

Choosing Growth with Scott Barry Kaufman FULL

Scott Barry Kaufman: [00:00:00] life is not a video game where you reach one level of need. Satisfaction. And then some voice from above is like, congrats. You've even walked family. You know, like life is a very non-linear journey through like a vast unknown of the world of the sea.

It's like a sailboat, you know? You gotta know which direction you're sailing or else the winds will just take you aimlessly.

That was Scott Barry Kaufman on psychologists off the clock we are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of Act, Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yel Shreen, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and [00:01:00] author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from coastal New England, I. Dr. Jill Sto, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. No more.

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Jill Stoddard: Thank you for listening to psychologists Off the clock.

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Yael Schonbrun: This is Y here with [00:02:00] Jill, uh, to introduce an episode with Scott Barry Kaufman, who's written a number of books, including his most recent book, Choose Growth, a workbook for Transcending Trauma, Fear and Doubt that he co-authored with Jordan Feingold.

And it was a great book, but also I was just really excited to interview Scott or. As Oprah calls him, Dr. Scott, I think he wants to now go by that, um, because he's kinda a rockstar in our field. And I have to tell just a funny little story about it. I was internet stalking him before our interview, and he had had a recent, appearance at.

At a place, and I thought it was mit. I was like looking through his Instagram feed really quickly, and so when we first got on, I live in Boston, I said, Oh, you were in the area. Are you still in Boston? He said, What do you mean? I said, Well, I saw on your Instagram feed that you did a presentation at mit.

And he said, No. I did a presentation at MTV. I was like, I am not giving you enough credit for being the rockstar that you are. I

Jill Stoddard: He's a lot cooler than you made him out [00:03:00] to

Yael Schonbrun: Totally. I was like, Oh, he is kind of nerdy. Cool. But I was like, No, he is. He is just downright cool So that's my story of misrepresenting the coolness of Scott Barry Kaufman, aka Dr.

Scott. So Jill, we talked, I know that you listened to the episode and I talked about a lot of different topics in positive psychology and other areas of psychology with Scott. What stuck out for.

Jill Stoddard: Well, it was actually at the very end of the interview, you asked him the question, whether he thought everyone needs therapy or should go to therapy, and this is a question that comes up in our field a lot. And you, a lot of therapists will say, everyone needs therapy, or especially all therapists must have therapy.

Um, so his answer was interesting and I'm, You didn't answer the question though, so I'm curious what you think.

Yael Schonbrun: I don't think everyone needs therapy and I don't think every therapist needs therapy. I think everyone who wants therapy should have access to it. And [00:04:00] I sort of have like two, two reasons why not everyone needs therapy.

One is that I. There are some people who are functioning fine in life and don't really want or, or need additional support, and . I think if you're doing fine, that's terrific.

The other thing is that if you do need support, therapy is one venue that you can get it. But there are so many different ways to get help in this modern world that we live in. There's podcasts, there's books, there's retreats, there's um, mindful meditation, journaling, Like there's so many different ways that you can work out struggles.

You know, you can talk with a good friend who has wisdom and compassion, and there are some people who simply don't. Talking with somebody who is a virtual stranger, , even if they have expertise in the field of mental health, that isn't their comfort zone. They're not verbal, , they process things differently.

And so I don't think we need to pigeonhole people into. Getting help [00:05:00] from one kind of venue when there's so much out there that can be fitting and more fitting for you if, if you are needing help. Obviously I'm a huge advocate of mental health treatment, but I just think that we can be broader about how people can seek help.

What do you think?

Jill Stoddard: I totally agree. I mean, I think it's just like many things when people say, Oh, is it okay if you hug your client? Is it okay? , if you self-disclose to your client, you know the answer's always well. It depends, you know, it depends on the person. It depends on in what ways they're stuck and what their needs are.

And I agree with you that if you feel like therapy will be helpful. Absolutely go for it. Or even if you're not sure but you're struggling in life, go try it. Like I always recommend people give it two or three sessions to get comfortable. You'd be surprised at how quickly you feel comfortable with someone who was

a virtual stranger just a few hours before, you know, Um, and that it can be really beneficial.

Not necessary for everyone. Someone once said to me, they think of [00:06:00] therapy, kind of like going to the medical doctor. Like if you come down with something, you go to the doctor, they help fix you up, and then you don't see the doctor again until you come down with something. And I think therapy can be thought of in a similar way, is that if you're struggling in some way, and it might be beneficial to consult a professional.

Go do that. And then once you're, you know, up and running and doing fine, you don't necessarily need to be in therapy forever. And in my clinic, we have a short term therapy model where we really only see people for a handful of months, get them on the road, achieve their goals, and then if they need us again at some other time in their life, they know that they can always come back.

Yael Schonbrun: But I think you're getting there to this question of what is the function of therapy? What role does it play, and what should you expect from therapy because you, in your. You do a short term model, but I do think there is this common, I would call that a misconception, although I, in some cases it is true, where what therapy is, is it's kind of this lifelong commitment to meeting with somebody once a week to talking about the things that are going wrong.

[00:07:00] And I think

that this idea that therapy is just a venting ground is largely untrue, and that misconception can keep people from seeking out therapy. Therapy could be helpful, and I think that's a bit of what you're talking about.

Jill Stoddard: Absolutely. And Scott even disclosed, you know, for himself, he said sometimes therapy didn't feel helpful because it was. Ruminating and harping on one thing he wasn't happy about week to week. And you know, I think for people who are in therapy, if you feel like you're just ruminating and harping on negative things and it's not helping you to grow and move forward in your life and feel better, then it may mean.

That it's time to find another therapist or to find a different kind of therapy because it certainly, therapy should never be something that makes you feel like you're more stuck in a rut

Yael Schonbrun: yeah, and, and, or, you know, Find , helpful tools, in or outside of therapy. And, and I will say that Scott Barry Kaufman's recent book,

Choose Growth is [00:08:00] a really great tool. So we hope you get a lot out of this really interesting conversation with Scott Barry Kauf.

Yael Schonbrun: Scott Barry Kaufman is a cognitive scientist and humanist psychologist who explores the mind creativity and the depths of human potential. He's a professor at Columbia University and the founder and director of the Center for the Science of Human Potential.

Scott hosts the very popular de Psychology podcast, great aim and uses his research to help all kinds of minds live a creative, fulfilling, and self-actualized life. He's the author and editor of many books, including his newest, which will discuss today, and the title is Choose Growth, a Workbook for Transcending Trauma, Fear and Self-Doubt, and he co-authored it with Jordan Finegold, and I'm so excited to discuss it today.

Welcome.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Oh, thank you so much. It's an honor to be here with you.

Yael Schonbrun: So, uh, I was saying this before we started the official recording, but I'm a huge fan of yours. Your research, you're writing, your podcasting, your, your [00:09:00] cool psychology nerd vibe, and you've done a whole lot of really cool things in your career thus far. But recently, my head sort of exploded on your behalf when I saw that you're featured in Oprah Winfreys, The Life You Want Class.

And I just wanted to start off by having you share what that experience was like.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Are you a big Oprah fan?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah,

Scott Barry Kaufman: yeah, no, it was a really special experience for me. Um, very meaningful. Um, and, um, and fun. I mean, I, uh, I, I, that was like really the, uh, the birth of Dr. Scott, which is now what I go by.

Yael Schonbrun: Is that right? Huh? Okay, I'll have to convert that. I can start calling you Dr. Scott. Are you a big Oprah fan? part of this

Scott Barry Kaufman: Well, I mean, you know, like everyone else, uh, well growing up, you know, I watched the Over show and, um, always found her, her stuff on human potential. Um, so inspiring and, um, I always knew that I wanted to grow up to inspire others, um, to reach their human potential as well. So I view her as [00:10:00] a, you know, a fellow journeyer

on this path, as are you.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So that sounds like, you know, that's just long been your mission and you've done it in so many ways through your writing, through your podcast, um, through your research, and it's, I, I just think the, the way that you've been so successful in bringing evidence-based psychology to such a huge, wide audience is just amazing.

And I'm curious, I mean, did you, did you foresee that at the start of your career?

Scott Barry Kaufman: You're asking really good questions, um, that not, not everyone asks me these questions. I like them. yes, I did foresee this at the start of my career. I always like danced to a tune of a different drummer. I guess that's, that's what my mom always said about me. But, uh, even in grad school, I got admonished for veering from the standard path.

Um, and, um, you know, like my advisor was worried about me that I wouldn't get tenure if I kept caring so much [00:11:00] about helping the. Um, and, um, and, but that was what was in my heart. I, I, um, I was one of the first bloggers for Psychology today when I, in 2008, when I was still a grad student, and I fell in love with it and realized like that was really my path.

And then I really could care less about tenure , quite frankly.

Yael Schonbrun: That's so cool. I mean, maybe it's not so cool that you didn't care about tenure, but it's so cool that you had this mission that was just, you know, A flame in your heart to bring wellbeing to a greater audience than many academics are doing because we're so focused on getting tenure on those milestones.

Scott Barry Kaufman: It's true. And I, I mean, I have so much gratitude for being able to live the kind of life I, I put together, um, which is a very non-traditional path, but I'm still a professor. So, um, I want to kind of inspire others to know there isn't, uh, maybe a circuitous path, [00:12:00] uh, and not

even circuitous, but like a, uh, non-traditional path to their self-actualization if tenure's not right for them.

And, um, I. Um, get precisely the dose of teaching. Um, uh, that I, that, that, that lights me up. Um, you know, without the faculty meetings . So that's, that's exactly what I wanted.

Yael Schonbrun: That is cool. I mean, what's the recipe for that? You know, if people are wondering like how do you achieve. How do you set about achieving those kinds of goals through a non-traditional path? I mean, the thing about a traditional path is like, there's more of a recipe of like, you know, first you do this and then you do this.

But if you're creating it, what, what are some of your tips?

Scott Barry Kaufman: A lot of it's about life design and figuring out, you know, what, what kind of particular life do you wanna live with? All its different parts. And um, and if they don't all go together in a traditional way, then you create it. I mean, I, I [00:13:00] had dream, I had a dream of being a professor at NYU during the day and a on Broadway at night, you know, because I also love musical theater and.

And I was a voice major so early, early on. That was one of my dreams, was that I was gonna do both. Um, uh, now that didn't pan out yet. ,

Yael Schonbrun: Yet, Yet, that's the growth mindset word, yet

Scott Barry Kaufman: I'm not giving up on, uh, Jve and Lemus. But, um, uh, but I, I don't look, I mean, I'm just always been a dream. I'm a big dreamer. I'm a big daydreamer. Um, and I ne I don't understand people that don't daydream and instead they just go down some path that, like everyone else told them, is the kind of predetermined path.

I'm just constantly daydreaming of, um, of the way of things I wanna do in my life and then I just go for it.

Yael Schonbrun: I love it. Think outside the box and go for it.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: All right, so let's talk about your amazing new workbook. Choose Growth. [00:14:00] It's, I have to say it's an amazingly comprehensive

tour through like the past a hundred years of the science of happiness, and it's really a cool synopsis of some of the best tools that scientists have come up with for creating a, a happier life, even in the midst of, of difficult experiences. What I understand is you and your co-author, Jordan Feingold's goal was to create a guide that was tied to this very specific cultural moment. So can you share why this book, Why now?

Scott Barry Kaufman: Oh yeah. I wanna give a big shout out to my co-author Jordan Feingold, who I think you would absolutely adore. Um, she unfortunately couldn't make today's interview cause she's on a train and, uh, the audio quality wouldn't be great,

Yael Schonbrun: That wouldn't be great. I just have to interject though. I listened to the episode on the psychology podcast that the two of you did, and you have the sweetest relationship. It was just it, like you can detect it in the book, but it was a wonderful episode cuz you really got to see the, the [00:15:00] mutual fondness and admiration and, and just kind of awe that you both have for each other.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah. It's a really special friendship. Um, uh, and she was a former student of mine, um, who is now, uh, Just making amazing waves in the field of medicine, uh, with this field of positive medicine. Um, it just feels like now is the real, the right time to talk about the mind body relationship and um, you know, the fact that so much, so many of us.

Um, which who have been through so much in the past couple years? Um, art kind of, we feel like new people, we feel like different people. We, we have maybe different priorities and just letting people know that's okay. Uh, you're allowed to change. People are so scared of change. That's another thing that I never understood, cuz I always like changing.

I don't like being the same person I was like last year. Um, but um, you know, just having people to be comfortable with [00:16:00] change and be comfortable. Um, trying new things and getting outside their comfort zone and exploring the world, exploring themselves. Um, we just think it's a really needed right now in our society, especially in America.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. . Yeah. Your work in this book in particular tries to help all kinds of people with all kinds of minds to live creative, more fulfilled, more self actualized lives. And you write in Choose growth. And I'm gonna quote that this book will help you spur growth intentionally regardless of your history or hardships or where you are in your journey.

And so one thing that I, I know you've talked about this before in other venues, but I think it's important to start here, but how do you respond? To when people argue that the expectation for individuals to choose growth regardless of circumstances can unfairly and maybe unhelpfully place the onus on them rather than on the system, which is the reason that these issues are coming about, the [00:17:00] challenges, the discrimination, and the other abuses that get heaped upon us. Why would it be our responsibility to choose growth when it's the system's fault that we're suffering?

Scott Barry Kaufman: it's a really nuanced question. The idea of fault is, is interesting. I mean, there are things that are obviously. Outside of a control, but there are definitely things that are within our control, um, and that we can do.

And I think that's what we focus on in our book is, you know, I mean that's like the 12 step program mantra, right? Like, um, you know, alcoholics acknowledge that there's, um, a lot of, uh, environmental situations that may have gotten them to the point where they are, but, um, they still. Um, a choice. And, uh, this goes all the way back to Victor Frankl and like the Holocaust, you know, and, and how he said, you know, even under the most dire of circumstances there, um, there were, there were inmates who were.

Committed to finding joy, um, for whatever time they had left in their life. And they're committed to [00:18:00] find meaning, um, and think through their purpose once they get out, you know, hopefully if they get out of, of the Holocaust. And, um, so I'm very much grounded in that tradition. And, um, and, and my gosh, I wouldn't be a psychologist if I didn't think that our inner world, um, can play some role in our outer life.

Um, you know, I wouldn't be a, I'd be a sociologist, I wouldn't be a psychologist. Do you know what I mean? Like, that's what we do in the field of psychology. Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah. I'll just share that I had this recent experience, so I had shared with you that I have a book coming out actually in a couple weeks

time. Um, .Thank you. And

it's a,

Scott Barry Kaufman: small thing.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I'm, Well, you're old hat at this. This is brand new to me, but it's very exciting. But, um, it's about looking. Work family conflict from a psychological perspective and have already gotten some feedback that from people who, who sort of feel like this is a systems issue and not an individual issue.

And it's so interesting because as a psychologist, you know, [00:19:00] we're helping individuals kind of navigate the world that we live in, right? I'm not a policy maker, so I'm not talking about it from a systems level, and I don't even disagree that there are serious systems issues to contend with. But, There is so much as you're pointing out that we can do from an individual orientation.

There are choices that we can make day to day and sometimes those choices can help change the system, right? If we sort of think about this in like a, additive way,

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, so much is, Doesn't this come down? Like internal versus external locus of control. You know, I want people to have more of an internal locus of control over their lives. I mean, I don't, I don't want, I don't advocate for people to fall into a pattern of learned helplessness. Um, I think that's very, um, detrimental on a human psyche.

Um, regardless of your circumstances in life, you know, because you may miss out on opportunities for, uh, growth, opportunities for connection in the, where you least expect it, you know? Um, . [00:20:00] Um, yeah. Uh, so I think I, I'm a very like, yes, end as, as opposed to either it's internal or either it's external. You know, I'm very, Jordan and I are both very Yes.

End people. We like to Yes. And to life, you know? Yes. Shit happens and, um, there are a lot of constraints on our lives, um, externally. Um, uh, and internally there are constraints, you know, um, talents and, you know, there's certain genetic proclivities that I don't have. Like LeBron James has, right? And, uh, well, vice versa.

Vice versa. I don't know if he

could be as good a podcaster of psychology as me. Um, but, uh, , you know, you know what I mean? So, we have, we, we, you know, kind of like live accepting, having deep acceptance as a route to growth and change in a, in a, in a way that'll be most practical with people. I is, is really kind of where my heart's at.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So you talk a lot about, in your work, you talk a lot about self-actualization and you sort of [00:21:00] carry forward Maslow's hierarchy of needs so can you help us reimagine this hierarchy of needs in a, in a more helpful way? Um, sort of ala your book, Transcend and Choosing Growth, what is it that we need to understand about this hierarchy of needs that we've long misunderstood about it?

Scott Barry Kaufman: I think the kind of clunky pyramid that a lot of people see, you know, with certain levels of needs and then other needs being, um, uh, important to get in some sort of, uh, priority sort of way. Um, it does highlight on the one hand the importance. Um, of basic needs on and how much that can influence our higher self being, even having opportunity to emerge.

Um, however, Maslow never drew a pyramid. Um, and life is not a video game. You know, life is not a video game where you reach one level of need. Satisfaction. And then some voice from above is like, congrats. You've even walked family. You know, like life is a [00:22:00] very non-linear journey through like a vast unknown of the world of the sea.

It's like a sailboat, you know? You gotta know which direction you're sailing or else the winds will just take you aimlessly. and of course if you, your boat is not secure and your basic needs are not met, you. Get stuck. Um, but you're also not gonna move anywhere unless you really open that sail and move in your most valued direction and really, uh, change your, the spirit of your exploration from a place of deprivation to a place of growth and exploration.

Um, so I think that, yeah, I think the sailboat metaphor, uh, is a better idea for, uh, the journey of, of self actual.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. It gives so many more directions to be working in as you know, sort of like imagining like this up, down line, but you've like got forward and backward and around and you've got this sail and you've got like the [00:23:00] anchor and there's so many different. Directions that you can be growing in. So I wanna talk a little bit about growth and adversity because this is an integral part of, of your work and, and you know, while we often think about, we're often motivated to

avoid adversity. You sort of make an argument for the opposite, and you talk about sort of how inherent adversity is in, for example, the hero's journey. So can you talk about why experiences that are terribly uncomfortable might be really important for us to grow and thrive? So not despite the challenge, but rather because of the challenge.

Scott Barry Kaufman: tell. I think that if we can view. Everything in life is a learning opportunity that, uh, that's a, that's a more helpful frame, um, than, um, than get ruminating, unproductively. Um, you know, there's intrusive rumination. Um, a lot of people with PTSD have a lot of intrusive rumination.

They, [00:24:00] uh, they, they're not able to control. Their thoughts about, uh, you know, they're getting too many unwanted thoughts about the past and what had hap what has happened, um, and being able to help people transform that into productive rumination where you are more intentionally. Um, uh, writing journaling.

I'm a big fan of journaling and of expressive writing. Um, research shows that even just like 12 to 15 minutes a day of expressive writing where you, um, just write about your emotions. A challenging event that happened to you, um, really is beneficial, um, for creating meaning, um, and maybe, uh, seeing how you can grow from the, the event itself.

Um, and really just being aware of the fact that you can't change the past and, uh, and eventually you have to give up hope that you'll change the past because life just moves in one direction and, and. [00:25:00] And, and, and, and, and I'm not the first one to say there's a great power to, uh, to the now, but there is great power to the now.

And I also would add, I'm gonna, Yes. And this, there's great power to the human imagination and our ability to, uh, daydream about our future. And, uh, who, and, and, and, uh, Perspective is, you know, the, what it's called in the field of psychology, Perspective.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that word.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: That's awesome. All right, I'm gonna switch topics a little bit, um, and talk about tribalism. About how tribalism can interfere with growth and keep us stuck. And this isn't exclusive even to politics. It actually also happens in academia. And I wanted to share a recent incident that cropped up in the news about a social psychologist who studies polarization through the lens of his research.

Jonathan Height, who you're friends with, . Um, and I'm obsessed with his work, but it was a really [00:26:00] interesting incident that happened, and I won't go into detail, but we'll LinkedIn article. But basically some of what has

happened in academia is, you know, efforts at forward movement at inclusion and equity.

What's really ironic is that to some extent ha has, it has resulted in treat treating people as members of groups, not as individuals with like the best of intentions. And so it's so interesting how we have such a hard time escaping tribalism. So I'm curious about your thoughts more generally on why we get so stuck in this tribalist tribalistic, if I can use that word, um, mentality and also your ideas on how we get unstuck from.

Scott Barry Kaufman: What a great question. Um, you know, I, I think that, that a lot of people do, uh, have great intentions and they're very empathetic and compassionate, um, about those on [00:27:00] their, their in group. Um, but they, I think that sometimes can blind us to. Having a bigger picture view of the effect, the potential consequences and effects on everyone else.

you know, like you, you can get so caught up in your own, uh, your own sort of pet project about your group, you know, advancing things that are important. Um, you know, uh, that, but you, you get so caught up in, in that, that you start to impart that as like, well, that's the only thing that matters, and that should be the only thing that matters to everyone else as.

And, um, that, and, and if everyone's doing that, then no, the no groups are listening to each other. No groups are, you know, you know, What about like crossing divides and, and, and helping each other paint the fence, you know, like, um, where's that in our society today? Um, there is, there is so much tribalism.

It's really true. Um, and, um, [00:28:00] Usually see that under environmental conditions where there's greater uncertainty, um, you tend to see that bands tend to, it's very human nature to, for different bands to, uh, to band together, , um, you know, and form, uh, coalitions. Um, now personally, that's just not the way I'm wired.

I'm not a coalition thinker. I am a universal thinker. I'm a humanistic psychologist. . Um, I get uncomfortable with coalition thinking and like, I'm not very good at politics. Um, I'm not good at being strategic about like, Oh, I should be talking to them, but, oh, I shouldn't be talking to them. I just treat people as individuals, um, when I meet them.

Um, and, um, curious about every human on this planet. You know, what's your story? You know, what's your unique life circumstance? I almost don't even

wanna be tain. By knowing anything about your in group or who, what [00:29:00] outgroups you hate. I, I don't wanna know any of that because that's gonna bias me in seeing the totality of who you are as a human.

Um, so that's, that's like just my perspective and, um, I think that's, uh, what Maslow called be love or love for the being of others, um, is a way forward. And, and the white triad, which is this person, TRIA that I've been studying as well, um, we have found in our research is correlated with so many things, transcendent values as opposed to tribalistic values.

So

Yael Schonbrun: Well, it's

so

Scott Barry Kaufman: thoughts?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I, I just find it so interesting cause I think that there's something so human about having group identity and wanting to affiliate with people who, who share that same group identity. And what I'm so curious about is what is different about you that you don't feel that pull to engage with group identity as much as other people seem to, And by the way, I just, I find it super refreshing.

Like I love [00:30:00] many of your social media posts where you point out how much tribalism is infecting the way that we're viewing things and, and the Jonathan.

Scott Barry Kaufman: It's,

Yael Schonbrun: one example of many. But it is so refreshing because I do think it, it's fascinating because in academia, you know, it's such a progressive, um, curious, you know, institution.

And yet there is like for, again, for such positive reasons, this tendency to drop into that tribalistic thinking. So, I'll draw back and ask the question like, what, what makes you different? Like, why, why don't you think that way? What, what are, what are practices that you've adopted that have helped you to stay more open and transcendent in that way?

Scott Barry Kaufman: Well, there's lots of. That's a really deeper question than you realize. Um, cuz I'm still figuring myself out. Um, I don't really understand why I'm, My brain is wired in some ways, uh, you know, with lots of areas in my life. We don't have time to get into everything, but if we ever become friends, um, you know, just my outlook [00:31:00] about so many things and even about relationships and just, there's just so many things that I just see the world in a certain way.

That I feel like an alien sometimes. I mean, I, I mean, sometimes I, Well look, I'll, I'll say. Quite often I feel like, like an anthropologist from Mars or something, you know, like a psychologist from Mars, just observing humans. And then I, I'm like, well, I'm human too. And then I have to remember that. But I've noticed something.

I noticed that when I, um, when I talk about how far in a lot of things seem to me, I notice a lot of people resonate with what I'm saying, which then leads me to believe that my friend Todd Rose, is really onto something big. Because he wrote a book called Collective Illusions, and in his book, Collective Illusions, he said, no one is really saying what they think.

They're saying what, what they think they're supposed to say from their tribal perspective. Um, but it turns out that actually if everyone was being honest about how they felt about things, um, they would inha, they would agree with each other more.[00:32:00]

Yael Schonbrun: It's like the emperor's new clothes. It's like we, we all think the emperor, we all think everybody else sees the clothes and so we say, Oh, he's wearing clothes even though all of

Scott Barry Kaufman: A hundred percent. A hundred percent. I mean, I have many, many instances where I think things and I'm like, Oh my gosh, I, I can't say that's not politically correct to say, or like, Oh my gosh, I can't, you know, I gotta be careful. I gotta be professional. I can't say that. But then if I do say it even on Twitter, like people really resonate with it and I'm like, Oh, that wasn't so bad.

Um, it, I, I feel like there's, so that, that's, that's illustrative of something, you know.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Maybe the fact that we do live with a lot of collective illusions. Um, I look, I think, um, you know, and I don't know why, it's a controversial thing to say, but I think that most humans aren't racist. Um, and I think that most humans have a lot of great, uh, intentions, um, and want to make connections and they wanna be good.

Again, that's the humanistic psychologist in me is that I, I believe in the inherent [00:33:00] goodness of humans. And I think there are, um, a minority, but, and they do exist of people who are deeply hurting and resort to hate, resort to violence, resort to racism and sexism, and those people are hurting themselves and, and, and, and they're hurting others, and they do exist.

But I don't think most people are racist and sexist. I think most. , um, are just trying to get through their own day and, you know, uh, it's tough being human, you know, And I, I think just recognizing that it's tough being human and we all make mistakes, but we also need to show ourselves a lot more self-compassion than we do.

Yael Schonbrun: That was so beautiful and I think it's so true, but it is so hard to remember that when we're feeling hurt by other people or by other, by tribes, by, by out groups that, you know, involve people that are saying are doing things that seem harmful to the people that we're connected with. And so, [00:34:00] you know, being a humanist psychologist I think gives you a real power to sort of, Connected to stay connected to that idea of, you know, people are fundamentally good.

Like by by and large people are good.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Most people I meet most and I and people, cause that's a representative sample. But, but most people, you know, even strangers I meet, uh, just have, you know, like they, maybe they're stressed, you know, partly stressed in their own life, but also partly like they don't, they would feel guilty if they knew they caused harm.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Most people are in psychopaths,

Yael Schonbrun: Most people are not psychopaths. Although there is a new Netflix show on Jeffrey Dahmer that is apparently super popular, but it looks really disturbing , but there are a few psychopaths out there.

Scott Barry Kaufman: They exist and they capture so much attention, but they're such a minority. I mean, most people aren't out there eating other people

Yael Schonbrun: True. Thank, thankfully, thankfully

Scott Barry Kaufman: Thank.

Yael Schonbrun: So let's talk about [00:35:00] positive connection, . Cause this is such an important part of growing and, and our positive wellbeing. And I am curious about your psychologist from Mars, ideas about connection, but you do, um, talk about. Parts of connection that I think are really under discussed.

Like we talk a lot about how to connect with people when they're having hard times, but you and Jordan go into detail about, um, connecting over the good stuff. So what's the science on the power of being there for the good and then I do want you to talk about different styles of response to good stuff that a friend or partner might have and what the best and worst way to respond is.

Cause I think there are some surprises in, in the science, in what we know.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Um, well, what's a, what's a big surprise you discovered in,

Yael Schonbrun: That. Yeah. So maybe I'll have you describe what it is, but that passive, constructive responses are the worst way to respond to somebody's good news. This is [00:36:00] kind of surprising

Scott Barry Kaufman: surprising to me.

yeah, so, uh, when you tell someone some good news, there's many different ways that someone can respond, but not, you know, just sort of like the way of being, of creating a high quality relationship. Um, is is one where you're. You're very like, actively curious and um, and, and encouraging.

Um, and you, first of all, you don't turn it back on you, right? You're not like, Oh, that's great news. Well, I, uh, actually just got some, This happens to me sometimes actually as well. Like when I put up the, the Oprah tweet, I got a lot of things like, Oh, I once talked to Oprah too, you know? And. Uh, you know that, okay, , but is that the most, is that the highest qual, the best way of creating a high quality connection with me?

You know, um, you know, there, there's a time when I'll be excited for you too, right? And there's a time you'll be excited for me. Let's, you know, in a, in a real friendship, um, you, you give people their time, [00:37:00] uh, when, when it's their moment, and it, it's a give and take. It's just like a relationship as well, right?

Um, and. Yeah, I just, that that overarching program of, um, active constructive responding is part of the whole high quality connection framework. And what are the different ways you can be an active listener, be an active encourager, um, uh, instill a sense of trust with people, um, and, uh, meet, there's a mutuality, um, of being comfortable with self dis.

That's a big one in a high quality relationship, is feeling really comfortable with self-disclosure. Um, and, uh, I really think that's what sets apart an intimate, uh, friendship, relationship, whatever. Then, um, then just meeting a stranger on the street. In fact, if I just meet a stranger and they self-disclose too much too fast, it makes me uncomfortable.

Um, there are some people who have very low boundaries. I don't know. Have you ever met anyone like that where [00:38:00] they. They just, they seem to have no boundaries at all. And like, you, like you'll meet them and then they're immediately, they're, you're, they're like, We're gonna be best friends forever. And you're like, Do I have a choice in that Do you know what I mean? Have

Yael Schonbrun: Sure. Sure. Well, first of all, I think it's a little unfair because once people find out you're a psychologist, , I think all bets are off. It's like the, you know, the airplane conversation where I'm reading some, you know, nerdy psychology book and somebody says, Oh, what are you reading? You know, why are you reading that?

And I'll say, Oh, I'm a psychologist. And like, boom. Like, I don't get to read the rest of that flight

Scott Barry Kaufman: Right.

Yael Schonbrun: I just get to hear it. And, you know, I could shut it down, but I, I don't wanna be hurtful to anybody. So, So there's that, but. For sure there are people who have poor boundaries and, and that is really uncomfortable.

And it is, it's sort of a fine line, you know, How do you know when it's time to disclose and, and when you've gone too far? Or how do you sort of detect when you know you need to set up some boundaries on the receiving end and how,

how can you do that in a [00:39:00] way that feels supportive and not shutting down, but also, you know, kind of protective of the long term health of the, of a relationship.

Scott Barry Kaufman: It's hard. It it, it's hard for, for people pleasers. It's hard for certain kinds of people. , to people who, um, had trouble in their childhood saying no to their parents, you know, and, and when they're, if they're, you know, one of their parents constantly made requests and made them feel guilty for asserting their needs, it could really be hard to unlearn those patterns.

Anyway, it's just, it's a very important topic and, uh, I think that psychologists. Should be really well trained in, in helping clients with healthy boundaries setting. , like if I had like a top 10 list of this, the major skills for a therapist, one would certainly be active listening, but then another would be helping the client with healthy, setting healthy boundaries.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. How do you define what a healthy boundary?[00:40:00]

Scott Barry Kaufman: I don't know if I've ever thought that through in a sense, like I precisely scientifically define it, but cuz it's one of those things that what's, well, what's best for you, you know, it's very individualized. Um, the healthy boundary is setting a boundary around yourself in a way that you still feel a sense of freedom and, um, aliveness.

In, uh, making the decisions that are important to you in your life. Um, I guess that's how I would define it. Um, if you feel like there are things impinging on that in a way where you're, you've become constricted, um, then I think you need to listen to that and, um, uh, and, and really reflect on it and see where it's coming from.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I like that definition. That was pretty good. Off the cuff

Scott Barry Kaufman: right.

Yael Schonbrun: Um, I just wanna kind of circle back to this passive constructive style, just because I thought it was, so, for me it was sort of like this aha moment that. . Um, and I'll give an example. So when I said, and I have a book coming out and you said, Oh, that's so great, [00:41:00] right?

That was active, constructive. But if you had just kind of been like, Hmm, let's move on, that would've been passive constructive cuz you didn't shut me down.

You didn't say that's lame, or your publisher's not as big as mine. and you didn't, you know, ignore it, you know? So there's lots of different ways that you could respond, but the passive constructive is like, Hmm, interesting, but then move on quickly.

And that is the most problematic for close relationships, which I think is really interesting. What do you make of that?

Scott Barry Kaufman: Well, it, a high quality relationship is one where you feel like there's a, it's a dynamic living tissue, you know, like it's like moving forward. And both of you are co-creating, uh, something that has forward movement. I mean, the, the, the opposite of that is relationships where you feel like you're being sucked in a black hole and.

And often talking with toxic people, , you can feel as though there, [00:42:00] you know, there's certainly no growth. and it's very stagnant and that kind of passive response doesn't, it really shuts down the energy, um, of, of the dynamic tissue. It's almost like implicitly saying, I don't want this thing that we have to.

And to become alive and to acknowledge knowledge it. So that's how I would interpret it.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I think that's so well said, and I think that's why. Passive constructive is worse than active destructive cuz at least with active destructive, you have somebody who's like engaged. When you have somebody who's passive, it just feels like there's no interest. And so like, it just like any connection dies away.

So even if somebody's actively like putting down your idea, at least they're engaged. It's so, which I think is kind of surprising.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah. sometimes things can still grow from a destructive response. Um, you know, like some arguments or fights can, can absolutely lead in a positive, or even a constructive direction. [00:43:00] Yeah,

Yeah,

Yael Schonbrun: All right, so I wanted to shift to talking about one of your lines of research and, and one of the chapters in the book that talks about how to grow healthy self-esteem. And you talk about sort of the link between healthy self-esteem and narcissism. Right? Which is an interesting thing to think about because if we've got like two high

self-esteem, we think too well of ourselves.

That's more. In line with something that's unhealthy and not very appealing to be around, which isn't so good for our connections and isn't so good for our long term success and, and, and wellbeing. So can you give us some broad strokes of takeaways from, from the book, um, that can help us learn where we should be focused in terms of building healthy self-esteem rather than accidentally dropping into narciss.

Scott Barry Kaufman: I think one of the best distinguished, uh, differentiations between healthy self-esteem and Narcis narcissism is that like, do you feel superior to others or do you feel that you're just [00:44:00] enough? Um, and then there's vulnerable narcissists who, um, or people who score high in vulnerable narcissism who don't feel, they feel like they're rotten at the core.

Um, but they also feel entitled to things . So it's a paradox. Um, but the healthy self-esteem is one where you feel really secure in who you are and, um, and your capabilities. You know, you feel competent, you feel like you can, um, make choices that'll lead to your future goals. Um, so there's a real sense of competence there.

And that's not the narcissistic flavor of the regulation for self-esteem, which is really with the grandiose form, really about feeling like you're inherently superior to others, um, and trying to tear down others, exploit them, um, so that you can constantly feel good about yourself. Uh, those are the healthy self-esteem.

Don't feel good about themselves when they're tearing down others or, [00:45:00] or, or dominating others. Um, they feel good about themselves when. Um, engage in something that is authentically meaningful to them, um, and, um, they show authentic pride, not hubristic pride for what they're doing.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Well, and just a real quick foray, I mean, so you also talk about the link between narcissism and imposturous, which is kind of interesting, right? That, that those two, like feeling like you're a fraud can actually go along with narcissism in general.

So I wonder if you can explain that.

Scott Barry Kaufman: There might be a surprising link to people. Um, That an imposter phenomenon, feeling like you're kind of faking, faking it in life, um, is very strongly correlated with narcissism. and, uh, it's, it's because mar with

narcissism, you really are putting on a mask. You, in a lot of ways, you are an imposter. You know, this is the thing is like, I'm really into tough love sometimes.

Like some people, some [00:46:00] people like I, I have this friend I'm not gonna mention. , but I, I have this guy, I know this guy who, like, he thinks he should win the Nobel Prize. he's like, um, you know, he's, he's, he's not a scientist, he's journalist. but he's like, you know, he's like, Sometimes I feel like an imposter and I'm like, Well, you are

You're not an, you're not a scientist like some people are. You are an, you are an imposter, like like, like some people who feel imposter syndrome should feel imposter syndrome.

Yael Schonbrun: I like that tough love cuz sometimes,

Scott Barry Kaufman: I gotta tweet that out. I'm

Yael Schonbrun: yeah, you should, but some, you know, sometimes, We don't, we feel like a fraud and it's an important cue to kind of check our expertise and check our confidence in what we put out in the world. So I actually think we don't need to totally toss Imposturous out, but rather look at it like any, like with any uncomfortable emotion of like, what information is this giving me?

Do I need to bone up [00:47:00] on what I know or how I'm putting myself out there? I is this sort of feeling of being a fraud informing me in that.

Scott Barry Kaufman: That's my point. .

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Thank you.

Yael Schonbrun: No, I love it.

I know that guide. No, I'm just

Scott Barry Kaufman: yeah, yeah. yeah. I just like, I'm not into self delusion, and I think narcissism is a huge self delusion, You know, like I'd rather earn it and fail. I'd rather fail authentically and succeed authentic.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that. Well, so now we get to sort of getting to know our, our signature strengths, right? You have a, a chapter in your book dedicated to, to strengths, And this is a really interesting body of research in the positive psychology world. So there are lots of different strengths that we might have, and what's interesting here is that you point out that we can overuse our strengths, we can underuse them, but we can also overuse them. And so why, why is that, uh, why is that true? Right?

Like, if I'm [00:48:00] a very grateful person and that is my signature, my signature's strength, why should I be cautious about over using?

Scott Barry Kaufman: You know, I think that that, uh, striking a good balance between all different aspects of yourself, um, is important, striking the right balance. Um, so that. That some sides to yourself don't overtake the rest of rest of you. Um, you know, you can be so gritty that you, that's all you care about in life is, is, is being gritty and you lose sight of the fact, are you even being gritty about the right goals for you?

You know, Maslow said, What's not worth doing is not worth doing well, um, you could be so agree. And, and nice that you people please everyone. And you know, in some strengths that that can be some context. That could considered a strength, but if you overuse it, you're losing your soul.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah,

Scott Barry Kaufman: So yeah,

Yael Schonbrun: balance

and all. I love that. Well, and so [00:49:00] I and the other two co-hosts of this podcast, Practice Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and at the core of acceptance and commitment therapy is this effort to be psychologically flexible. So

to kind of,

you know, find that balance and move between things as you know, circumstances.

You know, based on what makes the most sense for that moment in time. And that's kind of what you're saying, like there might be times where you wanna

kind of rein that in and there might be times where you really wanna live out your signature strength.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah, that's exactly right. And I, I'm a big fan of ACT approach. And have you had Steven Hayes on your podcast

Yael Schonbrun: We have, yeah. A couple of times. He's wonderful. Yeah. Such a brilliant guy.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: And, And I wanted to ask you, what are your signature.

Scott Barry Kaufman: humor.

Yael Schonbrun: not allowed to say humility because if you say humility, then it makes it not true.

Scott Barry Kaufman: That's true. That's true. No humor, Uh, creativity, and I think kindness.

Yael Schonbrun: that [00:50:00] seems true from, from this one interaction. I, I can validate that.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Yeah. But, uh, but definitely humor and creativity are up there. I, I'm very, I'm a very playful, I feel like that's my, that's my top like overarching, uh, theme in life is creativity and humor

and play. Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: All right, so I wanted to ask you one question that I wanted to ask a psychologist who will be totally honest with me for a while on air. I'm curious what you think about. Whether everyone should be screened for mental health, and then sort of a corollary of that, whether everyone needs a therapist.

So many psychologists say this, and I have more complicated thoughts, so I wanted to know your honest thoughts. Should we screen everyone for mental health? Does everyone need a therapist? What are your thoughts?

Scott Barry Kaufman: I'd say no to both those, both those things. I do think every person could use a coach of their own personal coach. So that's why I've

been getting more in the coaching profession lately, and I'm creating a new form of coaching. I'm calling [00:51:00] self-actualization coaching,

Yael Schonbrun: so why, why coach and not therapist?

Scott Barry Kaufman: well there, they're, those are very different things. So, um, a self-actualization coach, they're, they, they would help you reach your, you know, it's more proactive, more above the zero line, then get the negative 50 to zero line, you know, in helping you really reach, reach your dreams.

and it's not about, it's not about, uh, remedying a, a deficiency. It's about, bringing you forward into the future more. Um, and a good therapist can do both, obviously. Um, but, but, but coaching is not therapy and that's an important line to draw. I don't know if every person should have their own therapist either.

Sometimes. About it, constant ruing and talking about about what is deficient, can, can make things worse. I feel that way myself sometimes. Uh, sometimes I go through therapy and sometimes I'm like, I really like, that would not be beneficial for me right now to go to therapy.

I would just every week keep talking and harping on like the one [00:52:00] thing I'm not happy about, about myself, you know? Whereas like I would rather focus on the million things, not enough million. But the other, the other couple things that I am proud of about that sounded so narcissistic, the million things that are amazing about me.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, it's why you didn't check Humble as your signature strike. No, I'm just

Scott Barry Kaufman: No, that's probably the bottom for me. No, actually, I think, uh hum. Uh uh, Prudence is at the very bottom for me. That's one, that's one of the things on the character strengths list is

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, Prudence. Well, I actually, I actually co-authored, uh, an article on the difference between therapy and coaching with Brad Stolberg, who I know, you know, He's

terrific and he's awesome. All right, so before we end, one last question. What has been your most used practice to help Yourself choose growth in tough times?

Just give people like a little teaser of a practice that they can get more information about by reading the book.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Have more existential gratitude for life. This is what I talk to Oprah [00:53:00] about. Um, have more, uh, reframe things in your life more as. Oh, I have to do those things to, um, I get to do those things, you know, because I'm alive and what an amazing gift that I've been given of life to see, to see possibility in every moment as to, as opposed to harping on my past.

So, yeah, I really, really want to encourage people to have more existential g.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, they'll get that in a lot more by picking up the book. The book is really terrific. It will help so

many

people. And where else do you wanna invite people to go to find out more about your amazing wealth of offerings?

Scott Barry Kaufman: Um, look, I have, um, on, on, uh, Twitter, if you go to my Twitter page, I have like a, a link tree, you know, in my bio with like all my links. Um, but you, Scott Barry kaufman.com is, has everything as well. Yeah. Center for You Potential. The Psychology podcast,

blah,

Yael Schonbrun: [00:54:00] Perfect, perfect. Willing to that in our show notes. Thank you so much for your time. It was such an honor and a delight to chat with you.

Scott Barry Kaufman: Thank you. Likewise.

Yael Schonbrun: . I'm going to guess that if you are listening to this episode, that you love to geek out about books in psychology.

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