

THE
JOSH RIVEDAL'S
i'MPOSSIBLE
PROJECT



HOW TO
LIVE
MENTALLY WELL
AND **CRUSH IT**
IN HIGH SCHOOL

**Part of The i'Mpossible Project's
Peer-to-Peer Resource Series**

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INTRODUCTION

It's December 2010, the start of a new decade... and I'm back in college at twenty-six—making it happen, taking the bull by the horns, and thinking of other exciting clichés that applied to my life.

More than anything, I was ready for a change. In the previous fifteen months, I had some of the most calamitous fortunes in the history of calamity. My father took his own life, my mother betrayed me over my father's inheritance, my girlfriend of six years left me, I lost out on a big role singing on Broadway, and *Ugly Betty* got canceled by ABC (okay, maybe that last one wasn't so bad). If I could get through all that, what else could go wrong?

Um... everything.

In January of 2011, I started experiencing signs of what I later discovered was depression. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, and thoughts of suicide swirled around inside my head all day long. And worse—I couldn't shake off the suicidal thoughts, no matter how hard I tried. After nearly making an attempt on my life...

*I finally found the courage to
reach out for help...*

—first from family, then friends, and eventually my school’s counseling center, where I began seeing a therapist who helped keep me alive. I ended up attending school that semester and began to thrive.

Over the next four months I made a conscious decision to make changes in my life. Initially I wasn’t sure what I was doing or how it would all work. But I chronicled it all once a week, writing first to myself and then turning few into blog posts or entries into my first book. Looking back on this writing, there is a clear path I took toward my healing, along with tools for others to use to help them help themselves.

This book is what I learned about recovery, surviving, and even thriving as a student dealing with a mental health condition. You don’t necessarily have to be dealing with depression or anything else. All of this is sensible living, and inside are eight core principles on...

*how to live mentally well in high
school... and crush it while
you're there.*

This short manual is a product of testing, trial and error (falling flat on my face more than a few times), and gathering knowledge from my many mentors. I want to share with you what I’ve learned in order to help you have a successful high school career and beyond. It all starts with protecting, nurturing, and caring for that gray matter between your ears (no, not that big mole on your face). Why? So you can get a head start on living a

mentally healthy and fulfilling life regardless of your midterm grades, relationship status, or the prized internship you did or didn't land. #booyah

This book is a departure from the generic rah-rah inspirational-style material. No magical spirit-guide promises, no flowery find-your-inner-child guarantees; just eight short chapters—each a mixture of philosophy, direct objectives, and my aim for mental health “success.” Some chapters will be directly applicable to you, some will be applicable to a friend or classmate—feel free to share that chapter or the entire book with that person. This book is made to be shared.

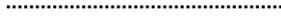
How To Read This Book

There are no chapter numbers. Start reading wherever you want your journey to begin. Take your time with each chapter, preferably a week, allowing time for “aha” moments—making space to implement what you've learned, allowing yourself to be inspired and to be an inspiration, and setting yourself up for a day, a week, a year, or a lifetime of sustainable, fulfilling change.

I know it's sexy to claim that I have all the answers—hell, it'll even pump out more books. But I can't in good conscience make that claim. I do know where to find the answers—inside of you. My hope is that this book will be a spark, a catalyst, or even the inspiration you've been searching for and to make mental health a priority and a possibility each and every day.

*Possibilities and opportunity for
adventure abounds.*

#iampossible



PUTTING YOUR SUCCESS ON AUTOPILOT

While emerging from a six-week period of depression and suicidal thinking, I realized I needed to develop new tools to dig myself out of the hole I fell into, and give myself a fighting chance to keep myself out of that hole forever. I had to develop healthy habits. What I discovered after a few months was that creating these habits didn't require much work. Soon, each "habit" became a staple of how I would live the rest of my life.

Eating—I'm no nutritional expert, but I do know that eating a whole extra-sausage large pizza in one sitting is not good for your physical or mental health. Check out a few of these sites for more information on how to help you make good meal choices:

- [Choose My Plate](#): Plan healthy meal and snack choices with this tool, which includes guidelines from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- [Health.gov](#): These resources from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services feature health news, interactive tools, and dietary guidelines.
- [It's About Eating Right](#): Tips on a range of issues from weight management and nutrition to food safety and grocery shopping from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
- [Nutrition for Everyone](#): Helpful guidelines on food groups, water intake, fats and carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables, and other nutrition topics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- [What Specific Foods Do](#): Find out how specific types of foods, as well as vitamins and minerals, play a role in overall health and wellness, and disease prevention. This is part of the Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing series from the University of Minnesota.

Sleeping—Getting on a semi-normal sleep cycle was huge for me. Instead of alternating falling asleep at midnight, the next night at 2:00 a.m., and the next at 6:00 a.m. while waking up every morning at nine o'clock, I had to make sure I got to sleep between 11:30 and 12:30 every night with few exceptions. Adults need seven to eight hours of sleep, and missing that sleep on a regular basis can have a negative effect on your emotions, your creativity, and the quality of your work. Taking all-nighters to cram are rarely useful. It's better to wake up feeling rested and then tackling your work.

Positive People—I used to hang with a mixed bag of people. But while learning to deal with my depression, I realized I could only keep positive people around. Negative people were a drain on my time, energy, and they put me in a bad place mentally. Positive people helped

me see new possibilities, the good parts of myself, and inspired me to raise my game as a friend, lover, student, mentor, and entrepreneur.

Exercise—When first navigating my way through depression, I noticed the extra endorphins produced during exercise helped change my brain chemistry for a short period, providing a temporary relief from the hurricane of negativity crashing about inside my brain. Walking is totally fine too if you're working up to getting serious about exercising. Exercise also helps improve memory and reduces stress. It also helped keep off some unwanted pounds due to my metabolism slowing down (damn you, Mother Nature!).

Talking It Out—Prior to my depression, I never talked to anyone about anything I was struggling with, and I rarely asked for help. But I had to change this to be able to go on living. And there's lots of ways to talk and get support. Your school's counseling center is a great place to start. This is one of your last opportunities for free mental health care—take advantage. You don't need a diagnosis to make an appointment. Either as a supplement or as a segue into dipping your toes into talking to someone, identify people in your world who you consider a mentor with whom you can have a heart-to-heart.

*Creating Healthy Habits isn't
About Making an Ultimatum or a
New Year's Resolution.*

It's developing systems to create little wins, making it easier for you to make long-term sustainable change.

Two Quick Examples

1. I eat like crap when I get hungry and food isn't readily available. So, I decided to prepare a few meals in advance of the week and blocked out time when I can prepare more easy meals. Calorie count is lower, proteins and health(-ier) fats are higher. My mental health is better because I'm not eating crap. And my pants continue to fit me. #woot
2. I dislike exercising and know I won't do it unless I make it really easy for myself to do it. So, I put running shoes, shorts, and a t-shirt beside my bed at night. When I wake up in the morning, those bad boys are staring me in the face and it's easier for me to slip them on and run out the door. Otherwise, I'd be searching for clothes and give up halfway to getting my socks out of the drawer. And we're back to my mental health being a notch better because the exercise triggers those lovely chemical friends, endorphins.

Create systems only when you feel a little extra motivated and when you can give a small amount of time to the task at hand.

*Set Yourself Up for Little Wins
That Add Up to Something Big.*

Trying to lose thirty pounds in a week or creating that paper on nuclear fission this afternoon with no plan is not going to make your life easier—it will make you give up your goal. Build on the little wins. This will help you to create long-term sustainable change that eventually becomes healthy habits.

ACTION STEPS

Strategy Time: 1-2 hours

- Identify 1-3 things you know you *should* do but are having trouble doing.
- What would make it easier for you to follow through with these healthy habits?
- Could it be setting up bills on autopay (you can have a friend or therapist help you with this)? Or is it putting a pair of sneakers by your bed so that when you wake up, you can go for a quick run?
- Take time on this, but don't get frustrated if you're having a hard time getting motivated. Reach out to a trusted friend, mentor, or therapist and ask them if they'll help you find tools to create healthy habits.

Don't forget: No matter what you're dealing with...

*You Have Everything Inside You to be
Healthy, Complete, and Whole.*



IS THERE REALLY LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?: PART I

Everyone is an expert at something. Sharing your knowledge with someone that results in a favorable outcome is a beautiful act. It provides a person with the feeling of being useful, needed, and having a purpose.

Before we talk about expertise and how to identify it, we've gotta talk payment. I'm sure sirens are going off in readers' heads... Slow down, Rivedal—it's impolite to talk about money. #Word. Sometimes it is. But getting payment doesn't always mean the exchange of money.

Mentorship or Charity: Sometimes sharing your knowledge and giving back is payment enough. There is a euphoric feeling you get from passing along your expertise to benefit a charitable organization or the next generation of movers and shakers. Additionally, this kind of work can be a tremendous résumé builder during your job search.

Bartering: Also an effective tool, one that I have used in the past to create a win-win situation. I need X work done. He needs Y but can't afford Y, so he offers to work on X for me so he can afford Y.

Moolah: And of course, there's always getting paid with actual currency. There might be a few slight hurdles to this, like learning some business skills and determining about the people who need what you have to offer (i.e., your "target market")—but Rome wasn't built in a day. The first hurdle is always a small one and that involves some simple research on Google.

You might be saying, "But I'm still in school. I'm not an expert at anything..."

*Bullius Shitius.
Yes, you are an expert.*

Your expertise doesn't have to intersect with millions of people, but maybe it can impact a few hundred. One quick analogy to illustrate the need for specialty: the rise of specialists within the medical industry versus doctors who are general practitioners.

Don't think you're an expert? Is there something people are constantly running to you for advice about? Computers, fixing skateboards, making gourmet pizza... ?

Recently I've come across patient activists in the health care industry. These particular people have a rare or rarely talked-about health condition. And then they start blogs and discussion groups about their condition. It's always about helping their community. Sometimes they will mentor other

people with their condition one on one. Sometimes the person will write a book and/or create a career out of their knowledge within this niche field.

One more thought on specialty and expertise. I did a Google search for a few random things that popped into my head—things that I thought might require a specialist. Each of the three following examples netted results that did indeed have specialists that had received payment: a) by giving back through charity or mentorship, b) by bartering, or c) as a person developing a part-time or full-time career based on that random niche.

- Navigating the Affordable Care Act in New York State
- Transgender women training bras
- Tuning old church pianos

ACTION STEPS

Strategy Time: 1-2 hours

- Go through your mental archives. List a few of the things people have asked you advice for recently or places you've volunteered for in the recent past. Write 'em down.
- Get in touch and offer yourself and your skills up.
- Volunteering and bartering are easier places to start before offering your expertise in exchange for money.

A Note About Money—If money is something you want or need in the near or distant future, see what other folks are charging for the same or similar service. At the start you're probably not going to make what they're making because you're the new kid on the block. But if you test your pricing (hey, would you be willing to pay X for this?)

and someone is willing to pay for it, then your test continues. If someone is willing to pay X, then will they pay for X+Y? The operative thought process here is this: You are providing a solution to a person's problem, which always supersedes your need for money, and informs the price you charge. (Can I charge this, and if so, will it allow maximum impact for the person I'm helping?)

A Note About Age—It's but a number, used unfairly in many cases to quantify a person's ability to be good at what they do ("trust me, I'm a doctor and I'm wearing a white lab coat"). Gain as much experience as you can in your chosen field(s) of expertise. If someone asks your age in a professional setting, learn to deflect with kindness. It's none of their business how old you are, but that doesn't mean you get to be rude about the answer you give. Practice answering age questions with a friend—always deflecting to the work or the matter at hand.

A Note About Making Promises—Always strive to be someone who keeps their promises. If you tell someone you're going to do something, do it. Don't get a reputation for being flaky. As you're getting your sea legs with giving of your expertise, you'll need to become hyperaware of the kinds of promises you're able to keep, when it's okay for you to say "yes," and when you have to say "no." Hint: At some point in the near future, "no" is going to overtake "yes," and that is a good thing.

Oh, and while searching for your expertise if it's not already apparent: Cut yourself some slack. That negative boogie monster in the back of your neck (the amygdala, the friendly but finicky fella who protects us from danger) might tell you you're not good enough. Thank that boogie monster

for doing their job, but let them know that you're in no danger and they can let their guard down. You're a badass mo-fo who has a lot to offer the world. Shake what yo' mama gave ya'—share your expertise.



IS THERE REALLY LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?: PART II

Applications are finished (or if you're like me back in high school—you put it off till the very last minute #notthegreatestidea) and you've been accepted into your first choice, or maybe your tenth choice.

Soon, you'll be off to college wondering how you'll ever get through that 8 a.m. physics lab. Homework might be piling up and midterms will be around the corner before you know it. Somewhere in the recesses of your mind you may be thinking, *High school is a lot harder than it looks on TV.*

Graduating from high school and going to college is a hell of a transition. But it's doable. One of the biggest keys to success in college is to know where and how to access resources of help. That could involve hiring a tutor, knowing where the counseling office is located, how to find events on campus, or which campus job is the cushiest.

And make sure you give yourself a holistic college experience and not just endless partying or twenty-three hours a day of school work.

And if you find that your vision of success isn't turning out the way you always thought it would be, don't worry. You're not alone. There are billions of people in the world ages eighteen to eighty (maybe even older) who aren't satisfied with their station in life. There are always options: switching majors, changing schools, taking time off, or pairing down from five classes in a semester to three.

*Any failure you have while in school
is only temporary and a lesson on
your way to greater success.*

ACTION STEPS

Strategy Time: Ongoing

- Research resources at your new college and make sure you write them down in your phone, your planner, or wherever you can access them easily. This includes: the Advising Office, the Tutoring Center, the Library Reference Desk, Student Organizations, and Campus Counseling.
- Reach out to people and departments of interest in advance. This could include a call to your new residence hall, or a handwritten note to one of your new professors. You are that early bird, and you will have your worm and eat it too!
- Brush up on your technical skills—learn to type faster, how use Excel Spreadsheets, and even PowerPoint if you have to. Technology can help you maximize your time.

- Brush up on your people skills—take an improv comedy class or enroll in a public speaking class. It's not just the knowledge of your subject matter that will get you a job. The quality of your people skills can get you hella far in life.
- Financial resources: find them, apply for them, and do everything you can to access means and methods to leave college as debt-free as possible. The earlier you handle your debt, the better because interest rates can be crippling.



MAKING TIME YOUR FRIEND

Time is a natural resource more valuable than all the gold, diamonds, and precious metals in existence and coveted by almost every human being who ever lived.

Every single one of us is marching toward inevitability: At some point in the distant future our physical bodies will no longer be functional on this Earth and we want to find things to fill our time, things that intrigue us and make us happy, before our time expires. Ineffective time management can and often does lead to stress and a lack of satisfaction in our everyday lives—and who wants that?

How many people do you know who say things like:

- I've got so much to do and so little time to do it.
- I stayed up all night studying.
- I wish I had a clone.
- I am so overwhelmed with all my work.
- This stack of work on my desk is really piling up.
- I wish I could get more done.

- I want...
- I wish...
- I hope...
- I should...

A Catchall Solution: Creating Time-Management Strategies...

—scheduling your time with such efficiency that you’ll be able to work, study, or play as much or as little as you want or need.

Life is too short not to be able to work hard, play hard, and do the things you love—bending time to work in your favor.

ACTION STEPS

Strategy Time: 1-2 hours on a weekly basis

Once a week for an hour or so you should take out your planner, your Google or Mac calendar, or some kind of a spreadsheet—whatever device suits you best—and plan out as much of your week as possible and schedule each task.

Notice that I didn’t say pull out your stone tablet and chisel and plot out your week. Your schedule is a living, breathing entity that needs flexibility and room to adjust to the errant curveballs we’re all thrown from time to time.

If you don’t already practice writing down your schedule, think about how many times you might have forgotten to be at an important meet-

ing for work or with a professor or maybe you missed a friend's birthday or a romantic anniversary. Writing down your schedule will go a long way in saving you from looking like a flake or an insensitive tool-bag ever again.

The easy part is knowing that you have class at certain times and you should certainly write those hours in but you should also be writing in things like:

Homework—Schedule it, do it, and get it out of the way.

Meal Breaks—Sometimes people like to linger with the time they take for a lunch break. But if you're okay with taking a half hour as opposed to a full hour, you can spend more time writing that paper or out on that hot date—things that may be a better use of your time.

Sleep or Rest—Just because you're a quasi-superhuman high school student dynamo doesn't mean you don't need to schedule in breaks to rest, relax, or sleep.

Batch Similar Tasks—This is one of my all-time faves. Since you've already mastered the "I'm going to write my schedule down," portion, know that when you're scheduling things out, you should schedule all like items together for maximum efficiency.

Put all of your highly creative and problem-solving activities in one chunk of time like:

- Writing a research paper

- Creative writing
- Studying, reading, or preparing for a speech
- Figuring out what women want

Put all of the things together that you can move through quickly, like:

- Emails
- Unimportant phone calls
- Paying your bills
- A five-minute fad workout

If you don't believe me, try writing a research paper while answering emails at five- to ten-minute intervals. You won't be able to focus properly on either task and that research paper you thought would be a five-hour task will turn into an all-day affair. Once you go batch, you won't go back (and face-palm)...

TWO BONUSES

I. Be the Chief and not the Hungry Hunter—

Schedule your time at least one week in advance. This is assuming you schedule your time at all, which you should. If you wake up on any given day and map out what you want done, it tends to be an exercise in putting out fires of the immediate and the seemingly urgent, rather than a process in keeping one eye in the moment and one eye on the future. Or, in terms of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, it's the difference of waking up and eating what you kill that very day versus planning out how, when, and where you're going to

gather food for the tribe for the next week. In the former, you're the Hungry Hunter constantly chasing, while in the latter you're able to be the Chief in planning for higher-level activities like building a nice shelter, irrigation for the tribe, and erecting grain silos.

2. In Case of Fire, Break Glass. Schedule contingency time. Example: I know I need to get X, Y, and Z done this week. I loaded up all my work on Monday through Thursday and even scheduled in my downtime. While going through the week, I found that I played too hard on Wednesday (totally cool). I worked too long on X and Y on Thursday because I was in the zone. I even had an unexpected doctor visit on Tuesday.

But in my calendar when planning my week, I gave myself a block of time on Friday from 2–6 p.m., as contingency time—time to work on all my leftovers from the week. So, I'm still able to complete most, if not all, of my tasks for the week. I don't feel guilty for missing out on certain things throughout the week. And I'm able to work, play, and leave time for unexpected events, making for a well-rounded existence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



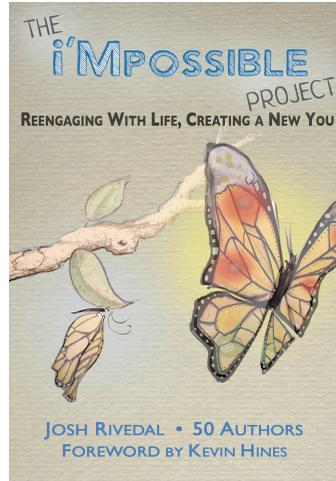
Josh Rivedal is an author, actor, playwright, and international public speaker. He has spoken about suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and diversity across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia. He is the founder and executive director of The i'Mpossible Project—a non-profit media company designed to entertain, educate, and engage on suicide prevention, mental health, diversity and social change. He wrote and developed the one-man play, *Kicking My Blue Genes in the Butt* (KMBB), which has toured extensively throughout the world. His memoir *The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah*, based on KMBB and published by Skookum Hill, is on The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's recommended reading list. He writes for the *Huffington Post*. He curated the fifty-story inspirational anthology *The i'Mpossible Project: Reengaging with Life Creating a New You* for release by Skookum Hill on January 13, 2016. Find out more at: www.iampossibleproject.com

ALSO BY JOSH RIVEDAL

**The i'Mpossible Project:
Reengaging with Life, Creating a New You**

Storytelling is one of our oldest traditions—yes, even older than the hokey pokey. Stories can make us laugh or cry... or both at the same time. They can teach, inspire, and even ignite an entire movement.

Reengaging with Life, Creating a New You is a collection of powerful stories. They're gritty, deep, heart-warming—and guaranteed to help you discover new possibilities in your life. Bam.



The stories in this first volume are all about overcoming obstacles, reengaging with life, and creating new possibilities—a son's homicide, a transgender man finding love, coming back from the brink of suicide, finding your funny in the face of overwhelming odds, and more... If you're ready to create new possibilities in your life, you need to read this book!

www.iampossibleproject.com/one

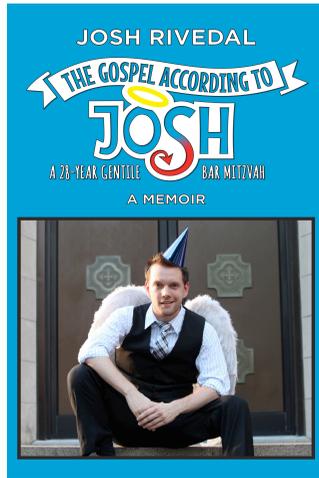
Preorder: September 16, 2015

Full release: January 13, 2016

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOSH: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah

By the time Josh Rivedal turned twenty-five, he thought he'd have the perfect life—a few years singing on Broadway, followed by a starring role in his own television show. After which, his get-away home in the Hamptons would be featured in *Better Homes & Gardens*, and his face would grace the cover of the *National Enquirer* as Bigfoot's not-so-secret lover.

Instead, his résumé is filled with an assortment of minor league theatre and an appearance on *The Maury Povich Show*—a career sidetracked by his father's suicide, a lawsuit from his mother over his inheritance, and a breakup with his long-term girlfriend. Tortured by his thoughts, he finds himself on the ledge of a fourth-floor window, contemplating jumping out to inherit his familial legacy. In turn he must reach out to the only person who can help before it's too late.



Available on Amazon, Kindle, at B&N.com and at
www.iampossibleproject.com/the-gospel-according-to-josh

On the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's
Recommended Reading List for survivors of suicide loss

KICKING MY BLUE GENES IN THE BUTT

The one-man show and educational program on youth suicide prevention

A 60-90-minute, 3-component Keynote Program

Part 1) Theatre: A 15 character, 7 song one-man Broadway-style play *Kicking My Blue Genes in the Butt* that ends with Josh's father's tragic suicide—a comedic yet poignant true story and primal piece of live-storytelling that creates an emotional connection between students and the powerful message that suicide is preventable.

Part 2) An educational session where Josh discusses signs and symptoms of depression and suicide, how to help oneself or a friend if depressed or suicidal, how to live mentally well while in high school, and reviews resources of help for students.

Part 3) A question and answer session to help introduce more students to staff counselors.

Perfect for student activities, student orientation, suicide prevention week/month, and mental health week/month.

Watch a Short Video Clip

www.iampossibleproject.com/suicide-prevention

