

HOW TO *Not* KILL YOURSELF

10 TIPS FOR TROUBLED TIMES

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! If you're reading this, then you haven't killed yourself. You're still alive. Well done! I'd like to think you're still alive because you saw my book and thought, "Well! I gotta have some of *that*," after which you read the book and decided *not* to pop a cap in your own ass. You're welcome.

Let's start at the beginning. People call me Dave. My real name is David but only my mother, Pamela, calls me David. My girlfriend Dominique calls me David too, but only when she is thermonuclear pissed (which isn't very often, because I am a saint). Now, you may be sitting there, sipping away at your second latte of the morning, reading my words and thinking, "Is this sumbitch making light of suicide?" Nothing could be further from the truth and I will forgive you for thinking such tawdry things, despite your clearly, shall we say... judgmental tendencies.

But seriously, no, I'm *not* making light of suicide. *Au contraire, mon frère*, I too have been to the dark side. I have on more than one occasion truly contemplated, although never literally attempted, the Really Scary Thing (Really Scary Thing = suicide and shall hereafter be referred to as the RST). I *get* it. What I'm doing here is not making

light of suicide, but instead hoping to transform my own darkness into lightness. I have lived clinical depression. I'm currently undergoing psychiatric evaluation for a possible diagnosis of bipolar disorder. I understand how deadly serious this stuff is. This book is nothing more than my form of therapy. We gotta get our stuff out, don't you think?

This little book is a list of ten tips, which is an ironic endeavor for me because I'm not crazy about tips. If you were to stop me on the street and say, "Can I give you a tip?" I'd promptly tell you to take a long walk off a short pier. But there you go. It seems I too am now in the 'tips' business. Ten tips, no less.

So, I thought of ten things I do when that dirty RST is creeping around, trying to get its filthy paws all over me. Then I wrote those ten things down in the form of tips. They aren't written in any particular order of importance and I don't necessarily do all of them when I'm depressed. It's pretty random, this collection. The truth is, I just woke up one morning at 3:30, grabbed my phone, opened a new note and let the words pour out.

To be clear, I am not a mental health professional. I am an artist. Which is to say, I have no scientifically proven, peer-reviewed research to back up my claims. If you read something herein that is contrary to previously

accepted psychiatric practices and think, “*This* guy is full of shit”, well, you could be right. But whatever, man. Take it easy. These are simply my opinions so don’t lawyer up on me just yet, bitches. All I’ve done is try to share how I, personally, combat depression. I don’t have any conclusive proof that my tips will help you, but I have a hunch they will. If you are depressed, maybe a wee bit suicidal, or just really hungover, I promise you these tips will make you feel a little better.

And one last thing: this isn’t a book about ‘being happy’. It’s a book about staying alive. About perseverance and resilience and survival. It’s about optimism and hope, despite all the pain and suffering we endure. But if you read it and feel joy, then *halleluckinlujah* my brothers and sisters! I’d be thrilled to hear about that. Happiness, though, is not my intention. Truth be told, I barely even know what happiness is. Analyzing happiness, to me anyway, is a bit like analyzing stand-up comedy. What’s the point?

I might not know happiness very well, but I *do* know the blues. You probably do too, am I right? If so, keep reading. At the very least you’ll have a few laughs, because I am one seriously funny guy. At the very best, who knows – maybe the planets will align and my words will find a way into your heart, inspiring you to leap out of bed and

proudly proclaim to all who will listen, "Well if this bald-ass bastard David can keep going, I betcha I can too".

You sure can. Enjoy, my friends.

DEPRESSION AND COMEDY

**“SUICIDE IS MAN’S WAY
OF TELLING GOD,
‘YOU CAN’T FIRE ME, I QUIT!’”**

– Bill Maher

I make my living standing on stages talking to real people, and for the vast majority of the time, I'm trying to make them laugh. It's a great job and absolutely perfect for me.

But it ain't easy.

Of all the never-ending conundrums comedians face while pursuing the elusive laugh, trying to decide whether something is appropriate to joke about is particularly challenging. Especially in this day and age. It will come as no surprise to you but we homo sapiens, anno 21st century, are rather easily offended and that's putting it mildly.

In short, is it appropriate to joke about suicide?

Or, will telling jokes about slashing my wrists with a butter knife get me eternally cancelled? I'm not gonna lie to you: pondering this question tends to keep me awake at night. Because, much as I'd like to consider myself a 'fearless' type of comedian/writer/performer, the truth is a bit more complicated. At my core, I'm something of a people pleaser and I'd rather you didn't hate me because I pissed you off while I'm on stage.

Now, I realize that trying *not* to offend an audience is rarely an inspiring strategy for a comedian and I try as hard as I can to *not* censor myself. But when it comes to the topics of suicide and depression, it's still true that I walk on eggshells around this topic. Maybe this makes me a shitty comedian, I don't know. But I would rather *not* overtly offend people who have had suicide and depression touch their lives. After all, *you* are my people.

As I mentioned though – it's something I've honestly thought a lot about while writing this book. Thankfully however, during one long bout of self-doubt on the subject, something magical happened. Lemme tell you a little story about the moment I realized I needed to push through my fears and keep telling my tale.

It happened with my friend and co-worker, Joop. One recent Friday morning we were sitting backstage, about 30 minutes before a 'corporate comedy' show for Om-denken – The Dutch Art of Flip-thinking. Waiting for the audience to arrive, Joop and I were catching up because we hadn't seen each other for several months. Thankfully, the chit-chat part of the conversation didn't last too long because Joop wanted to get to the real stuff. Our Joop is nothing if not a deep dude. He has that rare gift of truly giving a shit about people.

So, I told him about this book.

“What’s it called?” he asked.

“How To Not Kill Yourself,” I answered.

He laughed. Always a good sign. However, immediately after his laugh I saw something else flicker in his eye. Something more... *serious*. The air was heavy as I struggled to find my next words. It was an awkward moment because I hadn’t had much practice talking about the book, or my own struggles with depression outside of my immediate family. But this was an important moment because it was one of the reasons I wrote this book in the first place – to start a conversation about suicide and depression with more people. And here it was – actually happening, but I wasn’t feeling well prepared to handle it.

“Are you familiar with the subject?” I asked, immediately sounding like a fucking high school geometry teacher. But Joop took it well. He is, above all, a kind and gentle soul.

“Uhhh. Well... yes. Yes, I am familiar with it, Dave,” he answered and I could see him swallow hard when he said the words.

“My father and my sister both took their own lives,” he finally said.

Gulp.

Dear reader, I ask you: how would *you* respond to Joop’s words? A tragedy so immense, it’s almost unspeakable. And yet here we are, me and Joop, talking about his tragedy.

“Holy shit, Joop!” is all I can remember saying.

Then we talked and I asked him what happened. He was honest and told me the truth. We talked some more and because Joop really has been on the front lines of suicide, I asked him to read the book. I told him one of my fears is that after the book comes out, I’ll be talking to an audience somewhere about suicide and depression and somebody will stand up in the audience with a horrific story like Joop’s and they’ll scream their fury at me for making jokes about it and I won’t know what to do and I won’t know what to say. I asked him to read it so that maybe he could give me some advice about situations like that. Knowing what Joop had experienced, the pain he must feel, I thought he might be able to shed some light as to whether I was being inappropriate in my writing. I realize that might sound selfish. By asking him to read it, I was putting

my needs as a writer first, before considering how Joop felt about suicide. And maybe you're right – maybe it *is* selfish of me. But it felt ok to ask.

“I’ll read your book, Dave,” he said.

A few minutes before the audience came in and our show began, I told him about my own struggles with depression and suicide. He listened. I cried hard, right then and there, backstage just before the show. Tears for my own pain, tears for Joop’s pain, tears for knowing how hard it is to really heal. The whole time, Joop was with me. It was quite a moment.

But we still had a show to do. I pulled myself together, took some deep breaths, got some water. This was a corporate show so the audience came from some other “break-out session” and entered all at once. As they took their seats, Joop and I locked eyes and did our typical pre-show cheer, “Let’s do this!” we said, clasping hands firmly. Then we went out there and crushed it. Unforgettable.

Afterwards, Joop went home. He read the book. A few days later he gave me his blessing and his words of advice. After that, I knew I could push on. Now I’m ready for when somebody stands up in the audience and screams that they’ll never get their son, their daughter back, and

that I'm a cold motherfucker for trying to be funny about suicide – when that happens, I'll think of Joop.

Our moment that day showed me the power of actually talking about suicide and depression. It certainly brought us closer as friends and co-workers. I am very grateful to him for being so honest with me. It took real courage on his part to share his family's story. He absolutely didn't need to tell me. We could have had our little laugh about the ironic title of this book and moved right on. But he chose to tell me and it helped us. It may sound pretentious, but our conversation may have even helped to heal us, if even just a little bit.

Why is it, for many of us, that we can talk about cancer when one of our loved ones is afflicted? Or Alzheimers, or heart disease? We tell people. Not always, but mostly we do. We may do it in hushed tones, but we talk about it. Can't we do that with suicide and depression too? Because, like cancer and heart disease, they're also 'real' diseases that make us sick. These are diseases that require pills and doctors and therapy. We can talk about them too. We can do this. We've just got to start the conversation and see where it takes us. Joop showed me it's more than possible and to him I shall forever be grateful.