

## How to Captivate and Connect with AJ Harbinger

**AJ Harbinger:** [00:00:00] I think the biggest bit of advice that I have for all of our clients is get comfortable with silence. So many of us, uh, and especially myself as an introvert, have found over time that, you know, silence needs to be filled and silence can even be panic inducing, like, Oh, I should be saying something or doing something.

Why am I not? But all of those questions are room in that conversation for the other person to breathe and to really share and to get to a place of vulnerability. we can't do that if we're working really fast and we're already getting two or three steps ahead and assuming what the person's going to say

You're listening to AJ Harbinger on psychologists off the clock

We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you [00:01:00] flourish in your relationships, work and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of act daily journal.

**Diana Hill:** I'm Dr. Diana Hill coauthor with Debbie on act daily journal and practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

**Yael Schonbrun:** From coast to coast, am doctor yells shown. a Boston based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown university.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors  
we hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life  
Thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock.

**Diana Hill:** We're so happy to be partnered with Praxis, continuing education here at psychologists off the clock, they offer continuing education for promoting lasting change with evidence-based training.  
And they're the premier provider in continuing education for clinical professionals. Some of their ongoing on demand. Anytime classes include act immersion with Steve Hayes act in practice, and also the DNA VI model, which is with Louis Hayes who works with adolescents and is [00:02:00] fantastic.

**Debbie Sorensen:** yes, and we have big news. We Diana and Debbie here are offering a Praxis training. It's a two hour workshop on Wednesday, April 28th. And you can sign up best of all, it's free and anyone can join. It's not limited to therapists. And what we're going to do is talk about some of the concepts from our book that we have coming out in may and offer you some practices that you can use from acceptance and commitment therapy to thrive in your own life. So we're really excited to be offering that. You should check it out and we hope you can join us.

**Diana Hill:** So go to our website off the clock. psych.com to get a promotion code on live events through practice.

Hey folks is Diana here, and we have a conversation with AJ Harbinger. Who's from the art of charm podcast. And we're talking all about relationships today. Debbie is here with me. How did it land for you when you listen to the episode? Debbie?

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, well, it's really interesting timing. I think this is a important conversation to have at this moment, because right. This point in [00:03:00] history, we are looking toward reopening and reconnecting after the pandemic, people are getting out there a bit more socially, and I think that's going to keep happening more and more over the months ahead.

And so it was good timing because some of us might be a little rusty. So it's good to think about this. And what's so interesting. Diana to me is that I'm really hearing a lot of people who have more mixed feelings than you might think about getting back out there because you would think, Oh, I've missed being able to see my friends so much.

I've really missed. I felt so bummed out about being so isolated. And yet I'm finding that some people are not quite sure about it. I just want to normalize that because I think that a lot of us even I'm pretty extroverted and I definitely have enjoyed some aspects of. Being home more. And I think a lot of people are feeling whether they're anxious or just feeling a little bit.

Like, I'm not sure if I really wanted to get out.

**Diana Hill:** Another aspect of the pandemic is that [00:04:00] we got really clear really quickly about what's important to us and maybe some of the filler or things that we were doing that didn't feel connecting, or that was on the surface.

And after you've been through something like this, you may have a longing to connect in a deeper way, a more meaningful way, which is what AJ talks about. But at the same time doing that is incredibly scary. And vulnerable. And so how do we step into and really think about as we're, you know, in some ways rebuilding our lives, how do we want to rebuild them?

And part of that has to do with the people that we're engaging with and how do we want to engage and maybe there's ways in which we can do it that are a little bit more meaningful or, um, more grounded than how we were before.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And also I think for people who want to make new connections, whether you're dating or you're trying to meet some new friends and make new connections, I feel like this can be hard. And [00:05:00] especially it, it almost like builds up in your head more, the longer you've been. Not doing that. And it really becomes a little bit, maybe scary or awkward.

It might be tempting to want to avoid it and say, you know, I'm not going to get out there. And I think one thing that was really interesting in this interview is just thinking about some of the specific ways that we can show up in relationships that are more and less helpful. You know, sometimes we might feel anxious and therefore get a little guarded or defensive or actually more needy or something like that.

And it can. It can be helpful. I think, to just take a look at your values around relationship and how do you want to show up? Even if it feels awkward and uncomfortable sometimes.

**Diana Hill:** Some of the pressure off, because a lot of times we go into new relationships thinking that we need, we need. Have something clever to say, or be impressive and really the way that we connect with each other is more just around shared interest in vulnerabilities and [00:06:00] getting curious about who is the person behind, uh, maybe the shell that they're, that they're putting on or the story that they put on about themselves.

So a lot of times we show up with our story of, I am this, I am not that, really, if we can find more of a way in which we relate just to being human together, it, it takes the pressure off and it also leads to more comfortable, relaxed connection. AJ does a good job, I think at describing some of the steps to doing that in this episode.

**Debbie Sorensen:** And not only that he actually demonstrates it by sharing in that way himself in the episode, which I thought was really lovely.

**Diana Hill:** So take a listen.

I'm excited to talk with you and I'm hoping that today can just be pretty conversational and really highlighting who and what you are. And, uh, it's interesting because I really didn't know much about you, before watching you at the summit.

For a psychologist off the clock. And I had never listened to an art of charm podcast. I [00:07:00] only knew about you through Michael who? Michael Harold who's the strategic consultant on our show. He, he came to us through you because Jill was on your show. And, uh, I'm very picky with who I listened to. Like my, I have like three podcasts I listened to because my time is so limited. And you made it in.

**AJ Harbinger:** Awesome

**Diana Hill:** To the, to the small circle, because you were so charming, you charmed, you turned our socks off and you practice what you preach. So I'm excited to talk about, how you use these conversation skills to really captivate people. But there's also a heart there behind you, and I'm hoping we can talk a little bit about that today.

**AJ Harbinger:** love to thank you so much Kind words It's uh it's been a labor of love for 15 years So the podcast is certainly an opportunity to to work on growing those skills that I shared in the summit And it's provided an amazing opportunity to have great conversations with really successful people and unpack their mindsets and strategies around building [00:08:00] quality relationships which seems to be the common thread between everyone Success is the relationships

**Diana Hill:** I'm wondering, just because I'm interested about what it was that you were doing, that was, that was captivating during your presentation. I think others will want to know as well, because you talk about that first impression being so important and actually predicting, uh, what we think about people in the future.

What were some of the skills that you were using that, uh, charmed everyone so well,

**AJ Harbinger:** Well, I think number one is realizing that the energy that you join a zoom meeting with sets the tone. And I know myself, zoom can be quite exhausting. In fact, before this, I was reading some research from Stanford around zoom fatigue and what's causing it. So for me, the first thing that I do is remove all of those distractions going on.

And I make sure that I get a good workout in before. So have a great energy level. And the second I turn on the video, like I know that that's going to make that impact much [00:09:00] like walking in a room for the first time, around a physical first impression, and then making sure that I'm using my hands and I'm using more of the screen.

I noticed that many people in there presenting on zoom, they're pretty still and stationary, which is totally the opposite of how we would present on stage. Where we do have more room to move and actually just stipulate for the audience. So those are sort of the strategies that I have taken from the stage to presenting in a zoom and making sure that I'm taking time for the audience to get engaged to the buildup of what I'm presenting.

Uh, so that's really. My strategy when it comes to zoom presenting or podcast episodes. And of course, I've had a lot of practice watching those videos back from our podcast recordings, as they moved to zoom around what looks good in those little social media clips and what seems off pudding. So that feedback has been really helpful in my development.

**Diana Hill:** Uh, use a lot of science in your, , presentations, but you talked about how we only remember about [00:10:00] 10% of the material that someone, , shares in a presentation. But what we remember more is, is how they made us feel. And it was funny because the. The 10% of the material that I remembered was don't eat on zoom.

And the reason why was because earlier that day I was having a salad with ranch dressing in front of all of my podcasts co-hosts and I had this feeling and the embarrassment of, Oh no, I broken the card in her role. Could you talk about some of the, some of the rules or recommended besides using your hands?

And I know that's something that we all can can do to keep people engaged, but some of the roles that you have or recommendations you have on zoom,

**AJ Harbinger:** Yeah, well, that one is a, a Cardinal rule around eating on, on zoom. And the research is actually pretty stark because many of us don't realize that these zoom meetings are completely unnatural. Like this is outside of the bounds of human nature, much like when the elevator was invented or the first time we got into ride share.

Do we talk to the driver? Do we not? Do we look at people in the elevator?

[00:11:00] Do we not? These are unnatural settings that we're forced into because of the pandemic and technology. So realizing that prolonged eye contact can be a little jarring. So reminding yourself, Hey, look away at times, take a break. If necessary from that stark eye contact, if you're feeling a little anxious, And remove those outside distractions right on zoom.

We tend to be on our laptop and we probably have multiple windows open. There's probably notifications or text messages dinging. So turning off those notifications so that you can be fully present with your audience or with your team in a meeting is really important. And I've been on enough zoom meetings now to know what happens.

If I leave my office door open, it's sort of a universal signal to my fiancée, Amy or to my puppy. Hey. Come on in Amy is not busy. So making sure to close the door and keep that space secure so that you can give your all in a zoom presentation or a zoom meeting is, is really important. And it's [00:12:00] okay. At times, if you are eating, you are nibbling or you have something distracting to mute yourself and turn off the video and pull away as a nice break.

And the last thing I'll say that's helped me quite a bit is just moving to a standing desk. So many of us don't realize the difference in energy we have when we're standing and presenting versus seated and presenting, which is why in a typical, real life situation, you're not going to give a TEDx talk from a chair.

You're probably not going to present your thesis seated. You're going to be standing because it projects an air of confidence and it's a lot more engaging with the audience.

**Diana Hill:** it's so funny because I switched from a standing desk with my podcast to sitting on the floor. And the reason why I did that is because for me, I sit on the floor a lot when I'm working. And also I sit on the floor when I meditate. And so for me, it evokes a feeling of calm presence. And when I stand, I get a little too animated on the, like hitting the mic and.

Going all over the place. [00:13:00] And so it's just sort of also tuning into how you can best be embodied and present in this space. And it sounds like for you standing and projecting and expressing is really helpful for me. I run a little anxious. So I need to get more grounded. I need to get low to ground myself, but I love these ideas because we're entering into a, it's not just going to end with a pandemic.

It's going to be a new way of relating to each other and we have to be flexible and adapt in order to be effective in these new environments. And one of the things that I think about with you, because you're such a good relationship expert is how can we engage in meaningful connection with people when we're not interacting with them in the same way that we used to.

Do you have any tips for folks that are trying to find relationships or build relationships online? Not just present online.

**AJ Harbinger:** Yeah, I think you touch on a really key point that these technologies are becoming a big [00:14:00] part of our life, but we haven't really thought about that, how we utilize them as a tool for the outcome that we're looking for. So for example, in our X-Factor accelerator group, we get a lot of questions around online dating and the difference between the platforms and which one should I use and how should I present myself?

And it's very similar advice that I give anyone going on a job interview. Okay. It's not about you projecting this great image of yourself. It's about you actually interviewing the company that you want to work for or interviewing the person

that you would like in your relationships. So it's not about presenting the best version of yourself and trying to create this perfect image.

It's more about projecting what it is that you're truly looking for and what those expectations you have. In a partner and less focus on how you're being perceived and more focused on what am I using to filter in the right people.

And how am I presenting myself in a way that filters in who I want to see and filters out who I don't want to see

so that's how I would [00:15:00] encourage everyone to effectively use these tools of technology to connect us, to create better relationships.

**Diana Hill:** I really like how you talk about emotional, the, the emotional component of connection and in your most, actually I listened to your podcast on bids for connection, and you draw a lot on John Gottman's work. And I'm wondering how we do that. Like, when you're talking about.

Filtering out people. And then how do you keep the people that now, now you filter them out and you want to get to the next level of connection with them. How do you do that? And how do you use emotion as a way to connect?

**AJ Harbinger:** so a big part of that emotional bids concept is everything that we're doing in communication with a stranger that we're interested in is a bid for that connection and what we're posting on social media. What we're putting on a profile is a bid for connection. So, what I encourage all of our clients to do is to actually sit with, you know, what are the photos [00:16:00] that this person chose?

What are the prompts that they put in their bio? It's all there to tell a story. And they want that opportunity to share that story about who they are. And as an introvert, that's great because I don't have to talk about myself. I can ask better questions and listen to the emotional bids that are coming my way and turn towards them.

So, you know, When I look at an online dating profile and I'm working with our clients, I tell them to focus on the details in those photos, the details in the bio, and then ask them to share, you know, what was it like being at the top of that Hill when you were hiking or, Oh my God, I've never skied.

What's that feeling? The first time you stood up skiing. Now we're playing around the emotions. We're talking about the emotions that are tied directly to that dating profile. And when people say, Hey, you know, I'm struggling to connect with my friends right now. I'm not seeing them as much. It's like, well, go on social media and see what they're posting about.

What they're posting about is what they want to connect on. It's what's important to them. It's what they want attention for [00:17:00] acceptance for or appreciation. So that's how I like to incorporate technology and use it as a tool to foster connection, whether it's in dating or whether it's in my social life.

Uh, those are the signals that are coming at us digitally that we need to pay closer attention to, to foster those great release. Okay.

**Diana Hill:** that's fantastic. As a therapist, I have people answer questions in an intake. And when I read through the intake, I'm looking for the little. Bits of person

that's showing through in terms of their history. What's why they're coming in, not just sort of the symptoms, but the deeper, why that they're longing for.

And so when I was reading your bio. Online and reading through different things. There was two things that stood out about you that if you were coming in to therapy or maybe into a friendship, I'd want to know about the first was your experience. Uh, Of how you started the podcast, which was during graduate school and, uh, that you, [00:18:00] you discontinued, it sounds like a PhD program to pursue this.

So that really peaked my interest curiosity. And then the second one was you being raised by a single dad and here's this guy that's really into relationships and emotions and building a connection who was raised by a single dad. So those two things would be. Sort of my interest curiosity for you. Can you talk, maybe we'll start with the grad school.

One, can you talk a little bit about the why behind that?

**AJ Harbinger:** well, it's, it's interesting because it is rooted in my experience with a single dad and his. Emphasis that he put on education and how, of course, any parent wants their kids to succeed even more than they had. And my dad growing up entered the Navy, wasn't really that great in school. And then ended up in a pretty laborist.

Career doing hard labor and end up getting physically hurt by it and going through some physical rehab that ultimately [00:19:00] led to some painkiller addiction. So his journey working with his hands and just how hard life was on him, really set the tone for me and my sister to achieve an education that would allow us to move beyond hard labor.

And that for me, was rooted in science. So the story that I created growing up was that I was going to be a doctor. I was of course, going to make my dad proud. And I was never going to be put in a situation that, you know, a physical laborist job would harm me or ruin my future. And that story was so woven in to my young adult life that I would present about, uh, wanting to become a dramatic pathologist.

That's how specific I was in, in middle school. Based on my experience, fortunately with my aunt who stood, stepped in and became a mother figure to me. So my dad's sister really helped me and raised me and my sister with our grandmother. So although I didn't have a mom, I had a lot of feminine energy in my life and a lot around connecting and relationships all around me and [00:20:00] my sister being my best friend.

Uh, I learned a lot about. That experience from a woman's perspective and how to connect in that way on an emotional level, fast forward to graduate school. You know, I started in the pre-med track and I was going to start applying to med schools and I was talking to my career counselor and she said, you know, the schools you want to get into, they're pretty difficult, pretty competitive.

And. I think you need some more experience on your application to really speak to your why. And I was like, Oh, but my why is I've always wanted to be a doctor and she's like, well, that's not going to get you into med

**Diana Hill:** that's. Everyone's why.

**AJ Harbinger:** Exactly. So she really pushed me to get a job working first in a hospital and then working in a lab to really beef up my application to med school. And I didn't enjoy the work in the hospital to be Frank. I had a lot of experience with. Doctors and med students who were pretty unhappy with their choices and where they ended up. So that was kind of [00:21:00] shocking to me because I'd always looked up to doctors my entire life and thought, you know, if I just follow this linear path to success, I will be happy.

So that really was like, I don't know about this whole hospital thing. Let's check out the lab. And the second and God in the lab, we were working on an animal model for head and neck cancer STEM cells. And it was just completely fascinating work, very hands-on. I felt like I was creating and doing experiments that no one else in the world was doing.

And it was this new adventure for me, which really tapped into one of my main core values of adventure. So I loved that experience. I relished that work.

Unfortunately, as we got closer to publication, we got scooped by Stanford and a lab who had been working pretty hard on this exact same project.

And in pairing up with Stanford, I lost a lot of the credit that I was really hanging my hat on and hoping that I would receive from all of this hard work. So I kind of left that experience a little bit Willard and frustrated by science. But my principal investigator and boss really [00:22:00] encouraged me said, you know, the work you were doing was graduate student level work.

Have you ever thought about a PhD? And I'd never once thought about it? I told myself I was going to be an MD. I'm doing all of this work in the lab to become a doctor, to make my dad proud. And I was like, you know, let me look into it. So I applied to one school in Michigan. My boss had an opportunity to talk to the admissions and I actually got in.

So there I was in grad school and that's when imposter syndrome hit me in the face, like a ton of bricks. Uh, everyone in the lab was a lot smarter than me, more accomplished, published multiple articles. And I just always felt like I was a step behind and that really shook my confidence and that had a cascade effect in my life of not showing up for friends, not getting the dates that I wanted.

And I felt really sort of run down and beat up by that lab experience in the PhD program. And by putting my, my new boss on a pedestal, I just never felt like I was smart enough. [00:23:00] And that's what started this idea of, Hey, let's start a podcast to regain my confidence when it comes to attracting and dating quality women.

And that show started as a hobby, never thought it would turn into anything. In fact, you know, 15 years ago, if you were to say you're starting a podcast, people would probably wonder what. What is going on with you, is everything okay. Now, as we see podcasts are, are ever-growing and popular. For me, you know, the podcast was that gateway to, to have better conversations and learn how to grow my confidence. And as the podcast grew in popularity, I realized. There are a lot of young people dealing with these same struggles, not understanding the dating



world, not showing up in their relationships and struggling with confidence and imposter syndrome issues.

And that created an opportunity for me to start helping our audience members and coaching them. And it was just so impactful in my life that I said, well, wait a second. I'm I'm dreading going into the lab. I'm not really fulfilling my dreams on [00:24:00] pursuing this PhD. Um, I'm checking this box for my dad to be proud. But this other thing is so much more exciting. So I made the very difficult decision to sit my dad down and tell him I was dropping on to graduate school. And, uh, I'm sure I, I caused a few more gray hairs in that conversation and packed everything and moved to New York to start the coaching company.

**Diana Hill:** Wow. So much that you shared in there that really, and you, you were good at verbalizing it along the way in terms of highlighting your values and , that you were sort of like tuning in. To your values, but then it actually took that, that point in time in graduate school to say, I have to like, let go of this thing that I've worked so hard to get to.

It takes so much courage to do something like that. And it's interesting cause we share in the reason why it piqued my interest is that we share in that, that in my second year of my PhD program, I withdrew as well. And I remember that moment of like, [00:25:00] I'm going to let go of something that feels impossible to let go of and what will people think and how am I going to be letting people down.

But my gut being so loud about this, not working for me in this way, having to make that decision. And I wonder now you have perspective, like you're looking back on it now, so you can see yourself in a different way. What would be the. You know, they advice that you would give your yourself then knowing what you know now

**AJ Harbinger:** I was fortunate in that I listened to my intuition. So my advice would probably be the same. What I didn't realize is the impact that that decision would have on others and the way that I would allow their perceptions of me to impact me. And that's the piece that I would give my past self, some more guidance around.

That people are [00:26:00] going to say a lot of things, because they have a story about you built up in their head and they want the best for you. They just don't know what is truly best for you. So I looked at a lot of the way people perceived me and judged me and criticized that decision as they were trying to hurt me and holding me back and I pushed them away.

And some relatives and family members and friends even. Who just really questioned that decision because they thought I was giving up a clear path to success to start something that no one had heard of and moved to another city. And my reaction to that was to Stonewall and to remove myself and to damage some of those relationships, you know, looking back on it now.

Everyone was coming from a great place. They wanted me to be happy and successful. They just didn't know that this path was a way for me to achieve that. And I wasn't doing a great job in articulating my real reasons for leaving. I just

made the decision and left. [00:27:00] And I think, you know, that was really an area and, uh, room for growth for me personally, is to realize.

And that's also also what I tell our clients is that, you know, people are not purposely trying to hurt you. They're just doing the best they can with the tools and strategies that they have in their life. And if you, if you give people. A level of self-compassion that you give yourself and you're compassionate to what they're trying to do, even though you might not like the conversations, you might not like the way they're talking to you or judging you around things.

Um, they, they meant, well, for me, they just didn't realize that this path was the path that I needed to be on, not the path that they had built up in their head and the stories that I had shared with them as I was growing up.

**Diana Hill:** uh, as you talk about that, there are attempts to fix you or prevent you from. Making this move really at the root of them was caring deeply for you. It just came out as this fixing or judgment or criticism. And [00:28:00] isn't that the case in our relationships that we can get caught in this dynamic of I'm trying to like fix you right now.

But it's because I care because I love you. And we have to look past the, the fixing reflex to the, to the caring that's underneath. It. It, uh, I interviewed, uh, Dr. Rolnick a while back, who's one of the founders of motivational interviewing and he talks about that fixing reflex and how damaging it is and, and how it leads to less likely for people to change when we start to, uh, want to fix them or, or.

Or block them in terms of their trajectory, but one word that you used in there, which was stonewalling, and that sort of goes to John Gottman's work. And I know you've been really influenced by his work in terms of relationship. And, and I think of stonewalling, I got to think of the four horsemen of relationships.

The four things, the four horsemen come from the pocalypse of this is the things that if you do this in a relationship, it's sort of like the end of the world, and they're going to predict, uh, bad things in your relationship. And one of them is.

[00:29:00] Stonewalling. So maybe that's one of your, uh, uh, horsemen, but can you talk more about John Gottman, how he's influenced you in terms of relationships?

**AJ Harbinger:** absolutely. You know, it's, it's interesting that I started this journey to get better. With building my own relationships and ensuring that journey on the podcast and realizing that many of us are struggling in these areas, especially in the relationships we care deeply about. Uh, I realized from the start that a lot of what I was reading about John Gottman's work.

Directly applied to me in the relationship that I was in at the time. And, uh, I was in a, a long-term serious relationship where that is exactly what I would do. The second I received criticism was Stonewall. And then my partner at the time would tell me, you know, I don't think you're hearing me and I I'm, I really feel you're distant from me.

And here I was, I was driving that distance. I was making that choice to, to be distant in our relationship and it ultimately ended up in a breakup. And [00:30:00] in that moment I had an opportunity to really look at myself. So it's, it's interesting

as we frame this question around, you know, that that need to give feedback that need to give advice.

Well, it's great when you're a coach and I feel. So happy that, that my job involves giving advice. And sometimes my clients actually listened to my advice, but when we bring that into every relationship, every conversation, when people aren't interested in feedback, they want emotional support. They want compassion.

We're actually doing harm to those relationships. And that's been a realization that I've had over the last few years about how do I show up in relationships? And it's really interesting. We're talking about this because just yesterday in my men's group, We were having a conversation around feedback, giving and receiving feedback.

And I had mentioned something that I had started implementing with my fiancé, Amy around essentially we both have the same desire to, to grow and help the other person grow. And we simply ask at the very start of any [00:31:00] conversation around this is, are you looking for feedback or are you looking for support? And it's been life changing because for me, my first instinct as a coach, as someone who loves the research, loves the science loves working on myself, is to reach for that feedback and give that feedback. And many times Amy is.

Just sharing this because she just wants support. She wants to feel heard. It's been a lot weighing on her and in her head and on her shoulders. And I wasn't giving that support because I was directly going to here's the root of the problem. And here's what Dr. Gottman says. And here's how we fix it. And oftentimes in our relationship, it's not about the fix. It's simply about being heard and being validated.

So, you know, part of that was learning about John Gottman and now it's, it's also learning about myself and how I, I appear in relationships. And that's why we've had, uh, John Gottman's therapist on the show to talk about these four horsemen. And that episode is really popular because many in our audience are like me [00:32:00] stonewalling, just retreat.

Instead of having that confrontation, instead of, um, sitting with those negative emotions, it's easier to just withdraw. And to Stonewall to not say anything to your partner, to your friend and, uh, you know, sweep that conflict under the rug. But unfortunately over time that that's shown that the more we're sweeping under the rug.

Well, at some point it has to go somewhere and oftentimes it's way more hurtful later when we're unpacking everything that's under the rug. Then just in the moment, sharing how we're feeling, what we're thinking and what our needs are.

**Diana Hill:** Yeah, I wasn't thinking about the four horsemen and just to lay out what they are. It's giving criticism, it's stonewalling, it's being defensive. And then the last one, which is sort of, I think, Uh, is the most D it's like the most dangerous one, right? The one that predicts the most likelihood to have, a relationship problem in the future is contempt.

And contempt has a quality [00:33:00] of both criticism with superiority associated with it. And what I get curious about is not only for folks that, so you're

a stone Waller. So I'm curious about not only how you do that in relationship, but then how we do those, all those four things. In relationship to ourselves, like how we Stonewall ourselves or how we critique ourselves or how we practice contempt, where we think about, Oh, there's this superior version of me that went to medical school and I'm not living up to that or how we get defensive with ourselves.

We point fingers at everyone else. For you, which of those four horsemen do you, do you do with yourself?

**AJ Harbinger:** It's the same stonewalling. So I think for Amy it's criticism and we have this interesting cycle where I hear the criticism and I withdraw, and that frustrates Amy because she doesn't feel that the criticism is heard and oftentimes, oftentimes she would seek criticism for me. And I don't feel comfortable [00:34:00] giving the criticism because I know what it feels like for me and what it triggers that it's stonewalls.

So I often. Do not give the criticism or the feedback that she's looking for, either in those moments, in our relationship. So I'm very adept at giving the feedback around how we relate to others, but in our own relationship, I'm hesitant to give the criticism because I know it triggers me into stonewalling and I'm not going to lie a big part of working on my own happiness and joy and fulfillment in life is. Been removing that layer of comparison. So I used to, you know, especially when the business was just getting started and there was a lot of self doubt around what was going on, you know, I would check in on the old lab mates and see what they'd published and play through that fantasy of, Oh, I stayed in the PhD program.

Where would I be working now? How many. Papers will be published and sit with, am I doing the right thing? And to your point, you know, comparing yourself to that perfect [00:35:00] version. Uh, so that is something that I had to really unpack and sit with and, and work through because I knew that every time I was comparing myself to a future version of myself or an alternate reality of myself or to others in the same space that we're in, like comparing downloads and followers and everything else, it just led to.

A feedback loop that would lead me to Stonewall and withdraw and to beat myself up internally and not verbalize it. And then my friends, family, and partner would see me as someone who is clearly emotionally not present and not available. But not understanding why. So for me, I didn't want to put myself in that state because I want to be fully present in my relationships and I want to be the best version of myself.

So unpacking the criticism in honesty, I still Stonewall with myself and that's something that is a process that I'm continuing to work through unfortunate. And that we [00:36:00] have a relationship where we can communicate that, Hey, you're stonewalling or, Hey, this is. A lot of criticism that I'm not ready for being open and honest with those needs and expectations is really helpful and nurturing and developing and deepening that relationship.

**Diana Hill:** yeah, you're like your own little mini love lab. It sounds like. Learning over time about the dynamics between the two of you and then teaching that

that's a really, um, must be both vulnerable and rewarding at the same time. Doing that, like to talk about your relationship in such a public way.

**AJ Harbinger:** It's created an, an opportunity, I think for our clients to see the warts and all, and understand that we're all working through these things and it's not about being perfect. It's not about the pursuit of perfection. It's about understanding that these are patterns and these are triggers and habits in our life that we've developed through experience with our family, the way we are raised, the way [00:37:00] we viewed ourself and our self image.

And I would be lying as a coach. If I just said, Hey, everything is sunshine and rainbows over here in silver Lake. No, these are things that every relationship goes through and I want to give my clients the best tools. So I have to have used the tools myself.

**Diana Hill:** Yeah, it actually would be quite off-putting if you were to perfect. It's something that, um, Kelly Wilson said a long time ago at a workshop that I did with him, where he said, I pity the perfect parent, because if you are a perfect parent, then one day, your kid's going to come to you. And they're going to have something shameful or hard that they want to share with you and they won't share because you're perfect.

Right. And so I sort of pity the perfect coach or the perfect therapist or the perfect relationship expert, because people won't want to share if, or be able to go there if you don't show some of your vulnerabilities too. So I appreciate thank you so much for opening up in that way. With us in [00:38:00] this public way.

And I think it really links to some of your teachings around vulnerability and emotion and, and the different styles of communication. So you talked about in the, um, I'm remembering my 10%, my other 10% that I remembered from your talk was that there's three types of captivating questions. I took notes.

So I had an extra, remember this three types of captivating questions complimentary. So I did a complimentary one at the beginning and then vulnerable I'm working on my vulnerable questions with you. And then open-ended, which are just, uh, ones that are, uh, helping you kind of explore the person more. Can you talk about sort of how you do this in a coaching session, maybe with someone that's socially anxious or is wanting to try these skills on, like, what would be some advice you'd give them.

**AJ Harbinger:** well, I think the biggest bit of advice that I have for all of our clients is get comfortable with silence. So many of us, uh, and especially [00:39:00] myself as an introvert, uh, have found over time that, you know, silence needs to be filled and silence can even be panic inducing, like, Oh, I should be saying something or doing something.

Why am I not? But all of those questions are room in that conversation for the other person to breathe and to really share and to get to a place of vulnerability. we can't do that if we're working really fast and we're already getting two or three steps ahead and assuming what the person's going to say, and I used to do this even in preparing for the podcast.

So I'd put together our notes and I'd talk with the team about it. And then. I would start linking the questions together. Okay. I'm going to ask this question. Then the

guest is going to say this, and then this is the perfect follow-up question. And what I found over time is I never got to those follow-up questions.

I was doing all this preparation, but the conversation never went there. And how many of us come into these conversations? Thinking about the questions we're going to ask, what the answer is going to be, and then how we [00:40:00] can have that quick one-liner that joke or that follow-up question. And then we're flat-footed and we don't know how to proceed.

So a large part about the question and answer and statement model that we use in our conversation formula is yes, there are important, impactful questions to ask, but then there's also the silence that goes along with listening and giving that person an opportunity to really share. So we're the extroverts that I work with struggle is they want to fill the silence with themselves.

The introverts tend to struggle because they want to fill the silence with more questions. It's like a hot potato. Like I don't want to talk. So let me like find something else to get this other person to share. In reality, the best conversations have awkward silences. And I hate that we've turned them awkward because they're not, that's the beauty of conversation.

And each one of those questions creates that opportunity. For the silent pause and the person to really think and [00:41:00] explore who they are and then share who they are. Right? Many of us have not been asked to complimentary question where we're actually receiving a compliment. That's asking us to expand on how we gain that skill or how we're able to show up like that.

What about us has created that in ourselves? So when people get asked those questions, There is going to be a pause. There is going to be some silence, cause they're like, wow, I really need to think this through. And let me, let me sit with that a little bit. That creates the vulnerability that we're looking for around connection.

**Diana Hill:** so I totally received what you just said in a very meadow way of how I approach podcasting. And, and even in this interview with you, right. Of I have my notes, I have my plan, but then I'm also trying to tend to you. And it's so it's so great. [00:42:00] Thank you for that. The awkward silence and the being with the person, and it's sort of like a leaning back and letting go a little bit and letting the waves and the tide take you.

Yeah, really nice. Uh, and it makes me think about actually the feedback that I got so interesting after you. Talk, do you do these interviews? And then afterwards there's the chat after with the person. And oftentimes I forget to keep recording. Cause that's the best part, but the chat after with, um, Rollnick who was like, you know, motivational interviewing guy, his, his, his feedback to me was in the beginning.

You were, and this was feedback in the beginning. You were, you, you, you were pretty trying to be pretty clever,

but then it got good later on when you drop trying to be clever. And it's for me being clever is an emotional avoidance strategy. It's like, I can, I can lean on this thing. And it sounds like that might be one for you too. Like your science

background is like, how do I get clever about this? How do I link this to [00:43:00] science and grounded in this thing that I know, but, but, and that's okay.

I mean, there's a, there's some positive aspects about that, but sometimes being clever interferes with relating and connecting.

**AJ Harbinger:** And it keeps us from going to that area of real exploration where the, the fun and the vulnerability actually is, the more we plan out. And the more we try to be clever and stay in our safe space, right. For me science, like, let's go back to the science. Well, that's just me saying, Hey, I'm not really comfortable with the unknown of where this conversation can go.

And, you know, I. I'll be Frank many in my audience, probably don't even know some of the stories that I shared with you because. That's not how I approach our interviews and our conversations. I am a little bit more guarded on our podcast and our show. I've shared a bit about my experience. I do a lot more of that vulnerability with our actual clients as a way to really show them, Hey, you know, these are the flaws that we're all working [00:44:00] through.

Um, but that's even feedback I've gotten around. Our show is, Hey, I'd love to know more about AJ and Johnny. Um, they do such a great job getting the. Person they're interviewing to open up and in the toolbox episodes, they're great at sharing the science, but you know, what's the backstory there and how are they showing up in their lives?

So, uh, these are the fun moments for me, where I get to sort of relax a little bit and open up more.

**Diana Hill:** Yeah, I can see that. And I can see the difference between the beginning of our conversation to the middle, to now how it's started to open up. In a different way, you know, like in the beginning, you, you know, all the pointers to go through and we could've stayed in that space for a full episode of just give us the pointers, give us the bullet points, walk me through that PowerPoint and how different it feels when you're you have those same principles, but you're showing how you apply it.

In your life. That's, uh, that really interests me. Yeah. You know, I think about the science [00:45:00] thing, going back to that, it's something I it's really endearing about you and cool about you. So I don't want you to lose it. Like, don't lose the science, but it's also like how we don't like, for me being clever, right.

Don't lose it. Like, it's cool that, you know, all those Gotmann stuff and you know, but how do we use it in a way that's relatable and doesn't make people feel different. Or outside like, Oh, he has some information that I don't have. And so therefore he's better. Or, you know, so that's also part of relating, right?

Like how do we not do this one? AppMon kind of like, I'm better than, or I'm a somebody you're not as somebody which is really disconnecting.

**AJ Harbinger:** we talk about that. And our program is. Being high value is the term that we use. And what we're really saying is being cooperative. And looking for opportunities, not to put yourself ahead of someone, not to compete with them or to fight with them, but how can you look for opportunities to either bring them up or to get up to their level?

And [00:46:00] that's, it's a more nuanced take around how many of us appear on social media and appear in our relationships when we first meet each other? Because yeah, we, we want certain expectations to be met and we want people to perceive us in a certain light. But by being high value giving, instead of just constantly taking or looking for opportunities to take, we're creating that exact thing, that opportunity for the other person to feel heard, accepted, comfortable sharing.

And that's really where the magic is in any conversation.

**Diana Hill:** how do you do this with, uh, with Johnny? So you have this co-host and you, and you actually have this team. I'll say, Michael, I did ask. People to send in their questions. And I have a few questions I want to make sure we get to. And one of the first questions I got was from Michael Harold, who said on a scale from one to 10, how awesome.

Awesome is Michael 10. Uh, so you have this team, you mean that you're working with and, uh, Johnny [00:47:00] being one of them, Michael being one of them. How are you using this on a, in a, in a work environment as a team?

**AJ Harbinger:** Yeah. And it's, it's certainly been challenging now. I will say Johnny moved to Vegas in the pandemic. So Johnny used to be an LA and. Michael was the main remote worker that we had in Vienna. So we have time zone differences as well as technology there. The, the biggest thing for us is recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

And, you know, that just comes from working together with Johnny and being friends for 15 plus years. And even Michael. And what I love about Michael is his pursuit of feedback and his ability to also give feedback, which, uh, can be uncomfortable, especially when you're giving it to someone who's the leader and someone who's the boss, but all of us have.

Tried as best we can to create an environment for that feedback and those uncomfortable situations, because that's how we end up working better together and getting the [00:48:00] most out of our roles in the company. So, you know, Johnny's strengths are on the creative side and he has a music background I'm on the science side.

So we'll often trade off. On the prep or the way we approach interviews, like, Hey, I want to explore this psychologist or this entrepreneurs creative side with some questions around, you know, how they come up and brainstorm or how they utilize creativity in their role and that sort of Johnny's wheel house.

And then I'll go into the science and pull up the studies and say, okay, you know, what do you think about this? Or let's unpack that, um, But in conflict, the most important thing is, is letting the other person know, like I'm saying this, I'm sharing this with you because I really care about you. I'm not saying this because I want to tear you down.

And because I think that I'm better than you. I'm saying this because I know who you are as a person, and I know what you value and there's a blind spot here, or there's an opportunity for [00:49:00] growth that I want to share with you. And I'll be honest. You know, we also have a number of business partners and staff who aren't here because they were unwilling or unable to work in that environment.



It's not for everyone, but it's created an environment for us, a real growth. And if we're growing, I know that our clients will grow. Like it exactly, as you said, like, if we're not showing up and we're not doing the work, then we can't ask anyone who's working with us to do it blindly or do it on their own.

So that's how we approach that working relationship. And, you know, for Michael I'd give him an 11. And that he's, he's incredibly awesome. And patient with everything that we throw at him, and he's always a good sport about it, even with the time zones and everything else going on. So, you know, earlier what you were sharing was reminding me of a metaphor of drinking wine, right.

Uh, Amy and I are really into wine and, and oftentimes we get so in a hurry to drink this wine that we [00:50:00] just opened the bottle and drink it. We have to remind ourselves, like, if we just sit there, give it 30 minutes or an hour, it's actually going to open up, it's going to mellow. It's going to be a totally different line.

And oftentimes Michael's there patiently waiting with his glass of wine because it's 10:00 PM in Vienna and it's morning here in LA. So, uh, in that way, I really appreciate Michael's patience and working with us around the time zone issues and his openness, and always sharing what he's working on and what he sees in us for room for improvement as well.

**Diana Hill:** Yeah. Well, thank you for letting us share him with you. It's it's been, uh, he's. He really is a living embodiment of, of how to be effective in relationships and how to energize a team and be vulnerable at the same time. It's just, uh, We learned so much from him. And it seems like on your team, you really honor each other's strengths and give space for that.

Uh, you know, it's like in our household, my husband loves to vacuum and I like to make dinner. And so that's how we do our household. I like, I don't ever have to [00:51:00] vacuum. It's wonderful. Um, so that we can do that on our teams and we can honor that in each other. And, , I want to go back to some of the questions I don't want to leave out are.

Some of our listeners that sent in their questions for you. I know they want them answered. So one of them was, um, about tone and in particular, a tone between a couple where she's getting feedback from her husband about her tone. And I think it's like her tone of voice in the relationship. And then when they're in conflict, do you have any suggestions around that?

Around tone and in tone, when we're in a loving relationship and we're in conflict,

**AJ Harbinger:** So this is an area. And again, these are challenging conversations. So many of us approach a challenging conversation by playing it out in our head, thinking through, or going to say, choosing our words wisely. So what I would like them to add to their preparation is to ask yourself, how do I want my partner to feel when they hear this information? And by simply asking that question and sitting with the emotion that you would [00:52:00] like the person to take away from the conversation, we'll often realize that tone plays a much bigger role than we think. And it'll change naturally subconsciously the tone that we bring to that conversation. So many of us approach these difficult conversations thinking about, well, what's the point that I want to make.

What's the change that I want to inspire. What's the, um, Way that I'm going to win this argument. What's the data or the fact that's going to let them see the other side, but simply asking the question. What's the emotion that I want my partner to feel after this conversation will change that tone and the way that you actually express yourself in that conversation for the better.

**Diana Hill:** I love that you don't have to work so hard. You don't have to be so clever about it. If you just have the feeling, it's sort of like, okay, how do I want to embody that? And then your tone will naturally change. That's great. That's fantastic. Uh, so then another question that we had from a listener was around mirroring [00:53:00] and it sounds like maybe they have gotten some feedback around mirroring being, , an effective communication tool because they asked, when does mirroring to build rapport, become losing your authentic self. So you talk about mirroring .

**AJ Harbinger:** Yeah. So mirroring is the concept that essentially is grounded in. We like people who are similar to us. So we naturally gravitate to people who are like us. And of course, this has to do with survival in group out group. And the body language around mirroring is simply when you're in conversation, paying attention to how someone's moving and how someone's smiling and their eye contact and matching it.

To become more like them. Now, the problem is when we overdo some of these strategies in this science, we become inauthentic

**Diana Hill:** Or we'd be kind of like seventh graders.

**AJ Harbinger:** and we also wrap ourselves up too much in [00:54:00] what we're doing and not enough, and what the other person is sharing. So the question then becomes around authenticity is, are you spending more time thinking about your own behaviors than what the other person is sharing with you? And if you find in conversation that you are far more concerned with. Where your arms are what's going on with your smile? Are you furrowing your brow? When you're listening, then odds are, you've created distance in that relationship. And in that conversation and the other person is going to start to feel that you're inauthentic. So we have to stop ourselves. So we have to start. Being more self-aware in those moments, I encourage people to work on mirroring because it is a powerful, scientific concept around getting someone interested in us, liking us and attracted to us. But if we find through self-awareness that we're spending more time in conversation worried about our own [00:55:00] behaviors and actions and not enough time in conversation thinking and listening to the other person, then that's when that inauthenticity creeps in and we undo all of the benefit of mirroring.

**Diana Hill:** Oh, that's so great. So it's like how to not make it so formulaic. And self-focus and this is sort of a component of social anxiety. One of the things about social anxiety is you're so focused on yourself. You feel like there's a spotlight on you, wherever you go. And you're paying attention to every I'm in awe and move that you become more and more anxious.

So it's, being able to mirror, but then also not getting so rigid about that, that it becomes inflexible or limiting.

**AJ Harbinger:** And to come full circle to what we started with, you know, that's why zoom fatigue is so real right now because of this self view. We are in a constant state of having that spotlight on us and the ability to see ourselves with the spotlight on us, which is mentally taxing. So hide self view on your [00:56:00] zoom and allow the other person to fully show up and not be so wrapped up in those self thoughts.

And that's how we can start to work through that anxiety to become more authentic. Right? So the big part about everything that we talk about is raising your self awareness. And through raising yourself awareness, you can start to develop these social skills, these soft skills that we've talked about today. So I would journal after these conversations, right? So for this person who's asking about mirroring, let's say my goal this week is to work on mirroring because I know it's a very powerful, scientific tool for connection. So after every conversation where I've brought mirroring in, I would ask myself, how did I do. Did I feel that I did a good job in mirroring. And then I would ask myself how much of the conversation was I paying attention to mirroring versus paying attention to what the other person was sharing. Then the last question I would ask myself is why did that person share in conversation [00:57:00] with me? And if you can't answer that, why odds are you're showing up in authentically? Because you weren't present enough in that conversation to answer the why. And that's really how we strengthen our listening skills and we can bring any of these soft skills that we're working on to a level of self-awareness to really grow

**Diana Hill:** Well, thank you. You're I think this whole conversation today for me has been toggling back and forth between being present and being in my head. And you did a really good job of, as we went along, helping me get back to being present. And I'm sure that you do that with all the people that you work with and as you're working on it yourself, I'm sure people know about your podcast, but for folks that want to work with you or want to try on some of these ideas and really practice them in the real world, how would they go about that?

**AJ Harbinger:** So we have a great mini workshop. All around the science of captivating and connecting with your audience in one-on-one conversations and zoom meetings or [00:58:00] on stage. And in that mini course, we talk about the science, but also how to apply it in your life in a practical way. And I think that's why a lot of our audience members appreciate what we do with the podcast. And what we do with our training is the science is always there, but we want you taking action. Like, if you can apply these concepts, that's where the magic happens. So this mini course that the art of charm.com/captivate is a great introduction to the science around relating to people and creating that presence that it becomes unforgettable.

**Diana Hill:** that's the place to start.

**AJ Harbinger:** Exactly.

**Diana Hill:** Well, thank you AJ you didn't disappoint your captivating, but you also have hearts. So I started this show of saying, and it's just a real pleasure to

be with you. And thank you for taking your time. I know you're really busy and full, and you have choices around how you spend your time. So thank you for choosing to spend it with us.

**AJ Harbinger:** well, I appreciate the opportunity and the lovely conversation. I'm so [00:59:00] excited for your audience to take a listen.

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