

Rebecca Heiss -11-1-21 .mp3

Corey Andrew Powell [00:00:02]

Dr. Rebecca Heiss, helps clients break through their deeply ingrained inclinations to self-sabotage. She joins me today to discuss her latest book, *Instinct: Rewire Your Brain With Science Backed Solutions to Increased Productivity and Achieve Success*. I'm Corey Andrew Powell, your host and this is Motivational Mondays.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:00:22]

I'm joined today by Dr. Rebecca Heiss, author of the book *Instinct*, which examines how people can grow and become more productive by letting go of their fears. So Rebecca, welcome to Motivational Mondays.

Rebecca Heiss [00:00:34]

Thank you so much, Corey. I'm thrilled to be with you.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:00:37]

Oh, thank you. I'm happy that you're here as well. Because so many of these conversations help us grow and sort of move beyond our own boundaries that we put on ourselves in life. So let's just jump right in. So *Instinct* is described as a tool that can help people craft a better life once they can get beyond self-imposed fears, quite honestly. So, how did you arrive at that assessment to write this book?

Rebecca Heiss [00:01:01]

You nailed it right on the head. When you started with our own boundaries that we put on ourselves, right? I'm a stress physiologist and evolutionary biologist and what I've realized through my training through evolutionary biology is that unfortunately, we are stuck with lousy brains, like all of us. It's not your fault. It's just that our brains aren't built for the world that we live in. They're built for a world that was dangerous and sparse and scary because that was the world that our ancestors lived in. And our environment has changed really rapidly in the last 200,000 years. We've got technology and populations of 8 billion individuals. I mean, it's an incredible environment that we live in but our brains haven't caught up to that. So these stories that we carry in our heads of being in a dangerous scary space are holding us back from really living life fully.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:01:47]

So that's sort of like we're pre-programmed if you will. So we shouldn't really be ourselves up if we have that instinct, right? I mean, I think so many of us are probably feeling inadequate because why can't I get beyond the fear, but there's something clinical going on, potentially.

Rebecca Heiss [00:02:04]

Yeah, your brain is doing exactly what it should do. Right? It's literally there protecting you. So this whole idea of having shame and guilt around our fear of rejection. Well, that's good. If you get kicked out of the tribe, you die, right? Like crazy. Don't do it, do it or your fear of failure you fail to bring home enough meat you die. So these are really valid fears to our brains. The trick is getting out of that. So we don't live our entire lives in fear and then wake up one day and go, oh my gosh. I have all these regrets.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:02:34]

Yeah, that's one of my biggest fears and I sort of made the decision that I have to look at the time I have now as the gift in which to try certain things. I don't want to be an old man going, you know, if I could just have one more day because you don't get that day. You don't get that extra time.

Rebecca Heiss [00:02:51]

You never do. And that's always what people regret the most, right? It's not taking the chance, not taking the leap.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:02:57]

Yeah, we hear those stories a lot. So one of the key initiatives in the book though is to sort of help us rewire our brains, right, reprogram ourselves, and let go of that fear and mental barrier. So, can you give? I mean, I don't want to

give the book away. I want people to, of course, buy the book, but can you give one example from your book on how we can begin to do that?

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:03:17\]](#)

Yeah. I think one of my favorites is finding a clear common enemy. So your brain is naturally wired to see the other, to see people who look different, act differently, behave differently, have different cultures and different concepts as the enemy as the other. And actually we do this to ourselves. We other ourselves, ironically. So creating the clear common enemy, if our brain is constantly seeking the dangerous, the scary good. Let's give our brains that let's just update what that negative scary thing is. So instead of it being the other person or that idea of failing or that idea of being rejected. Let's create a concept like, I don't know. Let's fear poverty. Let's hear something that is more powerfully a driver.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:04:04\]](#)

So one of my favorite stories in this is, you know, talking to a guy who is fixing a door in an emergency room and him saying, well here at this place, you know, in this in this hospital, we fight against patient pain and I'm going, Oh well, of course, so him fixing that door, that door jarred patients as patients were pushed through. And so what he was doing in his head was fighting against patient pain, so he created this abstract enemy, which drove a purpose for his life. That's so powerful. Right? If we can use our biology to work with us rather than against us. Now, we can take our fears and kind of bust through them by fighting something more powerful.

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:04:45\]](#)

Yeah. So one of the analogies on your website that I think it referred to is a group of crows, right? A group of crows that, you know, by no means probably would be looked at as an animal that can take down a hunk. But a group of crows together, who've decided that the hawk is a common enemy, the hawk better watch out. Right? And that, and I think what's important about that is in such a divisive time that we live in. I saw that as an analogy for humans, like, instead of fighting each other. Like, you just said, why don't we collectively all come together and go, you know what, poverty is a pretty possible enemy. Let's fight, fight and conquer that one, disease, maybe we could all come together with a certain, you know, vaccination...

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:05:29\]](#)

This is a little dicey to admit, but when coronavirus was first announced when we first, kind of realized, oh my gosh, this is a big issue. I thought here it is. Here's the thing that will unite humanity because we can all fight against it together and there was a great opportunity there. Unfortunately, you know, it became politicized, we immediately went into our tribes, but that's the opportunity. You see it right there.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:05:49\]](#)

And crows have figured this out, right? When we cooperate, when we work together we can drive off, you know, much more powerful enemies together.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:05:58\]](#)

Wow, that is a great analogy. And so be more like crows people be more like the crows. So you also have a platform called Fearless Theory. It's featuring something called The Fearless accelerator and it's a personal and professional leadership development tool for high-performing women around the globe. Now, before I ask you to share a little bit about that. I must say before we begin today. I went to... I mean, I'm not a woman but I still took that quiz before we began this morning? I was like, I gotta do it.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:06:26\]](#)

Are you gonna reveal your results?

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:06:28\]](#)

Yeah, you know, what's funny about it is like I was pretty neutral, right in the middle of a sort of feel like I'm validated, but I sort of know, I could be doing better. I was right down the middle, but the questions were really, really genuine questions that you have to be honest about before you can even really do a proper assessment. I imagine that Fearless Accelerator has a similar Vibe. So tell me a little bit about the Fearless accelerator.

Rebecca Heiss [00:06:50]

I appreciate you bringing up the quiz. I mean almost all of my work is related to self awareness, right? Because when we are self-aware, when we stop the blame, the shame, the guilt we can become aware and realize, oh, this is just information. Now, when I'm having this stress response because of any number of things I can say, wait a second. This isn't a tiger leaping at me. I can't fight this email. I can't flee from this email. I can just breathe through it. So, so much of this work is around self-awareness. So thank you for bringing that up. The accelerator actually, moves beyond that to recognize you, know identity.

Rebecca Heiss [00:07:23]

Who are we? How do we show up outside of culture outside of the norms outside of the way we're supposed to behave? So it's very common. I talked to a lot of female leaders and for them to wake up at age 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 and go, I don't even know how I like my eggs. I'll have them scramble up, whatever you need, whatever you want because we're so trained to people please. And that's true for men too in a different way. So we talked through identity who we are at our core, as we work through stress and anxiety, recognizing that those emails aren't Tigers. We can't do those traditional things that our brain once did, right? We talk through fear of rejection and failure, impostor syndrome, which is huge, affects somewhere between seventy and eighty eight percent of women, especially high achieving women and is especially common for people of color because you don't have those role models. When you don't see yourself in those positions, of course, you feel like a fraud, of course you feel like a fake and then we talked through boundaries.

Rebecca Heiss [00:08:21]

How do you say no? Recognizing that when you're not saying no to somebody, you're probably saying no to yourself writing, always saying no. So how do we begin to train our brains to recognize actually? Every confrontation isn't a huge fight. It's not a big blowup. We need to be able to set these boundaries to keep ourselves safe and sane in this fairly insane world.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:08:41]

Yes, it's funny. That is one of the key questions from the quiz that I remember because there are quite a few questions, but when you just said that, that one stuck out to me is my ability to say no to people and it's because I want to be a people pleaser and I want to say yes, and I know my bandwidth is already expanded and maxed out but I'll go, Yes, of course. Yes. Yes. Because by Nature, I want to please, right? . And I think to your point women are almost programmed by society, a very misogynistic society, might have added meaning. It is what it is -to be that person. The woman has to be the, you know, the nurturer and she's going to support the entire family. And then if she's in business, sometimes she's got to balance all those worlds where no one asks the man well, how is your life going balancing being a dad and a businessman? No one, you know, so I totally understand that and you're the third consecutive woman I've interviewed who... that became part of the conversation.

Rebecca Heiss [00:09:37]

It's the water we swim in. So I always tell people you never hear anybody saying oh working dads. Oh are you a working Dad? And again, this is one of those things that I say, it's the water we swim in. The analogy that I always give is a David Foster Wallace story. Where he talks about these two young fish swimming along in the water. An older fish comes walking by and kind of says, hey boys, how's the water? And the two young fish swim on for a while longer. And finally, one turns to the other, like, dude, what's water? You just don't know and that's the systems of as you mentioned, you know, some misogyny of racism of all of these the systems that were surrounded by which we just accept because we've never known any different.

Rebecca Heiss [00:10:23]

And it's kind of breaking out of the mold of our brains as they will wait a second just because it's always been that way. Doesn't mean it can't be better for everyone. Yes. Yes. So it was like, yeah, it's not well, I'll do better. And so that personal do worse or vice versa. It's a No-No all ships can rise on this time.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:10:40]

One of the important things that I think has come from the conversation that I've had with these women. The last one being a high-powered attorney from Atlanta who has three businesses and four children, and she just did a really

impressive Tedx talk touching on the difficulties of being an attorney and having to balance all that. But what we came up with was the idea that society —men in particular have got to be more aware that women need that support.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:11:08\]](#)

It's a yes, and - I don't want to leave men out of the conversation either, because I think so frequently there's an expectation will, you can just handle it all because you're a man. And I like to refer back to growing up. I grew up on Disney movies. I don't know about you, right? Yeah.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:11:22\]](#)

I learned at a young age that if you're an old woman, you're evil. You're a witch, right? And there's a biological story there, right? Yeah. Not even valuable. If you're a man, unless you're a prince. Mmm, right, you know, you're not part of the Disney movie. So you gotta get out there and earn your money and develop your status. And so there's balances on both sides that I think need to be addressed at a much deeper level. Obviously, as a woman, I am more familiar with some of the needs that females have. And so that's why I've based the accelerator around high-performing professional women's needs.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:11:53\]](#)

That said, I don't want to leave men out of the conversation either because I do think biologically, you know, they've been prone to be these high-achieving. You got to stand out, You Gotta Be, You Gotta prove yourselves. And there's a lot of baggage that comes with that as well.

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:12:06\]](#)

Yeah, you know, that's such a great point, because I think we run into problems in our society with hyper masculinity as well, because men are afraid to cry and then they become overly aggressive because they're putting on an act where they think they're supposed to and that can lead to displaced aggression as well.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:12:22\]](#)

100%. I mean we all wear these masks, right? This is how I'm supposed to show up. This is how I get value from society, from my partner, from you name it. And it's really sad, I think, you know, so much of my work is all about what's behind the mask. What's So scary about what's behind the mask?

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:12:39\]](#)

You know, a lot of the times that we are facing fears, as we mentioned, initially, they were self-imposed fears, but we have to also talk about the fact that we live in a society where other people will project their fears onto you. So I often wonder how then, it's not always easy to tune that out. Do you have any thoughts on how to drown out the naysayers and people projecting their fears onto you so that you can be successful?

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:13:06\]](#)

I am a firm believer that you get to control you. You don't get to control anything beyond the tips of your fingers, right? So when somebody comes at me and they're really angry and they're upset and they're trying to push me down. My question is. Oh man. I wonder what happened to that person, right? Trying to hold a space of empathy for them, which is listen... I can say this all day. It's really hard in the book. Like, right now. I'm hanging with you Corey and I'm like, this is a great life, it's easy. But when you get into that stress out space, I feel it right? My heart starts to pound. And somebody comes at me with their anger, and their frustration. And so noticing, what that person's energy is doing to you and saying, wait a second taking that deep slow breath, which is super underrated, right? Because it's free to us and we don't breathe nearly as frequently as we need to.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:13:53\]](#)

Consciously taking that nice slow breath and saying, oh, oh this isn't about me. This is something different. It allows you to sort of gain a little bit of emotional space from that person. And again, you know, boundary setting is huge. I don't have a lot of people around me that do that because I don't choose to let them into my space. Social is a whole nother, environment right?

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:14:13\]](#)

Of course. Yeah, but you raise a great point. I just talked to a friend of mine a couple days ago and she was always active in her church. She's a brilliant art therapist and she's an author now. She just quit her job because she's now able to do her art therapy full-time. And she's got all these great speaking engagements. And she said, you know, I had to actually remove a lot of people from my life and I'm talking people who are like church congregants, who I know and I've known for years, but they were just not aligned and supportive of my vision and I can't have that in my space if I'm going to be productive. And so, you know, sometimes you do have to sort of leave certain people behind.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:14:51\]](#)

It's so hard. That Jim Rohn quote though, is that it is so true that you are the average of the five people that you spend the most time with. When you think about that very carefully, who are you surrounding yourself with your environment shapes you, really significantly. So if you're surrounded by people of a scarcity mindset, people who are always pushing your buttons, you're going to stay in that stress response and that Fight Flight Freeze response is not a healthy place to be living.

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:15:19\]](#)

Something that you're passionate about, is the societal history of making women feel ashamed of their bodies and how the media celebrates, what's quote-unquote, the great bodies, the hot bodies, the model of the athletes, the actresses, with the six-pack abs and all that. And then, they make women who don't have that body feel inadequate about how they look. So you've proposed a remedy for that which is a new, honest history that neither shames nor celebrates our bodies, but honors them by blissfully ignoring them. I'm very intrigued by that. So please share with me what you mean.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:15:48\]](#)

I'll give you a little back story on that. So I struggled with an eating disorder. I still struggle with an eating disorder. I haven't fully outgrown it but I was merely severe when I was 11 years old — 11 It's so young and it was because, you know, I recognized very early on what women are valued for and women are valued for their beauty for their youth. Because ancestrally, that's what we're valued for —for making babies and beauty is a proxy for reproductive health. So I was like, oh, oh, in order to fit in, I have to be skinny. So I developed a fairly severe case of anorexia nervosa and was hospitalized for the better half of a year.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:16:27\]](#)

And this is really problematic when you're thinking about an 11 year old kid and what this setup was, this giant fear. I'm either going to be rejected by society because I'm going to be too fat. I'm not gonna be pretty enough. I'm not going to be enough or I'm going to be rejected by my family and my friends because I'm vain. How do I balance this and I feel like so many women get stuck into these Tales of how do I not be vain. How do I not care what I look like? How I eat? How I present myself and still fit this idea of perfection of societal Perfection. And then I've seen this really interesting swing, right? Where it's kind of like this female empowerment. And we're all going to be, I'm going to show you all my roles. And I'm going to show you all that extra hair and all the things besides that I shouldn't have. And that's really cool. And I'm gonna argue. It's so putting the focus on our bodies. And so to me like the idea of just being invisible, is something that is lovely. We always talk about what the females are wearing to these galas. But like what did the men wear? We never talk about it because it doesn't matter, right? So the more invisible we can be in terms of how we show up. I think there's great power there.

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:17:42\]](#)

Yeah, you know, it's a strange analogy but sort of a comparison. So in New York City every year at the LGBT Pride Parade, it can be very provocative with how the floats and how the guys are dressed and I'm always like, well, where's the float with just the guys wearing? Khakis? Like, can I find that float. I don't go to the gym that much, to look like those guys. So, where's the Gap float, you know, but it's all based on what society projects we should look like based on stereotypes. And I think, you know, what's important about what you're saying too, is that you raised the point about, although the women are now sort of reclaiming, like, look at my own photoshopped pictures of my roles. They're still sort of fishing for now. A high-five of, yes, a validation. Even with that. So it's still a perpetual cycle.

Rebecca Heiss [\[00:18:30\]](#)

This is, you know, where I want to be really careful because I think it can be easily taken the wrong way. In your analogy, be as flamboyant as you want, by all means that, that is who you are, get out there. And, and do your thing! And if you want to really celebrate your body because this is really important to you, great, by all means do it.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:18:47]

Yeah. I am not want to discourage.

Rebecca Heiss [00:18:50]

Right, right. My point is that really for an entire history, it's the same thing with race. Like when people say, well, why does it always have to be about race? Because it always has been because we've always set up our systems around women's bodies and controlling women's bodies. And their race. Do you have a drop of black? Well, then you're black. Do the drop of Irish. Well, then you're black, right? We've changed. We've shifted the definitions over time, but it's still always been about control and unfortunately, I think a lot of women have really taken hold of that. It's hindering us from thinking about other things. This is interesting, too. When it comes to leadership, right? Because the question of, how do you fit in as a woman to leadership? Well, the model of leadership is based on men. So where does your power suit get really tall, get really big, intimidate, drive home? Yeah that works, but I don't think that's the best form of leadership. I think for a long time. We've ignored this other form of leadership which we are starting to talk about a little bit more.

Rebecca Heiss [00:19:52]

Around empathy and compassion and cooperativeness and rather than being competitive all the time and driving, only the numbers we care about culture because of a like, were the crows, right? We're working together. And I think that that form of women's leadership has been ignored for a long time again, going back to but how do I fit into this model of quote-unquote leadership, when 91% of the top ten leadership books in the last 10 years are written by white men? How do I fit into that definition? Will I have to present myself in a certain way?

Rebecca Heiss [00:20:23]

I have to show up to not be intimidating but still be intimidating enough that they take me seriously.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:20:28]

It's a tightrope, I can imagine. And so, yeah, I don't take that lightly. I know women have just again because society has done this sort of very schizophrenic, sort of assessment of who they should be. And so it's difficult to navigate through that. But I will say that that will bring me to my final question for you today, and I've enjoyed our conversation immensely, Rebecca.

Rebecca Heiss [00:20:49]

Likewise.

Corey Andrew Powell [00:20:49]

Thank you. So I just really want to know what you think for young people is not just females, although, a majority of our 1.5 million members are women like, well, sixty percent. So it's a good amount. But just with all we've discussed today about bringing your authentic self to the party fearlessly, what advice would you give young college students who are about to graduate, or they're entering college because it's their first time being an adult and having to navigate all these things we were discussing. What's one or two pieces of advice you would give?

Rebecca Heiss [00:21:24]

I think the biggest thing is to stop feeling like you have to be an expert. If I could go back and tell myself, hey back, you don't have to prove yourself. Ask questions, because it's the cliché, right? But like, if you ask the dumb question, you're asking the question that 12 other people in the room need to ask and want to ask. And the reality is we all have these fears, every single person from the CEO down to the intern, like in any organizational structure. Everybody's sitting there going, am I enough? Am I enough? And the answer is, yes, you are. You're already enough. You are enough. As you are. You don't have to prove yourself to anyone. So show up, be curious. Ask questions. Ask questions, Ask questions. And stay open. That my friends is the best way to live a fearless life.

Corey Andrew Powell [\[00:22:18\]](#)

Thank you for listening to Motivational Mondays presented by The National Society of Leadership and Success and available wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts. I'm Corey Andrew Powell and I'll see you again here next week.