



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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## Episode #42: The Problem with Productivity

*Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.*

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feeling bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan, and this is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out.
- Martha Beck: Like us.
- Rowan Mangan: Like us. Exactly.
- Martha Beck: For example.
- Rowan Mangan: This is us basically just trying to figure things out to each other.
- Martha Beck: Trying. Never actually.
- Rowan Mangan: And you're just invited.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. You're invited to come with us to try to figure things out. So, Rowie, what are you trying to figure out right now? Seriously, in your real life?
- Rowan Mangan: Seriously, in my real life. Well, as you know, Martie, there's always something with me. It's not one thing.
- Martha Beck: Always something. If it's not one thing, it's another.
- Rowan Mangan: Most recently what comes to mind is that I spent some time trying to figure out how to release cockroaches back into the wild when one lives high in the air in an apartment on the 24th floor, and to do this without grievous personal injury.
- Martha Beck: You do realize they can fly, right?



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Rowan Mangan: They can fly?

Martha Beck: Hell, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Oh.

Martha Beck: They'll fly right at you.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, Jesus. I didn't know.

Martha Beck: Yeah, it's not good. It's not good.

Rowan Mangan: I'm basically trying to learn how to be a New Yorker.

Martha Beck: Fair enough. Sorry. I'm sorry, the facts are just brimming. Do you know that if an elephant drops up from a height of four feet, it will kill it because it's so heavy? But a mouse dropped from the top of the World Trade Center, the new one, would not be harmed because it's so light that as it establishes maximum wind speed, they kind of flatten out like little parachute divers, and they hit the ground and they're so light, it's just like... and they just run away. Your cockroaches, you couldn't throw them far enough down to kill them.

Rowan Mangan: Well, that's fine. I didn't want him to die.

Martha Beck: I did.

Rowan Mangan: If I'd wanted him to die.. yeah, well, I think this is what eventually I'm going to have to make peace with. We live in an apartment some of the time in New York, and I am learning about it. There are cockroaches. That's a thing. It's not like you have to be a really, really filthy dirty person before the cockroaches show up.

Martha Beck: I mean, we are, but we don't have to. It's not a requirement.

Rowan Mangan: But there's this moment that I feel like I've read about or seen in movies or something. I think I've just read about it. But you've cleaned up the kitchen and then you go back in for something and turn on the light and there's this exodus.

Martha Beck: Yep.

Rowan Mangan: Okay. That's really freaky.

Martha Beck: You're from Australia, dude. They have spiders the size of your head that scream at you in the night.



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Rowan Mangan: Everything. I think it's new ways that things move, right? In Bangkok, when I lived in Thailand, it was about the... what do you call those little lizards?

Martha Beck: Monkeys. No.

Rowan Mangan: What are those little lizards called? Salamander.

Martha Beck: Well, no, they're not lizards. They're amphibians. They are geckos.

Rowan Mangan: Geckos, yeah. The little geckos and the way that they would move would alarm me, even though they're like-

Martha Beck: Oh, they're adorable.

Rowan Mangan: ... objectively adorable.

Martha Beck: They sell insurance. You haven't seen those, huh?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, no, I actually have. I wish I hadn't. But one morning I come in and there's a fairly large guy, cockroach guy. Might have been a girl. I don't know. I don't know how it identified, they identified.

Martha Beck: Non-binary, it's all fine.

Rowan Mangan: It was in the sink.

Martha Beck: Oh, God.

Rowan Mangan: And I think it was trapped in there. Well, I thought so not knowing it could freaking fly.

Martha Beck: No, it was not trapped in there. It was eating. It was eating little micro... this is why I'm fanatical about scouring everything.

Rowan Mangan: I scoured.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: I scoured.

Martha Beck: You did.



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- Rowan Mangan: Okay, so listen. I went in there, I saw this cockroach, I was like, "I don't feel that I'm at a place where I can violently kill this insect, even though he's kind of freaking me out." So, what happened is I thought, "I know. I'll bring my forest home self to the city." What we do in our forest home is that we get little creatures that find their way into our house-
- Martha Beck: Yeah, wolves and whatnot.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, just the little things that come in, and we get a jar and an envelope, the way you do, and the jar goes over and the envelope goes under, and then-
- Martha Beck: It's hard to get a jar big enough for a wolf, but we do.
- Rowan Mangan: We figure things out, amazon.com, look it up. We do that. I thought, "Oh, well, that's all right. This is just an urban jungle." Okay? So, I thought, "I'll just get him in a little paper towel, I'll take him over and I'll shake out the paper towel and he can whatever they do, just parachute with his little mouse body or something off into the world, and I don't have to kill him, but he doesn't have to be in my space anymore."
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: But I think I was quite on edge, Martie, as I was doing this.
- Martha Beck: Ya think?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I had him in the paper towel, and I'm going over to the window, and our apartment is fairly old and... what's the word I'm looking for?
- Martha Beck: A bit historic.
- Rowan Mangan: No, it's a little bit-
- Martha Beck: Cave like?
- Rowan Mangan: Things don't work beautifully. It's not like a fancy place. It's a place where things don't always work that well and you have to put a bit of elbow grease in. Long story short, I tried to open the window with one hand so that the cockroach could go out, and as I did it, I severely put my back out. I put it into a massive spasm that lasted nearly a week.
- Martha Beck: Was this the same moment when you actually broke the window?



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Rowan Mangan: No. No, that happened later.

Martha Beck: We have got to keep you away from the windows there.

Rowan Mangan: It wasn't me. It was the cockroach did it.

Martha Beck: Do you know those little eeffers can live for 10 days without their heads? They can run around breathing without their heads.

Rowan Mangan: I think we're losing all our listeners talking about this.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Okay. Okay. So, what happened? Did he release into the wild?

Rowan Mangan: Is Siri talking to you right now? Is she trying to save you?

Martha Beck: "Here's some information," and sent me something called What Happened is a 2017 memoir of Hillary Clinton by Hillary Clinton. So, yeah. Siri is on do not freaking disturb me.

Rowan Mangan: She doesn't think it's a disturbance.

Martha Beck: My electronics are absolutely in league against me, and the cockroaches are in on it.

Rowan Mangan: Nah.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I just watched a show with a robotic cockroach. Literally, they cut off his little MP antenna and put fake ones in, and then they put a little harness on him and it was electric, and you could have a remote control thing, and he would turn-

Rowan Mangan: What are you watching, Martie? I've got to look out for you. This sounds like a dream.

Martha Beck: No, it's called the White Rabbit Project.

Rowan Mangan: Oh my God.

Martha Beck: It's about electronics. I loved it.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, dear. Oh, yeah.

Martha Beck: But, yeah, okay, anyway.

Rowan Mangan: We've got to move on, honey.



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Martha Beck: Cockroaches, famously they will be alive after I'm gone.

Rowan Mangan: He was fine. I was pretty badly injured.

Martha Beck: Yeah, you were badly injured by the cockroach.

Rowan Mangan: I had to lie flat, Tang Ping.

Martha Beck: Tang Ping.

Rowan Mangan: Tang Ping, for some time. Days, days, days.

Martha Beck: Yeah, it's true.

Rowan Mangan: And the cockroach was fine. I think all the points you're making is they'll be fine, worry less about them, and I think that's been born out.

Martha Beck: They'll be fine. Worry about them, but not in a way that supports them.

Rowan Mangan: That's fair.

Martha Beck: There's a line that almost everyone draws. Super poisonous snakes, cockroaches, you just get them out by whatever means necessary.

Rowan Mangan: How do I kill a cockroach, seriously?

Martha Beck: You can't. You actually have to deport it to some other country.

Rowan Mangan: I was in the right neighborhood of solutions.

Martha Beck: I was on a TV news show in Kentucky once after my first book came out, and I was trying so hard to sell it, and I was so nervous on TV. I go on this TV station in Kentucky, and I'm talking about the year my son was born where he was diagnosed with Down syndrome and the whole thing, and I was in a fire, and I said, "I felt like a cockroach that God was trying to kill with a brick," because I have tried to kill them by smacking them with bricks, and I'm a gentle soul, I love my animals, but I will freaking pound a cockroach. You can't kill them. They just go, "Ho, ho. Embracing Swedish massage." The Kentucky TV guy, instead of talking about my book for 10 minutes, all I could talk about was cockroaches. "Yeah, they're in my fridge, and you get them with spray, they don't care. They laugh in your face. You'd stomp on them, they lift you off." I was like, "I wrote a book." I kept trying to steer it back and he was like, "Cockroaches."



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- Rowan Mangan: Just like me right now.
- Martha Beck: I got off and my agent was there and she just said, "Kentucky." But I don't feel that way about Kentucky. That was her thing. Yeah. Sorry. Variation there, but you can't kill them is my point.
- Rowan Mangan: I see that now. Martie, for God's sake, tell me what you're trying to figure out right now, and don't make it cockroach related.
- Martha Beck: Weirdly, this is just going to send all our insectophobes running, because we did not discuss this, but I literally had chosen something very similar, even though what I told you was I'm trying to figure out how to overcome my shame, because I went and read one of my books for audiobook. All my other books I've read some of them, and sometimes they get-
- Rowan Mangan: Out loud. She means read it out loud. She didn't just go and read it.
- Martha Beck: I went out into the yard and read my book aloud to the wolves. So, I'm reading, I wrote one book that was an allegory. I don't call it a novel. It's not well structured enough to be a novel, but it's a fictional book and it's sort of magical. I had to go read it aloud. Now, I've read nonfiction books for audio book before, and I'm not very good at it because I have a voice, as you all know, that sounds like someone trying to clean a toilet with a live raven. This is my description of my own voice. People are always saying, "Oh, Martha, I know how much you care about me because it's so clear you're trying not to weep because of your shaky little crone voice."
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, honey.
- Martha Beck: So, I'm already nervous, right? But I've read other books, I can do this. I talked to Ro's dad in Australia, who we're just sending so much love to him right now, and he is a professional reader of books. He has this gorgeous-
- Rowan Mangan: I think they say narrator.
- Martha Beck: Narrator?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know how to pronounce this in American. Narrator. He's a narrator.
- Martha Beck: Narrator.
- Rowan Mangan: Professional reader of books. Sounds like everyone's dream.





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- Martha Beck: He's a narrator.
- Rowan Mangan: He reads them out loud and they record it.
- Martha Beck: So, I said to Sean over Zoom, "What do I do? This book is different. It has characters. It has dialogue." And he said, "Well, you have to go through and cast all your characters. Choose a person to be the heroine. Choose another person to be the villain." I was like, "Okay." So I went through-
- Rowan Mangan: He means Hollywood actors.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Like picture Brad Pitt in this role or whatever so that you can keep the voice consistent.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. One of them, I remember I made him into James T. Kirk from the Starship Enterprise, the old Star Trek, because he would talk in a very intense way. It was just stuck in my head. Then I thought, "Great, I've cast all the characters, I know what I'm doing," but I did not reread my entire book before doing this. I thought, "I remember it. I fricking wrote it." Oh, I did not remember it, because as it goes through, I just cast the human characters and one pig.
- Rowan Mangan: And one pig. Sure.
- Martha Beck: But there are a lot of freaking characters in this book, and I'd forgotten most of them. So, I was like, "Oh my God, now I have to talk like a goat. At one point I had to talk like a goat, and I was like..." and it was humiliating. Then I got to one, oh, God, the shame, I've just had to make peace with it. Ro's going to listen to it and I'm going to have to go back and record the whole thing in this weird studio that literally was a NASA training ground and has pictures of space all over it. I mean, this little locked room with pictures of space. I just expect Hal to start attacking me any moment. 2001 Space Odyssey. Go look it up. I'm in there in this booth, and one of the characters, it describes the voice as being tiny and high pitched because the character is a tick, a tick named Bloodblotch.
- Rowan Mangan: When you were writing this and writing down a description of the voice, you weren't imagining yourself reading the audio book.





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Martha Beck: No. If I had looked at it, I would have found a character to be that tiny high pitched voice. It's at the end of the book. I was already really hoarse because I don't have a trained voice, and everywhere I go people come up and say, "I do vocal training, you need me," and I'm like, "I have had you and I never get better."

Rowan Mangan: Hang on. I'm just trying to think, who would we cast as the tick? Who has... what was it? A high pitched-

Martha Beck: Lila, our daughter.

Rowan Mangan: A high pitched what? Squeaky voice?

Martha Beck: Very high pitched and shrill and shrieky.

Rowan Mangan: I'm thinking. There's someone I can think of, but I'm struggling to place her. Maybe Amy Sedaris. Does she have that sort of voice?

Martha Beck: She could do it.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: She could do it. David Sedaris could do it, actually. We love him. He does kind of have a high squeaky voice, though. So, anyway, I'm reading aloud in this space tech environment, so intimidating, and there's a director listening to me and there's a sound guy listening to me, but in other rooms, and I'm reading the description. "The tick came out and he stood up on his back legs and he started to speak in this high-pitched tiny voice that you could barely hear." I'm reading this aloud and going, "Holy shit." Yeah, it's like a train coming at me. "I'm going to have to do this voice." So, I started to talk like this.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, no.

Martha Beck: Sort of like this. Because I was talking like this, for some reason I went into baby talk. The tick is connected to the villain, who is a huge male whose voice is like, "Rawr." I'm sorry. Oh, my sound guy is going to be so mad at me. Scott, don't be mad at me. So, I'm talking along like this and I'm like, "Okay, the director will tell me it's horrible." I sort of wait for the sound guy or the director to go, "No." Nobody says anything. I'm like, "All right." I go home and I talk to the director on the phone, I'm like, "I'm really nervous about that tick voice," and they go, "Yeah, that was a judgment call I had to make."



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I was just like... it is bad, Ro, and you're going to hear it and we're going to have to rent that damn NASA astronaut training center again for me to go back and do something with that voice other than me just killing myself. That's what I'm trying to figure out.

Rowan Mangan: I think really the only problem we've got here is that you failed to cast the tick.

Martha Beck: I got to go watch some Amy Sedaris.

Rowan Mangan: As soon as we finish recording, I'm going to remember whose voice I'm really trying to think of.

We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a favor to ask. You might not know this, but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears. All the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. So, it would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple, and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six if you can find a way to hack the system. I wouldn't complain. A review would also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. Thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

But do you know what? We have been blathering on an awful lot for people who supposedly have a podcast about a topic.

Martha Beck: Oh, a topic.

Rowan Mangan: Do you want to just slowly segue our way over to that?

Martha Beck: Yes, I do. Actually, you came up with the topic for this episode, and it was because you had this wonderful light bulb moment.

Rowan Mangan: I did.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Like so many of the light bulb moments that we have in our lives, Martie, this took place while I was scrolling numbly through Instagram on my phone.

Martha Beck: As is required of every citizen.

Rowan Mangan: That's right. That's right. Oh, I haven't talked about the fact that I've become American. I turned American since last time.



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Martha Beck: American.

Rowan Mangan: We'll save that. We'll save that.

Martha Beck: Yeah, okay.

Rowan Mangan: So, social media scroll, and I came across this post by someone called Nicola Jane Hobbs. This post has gone bananas viral because she's kind of doing what we're trying to do on this podcast, but maybe better and more eloquently and-

Martha Beck: More briefly.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, much more briefly.

Martha Beck: Endless stories about horrible insects. She could have put a few in just to be kind to us, but she didn't.

Rowan Mangan: No, no. Nicola Jane stayed on topic.

Martha Beck: No, we love her.

Rowan Mangan: We love her. I'm just going to read a few of them because they're basically her trying to help us reframe a lot of culture that's in our heads. One of them in particular really blew my mind, and that's what we're going to be talking about today. But there's a few. I want to give you the feel for it. The first one that struck me was instead of saying, "I'm falling behind in life," I've started saying, "Societal norms keep hijacking me today." That's what we talk about, Martie, isn't it?

Martha Beck: Yes, absolutely.

Rowan Mangan: We think it's a problem with us and not a problem with our programming, but Nicola's saying, "Check the programming."

Martha Beck: Thank you, Nicola.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, thank you, Nicola. Then another one is instead of saying, "I'm being so lazy," I've started saying, "My body is tired today." That one almost made me cry because I just think, "I'm being so lazy," is something I say to myself all the time.

Martha Beck: You do. You do.

Rowan Mangan: My body is tired sometimes.



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Martha Beck: Aw.

Rowan Mangan: But here is the one, okay, that absolutely blew my mind.

Martha Beck: Okay.

Rowan Mangan: This is what she says. Instead of saying, "I've had a really unproductive day," I've started saying, "My internalized capitalism is intense today."

Martha Beck: Boom.

Rowan Mangan: Now, we often end up talking about capitalism on this podcast, but for some reason I had never quite made this neural connection that it's part of the capitalist ideology or thinking that sort of thing, of trying to jam as many things into our days as possible. I realized that I 100% still measure my day and how successful, even that is a problematic word, but how successful my day has been via my productivity. How much did I get done today is if it's not much, bad day. If it's a lot, good day. Why? If you actually just step back from it and look at it, how much did I get done? How many things did I tick off? That's a random way to measure your day.

Martha Beck: Right?

Rowan Mangan: Right?

Martha Beck: I'm always going to the whole life, and it's like, are you really going to get to the end of your life and look at all these ticked off list of things to do and go, "I got a lot done, so my life was worthy."

Rowan Mangan: But every day is lifetime. You know what I mean?

Martha Beck: That's true.

Rowan Mangan: If you're a cockroach. Oh, no, if you're not, no. Forget me.

Martha Beck: No, you're absolutely true. We've talked about this idea before. You're absolutely right, I mean. We've talked about this idea before, but never quite in this way, of everything goes to this productivity mindset. I think it might even be biologically in the brain, a kind of hoarding mentality that can be triggered, but it's not in every culture, but ours just blows it into everything. It's almost like a shape the mind takes when it looks at the day.



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. You're right. Hoarding, maximizing. I keep thinking of this... all the productivity stuff is all about maximizing in one way or another.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. Get the most, the most, the most.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Why is that? Why the most always the best? It's a capitalist value set that is just in the air we breathe. It's in every interaction. It's all over. "How much did you do?" "How much did you get?" "How many did you..." and I even apply it. This morning I got up and I'm like, "Oh, I have half an hour to meditate. That's not enough." You know? "If I don't get an hour, I'm being really lazy." So, I was making capitalist and productivity based my time of silence and stillness and communion with the universe.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's so interesting when we start trying to evaluate the worth of time. What is my time worth?

Martha Beck: The worth of time. I just want to put a pin in that one because that's the question. What is the worth of time in your life in your day?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And in your day, not in your whole lifetime. I think what blew my mind was this using day as the unit here. I realized that as I started looking at what are the things that I use as a measure of my, was it a good day? Was it a bad day? And how even the things that are genuinely trying to be not like that, are trying to be quality, not quantity. I'm quantifying them in my head. We were talking about, we're obsessed with Dr. Becky Kennedy, parenting guru, and she talks about... I don't know how she calls it, but playtime with no phone, no phone play.

Martha Beck: Yeah, PTNP, I think, playtime no phone.

Rowan Mangan: Playtime with no phone, right.

Martha Beck: Something like that.

Rowan Mangan: That's uncomfortably close to something in a Stephen King book, Cell, that makes me scared.

Martha Beck: Maybe they're in league.

Rowan Mangan: Maybe they are.

Martha Beck: They're in cahoots.



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- Rowan Mangan: I bet they are.
- Martha Beck: Dr. Becky and Stephen King. Okay, go on.
- Rowan Mangan: That's like - I'm trying to subvert being capitalistic about productivity, and yet am I doing enough no phone play? Whatever, play no phone, whatever it is. Even this thing that is meant to be, it's pretty self-explanatory, you're actually giving your kid your attention and it's this gift you can give them of undivided attention, this rare commodity.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Commodity in our times, and am I doing that enough that almost anything, meditation, am I doing it enough?
- Martha Beck: Enough, enough, enough. So many people have deep in their hearts the question or the belief I am either not enough or I am too much. It's all about counting and packing in the right things and making sure the wrong things are gone. It's continuous in every field in everything we think about. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: The culture basically says, the culture is set up that we will ask ourselves how much is enough? Right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Then the culture's answer is more.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. More, more, more.
- Rowan Mangan: Because you're maximizing. You're trying to jam as much into the jar of the day as possible.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. There's never enough. I think it's an imagination based fear response. It's the belief in future scarcity that makes you think you have to hoard in the present. I think that once the fear is triggered, nothing is enough. It's like more, more, more, because you can't anticipate exactly the future and you can never cope with it until it arrives, so you're just like, "But anything could happen. Anything could happen. I need more, more, more, more, more." This was so funny because we were talking about this and getting a run sheet ready, and in between we were getting texts from my editor and a marketing person that works with us about knowing exactly how many books I've sold and exactly how the percentage that goes to the publisher and the net and the gross and everything. We'd go, "Yeah, it's so weird and capitalist. How many books do I sell? Come on, come on. Oh, let's count it every day." Yeah.



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- Rowan Mangan: It's so weirdly dopamine inducing, isn't it?
- Martha Beck: I know, and so hypocritical. I was exhausted from my own hypocrisy.
- Rowan Mangan: I was also exhausted from my own hypocrisy.
- Martha Beck: Then I was like, "But really, the reason I write is to try to help people," and that is honestly the case. I really, really write to try to help people. Then I'm like, "But how many people did I help?"
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Martie was immediately like, "Well, if it's wrong to..." not wrong, but you know what we're saying, if we're questioning this thing of, "How much did I get done?" Martie's like, "Well, let's go over to how much did I help?" I was like, "No, I don't think so, because that's still asking the how much question, and I feel like that's the capitalism, is the how much, and that is ultimately a spiritual bypass."
- Martha Beck: Yeah, and it doesn't work. I mean, there's a really poignant scene at the end of Schindler's List where this guy's saved all these Jews, and he's looking at them and he's saved like 2,000 people, and at the end they're honoring him and he's just completely depressed. He just was thinking, "I could have done more. I could have done more." He sees the horror of the war and he tries to address it, but because he's in this never enough mode, there's no joy in it for him. There's not even relief or an ability to take in love that he's being offered for what he did do. He's just like, "No, not enough, not enough, not enough."
- Rowan Mangan: I could have done more.
- Martha Beck: I mean, we were talking about how our beloved Kary-Koo, Karen, does puzzles, and she'll get a hard jigsaw puzzle. At the beginning of the pandemic I started buying puzzles for Karen, and they make her so happy. Without them she starts to pull out her own feathers.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Sometimes she'll say, "Martie, I'm not getting this done fast enough. I'm going to need your help," and I'm like, "Okay, I'll help you with the hard part."
- Rowan Mangan: I can tell when one of these conversations is going on even if I can't hear the words, because there's this deeply pragmatic tone of voice that you both adopt, serious and pragmatic, like, "Got it. Yeah. I can do that. I can do that for you."





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WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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Martha Beck: I'll come help, I'll come help.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Then Karen literally finishes it, counts the number of pieces that are missing so she can add to her own bitterness, and puts it back in the box. It literally is put together for 10 seconds.

Rowan Mangan: She doesn't take a photo, she doesn't relish the moment. She doesn't look down at it and go, "Yeah, I did that." She's just like, "All right, three pieces missing." Immediately-

Martha Beck: Immediately it's gone. But she's really like, "I'm not getting much done on this. I haven't gone fast enough." It's just bizarre. She never stops and says, "How much do I really need to do to be a good person vis-a-vis this puzzle?"

Rowan Mangan: And yet that is completely consistent with the cultural messages that we swim around in, right? There's all our apps, we were thinking about our apps and how we have Apple watches, sorry, not paid to mention them. In fact, we're dissing them because they're really annoying and they tell you to stand up all the time, and sometimes I don't want to stand up because I'm being really lazy. No, because my body is tired and I don't want to stand up. Sometimes that's not the right thing to do. So, stop freaking coming into my wrist and buzzing and telling me that I'm not standing up enough. You don't know me.

Martha Beck: Not at all.

Rowan Mangan: Not at all. Martie... this is so lame. We are so lame, Martie. We both play Solitaire on our phone-

Martha Beck: Constantly.

Rowan Mangan: ... like total squares.

Martha Beck: Oh my God.

Rowan Mangan: But you realized something about the Solitaire game.

Martha Beck: Yeah. It's telling me that I did really well on some of them, like, "Number one, all time personal best," and I'm like, "It's the same thing every time." Is it complexity of the hand or whatever? Then I realized it was how fast I win. So, I started getting a serious stress on because I'm like, "I want to play Solitaire. I cannot help the baby. I'm throwing the cockroach the out window. I am playing. Solitaire and going for a personal best."



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- Rowan Mangan: Sorry, Scott, about Martie's volume levels in that last little bit.
- Martha Beck: Yes. Sorry, Scott. I was too much. Too much. But, yeah, we did not ask for watches that would tell us to stand up every 20 minutes.
- Rowan Mangan: No, no.
- Martha Beck: They just put that in there assuming we'd be thrilled with it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I've talked before on the podcast about the meditation app that I used to have, the way they tried to gamify the meditation thing, and you could have friends on the app, and if you meditated more than they did, you went ahead on the board game map that they'd done.
- Martha Beck: Oh my God.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. It gets into your writing. "How many words did I write?"
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah.
- Martha Beck: Anyway.
- Rowan Mangan: I think, and I have said this before, and this is one of the themes that comes up, and it comes up around money, which we haven't even talked about, because I don't think I'd realize that capitalism was everything where we want to count stuff.
- Martha Beck: Oh, I love that.
- Rowan Mangan: I think when we can't count something, we can't measure it. We are confused by that. How do you evaluate what you can't count? And yet nature doesn't measure it.
- Martha Beck: It's not out there counting. It is not counting. It's like if you went out to the trees and said, "How much sunlight have you gathered?" They're not thinking about that. They're present.
- Rowan Mangan: That we know of.
- Martha Beck: That we know of. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: They're not talking about it.



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- Martha Beck: They're not talking about it to us. But I will say that our dog, Claire, and dogs kind of don't count as all of nature because we've bred them to be so much like us, but they say if you think your dog can't count, put three treats in your pocket and then give them two.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Well, the problem is she really can't count.
- Rowan Mangan: Claire is a special case.
- Martha Beck: So I give her three little treats every morning, and if I don't do the three, she gets very, very confused. But on the other hand, she thinks every time I come into the room it all starts again and she gets three more. So, she's kind of counting. But, yeah, when the pandas are out in the forests of China, they're not saying, "Not enough bamboo over there. I need to plow another 40 acres, get myself some bamboo."
- Rowan Mangan: It's so sweet when you reached a metaphor to watch just how your brain works. I can just see those little pandas frolicking about in your mind, and you're just describing them. It's so nice. I know they were there before you even thought of them and you reached in for them.
- Martha Beck: It just came in.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: I was wondering about squirrels, because squirrels are very acquisitive.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, they are.
- Martha Beck: They fricking get things. Also, acorn wood peckers. When we lived in California, in fall time, every crevice in every tree and every fence would be absolutely stuffed with acorns because acorn wood peckers stuffed them in as well. What they do is they get worms in them and then the wood peckers eat the worms, which is technically cooking if you think about it. So, there's that. But here's the thing.
- Rowan Mangan: It's so hard to follow you sometimes.
- Martha Beck: Sorry. Sorry. Here's the thing, Ro.
- Rowan Mangan: Please tell me.



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- Martha Beck: Squirrels are very acquisitive, but they forget and lose 80% of the acorns they gather.
- Rowan Mangan: It's awkward, isn't it? Someone should tell them.
- Martha Beck: So, what they have is more of a sport going on. It's like, I don't know, polo of the universe. They go out and they just enjoy putting acorns places.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't think they know they lose 80% of them.
- Martha Beck: No, they don't, but I think they're just like, "Yeah, acorns." "What are you going to do today, Al?" "I'm going to go put acorns in stuff." "Okay, well how many do you have?" "What do you mean? I can't count, I just love putting acorns in my stuff. Let's go out and plant some trees, bud." Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Am I right in saying, because our regular listeners will know that you've been reading a lot of brain science in preparation for writing your next book.
- Martha Beck: True. True.
- Rowan Mangan: So, it seems to me that the wanting to count things and wanting to accrue and everything is quite a left hemisphere sort of tendency, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: So, what I'm wondering is does the culture, does our culture, our individual, the Western... you know how we don't like to... you guys know what I mean, you people. Is it that our culture happens to reinforce those left brain tendencies, or is there a natural urging in that direction? You know what I mean? If it's nature, culture and nature is natural, then why do our brains tend toward culture in this desire to count things?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, it does. I think it's because we're designed to work with the whole brain. That's the healthy thing, when you've got the ability to count, but also experience the qualitative feeling of something without counting. But the interesting thing is that we're always slightly steered toward the left side of the brain because that's where the fear center happens. If you're afraid of anything it rings a very loud bell.
- Rowan Mangan: Interesting.



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Martha Beck:

So, it pulls you over into that way of thinking and you start evaluating from a very left hemisphere dominated place in that time, numbers, even words are mainly processed in the left hemisphere. I've talked about this before, but I just can't stop thinking about it, it's amazing, once you've gone into the left hemisphere of your brain and kind of shut yourself off from the right hemisphere, the left hemisphere of the brain does not believe that anything else exists beyond its own observations. I've talked about how people with right hemisphere strokes don't believe that their left and right arms and legs or that their left arms and legs belong to them because they're perceived with the right side of the brain.

So, somebody who's lost that right side will say, "Yeah, my right hand and my right leg are mine. These other two, I don't know. I don't where they came from. I wish somebody would take them away." So, you get into that fearful zone, and suddenly there's nothing but fear. The qualitative experiences of the right side of the brain are cut off or greatly limited. Then we start hoarding and counting and being miserable, and we go blind to the qualitative values of things like presence, joy, love. In Sanskrit, they call it [foreign language 00:37:06]. The word [foreign language 00:37:07], Sanskrit is related to European languages, and [foreign language 00:37:10] is basically what the [foreign language 00:37:11] means. It means the joy of thusness, the joy of suchness. "Look, this is how it is, such." Not how many, but such, and there's bliss in that. Yeah. Nature has a different way, I think, of valuing the day.

Rowan Mangan:

I have this image in my head of when we go into that left hemisphere mode, it's like we get caught in a little eddy of fear is all that exists, and therefore our only goal can be to make ourselves feel safe.

Martha Beck:

Once you're stuck in a fear place, it absolutely dominates everything else and makes everything else seem insignificant. So, what does nature teach us about this issue, Ro? We've talked about what the culture's been doing. What about nature?

Rowan Mangan:

I will tell you, Martie, in just a minute. Martie, when we're trying to come to our senses around this thing of productivity and capitalism and jamming in the things, I feel like what we are actually wanting to do is search for a reframe, a different way of thinking about this where you don't have to measure or count anything, right? Because as long as you're counting, you're in that left side, and you're in the culture and you are in capitalism, because I think we can always keep sliding sideways and find something else to measure, but I feel like that's where we need to do the reframe is actually at that moment.



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Martha Beck: Yeah, go out of that. You don't want to get to the point where you can't talk or count at all, but you want the dominant way of going through life to be based in your sensory experience. That's how every animal except humans does it. I love that we say come to consensus versus come to your senses, because one of the things I do when I am working with someone who's highly anxious is this exercise called sense drenching.

Rowan Mangan: It's beautiful.

Martha Beck: So, they come in, they're super anxious about their kid wanting to go to West Point or something, and I say, "All right, what are your three favorite tastes?" And they're like, "What?" I'm like, "What do you want to taste?" And they're like, "Strawberries, champagne and my dog," not in an eating sense, more in a licking sense. One of my older children once came to me and said, "I figured out that our dog licks us to say that he loves us, and that's why I've started licking him." Of course we stopped that, but it came to mind. Anyway.

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: My point is it, if you say to your sense of taste how much strawberry, it makes no sense. You can get intense versus not intense, sort of, but it's more like if you say to your nose, "How much pine smell? How much?"

Rowan Mangan: It's meaningless.

Martha Beck: "How many pines did you smell today?"

Rowan Mangan: Yes.

Martha Beck: "I went through the forest and I smelled the pine trees and it was amazing." "Well, how many trees did you smell?" Exactly.

Rowan Mangan: It's so true.

Martha Beck: It's a non quantitative smell.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We to don't need to, but I guess what you and I at least can challenge ourselves to do to try and change this mentality is to look for ways to find worth in the uncountable stuff, the things that can't be counted, so it sort of points us towards a more aesthetic kind of sensibility.

Martha Beck: Yeah.



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- Rowan Mangan: It strikes me that as I was thinking about this, I realized it reminded me of those forms. You know how you have forms that you fill out surveys or whatever, and it'll say, "How many between one and five?" And that's the other way.
- Martha Beck: Quantitative.
- Rowan Mangan: Quantitative. But then there's also just those lovely forms where it's just like, "Did you go there today? Why/and circle the one that applies," and the yes or no. What if that's the thing? So, as soon as you're saying how much, you're asking the wrong question. I think as long as we're trying to keep ourselves safe, we'll keep asking how much, because it's he who dies with the most toys wins. We think we're cheating death by counting things.
- Martha Beck: That is so true. We think we're cheating death by counting things. That is so true. Oh my gosh.
- Rowan Mangan: For some reason that doesn't feel completely fucked up in our brains, but it should.
- Martha Beck: We don't notice this. "How fast am I completing the puzzle?" "Who cares?" But it's almost like that becomes a substitute for meaning, because meaning has no quantitative manifestation. It just is. Right?
- Rowan Mangan: That's right.
- Martha Beck: So, yes, we are trying to say that quantity brings us joy and peace. If I get 10 puzzles done a week, I'm going to have a happier life. I'm going to have a more meaningful life than if I only get five done a week.
- Rowan Mangan: And the corollary of that is if I have \$10,000 in the bank, I'll have a more meaningful life.
- Martha Beck: Right. Right.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And if I have a bowl of soup, it'll make me happy, and if I have 10 bowls of soup it will make me 10 times happier. It breaks down when you start to look at qualitative experiences because they just are. The quality of your experience is what determines whether your life was rich or impoverished in a very subjective and wonderful way.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.





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Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's like yes or no is the only... it's beautiful the simplicity. It's a one or a zero. It's binary code.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Within that framework, you don't need any number higher than one.

Martha Beck: Whoa. Wait, say that again.

Rowan Mangan: Did it exist or didn't it exist? We don't need any number higher than one.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Rowan Mangan: The reason that's such a reframe is that it's the numbers that are making us feel safe.

Martha Beck: That's right.

Rowan Mangan: So, we force ourselves to stop making safety, this perception of safety our number one priority, and we move over to our right hemisphere.

Martha Beck: It's so interesting because I have so many clients who say... I had one client who said, "I need to have at least three children." I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, because if you only have two and one dies, there's only one left." I was like, "All right."

Rowan Mangan: Oh my God, that's so good.

Martha Beck: It was so weird. The qualitative aspects of life, death, having children, whatever, it all boiled down to, "How many can I count?" In the circumstance I imagine, which is one child dies, not that they both die in the same car accident, that will never happen. "I need to have three so that when one dies, because that's what I'm imagining, I'll at least have one left or two left."

Rowan Mangan: Two left.

Martha Beck: Two left or however many it goes, because having just one left would be not tolerable. All right?

Rowan Mangan: All right.



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Martha Beck: Okay? Productivity is the measure of the existential question: am I doing enough?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. What am I doing with my one wild and precious life?

Martha Beck: Right, the Mary Oliver, the Mary Oliver quote. "Just what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" She also said something that I love. She said, "Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work, which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished." Count that.

Rowan Mangan: Mary Oliver got it, gets it. She gets it. She knows that the answer, "What am I doing with my one wild and precious life?" The answer to that question is yes or no.

Martha Beck: "Am I standing still and learning to be astonished? I don't want to die without having lived." So, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I just need to say something.

Martha Beck: Yes, please.

Rowan Mangan: If I'm standing still and learning to be astonished, my little watch is going, "You have not closed your move ring today. You have not closed your exercise ring today."

Martha Beck: That little mofo saying, "Hello, you closed your ring two days ago. Why have you stopped?"

Rowan Mangan: Rude. Rude.

Martha Beck: I mean, it really is very, very rude. It's measuring fricking everything. It measures how fast I'm reading on my Kindle app. It measures how many new steps I've taken in a day, and it talks to me about them like I should care.

Rowan Mangan: I really feel, Martie, like this is a huge one, to be able to break out of this mental prison. One of our first episodes we ever did of this podcast was about me and my productivity addiction, which I go through periodically and get cured of periodically. Well, I'm in recovery.

Martha Beck: Yeah. We send her a rehab. She stops caring as much. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: To me, there is such an internal revolution in the idea that I could sit down at the end of my day and say, "Was there peace? Yes or no?" And I can control that.



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- Martha Beck: Yes or no.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes or no was there peace is kind of the opposite kind of question to, "How much peace was there?"
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: You can't ask how much peace was there, or it's like, "How many pine trees did you smell?" It's like, "What?" It's like a [inaudible 00:46:51]. It's like, "Huh?"
- Martha Beck: Was there beauty? If you ask that yes or no, you're not counting how many beautiful new pieces of furniture you have. You're saying, "Was there beauty?" And the mind immediately, by the way, has to switch to using more of the right hemisphere because it's saying, "What sensory kinesthetic experience did you have?" And all of a sudden, "Was there beauty?" Becomes, "I saw spiderweb this morning outside and there were dew drops on it."
- Rowan Mangan: Right. You don't have to be visiting the Louvre every day to-
- Martha Beck: Exactly. Exactly. "Was there beauty?" "Yes."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, because was there a sense of beauty? Did I inhabit beauty?
- Martha Beck: Coming to your senses.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes or no?
- Martha Beck: You can go through the most exquisitely beautiful life and never see it. If you don't see it, I don't care how much you have, your life is not rich.
- Rowan Mangan: Was there a sense of abundance? Yes or no? And that doesn't mean how much money is in your bank account. It means did you feel a sense of fullness in... we were talking about your bookshelves. Do you feel an abundance of books? Are there four books still to read on your nightstand? What an abundance.
- Martha Beck: Abundance. We worked with this lovely lawyer to help Ro get her green card and her citizenship there. He's so wonderful. I think he comes from Lebanon, and he's just jumping out of his skin with appreciation of everything. He actually, when he was like 14 went to try to get a visa to America, and they stamped it with a big red stamp that said denied, and he didn't know what it said, so he thought big red stamp, "That's great."



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He started just thanking them. "This is wonderful. I have everything." He's 14, his whole family's dead. "I have everything anyone could want."

Rowan Mangan: He unintentionally shamed the person.

Martha Beck: And the guy said, "Come back here," and they approved his visa. I mean, I'm not saying that I don't want to minimize people's suffering, but this man was in a situation where I would've been like... and he was so full of his sense of the joy of his life that he couldn't be resisted.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. He created that abundance.

Martha Beck: Abundance is like that. It comes from the rejoicing and experience.

Rowan Mangan: Absolutely. But by the same token, was there play? Why and-

Martha Beck: Not no phone playtime.

Rowan Mangan: No, no. Not how much.

Martha Beck: I went on, what's the German airline? I was on it when my older kids were young, and they got this most beautiful German made toy set as they got on the plane. It was amazing. Then we went up in the air and they turned off the fastened seatbelt sign and the attendant came on and she said, "The children will now take out their slates." I was like, "Have you done the slate work? Have you done the doll work? Have you done..." yeah, it's like that. It's a very productivity centered mindset, and there's no play. There wasn't as much play to it.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. The other one we were thinking about, because we were talking about exercise and how you've had a better day when you go to the gym at the moment because you sleep better at night, right?

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: I was like, "But I've had this thing lately where I've just been absolutely exhausted." So, it was like, did I exercise is not the right question.



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Martha Beck: No.

Rowan Mangan: We decided that the yes no question is was I kind to my body today?

Martha Beck: Yeah. I even like to say, "Was I kind to my animal?"

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I love that.

Martha Beck: Because I love animals and because if I'm thinking about my body, it has all these cultural associations and valuations come into it. Is it enough here? Is it not enough there? If I say, "Was I kind to the animal?" It's like, "Oh, yeah. Did I check to see if my horse was dehydrated or if it needed to lie down? If it needed to go out and run?" When I do that, I know when to rest and when to exercise. It's been a long road, but it really works.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Then for me, the Buddha used to say, "Whatever enlightenment looks like, it always tastes of freedom." He used taste because how much taste? How much taste? So, I think, was there freedom? Was there freedom today? That means freedom of heart and mind. The weird thing is we can have so much privilege and feel like we're being trapped by this productivity model. There's no freedom of heart and mind in how many things did I get done? The most important quality for me, well, peace and freedom are kind of on the same evaluative place for me. If we've been in this mindset, there was no freedom.

Rowan Mangan: In the coming days, I'm really going to try and start applying this yes no sort of thing to my days. At the end of my day when I lie down, I want to say, "Was there a sense of freedom? Was there a sense of abundance? Was I kind to my body today?"

Martha Beck: Was there kindness?

Rowan Mangan: Yes or no? Yes or no?

Martha Beck: Yes, no, yes, no. If the only question is yes or no, then the answer yes always constitutes enough.

Rowan Mangan: Yes, absolutely.

Martha Beck: Let's invite the folks to join us in this playtime in this thing we're thinking of, and stay wild.



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Rowan Mangan:

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