



**Ray Edwards Show, Episode 516
The End Of Overthinking**

Announcer (00:02):

Ray Edwards Show, show episode 516- The End of Overthinking.

Announcer (00:10):

The Ray Edwards Show. This is the podcast for prosperity with purpose.

Ray Edwards (00:18):

Jon Acuff is the New York Times bestselling author of seven books, including his newest release called *Soundtracks- The Surprising Solution to Overthinking*. We're going to be talking about that today. John is an Inc magazine top 100 leadership speaker and has spoken to hundreds of thousands of people at conferences and companies around the world, including get this list of companies he's spoken for- Fedex Nissan, Microsoft, Lockheed Martin, Chick-fil-A, Nokia, and Comedy Central. His large and highly engaged social media following, translate that, it means the people who follow him actually interact with him. It's not just a number it's people who care about what Jon has to say. He's got 300,000 Twitter followers, 187,000 Facebook followers, more than 125,000 Instagram followers. And more than 90,000 people subscribed to his email list. They look to him for his unique blend of humor, honesty, and hope. He lives outside of Nashville, Tennessee, And I'm so honored to have him as our guest today. Jon, I'm excited to talk to you for a couple of reasons. First of all, because you're Jon Acuff. I've been reading your books and following you for quite some time, and it's been a pleasure to get to know you. And I'm so excited about this new book, because I feel like this is a book that has- it's achieved perfect timing. I felt this is just the right time for this book to come out. Can you talk about the timing of the book? Did you sort of look at the situation in the world and say, we need a book like this right now? Or what happened?

Jon Acuff (01:53):

No, not, not at all. I wish I was that smart. You know, I actually probably took too long on this one. I would say there was a four year gap between books and I usually try to have a two-year or three-year. And so I finished the book. I was kind of getting ready for my biggest year of public speaking. And then in March, that completely changed. And so, um, the timing of the book just ended up being really fortunate. I feel really blessed with the timing of it because I keep telling people, overthinking was an epidemic, and then 2020 hit. Like 2020 was catnip for overthinking. And so now it's hard to find a person who hasn't over-thought something in the last year. So I just, I felt, you know, I, I would rather be out on the road sharing this idea via live audiences, cause that's my favorite thing in the world to do. But I also see the benefit

of going wow, I think a lot of people need this exact message right now and I really think that's special timing.

Ray Edwards (02:45):

What kinds of things do you think people are overthinking maybe right now? What have you been, what did you start overthinking when the pandemic hit? Can you talk to what we mean by overthinking?

Jon Acuff (02:57):

Yeah. So I define overthinking as what you think gets in the way of what you want. So it's all these thoughts that get in the way of what you want. But right now, something I've been telling people is everything is a thing. Like every little thing has so many extra thoughts on it, and the example I use is somebody went to shake my hand the other day I was out and about and somebody went to shake my hand. I immediately thought, should I refuse? Should I turn and give them the elbow? Should I give them a fist bump? Should I shake it, but then immediately put my whole arm into a vat of hand sanitizer as if to say, let me scrub off this deadly pandemic you just tried to murder me and my grandparents with, and I started looking around the room. Is this a handshaking room? What does that mean about us politically? And two years ago, you know what I thought when somebody shook my hand? Nothing, I just shook their hand. So right now every little thing has some degree of, okay, well what's going to happen next or how, you know, how should I proceed with this? So I think everybody's, I mean, I would say people are overthinking what's going to happen next. That's a really specific one. I've been saying that time is different right now, right now for me three days is firm. If I've make a plan, I feel pretty good three days from now it will happen. Three weeks is fuzzy. Three months is fiction. Like it's pure fiction. And so I've had to change. Okay. My calendar has a different feel. So I think a lot of people are overthinking, "Okay, we're going to plan this thing, but we're not entirely sure if it's going to happen." So, I think the pandemic's added a lot of overthinking to just about every situation

Ray Edwards (04:21):

We can back up. And I'm going to time travel like this a little bit as we go through this conversation, if we can back up to March, when you, I remember we were on a call and you were talking about how the, my whole business is built on speaking in public, and now I can't do that. What, what was that process like? And how did you get out of overthinking and into new action on that?

Jon Acuff (04:43):

I would say I spent like eight to 12 grumpy weeks, first. I'd love to say, like, I just gave myself a pep talk and then I had a bunch of gummy vitamins and then I turned it all around in an hour, but that's not even anywhere near honest. I would say I was frustrated. I remember sending my buddy Grant Baldwin a text on March 15th, and I said, "I think the first half of the year's will be tough for a lot of people." And the first half, like, that's adorable as if in June we'd be like, all right, everything's good. And so I was frustrated. I was confused. I was scared about, okay, well, what am I going to put together? Like what, you know, what things do I need to do next? How do I pivot? That was a really popular word. And so I came to a place where I needed a new soundtrack. That's a, that's, uh, you know, the title of the book, and it's just my phrase for a repetitive thought. And I needed a new soundtrack and simply it was, I can pine or plan. I can pine for how it used to be and be frustrated and, and kind of be grumpy about, ah, I shouldn't have to do all these extra things or I can plan. And I got to a point where it just made so much more sense for me to actually plan and shake off some of that frustration and say, okay, I'm going to build some new stuff, or, you know, I, you know, what does this make possible? That's another question I've heard people ask when they run

into a wall, what does this make possible? I started to tell myself things like a crisis is a classroom. It's a classroom. So what am I going to learn? Or a crisis is an invitation to innovation. It forces you to learn lessons you might not have learned on your own. So what am I, how am I going to approach this as a learning opportunity? And it, again, it took me weeks and weeks, but I eventually got there and was able to go, okay, I don't, I can't see the other side of it, but I can see my role right now. I can't control all these things. Here's the small amount of can control and I'm going to lean into them.

Ray Edwards (06:27):

Yeah, that sounds very familiar. I didn't have the language of soundtracks back then, but I do remember a point where I said to my team, look, we can either be like victims, or we can learn to be victors. And that became a mantra for us for a long time during last year, how did you come up with the idea of soundtracks? What is a soundtrack and why should we even be talking about soundtracks in relation to overthinking?

Jon Acuff (06:54):

Well, so, you know, I've heard people say a thought is like a leaf on a river or a cloud in the sky or a car on a highway. But for me, it's a soundtrack. It's this internal thought that plays often automatically, often in the background without you even knowing, but it has the power to change the entire situation. And I, you know, I always use movies as an example, if you open up a movie and there's a white picket fence, and there's some kids running down the street, chasing a ball, and it's a beautiful day, but then they play something ominous. You start to go, okay, there's a creepy clown in the sewer. Like, don't go in there. It's quiet. It's too quiet. But if they play a Vanessa Carlton song, you know, A Thousand Miles, suddenly somebody is making their way downtown. Like it's a romcom, it's happy. And so soundtracks for me are these really powerful, internal thoughts that most people don't even understand. They get to change. Most people in my experience don't understand that they get to choose the thoughts they have. I always tell people your thoughts come by two ways, choice or chance. Like you either choose them, or they just show up on announced and they're often not helpful. And so the goal of *Soundtracks*, the book, is to help you figure out how to create new thoughts, that lead to new actions, that lead to new results. And once you understand that your thoughts drive your actions and you have the permission to choose the ones that are going to be the best for you, it can change every part of your life. That's why it's been so fun. Like 2020 was definitely hard for me, but it was easier in the sense of, I felt like the world just got covered in water, but I'd spent two years learning how to swim. So I brought all these new soundtrack techniques to the situation and was able to go, okay, I can figure this out. I can move on. I can choose my thoughts today. And that changed my ability to get through 2020 and actually build something fun in 2021.

Ray Edwards (08:35):

Yeah. What I love about this book, one of the things I love about it is it's short. It's a relatively quick read, but I feel that it replaces so many self-help books and even seminars and workshops that are really spendy. I've, I've read all those books. I've been to all those seminars. And when I read this book, I kept telling my wife, "This is so exciting. I mean, Honey, I know you don't even like self help. You would like this book" because it's very simple. I don't want people to get the wrong idea. I think some of the hardest things to do are to write about complex ideas in a simple way and make it simple for people to implement. And I think that's what you've done with this book. And I know it was intentional. Can you talk about the research that went into this?

Jon Acuff (09:25):

I, I consider my job with a book-um, I consider my whole role is, I'm a handle maker. I put handles on ideas. We have enough ideas in the world. We don't have handles on them to pick them up and take them into our next Thursday or our next conversation with our spouse. So I try to put, handles on ideas. Um, and my favorite thing is to take these really complex things and find their simplest solution and find their simplest actions. I consider the book to be a Trojan horse for truth. So the questions you'll ask yourself are simple. You've heard of all the words, like no one in here will go. I've never seen that word before, but it's one of those questions that when you actually unpack it in your life, you'll go wait a second. There's something here that I need to explore. So the evolution of my writing, this is my seventh book, and I would say that the greatest thing that's helped me the most for the last two books is I have a researcher named Mike Peasley. He's a PhD. And he and I work on all the ideas before they ever hit a book. So it's one thing for me to have a good idea in my office, but it's another thing for me to test it with a thousand people and say, well, how did it help you? Or which parts weren't helpful, or what can I tweak? And then that was probably one of my favorite things in the book is that we made a list of people that we wanted to send a book to because we had used their story. And there were 35 people on that list. And I loved seeing that because it meant if you're a stay-at-home mom, you're not trying to figure out how you relate to me. Like I'm, I'm, you know, I might be in a different place. I have different challenges, different skills, whatever, but there's a stay-at-home mom that said, Hey, here's how I use my soundtrack. So when I'm able to test the ideas with thousands of people first, and then reshape them before they get into a book, it makes for a much wider experience. And it doesn't end up like another memoir of Jon Acuff. I'm 45, like, goodness, help me. If I do another memoir type book, like I just, I'm only 45, like it's enough already. So having other people in research gives me a greater chance to actually help a wider variety of people.

Ray Edwards (11:18):

I have told several people that this may be the last self-help book you'll ever need. And I say that,

Jon Acuff (11:27):

WOW!

Ray Edwards (11:27):

I say that not lightly because I love the genre. But this book takes a powerful technique, and it deals with something that I think most people don't think about, I don't want them to overthink it, but it's what you say to yourself. There's a famous athlete, I can't remember who said this, but he was asked, "how do you, how did you get yourself to perform at this level?" He said, "well, I, to myself, more than I listen to myself." And I feel like that's what you're addressing here. Instead of us just listening to the, the soundtrack, that comes up automatically, we're, in this book, we're taking control of what we say to ourselves every day. You had, you have a chapter, and it's a fascinating concept. Can you share a little about winning the week?

Jon Acuff (12:18):

Yeah. So I want this to be practical. A lot of, the part of the challenge sometimes of thinking as a topic is it immediately gets holistic and fuzzy and you go, what does that mean? You know, and it gets kind of complicated. So I wanted to say, okay, in any given week, you have two things you're going to deal with people and projects. So if you looked ahead and said, okay, in the next seven days, here's people I want to win with or projects I want to win with. Because you have a soundtrack for every single person in your life. Everyone listening to this right now has that person, that the moment their text comes up, they already start telling

themselves a story. They already start hearing a soundtrack. They haven't even read the text, just seeing their name. And they, you know, Oh, he only bothers me when he wants something ahh- and it puts you in this place where you don't actually get a good conversation. Same with projects. Um, even my most high performing type-A friends and, and you and I are in a high-performing entrepreneurs group. Even my most high-performing friends who lay out their clothes the night before. Cause it means they'll go to the gym. Don't pick their thoughts ahead of time. They don't say, "Hey, I've got a big negotiation next Thursday. Here's the three soundtracks I want. I want playing on loop." "Hey, here's a, here's a broken one. I don't want to be there". For me for instance, I've been taken advantage of in business situations. If you're in business long enough, there's going to be a situation that goes South. There's going to be some that may go sideways. And it's so easy for me to then listen to that over and over and roll into a new opportunity with this idea of where are they trying to screw me? What are they trying to do? And now I've got really tight fists and I'm playing gotcha. It's like, I've surrounded myself with bear traps and I'm just waiting for somebody to step on one. We've all been in meetings like that. So it would help me to go, okay, coming up this week, I've got this conversation. Here's this client. Okay. What, what do I want to happen in that meeting? What's the win? Okay. This is the win. What are the kind of actions that I need to take in order to get that win? Okay, great. What are the kind of soundtracks that would encourage me to take those actions? And so you keep coming back to, okay, what are the thoughts I'm going to have? What are the actions I'm going to take? What are the results I want? And it really simplifies your ability to go. Here's how you can get tactical thoughts. I'm not just trying, I didn't write this book so you'd feel better. I think you definitely will. I also want you to perform better. And I think that's where you start to see a lot of life change.

Ray Edwards (14:29):

You have a unique talent. I mean, often you're making a very important point and I feel like sometimes the point can be kind of painful for me to, to think about like that thing of getting taken advantage of in business situations. I've had that happen numerous times. And I have my own soundtracks that pop up around that. It happened to me recently, something went South and I started hearing phrases in my head thinking, where does that come from?

Jon Acuff (14:57):

Yeah.

Ray Edwards (14:57):

And so it's painful to think about, but yet you're able to do it in a way with you inject your signature humor. And I feel like that's kind of like an anesthetic. It allows you to give me a shot of the truth without it hurting so much.

Jon Acuff (15:11):

Yeah. I, I go back to something Chris Rock, the comedian, once said. He, I heard him once say that there are certain things people won't listen to unless they're laughing at the same time. And I think that's true. And I think, you know, you can say it's Mary Poppins, a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down. But for me, um, it's how I like to communicate. It's authentic. And I also like to kind of mock the mocker so to speak. So like, if you've got, if you've got a negative voice telling you something let's exaggerate. Let's blow, like what does that really mean? Like what are you really saying? Like, let's make fun of it. Let's blow it up so we can actually see that's ridiculous. Like of course not. You know? So if somebody said to me, I don't like that person at work, we would do what I call, pull the thread. We'd kind of, what's the thought behind the thought and maybe that person got the promotion you wanted and you go, okay, well that's, that could be painful, but what's the soundtrack you're hearing. Or maybe you're hearing a soundtrack that says they got the promotion I wanted, and they'll

never be another one. Like, and you'd go, "Whoa, one person got a promotion. So now all promotions are gone. Is that what like every single company is at a promotions now?" Like you'd never say that, but we allow these thoughts to kind of spin on their own unchecked. And so that's part of what the book does. It says, "Hey, let's take those loudest ones, those big glaring ones. And let's actually put them under a little bit of light and let's do it with some really simple questions. Some really simple exercises that are going to give you an entirely new playlist to listen to."

Ray Edwards (16:30):

You said this book, you want it to be a Trojan horse for the truth. Can you say more about that?

Jon Acuff (16:37):

Yeah. So, uh, you know, I don't know if this is a question you'll cover later, but one of the things I teach people to do is to take their loudest broken soundtracks and ask them three questions. And before I even do that, I say, well, let's figure out if you have one, because a lot of times when you say to somebody, "do you overthink?" They always say yes, but then if you go, well, what do you overthink? That's a little harder to answer. So I'll say, write down one desire. One thing you want to do. I want to start a podcast. I want to talk to my wife about money. I want to write a book. I want to lose five pounds. It can be any desire-big, small, medium, write down the desire. Then listen to the thoughts that come up immediately. Because what I say is every reaction is an education. So listen to your reaction because it's an education. And if it's not something you want, if it's not positive, let's put it through three questions. Here's the three questions. Number one. Is it true? Is the thing you're listening to true. Number two. Is it helpful? Does it move you forward or does it move you back? And number three, is it kind? If you set it to a friend, would they still want to be a friend? And an example of why that's a Trojan horse, again, those words, they're not that special. True, helpful, kind. But I was in the middle of a podcast recently and the podcast host got quiet and most of the podcasts I've done, this is why I think this book is special to me is that they turn into heart conversations in the middle. So this podcast got quiet podcast host and he said, wait a second. He said, I've had the number one podcast in my category for nine months. And the voice I hear in my head, my soundtrack is, "you're just lucky. You're just lucky here, just lucky." And he said, if a friend came over and they had worked for nine months on a project and worked really hard, I'd never say, "you're just lucky." I would never say such a terribly mean thing to them. Why am I saying it to myself? So that's what I mean, it's a Trojan horse because even in the midst of a podcast, I've had podcast hosts go, Whoa, wait, Whoa. I need to unpack that. And then we ended up talking about their life, not the topic. It becomes a heart conversation, not a topic conversation. And that's what I mean, Trojan horse.

Ray Edwards (18:32):

So true. I, I went through similar experiences as I was reading the book and I realized that I have all these soundtracks going about in the back of my mind about the level of success I've achieved compared to my friends, uh, compared to people I don't know, but whom I admire, compared to myself when I was younger, more energetic, more healthy. And all the things that I was saying to myself, were really mean, if I said those to another person, they would not want to ever talk to me again.

Jon Acuff (19:08):

You'd have zero employees and zero friends. And that was what somebody asked me. What's the biggest surprise of writing the book. And I said, how many of my own sentences end in "you idiot." Like, just like I, like, I think a powerful thing to do is to check your punctuation. What are you punctuating the soundtracks in your head with? And, and to be honest with you,

a lot of mine, when I really spent some time working on it, ended with you, idiot, you idiot. And I just thought, wait a second, wait a second. That's not, that's not what I want. That's not true. It's not helpful. It's not kind. I have the power and permission to do something about that.

Ray Edwards (19:41):

You were writing in the book about this person you worked for and you started going into all the things that this person was requiring of you and expecting of you. And I found myself playing a game I'm not proud of, but I was like, I wonder if I know who he's talking about. I started making lists of people that it could possibly be, and then I got to the, well, I don't know if you want to share that story?

Jon Acuff (20:03):

Yeah, of course. Yeah, of course. So I started to make a list and I think one of the most egregious things this terrible boss was doing was that he had a timer on his desk, and every time I would go use the bathroom, he'd pause the timer cause that didn't count as writing time or work time. And so after the end of a really long day, I mean it, when you drove, you had to listen to an approved list of, uh, educational podcasts. Um, I had traveled all day, worked my butt off, came home at like four o'clock and I was like, I should go back to the office. And then I thought I have the worst boss. And the hardest part was that he was, as I say, the only person in town that would hire me because the worst boss was me. And that was kind of what stopped me dead in my tracks to realize I was the one, I have a timer that I would set for 90 minutes, I got to write. And if I went to get a drink of water from the kitchen, I would pause it and go this isn't writing time. This doesn't count. And all these different things, when I stopped and said, wait a second, I'm doing that to me. And it became this great challenge. And here's, what's fun again. When I say Trojan horse, sometimes I might just mean, it's easy. Like you think it's so easy, it can't be helpful. And then you try it. So in that particular case, I didn't go on this long vision quest for years to figure out best boss, worst boss. All I said was, what's the opposite of the worst boss. The opposite of the worst boss is the best boss. And I've had some good bosses and I liked working for them better than my bad ones. What do they have in common? What does the best boss have in common? And then if I applied that to me. If I decided, if I told myself that soundtrack, I'm the CEO of me and I'm the best boss. If I told myself that over and over and then actually made it true. What would that look like? It would look like at the end of the day, if it's three o'clock and I have no more ideas, you close up shop. I'm the best boss, go ahead, go for a run, go outside, go see your family. And so that became things I could actually execute against, was going, if I flip it over worst boss, the best boss. Now I have some actions I can actually take to make that true.

Ray Edwards (21:59):

If you were describing to somebody who'd never heard of the book before, if you're saying, well, I have this book it's called *Soundtracks*. I think it'll help you do this. How would you answer that question? What do you think it'll help people do?

Jon Acuff (22:09):

I would say it'll help you turn overthinking from a super problem into a superpower because that's what I believe. So a lot of, a lot of books about overthinking and say, stop it, stop it, stop it. Like, stop it. Stop is up. And my thought is one that's impossible. Like two, I've got this really amazing thinking machine. What if I just fed it with stuff that helps me not stuff that hurt me. Ideas that pushed me forward, not ideas that pulled me back. So when I say, you know, overthinking steals time, creativity and productivity. Do you know what you get back when you turn it into a power that helps you? Time, creativity and productivity. So

imagine if your thoughts could work for you, not against you. And that's how I would, that's how I describe the book.

Ray Edwards (22:48):

That is powerful. And that's the experience I've had. I mean, I'm, I'm, I've got my own new soundtracks. I'm using them. I'm doing the thing you suggest doing in the book, which has been powerful for me. I would have said I'm a pretty positive thinking guy. I'm the guy who lays out his clothes for his workout. I'm the guy who has the list of things I'm going to do tomorrow. Like the three big things, just like Michael Hyatt teaches me to do, but I was not. I realized choosing the thoughts I was having every day, all day long. This is the scary part on automatic. Thoughts I didn't choose or decide on, but I was repeating to myself over and over and over again. Yikes.

Jon Acuff (23:31):

Yeah. Under the surface. And that's, that's what I think is really fun. And here's the thing. There might take a while to change a thought, but also there's times where I've seen people in a second change what they thought. Where having a new thought, changed their whole perception. We've all experienced that in other forms of life. We've always, you know, we've all had a worker, a coworker or a neighbor we didn't get along with. And then we find out his wife has cancer and it completely changes our understanding of who he is. That one thought that one bit of new information. So I think there are a lot of people that read the book and will automatically go wait a second. This is a broken one. Here's the new one. And I didn't realize I didn't have to feel that way. I mean, we did a graphic where we did old soundtrack and new soundtrack and people filled it out. And one of my favorite ones I saw was I saw a dad say, "My old soundtrack was, I can't be a good dad to my kids cause I didn't have a good dad myself." And he said, he wrote a new soundtrack that said, "I get to learn how to be a good dad." And those kids will have a different childhood because he just experienced the freedom of knowing just because his dad wasn't good to him doesn't mean he can't be good to his kids. Like that is generational. That's where like with this book, I feel like I'm getting a front row seat to life change. And that's just really fun.

Ray Edwards (24:43):

Yeah. I'm enjoying going through the process and watching what's happening with other people. As they read the book and start walking out some of the suggestions you make. Where is the best place for people to get a copy of *Soundtracks*?

Jon Acuff (24:59):

I'd say the best place is probably Amazon. But if you're, if you listen to this and you're like, I want to know more. Um, I actually read the intro and the first chapter on my podcast. I've never done that before. I just thought, let me do, let me just, you know, I'll walk you through the idea so you can get a sense of it. So if you want to check out the first chapter, I'm an audio person. There's a lot of audio people out there. Um, my podcast is called All It Takes is a Goal. Go, go listen to the first chapter. Or I even do an interview with Colleen Barry, who is this amazing person in the first chapter of the book I interviewed her for about 45 minutes. She lost her job, felt really stuck, had to take a bunch of smaller jobs. And one of them was as a receptionist and she decided I'm going to plan, plan a new path forward. I'm going to change my mindset. And today she's the CEO of the company. She was the receptionist at, and it's an amazing story. So go, you know, certainly you can get the book anywhere. You want to get it. But if you're curious from an audio perspective, go check out the podcast.

Ray Edwards ([25:53](#)):

Cool. We'll have the links to all those things and more in the show notes. Jon, thank you so much for being here today. And thanks for writing this book.

Jon Acuff ([26:02](#)):

Yeah, this was easy, Ray, I'm glad we got to do it.

Ray Edwards ([26:04](#)):

I'm telling you it'll change your life if you read it and do what it says. It's called *Soundtracks-The Surprising Solution to Overthinking*. Get your copy today. Links in the show notes until next time. God bless you live long and prosper.

Announcer ([26:22](#)):

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