

How Are You Doing Full

Cory Yeager: [00:00:00]

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I first have to be a great Corey for Corey. So that's really the, the, the reason that I thought focusing on this conversations on self are particularly important.

Jill Stoddard: That was Dr. Corey Yager on psychologists off the clock.

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Yael Schonbrun: 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 health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill [00:01:00] Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

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Jill Stoddard: Debbie and I are here to introduce an episode that I did with Dr. Corey Yeager. He [00:02:00] wrote a new book called how am I doing? And Dr. Corey has a really amazing professional history and current professional status. He is the therapist for the Detroit pistons, which I just think is so cool. Is one of the few times that my kids have actually been impressed with who I've gotten to talk to on this podcast, because they're obsessed with basketball.

Um, Debbie. I know you listened to the episode. I'm curious what you thought.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. I mean, I think. . Part of what he's doing is. Helping people do a little bit of reflection and soul searching and gives giving people some guidance for that.

And it's interesting because as a therapist, often people will come to therapy either. They're not sure what to do with their lives. Maybe they're in a transition period or they just feel like they're not quite sure where they wanna be going with their lives.

. And so I really think that probably a lot of people listen to this podcast because they're , trying to learn about themselves and trying to do a little bit of personal reflection and using this [00:03:00] podcast as some food for thought. And I think that he will definitely give you some food for thought about a number of.

Jill Stoddard: . One of the powerful things about this book that I think is really critical in any kind of introspective work is that, you know, therapy is in a sense of conversation with your therapist.

But even more importantly, it's a conversation with yourself. It's trying to figure out, you know, what's important to me, what's working, what's not working. These essentially are conversations that we're having with ourself and understanding them very explicitly in that way, can help us to have those kinds of conversations more effectively with ourselves.

And when we're communicating well with ourselves, when we're in touch with what we value with, what's important with what's working with, what's not, then we're able to talk more clearly with other people. And so that clarity with yourself is really foundational for being able to communicate with other people.

And. Making forward movement in whatever way matters to you. And so I think this conversation that I had with Dr. Corey is a very powerful opportunity to, [00:04:00] to really center yourself on the conversations that you would most benefit from having with yourself.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And I really think that what this episode offers and his book is a little bit more structure to that process because I think sometimes, you know, if I had a client and I said, okay, You know, between sessions, do some soul searching about your life and then come back to me next week. You know, it's, you're a little bit lost at sea.

It's like, well, what are you even talking about? You know, what do I, how do I do that?

Jill Stoddard: Right. Where do I begin?

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And he asked some just really, I think, interesting questions to, to get you thinking. And they're more in the book, but I think he covers quite a bit of territory in this conversation as.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, so I'll, Give people a little bit of a teaser of some of the questions than we were able to cover in our time together, um, that are really terrific, really good compasses so a couple of the questions have to do with, uh, the difference between treatment and healing, [00:05:00] how to make wise choices.

Like what does a good choice look like? The value of being present focused versus looking to the past? what is deep happiness and who's responsible for it. And so these are just a couple of the topics that we talked about, and he just, as Debbie said, had so many pearls of wisdom and he's such a fun person to listen to.

I would love to be one of his players kind of out on the court, receiving his motivational encouragement, because he is somebody who just really inspires you and energizes you and helps you to feel optimistic about the journey ahead. So we hope that you feel optimistic as you listen to this fascinating conversation with Dr.

Corey Yeager,

Yael Schonbrun: Dr. Corey Yeager is a therapist who merges his two main passions, athletics and therapy. As the Detroit piston psychotherapist. In this role, he supports the overall organization, individual players, coaching staff, and front office leadership. Corey's work also aims to advance dialogue about race and racism.

And he's [00:06:00] facilitated conversation across the country with various organizations, including the Oprah Winfrey network and elsewhere. And he is also known for his appearance on Harry and Oprah's show the me, you can't see, which is available on apple TV. Welcome Corey.

Cory Yeager: Thank you so much. It's so good to be with you.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I'm so excited to talk about your new book. How am I doing 40 conversations to have with yourself? It's an awesome read. And I kind of wanted to start off with this question. That's very broad, which is why a book about conversations with yourself.

Cory Yeager: yeah, I think the, the. Focusing on conversations with ourself is meaningful and deeply needed because we know as human beings, we do a great job of focusing on conversations and, and engagement with others. But we do a really poor job of engaging ourselves in conversation. So as a therapist, the work that I was doing and had been doing for years had me asking people questions all the [00:07:00] time.

So I began to take those questions and apply 'em to. And say, so how would I answer that? So, Corey, how would you answer that? Um, and that really was the Genesis, the precipice of, of kind of where we went with the book. So that's, that's kind of the cornerstone of why conversations with ourself because we need them.

And no one else is no one, a lot of people aren't talking about that.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Well, I love that idea that we so often have conversations with other people. We sort of fail to have them with ourselves. Why do you think we fail to have them with ourselves? I mean, we're the most accessible person to have conversation with after all.

Cory Yeager: I think we are the most accessible, but oftentimes society has not really told us that that's something that we should be thinking about or doing.

We're really focused on other, right. Who, who are you supporting? Um, are you supporting your wife or your children or your parents who are you? You're supposed to be supportive of others.

And I think that we're really great at that as human beings, but if we're doing all of that [00:08:00] focus on other. When do we get a chance to focus on self? Is that, are we 12th on the list? Are we 27th on the list of people that can of how we can support ourself? So I am begging us to be first on the list. That before I can show up and be a great husband or a great father or a great therapist and supporter of others.

I first have to be a great Corey for Corey. So that's really the, the, the reason that I thought focusing on this conversations on self are particularly important. And I think they've always been important, but I think now if we really look at our society and our communities over the last few years, we we're in Turmo.

Right that from living here in Minneapolis with the death of George Floyd and looking at kind of what worldwide what's going on, we have a lot of things that we're struggling with. So one thing that we can control is going introspective, [00:09:00] making sure that I'm okay. And then I can show up in the world a better version of self.

If I can do that work introspective.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. That's I think. Point is so important because even if our priority is to make the world a better place, if we can't show up strong and in a good place, it's gonna be hard to make forward movement. And as you're pointing out, We're really in a place where we need to be making forward movement. And I actually watched, I had the chance to watch some of the, uh, appearances that you made on news shows after George Floyd's murder.

And I'd love to talk a little bit about racism and the kinds of narratives that we generate about it. And I wanted to pull a quote from your book. You wrote. And I hope it's okay for me to quote you to you. but you wrote being a black man in America. I know I'm going to encounter tons of negative spaces.

. I'm not going to add to that with my own negative talk. My task is to move with positivity, even if no one else has it for me, I have it for myself. And so the question that I wanted to ask. What would you say to people who suggest that [00:10:00] such positivity has the danger of letting the system, the oppressors off the hook.

In other words, that it's important to harness anger, that negativity in order to drive change.

Cory Yeager: So I would say to anyone that asked that that a both end approach is quite is, is quite important that we can do both. That we can hold the systems accountable. Right. And, and work against that process of decontextualizing. I think one of the things that we've done with race, um, almost that has been done in, in a, in a really.

Smart and smooth fashion is to decontextualize the issues of race with people of color that telling people of color. Don't worry about it. Take a, pull yourself up by your bootstraps. You can do this. Don't worry. That is is not, not necessarily a bad thing to hear. But it decontextualizes the issues that folks of color face.

So when [00:11:00] we saw as people of color saw George Floyd being murdered with a knee on his neck, we didn't see just that one moment and say, oh my God, this is horrible. We saw 400 years of history in that moment coming to pass. So how can we make sure that we're contextualizing these issues around race? So we can broad and more broadly look at and understand why it is.

We may see the world in a certain way, um, and how others may benefit from better understanding and contextualizing those issues. But I also say, I need to make sure that I'm positive with me though, because I know that the world that I've inherited and that my sons have inherited is not necessarily kind.

To black men, we can do, we have to be honest about it. It's not necessarily kind. Does that mean it's always unkind? No, it doesn't mean that, but this is not necessarily all the, all the time going to be kind. So I [00:12:00] say to people all the time, if there are, if there's a line of negativity that will line up against me, I will not join that. I'm not gonna join it. There's enough negativity that I'll I'll deal with in my life. I won't stand in that line of negativity to harm myself that I will stand in the line of positivity. And one way in which to do that is to tune into your self talk, to be very clear on what it is that's going on in our minds, that conversations that were continuously having with self, because I think what happens is we are having these conversations.

We're not really aware of. Right, because it can occur. They're occurring all the time. They're always happening. As I'm speaking, you're having a conversation with yourself. I agree with them. I disagree with them. Right. So it's not, not if, but we know that they are surely occurring. If we can tune into them, then we could say, all right.

So I'm negative with myself. I beat myself up a lot. Once I'm starting to be aware of this man. I'm I'm not happy with the way I sound to [00:13:00] myself. I, I talk to people and I know I'm longwinded, but I love the, this conversation that I talk to people all the time and I personify self-talk. And I say, if the conversations that you're negatively having in your head were being held by someone else, and they were saying those negative words to you, would you stay friends with.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Cory Yeager: say no. If I was say, if I was hearing, Hey, you're not smart. You're not good. And you're not good enough for this. I wouldn't stay friends with that person, but we do it to ourselves. So how do we find the way in which to better understand it and move it to a positive venture?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, a more productive one and you work with athletes and I'm guessing that a lot of them have narratives that try to drive them. Right. And, and sort of the ideas, like if I'm hard on myself, I'll push myself harder and do better. And so I'm curious what kind of advice you give them, knowing that, that negative self talk isn't kind, but that it can potentially have that effect of driving them harder.

Cory Yeager: Yes. I think [00:14:00] that we can drive ourselves harder and not be. I think we can again, so you're gonna hear me. One of the, one of the phrases that I live by is, is the both end approach

Yael Schonbrun: I love it.

Cory Yeager: that, right. That finding the, the balance in both spaces, because that's probably, if we could find that balance, that's probably where we're doing the best work.

Um, so having players understand that you can drive yourself, but you didn't have to be. You can stay, you can outwork your, your opponents. You can do all that, but you can also do that in a positive way. You could tell you, so, Hey, I'm gonna stay in here and work outwork everyone else. And why am I doing that to myself?

Because I believe in me and I know that the harder I work, the better outcomes I'll have. See. So I drove myself, but I stayed positive. So I, I think that balanced approach is critically important and something that they need to understand.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Well, and I just think it's so cool that you are somebody who works with the most elite athletes out there. And you are saying [00:15:00] there is huge value in adopting a more positive narrative.

Cory Yeager: Yes,

Yes. And, and that on the court positivity. So what I tell my players a lot is want to develop a set of a few different sets of mantras. Little short, little brief, um, positive things that you can remind yourself when things go awry, you can quickly bring them back. Like I was one of the, one of the mantras that I find that players latch onto the best is I was built for this.

I think we can use that in all aspects of our life that as we're working or whatever we're doing, I do it all the time. I remind myself, I was built to do this. I was built to be successful in this realm. And I was built for this just that quick reminder, especially when things don't seem to be going exactly the way I would love them.

I, if I remind myself that I was built for it, I can say, then that means I was supposed to have this moment where it didn't go. Right. Because I'm gonna learn from it. Right. So I just flipped it into a positive space and it seemed quite [00:16:00] negative. So players utilizing that work, I think, is something that, that has been helpful for them.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I love that. It sort of brings to mind this research out of the lab of Amy Ruski and Barry Schwartz, where they talk about how you can have a job, a career, or a calling, and those kind of mantras really drop you into this is my calling and I'm gonna connect to it even when it's uncomfortable. So I, I love that mantra.

Cory Yeager: Yes.

Yael Schonbrun: So you do a kind of therapy called narrative solution focused therapy. And I think, you know, that really lines up with the, the book and how you're trying to encourage people to develop a conversation with themselves, to ask themselves really important questions. And I wonder if you can share some of the hallmark features of this treatment approach, and then we'll dive into some of the specific questions that you encourage people to ask.

Cory Yeager: Yeah that. So, so I see the world and that's why that narrative approach fits well for me. I see the world. I see individuals as stories that as you approach me, if I haven't seen you in two years, [00:17:00] but we met two

years ago and we had, uh, our conversation. I don't see you for two years when you approach me, I see your story.

Your story comes back to me very quickly because I, those stories are what to me, make you who you are. The narrative approach is asking for those content Laden stories and we, and from those stories, we'll find patterns. Not maybe they will always emerge. Um, part of my job as a therapist is to recognize the patterns that come from the content laid and stories.

Um, Focus being focused on solutions, right? Finding the solution, asking about the solution to an issue, not just focusing on the negative, it didn't work and right. All I'll ask questions. Like, so what have you tried to fix this issue? Well, people sometimes in therapy say I've tried everything. I said, well, everything. Wow. That's say that's tough to do that. You've [00:18:00] tried everything to fix this issue in the entire world. I don't know how you've had time to, to try everything. And those are moments that shock people back into. Yeah, I probably haven't tried everything. It feels really frustrating that like, I've tried a lot of things, but maybe I haven't tried everything in that moment.

Right. The opportunity for change and to see the world and see the issue differently, right there has, has flipped and then the healing can begin. Um, I am a true believer that healing can must come from within that. It's not gonna be something that I can help you as a therapist. To heal. What I can do is facilitate the change in your life.

I can support where you want to go. For instance, if I cut my arm wide open, what am I gonna do? I'm gonna go to the doctor. The doctor's gonna look at it. They're gonna say, Hey, let's clean that out. Let's put an ointment in and then we're gonna sew it up. That's all treatment healing. The [00:19:00] body will. The body will do the work of healing that, and scarring that over, that will all come from within me treatment quite important, just like therapy is all treatment very important, but the true healing must come from within must come from within the individual must come from within the community must come from within the religion, whatever it is, must come from within for true healing to occur.

I talk to my players and my clients about that all the time.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I love that distinction between treatment and healing, right. That they're different processes and that the therapist is involved in the treatment part, but that it's really the responsibility of the individual to sort of

carry the healing forward and, and to find resources, including community, et cetera, to, to carry that process forward.

I love that.

Cory Yeager: Hundred percent. Mm-hmm

Yael Schonbrun: All right. So you use questions in this book to help facilitate people starting that process of working with their narrative and initiating that healing, journey. [00:20:00] And I wanted to kind of dive into a few of the questions. You'll have to pick up the book to get all of them.

So let me start with this really fun question that you have in the book, which is, who is on your Supreme court. I wonder if you can share in this book, what does the Supreme court represent and who should be on it?

Cory Yeager: Yeah. I think that each of us, I is my belief that each of us should have, or develop a Supreme court in our lives and by the Supreme court in our lives. I mean, those three to five people that you can turn to that, you know, will be truth tellers. That means they're gonna have to know you. Decently well, and they're gonna have to be able to tell truth to you, speak truth to you about things that you're inquiring.

For instance, if you say, you know, I have a job opportunity and I'd have to move from Minneapolis to LA, um, for this job opportunity, I'll go to my Supreme court and I'll inquire. Now. I do not, and would not go to my Supreme court before first doing the work with [00:21:00] myself to say, all right. So what do I think about this?

Where do I stand in terms of, if I think I should take this job, or I shouldn't take this job that I think is a critical piece. And then I turn to my truth tellers, my Supreme court, and I inquire from them what they think I should do with this major decision that's in front of me. And, and from that three to five people in that Supreme court, a pattern will emerge.

If you ask them the same question or you think I should do with this, that pattern will emerge. If you tune in and listen. And in that pattern is usually the answer, but I submit that we already usually know what the answer is that we want. We already know, um, what we're looking for is confirmation. So that Supreme court can help us with that.

Um, and we have to be open to listening to whatever it is that they'll push forward to us.

Yael Schonbrun: I love those two features to, to be clear on what to look for for your Supreme court members, which is, you know, number one, people who know you well, [00:22:00] and number two people who would tell you the truth, not just what you wanna hear. But the actual truth of what they think and what you, what you probably deep down think.

So it's not just asking people to make you feel better. It's asking people for their honest thoughts, even if it's uncomfortable to hear.

Cory Yeager: I think the last bit that you said, even if it's uncomfortable to hear. I think this is the hallmark of a true teller, right? It, it may not be comfortable for you to hear what I'm about to dish to you, but I'm gonna, I I'm about to dish it to you because I think it's important for you to hear if we have, if we can set our lives up in such a way that we can hear that and not personalize it, but hear what it is.

Why do you think that about me? Why do you think that fits or doesn't fit for me? And those truth tellers usually have answers to those. It's we have to be open, um, to hearing what it is that they want to give us.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And then you, you. Get into this next bit that I think is really [00:23:00] important. Um, you, you get into this question of making the right choices versus making choices. Right? Right. So you might get some advice or you might have already made a choice and it may feel uncomfortable and you sort of make that distinction that sometimes we need to work on making the right choices, but very often we need to make our choices.

Right. So can you share a bit of your advice in this

Cory Yeager: Yes. So I, I mean, just that little play on words, making the right choice. Cause I think. We can get all consumed with, oh my God, I've gotta make the right choice here. I've gotta make the right choice here. Um, it's anxiety provoking, right? We, we don't wanna, none of us wanna make a bad choice. Um, but. if we can flip it a just a little bit and say, all right, so I'm gonna think through it, and then I'm gonna make a choice.

And then once I make the choice, I must go about making that choice. The right one. What I mean by that is this that I must work hard. I must have a positive [00:24:00] outlook. Once that choice is made, I can make it. Right. I can make it

be the right one with my energy, with my focus, with my engagement, with my understanding.

So I think instead of getting so tied up in, will this be the right choice or will it not? And, oh my goodness. And all that anxiety, I think that we should put energy towards making good choices, but then once we , make the. I'm gonna dump in all, all the energy I have to make that choice.

The right one

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I mean, when you even think about like the professional choices that you've made, you have a really interesting professional history. And I wonder if maybe you can share a little bit about it, but currently, just to be clear, if, if people didn't catch this from the introduction you work in Detroit, you live in Minneapolis, you have a family, so that must be complicated.

How do you make that the right choice?

Cory Yeager: It must be complicated. Yes. It, it has been, it has been quite complex. Um, so lots [00:25:00] of travel, , but one of the things that I've had, and I've always thought and talked about is that I wanted to find a way to couple, my two of my passions, the psychological realm, the therapeutic realm is a passion. And, and athletics has always been a passion of my former football player.

Um, all of that. So I want, I've always loved these two ventures and I said many years ago, I just wanna find a way to mix the two. Um, so I had went about. Coaching. I coached, I have four sons and I coached them in football all the way from like third grade all the way up. And I always was finding ways to talk to their team and the coaches would always say, Hey, Dr.

Yer, can you just talk to the team and give them some wisdom on whatever you it is? And I love that and it felt good. And I would always have players over the years that would come back and say the things that you said to us helped me, not just for football, but helped me really in. So I began to continue [00:26:00] to push those, that support, um, and then started doing some work at the university of Minnesota, engaging the football program, grew that, and just kind of really kind of helped morph that into what it is today and me working my way into the MBA.

Um, but it has been complex. Uh, it hasn't really been easy, but I know I made the choice to kind of blend those two passions. And then every day, since then I've went about making that the right choice that even though dad's not at home as much, I'll make sure that I'm at every game. So when I put a contract together, I'm gonna get with the pistons and say, I need to be home every Friday night.

I'm gonna need flight support to be home for my son's football games. So what did I do? I went about making that choice that I loved and I wanted right. For all of us. And I think we can do that. It's not necessarily easy, as you said, it can be complex, but it's important enough. It [00:27:00] was important enough for me to make sure that I'm in my son's life and in their sporting events that I have to find a way to make it right.

And we have, and I think we'll keep doing that.

Yael Schonbrun: That's amazing. . All right. So I'm going to hop into another question. This is about vulnerability. Most of us resist being vulnerable with others and with ourselves, because it seems the opposite of freeing, right? To confront your vulnerabilities. It feels like it's gonna constrict you but you offer this question.

How can your vulnerability free you? So I wonder if you can help us understand the paradox that you're pointing to when it comes to vulnerability.

Cory Yeager: Yes, I believe. Um, and, and similar to the work of BNE brown, I believe. That vulnerability really is hidden courage. It's a Virgin it's courage. It's courage. You have to really be courageous to be vulnerable, and you really won't be vulnerable unless you have a, a P people in spaces that you can really deeply trust.[00:28:00]

So now all of a sudden we have this word vulnerability. We have the flip of that, but it's still connected in courage. And then we have this piece of all right, how can all of that be freeing? Because if I can be vulnerable with myself and with others, I'm mimicking showing them that they can also be that with me.

So now that frees all of us up to be who we are in our spaces. And if, again, if we can be who we are in the spaces that we love to be. We now all of a sudden show up as more purely us and a better version of us. And I have to be vulner. To be able to do that. If not, I can get to a certain level, a certain engagement, but if I can push through that and say, you know, I'm gonna have to be vulnerable with people.

I, to, I had to be vulnerable with, um, within my PhD program, I got my, my doctorate at the university of Minnesota and I was not a great writer when I entered my PhD [00:29:00] program, had a master's, but it was an ma. So it was really about the art form of therapy. Not. That technical research based writing. So I got in there and said, geez, I'm kind of thinking about this writing.

And I'm getting tons of feedback. My writing is not up to par, so I didn't want to be vulnerable. So I was gonna try to tuck that away. My wife kept saying. Honey, how are you gonna hide that? You're not a great writer in a doctoral program. I don't know, but I'm, but I tried to go about that. It didn't work.

So I went to my advisor, Dr. Bill Doherty, who is really one of the best in the field in terms of couple therapy happened to be my advisor. And I said, doc, I just gotta tell you I'm struggling with my writing. And he said, yeah, I'm reading your stuff. Are you? You think you're telling me something? I don't know.

So in that moment, it, I was free. Like I don't have to try to fake this or hide. He already knew I need help. Now, one of the things I pride myself most in is I'm a pretty good writer now.

Cause he stayed on me. He [00:30:00] stayed on me, he stayed on me and I started to love writing and I hated writing when I wasn't vulnerable and didn't have the courage to engage.

And it was, I didn't have the freedom in that space, but now I love her. I mean, you asked me to write, I'm like, yeah, I'd love that. So

Yael Schonbrun:

Your advisor did a great job in, helping you to do your own healing in the writing sphere. I love this idea of. Sort of creating a psychologically safe space for ourselves in coming clean with, with our own vulnerabilities. And it kind of just brings to mind this issue that comes up so much in academia, but, you know, just in general, like when we don't know something and we feel sort of ashamed that we don't know, but until we can admit that we don't know, we can't learn.

So it's the same kind of idea, unless we sort of allow ourselves to confront the things that we feel. Uncomfortable or vulnerable about, it's really hard to make forward movement, which, you know, would be freeing whe you [00:31:00] know, if you could do.

Cory Yeager: That's right, right. And that, so I think that that's what holds us back. That's what has the tendency to kind of put shackles on us and hold us back and makes us doubt ourselves. And, and, and then what we, what, and that's what I learned. I thought I was really hiding my vulnerability. I really thought I was doing a great job of hiding it.

But everyone, it wasn't easy. It was easy to see. Well, the dude's not a great writer. He's in a PhD program, an R one Institute and his writing's not great, but I thought I was really hiding that I wasn't. So once I could understand that I wasn't hiding it. And there were others that knew, and there were people that could help, man.

I could just sit back and say, all right, now I'm gonna enjoy this PhD. Now I don't have to try to hustle around and tuck things away. And I don't have to do that. Um,

Yael Schonbrun: it's much less exhausting.

Cory Yeager: Yes. Much less exhausting.

Yael Schonbrun: And this is kind of a nice segue into this question about [00:32:00] untruths, about our choices. We, we so often tell ourselves that we have no other options.

Then to kind of persist in the path. Right. I already pretended that I knew the thing, so I can't sort of back out and now admit, but you write that, you know, we actually have many more choices than we often tell ourselves. And so I wonder if you can kinda share with us first, why do we so often tell ourselves that we have no other options than, than to sort of persist and how do we change that narrative?

Cory Yeager: Yeah. So this conversation, this part of the book came from, um, the existentialist, uh, Jean Paul SARTs work, um, about bad faith. And he really wrote about this concept of bad faith saying that we tell ourselves untrust. Right. So for instance, if I'm working at a job and I'm barely able to pay all my bills, I'll go about telling myself that this is, I don't have any other option though.

I have to keep doing this and I'll barely pay my bills, but I have to keep doing this only. This is the only option I have. It's [00:33:00] not true, but I convinced my I've convinced myself that it's must be true, but deep down, I know that I

could walk away from that job right now and look for a new job and figure it out tomorrow.

But that, that lie that I've told over and over and over to myself, um, has convinced me that my options are limited. Um, so we have to have some truth telling with ourselves. About where we are, how we got there, where we'd like to go. And what means do we have to change that? As opposed to that continuous effort of saying, I can't do anything different.

I mean, there's just nothing left. I have to do this and I have to keep doing this and I hate it, but I don't have any other options. So, and many times people in our lives, it may benefit them for you to stay stuck in those spaces. That if you went off and moved to California for a new job, I [00:34:00] lose a good friend of mine.

And I don't want, I want you to stick around here. So I'm gonna tell you, I don't think you should li I don't, I don't think you should go. I'm not saying that for your benefit. I'm saying it for mine. And I may not understand that though. Some of these things are moving at levels below consciousness, so I'm not really thinking I'm gonna lie to them and tell them they need to stay so I can get the benefit of having them.

We don't really see it that way. Um, but we have to find those ways in which to engage with or understand that space. Um, so we can kind of move it forward. So that's, that's an important thing.

Yael Schonbrun: I think so much of what you're saying about choice is so spot on and we need to hear it and we need to hear it multiple times that even in these really, you know, sort of dire situations, we often have more options than we see at first.

And no wonder cuz the situations are very difficult, but often if we can zoom out and sort of take the long view and, and just pause a beat and get in touch. ourselves and our [00:35:00] conversations with ourselves and our narratives about where we'd like to be going and how we'd like to be getting there. Uh, we can often open up some surprising paths.

Doesn't mean that circumstances aren't hard, but recognizing choice can be helpful, but that power can be overwhelming and intimidating.

Cory Yeager: Yeah, Kim it's both. And yes, I think that that recognition is not necessarily easy. It's almost like. It's almost like that we've moved through big portions of our life with a veil.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Cory Yeager: and then that's how you then see the world through this veil. And you think that's normed it because it is, I, I see the world through this veil and then all of a sudden someone how you figure out a way to take this veil away.

And it's almost shocking to see the world without this. But then we start to get used to it. And we say, man, I would never go back to that veil understanding or frame. [00:36:00] Um, so how do we move to unveil aspects of our life? Um, and I believe that's really, the work of therapy is my job is not to pull the veil for you, but it is to say, did you realize that you ha may have a veil there just based on what I'm hearing, that may be a veil.

And if you don't see it that way, I, I I'm really not gonna force it, but I'm gonna be curious with you, cuz I think that is a veil. So coming to that understand, I think part of therapy is to help say I'm seeing some things, I'm hearing some things now, guess what you get to do whatever you want with it, but I'm telling you what I hear and what I see, um, that may be helpful for you to understand.

Yael Schonbrun: One thing that I often do is I'll, I'll sort of cue people to some flags of, you know, when you are. Blinding yourself to choice, sometimes where you may notice that you're blinding yourself to choice, maybe phrases like I have to, or there's no option or, there's only one [00:37:00] thing for me to do here.

Those kinds of statements that reflect a lack of choice are often opportunities to pause and say, wait a sec, do I have no choice or are there options?

Cory Yeager: That's right. And see, so that is, and I believe therapeutically, that's part of where we're at our, our best when we're recognizing moments that you say, Hey, so you keep saying you don't ha I don't have any choice or I, I don't see the world that. So if we can catch those moments and really kinda spit them back to, Hey, so you keep kinda saying something that makes me think that you don't see that you have any choices.

But I think you might well have a number of choices. You've just kind of been closed off to them. So let's open, let's open our thinking. And even if it is that

we just, in this session, when we come together, we're gonna say that we're, we have choices in this space. I hope they bleed into your everyday life.

But in here let's find, let's find the opportunity to have some more choices. People will agree. They'll jump [00:38:00] on board with that quick, and then they'll find themselves in their everyday life. Maybe I do have a lot more choices than I, I think that's the work. That's the magic of therapeutic engagement.

Yael Schonbrun: Totally. So bringing this back to some of the work that you might do with your athletes, you asked this question that I think could be possibly sometimes a choice question, but the question is what can you do in 23 seconds? So can you share where this 23 second framework comes from and sort of how maybe your athletes sometimes respond to it?

Cory Yeager: Yes. So , the , Genesis of this question came as I was sitting at games and I was watching games. There's moments in a game where a, a basketball player will get fouled. So when they get fouled, they usually are gonna go shoot free throws. And there's about 23 seconds from the moment they get fouled.

To the moment that the ref hands him the ball to shoot the free throws. So I started watching that engagement from the moment of the foul, to the moment that they get handed the ball to shoot the free throws. And [00:39:00] I thought those guys aren't doing anything with that 23 seconds. They're not, they're kind of moving, they're not using it.

So I started to work with players saying, Hey, there's, I've done a little bit of research, rough research. Yeah. About 23 seconds. Wonder if we could be better? Shooting free throws. If we took our, those 23 seconds to slow our heart rate down, to remind ourselves and tell ourselves a little mantras of, I was built for this, I'm gonna make these free throws.

I'm gonna make these free throws. I'm gonna make these free throw and, and a little bit of that work. Would it service well? And guys started applying it and their free throw percentage went up. Right. And they calmed themselves in that 23. Um, they didn't get caught up thinking about plays that happened earlier in the game.

They didn't get caught up thinking about what was gonna happen the next quarter. They stayed in the moment they focused on breathing. So this is where it came from. And then that, that I found that applicable [00:40:00] to 20, that,

that, that space in our lives that we may not be utilizing. That the moments that we normally just say, let's let me get on my phone.

Cause I don't have anything else to do for the next 20 minutes. I'll just play. That's akin to that 23 seconds in a basketball game. And how can I use that more productively it, can I tune into my breathing and say, all right, where am I at in this current moment? I'm not gonna worry about what happened yesterday at work.

I'm not gonna worry about what's gonna happen with that promotion for the next 10 minutes. I'm gonna kind of focus on myself. That is where that 23 moment thought process came from and how I see it as being applicable to us in everyday life.

Yael Schonbrun: I love it because it's such a brief amount of time and you might have the thought of, I have no choice of what to do with 23 seconds. There's nothing to do. That's productive here, but you're actually saying no, there's there's choice. Even here, you can ruminate about something that you're upset about or, or sort of, you know, spend it in not thoughtful ways or you can be very deliberate about. [00:41:00]

What the most productive use of this very short span of time is. And actually you can get something out of it. Should you choose to do so?

I love

Cory Yeager: again, though, what words see, even in conversations that we're having patterns will emerge, this word choice keeps coming up for us, right? It and I, and I can't really help, but hear and see things in patterns, but this thing of choice is already, and that's what the book is really taught to focusing on.

Do we recognize the choices that we have, these questions that we can be curious about with self? Do we recognize that we have choices? How we engage ourselves? I think it comes up over and over and I it's important, so I can't help, but point it out.

Yael Schonbrun: And so. One other thing that I think came up as you were talking about the 23 seconds, is that there's a choice about thinking in the present more mindful oriented way or reflecting on the past. And in that 23 seconds where you're preparing to make a shot. It may be more useful to bring your heart rate [00:42:00] down, to, to calm yourself and to focus in the present moment.

But there may also be times where it's more helpful to choose to reflect back. And so you actually have this piece in your book that I love, where you write that to move forward. A lot of times we need to reflect back and that this reflects the African based concept of Sankofa. And I wonder if you can explain this concept and give us an example, and I'll, I'll just sort of interject here that this is another case of the both, and right.

Sometimes it's useful to be present sometimes it's useful to reflect back.

Cory Yeager: Look at the pattern recognition that we,

Yael Schonbrun: Two

Cory Yeager: you put the therapists on the conversation. You can't

Yael Schonbrun: Uh

Cory Yeager: But this, but this idea, this concept, this thought of Sankofa, if you Google Sankofa, it really it's a picture of a bird that's flying forward, but looking backwards, right? So this is the idea of, I want to be in perpetual movement in life.

We must be rivers, not ponds. Ponds can be stagnant spaces of. [00:43:00] Right. That if you dump a poison into a certain point in a pond and you come back and measure for poison two weeks later, and that same point it'll be. But if you go to a river and do the exact same thing and you go back two weeks later, they won't be there.

Why? Because the river river is ever regenerating itself ever moving same thing. So San COFA is saying, as we ever move, evolve, evolving and moving all the time, we never wanna lose sight of what got is here. Looking back to make sure that we're clear on where we came from, but we never stopped moving forward.

This is extremely important. It allows. The opportunity to do both that I'll never forget where I came from. I'll look back, I'll remind myself continuously, but I, I don't have to stop moving to do that, that I can stay in perpetual movement moving forward, grinding forward continuously. Um, and I just believe that is part of the, of our [00:44:00] own individual E.

is that we, the way we'll continuously evolve forward is to remember where we came from, but don't stop moving forward. Right. And I think we can do that in many or all aspects of what we're up to in life.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it's it's yet another case of the both and right. Be present, but don't forget about the past.

Cory Yeager: Yes.

Yael Schonbrun: All right, I'm going to get a couple more questions in. I love this one. Do you love to win or hate to lose what a great question to be asking of athletes, but also how does this question relate to folks who aren't professional athletes?

Cory Yeager: Yes. I think that it's really, the question is about how do you see the world? Cause I don't think there's a right or wrong on that. I would have to, to be honest, I would, I would tell you that most people that I engage with and ask this question, say they hate to lose. Which can drive you. I don't, I want the avoidance of negativity, the avoidance of [00:45:00] loss.

So I'm gonna do everything in my power to avoid that negativity. I see it different. I, the exhilaration of the win is what I'm in. I want that. I want that positive, that beautiful feeling. The people around me win. Winning is occurring. Everyone gets happier. I love. There's the, I just, I absolutely love that.

So I think what it can do for us as individuals is give us a better frame on how we may see the world. It helps us as we move forward in life. Um, so just asking that question, forces people to ponder. So, and I usually get the, the, the statement back. Well, they're the. Right. Loving to win or hating to lose.

It's like the same. No, it's not the same. I think it's different. That turns into a conversation. And one of the things that I would say with all of these questions, I really am asking them. So you can be more curious, [00:46:00] not looking for a specifically right or wrong answer, but it, but being curious, putting yourself in the space of wonder.

I wanna wonder about myself. I wonder about other people. And I I'm curious about other people, but I never really have done that with myself. So not being forced into a space of saying I gotta get it right. Or, or I don't wanna get it wrong, but more so being that, that curiosity that can really push us into a deeper sense of understanding ourselves.

That's where that came from.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that one thing that it does bring to mind though, is, is, you know, I. It's a little easier to build happiness. If you're trying to move towards more positivity, as opposed to move away from negativity and you do have this question of what makes you deeply happy. And, and so I, I, I hear you that there's not a, a right or wrong answer, but it does seem that when it comes to happiness, you're better equipped to build more happiness if you're moving [00:47:00] towards positivity.

But, but I'm curious, what do you say to players or clients or friends when they tell you that they can't think of anything that makes them deeply happy?

Cory Yeager: Yeah, so we're good. If you don't find anything that makes you deeply happy, we're probably gonna extend that session and we're gonna dig into, so hold on. And because that could spark us into all kinds of, so you're telling me. There's nothing that you can come up with that makes you deeply happy. And I probably would turn it into, um, that dream question, uh, solution focused base of hold on.

So if I will, if I could wave a magic wand over you and whatever answer you come up with that makes you deeply happy would happen for the rest of your life. Unquestion. You would come up with an answer. So if they said they weren't, they couldn't come up with an answer. I would not, I wouldn't stop there.

I would dig, dig, dig, dig. But the other thing in this concept of happiness, I am a deep believer that like, for instance, the person I'm closest [00:48:00] with in this world is my wife, but I also know my wife cannot make me happy. It's not her job. And my job is not to make her happy. She must pursue her owns. I will pursue mine and then she can help facilitate that with me once she understands, oh, that's what Corey likes.

That's what makes him happy. I can help facilitate that, but I must be in pursuit of my own happiness and I can't put any, I can't put that on someone else that I'm not happy because my wife won't do this or she's not, that's not, that's not her task. My job is to pursue mine and hold on to what truly makes me deeply happy.

And then if I know that I could share that with others and they can then know me better about what, what makes me deeply happy. I think that if you ask a person, what makes them happy and take deeply away, they can give you a

surface answer. If you have to ponder and think through what, what makes you deeply and profoundly [00:49:00] happy brings you into a deeper layer of, of approach.

It gets you to the root system. Ofs. Right. And that's what I'm interested in is what I'm, I'm not interested in. What's up here on the top, on the top layer. I want to get to the root system. That's narrative therapy. I don't, I want that root system. And, and I think once people engage in that way, they become particularly, um, um, happy about that type of work.

I love that.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Cory Yeager: If you couldn't tell.

Yael Schonbrun: I can tell I it's. It's awesome. I would love to be on the court, listening to you, talk with your players and hearing how they respond to you. And I'm curious if, if you've seen Ted Lasso and if you have a feeling that what you build with your team is a little bit of that kind of energy that, that, that show really personifies.

Cory Yeager: so I have had at least 20 people talk to me about Ted Lasso. I haven't watched

Yael Schonbrun: Uh, you gotta watch

Cory Yeager: I that's what I, so I know I'm on a mission. This is, this is the last time

Yael Schonbrun: this is your [00:50:00] assignment.

Cory Yeager: I am going. I'm taking that assignment. Actually. I don't have anything the rest of this afternoon of this evening, when I go back in the house, I'm gonna tell my wife, get the apple TV pulled up.

I need Ted Lasso. We gotta fi I have to watch this. So

Yael Schonbrun: watch it. And then I wanna hear, I wanna hear from you sort of thoughts before we air this episode. All right. Final question. Why is laughter important in therapy?

Cory Yeager: Well, I think that laughter is really, we use that little phrase that LA laughter is a great medicine. I believe that deeply though, that if I can laugh at others and self right self deprecating moments, all those things that that laughter is healing. Because if I can find the ability to move in the world, that laughter is happen.

Then everything else, I'll figure out a way to be okay. We will figure out a way to be okay if we're, if we're laughing in this moment, [00:51:00] then we'll figure out how to, to make the next moment. Okay. So I think that if we can produce that space of genuine laughter, um, that and self and others, then everything else will be, it will.

And I think this is about the simplicity of life. Life is really not that complex doesn't mean it's easy. Doesn't mean it's easy, but it's really actually pretty simple. So that laughter and that love and that partnership and engagement, those, that hierarchy of needs is simple. So how do we pursue that every day?

And one, and I think that I'm saying in the. make sure that you get the hierarchy of needs for you to Matt before you, before I can pour every water for everyone else. I have to first fill my glass and anything that overflows from Matt, everybody else can have, but I have to fill mine first. Right? So that's where that laughter [00:52:00] piece comes from.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, this was amazing. I, I could talk to you forever. If you wanna spark a conversation with yourself, I highly recommend this book, but dot Corey, where can folks find more out about you and your work?

Cory Yeager: So you can really, if you Google me, if you go to Instagram or TikTok and look for Dr. Corey Yager, um, you'll find me everywhere. The book will be on Amazon at bookstores everywhere. um, so that's probably the easiest way to get ahold of me. Um, but I hope people enjoy the book. Um, and we'll see what happens after that.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Good luck with the launch. Thank you so much for, for taking the time to talk with me today.

Cory Yeager: Thank you. I appreciate it.

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