

Transcript for Toolbox | Narrative Building (Episode 604)

Full show notes found here:

<https://theartofcharm.com/podcast-episodes/aoc-toolbox-narrative-building-episode-604/>

- AJ: If you don't understand your narrative, it puts you in peril.
- JOHNNY: Absolutely.
- AJ: It starts steering you off course and not allowing you, ultimately, to feel passion or a drive towards them.
- JOHNNY: Yeah, just floundering.
- AJ: It's an innate human desire.
- JOHNNY: Absolutely.
- AJ: And we hear this from guys who've gotten lucky and sold a company and then didn't know what to do with themselves, lost that drive. A lot of us, just feel work is our drive. But, you're not going to work for your entire life.
- JORDAN: Right.
- AJ: So it is important to craft a narrative that outlasts just your working career.
- JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. Today we've got an AoC Toolbox Ep. with AJ and Johnny and myself and The Art of Charm team. We're talking about narrative building. How the stories we tell ourselves and how they either serve us or they don't, how we often spend so much time and effort burying our past, that it becomes difficult to come to terms with it, and how to update those stories that need a little maintenance or perhaps even a complete rewrite. So enjoy this episode with AJ, Johnny, and myself from The Art of Charm team.

And by the way if you're new to the show, we'd love to send you some top episodes and the rest of the AoC Toolbox. That's where we discuss things like reading body language, having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, social engineering, networking and influencing strategies, mentorship, persuasion tactics, and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm. Check that out at theartofcharm.com/toolbox or in our iPhone app at theartofcharm.com/iphone. Also at theartofcharm.com/podcast you can find the full show notes for this and all previous episodes of the show. We're glad to have you with us here today at AoC. So enjoy this latest installment of the AoC Toolbox with AJ, Johnny, and myself.

So one of the things that I hear from guys that -- after boot camp, that they just love, is this narrative building exercise that you guys do. And I wanted to dive into this a little bit because it seems to be extraordinarily powerful in the group setting and I think there's probably some value here for the casual listener as well to outlining this process and diving in a little bit.

JOHNNY:

Well we've mentioned on another podcast about [the hero's journey](#) and it's much like that where, you have to understand where you've come from and you have to accept those terms. You have to know what habits you're putting into place now to become the person that you want be and then, and then, at the end of that voyage, you're a legacy. So if you make these decisions, you put in these new habits, what does that look like at the end of that journey, as your legacy?

AJ:

These three components, the past, the present, and the future, are something that a lot of times we don't think about and we don't even quantify in our lives and that leads to a sense of aimlessness and hopelessness. The narrative building component allows you to build in willpower and determination towards your goals in life in a very clear way. So we're not just scattered and thinking that we're passionless. But instead, we understand exactly where we came from, where we are

currently, and where we're going. And that's why it's such a powerful exercise to go through. And the hero's journey is something that you see in all good movies, stories --

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: -- religions, of this person, going out, seeking some knowledge, some truth in himself and ultimately having some challenges, some temptations, and overcoming them. And through overcoming those challenges, there's a lesson that leads him to finding himself. [00:03:28] himself.

JOHNNY: Well one of the interesting pieces about the hero's journey is that it's a story that has been told over time. So before there was movies, before there was books and before there was religion, entertainment had to come from somewhere. And so, you maybe with your tribe, and you're sitting around the fire and you had just eaten, and then one of the stories that would be passed along, would be a hero's journey story, which at the end of it would have a lesson for you to learn. And so, these stories, they're so deep rooted they're kind of attached to us and our evolution.

JORDAN: It's kind of like a fable that's in our DNA, and I put that in air quotes because obviously we have a lot of scientists listening to the show who cringe when I say things like that.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

JORDAN: It makes sense right? So these are the kind of -- "and that's why Arrested Development. And that's why you don't use a one armed man to teach people a lesson."

JOHNNY: Well it's a wonderful idea and it makes a lot of sense. What was the form of entertainment before all that? It was these stories and they had to have how to be as you move forward.

AJ: And it's how we connect as humans. So when people talk about building rapport, it's all along the line of your narrative.

How you explain your past, your present, and your future that allows you to be memorable, and allows you to engage them on an emotional level. That's how we stand out. So, quantifying and understanding what your narrative is, taking those lessons from your past, the habits that you're trying to form in the present, and then the future goals and aspirations, looking at them in a way that allows you mentally to put yourself on the journey so that you are not, as I said, rudderless, going through life not understanding who you are or who you want to become. So why do you think narrative building is so important of an exercise for the listeners Johnny?

JOHNNY: Well there is things that happens into your life that you had learned. Because of that, because of what you now believe from what you had learned, you'll make decisions and have actions that will go along with what you believe. Your behaviors are going to be gauged by what you believe. So what's important to understand what it is that you do believe. And for a lot of people, what the believe is what they had been told through family --

JORDAN: Right.

JOHNNY: -- through friends. They didn't chose it. It was given to them and if they didn't think about it, they had just bought into it without asking questions. If you were young and your parents told you something, you're going to listen to them, you're not going to [00:05:54]

CROSSTALK

JORDAN: Yeah you're not going to sit there and go, "Well let me test that theory out." I mean even the most rebellious kid has the same program. Is this what we mean when we talk about social programming? Is it in part this, this set of beliefs that dictate our actions? We've always had them, and that's the way we've always done it, and that's why we do it now.

JOHNNY: Sure and you can choose that. One of the things of -- it's important to understand is, your parents are liars. Everyone here can remember their first time they caught their parents lying. And were like, "God damn it!"

JORDAN: Santa Claus, the tooth fairy --

JOHNNY: "They lied to me!"

JORDAN: -- that was just the beginning.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. What's important about that is, if you understand it, there's other things that your parents had lied about. And it may not be that they were malicious in that lie, they just didn't know. It was a narrative that they adopted. That can go for generations. And so without challenging, or not understanding why, you will be doing things -- you'll be compelled to do things, and not have an idea why you do them.

AJ: Right, so it's almost like giving up your free will.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: These beliefs influence your actions so much and if you haven't thought about where these beliefs came from, the factual basis behind these beliefs, you can set up an operating system that leads you astray. Quite easily.

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: And that's the -- one of the most important first steps is understanding that these beliefs are under our control.

JOHNNY: Well I can give an example from my life of how my past affected the way I did things. So I was born in Western Pennsylvania about 40 minutes southeast of Pittsburgh. And my town was established as a mining town in the late 1800s, early 1900s. And my great great grandfather worked in those

mines. Now you can imagine what sort of life a miner would have at that time, right?

AJ: Pretty rough and tough life.

JOHNNY: Yeah, you're getting up very early. You're coming home after dark. And I had even read some things -- they would have to travel on their hands and knees for three miles into the mine before they could even start work -- that was just still travel time. And you can imagine the safety regulations weren't -- there's none.

AJ: Well I mean, even to this day, with the regulations there's still mining accidents.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. And there's no one in this room who will switch jobs with my great grandfather.

JORDAN: No.

JOHNNY: I don't think there's too many people out there and listening then that would do it either. Now that sort of life -- in order for you to survive that sort of life, you have to get tough. Right? So you're whole mindset is going to be, "I need to be tougher than what's going on here. I need to grind this through. If I work my ass off and I grind hard and I keep my nose to the wheel, then I can scrape out an existence for me and my family that was slightly better than where I came from."

You know so my great grandfather, coming from Eastern Europe, you can imagine what his life was like there, to where working in that mine in Western Pennsylvania was a dream. It was the American dream. Now of course, that he's going to tell my grandfather about working hard, being tough, don't take anything for granted. The opportunities that I had now brought to us by working in these mines, and here and taking our family from Europe into America, and don't ever forget that. Respect that.

AJ: That's the lesson that was indoctrinated.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. So then when my dad was young and he was wondering why my grandfather was out working in the factory and why he has to milk cows and stuff before school -- right, what's my grandfather going to tell him? "You're lucky to have cows to milk," right? "You're lucky to have land that we own that you're working on. So you better not take this for granted and you better show some respect for," -- and so of course, my dad takes over that narrative and what do you think my dad told me when I was complaining about my ***** Atari 2600 video games I'm playing before school?

AJ: I'm assuming it's cows and mines.

JOHNNY: Yeah, right? "Do you know what I was doing before school? It wasn't playing video games. It was shovelling **** and feeding cows and don't you ever forget that and you better not take that for granted."

AJ: Right.

JOHNNY: "And disrespect what your family has done for you to have video games. Whether or not they're ***** or not, to play in the morning." So of course, I adapt the narrative -- I adopt the narrative. So now I have it. And that work ethic, was -- to me, was this metaphorical hammer of tenacity and stubbornness. And if you want something done, you want to go after something, you work hard until you get it. And if you didn't get what you wanted, well then I guess you're a *****. You didn't swing the hammer hard enough."

AJ: You weren't tough enough.

JOHNNY: You weren't tough enough. Yeah and that's why you didn't get what you wanted. So then you have to learn how to swing the hammer and if you do get yourself to be tough, you will find that you get some of those things through relentless swinging of the hammer. And then you start to think, "Well this -- the

hammer works." But, it's the old saying of, "[What got you here won't get you there.](#)"

AJ: Right.

JOHNNY: Right? And though, that hammer of tenacity and stubbornness is -- it's not a bad tool. It can get you some things. It's just not the only tool.

AJ: And, that lesson that was passed on, you finally took control of. That narrative.

JOHNNY: Absolutely I had --

AJ: Your dad had that same choice but -- but he didn't --

JOHNNY: Yeah.

AJ: -- take control of that narrative.

JOHNNY: Absolutely not. He passed it on to me. And I think, you know it's funny because when my dad -- when he was working in a factory and that factory closed down and he saw himself with children, a divorce, and now being laid off of work, his narrative and his role came crashing down around him. And what my dad did -- went back, took his severance, went back to college, got a degree, learned that there was other ways of going about things and got a IT degree. So we all come to this point of whether or not we're going to buy into the narrative, or find another one that suits us that is more accommodating to success, or will forever be the one that we've bought into from whoever gave it to us.

AJ: The start of the hero's journey. It's the exploration of the lesson that was passed on to you. Whether it's religion, philosophy, morals, personal history and beliefs -- it's that questioning of it starts the exploration. So for most of us, our hero's journey starts through education. Going to college, training for a job, seeking knowledge. So that becomes the jump off point for this

hero's journey that we've been outlining. When you talk about developing your own narrative, it's actually easiest to get in tune with yourself first, before you start running around trying to connect with other people.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: Which is why this is an exercise in the course, because the greater we understand ourselves, the easier it is to communicate. When we're confused as to who we are or what we want or what we're doing, it's very difficult for us to communicate effectively with other people.

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: So what we focus on, in dealing with our present and figuring out who we are, is looking at the past -- where are we coming from, then sorting out, okay what do we want to move to? What is this future version of ourselves? And I know, for me growing up -- in college even, I had that future version of myself painted by my family. By my parents.

JOHNNY: Oh, sure.

AJ: It wasn't my real future version of myself. And that conflict started to happen as I reached graduate school. Like, "Is this truly what I want? Is this the future that I had in mind?" And that's when I started to reach these questions of like, "Well how determined is my future? Does it have to be this way?" Starts with looking at your past and then you've got to flip it and start looking at your future.

JOHNNY: The thing that I want to bring up with that is, it's kind of hard to see yourself out of it, when everyone around you has also bought into the same narrative.

JORDAN: Why would you be the one to break out [00:13:32]

CROSSTALK

JOHNNY: It absolutely -- look, here's the rule to that, right? The rule is, community creates belief. So the more people that believe something around you, the easier it is for it to be true.

JORDAN: Right, right. No one's showing the red pill.

JOHNNY: That there's another way.

JORDAN: There's no red pill laying around.

JOHNNY: Yeah. So in growing up where I did, not only was that idea through my ancestry, it was also in the neighbor kids. And the neighbor kids next to them.

AJ: Right, and their parents.

JOHNNY: And their parents. It was all -- because the whole town was a mine town. And not only that, when I would turn on the television in my town, the media in that area gave the same story. So for everyone to -- so why would there be another story? Other than the one that was given me when everyone seems to have bought into it. And that was the craziest thing for me to accept. Because, indoctrination, whether it be religion or worldview, or whatever it might be -- indoctrination is a very hard thing to escape if it's all around you, because it's the only thing that you will know.

AJ: Yeah, self reinforcing.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: Every time you go to someone else in the community to ask a question, you're getting that same response back, that same lesson back. Looking at the future and then questioning the future, "Is this truly what I want -- who I want to be?" and starting to articulate in your mind who it is that you want to be, is the important second step of crafting that narrative. So that we're like, "Okay, I know where I came from. I have some

lessons there -- some lessons that I might want to question. Where do I want to go? And how much of where I want to go is determined by other people in my life?"

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: Or is actually determined by what I truly feel -- desire. After we start to articulate that to ourselves, then we go and look at the present. And start defining ourselves on building the habits that will move us closer to that end future self.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. And the one thing about that -- and this is where the magic happens. Because everyone wants to know that they can change, everyone logically knows that it is possible, but when they're indoctrinated or in the middle of it, they see themselves making the same mistakes or the same decisions they're compelled to make because of the narrative. So then they feel that it is difficult to make those decisions. Right, then to change those habits.

JORDAN: Because of some cost or like, "Hey I've been doing it this way for so long, why should I change this?"

JOHNNY: Well of course, and everything that you know backs up what you've already been told --

JORDAN: Right.

JOHNNY: -- and what you've already been doing.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: So you look like you're crazy if you decide to break out of it, because you're basically swimming upstream and why the hell would you ever do that?

JOHNNY: Well this is when people write in and talk about how they want to move away or they want to go live into another country for a while. Once you're out of the nest, you will start to see other

narratives, other cultures, other people, other worldviews, and that makes things a little bit easier because as long as you're in the nest and you make those efforts, to change -- yes, people around you will be asking, "What are you doing? You can't do that."

AJ: Yeah.

JOHNNY: "You aren't allowed to do that."

AJ: And go to any high school reunion and look at --

JOHNNY: Oh, man.

AJ: -- the people who have the most changed, in terms of their worldviews, attitudes, temperament, they are the people that have left the community for some reason. Whether it was an extended period of time, whether it was permanently -- but it is breaking out of that sort of cocoon, that is a big part of this heroic myth and journey that we're talking about. Right? That's why when you think about the classic hero's journey, it has him leaving the village. They're leaving the village in pursuit of something.

JOHNNY: So in order to make these new habits, let's just say that I have habit A that I've always done and I have habit B, which I would like to be doing. Because A hasn't been getting me where I want to go and I know that I have to make a change. So let's just say that in a period of 10 times that you have the opportunity to choose A or B, knowing that B is -- gets you closer to your goal, A keeps you in the same place. If yesterday you've chosen, out of 10 times, A 10 times, but today you've chosen A nine times, you're that 1 percent better for that day. And what if the next day, out of that 10, you've chosen B eight times rather than 10? You are moving forward. Did you make your goal? Well no, but you're beginning to. You're moving in the right direction. So you can't get upset with you, that you didn't choose B 10 out of 10.

AJ: That pursuit of perfection and the second we don't meet this gold standard that we've crafted for ourselves in that future ideal, we then retreat and stick with A. And the important mindset is that B is always going to be more difficult. Your habits that you have, are now comfortable. They're easy for you. That's why they're a habit. But to break some of these old habits and start to create new habits, you're going to have to a little bit of heavy lifting.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: You don't grow muscle by not moving the muscle.

JOHNNY: And then of course, if you have this internal struggle every day to choose B over A, right, what are you going to need to help you in doing that?

AJ: Positive reinforcement.

JOHNNY: Because you're going to need encouragement, support, positive reinforcement. And where does that come from? Where are we going to get that?

AJ: Your closest friends, family.

JOHNNY: And you better hope that they're going to be supportive in the changes that you're down to make. Because what if they're not?

AJ: Then it's time to question the relationship that you've built.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. Those changes are going to be extremely difficult, if possible at all, in front of a system like that.

AJ: In front of friends who have no understanding of the change you're trying to craft.

JOHNNY: And go ahead and tell them that their narrative is wrong, that their worldview is wrong.

AJ: In terms of this -- this idea of narrative being three components, past, present and future. You think of them, when it comes to sharing with other people, it's like layers of an onion. Right? The outermost layer of this onion is your past. You'll freely share your past, some experiences, with strangers. We're happy to record our past and share it with you guys --

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: -- the strangers that we haven't met. Your present, what your habits are, your structures, your beliefs, what you're focused on right now, that's an inner layer of the onion, that you share with far fewer people. Right? You're not running around town sharing all of your habits --

(laugh)

AJ: -- your beliefs, or even your political views, right? Or your religion. They might be a big part of you reaching that end goal --

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: -- they're in your toolbelt, they're very important to you, but they're not being shared openly, they're not publicly on Facebook, for the most part, right? We share with fewer people.

JOHNNY: Oh, it's beliefs, ideas, opinions. All those things make up who you are. As somebody who grew up in a family where my grandfather said, "You don't talk about politics or religion at the bar," -- your politics and religion are the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are right there, whether it's organized or not. And so I -- I don't go into a bar and start yelling what I believe. But yet, people seem to want to do that on Facebook, I don't get it.

(laugh)

AJ: And not understand why it's irritating to everyone else trying to enjoy themselves.

JOHNNY: Well, here's the idea of going, walking into a bar and telling everyone what I believe and those -- "If there's anyone in this room that doesn't believe what I believe, then get out of here!"

JORDAN: Yeah.

JOHNNY: Right? So I go on Facebook and I go, "Here's what I believe, and anyone that doesn't believe what I believe," --

AJ: Unfriend.

JOHNNY: Unfriend. You're blocked.

(laugh)

JOHNNY: Can't do that in real life.

AJ: So the third part of that narrative is your future and that is the innermost root of the onion. That part we share, really with our best friend --

JOHNNY: Right

AJ: -- or significant other. Because that is all built around your hopes, your dreams, and ultimately your fears. Your fears are driving a lot of your future. So, those fears, we know that people can use against us. People can bash our dreams, they can bash our hopes, so we don't share that as openly. When we talk about surrounding ourselves with people that support us on this journey, well guess what? They have to know you and understand you at all three levels. They have to understand your past, your present, and your future, to truly connect with you. So a lot of times we feel unsupported in our journey and it's because, we're not openly sharing these other layers. We're hiding these other layers. We're suppressing them from the

people we want to connect with. And keeping ourselves from building real rapport.

JORDAN: Yeah for me, when I was younger, the things that worked really well for my lying parents, we're actually pretty good advice in retrospect. But it didn't always work out the way they planned. For example, my central, sort of character trait was, you've got to work hard and if you work hard, and you don't take shortcuts and things like that, then you will eventually be rewarded because, you know, employers like that. They like people who show up on time --

JOHNNY: Yeah sure.

JORDAN: -- keep their head down, work hard, solve the problem, keep on trucking, put in the extra hours. That served me really well. Well when I was younger I didn't give a crap, but then when I was in high school, it served me really well because other kids were lazy so I could outwork them. And then in college, other kids were lazy and I could outwork them, and then in law school, other guys were lazy so I could outwork them. And then I got to Wall Street and everybody was like, "I got here by outworking everyone." and then you can't outwork everybody else who's already trying to outwork everyone. Well that's what happens at Wall Street. Twenty hour work days, seven days a week, everyone's miserable--

JOHNNY: Everyone's already busting their ass the whole time, so what are you going to do?

JORDAN: And their natural smarts already -- like you've already hit that limit too.

JOHNNY: Sure.

JORDAN: Everybody is naturally smart and everybody's outworking each other. So for me I was like, "Oh, crap, I'm screwed now. They're going to figure out," talking of imposter syndrome --

JOHNNY: Yeah.

JORDAN: -- something we touched on recently. "They're going to find out I don't belong here. This is awful. All this hard work for nothing. I can't do it." Wah, whatever, cry me a river. And then this guy who had hired me, his name was Dave. He was never in the office, and he was a partner, but he was also one of the youngest partners. So that was confusing for me because we're supposed to bill in six minute increments and one day I ask him, "How come you're a partner but you're never in the office." You know," Do you just work from home a lot, what's the deal?" And he said, "No, I'm making relationships, that's how I became a partner. I'm bringing in the clients," -- this is a guy from Brooklyn who had a tan, I always like to say. Because if you're from Brooklyn and you have a tan, obviously you know something that other people don't know.

JOHNNY: Right, right.

JORDAN: And it turned out he was more valuable on the golf course, more valuable at his freaking Jiu Jitsu Dojo or whatever. He was more valuable there than he was in the office billing hours, because at that point in time, everybody else was billing hours. So I was like, "Oh, my God, there's this secret third path to the top of the law game, which is relationships, that has less to do with grinding it out and minding your own business, and everything to do with hacking the system."

JOHNNY: Right, which brings us to a new goal. To be good socializing, to be good with -- a connector. You have to now leave the nest, to figure out those skills to get to this other point, right? Back to the hero's journey.

AJ: We understand what this narrative is. The three components and how it is wrapped in this idea of a hero's journey. If you don't understand your narrative, it puts you in peril.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: It starts steering you off course and not allowing you, ultimately, to feel passion or a drive towards something.

JOHNNY: Yeah, just floundering.

AJ: Which is an innate human desire.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: And we hear this from guys who've gotten lucky and sold a company and then didn't know what to do with themselves, lost that drive. A lot of us, just feel work is our drive. But, you're not going to work for your entire life.

JORDAN: Right.

AJ: So it is important to craft a narrative that outlasts just your working career. You don't want to be rudderless after you're done working. But a lot of us use that as crutch. So if you don't have a personal narrative built, around who you were, who you are, who you want to become, you can feel lost.

JOHNNY: I feel that a lot of young people who have had everything handed to them in life, end up in that peril, faster than most other people because, there was nothing -- that work part, has now been taken away. And the work part, is usually what keeps regular folks sane, as they shift through life. But then if you take that away, then there's now nothing.

AJ: Right, and it's hard to find any meaning at all. We know that not having a narrative puts us in peril and can lead us astray, so let's start talking about building a narrative for ourselves.

JORDAN: All right, so we know that not having a proper narrative or blindly accepting the original narrative given to us, is not ideal. So what do we do to transition out of that and into something more valuable for us?

JOHNNY: Well it's a writing exercise that you're going to have to take some time to put together. The first part of that is going to be your beginning. And you're going to have to be honest with yourself about where you came from. And what the narrative of that place -- what the community believe -- what they had put on you, may not be what you believe in now but it was certainly for while -- it was something that you had been given, that you had to deal with. And ways to think about that -- think about the ancestry of your town. Think about how it was built, the type of people that settled there. If you look at your family's ancestry, what was the work and jobs that seemed to be running in your family? That's going to tell you a lot about the lifestyle and worldview that was given to you.

AJ: Sometimes, if it's difficult to see this -- right, we're too far in it, it's too close to our own nose, it's interesting to do this after traveling somewhere.

JOHNNY: Oh, yes, absolutely.

AJ: Leaving the country, immersing yourself in a new environment entirely, and then when you're there, after that experience, asking yourself, "Okay where did I come from? What are some traditions, beliefs, that have been bestowed on me that obviously other cultures don't abide by?"

JOHNNY Well I can say, to go along with that -- for whatever reason, growing up in this tiny little town of 13,000 people, I thought, growing up I was like, "My town's kind of hip. My town's pretty cool."

AJ: French fries in sandwiches?

JOHNNY: It -- yeah. That's a Pittsburgh thing but if -- even my town, like if we were going to go celebrate this weekend, we're going to the Sizzler. I mean, there's nothing there. But because I'm stuck there, I thought it was special. It was not until I left and was living somewhere else, that -- and was giving -- exposed to all these other cultures and all these other ideas that I realized

just what a one horse, one narrative, one worldview, conservative town that I grew up in, and it totally shifted the way I saw it, and it allowed me to be honest about where I had come from, in a manner that gave me some perspective on it that I had never had, not leaving there.

AJ: Yeah and for a lot of us that happens when we go to college. When we leave the nest, so to speak.

JOHNNY: Totally.

AJ: Now we're sharing a dorm with people from other countries, other cities, other ethnicities, who don't share any of the cultural norms that I share personally. That's when I'm confronted with it. Oh, why is it? Right? Being raised catholic, surrounded by family members, friends, everyone who's Catholic like, "Oh, wow there are other religions. There are people who believe in an entirely different God."

JOHNNY: When I would meet other people with a different world view or different ideas, my narrative had affected me so much that I would laugh at them thinking, "Well that guy's in for a rude awakening." It was a good thing that I was born in Greensburg Pennsylvania or I'd be *****. Thinking I was the lucky one.

AJ: Right.

JOHNNY: And then in actuality, I was the one who was *****.

(laugh)

JOHNNY: But you have to step outside of that to be able to see it. It's a mind blowing thing, when it dawns on you.

AJ: The other thing is that, the past is filled with pain. The past is filled with trauma and tragedy. In that sense, a lot of us try to hide that pain. Or not deal with that pain --

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: -- or run from that pain. And we bury our past so deep that we lose sight of where we came from and what were those core lessons and values that we learned out of that tragedy, out of that difficulty. And it is important to realize that your past doesn't define you --

JOHNNY: No.

AJ: -- but it is a part of you. You can't run from it. And if you can take the lessons from the past, that's the most valuable tool you'll have in your toolbelt as you move through this journey.

JOHNNY: Coming to terms with it, gathering the lessons. Even when you look back at the pain, find a way to spin it so you can get something out of it that moves you forward. It's the best thing that you can do with that. But putting that together, is going to give you a great idea of why you've gotten to the place that you have, and what you're going to need to do to get to the place that you want to go. That's why putting that past together is so important.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

AJ: So we've written our past down, we've gone into detail about some highs and lows and looked at the lessons, and now we have to go to the opposite end and look at future. And start thinking about who it is that we want to become and questioning those beliefs as to who it is that we want to become, if they are true to ourself. Or if they have simply been indoctrinated or passed onto us, as if that's the only way to succeed. Which is how a lot of our future is passed onto us, right?

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: "You can only be a doctor. You can only be a lawyer. You can only go to graduate school. That's the only way to be a professional, to succeed." The funny part about it is that most

of the time, the people who are passing us that information, aren't actually in any of those professions. They just feel that that is guaranteed success. And as we're seeing, for a variety of reasons, right, the global economy is changing. Some of these indoctrinations we've had, these beliefs that have been passed on to us to define our future, don't fit with success, don't fit with who you want to become.

JOHNNY: Absolutely, we see it over and over again of people who have not chosen their past, took what they had been indoctrinated in and now, are extremely miserable, and moving into depression without an idea of how to escape it.

AJ: Right. You follow that from point A to point B all the way through, and you realize that point B is nothing that you actually wanted or desired, could be crushing. So the earlier you can start defining your narrative, the better. But if you are in that situation where you feel like the future you thought you would have is not what you have, it's important to define the future you want, truthfully, on paper, writing that down. And then the third part of the writing exercise, the final part, is now looking at the present. What can we do, in the present, to shape our beliefs, create those habits and tools that we need, to reach that future?

JOHNNY: Getting educated on as much experience, world culture, worldviews, other people's narratives -- all that's going to play out in a role allowing you to be a better person, to figure out what changes you're going to need to make. From A to B is going to have to work for you.

AJ: And that's the amazing thing, right? We're listening to a podcast right now, that's being recorded in Denver, from some people who have some lessons to share. You can go on Youtube, you can go online and find these perspectives, and gain this information and knowledge for free.

JOHNNY: Which is just amazing.

AJ: Right. So now we're in a situation where we have an opportunity to find, to seek out all of these tools, they're right in front of us, and start the implementation process.

JOHNNY: I know for all of us there are probably thinkers and people in our lives, who upon meeting them, challenged our first worldview or narrative and when thinking about it, realized it's wrong, there's a better one or a more intriguing one or a lesson that you can be picked up there -- changing that. Having your worldview blown apart, only to have it -- one coming aside where a new one is born, and a better one, something that allows you to be so happy moving forward.

AJ: The last, most important component of all this after you've finished this writing exercise and you understand now those three components of your narrative -- building that drive, that support network of the five people closest to you. And building it by sharing appreciation for them. And it's one of the exercises we do on the program is reaching out to people and sharing some appreciation and then, allowing them to understand you on all three of those levels. Stop hiding certain parts of your past from the people in your life that matter, the tribe you're building. Stop hiding your hopes and dreams from your best friend or the people that you count on the most. Because the more informed as to your narrative and the more in tune with who you truly are or want to become they are, the more impactful of a tribe you are able to build.

JOHNNY: Absolutely. Once you start writing this out and you start to see it for what it is, it can be a bit overwhelming. I know for myself, when I had put that together, it allows me to be surprised how I ended up here but it was because of all the work that I had to put in and changes that I had to make and worldviews that I had to shift and -- to get to that position. And so, when you see your past laid out and you have that emotional charge from it, you know that you're connected to it and you know that you can start making those changes to move into something else.

AJ: At this point, we understand our past. The three of us came from blue collar families and situations with the auto industry in Michigan and obviously the mining industry in Western Pennsylvania, indoctrinated with some beliefs that lead to us wanting to grind things out, grit --

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: -- hustle, focus on being tougher than the next guy, trying to outsmart people, and that shaped our past. And I want to share a little bit about what we hope the future of The Art of Charm is. It's so funny, you know, if we had done this snapshot five years ago or six years ago --

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: -- it's changed.

JOHNNY: Yes it has.

AJ: So I do want everyone to understand that it's okay for your future to change and shift. We're not asking you to put this in a stone tablet. It's just a notebook, you can rip that page out and write a new future for yourself. But our future now has really grown. Whereas we started this as a company focused on just interpersonal relationships, getting better with the opposite sex, and we've grown ourselves from boys into men almost.

(laughs)

JORDAN: Well --

AJ: And hopefully some of you followed us on that journey. And now, you know the focus on becoming better individuals in society and having a greater impact and a legacy has sort of shifted the view for us. Right at first it was like, "We've got to launch this podcast." Then it's like, "Well we've got to get this coaching thing going." And now, that we've taken a step back from all that really, what our goal is, is to create a movement --

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: -- of individuals who are pursuing a better version of themselves with the best knowledge available and the best tools. For each one of us, we've encountered some duds of tools. Some tools that absolutely do not work, and we hope to convey the tools that have impacted us in a very strong way to everyone. And it's not just in person, we've been fortunate with the podcast but growing that into a space where we can communicate through video, audio, and over the Web. And a way to grow a movement of people who are focused on growth. And it's been so amazing over the 10 years of doing this --

JORDAN: Insane.

AJ: -- and the people that we've met --

JORDAN: Yeah.

AJ: -- along the way who -- just us sharing our journey, has impacted them. And that really is the power of sharing your narrative with other people. Is you can have an impact. You can inspire others. You can become that person that they look up to.

JOHNNY: Well just that and a way to collect more and better tools to get to where you want to go by sharing your narrative with other people and vice versa.

AJ: And the last component I know, a lot of times from this place of an expert and a coach, you're put on such a high pedestal that "You're perfect and you're not working on anything, and you don't have any bad habits." In reality we are all, right now, focused on our present --

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: -- and building those habits that will help us reach more people, create a bigger impact. So what are the things in the present that you're working on?

JOHNNY: Well I mean, obviously my health is at 43 -- is very important to me. And a lot of the decisions that I've made in the last few years of my life, I've been working towards that. So, giving up cigarettes, working out, during the week -- usually four to five days a week, trying to eat better. And those things are, when I first made those changes, were -- if I could do that nine times out of 10 this week, then I'm moving in the right direction. And next week, 8 times out of 10, I'm moving in the right direction. And that's what it took. And so at this point, I was feeling good on those challenges, and continue being one percent better every day.

AJ: I know for me, as I reach my thirties and lost my dad to some health issues at a younger age than it should have been, health jumped to the forefront for me as well. But also the focus has been on self discipline and understanding that I didn't exhibit it through high school and college and I was kind of able to skate by without being disciplined. And now, as we're obviously able to interact with and meet very successful people, discipline is such a huge component of that success.

JOHNNY: Sure.

AJ: So it's been a real focus of my life and challenging myself to become more disciplined, and seeking pursuits that require a mental and a physical discipline to them.

JORDAN: Discipline definitely follows -- I mean we all worked out -- yesterday morning we all worked out. This morning we're all going to work out. Tomorrow morning. And it's not just physical skills, I mean, this is -- I remember when we started this, we'd roll out of bed around whenever the hell we felt like it --

(laugh)

JORDAN: -- and just kind of do some stuff, or not do some stuff and then go do --

AJ: We made a lot of excuses, right?

JORDAN: Yeah always.

AJ: "Oh, we're just late risers -- oh, you know."

JORDAN: Or we're night owls and then it's like, well it's 8 o'clock and we're watching Netflix and going to sleep. Or not even Netflix at that point. But we're watching movies and going to bed. We just weren't doing it. And so now yeah, discipline for sure. Physical and emotional. And also for me, I'm working a lot on the critical thinking skills that apparently I was taught in law school and just never used and forgot about.

Because now -- the podcast is so large now, that we can no longer be like, "Well I don't have any responsibility for the content of this thing." Like, every expert that comes on every discussion that happens -- People trust us, then they trust our opinions and they're following us and they're relying on us. So I have to work on those critical thinking skills. I have to work on the ability to coach and talk to the people that write in and give them good advice and not just like the crappy knee-jerk reaction that I might have had five years ago on the same subject.

JOHNNY: Sure.

JORDAN: In a way, sort of become like -- I don't want to say reluctant big brother, because I enjoy it a lot but I didn't plan to become like the person who's doling out all this advice. I mean, as AJ -- as you know, the show started with us mostly talking about our failures and joking around. Not trying to be preaching from the ivory tower how other people should live. And yet now, I think we've learned a lot through the past 10 years of teaching others, giving advice, following our own advice, or not and

creating a business based on that. That the value there, has to be communicated but has to be done so responsibly.

So I'm working a lot on the skill sets that allow that to happen in a more entertaining way, in a more efficient way, in a more educational way, in a more responsible way, and that includes honing things like presentation skills, critical thinking skills, and things like that along those lines. And those will come -- hopefully come into play even more in the future, as I actually have kids that are related to me and not just the Internet of kids listening to AoC.

AJ: I would love for everyone listening to [download the PDF and do this writing exercise](#) after you finish the podcast because, it has a really profound impact on your life. And studies are showing, when you craft a narrative and you understand what the journey is in front of you, you can reach success.

JOHNNY: Absolutely.

AJ: And they're seeing it in test scores in students, grade points, and then they're looking at skills and retention. So understanding this component of building a narrative, I know for some, before listening to this might have been very foreign. I would love to see you guys submit the PDF over to us and see what journey you are on.

JOHNNY: From the guys who I know who really enjoy this podcast, and I know there's some big fans out there for Star Wars. I mean what do you think Star Wars is? It's the hero's journey. You have a hero's journey, you just have to put one together. There's going to be need or a place that you want to go. There's going to be a journey to get there. It's going to be scary and it's going to be tough. You're going to find some adversity, and if you toil around in that adversity long enough, you'll find what you need to make it to the other side. Having that idea, what that other side is, is important. Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, all these stories, through time are -- are the hero's journey. And

everyone has a hero's journey inside of them. You just have to put it together.

Jordan: I feel like we have to have a rainbow going across the sky on that note. And that PDF, we can throw that down just to make it super easy. It can be linked in the show notes, but we'll link to these show notes in an easy to find way. If you'll just go to theartofcharm.com/heropdf so the PDF that you'll get -- we'll actually throw it right on the page but you can find that page real easy at theartofcharm.com/heropdf and it'll be linked in right near the player for this episode. Thanks, guys.

JOHNNY: All right.

JORDAN: Great big thank you to AJ, Johnny. They did a great job as usual. I love these Toolbox episodes and if you enjoyed this, don't forget you can let us know on Twitter. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. I'd love to hear your number one takeaway from this episode. Remember you can tap our album art, that little picture of AJ and I, the little cartoon -- in most mobile podcast players you can just touch your phone screen, it should pop right up. I'm also on Twitter and it's a great way to just engage with me there and engage with the show.

Our boot camps are live programs are at theartofcharm.com/bootcamp. That's where you can join thousands of other guys who've been through the program. It's a live program in L.A. Guys come from all over the world so I don't want to hear how you live in Chicago and it's too far. You can join their network for life and you can travel around the world and meet people all over the place that have been through the program. A lot of life long friendships formed there and the live program is by far and away my favorite part of running AoC. So check that stuff out.

We're happy to send you some info. If you're just thinking about it a little bit, or you're curious, get in touch. You can email me jordan@theartofcharm.com or go to theartofcharm.com/bootcamp. I also want to encourage you to

join us in the AoC challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge. You can also text the word charmed to 33444. That's C-H-A-R-M-E-D to 33444. The challenge is about improving your networking and your connection skills and inspiring those around you to develop a personal and professional relationship with you.

We'll also email you our fundamentals Toolbox that I mentioned earlier on the show, which includes this episode and includes some great practical stuff on reading body language, having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, mentorship, persuasion tactics, and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm. I also do regular videos with drills and exercises to help you move forward. It's designed to make you a better networker, a better connector, and a better thinker. That's theartofcharm.com/challenge or text the word charmed, in the U.S., to 33444.

For full shownotes for this and all previous episodes, head on over to theartofcharm.com/podcast. This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor. And the show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty. I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. Go ahead, tell your friends, because the greatest compliment you can give us is a referral to someone else, either in person or shared on the Web. Word of mouth is everything. So stay charming, and leave everything and everyone, better than you found them.

