

Business For Superheroes Podcast Transcription: Episode One Hundred And Ninety Seven: Sleepwalking Through Life



This is a podcast about one woman's mission to help entrepreneurs and business owners write better business books. Each week, we tackle your writing excuses because they're our excuses too, and help you beat the blank page of doom so that you can write the book that will grow your life and your business. Now here's your host, Vicky Fraser...

Vicky: Hello and welcome to the 1,000 Authors show, I'm Vicky Fraser and this is my husband Joe.

Joe: Hello.

Vicky: Hello and today we are drinking tea because it has been foggy all day.

Joe: Foggy, it's cold, it's mid afternoon,

Vicky: Yeah

Joe: Bugghhh

Vicky: So, I am drinking 'cause Joe got me a beautiful advent calendar, tea-vent calendar for Christmas.

Joe: Mhmm.

Vicky: And it has tea in every one of the drawers four sachets of tea. I am drinking, today's tea is Chelsea Garden which is white tea with rose petals and it's delicious. And you are drinking Piccadilly.

Joe: Piccadilly blend tea.

Vicky: Which is kind of fruity and delicious so it's all from Whittard's. Hi Whittard's!

Joe: Hi Whittard's if you'd like to sponsor us, just send us much tea.

Vicky: Yes, that would be awesome actually. And if anyone would like to sponsor us for gin, then you can send us gin too. So yeah cheers.

Joe: Cheers.

Vicky: It's been a bit of a tough couple of days here Casa Fraiser, Casa Dingle because Kernick the tiny sheep has been really quite poorly.

Joe: He's an idiot, let's face it. He's not very bright.

Vicky: They, there was a raid on the chicken run which normally the sheeps can't get into but they managed it and he came in and found food gone.

- [Joe] Yeah, he learned a new trick and managed to get his way past the chicken run door, knocked over all the food for the chickens, ate it all which initially we just thought oh well you know, that's a bit of chicken food got ate. Never mind, eh? And then the next day he was really ill.

Vicky: Yeah, I just found him standing in the field and staggering and the staggering was what really frightened me. But the vet came out and she gave him antibiotics and painkillers and said and gave us some stuff to give him antacid drenches and the problem is chicken food isn't poisonous to sheep but it's not good for them,

Joe: It's wrong for them.

Vicky: It's wrong for them. and it's too rich and it's got too much of the wrong stuff and it makes them bloat, because sheeps have rumens which is like a section of their stomach where they break down some of the food and it's where the grass and stuff goes and they'll bring it back up to chew the curd that's, that's how that works. And if the wrong food gets into the rumen, the wrong bacteria grows and it just makes them really gassy. And it can be super dangerous the bloat can because it can mean that they can't breathe amongst all sorts of other things and it can damage their livers and all sorts of stuff. So, we were really freaked out and the vet said if he makes it through the night, he'll probably be fine.

Joe: He made it through the night.

Vicky: Did make it through the night, and we were considering bringing him into the house actually because it's cold last night but he took himself into the shelter and when I went out to see him, we went out to see him at 11, he was okay.

Joe: He was all right.

Vicky: And yeah, here's this morning, he's up and about nibbling hay. He's had some more antacid drenches.

Joe: Which he doesn't like.

Vicky: He does not like.

Joe: But yesterday he was like completely passive and allowing us to just put them into him.

Vicky: And today, he was like I've had enough of that.

Joe: And today's fuck this, I don't want it.

Vicky: So hopefully, by the time we do the next podcast we'll be like Kernick the tiny sheep is back to normal but it's still, we're still quite worried because sheep, they're funny. One of the things they do best is die. And they tend to, they're odd because they tend to just they hide their symptoms anyway until it's really late because they're prey animals so all prey animals, and chickens are the same, will hide the fact that they're ill until they're almost dead. Which is a problem because it means you can't treat them. And also sheep have this weird thing where they tend to sort of give up.

Joe: Yeah.

Vicky: They get ill and then they give up and it's odd. So yeah, so I think it's crossed, Kernick the tiny sheep will be fine but it's been a tough couple of days because of that, anyway we are today, talking about sleep walking

through life. But before that we're just going to do our normal what we're reading, Joe what are you reading?

Joe: I'm reading "Iolo's Revenge"--

Vicky: Iolo

Joe: Iolo?

Vicky: Yeah, It's a Welsh name.

Joe: okay spelled I O L O

Vicky: It's pronounce Yolo.

Joe: Iolo, "Iolo's Revenge" by Diana Ashworth.

Vicky: Which is what I was reading last week.

Joe: Which is what you were reading last week, it's lovely, it's very nice.

Vicky: Are you enjoying it?

Joe: Yeah, it's quite light and pleasant and--

Vicky: It's just lots of little stories, isn't it about life on the sheep farm.

Joe: A couple of people who found themselves accidentally sheep farming in a tumbledown cottage .

Vicky: They ended up with a flock of I think it was, I think they ended up with like fifty odd, didn't they? And they started off with ten or eleven. And we've just got the three, which is plenty. And I am reading "Kings of the Wyld" by Nicholas Sims or Seems, no Eams, not Sims. Nicholas Sims is somebody entirely different isn't he? Nicholas Eams, it is it's comedy fantasy and it's about bands that go touring but not music bands it's about bands of heroes and they kind of go touring and they get famous and they're like the rock stars of the fantasy world and it's very funny. It's not like ha ha ha

comedy all the way through it's just like a tongue and cheek slightly fun poking at the fantasy genre and it's very good. I'm really enjoying it. I'm already looking forward to book two and I'm only a third of the way through book one.

Joe: Cool.

Vicky: So that's really cool. Um, the non-fiction that I'm reading at the moment, I finally finished Atomic Habits which was a magnificent book, like life changing book. I have been, I've been up at half past six everyday for the last month, haven't I?

Joe: More or less.

Vicky: And it's been, it's just a case of tiny changes to habits and things so that's been really cool but I am reading now, or I'm literally about to start reading this book which is The Art of Asking by Amanda fucking Palmer and Amanda Palmer is a rockstar and a writer and she's married to Neal Gaiman who is one of my writer heroes and this book is all about how to-- Well, it's kind of a memoir I guess but it's all about how she learned to ask for help really. Because she spent quite a long time performing as a living statue in a wedding dress and she's done all sorts of interesting performance art and she's in the Dresden Dolls which are a really good band. She's just a very interesting person and I really like her and also if you want to see something hilarious Google Amanda Palmer and the daily mail or just Google Amanda fucking Palmer. Because the Daily Mail hates women and they wrote a piece attacking her and she did a performance art piece in response to it and it's hilarious and great and thoughtful and it's just, it's just wonderful. It's everything that I love about attacking the Daily Mail because it's an evil rag, the Daily Mail. It is, it's poison. So yeah, so if you're going to read any newspapers. We used to have a thing in the press office that I used to work in, in the charity that I used to work in and we, 'cause we had to read the papers and kind of find anything that was relevant to what we're what the charity did. And we had to institute a rule that you weren't allowed 'cause people would have like a newspaper each or a couple of newspapers each, you weren't allowed to read both the Daily Mail and the Daily Express on the same day because it was a health hazard .

Joe: Too much.

Vicky: Too much poison, anyway so that's what we're reading at the moment. Speaking of the Daily Mail and thinking, that is what this episode is all about.

Joe: Right.

Vicky: It's all about how to think and how to think critically because well the problem is we all fall into bad thinking habits because thinking's hard.

Joe: It's expensive isn't it?

Vicky: It is expensive.

Joe: It takes time, it takes energy. You might discover things you don't enjoy very much.

Vicky: Yeah and well first of all. So we have two systems in our brain and if you know anything about psychology and how the brain works then this is, you'll probably know this, if not it's super interesting. Psychologists described it as like, yeah psychologists? Yeah that's the word I want, not psychiatrists that's the pathology of the brain, isn't it?

Joe: Yeah.

Vicky: Psychologists described it as and neuroscientists as well, system one and system two. And system one is the automatic part of your brain that takes care of driving and brushing your teeth and--

Joe: It's the lizard bit.

Vicky: It's the lizard bit, it's the habit. It's where everything's done automatically and you know it's there because it saves our lives.

Joe: Sends out like heartbeats and breathing and all that kind of stuff or we--

Vicky: Sort of but, no not-- Yes, yes and no, so that's part of it but I'm talking about the unconscious stuff that you learn to do. So you know when you get in a car and you've been driving for a while.

Joe: And you just drive.

Vicky: And you just drive. You don't think about, oh I have to like put my foot on the accelerator, on the clutch and I have to change gear and I have to let it off gently. You don't think about that you just do it. It's automatic which also can be a problem but that's what system one does and so you don't have to think about every action when you brush your teeth and you don't have think oh, I need to open the door I need to grasp the door handle and--

Joe: Turn it clockwise.

Vicky: Yeah and that also goes for habits like smoking and drinking and sitting and watching Netflix all evening. They are habits that your body gets into and system one takes care of that for you so it's short cuts and it's energy savings.

Joe: Stuff you've learned to do that you don't need to think about anymore.

Vicky: Yeah and it's really, really important. It's how animals are built really. Animals are basically system one machines. And so are we to a large extent but then we've also got system two and system two is our problem solving

Joe: Right.

Vicky: Stuff. So when you're learning something when you're learning to drive that's system two that's working now because you're having to figure out all of this stuff and when you are reading a book if you're not just kind of reading brainless pulp if you're reading something you want to learn from that's system two. If you're learning a language, if you're learning to play a musical instrument that's all system two as well. So all of the stuff that's hard, and it is really, really hard work as well and the reason we've got system one is because your brain uses more calories than any other part of the body.

Joe: Right.

Vicky: Unless you're kind of at your--

Joe: You're actually climbing a tree at that point.

Vicky: You're actually climbing a tree, yeah. But thinking is really, really hard work so have you ever kind of spent a couple of hours working on a really tricky problem and then been like tired and hungry afterwards? That was because all of the calories, your brain has guzzled all of the calories that were in your body, basically and the problem with that is that if something then pops out of the bushes at you with big like pointy teeth you're not going to have the energy left to run away from it.

Joe: Right.

Vicky: Or to you know stab it or to figure out how to get away from it. So that's why we tend to always default to system one 'cause it's an energy saving device.

Joe: Okay.

Vicky: Which is cool but the problem with that is that I actually think it's really interesting that we've evolved to have system two at all 'cause--

Joe: Well, yeah, we've got unreasonably large brains haven't we?

Vicky: Mmmh Which is a problem for another reason as well because childbirth is incredibly dangerous for human females, incredibly dangerous and that's why.

Joe: One of the reasons why we're born so early, isn't it?

Vicky: Yeah, because otherwise our giant melons would you know rip women to bits. But again it's like they've, I say it, there's nothing conscious driving it but it's interesting I think that we have evolved to have these giant brains because they're not efficient in terms of energy and all the rest of it and they're not efficient in terms of being born either and so the pay off of problem solving must have been worth it, I guess in evolutionary terms.

Joe: Yeah, I guess you've got, you've got a couple different routes haven't you? You either go for, you either evolve in a sharp and pointy direction or you evolve in a strong direction or you evolve in a clever direction or a-- I don't know there's like camoflaug and other systems of survival I suppose.

Vicky: Yeah, but they don't take up, they're kind of passive though. They don't take energy to--

Joe: Well, yeah they do it takes more energy to generate stripey feathers than plain ones. And it must take more energy to--

Vicky: Maybe.

Joe: You know to be strong enough to not get eaten by things

Vicky: Yeah, maybe.

Joe: or grow claws to defend yourself with and all that kind of stuff. So I guess evolution is just casting around all avenues of advancement and we happen to be the ones that got the brain.

Vicky: Yeah, I just find it really interesting that that's what helped us survive and I guess that just when it was at that tipping point between you know is it more-- is it better evolutionary speaking to have a bigger brain or to have the system one stuff that, you know what I mean? I wonder what it was that that one thing that--

Joe: Community stuff I reckon. I reckon it's social stuff. Social stuff developed.

Vicky: Maybe. It's really interesting, anyway. We could go down a massive worm hole here so let's stop there. You've been down enough worm holes today but you can also get into bad thinking habits and the reason again is energy conservation, system one, system two so and for me bad thinking habits are thinking things like I know what I think, I know what I like and this is the way I am.

Joe: I've made this decision before and I'm not making it again.

Vicky: Yeah, I vote this way I vote for these people. This is particularly interesting at the moment, it's like this is who I vote for, this is what I think about politics about religion, about that annoying man that lives down the road. That's what I think. And the other thing that is kind of bad habits I think is the instant opinions that we get fed to as by social media, by the new media, by the BBC, by all of those kind of things. It's like oh, here is what you should think.

Joe: It's a lot easier and more energy efficient to just accept stuff. If somebody you trust says this is, you know, don't eat those red berries then you just believe them don't you. It's simpler.

Vicky: And there are situations where that's a good thing to do. Because if somebody says--

Joe: Don't eat those red berries.

Vicky: Don't touch that, it's really hot. You know but with stuff that's not immediately life and death that's really bad. It's a bad habit to get into and it's, and you know I'm as guilty of falling into it as the next person because we're all, that's what we do--

Joe: It's almost impossible not to fall into that habit because we don't all drive to work thinking turn this thing to go left a bit and wiggle that stick and foot clutch and all that business, do we?

Vicky: No, and it's difficult so in this episode of the podcast I wanted to go through eight ways that you can improve your critical thinking skills and we'll come to that in a minute.

Joe: Okay.

Vicky: Because it is something that you have to work on and practice and it's not something that we're really taught in school or I wasn't really taught in school how to think, were you? Like overtly?

Joe: Not directly, but I do think a lot of what we were taught required it.

Vicky: Yeah, I was actually thinking about this earlier when I was planning the podcast because--

Joe: You planned this?

Vicky: Yeah, mhmm.

Joe: Mmmh, okay.

Vicky: And I was thinking really kind-- I was using my system two Joe. I was thinking about really carefully, 'cause I don't, I'm not knocking, I do think our education system needs a massive overhaul because I think it was created in Victorian times to produce automatons for factories and I think it, do think it needs a big overhaul. Throw the hate at me teachers I am not bashing teachers at all, it's the system that I've got a problem with. I think teachers are lively, wonderful people but yeah I was trying to think about this. Yeah, a lot of what we do at school is geared towards passing exams and not thinking so it's like how many facts can you remember for this history exam or for this English exam or for a French exam and I never have liked exams. I don't think they're the best way to gauge people's ability. And we're taught to kind of memorize stuff and regurgitate facts and even when it comes to science. Because I was genuinely thinking where even when it came to history and English, I was never really encouraged that much to form my own opinion.

Joe: Really?

Vicky: I don't think so, I'm trying to, I'm not being unfair here.

Joe: I remember writing essays on imagine this and empathize with that. And write this from the other viewpoint and, you know--

Vicky: I never got essays on write this from the other viewpoint that would have been cool.

Joe: You know what's your opinion on this and now next week it will be directly the opposite. Well, yeah I remember things like that and I remember

applying techniques, you know learning techniques in maths and then being asked sort of different questions and having to kind of put the things you knew how to do together to get from one place to another.

Vicky: Oh yeah, that kind of problem solving in maths and science, I do remember and I think that that can teach you stuff but I'm just, I was thinking about what I learned in English and I remember learning or I remember reading books and then we would think about what was the author trying to say but I don't ever remember a lesson in which was like what have you taken away from this? It was always what do you think the author's message, deeper message was here. And quite often I think the author's deeper message was I'm just going to write this shit.

Joe: I'm going to write stories.

Vicky: Not always obviously but so yeah, I might be wrong and I might be misremembering, I did not enjoy school so I may be doing I may not be remembering accurately but I also think that when you leave that environment you stop thinking because you don't, you almost don't have to anymore.

Joe: Yeah, I think it depends

Vicky: It depends on what you do.

Joe: What you do for a job, yeah.

Vicky: I mean you do have to think.

Joe: If I'm an engineer, I spend a lot of times scratching my head thinking about things.

Vicky: Yeah, but I don't think everybody does so--

Joe: No, no probably not.

Vicky: And I don't think people practice this stuff either and also the other thing that people do and this is really destructive to thinking is multi-tasking

which by the way nobody can do. It's not possible. We can't run two pieces of software in our heads at the same time like a computer can. We can't do it. It is called task switching so whenever somebody says they're really good at multitasking I laugh at them because I'm like you can't, you're not.

Joe: They're multiplexing not multitasking.

Vicky: Maybe, yeah two screens. Multiplexes, I'm thinking of cinemas, I don't know.

Joe: Not that kind of multiplex but close enough.

Vicky: Okay, so yeah what people are doing, slight aside, what you're doing when you think you're multitasking is task switching really quickly and you're not doing either of those things very well because it takes quite a lot of energy to task switch and it takes a lot of concentration. And they reckon it takes 20 minutes to get back into a task again after you get interrupted, so bear that in mind next time you're answering the phone.

Joe: There's a thing in software writing and software design, whereby if so you know, in a piece of software quite often you've got this variable and that variable and you're incrementing this while you do some maps on that and you're drawing some stuff on the screen and what not if there are more than five variables that you are tracking in your piece of software, then your piece of software is too big and you need to cut it in half and break it into smaller modules because the person at the keyboard can't manage more than five. Typically, beyond five is where things start getting complicated and wrong. So if you have more than five variables your design is wrong.

Vicky: Mmh, I like that. See, it's always keep it as simple as possible as a good rule for life I think. You don't want to over complicate things. so whenever you hear somebody really making something very complicated either be suspicious that they are trying to pull the wool over your eyes about something or be suspicious that they actually don't know what they're talking about because if they can't simplify it then they don't know what they're talking about sufficiently to be able to explain it to you. That's just a little aside as well. So I would like to define thinking.

Joe: Thinking.

Vicky: Yeah, because as a counterpoint to the multitasking myth. Thinking means concentrating on one thing for long enough to develop an idea about it.

Joe: Right.

Vicky: Which is kind of the opposite to what a lot of us do all the time when we're busy.

Joe: Right.

Vicky: And so it's not learning other people's ideas and it's not memorizing a load of stuff, even though that can be very useful. But, what we want to do is think for ourselves otherwise we are just really sleepwalking through life and that's the title of this podcast. So you're just drifting through life picking up other people's opinions and thoughts and never really thinking about things for yourself.

Joe: Sure.

Vicky: So I want to, I want to be good at critical thinking basically and I don't think I am good enough at it because it's difficult . Thinking is hard but it's super, super important. So just before we go on to my eight ways to improve your thinking I wanted to talk a little bit about why it's so important and I've got a quote from a woman called Linda Elder who is the president of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and would you like to read the quote Joe?

Joe: "Many unexamined lives together "result in an uncritical, unjust, dangerous world."

Vicky: Yeah.

Joe: Many unexamined lives together result in uncritical, unjust, dangerous world.

Vicky: Which means people just drifting through life and going with the status quo and never really questioning anything because we are taught not to question things that even despite what you might be taught in school society as a whole is constructed for us to not question things, not question authority, not question what you're told to do, not question the status quo.

Joe: Operate inside this box please and go to work and pay your taxes.

Vicky: Yeah, and if you draw that right to its furthest conclusion you end up with stuff like the Holocaust because that was a whole bunch of people not really questioning what's going on or thinking what's going on and just going along with the crowd. There are all sorts of other reasons that that happened as well but I think that is a key one and Lisa Elder's written some really interesting stuff about that sort of thing and why the world can become a dangerous place when we stop thinking about it.

Joe: Linda Elder.

Vicky: Linda Elder, yes. And Bertrand Russell, who I'm a big fan of except for I have a problem with his book but I'll come to that. Bertrand Russell also said, "The great majority "of men and women in ordinary times "pass through life without ever contemplating "or criticizing as a whole either their own conditions "or those of the world at large." And I would say that's really true and possibly at no other time truer than right now, which is, and it's just important. I would go even further than that and say it leads to, that kind of thing leads to people just accepting stuff.

Joe: Yep, that's the way it is.

Vicky: It's like that's the way it is and then blaming their crap on other people which makes me so cross and I think that is a big part of the reason why this country is in such a lot of the shit that it's in at the moment and a load of people who are like, "Oh, I'm not very happy. "My life's not very good. "Who can I blame, I can blame those people "who look a bit different from me "or sound a bit different from me or" And I think that's what it leads to ultimately and so, yay for critical thinking . It leads to people not wanting to make things better. It leads to people wanting other people to make it better for them and that's just not going to happen. If you rely on other people's

agendas, they're not even thinking about you, so. So, critical thinking, why does it matter? Really important because it lets you grow and develop as a person and I think that's a really good thing and it's fun. It helps you make hard decisions and make better decisions as well. It's really difficult to make decisions if you're not very good at thinking because you've got to weigh out the pros and cons you've got to think about, you know it's like playing chess. You've got to think four moves down. And that's hard work. I'm crap at chess.

Joe: Yeah and in today's calorie rich world, it's not necessary to be energy efficient anymore really inside your own head. We're not living from one

Vicky: Berry to the next.

Joe: One berry to the next, we've got plenty.

Vicky: One red berry, one red berry to the next. Another reason and this is really important. Another reason why it's really important to be good at critical thinking is that it makes it less likely that people will manipulate you.

Joe: Mhmm, for sure.

Vicky: And I'm going to use the example of Anti-vaxxers right now and every single political party in the UK and abroad right now and all of them, I don't care if they're on the left or the right all of them have found it really easy to manipulate everybody because the media has fed and fed and fed. Yeah, so the ability to think critically just means that you are less likely to have the wool pulled over your eyes by everybody.

Joe: Whoever it is that has an agenda to pull the wool over your eyes.

Vicky: And if you're you don't want to think about it in terms of politics, think about it in terms of marketing, you know the shady people who are offering you the get rich quick schemes. Think about why they're offering you those and whether it's actually likely that it's going to work.

Joe: They just want your hundred bucks.

Vicky: They just want your hundred bucks. And it makes you as well, a better choice for your customers and prospects if you can think through how to solve their problems for them.

Joe: For sure.

Vicky: This is why you guys are so good at what you do, I think.

Joe: Yeah.

Vicky: Yeah, okay so let's get to, how to actually improve your thinking because I was thinking about this the other day. I was like, oh, I want to get better at thinking how do you do it? And so I've been thinking about it.

Joe: Wait, before you even start having things to do you're eight things, I think the step, you know the prelude to these steps is at least being aware that you are a person who is quite often operating on autopilot.

Vicky: That is actually one of my steps.

Joe: Is that one of your steps?

Vicky: Yes it is.

Joe: Why is it not, why is it not the first step?

Vicky: Well it, it's kind of that step. It's think about what you're thinking. Okay, well that can be the first step then. so the first step then is think about what you're thinking and this is something that I've started doing, I've started doing regularly a couple of years ago. Because I think because of the cognitive behavioral therapy I had for my depression and anxiety because I wanted to notice what I was thinking. Because that's habits, it's system one, you get into negative or automatic thoughts and they destroy you from the inside out so think about what you're thinking. 'Cause we think so fast we barely notice it. You know, a thought arrives in your head so quickly and embeds itself there and digs a hole and it's just there then. So every time you have a thought just pause for a second and think about it. Am I right? Is this thought correct? And for me it's my inner dickhead quite often. Oh you're

really shit at this. Well, am I actually? Let's have a look at the evidence. Let's examine the evidence. So yeah, think about it, what are your cognitive biases. We all have cognitive biases, all of us. One of 'em might be the sunken cost fallacy. I need to keep doing this because I've put so much time and effort into it. No you don't, it doesn't matter what you've done in the past. It's like how much time you gonna waste in the future. That kind of thing. Am I being prejudiced? What prejudices do you have 'cause we've all got them. You know if you're thinking something, oh, that person, I don't like that person, it's like why? So every time a thought pops into my head that I think is unworthy of me like ughh.

Joe: Where'd that come from?

Vicky: Like the other day I was like ughh I don't like Asda, because I don't like the type of people that go to Asda. I'm like that's an awful thing to say. And so and no I'm admitting that it's an awful thing to say so I sat there and had to think about it. I was like no, that's really bad and so, you know every time that kind of thought pops into your head you need to examine it and that's an example of one of my prejudices. I don't want, I don't like it, I don't like that side of my biases and my prejudices and we've all got them. What's one of yours

Joe: You must have been into a crappy Asda at some point.

Vicky: I was, yeah. The reason I don't like Primark, I got elbowed in the face at Primark once. Obviously not all of the people who go to Primark are going to elbow me in the face but that's my point, you make that connection.

Joe: Connection, and you stick with it 'cause it's easy.

Vicky: Yeah.

Joe: So now you don't go to Primark.

Vicky: No, I don't and I have other reasons for not going to Primark that's ethical shopping and all the rest of it but that wasn't my-- I could say, oh well that's my reason but the reason is I got elbowed in the face once at Primark and therefore that's the connection I made. And so that's what I'm talking

about kind of thinking critically, it's like why don't I like Primark? I can tell myself it's for a lofty ethical shopping reason but actually, it's because of the assumptions I make about who shops there which is not fair and it's bullshit and it makes me a dick and I'm quite happy to admit that but at least I know I'm a dick and I'm working on it. 'Cause like yeah, I had a bad experience at Asda once. I don't shop in Asda anymore. That kind of bias makes me a dick but at least I know it and I'm working on it, so that's my, do you know what I mean?

Joe: You need go shopping at Asda.

Vicky: I think that you ought to share one of your cognitive biases that makes you a dick.

Joe: Oh geez, I don't know really, um--

Vicky: You've got lots, don't even pretend you don't.

Joe: Do I, do I?

Vicky: You must do 'cause everybody does.

Joe: Well, yeah I probably do. Don't know what any of them are though. You can't spring that kind of question on me without prep.

Vicky: Okay, so I'm working--

Joe: Oh, um, gray sweatpants. Gray baggy sweatpants.

Vicky: What about them?

Joe: You're stupid.

Vicky: I'm wearing yellow baggie sweatpants, is that the same thing?

Joe: Not the same thing, gray baggie sweatpants particularly on men. Don't know why.

Vicky: But you know that's nonsense though?

Joe: Yeah.

Vicky: The logical part of your brain when you think about it.

Joe: Yeah, yeah.

Vicky: But the knee jerk reaction is ugh, don't like 'em.

Joe: Yep.

Vicky: Yeah, so listeners, what are your cognitive biases that you know when you think about it, that you know makes you a bit of a dick and --

Joe: Spit them out, email us.

Vicky: Yeah, email us, I'd like to know. And you can also email me some hate if you shop at Asda because frankly I deserve it.

Joe: Or wear gray baggie sweatpants and have a PhD in you know--

Vicky: Yeah, because it's really and that's the point like it's ridiculous. And this is why I want-- And that actually, that thought about Asda that made me think I need to get better at this because I don't want to be the kind of person that makes those assumptions because it's really dickish. So, that's what we're talking about here. Think about what you're thinking. I am thinking about what I am thinking and sometimes I don't like my brain very much Um, next way to improve your thinking, question your basic assumptions. So when you think, "I know what I like." Change that into "What do I like?" "Maybe I can try this." "I know what I think," becomes "Might I be wrong?" "Let's find out." "I can't do this," becomes "Well, what if I try this way?" So question your basic assumptions about the world 'cause I find quite often that my basic assumptions are either wrong, flat out wrong or a bit skewed. So that's quite a cool way to do things, super simple. Way number three to improve your thinking ask basic questions. We're getting back to the simplify everything thing. So rather than complicate it because humans are really good at over-complicating stuff, start with what do I know. What do I know about

this thing? How do I know it? Where did I get my information from? What am I trying to prove or find out? Where am I trying to get to? Am I missing anything? Like really break it down, because I find that if you've got a problem that's difficult to solve, go right back to basics. What actually is it that I'm trying to do? What do I already know? And that can be quite a cool thing to do. Reverse stuff, number four. Just as a thought experiment really. What came first chicken or egg. Reverse it, if you think that the chicken came first then say oh what if an egg just popped into the world fully formed obviously that's probably not true but it gets you thinking about things in a different way.

Joe: I think as well, say you are quite often you're trying to justify a decision, I find. So it's like well I want a new tele therefore how do I justify it.

Vicky: 'Cause that's how our brains work.

Joe: 'Cause that's how our brains work, you make an emotional decision and then you start justifying it with facts.

Vicky: Yeah.

Joe: And then you go, well this is got more features and I'll be able to do this without plugging in the thing-a-ma-jig and they'll be able to oooh--

Vicky: Yeah, I don't like Primark because its ethical shopping. It's like no, because you got elbowed in the face. You don't like it.

Joe: So quite often there's like a decision you've made before you start trying to dig out the facts as to why that actually is, so reverse the decision. I do not want to buy a tele because. I am going to go shopping in Primark because.

Vicky: Yeah, I'm not I like my clothes to last for more than two washes and that is a good reason for not shopping at Primark too. Cool so yeah, and related to that related to reversing the cause and effect thing is take an opposing point of view. So instead of assuming that somebody who disagrees with you is wrong, or stupid as has happened a lot in the UK recently.

Joe: By the way, in case anybody's not getting all these references 'cause your listening to this podcast in like 2025, I for one welcome our robot overlords but we've just gone through the Brexit whole thing again. We've just had an election and the country's really divided.

Vicky: Yeah, and that's all we shall say.

Joe: That's all we need to say on that.

Vicky: But it's been, a lot of ugliness has come out of it. I've seen friendships break up. I've seen people say the most horrible things to each other. A little bit of fucking empathy wouldn't have gone amiss on all sides and so yeah, this is really cool put yourself in somebody else's point of view. Really try and understand where they're coming from, they might still be wrong after you've done that. But at least you will understand a little bit more about where they've coming from. And you know maybe they're not 100% wrong. Maybe they've got a point.

Joe: There's some aspects of what they're saying that make sense.

Vicky: Yeah, and you might still believe what you do but you'll also have a better idea of why you believe what you do if you look at your beliefs from the opposite side and I think it's really important to do that. Rather than just be like this is what I believe and that's the end of it. I think it's really important to look at it from a completely opposite point of view and it's good for you. Join the debating team. Quite often you'll be made to take the point of view that you don't agree with.

Joe: Absolutely. And taking those opposing views and trying to justify them and understand them goes a long way towards combating populism where everything gets broken down into one simple concept. Where the Tories are nasty bastards or Labour are --

Vicky: Socialists .

Joe: Total socialists, you know practically communists and you're just like ugh, come on really?

Vicky: And, you know we're all guilty of it. I have been totally guilty of it as well. It's just like I can't vote for them because they're assholes and I can't vote for them because they're assholes and it's like well no things are not that simple actually. But that is, and again that is a symptom of the media having a lot of power over what we think because they present things as very black and white because that's how they sell papers.

Joe: Yeah.

Vicky: So have a look at things a bit deeper and that leads me to number

Joe: Whatever number's next.

Vicky: Look at the evidence that you are being presented with. Where does it come from? If it comes from the Daily Mail you can almost guarantee that it's going to be bullshit. No, I'm serious they--

Joe: Well, is this one of your biases.

Vicky: No, this is from my years of working in a press office and actually examining where their sources come from and discovering that most of the time they're not even researched. And read beyond the headlines. Well this is a really, this is one of my real bug bears is on, especially with social media you'll get people like sharing a story and you know they've only read the headline because when you get into the story, the deeper story, you go and have an actual read of it it actually bears little resemblance to what they've said in the headline, it's like oh coffee is a cure for cancer. You go and read the story and it will be like oh in this one study, they found it may have had a slight effect on this cancer in a very specific rat. So don't just read the headline, go read the story. And also have a look where the evidence has come from. There used to be evidence to suggest that smoking was good for you. Guess where that evidence came from? Guess where the research came from? It was funded by--

Joe: Tobacco companies.

Vicky: It was funded by tobacco companies, yeah. The antivaxxers are great at providing evidence that comes from companies that have a vested interest

in peddling really harmful shit. If antivaxxer evidence has come from the Whole Foods, the green news or bloody David Avocado Wolfe, oh that man, anyway just look at where the evidence comes from, if it's been funded by a company with a vested interest in something, go find some other evidence. Have a look at what else is out there. Climate change deniers are really good at this. They pick the evidence from the 0.01 percent of scientific studies that say oh, it's a bit ambiguous and ignore the 99.99% of studies that say we're fucked.

Joe: Go and watch that flat earth documentary on Netflix, it's hilarious. They're desperately trying to prove that the Earth is flat and every test that they design and do proves that the Earth is not flat and every time there's a reason that they just start inventing reasons as to why that might be the case and don't change any of their beliefs.

Vicky: Yeah, there's a really good book called "The Heretics" by Will Storr. Read that because that's a really good explanation of why people believe the things they do and how tied to identity it is and this is another reason by the way why critical thinking is really good for you because a lot of, if you're trying to change somebody's mind what you've got to understand is that if they believe something, it's really, really closely tied to who they are as a person and that's why it's so difficult to change people's minds. And that's why I think it's really important to really think about your beliefs and what they are and all the rest of it. And so when I think about myself as a writer, I'm really careful that that's not all I am that my identity is not solely tied up in being a writer because on the one day that I don't write suddenly what does that do to my sense of self?

Joe: Oh yeah, your like I don't really each day.

Vicky: Exactly and it's like, yes I want to get into good writing habits but that's partly why I am also an aerialist. You know what I mean? I think it's really important to think about your thoughts as almost separate from who you are because it allows you to change your mind about things which is super important. Which brings me to think for yourself, which sounds obvious, but I think quite often we think that is what we're doing but I know that on many occasions recently, especially recently I've realized that actually my opinions have been fed to me by social media by listening to the news.

It's why I've stopped listening-- Every time the news has come on in the last couple of weeks I've turned the damn stuff off because I'm just sick of having my brain screwed with. That's why I've taken Facebook off my phone because I don't want that feeding into me and giving me my opinions so, yeah. And the final thing, thing number eight is write. This is a writing podcast after all. But I would say write because writing is thinking. To write we have to think more deeply. If you're writing something down, do you find that?

Joe: Yes, absolutely. We write a lot of documents to do with design and what the customer thinks they want and all that kind of stuff and the customer will say, well I want a thing that does this and we'll go well let's write that down and go into detail about how that works and what it's going to do and duh duh duh. And 20 minutes into the conversation we're discovering that what the customer thinks he wants is probably not what the customer wants and you end up with a much more sophisticated rounded thing that solves the problem that the customer had.

Vicky: So yeah, I would like you and me and you to just get better at thinking really. You might find that when you do start thinking about stuff like this and questioning things you might find that people start falling out with you a little bit because they won't like it. And it's a little bit, was I talking to somebody the other day-- Oh yeah, I got an email from somebody the other day who wants to write a book. He started and then kind of put it off because he had mentioned it to somebody and they'd said oh, everything's already been written why are you bothering? You might kinda think that oh it's just a throwaway comment but it's not. It's like the same as the person who when you say you're trying to lose weight, they're like oh just have a cake. Or when you say you've stopped drinking, oh have one it won't hurt. It's not supportive. It's insidious, it's nasty, it's awful. If you're the type of person who does that, stop it. It's holding a mirror up to somebody, them not liking what they see and then trying to stop you from becoming the type of person that they don't feel that they can become. So that's another reason to think for yourself but you might also find that when you start questioning this stuff, people object to it for that reason because they can see you thinking about it and it's something that maybe they'd like to do but it's too much trouble.

Joe: It's a bit difficult. It's easier not to.

Vicky: Yeah, if you can also get to the point where you're questioning people respectfully and having debates instead of just degenerating into internet arguing that is fantastic because then you can disagree with people and not fall out with them, which is a really nice place to be.

Joe: It's a good skill.

Vicky: It's difficult, it's really hard. Really hard, especially when your identity is tied up in what you believe. Right well what's the take away this week?

Joe: Well, Bertrand Russell, "History of Western Philosophy" read that. That will give you some good pointers on how to think.

Vicky: Yeah, I mentioned right at the beginning that I had a bit of a problem with the book and I do. It has no women in it. It has no female philosophers in it. So there are other books that you can read as well that are really, really good but I think, I still think Bertrand Russell's book is a really good start because it's easy to read compared to a lot of books on the subject. It's a massive thick thing, don't let that put you off.

Joe: Do you read the whole thing start to back or do you kind of pick around in it?

Vicky: I've picked around in it. It's been a long time since I've read it and I'm actually gonna get it out again and have a read over the next few weeks.

Joe: All right the Noodle alarm says it's time to finish this podcast.

Vicky: Yes, he's right. Next week we're going to be talking about rotting badger growth versus grow your life. Joe's like what are you all about? So, we'll be talking about that next week and I'm planning, still planning my big book launch for January. There's going to be lots of cool swag and I'm still planning my writing retreat in Fuerteventura in late February.

Joe: Nice!

Vicky: Yeah, so that's going to be cool. I've just finished a massive deadline for a client.

Joe: Woohoo!

Vicky: And so I can breathe yes, Noodle that's how I've been feeling and if you've listened to every episode email me with your postal address and I will send you a silly gift and yeah, what else?

Joe: If you like this podcast then go to iTunes, subscribe, write us a review five stars, recommend us to your friends, send a link, all that stuff.

Vicky: And if you've got any questions at all

Joe: Any questions at all, if you fire them to Vicky@vickyfraser.com

Vicky: Yeah, any questions about writing a book, any questions about publishing a book, self-publishing a book, send them over to me and we will answer them on the podcast.

Joe: Sweet!

Vicky: That'll be really cool. Thanks for listening Noodle says goodbye and we'll be back same time next week. Bye!

Joe: Bye!

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