And allows us to become better at problem solving. Um, so it's a slightly subtle technique, but it's one of the most powerful techniques. And there are a number of different ways of gaining this distance. But the basic one actually.

The, it comes from an insight. It comes from really understanding, um, that our feelings are shaped by these beliefs and value judgments, and that we're projecting them onto external events and taking full ownership for that and making that kind of your, all the stories won't make that into an entire philosophy of life.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, this is such a powerful concept for me. It was, uh, it began with thinking about self awareness and trying to recognize my thoughts and my feelings so that I could even examine them. And one example most recently was the week we are recording this interview. My doctor she's 16 months. She got to the hospital.

And obviously it was my first child and due to Corona and restrictions, I couldn't be with my wife and my daughter. And I heard the stories that the hospital was overloaded with work and they couldn't treat her properly and stuff. And I was sitting at home. I was freaking out because of course I wanted to, I wanted to be there for my girl and I wanted to protect her from all the harm and I couldn't do anything with it.

And then it's. I am probably into stoicism for three years by now. And it took literally everything that I had learned so far to be able to take the step back and to just see. This is what I can do here are the options that I have this in itself is neither good, nor bad, because I cannot do anything at this point.

How do I make the most out of the situation? How do I best serve my family? How do I take care of that? The business is still running, even though I'm freaking out like a headless chicken and the, these things. I think they start with self awareness so that you get the, this click that, that you recognize that you are catastrophizing, that you're projecting what you've learned in the past, maybe onto the future, because when the same, even when a bad event happens in the past, we remember it.

And we think of what happened the same time again in the future. Um, the, the thing was for me, Um, that I'm experiencing, it's hard to phrase this, but sometimes I'm upsetting people around me with, with this perspective, because they think like I'm overly simplifying things sometimes, and I don't join their train of emotional catastrophizing and stuff like that.

So this is, this is a challenging concept when, when you are around people.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Yeah. Well that's because people are all wrong about how emotions work, um, based to be honest. Um, we don't really don't want to

hear that though. They are not, they don't, of course they don't want to hear that. Um, but that's why we have psychotherapy and psychology is because most of us are never really taught as children how our emotions work.

And geez, man, it's not like we have five seasons of reserve studies on how emotions function. And there are things that we are kind of discovering. And then the things that we've known for like, well, over half a century, there are kind of open secrets are taken for granted by researchers. And yet they're still not taught in school.

But really, really basic things about the way, for example, the role that our police have in shaping our emotions would be something that's kind of Glint, blatantly obvious at most psychologists. But a lot of people still talk about their emotions as if they just wait. They come from nowhere and they just can happen to them and they don't have any control over.

Uh, I actually, I, let me, I'll go on my hobby horse for a second and kind of rant about something that I think is important. This is, there are many things that I wish we could teach them. So one of them is the way that we talk about emotions is incredibly simplistic, right? Some psychologists in the past have coated the lump theory of emotion.

So we talk about anger as if it's like a thing. I kind of Wells up within me. When I start to get angry, I was just angry. You're angry. It's like, you know, Amorphous blob of anger that we have. Right. Um, so it's almost like there's no attempt at all to properly dissect or analyze what our emotions consist of and let that say, generally people talk about it.

You know, if you've got any interest in psychology emotions and you listen to people talking about their feelings, it just seems like there's zero analysis. Like it's just a way of just getting. And it takes different forms. Same as anxiety and depression. There are sensations. There are action tendencies that contribute to that.

There are facial expressions that contribute to our experience of anger. Um, there are patterns of thinking, but the most fundamental distinction that we can make. So there are many distinctions. I would say that anger, anxiety, depression, the way I tried to explain it to clients is to say, it's like, imagine it's like a cake that's baked of many ingredients.

It's not just like one thing, your anger, your anxiety or depression. It's a recipe that you've cooked. Y it's made from this bag or some flour or some shit. It goes

into their thoughts, actions, feelings that all can contribute in a very specific way. And also our emotions are much more fragile than we realize.

Once we realize that all these ingredients, like if you put like twice as many eggs and way in half as much sugar, you're going to get like some really weird Takealot comes out at the end of it. If you change also the ingredients that go into your emotions, your emotions change. And once you realize that you have way more control over your emotions and you would normally assume it stops with revising, it starts to just looking at it and realizing that there are components to that sort of bets.

It's not just like a big amorphous blob that you can't get a handle on. Right. There are mechanisms and leavers and, you know, processes. But the, the most basic sort of like elementary distinction that you could make is that in any given emotion, there are aspects of the, are automatic processing, a psychologist, Fraser, involuntary, or reflex, like, and then there are aspects of the emotional experience that are voluntary.

And the Stoics really put a lot of emphasis on this distinction. When you're talking about ancho entrepreneurs, there are many articles written by entrepreneurs, uh, about. And, uh, as you know, many people, uh, who in business world are interested in buying quality and Tim Ferris kind of gates or role models in the self-improvement field.

Uh, and they're both, you know, great advocates of stoicism. And one of the things I've noticed is when entrepreneurs speak a bit stoicism, they're most interested in isn't, the cognitive therapists are interested and it's not a. The coconut theory of emotion, per se, it's more what we call the dichotomy of control that they tend to talk about this distinction between what's on the voluntary control and what isn't.

And people think of that in terms of external events, like, you know, those aspects, that situation are under my control. And then my response to it as the end, your heads, there are things that are under your control and things are all right in your eyes. Y and your anxiety, there are bets that you control and bets that you're doing, and that distinction is fundamental to modern co-operative models of emotion, basically, because, I mean, um, so I, I, this is kind of going into like a tiny little bit of a deep dive, but I'll do it very quickly.

One of the first things that I would do with clients normally is just say, look. Um, people tend to try too hard to control the involuntary aspects of emotion.

So say they're anxious and the heart rate start really beating fast and they start sweating and shaking. That's kind of, these are autonomic responses.

They're not really under voluntary control, not directly anyway. And people will let focus on them and try and conceal them or suppress them. They'll feel embarrassed. Like Neo second, all the anxiety about them. They get quick preoccupied with them. So they're like trying to control these things are physiological reactions that they can't really control.

Right? So often people are trying too hard until the aspects of emotion that aren't under, the direct control, all the research and a lot of research conveyors and the finding that they are to ex. Those feelings with a kind of attitude of studied in indifference to put it very simply, but then people neglect to control the aspects of the emotional response that are voluntary.

So that would be what you're doing. Like, so whether you approach the thing that you're anxious about, or whether you run away in the opposite direction, or whether you've covered your eyes and cannot try and distract yourself from, or something like that, you're hoping responses are under voluntary control, but also the conversation that you have in your head about it.

So when people are anxious, they often engage in a stale of voluntary thinking that we call worrying and to, you know, my specialism is treating anxiety disorders. So, you know, one of the oddities about that as the. When people worry a lot. Um, and some people have pathological worrying. They have a condition called generalized anxiety disorder.

If we something called a worrying disorder, everybody worries to some extent, generally people assume that worrying is involuntary Butler. The wrong by ironically worrying is actually a voluntary cockpits approach. You know, so people have it completely back to front. They're trying to control the involuntary aspects and neglecting to control the voluntary aspects.

How messed up is that? That's how completely messed up our.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, so true. Sorry to interrupt. But I have many friends who are not entrepreneurs, who, who don't live their best life. If I want to say it that way, and they have this attitude, they always expect the worst outcome of any situation. They always expect the worst.

So they're not disappointed when the worst happens and they think they always get the. Because if something better happens than what they expect, they're

pleasantly surprised. And this is just so frustrating to me. What, what, what are your thoughts on that? I don't think there's anything

**Donald J. Robertson:** inherently wrong with things that X, but when it becomes problematic is in part, when people spend too much time doing it and they engage in a style of thinking that we call ruminative thinking.

So that that's what we call it. When someone thought for us, this kind of go round and round and round. People who very pathologically might say that they feel they're not almost all the long. And they also do it at an appropriate time. When they're trying to get to sleep at night would be the classic time.

That's everyone's favorite time to worry by entrepreneurs fixing to worry is

**Jan Koch:** no one at school. How do I cover the bills for the next week? Yeah.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Like trying to get sleep and your body's like, you're supposed to be shutting up right now so I can sleep. And your brain is like, how am I going to get the bills and what we're going to do about this and what somebody sues me and what this Y so we call it for F.

Right. Uh, it's a type of catastrophizing basically. So when people engage in that, just use a lot of technical analysis for you. They typically overestimate the severity and the probability of a threat and underestimate the coping ability. So there are several, even in terms of the content of the thoughts, there are several aspects to why that have to come together in a particular balance in order to be plus.

Like, you know, and if you changed any of those variables, the case. It's the same. Like you wouldn't end up with warrior anxiety, you cook up some emotion that probably wouldn't be as much of a problem. You know, the move worry is fragile, man. My people don't think it is, but like you just need to pull one off.

I know. And the whole thing collapses right way. It's strange because it was hard to stop worrying nurse.

**Jan Koch:** How, how do we do that though? When we are stuck in this rod that doesn't take some external person to say, Hey, just slow down for a minute and do something else. Or how do we do that? If we are just on our own,

**Donald J. Robertson:** actually you've hit the nail on the head in a way, the tricky part of it is more of having the self awareness to change something in the first place.

So it's much easier if you have a coach or a therapist, or if you can have practice and self what we honestly, mindfulness training. Because you have to, it saying it's easy to change. It is one thing, but it's almost like everyone forgets to, to change their wording or do anything about it. So you have to pause, but once you've paused and you've noticed what's going on, actually there are many, many different things you could potentially do that would disrupt.

Ruminative thinking. So I'll give you some examples, right? Like it's really, uh, almost anything that you do that changes the process of thinking. So if you were to try worrying, why are rubbing your tummy and patting your head? For instance by, yeah, my, you know, after 30 seconds you be like, Jesus has kind of like confused, you know, and it's hard then to get as a mouse and the anxiety as you would normally, you still think stuff through and you can still problem solve, but you have grit of distance from it, but you wouldn't be as confused with the.

Or worrying in slow motion with pauses by. So if you can slow down your internal dialogue and pause more of the nuts enough to the shop to, um, and also sometimes what we often do actually is get clients to speed things up. So we'll take one sentence. Um, it was a psychologist called Texan of it discovered this phenomenon by the way, at the start of the 20th century, but he didn't realize how it could use clinically.

That was only really discovered over the past 20 years or so. So what Texan have discovered is that if you repeat. Phrase or a word really quickly. It starts to kind of feel meaningless. Um, So, if somebody's saying nobody likes me, everybody hates me. I think we're gonna need worms, but again, really, really depressed thinking about that or anxious, whatever we made it.

Um, get them just to repeat it really fast. So it load for 45 seconds. Tighten before stopwatch.

and that's five seconds. Right? And already, it starts to kind of feel for the wheel. The forty-five seconds. It really starts to feel like strange. And you could still then have a conversation about the idea that Nokia likes you, but you do it with a greater sense that detached. From why we call that a verbal diffusion is the term that's usually used in behavioral psychology.

That technique has a 90% success rate play in, uh, uh, experimental settings. Like it's so robust. It's one of the, the, the most kind of robust level can tie. That we can sometimes have a 50, 50 success rate that we using in clinical practice. And the elements are working 70, 80, 90% success rate, at least in changing the way that people feel.

But also what I Fe I used some things are anything you change that you could say, you know, stand up one leg. Or, you know, you could say, um, to somebody, have you tried worrying in a Scottish accent?

**Jan Koch:** you make it more pleased? Yeah, just make it more

**Donald J. Robertson:** fun. Yeah. I have STV. No one agrees with me. I don't, I think the art to do a Scottish accent. Like I think if I try to think about it too much, then it starts to sandwich on coronary instead or something like that. Right. If you, the point is you mentioned Elliot's noticing.

If you, the track really the underlying track is anything that causes you to slow down and meet, pay more attention to the process of thinking itself. Well, we, to this phenomenon that we call cognitive distancing or verbal diffusion, and that tends to weaken the emotional impact of the thoughts that you're having.

So you can still have a thoughts, but you won't be as kind of engrossed in them and they won't have the same. Uh, impact on you.

**Jan Koch:** I do that verbal diffusion technique with Texas, Texas, Texas, Texas, Texas, Texas later tonight.

**Donald J. Robertson:** Good idea. Yeah. Um, and it's kinda fun to do it. It's pretty quick and easy. I mean, geez man, freighted people for five hours a week for an average of five years.

That's like hundreds and thousands of hours of therapy. Um, but actually some of the most effective techniques that we have work really in the market in a matter of a minutes or less than a minute. Um, but one of the things is that the best self-discipline is usually required because people. Um, I dunno, like, uh, kind of almost don't believe that it can be that easy to change how they feel about things.

And it's usually, if you have a therapist, they would just tell you to do it. People do it and they go, yeah, I feel different now, but we self-help, people require a little bit more self-motivation to do. I mean, the kind of thing, since we are

standing here on a room and, and sort of repeating of the Weisman look device, we not doing over and over.

So a lot of people would try things like that, but we just assumed because if you do them, you actually think that that can be quite effective. And I'll just throw out another couple of quick techniques to show you how easy therapy is, right? Yes, please do. Yeah. So we talked a little bit about. We kind of alluded earlier, I think to the view from above, which is another stoic technique that the Stoics were a hundred percent right.

That when people are highly emotional, they tend to narrow the scope of attention though. So you can think of it, several things at once. You can be driving your car, talking to your kids in the backseat, thinking about what you're going to have for dinner and listening to the radio while at the same time, right.

You can walk into. Mike, so we can pay attention to multiple things, except when you're stretched, et cetera. You're an entrepreneur by, and you're under a lot stress and your brain will then naturally know the scope of attention though. And we do something that's for instance, something's called threat monitoring.

So your brain narrows at scope, then like a magnifying glass and look for potential signs of danger in your environment, which is helpful if you're a little furry animal, right. And you're out on the plate. And you see a predator that rise, and you may want to foom narrow your focus of attention to watch that thing on the horizon, like a Hawk to see whether it's going to head in your direction or not.

But when you're laying in bed at night, it's a really unhelpful thing to do, right? Because it magnifies threats and it distorts them because by doing that, you ignore context, which very often would have implications for the social meaning of a threat that we're facing. So the Stoics were right that by expanding the scope of our attention, we can, well, I don't know.

They look our emotional response to threat and see them more realistically by placing them back in a broader context. And they thought we should practice that every day. But when we are doing that spatially, we could do it chronologically. Um, one easy technique is say, somebody says that they're had a relationship breakup.

They're worried that the girlfriend is going to die. Or, uh, or vice versa, uh, someone looking to get divorced, the boyfriends can break up with them or whatever. So therapists and easy technique would say, okay, well, I suppose

your girlfriend dumps you. What's probably going to happen next. So when people catastrophize, they focus on a slice of tape.

Like a editing a movie to go this sleep little segment where I imagine her slamming the door and walking over or whatever, it's like the worst part of it. But you have to ask from a philosophical perspective, why would you only focus on that team? And not what happens in the weeks, fall away is completely arbitrary.

What segment you focus on, right. But we do it in a, such a selective way. It's going to amplify the distress and make us feel like we can't cook. Cause we're not visualizing coping. So we have a more preservable coping ability in a higher prisoner, the severity of the threat. yeah. Every

**Jan Koch:** time when a project goes wrong or when a client cancels or something, you are in this situation as an alternate.

Yeah, every single time

**Donald J. Robertson:** I see you say, well, it's probably going to happen next. And that forces people to expand the chronological perspective and they go, well, probably feel really depressed ourselves. Women will cry. They go, well, they're most probably going to happen next. Well, I guess, you know, like, uh, I'll, I'll just kinda move around for a while and then probably what's going on.

So you just keep repeating those questions, keep pushing people forward. The fourth, they go, well, I guess I'll start going out and socializing. Maybe an then what's probably going as for prevention would be somebody else. And it was probably going to happen. Well, I guess things will move on and I'll feel different that, so it does two things.

It broadens the perspective so that it dilutes the intensity or the original experience of focusing on and also forces them to mentally how squeeze. Like, so, which is their appraisal, its severity and increases their appraisal and the coping ability just by repeating the question, what's probably going to happen next, over and over again, I used to train therapists for a living like, and there are some techniques in therapy.

You could literally. Literally train a monkey to do like, and therapists get paid lots of money to do this stuff right now. I lost off the therapist is quite nuanced and directly like it's harder than it was difficult to research research to read and

stuff like that. Like any profession, there's also bits of it that you could literally tend to train a chimpanzee to Y or a para or something.

You could probably train a pigeon to do it right. Just about. Y. So basically just go over a problem. What's probably going to happen next and uptight in many cases, well, our, somebody to completely change their cognitive appraisal of a situation and stop worrying and cope better with it. And that that's something that entrepreneurs could do this well, will easy.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, th that is a great point. It reminds me of this marketing strategy that when you break down the pain points of customers that you want to solve, you ask why five times, like, why is it a problem for them? Why, why, why wide? So you dive deep into the problem. It's essentially the same thing. You just.

From what I understand is you remove the lethargy from this situation and you propel yourself forward because what's next, what's next? What next is forces you to think about a future outcome? And in that situation, when the client just broke up on your project failed, or you have to refund a big chunk of money, you're getting sued.

You just focus on the issue at hand and you are not able to move forward. Constructed. And

**Donald J. Robertson:** a similar technique, which is also pretty easy to do. I kind of a cousin to that is just to say, well, five years from now, 10 years from now, looking back on this event, um, how would you feel about. And of course, most people are going to feel less distressed.

They're going to be able to appreciate things more objectively that also kind of forces them to think a bit about how they would move on for court and play again. But I reckon probably given enough time, I could train a pigeon to do that by you can, you know, like if all you have to do is imagine my five years from now looking back from the then, and I, that's a very powerful technique.

It's something that I use a lot. I think we can learn a lot from our own life's from our own experience, as long as we can of approach it in the right way. I think as you get older, like one of two things happens either. You know, you're just kind of, uh, don't wear anything cause you don't make the effort to Y or as you go older, you're more reflective.

And you think what I learned from my life so far, why when I look back on that and a good question to ask yourself with what happened to all the stuff that you used to really worry about. Like, you know, I remember all I sent of all the time and effort you spent over the years worrying about stuff like how much actually happened away.

And if it did happen, was it as bad as you anticipated? How helpful was it worrying? Like sometimes, maybe the worrying help you. And did you have to worry as much as you actually did? Almost everybody looking back over the course of the life of faith right now, most of the worrying that that was just a waste of time.

I just, it just was unnecessary misery way. You know, I love the thing just didn't happen at all, or it wasn't as bad as before it was going to be all the worrying just doesn't help any way you could figure that out. I will say. All right, but I guess the metaphor is, are you willing to very commonly just look back at your own life experience and learn from it.

This is why therapists we get kind of opinion because we see thousands of clients and we watch what the client seaters and do. And we see the ones that are getting better by an acquire, get better in coaching or therapy often are doing really simple things like. Bye. And so again, one day we're going to figure this all out as a society and we'll start teaching our kids how to cope better with their emotions.

**Jan Koch:** Hopefully. Yeah. Hopefully one of the biggest shifts that I made in my daily business routine is just setting aside time to reflect I'm in business for 11 years now. And for the first nine, probably I was just constantly push, push, push. Full throttle pedal to the metal every day. And I thought I was too busy to think about this stuff to, to learn about this stuff.

And it wasn't until I hired a mentor who said, Hey, slow down. And the, the, the reason I had a mentor is because I knew I was going to be a dad and I wanted to balance life and business better. And at that point I was forced to. Assess what I was doing and whether that was moving me and the family in the right direction or not.

What advice do you have for entrepreneurs who aren't willing to make that trade off to set aside like even 10 minutes a day?

**Donald J. Robertson:** I think again, I mean, there's many things that I could see a bit actually, but one of them is there's a court in Marcus Sebelius where he talks about how. Most of the stuff that we see and do in life is unnecessary.

And most of our thinking is unnecessary. Just, he used to say ma many of there are many techniques in the meditation as a marketer Lewis, but so one of them is to observe what you're doing. And he would say, just ask yourself, is this necessary? And he said, To clarify, this is a kind of shorthand. What he means is does it actually contribute to your fundamental goal in life now, then you need to think what your fundamental goal in life like, and this thing that I just spent the last hour of doing, does it actually contribute to that?

Is it irrelevant to her or does it actually take me in the opposite direction from it? Why? And it, most people don't do that at all. My, again, it's such a simple thing just to go. The thing that you're doing right now, the thing that you just spent the last hour. Is it taking you towards your goal or away from it, or is it doing nothing way?

And you know, when you do that, it is quite dramatic. You know? Um, for example, I'll often ask clients to work on their values and goals. And, uh, when, uh, uh, one of the first questions I'll ask them once we've kind of clarified the values is how much time in minutes did you, or did you spend yesterday or over the past three days or over the past week, actually doing stuff in the service of your fundamental volumes.

And then the most common answer that I get to that. Zero minutes. Yeah. But shocked me at fast. Right? That's a shocking thing to see. This is the most important thing in life to me. How much time have I spent on it over the last week? Like zero minutes. And you think there has to be a way that you could spend at least two minutes way on the thing that you reckon is the most important thing in the universe by, you know, there's something wrong.

If you're the answer to that question is zero. Y. And, you know, usually it's not that difficult to get people to find time in the day, once they realize that. Um, and we mentioned earlier worrying, most people worry to some extent and usually worrying is pointless. When clients come into therapy, the approaching the, the most common reason they have for not doing homework assignments is the local say, wasn't it?

Do they have time? For the CBT forums or whatever. So techniques to help people to stop worrying or create. You know, I'll say the clients, you're going to have a problem if you do this properly, because you're going to be stuck

thinking, what am I going to do all the free time that I've got? How much time do you spend?

What are a couple of hours? What are you going to do when you stop worrying? Like this is the moment that's following up a lot of your time. I mean, there is a theory. One of the leading chosen and worry is guy called Tom work of it. And he has this, uh, slightly technical research based model of. Uh, called the cognitive avoidance model of worry, you know, basically bottom line is that people, when they worry believe that they're kind of facing their fears, worrying about my problems, but the paradoxes, I rather like what is an ironic paradoxical process because actually on close inspection, it seems to be more a way of avoiding.

Confronting problems. It's more avoidant than most people realize they track for themselves. They do it for themselves and to feeling as if the confronting their problems. When in fact they're doing it in such a way that they never really confront the problems and a concrete and sustained manner where they can escape her over the edge.

But the peaking of rent late when they're worrying, like, but not really just confronting things in a more patient and sustained way. And when you do that, it's painful to face up to your problems and really visualize how bad things could get. And the pain doesn't last that long now. And usually you get over it, whereas a, it would be like ripping off a band-aid to really confront a problem, but worry is kind of like packing out the band-aid over it over and over, and just keeping the pain going permanently by outdoor air.

Um, that's where it's like basically, and it wastes a huge amount of time and energy more time than that.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, sorry, go ahead to don't. Didn't want to interrupt. I just

**Donald J. Robertson:** gonna say, like, if you eliminated where you would have far more time on your hands, um, and you know, the techniques, uh, uh, the benefit people's small changes often have big consequences if they're strategic.

Um, and so it may be, people may only need to do things that take less than five minutes each day in order to really benefit them. It doesn't have to take a really long time. Most people I are, I'll talk to clients. I'll say maybe if they ever watch television, you know, why can't you do this during the commercial breaks on TV?

Um, you know, like why can't you do this instead of checking social media, um, a good strategy. That's kind of derived from a bit, a famous behavioral psychology principle called Primax principle is to say to yourself, if there's something that you do frequently throughout the day, it could be anything, right?

So it can be scratching your backside. It could be anything that you do frequently be checking your emails, social media, whatever. If you want to introduce a new habit, one way of doing it. Is to say, to introduce a strict rule that says I'm only allowed to check social media. 20 press-ups first or something like that.

Right. So, okay. You set yourself, we can take social media as much as the one, but every time I do it, but between press-ups first, as you make a rule that you have to do the new habit that you're trying to install first, before your loads to do the old habit that you're already engaged, you're

**Jan Koch:** connecting something new with something that's already there.

Yeah, I do that quite a bit. When I get, when I catch myself going down those mental rabbit hole sometimes. Um, what I like to do is a technique called box breathing. It's I came across on YouTube, I think Jocko, Willink, um, where you breathe in for four seconds, you hold for four seconds, breathe out four seconds and hold.

And it's just what we said earlier. It's it's interrupting this thinking pet on this thought pattern and it just putting me back into a state. Where I get out of this worrying and I'm ready to attack whatever is in front of me. And because I know that technique comes from Navy seals, I feel even more engaged in that.

And th this is, uh, the differentiating factor. I see in many conversations with entrepreneurs, way more successful than I am is they don't obsess about problems. They accept that the challenge is there and they go straight to. And said something very

**Donald J. Robertson:** interesting there, actually, which is knowing that it comes from Navy seals makes a difference.

So again, like life is all about illusions. Like life is about what the magician who's kind of, uh, go, are you looking over here? We're actually, he's doing something over a year with his other hand. So people always look in the room. Place in order to solve their problems. And I say a daily, or when they're dealing

with their emotions, it's kind of like the focus in the wrong aspect of their emotion.

If we just focused on another part of it lately, they probably find it quite easy to resolve. Now I trained therapists for many years, train life coaches around the trainings, go for them. Everybody always wants to know what all the techniques are. Right. But we have many techniques that we know quite, quite well.

The, I mentioned earlier, the key thing is the motivation to use the. Bye. And where does that come from? It comes from a number of sources, but one of them is a social proof you might say. So, uh, Jocko, Willink, does it Navy seal who's to the highlight, maybe it's worth giving us a goal, right? Maybe the motivation is actually more important than the choice of individual.

Say, as long as it's a reasonably sensible tax. Right. Not that like saying that you're taking up exercise. If you take someone who's a couch potato, does it, maybe it doesn't matter what Marshall, up into that much, as long as it's a reasonably sensible choice, maybe it doesn't matter that much. What type of a socket training they do exactly right.

Within reasonable limits. But the key thing is just whether they're actually motivated to do that. And the first place, like the main variable might be, whether they actually feel that they can commit to doing something. And so in many cases you may find a technique that's not optimal, but as long as somebody actually is motivated to do it, that might be better than having a technique that's optimal for the individual.

Doesn't feel convince fire. It doesn't feel like an attraction to mortar. They video have the same motivation of it. So often the therapy. Well, we know that's what we know that works from experiments, but matching the technique to the client is also important. You said that the Navy seals, you know, when advantage you're working with groups of people is I'll give you, I'll tell you a long story.

I worked on a research project for the department of the environment in the UK. Def on, uh, noise related stress. So people that had stress because of noisy neighbors or, uh, power stations humming and things like that. And they could sleep and stuff. So I had a group of them in Harley street and I gave them just like a book stand up, relaxation CD.

And this group of people are often quite, um, have a sense of hopelessness. They'd been troubled for many, many years, tried everything, nothing works, you know, kind of mantra. So I gave him a CD and the next a week I saw them,

uh, I said, how did you guys go on with the CD? And the first couple of people I spoke to, they said, oh, I didn't actually try it because they didn't have the motivation or the confidence to even give a goal.

Right. I knew if it probably helped them. Right. But one, the youngest member of the group said, oh, it was amazing. It's the best sleep I've ever had. My next week, everyone had. Right. Because nobody ever listens to the expert by nobody wants to listen to the therapist, but social proof, like the somebody else in the group, it's just like them.

You're just like me. And you did the thing and it worked for you. So maybe it would work for me too. So then you have the motivated. To do it so that one of the puzzles is again, looking in the wrong, you know, often we have plenty of techniques, we've got a whole toolbox of techniques and they're really the laws of awesome techniques to choose from.

Take your bet. Right? The trick is actually having the motivation to put them into practice consistently. And sometimes that's a real challenge is like, how do you tap into that motivation and find that way within yourself to have a goal at doing something that might feel a little bit.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, it makes me think about, uh, Jordan Peterson's 12 rules for life.

Rule. Number two is, uh, care for yourself as if you were responsible for it or something like that is that the notion is we care for everybody else. If our dog gets prescribed medicine, we make sure they take it. But if we get prescribed medicine, 30% of people don't take it just as you said, because we don't think we are worthy of being cared for as if we were caring as if we were caring for somebody with.

And I think it's just, uh, he brought it, broke it down very clearly and eloquently and related it back to the upbringing of humanity and so on. But you've just made a point there in that we have to care for ourselves first so that we can then care for everybody else. And essentially that's how I see it.

**Donald J. Robertson:** I think. So I think that's a very good power then. Like there's a lot of things that John Peterson says that I think are really good. And then there's other things that you say is that I think are pretty off the wall. Bye to be honest. Uh, I think he's probably one of the most heightened mess self-help portals for read.

Um, but yeah, like I totally agree with him about that, that paradigm, the idea that therapy self-improvement is you see, it's an old idea. Um, the it's about, uh, learning to repair in wholesales, or as we say in therapy, the job of the therapist or the clinician is to make themselves. Right. So my job when I'm working with a client is to get to the point where they say, I don't really need you anymore.

Why? Because I've gotten to the point where they're their own coach. They become their own therapist. My a good therapist is always trying to put themselves out. Basically, you know, and they should be confident about it. Not going to have the most impact with the client as they approach their thinking, you know, have a kind of exit strategy for therapy as it were right in the kind of thinking, how can I get as clients to the point where they just don't need therapy anymore.

They don't need me anymore. Like they can, you know, they can do everything for themselves that I can do for them. And so, but then you have to be willing to. Take that level of responsibility for yourself, like you're managing yourself or being a parent yourself or a friend to yourself. I do. I tend to think of it in a sense is actually about friendship.

You know, like if you really loved yourself, you know, if you liked yourself, if you were a friend to yourself, then you slow down and you kind of judge things in a more balanced and a slightly more cautious way. You know, sometimes you might think have to be proved to be kind with myself. You know, sometimes maybe I go a but easier on myself.

Like I think actually, and this might seem like a strange thing to say, as I said earlier, there are opportunities in life and they can benefit people enormously. Although many people would just watch the street over them. One of them is just being alive, alone. All right. So I don't think wisdom comes from experience.

I think wisdom comes from experience combined with reflection, right? And so, as you get older, you do have a huge wealth of experience. You prepare, you meet more and more people buy and you could learn from that if you're smart, but most people, I think just sail through life and don't really learn anything much from their experience.

In many cases they don't. But one of the things you can learn from, I really believe. Oh, yes. Yeah. Like, so you have a child. And I say that because we also use a strategy in therapy. We say, um, if someone's like beating up on

themselves, for example, we might say, what advice would you give your daughter as she was in the situation?

Like, and usually that forces people to switch perspective and to kind of think, okay, I guess I'm handling this badly. I wouldn't recommend that my daughter handle it in the same way. I tell her to do this instead, but geez, I've thought works. Just imagining it from that perspective. Well, if you actually have it.

Right. And you actually are thinking that you would give them, hopefully, hopefully my, it makes you a tad more responsible by and thoughtful. And then maybe you can apply that idea. Now, I think much more easily, you know, about all the advice that I have given mental or, and I thought, geez, maybe I should be following that advice myself.

So it gives me a kind of reference point. You know, if you really care about someone else, and you're kind of more thoughtful, more reflective of that, the advice you give them, the way that you interact with them, maybe when they're emotional or upset, you can transfer those skills onto your care as well.

You might learn something useful, but managing your emotions by doing that. That's an opportunity. Not everybody benefits from. Right. But if you're ready to benefit from, uh, having a child, um, you know, and learning from the experience, it could be one of the most enlightening, uh, experiences in life.

**Jan Koch:** Yeah, definitely, definitely as much, as much as I would love to continue this conversation, we are already at 55 minutes roughly.

I, I need to bring you back for another interview because I just think there's so much more that we need to talk about, but, uh, unfortunately we need to wrap up here at this point. If there were one, add one piece of advice that you can give to entrepreneurs to make the most out of this situation, to cope with stress, as good as they can.

What would that be?

**Donald J. Robertson:** If I was to give them the. Stoic piece of advice, it would be realize our question, the prevailing values of the society in what you love, because maybe they'll toxic, right? Maybe we are born into society and through our history, we, you know, we've been, society has gravitated towards materialistic, hedonistic, egotistical, consumerist, celebrity culture, all the stuff that we all in reflection know is.

Right. It's not really what life is about, but it's so easy to get sucked into it. So it's on TV, it's in the movies, we're surrounded by it. And so the really fundamental thing I think is to have this revolution, I, and our moral values, like realizing why that life isn't about having the biggest car or like in the biggest round of applause or having the most followers on social media.

Why, you know, life is over. The way that you live it and it's about your attitude towards it. And it's character based is this two X would say, character is destiny buy. You know, it's about having courage and integrity. Being able to look yourself in the mirror and have a sense of pride and the person that you actually are is more valuable than any material possessions or any external, or you could look for.

And I think. The storage thought this is hard. It's like a U-turn. We have to range ourselves, uh, the prevailing values and learned how more enlightened philosophical values and let that if we can do that, right. It's that perspective that grants us emotional resilience. It's learning to really appreciate our.

Character more of than external, uh, events or, uh, other people's opinions or others. Um, that's really, I think what the Stoics want to tell us, what's the message.

**Jan Koch:** Beautiful way to summarize the session. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us, Donna, and for everybody watching check out the book, think without the video, the social profiles are too, and definitely give Donald a follow.

You can learn a lot. Thank

**Donald J. Robertson:** you very much. It's been a pleasure.