DISCUSSION GUIDE

Embrace Optimism
Activate Your Purpose
And Write Your Own Story

Jess Ekstrom
Founder of Headbands of Hope

CHASING THE BRIGHT SIDE
What happens when we live with more optimism?

Opportunity, that’s what happens when we believe in better and go create it.

And Jess Ekstrom, founder of Headbands of Hope and author of Chasing the Bright Side, is here to help you start living with optimism so you can step into the opportunities that were made for you.

“When you discover what matters to you, it opens the door for you to pursue new ways to chase it down,” she says.

HERE’S HOW THIS STUDY GUIDE WORKS:

1. Buy Chasing the Bright Side if you haven’t already.
2. This guide can be done individually, with a group or a buddy!
3. At the beginning of each chapter, there’s a quote. What does that quote mean to you?
4. After you read the chapter, pull at least one (hopefully more!) “keeper” tip that you want to remember and write it down.
5. Then write at least one “takeaway”— a practical idea from the chapter (or one the chapter inspired) that you would like to incorporate into your business or life.

We hope the act of writing down your takeaways and ideas will help cement them in your mind and influence your next steps!

If you’re open to sharing your thoughts—we’d love to hear from you. Share your study guide on social by tagging @jess_ekstrom #chasingthebrightside for a chance to win some Bright Side Gear!
CHAPTER 1

MAYBE SHE’S BORN WITH IT:
Are we born with a childlike optimism?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Of childlike optimism, Jess says, “we have this fearless approach to pursuing the good and a never-ending list of what’s possible.” In what way(s) did this approach define your childhood aspirations?
2. How old were you when your childlike optimism started to fade?
3. How did that switch to a more pessimistic outlook affect you?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 2

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN:
What opportunities can open for you when you realize that “anything can happen”?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. When did you become aware of negative realities?
2. Jess writes that “the sooner we’re confronted with the reality that anything can happen to us in life, the sooner we can start preparing for those moments.” How can we prepare for “those moments”?
3. “Fear” and “possibility” are the two sides of the “anything can happen” key. Explain that concept as Jess defines it.

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 3

YES, AND...:
How does “yes, and” as a tool for improvisation work in real life situations?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. How have you “built on your story” by saying “yes” to something?
2. How have you missed out on an experience by saying “no”?
3. When was a time when you said, “yes, but” and found a reason not to take a risk?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 4

IF IT ISN’T THERE, CREATE IT:
How do we provide value by filling a gap?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. When was the last time you solved a problem and created “value”?
2. Jess says that “optimism is not about ignoring the pain and bouncing to a happy place; it’s about surveying it.” What does she mean by this?
3. Share an instance where you “let the wonder be bigger than the limits.”

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 5

BABY STEPS:
Why is taking baby steps preferable to flinging yourself headfirst into a project?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. “Small actions give us the confidence to do bigger actions later on,” writes Jess. When was a time that you built the confidence you needed by taking baby steps?
2. Have you ever let lack of support stop you from taking small steps toward personal success? If so, why?
3. Jess says, “When we don’t burden ourselves with the heaviness of a long to-do list, it makes everything seem more manageable.” When was the last time you overcomplicated a situation?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 6

SHE MADE IT WORK:
How can our passion for something make “it work” in our favor?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Recall a time when you pursued a project (or a dream) that seemed crazy to others, but made perfect sense to you.
2. Why is the “easy way” not always the best way to meet goals?
3. How do you celebrate “wins” in your business and/or projects?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 7

THROW A FAIL MARY
How can failure help us grow?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
Failure has the unique ability to look like two things: a dead end or
1. According to Jess, “Failure has the unique ability to look like two things: a dead end or a U-turn.” What does she mean by that?
2. Is it possible to create change when you’re “safe”? Why or why not?
3. When was the last time you opted to quit rather than continue to pursue a goal?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 8

YOU’RE TALL ENOUGH:
Have you ever felt not “tall enough” to be successful?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Describe a time when you felt out of place in a business setting.
2. Is it okay to not be sure of “what’s next”? Why or why not?
3. Jess says, “Do not wait until you think you are tall enough for the roller coaster because you will always come up short.” What does she mean by this?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 9
FINDING THE WHITE SPACE:
Where have you found “white space”?  

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. What does Jess mean by “Excellence is not about following what’s always been done; it’s about finding the white space that hasn’t been touched yet”?
2. How does conformity quell our pursuit of innovation and creativity?
3. Describe an instance when you offered something so different that it set you apart completely from your competition.

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 10
THE WORST FUND-RAISER EVER:
In what ways can fund-raising be challenging?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Jess says that “the results of kindness have nothing to do with recognition and everything to do with intention.” What does she mean by that?
2. If you could do anything philanthropic, no holds barred, what would that be?
3. Why is giving “hard”?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 11
THE THINGS WE TELL OURSELVES:
In what ways do we control our thoughts?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. How does your “internal dialogue” help guide your decisions throughout a typical day?
2. According to Jess, “Optimism is not as much about a tactical plan of execution as it is about internal belief.” What does she mean by this?
3. How do you personally take the power to control your thoughts?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 12
THE STRUGGLE IS WORTH IT:
How do tough times create strong people?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Jess says that “it’s okay to not be okay.” Give an example of how this has applied to a situation in your life (personal or business, or both).
2. Share a time when you were moved to action by being in “the darkness.”
3. Is being optimistic simply about being happy? Why not?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.
CHAPTER 13
ALIGNMENT OVER ATTENTION:
What are your reasons for doing what you do?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
1. Have you ever had a situation where external accolades (attention) were more important to you than internal alignment as a result of your actions?
2. What does Jess mean by “attention and success are not codependent”?
3. How would you answer Jess’s question: “When the likes go away and the applause falls silent, is what you’re doing right now still meaningful to you?” Explain.

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.

CHAPTER 14
ACTIVATE YOUR PURPOSE:
How is your purpose the foundation for your story?

“A KEEPER” — Write down a brief quote from the chapter that really struck you or made you think.

TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS:
2. Is that purpose a result of goals you’ve had for a long time—or are they more recent?
3. According to Jess, “When you discover how to build your purpose into your work, your work becomes a service, not a job.” How do you interpret this?

YOUR TAKEAWAY — Write down at least one idea from the chapter that you would like to try.