

"Learn to master the most powerful weapon: your mind." —DAVID GOGGINS

OZ PEARLMAN

READ YOUR MIND

Proven Habits for Success from
the World's Greatest Mentalist

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TO MY CHILDREN:
YOU'VE GIVEN ME JOY BEYOND ALL MEASURE.

TO MY WIFE:
YOU'VE GIVEN ME EVERYTHING AND ARE MY EVERYTHING.

Channel Your Inner Mentalist

Picture this.

I'm a guest on a private island in the British Virgin Islands. A band plays steel drums as the clear waters of the Caribbean Sea gently lap the pristine shoreline. Chefs tend to jerk chicken sizzling on an elaborate barbecue while a team of uniformed servers weaves in and out of the crowd. The breeze smells like spices, hibiscus, and money. It's magic hour, the last golden light of day washing over us. All the beautiful people are enjoying bespoke cocktails. The other guests and I can't help stealing glances skyward; our host on Necker Island has just returned from the edge of space on his Virgin Galactic rocket.

Sir Richard Branson's people could have hired anyone to celebrate the occasion. I mean, this is a man who has Mick Jagger on speed dial, right between Paul McCartney and the King. To my surprise and delight, his team chose me. I'm working the crowd, going from group to group, building up excitement and momentum as we all wait for the guest of honor. Suddenly, his friends and family part like the Red Sea. The barefoot billionaire appears, sporting a deep tan that contrasts with his iconic white-blond hair and open linen shirt, flashing that unforgettable smile. Everything about the scene feels surreal.

A moment such as this demands nothing less than the best, and I'm ready with one of my strongest reputation-making tricks. I lock eyes with the man, the myth, the legend, and it is go time.

“Imagine someone’s face, anyone at all, and see them in your mind’s eye,” I say. Then, using a small pair of scissors, I start slicing and dicing one of my business cards, like a child carving out a meticulous snowflake. Everyone around me whispers as they start to anticipate where this might be going.

When I ask him who he is thinking of, he casually says, “Barack.” Then he adds, “Obama,” in case I wasn’t sure which Barack he has in mind.

I unfold the paper and hold it up against my dark gray suit, revealing the freshly cut silhouette of the former president. The audience gasps in astonishment, but Branson, who does billion-dollar deals before breakfast, isn’t so outwardly effusive. Instead, he gives me a sly little smile. The best way I can describe his reaction is that it’s like having the Godfather reach over and pinch you on the cheek as an understated sign of respect and affection.

Sir Richard tucks the piece of paper into his breast pocket. He looks over his shoulder to make sure no one else hears him, leans in close, and whispers, “I’ll give this to him tomorrow when he arrives.”

What If You Could Read Minds?

Who hasn’t wished they could read someone else’s mind? How much easier would everything be if we could just figure out what other people were thinking, right? I mean, you’d probably never fight with your spouse again because you’d understand that should he or she say, “It’s nothing,” it would *definitely* be something, and you could act preemptively.

What if reading minds gave you practical skills, enabling you to predict the right time to ask your boss for a raise, to cease self-sabotage, or to stop procrastinating and start doing? You’d be more confidently persuasive, able to influence those around you in an effortless manner. How great would that be?

Of course, mind reading would be nice to have if you found yourself in a position of weakness, because you’d have the formula to flip that power

dynamic to your benefit. By knowing what's in another person's head, you could get a gatekeeper to give you what you want, whether it's an extension on an assignment or a waiver from your homeowners' association. Reading minds would make you better at understanding human nature, which makes it the ultimate cheat code in life.

What would be even *more* useful than reading other people's minds? The ability to read your own. Picture the results of tapping into your motivations and learning how to change your outcomes; of pushing past what's kept you stuck. What if you could set yourself up for success in the long term?

You can do all of this using the skills of a mentalist.

I've spent almost thirty years learning how to reverse engineer the human mind. Knowing *how* you think reveals to me *what* you think. From Tom Brady to Serena Williams, Howard Stern to Shaq, I've convinced some of the most notable people on the planet that I can access their innermost thoughts. But guess what? My entire career is built on a lie.

Ready for a bombshell?

I can't actually read minds.

What I can do is read *people*...and so can you! You already do it hundreds of times a day, every time you interact with another human being at home, at work, on the street, and everywhere in between, and I can help you be even better at it. Few skills will take you further in life than learning how to channel your inner mentalist. Reading people is a critical step to achieving what you want in this world. From getting ahead to getting what you want, the tactics I employ as a mentalist can be repurposed from entertainment to success in everyday life.

All of us have an internal BS detector that we developed from being around people, from getting social stimulus. What you may not realize is you were born being able to read minds. You can tell when someone's not paying attention to you. You can tell when someone's lying to you. (If you're a parent, you're *really* good at this.) You can tell when someone's interested in you or when they're faking it. We all have this sense. Well over two-thirds of

communication is nonverbal^[1], so it's not a matter of *what* people say but *how* they say it, and even what they leave unsaid.

Mentalism is magic of the mind. Rather than using fast hands to fool your eyes, I watch the way people move. I listen to the words they choose. I study their patterns and behaviors, often without them realizing I'm doing so. Mentalism is all about psychology, observation, memory, and communication. These small signals tell a much bigger story—and once you know what to look for, you can “read” people almost instantly. When I say to channel your inner mentalist, what I mean is this skill is instinctual. When you were a baby, long before you understood spoken language, you were able to interpret your parents' thoughts by studying their faces. The furrow of a brow, the flicker of an eyelid, the pull of the upper lip; all of it infused with meaning. The first time we smiled at our parents and they smiled back, we said to ourselves, *Oh God, when I do the thing with my mouth, that makes people pay attention to me!* And it's that first bit of dopamine that gets us going. The ability to interpret other people is innate in all of us because we're social creatures; it's why our species has survived.

The question isn't *Do you have the skills?* because the answer is *You do*. The question is *How do you take your skills to the next level?* How do you improve on your instincts and learn to trust them more?

This isn't about tricks. It's about transformation. I'm going to teach you the very techniques I've used to perform for millions of people around the world—but more important, I'm going to show you how to apply them in your own life to create real, lasting change. You don't have to be a mentalist to think like one. You just need a shift in mindset—and a few powerful tools.

So, I'll walk you through how I became a mentalist and start you on the path to honing your skills so you can learn to read people and apply the principles of mentalism to your everyday life. And, crucially, to develop the ability to look into the mirror and start to read *that* person's mind, which seems daunting, but it's not. In fact, it's easier than you think!

Like Magic

When I was thirteen, my parents took me on a cruise where I saw a magician perform for the very first time. I was captivated as I watched miracle after miracle. And then the most incredible thing happened: He picked me to join him onstage. The magician performed a classic known as “the sponge balls,” where the balls appeared, disappeared, and changed in number and size in my hands. An obsession was born and, from that moment on, I spent my time stalking him because I just had to see more. (FYI, there are surprisingly few places on a ship a grown man can hide, especially from a determined kid with nothing better to do.)

When I got home, I checked out every single book on magic at the library and read them from cover to cover...twice. You could not find me at any point of the day without a deck of cards in hand, literally: I found waterproof cards to practice with in the shower. By the time I'd turned fourteen, it was apparent that magic was more than a passing fad for me. But I didn't need to be a mentalist to understand that my mother was tired of driving me to Wunderground, the local magic store in metro Detroit where I grew up, and paying for the tricks to satisfy my obsession. Ever pragmatic, my mom told me if I was serious about pursuing magic, I needed to get a job and start supporting my own hobby. My folks were on the cusp of divorce back then, so it's possible that my bending of spoons at the breakfast table didn't exactly ease collective stress.

Anyway, instead of taking a paper route, babysitting, or shoveling driveways, I did what seemed the most logical thing for a kid in my position—I decided to try and get a job as a strolling magician, who does close-up magic while mingling with the crowd. I imagined all the tricks I could buy and how I could take my magic to the next level. At no point did it occur to me that my idea was (a) half-baked or (b) almost certainly destined to fail, because otherwise I'd never have tried in the first place. Ignorance can be bliss. If I'd asked someone else how to land that job, they'd have told me,

“First you have to do this, then you have to do that,” and I would have psyched myself out of even trying.

Zia’s, a family-style Italian restaurant in a strip mall a half mile from home, seemed the most logical place to give my magic gig a shot because its location was cursed. Every restaurant that opened there failed after a couple years. So I figured they could use my magical touch, pun intended.

I decided to go in one day after school with my mom, which happened to be perfect timing because at 4:00 p.m. the place was mostly empty between shifts. We sat at the bar alone, ordered some beverages and appetizers, and I started performing for my mom. This caught the bartender’s eye, so I asked him if he wanted to see some magic, too—which was exactly my plan. Had I gone in during the lunch rush or at dinner, he probably would’ve ignored me. But because he and the rest of the staff weren’t busy, he said, “Let’s get a bigger crowd going.” He called over several servers and, the next thing I knew, the general manager was coming by to see what was going on.

My mom, always my number one fan and a slightly pushy Israeli, gave me the eyebrow raise that indicated this was my moment. It was time to start selling. My mother and I tag-teamed, asking when their slowest night was and if they ever had entertainment. Like any good attorney, we asked our questions already knowing what answers we wanted them to give, leading them to the conclusion that I was what their restaurant was missing.

Why were they so willing to give me that shot? Maybe they were grasping for straws and thought, *We need whatever hook we can get to have this restaurant take off.* Lo and behold, I landed one night per week of strolling magic, going table to table. I was too young to drive so I walked there carrying my small bag of tricks, freshly printed business cards, and a dream.

The one thing I already understood was the concept of “Fake it till you make it.” My superpower was acting like I knew what I was doing even when I didn’t. I had my pitch perfected because I’d gone over it in my head a hundred times. That’s why when I got in front of Zia’s owners, with a proud Jewish mother behind me, I projected an aura of confidence and pulled out my best tricks. They bought it; I was *in*.

Pick Your Moment

Performing close-up magic at Zia's was probably the best education I could ever receive about learning to read people. I was able to iterate how to approach strangers and how to get a sense of what they thought of me even before I began performing. My mind would race trying to answer the questions: *What do they think of my act? How do I win their favor? How can I get them to want more?*

Through trial, error, and all kinds of rejection, I learned that my tricks were only a small part of the show as a whole. Everything counted, from my personality and my energy to the statements I'd make upon greeting them.

When I'd walk up to the table, every factor made an impression, even my smile and my body position. I learned fast that timing is everything. If people had just sat down and hadn't yet ordered, they could be flustered or get angered by my presence. They hadn't unpacked their day yet. They needed a minute with their drinks and a few calories from the bread basket to ease their tension. I used all these little bits of info when deciding the right moment to visit a table.

The sweet spot was just after they'd ordered, when the excitement of making their choices was over and there was a lull in the conversation as they anticipated their meals. Diners were the most relaxed and their guards were down. That's when I could go up to them and say, "How's everybody doing tonight?" I knew that when they saw me come over—obviously not their server or the manager—their minds would race with questions, so I would address their objections before they were even consciously aware of them. While I'd yet to study any psychology in junior high, Zia's taught me about heuristics, meaning the mental shortcuts people take to make quick decisions. My customers' default setting was assuming I shouldn't be there, so I'd immediately counter that. I'd tell them, "The owners have a treat for you tonight!" indicating that not only was I welcome, but I was a value-add and management wanted me to be there.

You've likely been in very similar situations when wanting to get something from someone and trying to find the best moment to do so. Let's say you want to ask your boss for a raise. It's important to you, so you have it on your calendar to talk to him or her first thing on Monday morning, when they're back from their annual vacation cruise. It's a big deal, so you want to get it out of the way right now. But if you do it then, even though you've worked your butt off and may well deserve that raise, you may be shooting yourself in the foot. Because your raise is not necessarily as important and immediate a concern to your boss.

Put yourself in their shoes—does your boss have a million other things on their plate? Are they normally in the best mood first thing in the morning, especially after an extended break? You know this person. You've worked with them for years. You've seen when they're at their kindest, their most receptive, their most generous, and it's rarely at 8:30 a.m. on Monday when their phone is ringing off the hook, their inbox is full, and they haven't even touched their coffee yet.

When I was working the restaurant, was I technically employed if they paid me fifty dollars under the table and sent me home with some spaghetti? I quickly learned ways to hype up a table before I'd perform. I'd ask, "Did you hear what's going on?" They'd say no, but with that one question, I shifted their hesitation to anticipation, and instead of being bothered, they were now intrigued. I'd continue, "Then you're in luck!" further piquing their curiosity. Who doesn't want to be lucky? Who doesn't want to feel in the know? Every word and phrase was designed to grab their attention and not let them go. I was setting a path in motion and that is key to tapping into the minds of others. This is Human Behavior 101: learning to anticipate the thoughts of others before they even think them.

When I'm performing, I don't use this anticipation to amaze you. I use these little sweeteners to get you to like me, to get you interested in what I'm presenting, and to win you over so the experience is all the more memorable. And you can do the same. Like in the example above, when asking for a raise: You know your boss. You know when she or he is at their best, their

happiest, their most generous. Learn their patterns, make an effort to actively pay attention to their moods, and use this knowledge to strike when the time is right!

Shift Out of Autopilot

Zia's taught me the value of being an active participant, one who remains present in every moment and pays attention to every little detail. More important, I learned that I needed to make an opportunity happen, rather than wait for others to take the initiative. This is something all of us can improve in our lives and occurs only when you take charge and assume responsibility. For example, think about your day-to-day life with your spouse. How often are you truly present? And how often are you just going through the motions? We are bombarded with so much information that, with our eyes alone, we're processing one megabyte of data every second.^[2] To handle the thousands of tiny decisions we make every day—from seasoning our food to picking out a tie—our brains create habits to help us process this info. These habits we develop help us to not be overwhelmed by information, yet they also make us default to autopilot. We counter this by leaning into active participation.

In lieu of going through the motions, try to view things from your spouse's perspective. Consider what might be on their mind. Are they anxious about work? Are they worried about the kids? Are they stressed about everything on their to-do list? The simple act of being able to read the room can be a relationship saver. (Again, this is tied closely to timing.)

If I performed my show on autopilot, I would mess up all the time—even though I know every formal beat of my performance by heart. I must be hyperfocused when I'm with an audience. I have to study everything they're doing, like their traits, their mannerisms, their eyes, their body language, and even their pauses. The smallest “um” uttered by a spectator at the wrong moment might seem harmless at first glance and would likely go unnoticed

by the audience. But for me, even a small moment of disconnection can spell doom if not immediately addressed. That “um” may indicate that something was missed or that my participant may be mildly confused. This is a big red flag that I simply can’t ignore. For example, this tells me their brain thought of one thing and then shifted to another. That one little pause could be the difference between succeeding and failing on a trick in front of thousands of people.

Failure was my teacher and my motivator in the restaurant days. When I first started working the gig, I’d walk up to a table and say, “Oh, are you ready? Let me do some magic.” Then many of the diners would just laugh and go, “No thanks, kid.” You’re walking up to someone, ready to give them your all and they reject you? What a gut punch. (We’ll delve deeper into dealing with rejection in a later chapter.) It’s hard to move past that.

I could have left the rude table and thought to myself, *What a bunch of jerks*. The easiest thing is to shift the blame onto them rather than learn from this situation. Then I’d be annoyed, that tension would impact me, and I’d bring that kind of negative energy to the next group. When you’re going up to fifty or more tables in a shift and three in a row treat you poorly, it can ruin your whole attitude.

My tricks weren’t paying for themselves, though, so I had develop thicker skin. Instead of quitting, I tried to figure out what I could do that might yield different results, and I learned that every “no thanks” was giving me the data I needed to turn my next interaction into a “yes, please.”

I discovered that instead of being mad at them, I’d be more effective in the long run if I tried to understand them. I couldn’t let myself wallow in that rejection. Our brains are hardwired to register and dwell on negative events. This is called “negativity bias” and it means we feel the pain of rejection far more deeply than the balm of praise.^[3]

I didn’t know anything about neural processing back then. I had no idea that a negative stimulus resonated more strongly in my cerebral cortex. All I knew was that I’d feel better if I tried to put a positive spin on the situation—I’d be more focused on the task at hand instead of distracted and diminished

by the recent past. So I'd say to myself, *What if their kid is sick at home? What if they had a huge fight right before they came? I feel really bad for them. They must be having a rough night. I can't wait to bring joy to the next person.*

I also started conducting after-action reviews to see where I may have veered off the rails. Maybe I'd realize that they'd been talking and I had interrupted. How would I feel if someone interrupted me? I had already started on the wrong foot when I walked up to them, and so I'd had to climb up a hill just to get their attention to win them back over. That was *my* fault, not theirs. In so many instances we tend to blame the other person instead of examining our own behavior to see what we could have done better instead—as if in a failed interaction there is only one party to blame.

When you walk up to somebody and they don't know you, what's the first thing that often happens? They get tense. You can see it. I mean, imagine you're standing at the ATM and someone approaches you—that's anxiety-provoking for sure. Your body goes into fight-or-flight. This happened to me a couple months ago. Someone was panhandling and they came up to me as I was putting in my PIN. I said, "Listen, I'm getting money out. I'm willing to help you, but give me a minute and I'll meet you outside." A better way of handling this would be if he held the door for me on my way out and then said, "If you can spare any change, that'd be amazing." He would have created a totally different feeling in me. Ultimately, I still helped him, but this is something to keep in mind if you're ever trying to solicit signatures for a petition or donations for a nonprofit. It's so important for you to consider the other person's reaction, making sure you don't interrupt or impose. In a situation where you're, say, trying to collect signatures, you're going to find the most success if you acknowledge the other person by saying something like, "I can tell you're so busy, but I have to quickly share this with you." Speak with light urgency, empathize, and validate their reactions and don't be surprised when you're able to get what you need.

Find the Right Energy

A couple of years ago I was presenting and performing at the ESPY Awards, standing arm's length from LeBron James, arguably one of the most famous people in the world. We were elbow-to-elbow backstage, and he was getting ready to go up and give a speech. We said a brief hello and exchanged pleasantries. I knew that was the absolute worst moment to say, "Hey, LeBron, can I get a selfie?" The timing was just off. Plus, I want to be seen as an equal, and coming up to him as a fan was the surest way to not get what I wanted. For him to give something of value (in this case, the selfie), I would ideally provide him with something of value first. So backstage, pre-speech, just wasn't the right moment.

However, seconds later, I met Patrick Mahomes, and he was in less of a time crunch, having just wrapped up his stage portion. I ended up talking to him and getting a good vibe. Plus, he knew who I was because earlier I'd performed for his wife, making her the star of my act; I won him over right from the start as I'm sure he typically gets most of the attention. At the end of our conversation, I said, "Patrick, it's been a real pleasure hanging out tonight, let's get a picture to remember it!" Without hesitation, he wrapped his arm around me and said, "Oh my God, get in here!" and we took the photos.

I didn't really need to ask for permission, and I could assume the close, because the timing was right and I'd locked in what matters to him most: his wife's happiness. So, when I asked for something in return, he was more likely to accommodate wholeheartedly. If I'd tried the same move with LeBron, he probably wouldn't have acquiesced because he was concentrating on what he was about to say to a huge audience, plus there was nothing in it for him. Often, getting in touch with your inner mentalist is as easy as thinking about what's going through the other person's head.

A while back, I was at an incredibly high profile event. This room was filled with the heaviest of heavy hitters in the sports world, including most of the team owners along with the commissioners of the NFL, NHL, NBA,