



TEXT BY *Dina Santorelli*

Gathering 'Intelligence'

Nationally syndicated host **John Tesh** publishes his first hardcover book based on his popular radio show

If **WHY** magazine suddenly morphed into a human being, it might very well look just like **John Tesh**. Every afternoon, Tesh, probably best known as the former co-host of *Entertainment Tonight*, hosts the nationally syndicated radio program, "Intelligence for your Life," which offers tips to a whopping 8 million-plus listeners on how to better their home, their work and their life (sound familiar?). It's an "on the air" brand of life coaching that has now

become a brand new book, *Intelligence for your Life: Powerful Lessons for Personal Growth* (Thomas Nelson, March 2008).

In this uplifting book, Tesh shares his own personal story of how he has applied bold principles to live a purposeful and passionate life. He hopes his *Intelligence* will inspire readers to find the deepest desires of their heart, create a plan for pursuing their dreams, overcome crippling fears, and motivate those around them.

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Tesh recently took time out to speak with WHY about his this latest chapter of life.

WHY: *You're a New York boy, right?*

TESH: I grew up on Long Island. My parents are originally from North Carolina, and they moved to New York when I was born. Then after 18 years of paying taxes in Garden City, they were, like, 'I'm outta here.' So my dad took off to North Carolina, and my mom stayed with me as I finished my senior year. Then I went to school in North Carolina, North Carolina State. I had the television/radio bug and bounced around North Carolina, Orlando and Nashville, then came back to New York City as a cub reporter, then lived in Europe for a while and then moved to Los Angeles in 1986.

WHY: *Wow, pretty exciting.*

TESH: You know, it was. When I look back

on it, it was like, wow, that was fun. And I could never understand why people were like, 'Oh no, I'm not going to move or change cities.' I was living out of a U-Haul.

WHY: *I am an avid listener of your radio show, which comes on about the time I've left my computer and have started making dinner. How did the show come about?*

WHY: It's been on for five years. The cool thing about the show is that it started as a weekend show, sort of a countdown show, and it got cancelled by Westwood One. They said, 'Nobody is listening to this.' I called my friend Scottie and said, Listen, I have an idea for a show, and I think it can be amazing... I'm one of those guys, by the way. I'm a serial entrepreneur. I've read *Focus, Differentiate or Die*, all that nonsense, but I love taking chances like that. And he said, 'What kind of show do you want to do?' And I said, 'It's going to be called Intelligence for your Life.' And he

said, 'Are you out of your mind? That's the worst title I ever heard in my life.' No, it will be like a newsletter for the air, I said. This is, by the way, how I've had three or four different big businesses fail, because I get so excited about it, and everyone gets so excited about it around me and says, 'Let's go!' and it goes right into the toilet.

So I said, Imagine yourself standing next to a newsstand, a giant newsstand, and a whole staff of people go in there and find all the great articles you need for your life, and they give them to me, and I whisper the stuff in your ear. He said, 'That sounds ridiculous.'

The idea for the show actually came from my wife [actress Connie Selleca], and she didn't even know it. My wife is an actress and a mother and a cook and all that stuff—one of those crazy women, like you, who probably does a million things and never has time to read. And I looked at her side of the bed and there were literally like 25 magazines—*Oprah*, *Prevention*—with all those stickie notes in them. I said, That's the show! We'll do a show for that woman, and

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it's literally what we did. We started with 5 researchers, we now have 11, and we just put our info into [snippets] of up to a minute and 58 seconds.

WHY: *That's what I love about the show, that you can stop for a minute in your kitchen and listen and hear the whole story.*

TESH: Sometimes it's just, you know, don't blow on your armpits as you're facing south, but other times it's a story like the woman who put her 9-year-old on the subway in New York – here's what she did and how do you feel about it? And then it's just a deluge of people calling.

Part of our "Bible" is we don't do any entertainment news... in fact, it's written up on the wall. We don't do celebrity birthdays. It's that *Differentiate or Die* thing – find your place and be true to it... People came to us and said, 'You should take live phone calls and do this...' No, we are all

the info you need to live your life better, to be the smartest person in the room, that's what we are, and we just sort of chant that, and that's all we do on the radio. And we get all these offers to do television shows and I'm like, no, I don't want to do that anymore. This is great. I can pay my mortgage... although I didn't take a salary for 3 years.

WHY: *I listen to the people who leave phone messages, the ones that you air. You really connect with your listeners, who are of all ages.*

TESH: People call it 'life coaching,' and I think that's what we're looking for. We have gone to the point where we are so cynical that we are flipping over to the other side. There are some radio programs that are starting to imitate this, and I think it's great. It's just positive radio, because that's an area that you can own. This is not Howard Stern. If you listen for a half hour of Fluffy and

Danny in the morning just complaining and playing horrible tricks on people, you become what you behold. By the time you get to work, that's what you'll be...

The reason you hear me so excited is I'm not really doing any of the work. I'm just like a quarterback who has 15 coaches who say, hey, run this play, all you have to do is hand the ball to the big guy here, and then we win the Super Bowl. That's really my job. I have a reasonably pleasing voice, and I'm not a heavy drinker, so I show up for work on time.

WHY: *I read a quote of yours: 'The world is full of people who have big dreams, whether it's having a best-selling novel or playing at Carnegie Hall, but many never achieve them.' And that really struck me. I wondered, Why don't they? Do they get jaded? What do they lack? You mention in your book about putting together an action*

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plan for achievement. Do you think that that's part of the problem, that people are just waiting for things to happen to them?

TESH: I think it's all that stuff. But before you even get to an action plan, you have to get to that risk part. There's a chapter in the book titled, 'Hard Work, Risk and Prayer.' That was what the original title of the book was.

I went 5 years of my life in horrible pain, because I had stage fright. I grew up as a little kid playing piano, and my parents literally used to just drag me out of bed in the middle of the night to play, granted they were a little high, but they had me play in my feetie pajamas a classical piece, and if I made a mistake, my dad would say, 'No, no, now play it again without a mistake!' Or he would say something like, 'Hey, we pay for these piano lessons, now show us something.' I was just scared to death most of my life, and when I started trying

to play in recitals, I would forget stuff, I would lose the feeling in my left arm. I went to a therapist for 5 years, and he took me through the process of failing. It's about practicing failing and getting used to the feeling of failing.

WHY: *We devoted one of our features to that very topic recently.*

TESH: We actually sat at the piano, and my therapist would say, 'Now make a mistake on purpose.' When I did, he would say, 'Now get out of it.' And we came up with this thing where I would sort of smile and shrug my shoulders and either play it again or go forward. Another thing he taught me was to own your environment. I still do this. Whether we play at a performing arts center or a church, I'm the first band member who gets there, two hours before everybody else. I sit in about 40 to 50 percent of the seats all over the theater. I sit there, I

walk around on the stage, talk to all the stage hands. I talk to the ticket taker in the box office. I go backstage and walk through all the dressing rooms, so by the time I walk on stage, everybody who comes in there is in MY house. I did this with Carnegie hall... People asked me, 'Why aren't you scared?' I said, I've been in every room here, every seat, have you done that? I know that seat 4E in the third row is broken.

I read this article where they asked people 90 years and older what was the one thing they would do differently if they could do it all again, and almost every single one of them, in one form or another, said, 'I would risk more.' I got so maligned when I left *Entertainment Tonight* in 1996, leaving a seven-figure-plus job that I had reading the Teleprompter for 30 minutes a day. 'Oh, he's going to be a musician now,' they said. What they didn't realize was that being a musician was what I wanted to do my whole life. To me, it was a natural move. To everyone else, it was 'Get back over there...' 🏠