

Shelf-Help Podcast Show Transcription

Alex: Hello, everyone, and welcome to The Shelf Help Podcast connecting you to the best self-help books on the shelf. I'm Alex.

Jake: I'm Jake.

Sullivan: And I'm Sullivan.

A: And today we're going to be looking at the application of the self-help book, how it connects us to our daily lives. We're going to be analyzing this book and talking to you about our opinions on Jen Sincero's *You Are a Badass*.

J: Okay, so Jen Sincero's *You are a Badass* is essentially a self-help text that wants people to love themselves and wants you to raise your self-esteem. And it gives you like a rulebook or like a playbook somewhat for like tackling life's problems. And these rules can be very niche, it can be very broad, it really just depends on the chapter and the context.

S: So Sincero makes no real declaration of marketing toward a broad audience, however, the book is very evidently targeted toward a very narrow subset of the population, namely, well-to-do middle-aged women in upper-middle and high-income countries. Alongside this critique, much of Sincero's advice stems from her own experiences which seem quite unrelatable and are based very loosely on spirituality. We'll offer up a discussion of who Sincero is and what she's accomplished as a result of *You Are a Badass*, an evaluation of the self-help techniques she's employed in the book, a critique of her argument, as well as the few nuggets of wisdom that we were able to extract from *You Are a Badass*. *You Are a Badass* was published in 2013, and founder of the establishment of Sincero's brand, which has been wildly successful.

A: So first, we have to kind of look at the brand that she has created with this book. She has four books that go off of this kind of *You Are a Badass* idea, she has the first book, which we'll be discussing today, *You Are a Badass*, *You Are a Badass at Making Money*, *You Are a Badass Everyday*, and *Badass Habits*. She's taken this and she's commercialized it with an online shop. She's furthered her branding with souvenir-type products, and established the brand on this foundation of a self-help book.

J: She gives lists of prescriptions or playbooks and lists form that tell you step by step instructions for how to tackle these problems. But the only problem is that these problems are very narrow. Sincero employs a one size fits all approach, which is pretty normal in the self-help realm. But it really does still exclude a ton of people and their problems. Another issue with the methods employed by Sincero in this book are redundancy. She advises similar actions to take on nearly every kind of problem in every chapter. And sometimes they're the exact same. I don't know what kind of value you're supposed to extract from these very redundant instructions. But let's just talk about some of the ones that she uses over and over again, raise your frequency, still don't understand what that means. Be grateful, simple enough. Look on the bright side, very similar to be grateful. Love yourself, which is pretty much at the end of every single chapter, she writes. And a theme that she doesn't say outright, but essentially describes over and over and over again, is to do whatever you want. Another thing Sincero often does in this book is she maintains a very casual, conversational tone. And I want to give her some praises for this because there's so many books out there where people are just trying to show off all their SAT words. And I struggle to imagine anyone having a hard time reading this book. And I think that's really nice to keep things accessible. But accessibility aside, this book has major problems at

every turn, and they are unable to be ignored. Let's just give this book one titular descriptor, and that is that this book is a celebration of ignorance. Nearly everything in this book that is advised someone, everything that every anecdote that is recounted, it's just stupid. There's not really much else to say about it. There's bad advice. There's ridiculous stories, and there's a completely messed up worldview. So let's just dish and have a little bit of fun picking this book apart for what it really is.

S: My biggest problem with Jen Sincero's *You Are a Badass* was that it was, in fact, just bad advice. Her whole epic philosophy revolves around just doing what you want to do, and not really taking responsibility for the emotions of others in almost any circumstance. She describes a lot about take control of your destiny. If you're not taking control of your destiny, you're not vibrating at the right frequency, it's the universe... the universe needs you to vibrate faster. First of all, who is the universe she makes no pretense of this being a religious book that says that she doesn't believe in God but she believes in the Universe, which she uses in capital letters.

J: She believes that the source energy Sullivan, the source energy!

S: Oh excuse me! Well, but she says she uses them interchangeably. The source energy and the universe according to Jen Sincero are interchangeable. So the source energy is the vibrations part, right? So that's the "you're not vibrating at the right frequency" or not vibrating at the frequency that the universe or the source energy, this powerful, overarching godlike force is wanting you to. So you are in control of your destiny, which simply isn't realistic for every person. So our ethics philosophy revolves around doing what's best for you doing what you want to do, and not taking responsibility for others in other circumstances. She outlines a whole moment about what it means to screw someone over, in her words, and she includes a lovely definition of what she means, which really problematically includes the definition of screwing someone over is "taking their money and doing a lousy job or destroying their water source or enslaving populations, things like that. Your mother being disappointed or your father disapproving, or your friends being outraged, does not qualify as screwing someone over". Thank you, Jen Sincero, for telling me that enslaving populations is indeed screwing someone over. I am in shock!

J: We're not even getting to what I think is the worst part of the book as it has material effects that could essentially ruin your life. And that is that her financial advice, it's, it's horrible. Jen Sincero is the Biblical Moses of financial ruin. You listen to her, you follow her, you will get there. She tells people to max out your credit cards if you want something that you can't afford, and that it'll all work out. In her chapter about upgrading your environment, she essentially tells people to just buy new furniture or spend a bunch of money sprucing up your house, slap a new coat of paint on it, and that that'll make you feel better, and if you feel better in your home, you'll be performing better. A lot of this stuff is just completely classist, and it's really gross.... and she treats money like this non-valuable, just infinite well, that she can just constantly go to over and over again to make herself feel better. And one specific anecdote really really peeved me really, really empowered me to give her the title of the Biblical Moses a financial ruin. And that is the anecdote where she talks about buying an Audi that she can't afford. She essentially just goes on this tirade about how she needs to have a better car, but her life can't really support it and so she just buys an Audi anyways! She just buys another car, a new car, her car wasn't even broken. And her justification for this, essentially, is that if you treat yourself to these ridiculous luxuries that like less than point 1% of the world population can afford that the universe will just reward you, it'll know that you're serious, it will essentially just keep you financially afloat because you're you. And not only is this untrue, it's very dangerous. And I feel really bad for people who have read this book and then taken its financial advice, would love to see some of their stories and how it worked out for them. And if the universe kept them financially afloat.

A: And her belief in the universe and this kind of whack jobs spirituality is what informs nearly all of her philosophy. She takes this esoteric New Age spiritualism and uses it as a backbone for the logic of her practices, manifest this, believe in that, leaving her core arguments, invertebrates. On page 33, she talks about believing in the not yet seen learning to master the energetic realm and stay in your highest frequency. And by doing that you quote, "harness your innate power to create the reality you desire". She goes on to talk about raising your vibration, you have to believe that everything you want is available to you. And again, that just goes back to this concept of having really terrible advice. Being able to manifest the universe into giving you what you want isn't something that people are capable of doing. It doesn't provide you with the financial stability, and it doesn't lead you to your best self. In fact, all it's doing is teaching you that luck can dictate your success, that believing in something and praying for it and hoping for it and manifesting it and saying it over and over again and essentially having no action and essentially having no real financial background to support you and do these kinds of things... it leaves you essentially without any kind of actual good advice.

S: Moving on to sort of a solid critique of the argument. A lot of Jen Sincero's inclusion practices have really strong contemporary problematics, right? In the age of 2021 this book seems particularly ignorant. It is very clear that *You Are a Badass* by Jen Sincero, published in 2013, did not live through 2020. She narrows her audience significantly, by a lack of awareness about the problems of people unlike her. She describes problems she's faced in ways she's gone about rectifying them (like buying her Audi that she could not afford yet still somehow afforded) that takes a lot of relatability out of her argument. So the text argument itself is often noninclusive, and frankly quite obvious. Perhaps this is because Jen Sincero, popularized many of the phrases in the book, but I simply find that unlikely; much of it is common sense, or just psychological information kind of darkened up. She says, your thoughts and beliefs dictate your reality. So if you want to change your reality, you have to change your beliefs. Obviously, part of that's true, that's a psychological principle proven in science, but she doesn't give any concrete instructions as to how to continue going about that. She says, you have to change your thinking first, and then the evidence appears, how does evidence appear? Changing your thinking can do some, but you have to change some actions too. And that's something that she never gets to. The non-inclusive aspect of her argument was particularly problematic as well. She flipped Samuel Smiles's 'true gentleman', the sort of originator of self-help on its head. Employing a universal appropriation of Smiles's self-made man, which simply isn't possible for everyone, much less an equitable process of operation. She gives a really clear example of the noninclusion as well as her own personal privilege later in the book when she's talking about an experience she had with a police officer. Again, like I said, these topics were clearly not as conversed about in the age of the publication of the book. But I'm just going to read you a bit of her anecdote. "We always remain those polite Sincero kids. Can I help you, officer? Thank you, officer. Yes, sir. That is my marijuana. Not only are the words "please and thank you" ingrained in me like the recipe for my Italian father's red sauce or the knowledge that it's not cool to kill people... but being polite just always seemed to be such a no-brainer. Aside from the fact that it makes you feel like a good person, people will usually do what you ask them to do, if you're nice about it. And if you're not, they won't. Hello? Which is why it completely baffles me when anyone over the age of five is rude, and especially when they refrain from the 'thank you' part of the conversation when a gesture is made on their behalf, either by me or other people or the Universe in general." Again, the universe is in all caps, who the hell is the Universe? but second of all, this simply isn't a realistic situation for many. This week alone, there have been many encounters with police and minor crimes that have been completely unjust to different individuals and she really exhibits her own privilege as a woman of an upper middle-class background in these examples, again, taking away from some of the relatability, and simply being un-inclusive, this advice being grateful is obviously something that many of us have been,

you know, instructed in our lives. But this isn't a realistic example of those manners coming in handy, just because it is so unrelatable to so much of the population.

J: Yeah, and Sincero failing to see the racial insensitivity that she's essentially bringing to life with her own anecdotes and her own advice. It's not as common as the rampant classism that just runs amok in this book. I mentioned it earlier about the upgrade your environment part of the book, and I want to read a little bit of it right now. Because this is exactly what I mean when I say this "rampant classism". "If you aspire to have a more up-leveled and inspiring lifestyle than you presently have, and you're actively visualizing this for yourself, it's going to be quite a struggle to keep your thoughts large and in charge. If every time you pull up to your rickety ass house, you hear the Sanford and Son theme song start-up in your head. So even though you're going to be thinking and imagining the change before it happens, do what you can to make some upgrades to where you're at now, give the place a paint job and clean it up, get new furniture." And I'm just going to stop reading there because oh my lord, so rickety ass house, just buy new furniture, just paint your house. It's not like you have a job or anything that you're at during the day.

A: And again, she's putting so much prioritization on material goods, which is wild to me.

S: This is also within a chapter entitled Your Brain is your Bitch... about how to rectify your situations by your thinking. Again, with this being the sort of tangible advice I say in quotes that she's giving. So in conclusion, this book isn't just bad for being written in 2013, it could be construed as socially irresponsible in nearly any time during human existence, which means that these contemporary problematics that we just discussed, aren't necessarily so contemporary. But moving forward, we also have a problem with the author's worldview. She's really idealist, which to some extent is admirable, but like we just discussed so much of what she writes is so noninclusive.

J: Also, I want to bring in a little bit of Binkley here, it seems like Sincero is almost like exactly what he was looking at some times when he wrote about like the creation of neoliberal subjects. And we've talked about Binkley here and then on this podcast, as he's usually pretty useful for understanding some of the problems that we come across when reading the authors we read on this podcast. And here he is again! But this time Sincero is essentially THE like, evil object that Binkley is always talking about when he's referring about the creation of neoliberal subjects and how institutions try and govern individuals by appealing to their capacity to perceive things positively, even when they really shouldn't. And this is a spot on way to attack Sincero in her arguments, the neoliberal subject she's creating, or whoever's reading the book and going out and buying an Audi by maxing out their credit card or taking out ridiculous obscene loans at insane interest rates, but the part that really hits the nail on the head, is the part about institutions governing individuals by appealing to their capacity to perceive situations positively. That is, essentially all that Sincero does in this book, she's constantly telling people be grateful, love yourself, just vibe correctly, have easy frequency, she's constantly telling the reader to just think happy thoughts and good things will happen. That really, really falls in line with Binkley's idea of the institutions and how they govern us. Another problematic aspect of Sincero's entire worldview is her use of victim-blaming, it's essentially necessary for her belief in the law of attraction. She essentially argues that bad things just happened to people who have bad vibes. It's really just, it's just a pathological worldview that just focuses all the blame on the victim.

S: Chapter 17 is actually titled, It's So Easy Once You Figure Out It Isn't Hard, which in itself says enough about the skewed aspects of Jen Sincero's entire worldview.

J: And once again, let's return to the financial side of things. She has an unrealistic relationship to money that manifests itself as glasses, need something done, pay the money and hire professional she says, can't afford something, buy it anyways, because that's and I quote your truth. She advocates for spending money you don't have because it will magically help you make the money that you still don't have. And right here is where I want to get around to Marcuse's idea of affirmative culture. We haven't talked about Marcuse, as often as we've talked about Binkley on this podcast. But we have brought him up a few times. So the way that she falls in lines with this idea of affirmative culture is that she believes happiness is entirely internal. She divorces it completely from material reality. Maintaining one's happiness is not a matter of material reality whatsoever, it is completely up to the individual and how they perceive things. And oh, you may never be able to buy an Audi. But you can be happy in your rickety ass house according to zero as long as you just vibe correctly, and raise your frequency. In this affirmative culture view just discounts the entire, like, purpose of the book, the idea that like you would be going to read a book to help you realize your potential to help you raise your self-esteem. But then the book just says like, "oh, you don't need anything like you just kind of have to have good vibes". And it's like, it's like she's almost admitting that this is a scam in some roundabout way. And it's just a complete inability to comprehend the real problems of mental illness or disability. She leaves no room for these interpretations, and she's constantly belittling the people who are afflicted by these things.

A: Simply put, Jen Sincero has a misguided sense of authority. throughout the novel, she begs the reader to just stop thinking so hard. She verbatim says life is a party, just go with it, essentially calling for a primal reversion, especially in her anecdote with the loincloth man who just simply was living his life and ignoring the social constructs that dictate that he do X, Y, or Z. And she claims that this is what makes her successful. She uses this spirituality as a way to justify anything, and she continues to do it even just because things have worked out for her over and over and over again. Everything Sincero suggests either belittles others for their religion or spirituality and is in bad taste. But she takes her own spirituality on the offensive she weaponizes it acting like this new age evangelist, and continuing to tell people that this is how to be successful This is how to achieve material gain. This is how to be happy. This evangelism is obviously born out of her success. It's born out of dumb luck, and a safety net of a doctor for a parent, which isn't something that everyone has and she continues to overlook that.

S: By no means does this mean that she's not qualified or professional or anything like that. She has indeed built an empire and I don't want to take that away from her. But a lot of what she's built his empire on is simply unrelatable and opportunities that haven't been afforded to every other person on the planet. And as a result of this, a lot of her suggestions are largely unrelatable thus emphasizing her misguided sense of authority.

J: So after essentially roasting this book for however many minutes we were just going on for it, let's talk about some of the redeemable points. So this is kind of a trick segment because the thing about redeemable points is that they're surrounded by disqualifying bad advice, or problematic worldviews, which undercut nearly all of the good things sincere does advocate for.

S: That said, some of these points are actually redeemable or at least scientifically proven. First of all, toward the beginning of the tech, she discusses the growth mindset, which actually is psychologically proven in the discipline, talking about the way that if you perceive a challenge or a setback as an opportunity, rather than a deficit, you will move forward and have a better chance of succeeding in the future than someone who views a failure or a rejection or any sort of shortcoming as a deficit rather than an opportunity for further growth. So the growth mindset is actually psychologically proven and is useful in many disciplines. She also says that most answers reveal themselves through doing not thinking, which is something that I wish she'd

carried on throughout the book since most of her book is change your thinking and your environment will change. She literally says, like I mentioned, most answers reveal themselves through doing not through thinking...then why did I read so many chapters on change your thinking? As a result that is really accurate. Like I said, all we wanted was more concrete advice on how to change this thinking into action. And so the balance sheet strikes with this turns out to be a little bit primal in nature. She also discusses the power of giving and the way that giving can in turn, make you feel better or grow in some way. So the power of giving actually is something that again, has been psychologically proven to be successful and useful, especially in concepts of one's own self-worth, or self-compassion, thus rendering me a badass since Jen Sincero was telling me I am a badass.

J: Speaking on the power of giving, I really do want to at least give some praise to Sincero here for her generous spirit. Because in a way, like part of me hopes that she thought she was giving us something good with this book. And if she was trying to give people something with this book, it kind of comes off as a cat dragging a dead bird to your doorstep. But at least you tried.

A: I also think the book was incredibly easy to read. It was very like we had earlier in the podcast, it was very accessible. I almost think that some of the advice is just so bad that it makes it hilarious to read. I think you really look at it as just simple. It's just simply funny. Also, I also think like hearing someone repeat you over and over again to love yourself, even though that's not going to help you repay your loans and to help you move to Paris and drink wine every Saturday night. I think there is something to be said about someone who consistently says the way to becoming a badass is to love yourself. Essentially, that's the thing that's repeated most throughout the novel. And if you've cut it down, you've cut down the spiritual bullshit and you've cut down the bad financial advice...I think loving yourself is the biggest takeaway that you should be gaining from this book.

J: So let's get to the conclusion. This is the part where we deliver a verdict on the book and whether or not we recommend it. And I think you will have no problem guessing what we're going to be recommending you do and that is to do not buy this book. It is horrible advice and reading it is like listening to the stupidest person you know, go on and on and on about something that you know they're wrong about this book also has the potential to ruin lives, which I believe is pretty unique, so like props to that I guess. And it's not even that entertaining in it's abject horror which I guess me and Alex kind of disagree on she thought it was very funny reading the bad advice I thought it was just like horrifying. It was like watching a train wreck but instead of like the interesting part of the train wreck it's like everyone you love and know is on that train.

S: I will also say I do agree with Jake. I would not recommend this book for many of the same reasons but also because I have trouble grappling with the ethical ramifications of someone who has built this empire on her You are a Badass franchise from a book that is so unrelatable and noninclusive. Again, like I said, it's very evident that this book did not live through the last year of our lives, but I don't think that makes it okay just because it was written in 2013 doesn't give it a free pass for the noninclusion and continually discriminatory and for the oblivious worldview that Jen Sincero advances throughout the text, which leads me to not recommend it to you. I will say this book was somewhat hilariously misguided and while difficult to get through, it was like Alex said at least an easy read.

A: Yeah, that being said, I also wouldn't recommend it if you're going to take the advice seriously. I don't think that the book serves the purpose that it set out to serve. But I did have a couple giggles I did repeat to myself over and over again love yourself as I read it. But that being said, we are signing off today. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you for enjoying

our roast section of this novel. Once again we are the Shelf-Help Podcast connecting you to the best self-help books on the shelf.