

Episode intro:

You have this deep, critical voice in your head. It is like you are living with a horrible, micromanaging boss all the time. We know what that's like if we are actually sitting next to one of those people and they are constantly barraging us, and yet we just think it is normal when it is coming from ourselves.

Welcome to the Art of Accomplishment, where we explore how deepening connection with ourselves and others leads to creating the life we want with enjoyment and ease.

My name is Brett Kistler. I am an adventurer, entrepreneur and a self exploration enthusiast. I am here with my co-host, Joe Hudson. Joe is a business coach who has spent decades working with some of the world's top executives and teams developing a unique model of human patterns that underpin how we operate with ourselves, each other and the world. A good entry point into this model is a mindset called VIEW, vulnerability, impartiality, empathy and wonder.

Through understanding and cultivation we learn to easefully drop into the VIEW state of mind, deepening self awareness and increasing our connection with the world around us. To learn more about this podcast or courses, visit artofaccomplishment.com

Most of us have a voice in our heads constantly narrating ourselves.

[Whispers: Why did you say that? She hates me. Get it together. Get it together.]

Have you ever noticed what yours is like? How it talks to you? How would you feel if someone else spoke to you the way this voice speaks to you? Would you speak to someone else in this way?

Today we are going to explore how the voice in our head influences what we say, do and feel and explore how to develop a new relationship with it. Joe, what is the voice in the head?

Joe: The voice in the head. Let's make a distinction. There's a voice in your head, which is the thing you can hear talking to yourself. It's kind of the editor that's constantly happening, that's judging your situation, wondering what people are thinking about you, telling you what to do, telling you how to do it. I would make a distinction here that there's the voice in your head that is repetitive, and the voice in your head that is unique or inspirational.

Neurologically speaking, they say that we have about 50,000 thoughts a day that happen. That's the voice in your head. Most of those for most people, the voice is saying the same thing over and over again. You should lose weight. You should lose weight. Or why are you drinking so much coffee? Stop drinking so much coffee. It's a repetitive voice in the head.

When I am speaking about the voice in the head in the context of working with people, I am talking about the repetitive, bossy, critical voice in the head.

Brett: Let's take a moment to help tap into their voice in the head right now. If it is 50,000 thoughts a day, it must be accessible at any time.

Joe: Yeah, that's great. So a wonderful way to do this is to just be silent for the next, say, 20 to 30 seconds and stop thinking. [silence] In that time period, a thought arose, and maybe the thought was how long will this silence last or this is stupid. What makes us do this? Or I hope I didn't forget the eggs in the oven, whatever. That's the voice in the head. That's what it is. It's the constant thinking that goes on, and for most people it is very auditory. It is very word focused. For some people, it is more somatic. It is more body focused. But the grand majority of people, literally it is like they can hear the voice.

Brett: I felt both. As the silence went on, I started to feel a little bit of tension in my body, and then the thought that popped up was I wonder how much dead space we should have in a podcast before we lose people's attention.

Joe: Perfect. Both are always happening. There's somatic. That's not exactly true. There's always the somatic experiencing that's occurring. You cannot stop that, and then oftentimes there are thoughts that go with it. The tricky part is that the more you become aware of the voice in your head, the more you become aware of what it is saying. Oftentimes, when people first get confronted with the idea, they might not think they have many thoughts in their head and the voice in the head isn't very active, and then the more they pay attention to it, the more they realize it is constantly humming along back there.

Obviously, there are people who do a tremendous amount of meditation or different practices where the voice in the head is far more silent, particularly the reoccurring voice in the head is far more silent and quiet. That in itself is an interesting thing, because the somatic experiencing hasn't stopped, and so to some degree it is harder to find the pain that's occurring. The voice makes it much easier to feel that pain or to see the dysfunction of the way the voice happens. It is harder to understand it or see it or work with it, if it is just a somatic experience.

What I notice is the more you become aware of it, the more sensitive you are to it. The more sensitive you are to it, the more you realize what it is saying and how it is saying it. A great example of that, I did a ton of meditation in my earlier years. A point came along where the voice in the head cut by like 75%. I felt like it was gone for a while as far as the recurring negative, looping thoughts. Over time, I have noticed, “Oh no, there are still things there that took me a while to notice.” Just the thing that's always saying, “Have you done this, have you done this, have you done this.”

It's just a matter, like anything, it is subtle until you see it. The more sensitive you become to it, the more you become aware of how much it is affecting your day to day, minute to minute life.

Brett: What makes it important or interesting to become aware of it? I imagine if I had a roommate in my head just constantly talking to me, ignorance would be bliss. What makes it worthwhile to start paying attention and noting what it is saying, if what it is saying can be so self-critical and distracting?

Joe: There are a couple of reasons. One is because it is the first step to a different relationship to it. In my first experience of really becoming aware of it, I was reading a psychology book on Gestalt. It was Fritz Perls, I believe, and he was talking about how there was an upper dog and an underdog in your internal dialogue. The upper dog was like the bully telling you what to do, criticizing you, and then the underdog was the one rebelling against that, which is a much more subtle, quiet voice that it often takes years for people to get in touch with and experience.

Just being aware of it, just being aware. For me, in particular, it was the should thing. I think he called it out. When you tell yourself you should do something, that's the upper dog. Just by recognizing it and seeing it every time it came, it just started to become quieter and quieter. Just the recognition of the voice in the head can change the way the voice in the head dialogues with you, until you resist it, until you are like, “Oh man, I have got to change that voice in my head.” Then the voice in the head is now telling you to change the voice in your head, and that resistance makes the voice in your head persist.

But just the simple awareness of it, just like the gentle, there it is doing that thing again, can reduce it. So then the question of course is, “Why would I want to reduce this voice in my head?” There are a ton of reasons for that. A very active, negative voice in the head is in the DSM called dysthymia. The definition of low-level depression is this constant, negative self-talk. That's one reason. Another reason is, because life is just far more enjoyable and sweet when your consciousness isn't a horrible boss.

On one level, you said if my roommate was like that, I would rather just not hear them. The truth is when you have this deep, critical voice in your head, it is like you are living with a horrible micromanaging boss all the time. We know what that's like if we are actually sitting next to one of those people and they are constantly barraging us, and yet we just think it is normal when it is coming from ourselves. Just the joy and bliss of life as that voice changes or as your relationship to it changes, it totally can transform how much joy and happiness and ease and clarity you can have.

Brett: Somebody I was talking to recently about the voice in the head, they said their voice isn't a self-critical voice, but what they do is they rehearse conversations they could have had. It seems like that is a way of being self-critical. The fact that you would rehearse a conversation you have already had about how you could do it better comes from self criticism, and then self-criticism is shaping the thoughts of what you thought you should have said. What are some of the other ways that the voice can show up in people if somebody is listening to this and they are not connecting with this idea of there being a voice in their head that's critical of themselves or the upper dog, as you put it?

Joe: Constantly telling you things to do, shoulding you, wondering about what other people think of you incessantly or even just more than once, rehearsing and trying to make sure you get perfect at something before you actually go and live it. All of those are great examples of how the voice in the head can work. There's a multitude of ways it can work, and it is quite cool in the way that it finds its new home when you have spotted one. Like I said before, you can be saying the should thing, I understand that. I don't want that, so I am just going to be aware of it. Then pretty soon the voice in the head becomes the aggressor to the voice in the head itself. It's amazing how it can just find it's new natural home.

In Zen, they talk about trying to use the voice in the head to get rid of the voice in the head. I am paraphrasing here, but to use the voice in the head to get out of the voice in the head is like asking a thief to be the security of your house. It doesn't work.

Brett: Yeah, the voice isn't you, and the voice speaking to the voice is also not you. All of it is just in the way of your impulse. What that kind of brings me to is one of the characteristics of the voice is that it seems to be slowing us down, either by pulling us out of the present into the past or the future, trying to solve some unsolvable puzzle, or the self-criticism in it can just inhibit us from taking steps that may be imperfect, but are steps or speaking what's true for us in the moment without imposing a lot of restraints around what people might think or what might be wrong about it.

Joe: Yeah, I mean just a great way to think about this is so the voice in your head has worried about how some future things are going to go, maybe a job interview or maybe a first date. If you think about all the worrying that you did and all the scenarios that it

went through and all the things you thought you were going to say and all of the ways you were going to behave, how much of that was actually pertinent, how much of that was actually useful energy, how much of that actually helped you prepare, and how much of it just did nothing and was just a waste of time. How much of it actually hurt?

I see oftentimes when people are rehearsing things over and over and over again, it builds up such an anxiety around the actuality of the thing happening that they are not there in present with what's occurring in front of them when the time to rehearse is over.

Brett: My experience of that is, it also sets up for major disappointment and a shame spiral after the conversation doesn't go anything according to your rehearsal.

Joe: That's a characteristic of the voice in the head, actually, to create the reality it is trying to avoid. Give an example of a perfectionist, and having the voice in the head trying to convince you that you need to be perfect about something. That incessant nature makes it very hard to even do something really well. That's why you see so many artists get hooked on heroin or alcohol, anything that just silences the voice in their head so they can be in that flow state so they can create their best work.

It's no different than doing a PowerPoint presentation or making a speech, or having a great first date. It's about being present in the moment, and being true to yourself in that moment.

Brett: In an even more diffuse way, just sitting down and looking at a blank page or a blank canvas and feeling just that slight negative emotion of like uh, whatever my brushstroke is about to be is going to be wrong. Whether or not that's even a voice. I've always felt that present in anything that I am doing to some extent and most of the time just didn't notice it, and many times just didn't take action on things that I wanted to do or would have loved to have done, but just didn't notice that I didn't do them, because I avoided feeling that feeling. Then I avoided feeling that I had felt that feeling, and that's why I didn't do the thing I wanted and then justified it for some other reason. I just didn't have time.

Joe: That's a great example. It could just be a feeling. Then if you stop and say, "Hey, what's the message behind that feeling?", then you will be more aware of the voice. Oftentimes for different people they will be more aware of the feeling or more aware of the voice, and they are often in concert. The voice can be really subtle, or the feeling can be seemingly very subtle, just like the voice can seemingly be very subtle.

Brett: When you start noticing this voice and you start paying more attention and noting it, what are some tips for not getting into a resistance battle with it, but also not

buying into everything it says, which is I guess is what we do by default when we are not noticing there's a voice.

Joe: That's the thing. The thing about having no awareness of the voice and it is happening— Even in this moment, I have awareness of the voice happening. In this moment, I don't. When we are not noticing it is happening, it is far more likely to control what we are doing. That's a really good point you just made. There are so many ways. There is a plethora of ways of working with the voice in your head.

One whole category of ways to work with the voice in your head is just to ask how you relate to it. Voice in the head says, “You should have done better in that project!”, so some ways to relate to it would be, “Okay, fine.” and then a subtle, “Fuck you!”, in response to it. Another way to relate to it is, “I see that you really care that I do a good job and I would love to ask you to use better management techniques with me.” Another way to deal with it is to practice silence. Another way to deal with it is to love it. Another way to deal with it is to tickle it. Another way to deal with it is to really get in a massive fight with it and then see what happens when you are exhausted from that fight.

The main thing here that I really recommend is to play and to experiment. Oftentimes the underlying assumption is, there is this voice. A, it is never going to change, and B, there is nothing I can do about it. C, it will always be there. What if it is like, “I am going to do a series of experiments with the voice in my head? I am going to play with it in different ways. I am going to laugh at it hysterically one day, and I am going to just notice it another day. I am going to love it the third day.” There is so much flexibility in it, but there is something in our system that is so scared of having that voice in the head go away or to change that it convinces us that we have no flexibility or no options around the voice in the head.

Brett: When I have heard other people describe this in other books or other work, and there is even a little bit of it in this conversation, there is an assumption that the voice itself is not valuable. It would be better if we didn't have it. Here's a bunch of strategies to get rid of it. But I am curious what value there is in that voice, because often the self-criticism that I experience of how I could have done something better is real. It is just that I feel ashamed that I didn't do it that way the first time, but I actually could have done better. Maybe the voice has something valuable to say.

Joe: There is a way of hearing the voice in the head and hearing the intention behind what it is saying, and that's almost always valuable. If you assume for a minute that the voice in the head loves you and it just really has a whole bunch of crappy strategies to love you but it really loves you, then there is a way of listening to everything the voice in the head has to say as a deep care. It is just not doing it really well.

If I told you you are messing up this podcast, “Hey, you are messing up this podcast, hey, you are messing up this podcast, look. You are still being silent. You are messing up this podcast. Why aren't you saying something, Brett? You are messing up this podcast.” That's not going to make a great podcast. But the deep care behind that is it really wants you to be successful and so getting into a war with the voice in the head is you can't ever win that. The question is what relationship you want with it.

Another cool thing to think about, is oftentimes the voice in the head is talking to itself more than it is talking to you. I am going to let that one sit for a second. It's almost projecting onto you. When the voice in the head is saying you are messing up this podcast, you are messing up this podcast, is it you or the voice in the head that's messing up the podcast?

Brett: There's something interesting in that, where the voice in our heads often seems to map onto an actual person in our history or some blur of many people in our history that were caretakers or parents or teachers. A lot of the things that I say to myself in my head are things somebody else might have said to me in the past, and so I've just internally learned to say it to myself first before somebody else does it.

Joe: That's part of the care it has. It is trying to keep you out of trouble. It is trying to keep you from not being insulted, not being chastised, not having to feel the way it felt when you were three years old and being chastised. It often mimics very important figures in our life or it is reacting to very important events in our life. That's definitely how it goes, which is interesting, because oftentimes if we had, let's say, a really critical mom and the mom just really criticizes us, at some point you are like, you are full of it. You don't know what you are talking about. But you don't question your head that way.

If your mom is constantly like, “You should shave more, you should shave more, you should shave more, you are like, “You are the wrong generation. You don't know.” But if the voice in your head says, “You should shave more, you should shave more, you should shave more.”, you are far more likely to buy into it. But you didn't even choose to program it. You didn't even choose what reality it agrees with. That was chosen for you, and yet humans constantly believe what's going on with the voice in the head, which is another way to relate to it. To actually see through the false logic of the voice in the head. The voice in the head is always contradicting itself. “You were too cocky there. You were too humble there. You spoke too much. You didn't listen enough. You listened too much. You didn't speak enough.”

If you really start looking at how the voice in the head operates, it doesn't give you actually a place to succeed often. There's no way out. There's a problem with everything, and yet we still buy into it. To really look and find out that there's a little bit of untruth in everything the voice in the head says, everything the voice in the head says,

and to find that, it gives you a lot of freedom and perspective from the voice in the head itself, the recurring negative voice in the head.

Brett: What about the truth in it? What about the times where if I did say the thing I thought of saying, then I might have lost a client or a partner or angered somebody or gotten judged? How much of it is untrue? How much of it is true?

Joe: This is an interesting question, right? So let's say you have done something that insulted a client, and let's say the best thing is to say, "Hey, I am really sorry about that. I did that. It's not what I wanted to do. It's not how I want it to be with you, and I apologize." Then that thing you did wrong can build trust, and can actually make your relationship deeper.

If you are in your head saying, "Wow, you screwed up with a client.", and that happens once. It's not a reoccurring negative thing, and you immediately take action on it. Then whatever is happening is an effective, efficient cycle, but if you are saying it multiple times and doing nothing about it, or you are saying it 20 times and then doing something about it, that is not an efficient cycle. That's just self-abuse. There is no need for that. It doesn't make you happier. It doesn't improve the relationship. It doesn't make them happier with you. It doesn't build trust. It doesn't add anything there.

The important thing is it is reoccurring, and it is negative self-talk.

Brett: Something I have noticed is when it is reoccurring, there is often some kind of double bind. There is like I really screwed that up. What I need to say is this, but I already said the other thing and I cannot go back on my word. Now there's sort of a fight between the different versions of the voice.

Joe: Yeah, exactly. How efficient is that? How is that helpful? Exactly. And there is a wisdom to it, and it is like, "What is it that you want?" "I want a better relationship with him, and I don't want to look like I am inconsistent. I want to be respected by this person." If you get in touch with that and you just name that, put it in a VIEW frame of mind, it is amazing to say, "Wow, I noticed that I was being inconsistent here. It's now how I want to be you. I always noticed I am having a hard time saying that I was inconsistent, because I am scared you are going to look at me this way or this way. It is more important for me to be in my integrity than to try to look good in front of you. I apologize, and how can we proceed to build trust from here."

When the voice in the head is abusing like that, what's occurring is you are creating fear in your system. It is creating an anxiety, and then that anxiety makes you think in a binary way, either apologize or don't apologize. It doesn't give you the whole, vast array of opportunities in front of you at any moment. Also, that anxiety puts it so that you have

a false end. The only moment you can see is that moment of apologizing or not apologizing. You are not seeing the whole relationship and how it can get better over time.

That abuse, that self-abuse, turns into anxiety, and the anxiety prevents us from learning. The anxiety limits our options, the options we can conceive of. The anxiety stops us from seeing a very particular moment. That's another reason why an abusive voice in the head is not effective.

Brett: That thing you just said, that scenario where you were just speaking to the client was beautiful and I could imagine being— This has happened before where I am like, “What would Joe say?” I am like I can't come up with what Joe would say, and I am like oh. What would I say if I was speaking so clearly from my truth that I don't feel like I have access to because I am under a barrage from of all these different voices. Then nothing gets said.

The thing you said to me the other day, which was like, life is really great once you realize you are already wrong.

Joe: Yeah, there's another thing. What I did when I said, “What is it that I really want?”, and then I spoke the want. What you are doing is saying, in some version of what's the right thing to say, whether it is through the projection of me or through being completely high integrity. Doing the right thing, trying to make it right, is part of the anxiety.

Brett: That is the voice. That's what the voice is trying to do. It is trying to make you right. A fear of being wrong.

Joe: And that's how the voice gets more and more subtle. It sounds like a great thing. What would my highest integrity self say? That sounds like a great thing, but it is still trying to get it right. That's why I said to you, that life is great when you know you are wrong, because then you don't have to try to be right. Then you are just operating from that place naturally, that place of integrity naturally.

I find the much neater trick is just to say, “What do I want?”, and then speak into that want, which is far more vulnerable than trying to be right.

Brett: Absolutely. Being right is trying to say or do the thing that is perceived by both the voice in your head and others as everybody agrees that it is right, which is an impossible task.

Joe: Totally impossible.

Brett: What you want is something that can flow and change, and it can be true in the moment and you get what you want or not what you want and then learn more.

Joe: That's right. Also, there is this total freedom in identity. If you aren't worried about being right, then you don't need everyone to think you are right and you don't need to be right. There's a huge freedom in that. There's this amazing freedom in it. What's cool is that, if you are there and every time you worry about being right or every time you are wrong and somebody is chastising you for being wrong, and you let that emotion move through, it disintegrates more and more of what some traditions would call the ego, but I would call just limited perspectives. It just starts to disintegrate your limiting perspective, and it allows your identity to be an internal experience of identity to be far more expansive and to need a lot less protection.

[bell]

Okay, so this is the time in our podcast when we do something just a little bit different. We take a break from the intellect and incorporate our bodies and emotions into the conversation. We do this because it helps us integrate the information better, and usually it is a bunch of fun.

We crowdsource these exercises from our community, so if you have a good one, please share it with us. When doing the exercise, take it as a treat and as an experiment. Just do the activity and see what happens. As always, enjoy yourself.

[bell]

Woman's voice: Hi everyone. This is Tara. Take a big inhale. You are going to keep your eyes open for this one. Our attention is going to be on our eyes this time. On your next inhale, you can use the inhale to sort of scan if you have any tension around your eyes. You can use the exhale to release any tension around your eyes. See how much you can let your eyes just rest in their sockets.

Many of us carry a lot of tension around our eyes. You can use your breath to continue letting your eyes relax. You are going to let your vision go soft so you are not going to focus on any one thing in front of you, just see how much you can let your vision go soft. Everything may go a little fuzzy. That's okay. Take another inhale.

I am going to take it one step further. With your eyes deeply resting in their sockets, see how much they can just receive the visual field in front of them. The visual field comes to them and all they have to do is they get to receive the visual field. Just notice how you feel different at the end of this than when you started.

[bell]

Joe: Welcome back. I hope you enjoyed the exercise as much as we did when we found it. Before we go back into the episode, I wanted to thank all of you who have been sharing the podcast and signing up for the VIEW course. The interest and support you guys have shown has been both overwhelming and humbling. It is a pleasure to know that we have something to offer that has been so helpful to you. All right, now let's get back into the conversation.

Brett: I can observe that any of my internal thoughts are actually trying to avoid feeling something. The thought might be self-criticism, which is trying to gain control over myself to avoid feeling whatever I felt by not getting it right in whatever sense. But also rehearsing a conversation or just overthinking about something, a project that I want to do, if I find myself in a circle or a cycle on it, it is often that I am just trying to collapse the discomfort of the unknown into some framework of known. If I am trying to do that, to some extent that's impossible. It will just be an unsolvable puzzle. I will just keep doing it. When, if I just let myself feel the powerlessness of the unknown, then all of a sudden those thoughts go away and I am actually freed up to take action.

Joe: What's cool about what you just said is, that's a fractal or a micro version of a major thing that happens, whether it be the fear of death or a fear of taking a risk. To be okay with that feeling of unknown, to be okay with I don't know what's going to happen next, which is true. We think we know what's going to happen next. We get taught over and over again. We don't. We create our world so that we think it is predictable, and then something very unpredictable happens.

Brett: Everyone has a plan until you get punched in the face.

Joe: I haven't heard that one.

Brett: I think it was Muhammad Ali or somebody. Don't quote me on that.

Joe: There's another one. I think it was John Lennon, which is, plans are what you do while life is happening. That generally is to be in love with the feeling of confusion and mystery and unknown, and like all emotions, it seems like if we do that, then we don't make plans or if we do that, we won't be prepared. If that's happening, then the voice in the head has convinced you of that through some wonky logic. What actually happens when we get good with that is, that plans happen far more naturally, organically. They flow far easier.

Brett: This brings up something else, another way that this has shown up in my life as stopping me from moving forward. If I get to the point where I am rehearsing a possible conversation, and then I feel like I have actually fully rehearsed it and then it was perfect, then all of a sudden it becomes completely uninteresting to have that

conversation. A, I don't want to break its perfect image in my mind, and B, it becomes boring, because there is no unknown in it. C, sometimes I will actually trick myself into thinking I actually had the conversation. It could be disastrous.

Joe: Yeah.

Brett: I can't count how many times I've been like, "Wait a minute, didn't we talk about this. No, we didn't talk about this. Oh no."

Joe: Those are all the more subtle ways the voice in the head operates. You just kind of described maybe the voice in the head doesn't want to feel or the system doesn't want to feel rejection, and so the voice in the head starts with, "Let's rehearse so that you don't experience the rejection." Then the voice is like, "This is boring.", and then the voice is like, "You probably had the conversation." That's how the whole thing works. There is always a way for it to insinuate itself, and the more you become aware of it, like I say, it is subtle until you see it. The more you see it, the more depth there is available.

All that is needed is just to relate to it differently, and to love it and to be aware of it and not have a fight with it. Then you can have moments that happen in your life that feel like big moments. Sometimes and sometimes they don't. All of a sudden, you realize the voice in my head is so much quieter. There is so much less of it.

Brett: What happens when you get to that point? What did it feel like when you had that 75% reduction of the voice in your head?

Joe: It's different for different people. For some people, it is hardly noticeable. It is such a slow progression. What I notice is, people that were like really deeply depressed and then that kicks in, and then it is just like this life changing, "Holy crap what just happened?" Some people resist it. There is this whole thing called depersonalization disorder. The Zen call it Zen sickness. It can happen, and people are like, "Wait a second, where am I? This isn't good. I need that back."

You can have all sorts of reactions to it. When it happens and you are aware of it, and you are not fighting with it, it is incredibly joyful. Your car has just become 75% more efficient. Your energy is far more aligned with the way you want to be going, and not second guessing yourself. It is more enjoyable, and you are more in the present, all that stuff.

Again, to have a goal to get rid of the voice in your head is to not love the voice in your head, and therefore, it is a very slow process. It is far better to just love the voice in your head as it is, and not try to get rid of it and not reject it.

Brett: It almost sounds like the framing of getting rid of the voice in the head is creating separation from it, but what we are actually going for is developing such a relationship with it, that it is communicating with us so clearly that it is just part of us, instead of compressing itself down into words and then hitting us in our logic battlefield.

Joe: Yeah, it is an interesting question. Eventually, that question comes up as you are talking about what is the voice in the head and what's you. What's the difference between them? I think that's a great question to be sitting with, but not to be answering. To be in that question, "What's the difference between me and the voice in my head actually?" That in itself can change your relationship with the voice in your head.

Brett: With that to sit with, what's another practice or maybe a homework assignment to develop this relationship further with our voice?

Joe: There's an infinite amount. They work differently for different people at different stages. When I see somebody, I can point more directly to what might be useful for them. Generally, there are two that come to mind. One is just tell yourself that you love yourself, maybe in a mirror, in a camera, and then listen to the response to you loving yourself, all the ways it makes you uncomfortable, all the things you say that you are not loveable for. That's all the voice in your head. If you want to excavate it, that's a great way to excavate it.

Another one, which is a more subtle trick, is just to ask the question, "What's looking out behind my eyes right now?" You'll notice that that often quiets the mind. It also kind of puts you in, where your identity has moved from the voice in your head to awareness. Are you the voice in your head that's constantly talking or are you the awareness of the voice in the head talking? It asks that question, and you can do it at any time. It is a great practice in the fact you can be in a meeting, you can be in a fight, you can be going to the bathroom and you can say what's looking out behind my eyes.

There's a ton of versions of that question. The most common one is, "Who am I or what am I?" That's not a question to be answered. That's a question to be in wonder. It's to be in wonder in that question. But there are a ton of little hack questions like that that are available, but I would say start with one of those.

Brett: What about journaling? Writing down the voice in your head.

Joe: I don't have any problem. It is a great thing if you want to write what the voice in the head is saying to you. Great. Bring it into awareness. Even better, once you have done it, be an argumentative lawyer to it. Not an adversary, but an argumentative lawyer and find out what's a little untrue in each of the statements. Someone says I should lose weight. You should lose weight. According to who? What do you mean by should?

Shouldn't you be the weight you are, because the definition of should is what is, right? I have to lose weight because if not, I'll die early. What makes dying early bad? Who is to say that the best thing isn't for me to die early?

I know that's crazy, but look for any way in which the logic might be. Also, I should lose weight. I've been saying it for a decade. It doesn't work, so what makes me keep on saying I should lose weight. Maybe I should say I want to lose weight. What's the response to I should lose weight. Most people's response is rebellion. They don't do it. There's all sorts of ways to just start looking into and analyzing and bringing a fresh perspective into the voice in your head.

Brett: It seems like the example you just gave, somebody asking those questions would get themselves more in touch with what they are actually afraid of underneath the judgement the voice had.

Joe: You can bring VIEW from the first podcast and from the course. You can bring that same methodology and point it towards the voice in your head. Being vulnerable with it. "Ow, it really hurts when you tell me I should lose weight." Being impartial with it, "I am not going to try to get rid of you. What's going on? What do you really have to say?" Being empathetic with it, "How scared is the voice in the head to be shouting at you like this? What is it so afraid of?" To feel that, to bring wonder to it. You can bring all of that VIEW to your voice in your head, and you can dialogue with it in a journal. It is a great practice.

There's really infinite ways to deal with it, to play with it, to have fun with it, and I just encourage people to experiment, play.

Brett: It seems like a great internal playground for VIEW, and then you might find that the same kind of VIEW conversations you start to have with the voice in your head are going to probably be somewhat similar to the conversations you might have with your first VIEW conversations with your family or your parents, or your family of origin where many of the voices come from.

Joe: It will also affect all of your relationships. If you see through your own shoulds, and somebody says, I really think I should, you see through their should, whereas if you believe your should, then you believe their should. If you believe your sense of rigid morality, then that is inhumane, then you will believe their sense of rigid morality that is not humane.

When you see through your own voice in your head, you are a bastion of freedom for people, because when they are talking to you, you don't buy into their limiting perspectives.

Brett: To wrap this up, can you ask a couple questions for our listeners to ponder, to integrate this conversation.

Joe: How do you want to relate to the voice in your head? What's the most fun experiment you can think to do around the voice in your head? What would it take for you to enjoy the voice in your head just as it is, without wanting it to change?

Brett: Perfect. Thank you, Joe. I really loved this conversation.

Joe: I really liked it. It felt really alive.

Thanks for listening to The Art of Accomplishment. If you enjoyed what you heard today, please subscribe & rate us in your podcast app. We would love your feedback, so feel free to send us questions and comments. To reach out to us, join our newsletter, or check out our courses at artofaccomplishment.com