

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:00:02 — Most of the deterioration we experience is a function of our minds. If we could only wake up, life would be very, very different for virtually all of us.

Rich Roll

00:00:11 — Most of us live mindlessly most of the time. Dr. Ellen Langer is the author of several books on mindfulness, including her latest, *The Mindful Body*.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:00:22 — Medical science can only give us probabilities. There are still doctors who will say something like, you have six months to live. There is no way they could know that.

BCTABKA: Harvard psychology professor Ellen Langer showed that mental attitude can reverse the effects of aging. Her groundbreaking research, spanning over 40 years, delves into the mind-body connection.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:00:42 — Everything you think you know for sure, every limit you place on yourself, is a function of your mindlessness. People think they want complete success, not knowing that if they had complete success, life would be empty.

Rich Roll

00:00:55 — That's maybe the most inspirational monologue I've heard in a long time.

РЕКЛАМНАЯ ВСТАВКА: 00:01:10 — Today's episode is brought to you by the awesome organizations that make this show possible.

Thank you for coming. It's an honor to meet you. I appreciate you coming to do this today. It's a treat to have such a legend in our presence today. You know, one of the things that I love so much about you and your work is just the kind of novel, unconventional approach that you've taken into psychology and you do it with this seeming

00:01:38 — kind of twinkle in your eye, like, you know, kind of pushing boundaries.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:01:42 — I'm doing what you're doing, but not.

Rich Roll

00:01:44 — But with a beginner's mind and this kind of sense of awe and wonder, says a lot about your imagination. Like all of these studies, you've done so many studies over the years that the average person wouldn't even concoct in their wildest dreams. And you're just putting them to the test all the time. Like over the course of your career, like what is one of the wildest craziest studies that you came up with and tested?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:02:08 — We're doing one right now. And all you're doing is watching somebody eat pizza. That's the whole thing you're watching. So we give different instructions. One group is supposed to count the number of times the person is chewing. That's the control group. The important group is imagining tasting it and smelling it and feeling on the, so a whole-

Rich Roll

00:02:29 — Bringing a mindfulness to it.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:02:30 — And so the question is, will they gain, lose, or no difference in weight? That's pretty wild. If they lose weight, I'm gonna have to rewrite physics.

Rich Roll

00:02:44 — Well, you've already demonstrated that this has an impact on satiate, on hunger, right? Like even with the time that you spent with your friend and she's eating her sundae.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:02:54 — And it was amazing. You know, in fact, I'm very external in that way. And whenever I go out to dinner, it's very important to know the time in between when I get there and start watching somebody else eat and when they're gonna take my order. Because I don't want, when you're taking your last bite of that burger, for me to now order. Because I'm not gonna want the burger in another five minutes. Right.

Rich Roll

00:03:13 — There's so much to kind of extrapolate from that, right? I think there is some kind of weight loss like guru protocol that we could define from that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:03:24 — So here's one, we haven't done this yet, but you know David Edwards? So, David was at MIT, I think he still might be there, and he has these things, they look like hourglasses, and you turn it over and it emits an odor. One of these is the odor of chocolate. And it seems to me that if people smell chocolate and then have available to them all sorts of snacks and chocolates, they're going to eat a lot. However, if they do it multiple times, they won't want the chocolate. It's like people who you walk by a bakery, you have to have it, but maybe you don't have to have it, but the people who work there, don't eat the stuff very much.

Rich Roll

00:04:03 — Well, you tested that with cheese as well. Like people who-

Dr. Ellen Langer

No, that wasn't mine. Oh, that was a different one, yeah, but it's in the book. But it was the same idea.

Rich Roll

Imagining eating a bunch of cheese and then that translates into when you're actually presented with cheese, like you're gonna eat less.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:04:18 — Yeah, similar, but the point here would be if you wanted to control your weight by eating less. So the substance you want to eat less of, you overdose on the smell.

Rich Roll

00:04:29 — At some point you would develop a tolerance for that. I think that we haven't tested that part of it.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:04:34 — I watched, remember Mad Men? And every minute they're smoking. So, and I was a smoker, I still smoke. So I walk into the room. No one's listening, don't worry. I walk into a room and Mad Men is on and he's putting out a cigarette, one of them. And I didn't want a cigarette, okay. So if they're lighting up, I want a cigarette. If they're putting it out, I don't. And so the, you know, if you break up in your mind, imagining difference, it's not, you know, one activity.

00:05:07 — It depends on where you are in the activity.

Rich Roll

00:05:09 — Sure, well, it's that sort of cue behavior reward cycle, right, so if he's putting it out, it's telling your brain, oh, I've already satisfied the craving. Like what's the wildest study that you would like to put to the test that you haven't yet?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:05:22 — Well, one is I would like to take hundreds of people who were just diagnosed with cancer. We could use three, four different kinds of cancer. And you know, nobody is going to be happy when they get a diagnosis, so give them three weeks. Then after that, measure their stress level every three weeks, four weeks. And I predict independent of their genetics, independent of their treatment, independent of nutrition and the kind of cancer,

00:05:52 — stress will predict the course of the disease.

Rich Roll

00:05:56 — That hypothesis comes from where? This idea that you have that stress is really foundational to way more than we think.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:06:04 — Yeah, I couldn't tell you where any of these ideas come from, but I'm overwhelmed. I can't get out of bed.

Rich Roll

00:06:09 — Do you just, what is your process? Do you wake up in the morning and jot down ideas like you must have hundreds of studies that you want.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:06:17 — I have a friend collaborator who's a member of my lab, Philip Myman, he's big in AI. And I know he can't possibly remember these, but at least I feel, so I go, Philip, I have this great idea. I tell him and then it's out, you know, whether it'll ever come back or not, I don't know.

Rich Roll

00:06:36 — So, the foundation of your work is essentially disabusing people of this dichotomy between mind and body.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:06:46 — When I think about it, people talking about mind and body, these are just words. And people have made them, reified them in some sense. And it seemed to me, just the work on placebos alone, that there's more going on. And you know,

the mindful body, when I first, it was first going to be a memoir. So I have lots of personal stories in there.

00:07:11 — And two that speak to the mind-body unity. Oddly, both about pancreas. Now you tell me how many people you know who have even one story about a pancreas. I have two. Yeah. All right, so I was married when I was very young. Foolishly, maybe, maybe not. And I went to Paris on my honeymoon. I was 19 going on 40, and so I have to be very grown up, because after all now I'm a married woman.

00:07:40 — Doesn't follow, but it did in my mind at that time. So we're having dinner in Paris, and I ordered the mixed grill, and on the mixed grill is pancreas. So I asked my then husband, which of these is the pancreas? He points to something. I'm a big eater, I love eating, I eat everything else with gusto. Now the moment of truth. Can I eat the pancreas? And I feel I have to, because I have to prove that now I'm all grown up.

00:08:08 — So I start eating it, and then I get sick, literally sick to my stomach. He starts laughing. I say, why are you laughing? He says, because that's chicken. You ate the pancreas a while ago. Okay, so what was going on there? Another pancreas-related story with the same bottom line, perhaps, was my mother had breast cancer that had metastasized to her pancreas.

00:08:33 — That's the end game. And then all of a sudden it was gone and the medical world couldn't explain it. And so for me, just entertaining the possibility, even if just for heuristic purposes, just to generate new hypotheses, let's put the mind and body back together, see them as one and see how far we can push it. And that would explain both of those pancreas instances.

00:08:58 — And then we've done study after study and they just keep turning out to make it so that we don't gain anything, I don't think by keeping them as separate. And the separate has delayed research because the question it raises is how do you get from this thing, fuzzy thing called the brain to something material called the body? And so everybody's looking for mediators and you put it back together, you don't need a mediator

00:09:26 — because it's one thing.

Rich Roll

00:09:27 — Right, the findings are so astonishing that it's very difficult to digest. And I think despite the fact that the kind of advent and awareness around mindfulness is growing kind of exponentially right now, there is still this recalcitrance in the Western medicine kind of, you know, kind of-.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:09:45 — There's no question about it.

Rich Roll

00:09:47 — Corporate industrial complex to resist that notion when it comes to diagnosis and treatment.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:09:51 — Yeah, there was an article that somebody wrote about me for, it was the head of the magazine section of the New York Times. And so, it took me forever to explain to him, mind, body, unity. And then when he turned the article in, and these are very smart people who already agreed to publish the article, still they kept asking, sort of, what's going on under the hood? What's going on inside? And I'm not suggesting that there's nothing going on.

00:10:19 — I'm simply suggesting that more or less it's all happening simultaneously. Now, decades ago, the medical model was such that they didn't believe that psychology mattered at all. I mean, it's nice to be happy. I'm sure they felt that way. But that the only way you're going to become ill was the introduction of an antigen, pathogen, what have you. And And then that model shifted to the bio-social model.

00:10:46 — So now they know psychology matters some. And eventually I think we'll get to the point to realize that it's really in some sense the whole ballgame.

Rich Roll

00:10:56 — That leads me to recall the study around colds and flu. Yeah. That's in the book, which is so wild.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:11:03 — Incredible. And it's so funny because I've done several podcasts once the book came out and I've never talked about it. And I, you know, each time I say it, I'm like, talk about the cold stuff.

Rich Roll

00:11:15 — Yeah, yeah, please, please elaborate.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:11:17 — So basically, people come in to the lab or the room, and there's a large television, and the television is showing a video of people coughing and sneezing. The room is full of things like tissues, chicken soup, Vaseline, whatever might prime a cold. And essentially, without the introduction of a virus, people who believe, for whom we prime a cold, get sick.

00:11:48 — There's no evidence, I think, I'm not sure of this, but that if your hair is wet and you go outside, that you're going to get a cold. But I believe that if you believe, if you go outside with a wet hair, that you're gonna get a cold. And

wouldn't it be a nice test to see, to take people to find out how they believe colds come about and then test them in those circumstances.

00:12:12 — The interesting thing would be to put them in a situation where you, a different situation from that, where you're introducing a virus and to see if they get sick.

Rich Roll

00:12:24 — There was some added nuance to that as well, wasn't there? With some interesting prompts, like sort of telling people like, hey, you might be on the verge of a cold or, and then having a control group and seeing what would happen. And then they would start to express symptomology. And obviously, I guess on some level, we're all harboring viruses and bacteria. So maybe that sort of activates or represses an immune response.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:12:50 — When I tried to explain it and I thought, well, I mean, where is it coming from? Then all of a sudden you become sick. The weak hypothesis, and I couldn't answer that, but that would be the strong hypothesis. The weak hypothesis is that the last cold you got or the cold before that wasn't 100% cured and so it's dormant and what this did was make it active again.

Rich Roll

00:13:16 — Right. Human beings are insane. Oh, there's no question about it. And you've sort of backed this truck up into this world that pulls the covers on like, you know, we think we're sentient and we're making logical, rational decisions all the time and we're not easily manipulated and that we have an agency and control. And the book really pulls the covers on that to reveal a very different picture of how we operate, how easily we're conjured into believing one thing

00:13:43 — or the other, how we can be manipulated and the power of belief on outcomes in terms of physical manifestations.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:13:50 — Yeah, no, I don't know if it's how easily we're deceived because I think the whole structure, since we're little kids, everything is sort of conspiring against us, you know. You're taught right and wrong as if these are completely different. You're taught absolutes at every turn. And so then when you grow up and you believe these absolutes absolutely, it doesn't seem quite as surprising.

00:14:17 — Within that structure, then you can prime people and move them around.

Rich Roll

00:14:21 — Those structures give us this illusion of control or a sense of security, which of course leads to this idea of mindlessness, which is really how you kind of enter this world, not through the traditional Zen Buddhism world of mindfulness, but from the opposite direction.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:14:39 — It's even worse than that, Rich. Okay, so I start studying mindlessness and from the very beginning, I'm gonna have data, so much data showing that virtually all of us are mindless almost all the time. Then I had a conversation with somebody and I wish I could remember with whom it was because he said to me, I don't know if he said it in this nasty way, but I don't know how you make this nice, you are what you study. I took it seriously, so then I decided to look at the other side of it.

00:15:07 — And it was only after looking at the other side of it that I learned all about Buddhism and, you know, Eastern philosophy and so on. But my ideas had already been formed, and what was interesting to me was, for me, from a Western scientific perspective, to come to the same point, time after time, as this ancient thinking felt that there must be something there.

Rich Roll

00:15:34 — The idea that we're mindless most of the time is a disturbing thought. But when you reflect on that, it becomes very clear how true that is. And there's a couple of quotes that I jotted down that you've said that I think can kind of set this up. You said, we don't enjoy our lives enough because we are not actually there. We are mindless, not mindful. Virtually all the world's ills boil down to mindlessness.

00:16:01 — Most of us live mindlessly most of the time.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:16:04 — Yeah, no, I mean, big, it's even bigger than that when I give talks about it, where I have a slide that says, virtually all of our ills, personal, interpersonal, professional, global, are the direct or indirect result of our mindlessness. Now, when I give a talk on that, I say, and just among us and the other million or so people. I've said this to, I mean all.

00:16:31 — So yeah, I think that if we can only wake up, life would be very, very different for virtually all of us.

Rich Roll

00:16:38 — Well, let's tease that out a little bit. Like what would be a good example? Like I'm thinking of those moments when you're driving the car and then you kind of come to and realize you don't even know where you were the last 10 minutes. Oh, yes.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:16:51 — It was that example that made me realize it in the first place. You know, that I'm driving and I think I'm going to be at exit 32 and I say I'm at 38. Where was I? No, everything you think you know for sure, every limit you place on yourself is a function of your mindlessness. I mean, we make people more mindful and they live longer. So we're talking, you know, we're talking about very big changes as a function of giving up this view that you know.

00:17:19 — The powers that be, I think, would like us, even in our democracy, to stay mindless. Because that instantiates the status quo in some sense. But I think everybody knows they don't know. They just don't know that they can't know. So they pretend. And they opt out. And when somebody acts as if they know, then what you do is genuflect or give them the power of a stage.

00:17:46 — But because everything is changing, everything looks different from different perspectives, you can't know. So, when I lecture on this, I often give this example. One thing that everybody thinks they know. How much is one plus one?

Rich Roll

00:18:02 — Well, I'll play along. I've read the book.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:18:04 — So, the answer is two. Okay. So, it is sometimes two, but not always. If you add one wad of chewing gum plus one wad of chewing gum, one plus one is one. If you add one pile of laundry plus one pile of laundry, one plus one is one. You add one cloud plus one cloud, one plus one is one. In the real world, one plus one probably doesn't equal two as or more often as it does. Now imagine right after we finish talking, someone comes over to you and says, Rich, how much is one plus one?

00:18:31 — You're no longer going to mindlessly say two. What you're going to do is pay some attention to the context and then you're going to answer more mindfully and say, it could be, and then you can say, it could be one, it could be two. Right, and what does plus even mean? Exactly, yeah, right, right.

Спикер ?

00:18:46 — You know.

Rich Roll

00:18:48 — It's simultaneously humbling, but also confronting. And as, you know, a scientist who is in a world where the scientific method is everything and there are guardrails and rules and protocols, and this is the way we do it, and we don't do it like this, and this is the way it has to be, I would imagine that you're ruffling some feathers here and there.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:19:08 — Yeah, but I'm oblivious to it most of the time. I just ruffle and then find. I had written in another book about the art, becoming an artist. I started to paint. You're a painter. And I didn't, I was applauded for not following certain rules. And then I admitted I wasn't following, I didn't know the rules because I couldn't find them. So much of the time when I'm being recalcitrant, It's out of ignorance rather than courage.

00:19:36 — I think this is really important, especially, but not exclusively, with respect to health. Medical science, like all science, can only give us probabilities. An experiment says, if it's reliable, that if you do it again the exact same way, which you can never do exactly the same thing, you're likely to get these findings. Those probabilities are presented in medical journals, textbooks, what have you, as absolutes.

00:20:06 — When you know something absolutely, you don't pay any more attention to it. And people need to know that everything they're told is a probability, is a best guess. So, I mean, I can't imagine, but there are still doctors who will say something like you have six months to live. There is no way they could know that. And when their prognoses become self-fulfilling, then I get upset, even the diagnosis of cancer, that you have cancer.

00:20:38 — You could have something that people have called cancer, but is different from it in these ways and those, we just don't know. So, and if I got sick, I'd certainly go to the medical world, but I wouldn't just hand myself over to them. And any doom and gloom hypothesis, I don't think I would be quite as willing as many people seem to be to accepting the truth of it.

Rich Roll

00:21:03 — Yeah, there is a sense, despite the illusion of control, which we're gonna get into, there is this kind of hopefulness around agency that emerges from the book, because when you realize that you do have a little bit more control than perhaps the traditional dynamic of a doctor telling you this is the way it is and this is how it's gonna go, So, it's empowering.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:21:27 — Yeah, you know, I mean, for one thing, when you're told you have a chronic illness, the way people understand chronic is it's uncontrollable. Well, you can't prove that anything is uncontrollable. All we know is that we don't know. It's indeterminate. Now, if you think you definitely can't do something, you're not gonna do it. If you think, who knows, maybe not, even probably not, you may try it. And so, there's always a modicum of control we can exert.

00:21:54 — Even the simplest thing, I believe, this one I don't have data for, but that if something is ailing, you know, your arm is in bad shape, if you make the rest of your

body healthy, you're gonna have a better chance of beating whatever the disorder is. You know, imagine you have an Olympic runner and you have a couch potato who's, you know, overindulging in bad food or whatever, and they're both exposed to COVID.

00:22:21 — I would bet on the athlete. Sure.

Rich Roll

00:22:24 — But so then you can't say it's uncontrollable. There's two things operating here. One is sort of the calcification of thoughts and ideas and possibilities on the one hand, and then on the other hand, it's about the power of language and how we communicate ideas and how potent the words we choose to describe certain things can be in terms of how we think about ourselves, our belief about possibility

00:22:52 — and the physical kind of outcomes and manifestations that we demonstrate physiologically as a result of those words. I'm so glad you pulled that out.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:22:59 — Because that's a very important part of the book. But when I start talking about it, I usually just end up with all of the, you know, exciting to me studies on mind-body unity. But language, you know, even a simple thing. So I went to visit a friend who had a very bad case of cancer. She just gets back from the hospital. Hi Eva, how are you? She said, fine, I said, what did they say? My cancer is in remission. And then all of a sudden I thought about it, oh, wait a second, if I went for the very same test, chances are they'd tell me I don't have cancer.

00:23:29 — Why is it I don't have it, but she has it in remission? And that seemed to me a way of understanding almost everything in this culture, that you could have the thing as bad, you have it in remission as better, but they never go the whole distance. There's a better than better way of understanding almost everything we do and hopefully I can give examples of that. But to say your cancer is in remission, what does that mean?

00:23:54 — Is it lurking someplace? No, it's sort of in some ways the medical world edging their bets on if it comes back. But the understanding that if cancer comes back, it's in some ways the same cancer, that's why we call it cancer, in some ways it's different. And what we need to do is attend to the ways it's different. The example I use is a cold. You get a cold. When the cold seems to be gone, you don't say you're in remission.

00:24:22 — You say you're cured. Now, if you get a cold after that, you see it as a different cold, just like a cancer. In some ways, it's the same. In some ways, it's different. By saying it is different, you're empowered. I can beat these. Look at how many I've handled in the past. And then the one thing that drives me the craziest is the five-year rule that a woman has breast cancer, the cancer is gone, and they sold a remission, they would be better off calling it cured.

00:24:49 — They have to wait five years without it reappearing for the medical world to say it's cured. Believing that it could be there is very stressful. And we've made clear my views on stress. So in the choice of language, they're keeping people in a state that I think is very unhealthy. And before I did this, by the way, so I had my views of remission cure, Then I called Susan Love.

00:25:15 — Susan, when she was alive, was a breast cancer expert, the expert, and she agreed with me. So, I felt a little more comfortable going against the many people in the medical world with that.

Rich Roll

00:25:29 — It's not just a differentiation in language and word choice, it's really a different paradigm. Oh, yes. Because on the one hand, these are binary dualistic terms where there's hard lines before and after and kind of a concretism to the whole thing where your whole deal is attention to variability. Everything is in flux all the time. Nothing from any moment to the next is the same in any conceivable possible way.

00:25:56 — And within that, there is this, again, hopefulness like a sense of possibility or something being different and an appreciation or in a mindful attention to that offers new ways of perceiving it and ultimately considering and treating it.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:26:13 — Yeah, I mean, we have several studies, as you know, on what I call attention to symptom variability. That's just a fancy way of saying being mindful. Being mindful is noticing change. When you're given a diagnosis of some dread disease, the assumption most people have is that it's going to stay the same or get worse. But nothing goes in only one direction. There are always blips. You know, it's like the stock market, you know, goes up, goes down a little bit, goes up, you know.

00:26:39 — If it's on a course to go up, you still have moments where it's falling and vice versa if it's going down. And if we paid attention to when it's better, why is it better now? We'd have a way of controlling it. So we do these studies where we call people at random times of the day and ask them, is that symptom better or worse than before, from the last time we called for instance, and why? Now, four things happen when we do that.

00:27:07 — The first is you start this process where you feel in control. You're doing something to make yourself better. Second, by noticing that now it's a little better, that feels good because you thought it was only awful and there are moments of some relief. Third, by asking yourself why you engage in a mindful search and we have so much data that that mindful search alone is good for your health.

00:27:33 — Last, that if you believe or look for a cure, I think you're more likely to find one. Now, we've done this with multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, arthritis, chronic pain, a host of real things, things that are scary for people to have, and in each case, we get a great improvement.

00:27:55 — And you can do this yourself, which is how it all started, which is people, when they take a placebo, You know, the doctor is wearing a white coat, gives you this nothing, you take it and you get better. Clearly, you're doing it yourself. So what do we need the doctor for? And so that's how this attention to variability started. Most people have a smartphone. So you set your smartphone for an hour, and in an hour it rings. And you ask yourself, is the symptom better or worse than the last time, and why?

00:28:28 — Men set it for three hours, two hours and ten minutes, doesn't matter. Or just random times in the course of a day, over the week, two weeks, whatever. And that even if you don't get the answer, you're going to end up better for the reasons that I said.

Rich Roll

00:28:44 — Because you are paying mindful attention to what's occurring which is connecting you more deeply to yourself.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:28:51 — And when the neurons are firing, that's literally and figuratively enlivening. It's energizing, which is something that I often fail to remind people of, Because I think we should be mindful all the time. You say it to people, oh my god, it sounds scary to them, unless you're an academic. It's confused with thinking, and even thinking has gotten a bad rap. It's not thinking that's hard. It's the worrying that you're not going to be able to solve whatever the problem is.

00:29:19 — That's hard. So what we find is that the more mindful you are, the more energized you are. And the way for people to understand that is if they think of doing whatever they enjoy doing, that the only way you can enjoy it is if you're there for it. So it turns out mindfulness is energizing. It turns out that it's good for you. It turns out that it feels good.

00:29:43 — And you know that I've been doing this for so long there's been lots of opportunity to put in all sorts of dependent measures. So it's better for everything. People see you as charismatic. It actually leaves us imprint on the products you produce, your relationships improve, your memory is better, so on and so on.

Rich Roll

00:30:03 — So for somebody who's new to this idea of mindfulness or have traditionally associated it with a meditation practice, something formal like that, what is the process of getting somebody mindfully engaged?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:30:17 — What we have people do is notice new things, three, five, really doesn't matter, but people need a number, so he said, notice three new things about

things you know. Go home and notice three new things about your spouse. Notice three new things about the lawn. Three new things about something at work. And what happens is when you're noticing new things about the things you think you know, you come to see you didn't know them very well, so your attention naturally goes there.

00:30:46 — Now, the other way, the top-down way, is to accept that everything is changing, everything looks different from different perspectives. So uncertainty is the rule. Most of us have been taught from day one, certainties. And those certainties are making us mindless. They make us unaware of all sorts of possibilities for every aspect of our mind.

00:31:11 — For me, life changed when I was at this horse event. You remember, I'm a straight A student. And you were also, well, we're the ones people hate. I might have even as a kid memorized what was underneath the pictures. I mean, that was terrible. Okay, so I know. Now I'm at this horse event. This man asked me if I'll watch his horse for him because he's gonna get his horse a hot dog. I roll my eyes internally so he can't see, important to be nice, and I think he's crazy.

00:31:39 — Horses don't eat meat. Everybody knows, or at least all the A students know that. Okay, good. Horses don't eat meat. He comes back with the hot dog and the horse ate it. And it was at that moment that everything changed for me. That everything became possible because all of the things that were preventing that possibility now just crumbled.

00:32:02 — There's so many ways that they're wrong. You know, how many horses were tested in these studies? How much grain was mixed with how much meat? How hungry were the horses? You know, when you're doing a study, these sorts of questions really matter. And they're typically ignored when the results are being reported and reported in magazines.

Rich Roll

00:32:26 — Who needs a cup holder when you have a CamelBak? And I have white seats. It's not gonna spill. We're brought to you today by a brand new sponsor, CamelBak. So much more than just those hydration backpacks we love. Coming in hot with a gorgeous line of super functional, beautifully designed, vacuum insulated drinkware. They will not leak.

00:32:48 — For all of us who enjoy our beverages on the fly, for all of us who are fed up with hot stuff not staying hot, cold stuff getting warm, and that lid that you were absolutely sure was sealed just pops off, problems no longer courtesy of the legends at Camelback who get it and deliver. Basically, they have sizes, colors, shapes, essentials for every occasion and all your beverage needs. Go to camelback. Com, sign up with your email and use my code richroll for 20% off your entire purchase at checkout, or you can click the link in the description below.

00:33:24 — From there, it's sort of a short leap to this idea of the illusion of control that we walk around with, like in addition to these rules and these structures and

organizational systems that help us make sense of the world that we kind of adhere to, that drive a sense of mindlessness, because we can just operate within that context, we have this sense that we are exerting some level of control over our lives and external events, while also feeling like we're pretty good at assessing risk when it comes to decision making.

Dr. Ellen Langer

And of course, you know, I disagree.

Rich Roll

Yeah, I know. So I'm just said, I'm just lobbing you a softball here.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:34:07 — But there's so much, I don't know, I don't know which one to hit. All right. Well, the first thing is that people hold things still, because I think then they'll have greater control over it. If I can say what kind of person you are, now I know you're a whatever, then I can make sure you don't hurt me in that way.

Rich Roll

00:34:27 — But that's the evolutionary kind of explanation for why we're wired that way. That's what you're saying? No, no, no, never went there.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:34:35 — If I think you're the kind of person who's late, so we're married, and I'm going to make dinner, we'll make it very traditional, I'm too old for you, but that if I know that you're always late, I adjust myself accordingly, right? But you're not always late. And if I cared more about you and wanted to facilitate things in the relationship, I would pay more

00:35:02 — attention to when you were and when you weren't, just like the symptoms that we were talking about a moment before. But I hold you still now, you're that kind of person, you're always late, you're always cheap, you're always whatever we call people. And that makes us feel in control. As long as I know how everybody else is, I know how I should be. But because everybody is changing, and because sometimes you are this way, sometimes you're not, and even when

00:35:30 — you're this way, whatever that is, there are other ways of looking at it, so you're being careful with money, you're not being cheap. When we recognize that, then we actually have more control and the relationship improves. We pigeonhole people. We make comparisons all the time that are mindless as a way, I think, to exercise control. But since we're so often wrong, we're actually giving up control. I mean, if I see you as a snob, what am I going to do? I'm going to avoid you.

00:36:04 — Why do I want you in my life if you're a snob? If I take that same behavior that looks like you're a snob, I say, oh, he's really shy. You wouldn't expect a tall, handsome man to be shy, but he's shy. Now, every behavior that was true for you being a snob is also true for you being shy. Once I call you shy, though, I want to embrace you.

Rich Roll

00:36:26 — That kind of speaks to this other idea that you have around transcending judgments and getting to this place of understanding.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:36:34 — This is the most important, it's so funny, because in 45 years of research and some of them life and death, changing the meaning of aging, big potentially big important things, this is the one that is nearest and dearest to my heart, which is behavior makes sense from the actor's perspective or else he or she wouldn't do it. No one wakes up in the morning and says you know today I'm gonna be clumsy, inconsiderate, and I'm gonna procrastinate.

00:37:04 — So when people are doing things that get on your nerves, what is it from their perspective? Now, so I was doing therapy when I was at Yale. At first it was fun, and you know, then I didn't have the patience for it because. I wanted to say, you have all of the behaviors you want, just do them. You know, but of course you can't say that to people, just do it. So what was it that was keeping them from doing it? And then I realized that when people are trying

00:37:29 — to change a behavior, they're not looking at it as the same way as when they're motivated to do the behavior. So, for example, I am scarily gullible, really. It's very easy to take advantage of me, and several have. So I want to change. You see how gullible I am. This is not good for our relationship. You've got to change. I keep trying and trying, and I'll fail. And And the reason I'll fail is that because going forward, I'm being trusting.

00:38:02 — And I don't want to stop being trusting, even if it means sometimes people will take advantage of me. See, you are so damn inconsistent, it's really hard to tolerate you. I love your flexibility. I am so impulsive that I need to change, but that's because I value my spontaneity.

00:38:22 — So we did a study ages ago. We gave people 300 behavior descriptions and we said circle those things that you've tried to change about yourself and you have trouble, gullible for me, impulsive, okay. Then you turn the page over and in a mixed up order are the positive versions of these. Now circle the things you really value about yourself, my spontaneity and my being trusting.

00:38:49 — Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So in other words, with this, you can see how relationships would improve, right? Because now there's no reason to demean you because what you're doing makes sense. I was just mindlessly saying it in a rigid way.

Rich Roll

00:39:04 — There's always a reason for the behavior and what you're referring to are the values that motivate and underlie the behavior. So trust is a value that is important to you. And the manifestation of that is gullibility. You can change gullibility and still hold on to.

Dr. Ellen Langer

Not really.

Rich Roll

Trust. Well. You can set healthy boundaries and do, there's ways, I think there's ways you can play with that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:39:29 — No, what you're saying is you can be a little less gullible by being a little less trusting. And sure. Yeah. But the two are the same. It's the same thing.

Rich Roll

00:39:39 — But I think getting to the values that are driving the behavior is the pathway to understanding. And to your point, that every behavior is motivated by some reason that makes sense to the person who's perpetrating it, it's this idea, my wife says this all the time, like every man or every woman is right from their perspective. And if you can understand that and embrace that, I think it allows you to kind of have a little bit more grace

00:40:05 — and a sense of empathy and understanding.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:40:08 — Yeah, I think that because we're brought up mindlessly, which means we seek single explanations for events, that if you see something different from the way I see it, I see it the way I see it, it must be right, because if it weren't right, I would change it, right? So anything you do that's different from me means that you're wrong.

00:40:28 — And so we have to open up all of that, and all of that stems from, strangely, I think, a belief that the things that we're after are scarce, that we both can't be important, happy, full people. There's always this, you know, who's better on which dimension, whether it's, you know, with friends, relationships. And I think we're taught that in the beginning. We're taught that in schools by there being a normal distribution for grades.

00:40:58 — You know, Harvard had this thing, this was years ago, where we got a printout that compared the grade you gave the student with the grade that student got in other classes, basically saying, you shouldn't give that student an A because the student is a B student. And I don't know, I think sometimes I give all A's because they all deserve A's.

Rich Roll

00:41:22 — Well, it's interesting how rules and institutions and structures drive that sense of a scarcity mindset from the moment we come into the world, right? And we're not even kind of consciously aware of it. And you have a whole chapter on this in the book, this difference between an abundance and an abundance mindset and a scarcity mindset.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:41:39 — I came to pass with somebody that I knew who, I'm like a little kid and I went, you know, you wouldn't believe this, I got these sneakers on sale.

Rich Roll

00:41:48 — Okay, big deal, right? You have a lot of energy.

Dr. Ellen Langer

I do.

Rich Roll

And this is your third podcast today. Yeah. So this mindful approach is working for you.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:41:55 — Yeah, no, mindfulness is energy beginning. So I'm not gonna be able to sleep tonight because I'm gonna be too energized. Anyway, so I come back and I say, I got these sneakers on sale, excited. Did, in my mind, what I'm doing is sharing, right? I got these sneakers. You get the sneakers. I'll tell you where to go. She thought I was bragging, and it took me so long to figure out, how could I be bragging?

00:42:21 — But because her mindset was one of scarcity. So if I got them, now there are fewer available for other people. Mine was, sneakers can be gotten at this price.

Rich Roll

00:42:34 — Which led to her resentment or jealousy. But how does mindfulness work to disabuse us of a scarcity mindset?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:42:44 — Well, for one thing, you see how things are more abundant. You see how several things can be used in several different ways. You know, we have notions of natural resources. You want more natural resources? Call more things natural. You know, it's, I mean that, you know,

Rich Roll

00:43:03 — Back to the language thing.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:43:05 — The things that we care about, but people don't know that this is what they care about, are not limited. They're not scarce. As I said a moment before, despite all the normal distributions we set up, saying some people should have a lot, some a medium amount, and some very little, whether it's talent, beauty, money, health, the things we care about are not limited, that we can live in a world. You can, just forget the world, have a relationship where both of you prosper.

00:43:34 — It doesn't have to be, you know, here's my domain where I'm better than you, here's your domain, which is when the good relationships work, tend to be that way.

Rich Roll

00:43:44 — Scarcity isn't unrelated to control issues either, right? No, of course. Like if you're driven by a scarcity mindset, you want to kind of control, you know, what you have access to, et cetera. And that kind of gets into this idea of future casting and, you know, probabilities and how we as human beings think we have a sense of what's gonna come next. And your whole thing is like, virtually nothing is predictable. This is so hard to communicate to people.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:44:11 — People think they can predict all the time, you know, because they're making predictions. And then if, you know, if I make a prediction that you're going to smile, huh? You see, but I could have-

Rich Roll

00:44:22 — You're a manifestor.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:44:22 — I could have left it for three days, right? And at some point you're going to smile. So it's very easy seeing that our predictions are right. We think we can predict because we're so good at postdicting, looking back. So an example, John and

Mary are at a party, they're fighting. And if I said to you, you think they're going to get divorced, you say, how do I know? People fight.

00:44:44 — But if we don't have that conversation, you see them fighting, a month later, two weeks later, it doesn't matter, somebody says to you, hey, did you know John and Mary are getting divorced? I knew it. You should have seen them go at each other. And I think that people don't understand that while you may be able to predict for the group, nobody who knows anything about numbers believes you can predict the individual case. So what does that mean? If I were to say to you, here's a used parking lot, a lot of cars in a parking lot, and here's a Mercedes dealership.

00:45:16 — Now you go and we pick 20 cars at random, or we look at 100 cars, and we just try them ones, chances are more Mercedes are going to start than the used cars. But I don't know of anybody who'd take the bet for all the money, all the future money you're going to make, and I'll match it, that any Mercedes that we pick at random will start.

00:45:41 — Because we know things happen. If I am in a foul shooting context with Michael Jordan, whoever's the lead now, I could win if we only shoot one ball. I sometimes get it in, he sometimes misses. If we do many, you know, the difference in our talent will reveal itself. And most of the time what we're doing is making decisions about individual cases. Now when you know you can't predict, it throws everything into disarray, but it also makes life easy.

00:46:11 — Most people get themselves crazed with, should I do this or should I do that? The decision is based on a prediction, right? Should I do this? Is because I'm predicting that this will be great. Or this, which will be great, which will be great, or I don't know, and so on. When you can't predict, it doesn't matter. And if it doesn't matter, then life actually becomes easy. So my bottom line, rather than waste your time being stressed over making the right decision, make the decision right.

00:46:42 — Randomly choose. Now, you can randomly choose if you want an Almond Joy or a Snickers, nobody's going to care, right? But it's the exact, this is the hard part to swallow, it's the exact same thing about getting an abortion or not, getting married or not, taking the job or not. Doesn't matter whether the decision is big or small, you can't know.

Rich Roll

00:47:08 — That's a very confronting idea.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:47:09 — Yeah, well, I mean, you can only live one life. If there were some magical way that I could live a life as somebody who's had three kids and live a life as somebody who has one kid and somebody who hasn't had kids, maybe I can make a comparison. But you don't have that available to you. So I say to my students,

so let's say, should you go to Harvard or should you go to Yale? So they made a decision to go to Harvard. So let's say it's terrible, you know, if they screw up royally, and they say, oh, I wish I had gone to Yale.

00:47:39 — There's no way of knowing that Yale wouldn't have been worse, better, the same. And that's why regret is so mindless, because the choice you didn't take, you're presuming, would have been better. And, you know, there's no evidence for that.

Rich Roll

00:47:55 — But we have this predisposition to haunt ourselves with these sorts of things, looking retrospectively over our life and wondering what could have been or what should have been had this or that gone differently.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:48:06 — But you only do that when your present is not happy.

Rich Roll

00:48:10 — Right, exactly. But the labels, good, bad, better, worse, are all words and subjective thoughts that we place on top of these things and they become real or emotional experience only by dint of the fact that we've made that decision and labeled them.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:48:28 — Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Rich Roll

00:48:30 — And mindfulness is a way of putting distance between you.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:48:34 — Well, the way you put distance between it is by seeing it in a multifaceted way. So here are five ways it's good here, five ways it's bad, you know, I don't have to-.

Rich Roll

00:48:45 — What is good or bad?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:48:46 — Well, but if you're using that language for yourself, right now we have, if it's good, I have to kill people to what I can to get it, right? Stay up all night. I mean, I have to get that thing because it's good. And if it's bad, I have to do everything I can to stay away from it. Now, when you know it's neither good nor bad, I don't have to do anything, whatever. If this podcast is wonderful, that's great. If the podcast turns out the cameras aren't working, it's also great because I can enumerate all the advance,

00:49:14 — this is funny, the other day I was told of this very, very large prize, if you can extend life, which is what I've been doing, right, for the past 45 years. Okay, so somebody-

Rich Roll

00:49:28 — Is this the Peter D. Manis thing?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:49:29 — Yeah, somebody tells me about this, \$100 million. Okay, so I'm driving by myself. I have an hour drive. So, oh, okay. Now, first to the government, I don't live in that moneyed world, but I'll assume the government wants \$50 million. What am I going to do with the other \$50 million? And it's taking me my whole ride home.

Rich Roll

00:49:48 — You're already mad at the IRS for taking away so much money from you.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:49:50 — No, I didn't care about that because the \$50 million wasn't enough for me. And if I give this to you, oh, then you're going to be upset that I didn't give as much to you. At the end, And I was fine not having the money.

Rich Roll

00:50:02 — You created your own like sort of accelerated suffering as a result of trying to experience what that might be like. That's very funny.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:50:11 — So the point is that, you know, with everything good, there's a way of constructing it, understanding, construing it so that it's not so good and vice versa. And people need to understand outcomes are in our heads, the value of outcomes. The outcome is nothing, you know, the way you understand it will determine your emotional response to it. And there, the more mindful you are, the more ways you can look at it, the more choices you actually have.

Rich Roll

00:50:36 — How well do you practice that yourself?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:50:38 — You know, I'm almost embarrassed to tell you, I virtually never experienced stress. Wow. Yeah, I mean, I've had some big things happen in my life, you know, a major fire that destroyed 80% of what I owned, my mother died when she was young, you know, these sorts of things. But when the house went up in smoke. And I called the insurance agent, came the next day, and he said to me, in his 25 years on the job, this was the first time that the damage was worse than the call.

00:51:09 — Oh my God, oh my God, is what most people say. I can't, oh, and it's nothing, right? Here, it was a lot. But my feeling was, I had already lost the stuff. Throwing my sanity away wasn't going to get it back. And I also felt, I'm not so attached to things. I love nice things, but I don't need them. You know, so, and those things were all part of my past.

00:51:31 — As long as you have a rich present, you don't need the mementos from the past.

Rich Roll

00:51:37 — What I extracted from that story is like the sort of golden lining or the benefits of this where it was like a new kind of understanding of the meaning or importance of material things in your life, realizing like, okay, that wasn't so great, but like, I'm actually fine. And then going and lecturing without your notes. That was the best. And having a kind of revelatory experience of finding something new and different.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:52:03 — Yeah, that one. So I didn't care really about anything that I lost in the fire, except that in a short time from the date of the fire, I had to give a large lecture class and my notes were destroyed. And so what am I gonna do? What am I gonna do? So what I ended up doing was calling a student who took the class the year before and I borrowed her notes like a telephone game.

00:52:26 — And because they were somebody else's notes, even though they were basically copying down from what I had said, I involved myself, I engaged myself in the preparation for each lecture in a way that I hadn't done in a while. The problem, PowerPoint slides are wonderful, but once you have it, it's sort of hard to to change your thinking about all of it. So here, since I didn't have any of the slides, everything was new, and I think it was the best class that I had taught.

Rich Roll

00:52:59 — Do you have a formality in the way that you bring mindfulness into your moments and your hours and your days, or is it now just a muscle memory where- It's none of those things.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:53:09 — I mean, I think that it's the way I do everything. It's sort of up and out, you know, in some sense. A lot of people ask about my doing a study, has the study changed my life? The results of the study surprise me or whatever. And I don't know if I do this backwards, different from other people, but for me, I do something and I notice the doing of it.

00:53:35 — And then I say, well, do other people do this? And, you know, if not, why not? And then I set up the study. So I already have evidence. I don't have evidence that it's going to be broadly done, but at least evidence that at least I do it.

Rich Roll

00:53:49 — It feels like a natural inclination that you have as a result of this, that you can kind of see things through a unique different lens that other people don't see. And that energizes your imagination.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:54:03 — It's not that I see it the way you see it, and I see it the way I see it. And you know, that many times I'm oblivious to the fact that you're seeing it differently. You know, and it's only then talking about it. I remember, and you know, because that was, had a lot of Milmore stuff in it, that when. I was an undergraduate, and I had been helping this professor with something, and I came up with something that she didn't come up with, which is going to happen, but she then decided it was because I was creative, which was never a label I had for myself.

00:54:36 — Those were the people, the kids who could draw or who were in band. So now I'm creative. Then almost at the same time, I had written a program text for a paper, a final paper in a class. And the teacher wrote back, got my A's, and I wrote back, I have such chutzpah. Well, as Yiddish, you know, it means you're able to go out there and break the rules and do whatever.

00:55:01 — And, you know, wish I never saw myself that way. Now I had double permission. Creative chutzpah, you know, telling me that I can break out of a structure that is stifling for people.

Rich Roll

00:55:14 — I want to get back to this idea of how much agency and power and control we unknowingly kind of yield over the well-being of our bodies and our minds, not to be dualistic about it. But I think a good way to kind of elaborate on that is some of the work you've done around aging and belief.

00:55:37 — And in particular, maybe, you know, start with the counterclockwise study.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:55:42 — Yeah, well, the counterclockwise study was the first test of the mind-body unity hypothesis. Again, mind and body, if it's one thing, wherever you put the mind, you're necessarily going to put the body. So we have a host of studies where we put the mind in strange places and take our measurements. In this case, what we did was to, um, retrofit, um, a retreat to seem to be 20 years earlier.

00:56:07 — And we had old men live there for a week as if they were their younger selves. So, uh, they would be talking in the present tense about things that had passed, um, the books, all of the props, the TV shows that we showed. Everything said this was 20 years earlier.

00:56:27 — The comparison group stayed in the same retreat, not at the same time, and talked about the same thing, except they were talking about it in the past tense, and it was clear that now is now and then was then, where those emerged for the first group. And their results were big, I think, that in this period of one week, these are men in their late seventies, eighties. And that was, you know, 20, 1979. So lots of years ago when 80 was probably like a hundred.

Rich Roll

00:57:04 — Yeah, it was different.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:57:05 — Yeah. Anyway, so without any medical intervention, their vision improved, their hearing improved, their memory, their strength, and they look noticeably younger.

Rich Roll

00:57:16 — In a week. One week. One week. And you were measuring all these biomarkers.

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:57:20 — Yeah, yeah. Well, the funny thing is where I started this and I was trying to get the measures together, I called all the geriatricians that I could think to call. And I said, okay, if I have a 50 year old man in one room and a 75 year old man in the other, what measure do you want me to give you so you'll know who's who? They couldn't come up with anything. You know, so whatever that means.

Rich Roll

00:57:46 — So what do you extrapolate from that finding?

Dr. Ellen Langer

00:57:49 — Most of the deterioration we experience is a function of our minds, you know, that you see with old people, I experience it myself, I forget something, oh my goodness, you know, am I becoming demented, and you know, for me it's odd, I mean, I teach undergraduates, they don't get 100 on the test, you know, they forget also, the thing is that they don't worry about forgetting. As we get older, we stop ourselves, we presume we can't do things, so we don't do them.

00:58:19 — And by removing that, all sorts of possibilities present themselves. You know, that you can do the same things you did before, maybe it's better to do them differently. You know, I'm thinking about when I played tennis with these young kids, and I was playing very differently from them. They were 16-year-old boys, full of energy, running all over the place, but I knew the game. And I knew if they're standing there, the ball's going to come here.

00:58:46 — If they're standing there, the ball's going to go there. I don't have to be racing around quite as much as they did. And so if you assume that as you get older, you become wiser, you should change some of your behavior. But if you're not aware of changing your behavior because of these positive things, we tend to always make negative explanations for why we've changed. It's always based on you can't. And I don't think that there's any, we can never prove that we can't, which people don't seem to understand.

00:59:15 — And trying is a whole ball game, which this is the piece that, I don't know how this came about, but this massive misunderstanding where people think they want complete success, not knowing that if they had complete success, life would be empty. So an example I'm fond of using, you play golf. If you got a hole in one, every time you swung the club, there'd be no game, right?

00:59:41 — You know, an example I used earlier today, you're in the elevator, you're a little kid, You try to reach that button, you can't, you can't. Your father picks you up, you press the button. Wowee, wow. Then you get a little, you still can't. Now finally, you're tall enough, you press the button. Tell me how many times you've been in an elevator where you were excited about pressing. So once we can do it, it's no longer meaningful to us.

Rich Roll

01:00:03 — Right, I got you. But what I do do is I always press the door close button.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:00:06 — Oh, me too, even if it doesn't work.

Rich Roll

01:00:07 — And I know it doesn't do anything, and I know you've written about this as well, but I still do it every time. Yeah, me too. In reflecting on the counterclockwise

study, I can't help but wonder if part of it is the sense of hopefulness, like the idea that you're younger, there's a future that's unwritten that lies ahead, that kind of drives a sense of youthfulness, as opposed to the person who is sitting in their older years

01:00:36 — and looking in the rear view mirror where life is about memory and the sense of possibility for the future seems much more curtailed.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:00:44 — And that's what people say. My own feeling is that if we're both here now, we're in the same now. And that it's nice for you to decide in 10 years you want to do X. But it would be stupid, mindless, if you really had a commitment, because you don't know what you're going to want to do in 10 years. So, I don't think most of us, when I was younger, I didn't spend that kind of time thinking about the future.

01:01:16 — People say that, but at least for me, it wasn't true.

Rich Roll

01:01:19 — So do people ask you what your five-year plan is or your 10-year plan?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:01:23 — I'll tell you, it's worse than that. I was in Australia and I gave a talk and there were several people giving talks. Then the person who organized this had us all come out on the stage and surprised us and asked, what is your bucket list? Which is the same sort of question, right, about the future, what is it? And so each person, big shots, give their bucket list. She comes to me, and I go, I don't have a bucket list. First, I felt bad I didn't have a bucket list, if everybody has a bucket list.

01:01:50 — And then I said, wait a second, if I don't have a bucket list, it's good that I don't have a bucket list. Why? And then I realized, you know, you can't make the moment more full than when it's full. And so, you know, it'd be nice, you know, if I were unhappy here now, I might long to be in Paris again, not having the pancreas, but just, you know, being in Paris.

01:02:13 — If I am filled up while I'm here, mindfully engaged, enjoying myself, I don't need to be anywhere else.

Rich Roll

01:02:20 — That's a beautiful way to think about that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:02:23 — But it's the same thing with looking in the past or looking for the future.

Rich Roll

01:02:26 — Sure, yeah, if you're fully present for what is happening right now, that sense of yearning for something better over the horizon isn't nagging on your soul. We've all had that experience of looking at photographs from, you know, a bygone generation. What does a 60-year-old look like in, you know, 1880 or 1920? And then looking at photographs of people today at the same age, and it's very clear that we have a different relationship with aging.

01:02:59 — Like, people do look younger now, and I have to believe that that's because we have a different sensibility around what it means to be a certain age. There's some crazy illustrations of the same thing in the work that you've done. Like in the studies that you talk about in your book, I think one of the ones that stuck out the most for me

01:03:20 — is the ones that you did with the diabetics around perception of time and perception of sugar intake.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:03:28 — So we have people come in who are type 2 diabetes, we give them all sorts of tests. And then we sit them down at a computer and the reason for what I'm going to say next will become clear at the end of the sentence. So we're going to have them play computer games and we tell them change the game you're playing every 15 minutes or so. That's to ensure that they'll look at the clock that's by the computer. The clock is rigged, but they don't know it.

01:03:54 — So for a third of the people, the clock is going twice as fast as real time. For a third of the people, it's going half as fast as real time. For a third of the people, it's real time. Most people would assume that blood sugar level will follow real time. What's the difference what the clock says? Our hypothesis, which was confirmed, was that blood sugar level will follow perceived time, clock time.

01:04:21 — Now, it's the same thing we did with people in a sleep lab. They go to sleep, we change the clock so they think they got more sleep than they actually got, less sleep, or the amount of sleep. Cognitive and behavior functions seem to follow perceived amount of sleep. And this is also relevant to a larger thing, I don't know if we talked about fatigue. So fatigue is largely a psychological construct.

Rich Roll

01:04:45 — As an athlete, this is really fascinating to me.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:04:48 — Yeah, I mean, you know, but people believe that the body is such and if you don't do your weights and build yourself, you're going to peter out. That's all there is to it. Now, the more mindful I get over time now, the more animated. But so the first thing we do is I give people, I ask people to do jumping jacks. Simple, very

simple study to start. Do 100 jumping jacks. Tell me when you're tired. They get tired at 70. We have another group. Do 200 jumping jacks.

01:05:14 — Tell me when you're tired. They get tired at 140. Then we have many of these sorts of things. Now, I say to my class, how far is it humanly possible to run? These are smart kids. They know the marathon is 26 miles. They know I wouldn't ask the question if the answer were 26. So they start guessing. It becomes like an auction, 28, 30, 35. No one ever goes beyond 50. Whoever says 50, everybody groans, right?

01:05:43 — Impossible. Then, I play a video. I don't know if you've seen it. It's a video of the Tarahumara, a tribe that lives in Copper Canyon, Mexico.

Rich Roll

01:05:53 — I had the author of Born to Run here. Oh, okay, there you go.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:05:56 — These people can run 200 miles without stopping. Now, to my mind, the difference between those who can run, I can't, I haven't, not that. I can't, but I've never run five miles. The difference between, let's just say, 26 and 200, metaphorically, is the difference I'm saying between what we think we can control now and what we actually can control and maybe beyond.

01:06:23 — That we're nowhere near living the lives that we could live and to go back to what you're saying about language, all our language conspires against us, saying we make a little progress and we think that's the end. I was thinking today about another thing, I don't know if it's the medical world, I As soon as you take people, we have people who can remember lots.

01:06:49 — And we call them super-memories, and super-tasters, and super-whatever, making it as if that's a closed category that the rest of us can't get into, rather than that it's on a continuum and these people do it a little better, and so maybe we can proceed in the same way. And I believe that any category where you have a super is something available to all of us.

Rich Roll

01:07:17 — That's maybe the most inspirational monologue. I've heard in a long time. I love it. And I got a new video you're going to want to show your class because we had a guy in here the other day who ran 450 miles. Oh, wow.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:07:30 — Yeah, I have to see that.

Rich Roll

01:07:31 — 200 ain't nothing anymore. Yeah, that's incredible.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:07:33 — But, you know, to tell you these videos, the other thing, did we talk about piano stairs? No. Okay, so, one thing that people have to understand, so when I say you want to be mindful all the time, you see from the way I am now, mindfulness is energy beginning. Mindfulness is the way you are when you're having fun. So, these people, I think in Scandinavia, let's say Sweden, you know, turns out, I didn't know this then, subways all over the world, they're the same, you have an escalator and you have stairs.

01:08:01 — And all over the world, everybody is taking the escalator. The random athlete like you will run up the stairs, the young boy up the stairs. Now what they do, they lay down a piano keys on the stairs, so it actually makes noise, doot, doot, doot. Now, in almost no time, everybody takes the stairs because it's fun.

01:08:23 — And what I say to my students is, why do you have to wait for someone to put the keyboard down there? You can do this in your mind, just doot, doot, doot, you know, whatever. Or whatever, everything can be made to be fun. And the world has taught us quite the contrary. You're not supposed to have fun at work. So you have work versus play.

Rich Roll

01:08:43 — Studying is hard, college is hard, all of these things.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:08:47 — Yeah, and it all keeps people in place and it's not a good place to be kept.

Rich Roll

01:08:51 — Framing, this is something you did with the chambermaid study as well. Like, is it work or is it exercise?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:08:59 — First thing that was interesting, Okay, we take these chambermaids and we ask them how much exercise they get. This was surprising to me, because these women, all they're doing is exercising all day long, but they don't think they do exercise, because to them, exercise, according to the Surgeon. General, is what you do after work. So for those who sit in a desk all day long, they're not really exercising, it's when they go to the gym afterwards.

01:09:28 — Okay, so now imagine, we didn't do this, but those who exercise, the chambermaids are exercising, should be healthier than socioeconomically equivalent people who are not exercising. But they're not. So what we do, very simple study,

we take the chambermaids, divide them into two groups and one group. We just teach them. Do you know your work is exercise? Making a bed is like working on this machine at the gym, sweeping is like... Okay, so all we've done is change their minds from not realizing their work was exercise to seeing that their work is exercise.

01:10:06 — We took lots of measures to start. When the study is over, we want to find out, is she working any harder, expending any more energy than this? No. Are they eating any differently? Those who see it as exercise, no differences. Nevertheless, those who now see their work as exercise, we get they lost weight, a change in waist to hip ratio,

01:10:28 — body mass index, and their blood pressure came down.

Rich Roll

01:10:30 — And the control group, no change in the other group.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:10:35 — It's so crazy. Now it's interesting, but you know, let's talk about mindlessness, that when I give these findings, I could just say they lost weight, but doesn't it have more of a scientific heft when I say there was a change in body mass index and waist-to-hip ratio.

Rich Roll

01:10:50 — And how are these results received by your colleagues?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:10:54 — Oh, you know, the people in the world love it because now they can see themselves as exercising and losing weight without, you know, exerting more energy. You know what Mark Twain, I'll get to the question if I remember it, Mark Twain said about exercise? No. Sad, you'll hate it. He said, every time the urge to exercise comes over me, I know if I just sit still for a moment, it'll pass.

Rich Roll

01:11:18 — Well, what if you just sat down and imagined yourself exercising or tried to visualize or experience what it feels like to be fatigued from exerting yourself?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:11:31 — Your imagination is far, far more powerful than most people believe. There are studies by others of people who are flexing their muscles and that imagined versus real, and the outcome is basically the same. That's a hard one to believe. Well, it's not mine, so I don't care if you believe it or not, but to go back to the question, you know, what are people's responses to my work?

01:12:00 — The people who hate it or whatever don't come to me, so I don't know, and I think that, you know, I've been in the field for so long that, you know, I think that people assume that it's true.

Rich Roll

01:12:13 — Hmm, when we think of placebos, we think of the sugar pill or the capsule that we're given that we're either told or not told is a medication or not. But placebo is actually a much broader concept.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:12:30 — It's an expectation and our expectations control our behavior in ways that we're not aware of. A simple example, most people have used the Snelling eye chart to see your vision. And this whole thing is so remarkable to me that people buy this. You look at letters that make no sense in a doctor's office, which is necessarily stressful for so many people, and the doctor gives you a number

01:12:55 — and you see that's the way you see, it wouldn't occur to me.

Rich Roll

01:12:59 — I just did that like two weeks ago.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:13:01 — Okay, and I see you're wearing glasses.

Спикер ?

01:13:03 — Yeah.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:13:03 — Okay. I've worn them my whole life though.

Rich Roll

01:13:04 — Then I started to feel bad about it after.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:13:06 — I don't want you to feel bad about it, but we have remedies. Anyways, so I look at this chart, and we've agreed implicitly that I'm bizarre, and when. I see the eye chart, I don't see it the way other people see it, I think, if they think anything. I see it as, this is a setup. The letters are getting progressively smaller, which is leading

me to expect not to be able to see. So we come up with a different eye chart, where now the letters get progressively larger, letter, creating a different expectation.

01:13:39 — Now the expectation is, soon I will be able to see. And what happens is that people can see what they couldn't see before. One more expectation study. Most people assume when you get two-thirds of the way down the I-chart, you're going to have trouble seeing it. What we did was we took the original I-chart, we just took the bottom two-thirds, so you don't need those big letters anyway, two-thirds

01:14:04 — of the way down there are much smaller letters than on the original, but they're both occurring in the same place, right? Two thirds of the way down. And again, people saw what they couldn't see before.

Rich Roll

01:14:14 — You also did this study with pilots, fighter pilots.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:14:19 — Yeah, there are different variations on the same thing that if you believe you can, then all of the things that prevent you from doing whatever it is are eliminated. Pilots are seen to have excellent vision. So what we do, we put people, we test their vision. We put them in pilot uniforms. We have them go into a flight simulator. Have you ever been in a flight? It's very real.

01:14:45 — There's an oncoming plane and we want them to read a very small set of letters that was taken from the eye chart on that oncoming plane. When they're pilots, they can see it.

Rich Roll

01:14:57 — And the ones that were in the control group who were told the simulator was broken. They were unable.

Спикер ?

01:15:02 — They had to simulate everything.

Rich Roll

01:15:03 — Exactly. They didn't score as high.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:15:04 — You know, I mean, if you had trouble doing something and I had you put on an outfit of Superman, okay, you know, so you see yourself, I think you would be able to lift more weight. If you were Einstein, you know, I have people because they think that I am less afraid than they with certain things. So, if they have to go into

fighting with a waiter or, you know, somebody, employer, they pretend that they're me.

01:15:36 — That's fine. You know, but I, you know, I believe I can sing. If you saw me, not saw me, but heard me in the shower, and when I'm being Maria Callas or Barbra Streisand, I get a lot of notes. But it's me, right? They're not there. You know, so I think that we all, that we not all, but many of us tend to underestimate our abilities.

01:16:01 — And so some of these studies just sort of free us from whatever is holding us back.

Rich Roll

01:16:07 — It's very encouraging and empowering to understand that, you know, belief can drive better outcomes for ourselves. And if we can get to a place of, you know, disabusing ourselves of all the assumptions that we make about how things work and don't work and what our limits are. For somebody who's watching or listening to this, who's saying, well, that's great and that's super entertaining to hear that, but like, how do I begin to construct my version of this?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:16:34 — We already said that if you take on the assumption by the assumption that everything is uncertain, there's a way that you naturally approach things more mindfully. But if you take any explanation, if you have children and they ask you a question, Don't answer it with a single answer, answer it with multiple answers, answer it with answers that then take those answers and show how, gee, these are negatives, even though they seem positive and vice versa.

01:17:01 — Just open everything up and it will all happen naturally. The other, in a more mundane way, that most people are stressed most of the time. That stress means that they're making predictions about things that can't be predicted and they're oblivious to the fact that they're in charge of their experience of that. So think of the things you were scared of in the past and how did it turn out? It almost always turns out fine.

01:17:31 — So going forward, you don't have to be so afraid.

Rich Roll

01:17:35 — Well, anything you worry about, it either doesn't happen, which means that was a waste of energy and time, or if it does happen, it happened and there was no reason worrying about all that time that you wasn't worrying about before it happened.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:17:49 — That's the main thing. So there are people who, I wrote about this, I think it might even be in the book, about defensive pessimism. And some people, so you have people like me who are clearly optimistic, but everybody thinks that they're realistic, right? I don't think that, I'm thinking positive, but deep down I know it's negative. This is the way it is. And the negative person is not being negative, this is the way they experience the world.

01:18:14 — But defensive pessimism is basically the idea that what you should do is hope for the best, but expect the worst. Okay? Now, that would be fine if the world existed independent of human presence, where you could actually count things without influencing them. That if you're expecting the worst, you're going to see the worst. And if you're going to see the worst, it's going to have a very different effect on you.

01:18:43 — And that the alternative is to see the best. You know, that if you worried this, I wrote this for people at school about worrying about being COVID. And that worrying about COVID is only making you weaker should you have to deal with COVID. What you need to do is develop a plan at the time. So it was, okay, I'm gonna wear a mask.

01:19:08 — I'm gonna wash my hands. Okay. And I'm gonna stay away from people who are coughing in my face. Now I have a plan. Now I'm just going to live my life. Now, if it turns out, if instead of this, you worry about getting COVID, your stress, as we said many times now, is very bad for your health, and you may get it or not get it. So you start off, you're doing these things, you can get it or you cannot get it.

01:19:34 — If you don't get it, as you've said, you've wasted all this time. If you get it, all that time you've spent worrying makes you less able to handle it.

Rich Roll

01:19:44 — Right, because the stress and anxiety has impaired your immune system. It's not six of one, half a dozen of the other. People keep thinking that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:19:49 — Glass half full is not the same thing as half empty. If you see it as half empty, you spend your time being thirsty, worrying about where you're gonna get your next glass of water or whatever, the martini, whatever's in the glass.

Rich Roll

01:20:03 — And being in the presence of somebody who is so beautifully and eloquently mindful and practicing this idea and exuding this sensibility is actually contagious.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:20:17 — Yeah, we have studies on contagion, but let me tell you that there are times I'm mindless. My response to my being mindless is probably different from your response to your being mindless. When I'm mindless, I say, yes, I'm right. It's out there. I mean, I've been studying this, caring about this for 45 years or more. And still there are moments where I do something mindlessly.

Rich Roll

01:20:42 — But the more mindful you are, I suspect, the more questions arise and the more uncertainty becomes apparent because things aren't as they seem, the more you're paying attention. Exactly, exactly.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:20:54 — Now, the way it's contagious, there are several ways. The first is that when you're mindful, you tend to be more charismatic. And so people are giving you more attention, and more positive regard. And that allows you to feel better and then to be even more mindful. But if I'm mindful, there's a way when I'm talking to, let's say you are usually hiding what you're feeling or whatever may be the case, you feel safe.

01:21:24 — And if you feel safe, then you're going to be more mindful because it's better, okay? It just leads to all sorts of good outcomes. So that's one thing. Another is that it actually seems, this is wild, to be in the air. So what do I mean? This is a study we did with meditators actually.

01:21:48 — So we have meditators meditating in a room. They leave. Now the participants come and we give them tests, cognitive tests, memory and things like that. Or, there's no one in the room, and the participants go into the room, taking the same tests. When people have just finished meditating, the participants perform better than in the empty room.

01:22:14 — Somehow it's in the air. Now, I make clear that these studies, and others like them, are at the end of the book. You know, with enough disclaimers, I'm just telling you what I found. Right. I'm not telling you what you have to believe. I mean, that's fucking crazy,

Rich Roll

01:22:29 — But the idea being that there's a residual like vibration, they meditate, they leave, there's some energy force in that room that is influencing the test takers.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:22:40 — Yeah, next time we do the study, if there ever is, we should have a fan. So whatever is there- It blows out the particles. It blows it out and then you shouldn't get it. So you have meditators...

Rich Roll

01:22:49 — Is it waves or is it particles?

Dr. Ellen Langer

Yeah, right.

Rich Roll

We're going quantum here, right?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:22:55 — But the less crazy, not crazy but different, are things like with autism. So now I think another thing that you can pull out of my philosophy of life, if it is a philosophy, is that every group that is diminished in some way probably has some asset that's being overlooked. And so I thought, you know, I don't know anybody autistic.

01:23:23 — And so this is purely, most of the things that I come up with come from experience. This is just derived. What if kids, if most people are mindless, and if mindlessness is off-putting, which it is, I have other data, you know, where you're interacting with a mindful or a mindless experimenter, and just, it's uncomfortable when the person is not there, and we have expressions like the light's on but nobody's home to acknowledge that when someone's not there, you know, you don't like being with them. Okay, what if the kid or adult who is autistic is hypersensitive to other people's consciousness, more aware that, and in that regard, that means that if you're mindless, it's gonna have a bigger negative effect on me. So what we do is we take autistic kids and we have them interact with adults being mindful or mindless.

01:24:22 — And when the adults are mindful, the kids are just like, well, the other kids.

Rich Roll

01:24:28 — Another example of that is- The point being that that just abuses the idea that autism is about like an Indian capacity for emotional intelligence.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:24:39 — Yeah, exactly. It speaks to the opposite of that. But I'm not, this is one study, one brief thought. I'm not suggesting that now I'm an expert on autism or that this explains everything, but it'll end up, I think, a piece of the puzzle down the road. But the other study, so there are people who drink a lot.

Rich Roll

01:24:57 — Yeah.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:24:58 — Now, nobody, okay.

Rich Roll

01:24:59 — Well, once upon a time, Ellen.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:25:02 — But so nobody drinks to hurt their liver. That's the first thing. So when you tell people you have to stop drinking because of these things, again, it's what I was saying before, the behavior makes sense going forward or else people wouldn't do it. Mix and match 20 different things here. Another way of helping people have a drinking problem is keep a diary. This is attention to symptom variability. Make a column, columns where you're going to note different times of the day.

01:25:32 — Did you have a drink? Yes or no. Did you want a drink? Yes or no. And you do this even for the course of just a week. You're going to see there are times you didn't drink when you wanted a drink. You're going to see there are times you drank when you didn't want to. And all of a sudden, despite what people argue, shows you that you have some control over your drinking. And then the decision to stop or whatever is much easier to make than make you feel that you're just low down, whatever.

01:26:06 — People who drink, if I said to you that here's John, John engages, John gets stressed. And when he gets stressed he does X and then he's unstressed. There's nothing irrational about that, is there? So now we put in he takes a drink or too many drinks.

01:26:28 — So I think that many of the people who are serious heavy drinkers are extra sensitive to other people's consciousness just like the autistic person and that drink is to settle them down. So now we run a study, it's a wine tasting study, and you can drink as much as you want. All we wanna know, you believe, is your view of the wine. The experimenter, who's blind to the whole study idea, but the experimenter is mindful or mindless?

01:27:03 — Well, it turns out when that experimenter is mindless, you drink more.

Rich Roll

01:27:08 — Yeah, I really like that study and this note, like I do believe that there is something to the hypersensitivity of the alcoholic or the drug addict and I'm somebody who's been in recovery for a long time and I think that sensitivity makes the world kind of a scary or uncertain place and a coping mechanism is drugs or alcohol or whatever behavior that becomes adjective.

01:27:39 — Right, it's a survival mechanism to reduce anxiety and stress and kind of eradicate that uncomfortable feeling that you have. And we all know addicts or normal people, whatever, when you go into a room and there's somebody on the other side of the room who you don't know, and you know immediately whether that person is safe or unsafe, like you can feel that energy.

01:28:03 — And I think there is this idea that perhaps some people are more sensitive to that than others. And that leads them towards behaviors that are not in their best interest, but energy is real. Like we all have had those experiences or we walk into a room in a house that we've never been in before and we feel something. Yeah, well, that's what I was trying to capture,

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:28:26 — but it is still a little woo-woo. When I first read the book, the chapter was called the woo-woo chapter. You know, to say, look, it was, I had an experience that I took out several of these.

Rich Roll

01:28:38 — Your editors are like, this is too much.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:28:40 — Yeah.

Rich Roll

01:28:40 — All right, but you're gonna tell it here.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:28:42 — I'm gonna tell you because I don't understand it, but it happened. So I had just gotten back from Japan and I'm having dinner and we're talking about, let's go someplace. And so my partner says, well, we, you know, it's too expensive now, which is self-silly because somebody is always paying for these trips. But somehow we still managed to spend too much money. OK, where should we go if we go?

01:29:07 — And we can't remember the name of the place. At that time, it felt very exotic. Then we remember Kuala Lumpur. OK, she says, we can't go because it's too expensive. I say, maybe I could get the Harvard Club to pay for it. Now, this was insane. I never had any interaction in my life with any Harvard Club. I don't know what I'm talking about. The next day, I get an invitation to Kuala Lumpur from the Harvard Club of Kuala Lumpur.

01:29:40 — Uh-huh. You know, now I've had conversation after conversation, this is a long time ago, with statisticians, you know, we'll be very nice to each other and all of a sudden they walk away from me. I just want to understand it. How do you

understand it? What do you make of that? I don't. You know, at first I thought, I wonder, Did I have a sense where I'm picking up things, or am I putting them out there?

01:30:06 — You know, because you can't tell from that experience, right? That if I'm picking it up, so the mail is coming, you know, the Kuala Lumpur, and yeah. I don't know. All I know is that we know so little about the things we think we know, that if we only recognize that, these sorts of phenomenon wouldn't seem outlandish, necessarily wrong from the start. You know, I mean, so I turn on the television and I'm watching people in New York.

01:30:37 — How could that be? You know, I mean, and I can give some electrical, you know, electronic, but I don't really understand it. And most of the science explanations that we have are just naming things, you know, and when you go up a level of analysis in the name, it's like you understand that you go down a level.

01:30:58 — But it's really, so when I realized I don't know that, then my not knowing something else, I don't know it, but I accept it, makes it easier for me to accept other things like this.

Rich Roll

01:31:11 — So when you turn on the TV and it's not New York, but it's a congressional hearing around UFOs, what's going on in your mind?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:31:20 — You know, I think that, what do we mean by a UFO? Oh, there's so many unidentified objects there. I don't know. I know that I don't take a hard line about anything not being true. I just don't know. But I also am not going to put myself out there and argue that it is true. I don't have a position one way or the other. But people do have strong positions about some of the things that we're talking about.

01:31:52 — And they say, it's impossible. And I think that we just lose an awful lot by that view. So to me, everything is possible. Everything is potentially interesting. Life is fun.

Rich Roll

01:32:06 — And if we could all inhabit a level of mindfulness that you speak about in your work and in your writings, we have a chance at approaching this mindful utopia that you talk about.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:32:21 — So, yeah, so this is, this was a tease at some point I'm going to write the book about. Mindful Utopia, because I, so my goal in life, right now, life, the world is vertical. You have people like us who are near the top, and, you know, people are

ordered, you're not so good, you're okay, you know, and so on. And I find that offensive, and I want to take the vertical and make it horizontal.

01:32:49 — That none of us are better than, you know, when I say to somebody that I don't think anybody is better than I am, she immodestly says, but I don't think I'm better than anybody else. You know, there's a different way of understanding how we might be living. And so I wrote this little song for my grandkids, and I was just talking about this earlier today.

01:33:16 — Actually, I'm going to sing it. I'm not going to sing it for you. But it says it all. Everybody doesn't know something. Everybody knows something else. Everybody can't do something. Everyone can do something else. Now, it's hard in two minutes to get the full feeling of that. But I'm in the car. The kids are five years old, twins. One of them starts whistling. I say, Theo, you're such a good whistler.

01:33:42 — The other one says, Grandma Elle, when. Theo was learning how to whistle, I was learning something else. You know, it just seemed to me perfect. So he doesn't have to feel bad that he can't whistle. He doesn't have to feel one down. He doesn't have to compete with his brother.

Rich Roll

01:33:58 — There's no scarcity. There's no competition. There's something for everybody. And the world is infinitely abundant. Everyone doesn't know something, but everyone knows something else. Everyone can't do something, but everyone can do something else.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:34:13 — When I start, I have a little video, where I start and I say, I can sing, but I like singing, why shouldn't I sing? There are lots of things I can do. And then we break into the little ditty. I don't know, you know, it could be simple-minded.

Rich Roll

01:34:32 — I think it's rather profound.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:34:33 — Because that's the world that I see that we could be living in. I don't see that there's anything that really prevents us from getting there except that a whole lot of mindlessness.

Rich Roll

01:34:47 — Well, along this continuum on the evolution of consciousness, like where do we currently reside? Where would you like to see us going? And I know that your predictions are not your bag, but we're heading into kind of a- No, I think there's been

an evolution. A tricky year and I do, you know, I am interested in the concept of elevating conscious awareness.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:35:12 — Yeah, I think, you know, as you said, I don't have to predict because we can't predict and this one in particular, we can't predict. It's a very strange time, but there'll be a lot of good things that come from it. And I think we're in the midst of an evolution in consciousness and it can only be good. I think some of the stuff with AI, which I don't claim to be an expert on, you know, people just keep finding things to worry about.

01:35:42 — AI is a tool, and it'll help us. I remember years and years ago, I came out of a movie in New York, and neither of those are necessary to tell you the story, but, and this person wanted me to sign a petition because he felt that VR videos, what are they called? VCRs? No, VCRs.

01:36:04 — We're going to put movies out of business, you know, and they were threatened. There's always somebody threatened, but that's also what leads us to progress in many ways. So there'll be that. I think that if AI is able to help take over lots of jobs, that will free people to be more innovative, creative, or mindful in my terms.

01:36:32 — Once you start paying attention, you can take all that I've said and use it to reform almost everything.

Спикер ?

01:36:39 — Yeah, there's infinite applications.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:36:39 — Yeah, you know, so for hospitals, hospitals I don't think have changed in important ways since they were created. And that it seems to me insane, if I may borrow a term from my field, that here's a place that you go into and are stressed when you enter it, just as I said with taking the eye test, and you're going there to be healed. You know, there's no reason that hospitals can't be more spa-like.

01:37:08 — There's no reason that we have very high burnout in the medical profession, and burnout is a function of being mindless. So if the nurses were taught to look for the smaller changes in people, it would actually help their health. People, when I'm mindfully engaged with you, you feel seen. Everybody prospers.

01:37:33 — So it's a way of making everybody in the organization more mindful. There's no reason, you know, we have washing machines. We don't need to have so much white. There are so many changes. People, we know that social support is really important for people's health. Yet in hospitals, everybody is kept separate. You know, and so on.

01:37:56 — So I have a list of these, if I constructed the Mindful Hospital, if I constructed the Mindful Organization, it would also share, you know, have many differences.

Rich Roll

01:38:06 — You're gonna love this. So I was reading this part of the book, which is at the end of the book this morning, sitting in a waiting room at a diagnostics lab down the street here, because I was getting my blood drawn for a blood test. And I'm reading about the Mindful Hospital and all the like, everything that you just described. And I looked up and took a mindful assessment of my environment. And I was in this waiting room and there were some people who were like staring at their feet.

01:38:37 — The walls were peeling, you know, the wallpaper was peeling off the walls. There was a like bulletproof glass window with no, that was sort of opaque and there was no human being behind it, except there was a little sign on it that said, please don't bring firearms in here. And then there was an iPad where you could check in. And I literally felt like I was in a room waiting to meet with my parole officer or something.

01:39:04 — It was the most dispiriting dystopic like environment where you're going to into this room to kind of be vulnerable and have like this procedure done, et cetera. It's a clinic, it's not a doctor's office, but the point remains like there's a lot of room for improvement here.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:39:22 — Yeah, yeah. I had many years ago had to go to court. I don't, I think I was taking out a restraining order. I don't remember what it was, was a restraining order.

Rich Roll

01:39:31 — There's probably a good story behind that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:39:33 — Well, no, it's a boring story, but the point is it was all fixed in some sense. The person who took me there had already, everything was wired in some sense. It was, I hadn't done anything. It was, you know, I was on the accusing end. And, you know, being a public speaker for so long, all of this, right, at Harvard, Loftin University, I go into this courthouse to make this request for, and I felt scared.

01:40:06 — I already had the answer. And I look at these other people, it's just, it's criminal, to borrow a term, you know, that I think that the way we've constructed so many environments is a way of, again, instantiating the status quo, keep people in place.

Rich Roll

01:40:24 — Have you had hospital administrators or any healthcare executives approach you as a result of?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:40:29 — Well, I haven't had this out there, the book came out in September. This one thing, I was talking with people in China about doing a mindful hospital. I don't know if that'll happen. It's interesting to me because I have mindful schools that are vastly different from our current schools and they're people from India and Canada, nobody in the United States, it's out there,

01:40:56 — it's out there, whether I lead it or somebody else, it will have an effect, it can't help but.

Rich Roll

01:41:03 — It's pretty cool, I mean, if you just got one up on its feet and then you could study it and then you have a test case.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:41:09 — I know it's one of those things where it's fabulous. You know, that I just can't imagine that the Mindful Hospital or the Mindful School wouldn't be successful. It almost can't be as bad as things are now. Yeah. Really. It's not good. No. I mean, when you think about school, you have the kids who get Ds and Fs. They become our killers or whatever, right?

01:41:35 — Nobody is letting you think well of yourself. You have to make a reputation some way. The kids who get Bs and Cs, they are average. Who wants to be average? But then you take those of us who get A's. Now, we don't know how we got the A. Everybody expects us to get A's. We don't know if we're gonna continue. It's stressful. Nobody wins.

Rich Roll

01:41:55 — Also, you're being evaluated on an irrelevant metric, which is your ability to memorize stuff and take tests.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:42:01 — Yes, I mean, it's totally insane. It's also the case that the tests are designed to find what you don't know. Everybody knows something. You know, when I give a test, tell me what you do know. What does it mean that there's, who decided that this thing that you don't know is so important that you can't pass the course without knowing it? It's ridiculous. So if you found yourself... As a teacher, yes. If I found myself teaching, my exams would be different.

Rich Roll

01:42:29 — Right, well, I was gonna broaden that. If you woke up and you were the Secretary of Education, or maybe you were the new Surgeon General, and you have this agenda to roll out the mindful hospitals and a re-imagination of education, like you could wave your wand, what does it look like?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:42:47 — Oh, I mean, I've written about such, you know, the hospital, you get an inclination from here. And, you know, the mindful school, everything about school now is mindless. You know, the looking for single right answers to things, giving teaching information in an absolute way. Horses don't eat meat, one in one is two.

01:43:09 — You know, you can change the content to make it more sophisticated, but it's the same idea that doesn't lead you to look more broadly at things, but rather, you know, helps you close your mind. So in the mindful school, one of the things that we were going to do, and you know, I can't do all of these things at once, and I say yes to everything because everything is exciting, and that's why none of this gets done, but I would find if somebody wanted to do this, could afford to do this, this would be more interesting to me than the secretary of education or you said health, whatever.

Rich Roll

01:43:48 — Surgeon general. Surgeon general.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:43:50 — Yeah.

Rich Roll

01:43:50 — Yeah.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:43:50 — No, I would like to just be able to do it. And so what I wanted to do was to build the school with the building itself is upside down. So everything about it says this is different.

Rich Roll

01:44:06 — And there should be some Silicon Valley person who's up for that.

Dr. Ellen Langer

If they call me, I'm happy to listen.

Rich Roll

Well, hopefully you'll get a call. Your class must be very popular at Harvard. Is it very hard to get into? Is there like a long waiting list? Like how does that work?

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:44:22 — You know, you have to decide early on. So, and then they petition and they petition and they plead.

Rich Roll

01:44:31 — And you get letters slid under the door of your office and stuff.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:44:35 — And I almost always say yes. So I don't know how long I'm going to be teaching this particular class. And I just, I already told people at Harvard that I want it open to everyone. You know, right now you have to have certain requirements, which you don't really have to have. So that'd be my last hurrah. How long I'm going to do this.

Rich Roll

01:44:57 — Well, I'd like to come and take it. Does that mean I can come and take it? Yeah. Alright.

Dr. Ellen Langer

01:45:00 — And I would like you to.

Rich Roll

01:45:01 — You're an absolute delight and an inspiration. This was really fun.

Dr. Ellen Langer

Thank you. I've enjoyed it too.

Rich Roll

Your work is really important. It's revelatory. We are in an evolution of consciousness or perhaps even a war of consciousness. That implies a duality, I don't know. But

I think the way in which you address these topics from your lived experience and all these experiments that you've done is really, it's fun.

01:45:28 — Like reading your book is fun and also mind blowing in many ways. So I encourage everybody to pick it up if you haven't already, The Mindful Body. And will you come and talk to me again sometime?

Dr. Ellen Langer

Oh, I would love to. This is great. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Rich Roll

Cheers. That's it for today. Thank you for listening. I truly hope you enjoyed the conversation.

01:45:53 — To learn more about today's guest, including links and resources related to everything discussed today, visit the episode page at richroll.com where you can find the entire podcast archive, as well as podcast merch, my books, Finding Ultra, Voicing Change and the Plant Power Way, as well as the Plant Power Meal Planner at meals. richroll.com.

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01:47:16 — Thank you, Georgia Whaley, for copywriting and website management. And of course, our theme music was created by Tyler Pyatt, Trapper Pyatt, and Harry Mathis. Appreciate the love, love the support. See you back here soon. Peace. Plants.

Спикер ?

01:47:33 — Namaste. 🎵...

01:47:46 — 🎵 🎵

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