

## **Episode 174 Transcript : Rational Thought**

00:00:00:45 - 00:00:14:02

Karen Brown

Hi, everybody. Welcome to another episode. We've spoken many times on this show about the need to make decisions in our lives. Should we stay or should we go? Should we renovate, should we leave things as they are. Should we retire?

00:00:14:07 - 00:00:31:20

Karen Brown

What happens if we don't? How long do we put things off? Decision making is really tough. I heard a fascinating conversation recently with psychologist Steven Pinker. Now you may have heard of him. He's written a lot of books, a lot.

00:00:31:48 - 00:00:50:45

Karen Brown

He's a Canadian American psychologist. He speaks. He teaches. He's into so many things, but largely how the brain works, rational thinking. And this book that I am referring to that he was talking about is called rationality. What is it?

00:00:51:05 - 00:01:13:28

Karen Brown

Why it seems scarce. Why it matters. The conversations were ever so interesting. And while he doesn't talk about older adults per say or real life renovations per say, I can take his philosophies and suggestions and apply them to our stream of thought very easily.

00:01:13:46 - 00:01:32:35

Karen Brown

And I wanted to share all of that with you today. So at one point, he made the point that no other species has doubled its lifespan. That's really positive, because it means that some good, rational thinking and decision making was applied along the way.

00:01:34:37 - 00:01:53:31

Karen Brown

He makes a distinction, though, about the levels of thinking and the levels of choices, and the example he used was public health because it's such a big topic in our world right now. There is a difference between individual decision making and social decision making.

00:01:54:45 - 00:02:16:01

Karen Brown

Individual thought and social thought, so here's the example that I'm going to put his thinking to in order to explain what he means by that at an individual level, we have a lot of people who have negative thoughts about wearing masks and becoming vaccinated.

00:02:17:10 - 00:02:47:14

Karen Brown

On the social level, our public health officials have decided that it is for the greater good that we do both of those things. So both streams of thought can exist at the same time. For our purposes, society has decided that adults who have cognitive or physical challenges when they get to a certain point are best looked after

00:02:47:14 - 00:03:05:07

Karen Brown

in a group situation. Long term care nursing care, where the return on investment of staff is a decent one, for instance, where you live, if you live in long term care, there might be one staff member for every ten residents.

00:03:06:04 - 00:03:25:32

Karen Brown

Is that good for the individual? That's an argument that a lot of people have discussions about. It is definitely a good return on investment for business. You can look at it both ways. On the other hand, you can look at individuals who choose to live in their own homes.

00:03:25:33 - 00:03:45:46

Karen Brown

Now remember something less than 10% of people will ever live in long term or nursing care. That means that a little more than 90% of us will remain living in our own homes or with our families or in some kind of a group situation with friends that we pull together and choose to live together, perhaps with some

00:03:45:46 - 00:04:04:28

Karen Brown

common services. But on a one to one basis, it's not uncommon for individuals who make that choice to have a family caregiver either move in with them or take over their care to varying extents, depending on what their needs may be.

00:04:04:49 - 00:04:25:54

Karen Brown

Now, that may be a really good, rational decision for the person who is living in the in their own home. For the caregiver, is that a rational decision and a good decision? After all, they are largely untrained. They have to take time away from other activities that they would have been doing.

00:04:25:55 - 00:04:50:10

Karen Brown

Had they not been providing care. And oftentimes they're not paid for it. The level of unpaid caregivers in pick a country is huge, so it's a rationally good decision for one person, but maybe not for someone else. I had a friend who has now passed, but she lived well into her nineties and only in the last few years did

00:04:50:10 - 00:05:09:11

Karen Brown

she move into long term care. Until then, she lived in her own apartment downtown. However, somebody had to come and take her grocery shopping. Somebody had to come and take her to the doctor. Somebody had to come and fix her tech problems because she could never quite figure out her DVR or her computer.

00:05:10:00 - 00:05:31:47

Karen Brown

She was a pet, but really, it was very hard on the caregivers and eventually her friends kind of fell away because she was always asking things of them. She didn't have children, so these were friends. There were one or two devoted friends who continue to do for her until she did move into long-term care, which was

00:05:31:58 - 00:05:55:59

Karen Brown

a better decision for her and for everybody. Clearly, so you can see that, you know, there are often shades of gray. And one of the shades is that for a family caregiver, they may really love the opportunity to give back to somebody who perhaps cared for them when they were young, and they see that as their duty

00:05:57:05 - 00:06:18:57

Karen Brown

and they really, truly enjoy it. Shades of gray. So another thing that Steven Pinker advises measuring is the outcome of a decision being wrong against the outcome of the decision being right. Now some of these things, you can anticipate some of the things you can't anticipate.

00:06:19:33 - 00:06:40:01

Karen Brown

He says that bad things can hurt you a lot more than good things can help you. And I understand that, you know, the consequence of a bad decision may be very evident, but the consequence of a good decision is evident only in that bad things didn't happen or to the extent that they might have happened.

00:06:40:01 - 00:07:00:05

Karen Brown

Otherwise, apply that whole line of thinking to our needs should we stay in the family home, which may not work for us anymore, it may not support us in the way that we need. There may be stairs. It may not be a place that is accessible to other amenities.

00:07:00:05 - 00:07:17:34

Karen Brown

By walking, you may need a car. You know, there are lots of things you can think of about why a home wouldn't support you inside the home, of course, we've talked about the the heights of counters and how far you have to bend over to plug things in and is the laundry room in the basement and requires

00:07:17:34 - 00:07:30:48

Karen Brown

you to go downstairs? I mean, you can go on and on for that if you choose to stay in the family home. It might be OK. There may not be consequences to any great extent, on the other hand.

00:07:32:00 - 00:07:52:47

Karen Brown

If you fall down the stairs. And sustain. A reasonably bad injury. Decision making will then be taken over by someone else, and they may not make the kind of decisions that you would make for yourself. So in that case, this decision has hurt you more than it has helped you.

00:07:54:46 - 00:08:14:04

Karen Brown

Pinker does note that in assessing probabilities, one also has to factor in personal behavior. Personal attributes, for instance, in our world, is a given person more or less careless. Are they more or less able to take and manage medications?

00:08:15:00 - 00:08:33:21

Karen Brown

Are they more or less into exercise? So let's take the medication one. For instance, if somebody is not able to properly manage medication, the negative outcome could be far more dire than the positive outcome of taking those medications.

00:08:33:57 - 00:08:50:25

Karen Brown

So if you're not able to manage the medications and you start skipping days or you forget that you took them and you take them again, those consequences can be pretty negative. There are risk reward trade offs and sometimes changing the incentive to increase the reward.

00:08:51:33 - 00:09:09:51

Karen Brown

Can be quite meaningful. So back to our world. The example of moving from a larger home to a smaller home. The reward might be increased by having increased independence. You have less utility bills to pay because you're not paying for space that is underutilized.

00:09:10:32 - 00:09:40:57

Karen Brown

The risk has been reduced by removing stairs from the equation. However. There is a risk to your emotional and mental health. Because you may miss. The neighborhood, your friends, the familiarity of we've always done it that way. The question is, can you push through and allow that to fade away so that the reward is more clearly seen

00:09:41:10 - 00:09:59:48

Karen Brown

of having made that move? The one sentence that Pinker said that stuck out to me more than anything is fear has evolved to be more powerful than pleasant anticipation. Fear has evolved to be more powerful than pleasant anticipation.

00:10:01:14 - 00:10:21:22

Karen Brown

Is the pleasant anticipation of engaging with a new neighborhood? More powerful than the fear of leaving that old neighborhood. Is the pleasant anticipation of retirement more powerful than the fear of not having structured days anymore? You know, for sure.

00:10:22:18 - 00:10:39:32

Karen Brown

Looking at all of these issues with shades of gray is not for the faint of heart. It really takes a mindset that you're going to work through all of this. Can you rationally look at the issues with all of these shades of gray attached and make a really good decision for yourself?

00:10:41:19 - 00:10:52:32

Karen Brown

Real life renovations are not for the faint of heart. Join us next week, Wednesday at twelve noon for another edition. And until then, look after yourselves. Bye everybody.