RISING AMBITIONS CONCEPTS



BEYOND
THE SURFACE

JUSTIN YANG

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An Introduction to Seeing What You Haven’t Been Seeing

Justin Yang

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Have you ever looked back at something you did and wondered: Why the hell did I keep doing that?

Maybe it was a decision. A relationship. A goal you kept putting off. Something you kept trying to fix.

And the strange part is, while you were in it, everything you were doing seemed to make sense. You had your reasons. You had your explanations. You probably could've defended every single one of them.

Until one day, something happened. Maybe somebody asked you a question. Maybe an experience challenged something you believed. Or maybe you finally got tired of ending up in the same place.

And suddenly, you started noticing things you hadn't noticed before. Not because those things were necessarily new. But because you were finally aware enough to look at them.

That's what I want to explore with you.

Not how to become a completely different person overnight. Not how to think positively. And definitely not how to convince yourself you've figured everything out.

I want to show you a way to look at something you're already experiencing. Something real.

We'll peel it back together. And by the end, I want you to have something you can actually use.

Ready?

Let's look.

01

YOU CAN’T INVESTIGATE WHAT YOU HAVEN’T NOTICED

Think about something you’ve done for years without questioning it.

Maybe you always say yes when somebody asks for help. Maybe you avoid conversations that could upset someone. Maybe you tell yourself you work better under pressure. Maybe every time something doesn’t work, you immediately start searching for another solution.

Whatever it is. For a long time, that behavior might’ve felt completely normal. It’s just what you do. You might even describe it as part of your personality.

Then something makes you notice it. You say yes to another commitment you don’t have time for. And for the first time, instead of thinking: Why does everybody keep asking me for things?

You wonder:

Why do I keep saying yes when I don’t want to?

That’s an entirely different conversation.

Nothing about the event changed. But now you're aware of something you weren't examining before.

And that's important. Because before you can investigate a behavior, you have to notice that there's something worth investigating.

I think of that as awakening. Not some magical experience where everything suddenly makes sense. Just becoming aware enough to recognize:

There's something here I haven't really looked at.

That's where seeking begins.

But noticing something doesn't mean you already understand it. We haven't earned that conclusion yet. So let's keep going.

02

THE FIRST EXPLANATION ISN’T ALWAYS THE WHOLE EXPLANATION

Let’s stay with that person who keeps saying yes.

Imagine a friend asks them for another favor. They’re exhausted. Their schedule is already full. They really don’t want to do it. But they say yes anyway.

Later, they’re frustrated. And their explanation is:

People keep taking advantage of me.

Maybe that’s true. Some people absolutely take advantage of generosity.

But there’s something else worth examining. Why did they say yes?

Maybe they genuinely wanted to help. Maybe they felt responsible. Maybe they didn’t want to disappoint their friend. Maybe they were afraid saying no would change the relationship. Or maybe something completely different was happening.

We don’t know yet. And that’s the point.

The first explanation might describe part of what’s happening without explaining the whole situation.

So instead of immediately deciding who or what is wrong, let’s ask a better question.

What would have to be true for this behavior to make complete sense?

You don’t have to agree with the behavior. You don’t have to excuse it. You’re trying to understand it accurately enough to know what deserves changing.

That’s different from simply telling somebody: Stop saying yes.

Because they probably already know they can say no.

The interesting question is why saying yes keeps making more sense to them in the moment. And that’s where the layers begin.

03

IDENTITY: WHO HAVE YOU LEARNED TO BE?

Let’s say this person has always been the dependable one. The one everybody calls. The one who figures things out. The one who doesn’t complain.

And maybe they genuinely value being dependable. That’s a good quality.

But after years of being recognized for it, something interesting can happen.

Being dependable stops being only something they do. It starts becoming something they believe they must continue being.

Now saying no doesn’t just feel like declining a favor. It might feel like becoming someone they don’t recognize.

Someone selfish. Someone unreliable. Someone who lets people down.

See the difference?

We’re no longer only looking at a scheduling problem. We’re examining the identity that may be involved in the decision.

And this is where I want to be careful. I'm not saying everybody who struggles to say no has an identity problem. I'm saying identity is one place worth looking.

Think about your own situation. What kind of person have you learned to be in it?

The strong one? The funny one? The successful one? The person who always knows? The person who never needs help?

Now ask yourself:

What do I keep doing because it supports that version of me?

And here's the more interesting question:

Is that still who I want to keep becoming?

You don't have to reject everything about yourself to grow. Sometimes you just need to recognize when a useful quality has become a rule you never agreed to live by forever.

04

MEANING: WHAT DID YOU MAKE IT MEAN?

Let’s go back to the same situation.

Your friend asks for help. You don’t want to. But saying no feels terrible.

Why? What does saying no mean to you?

Maybe it means: I’m letting somebody down.

Maybe: They’ll think I don’t care.

Or: Good friends don’t say no when people need them.

Notice something.

Those aren’t necessarily descriptions of what happened. They’re meanings attached to what might happen. And those meanings can make a simple decision feel much bigger.

Now we’re not just deciding whether to spend Saturday helping someone move furniture. We’re potentially deciding whether we’re a good friend.

That’s a lot of weight to put on a Saturday.

And maybe helping really is the right decision. I'm not here to tell you otherwise. But I do want you to notice what meaning you've attached to it.

Because sometimes we aren't responding only to the situation in front of us. We're responding to what we've decided the situation says about us.

So here's the question:

What am I making this mean?

Try separating the two.

What happened? My friend asked for help.

What did I make it mean? If I say no, I'm a bad friend.

Now we have something we can examine.

Does saying no actually make somebody a bad friend?

Under some circumstances, refusing to help might have consequences worth taking seriously.

But does every no mean that? Probably not. That's why we investigate.

05

PERCEPTION: WHAT ARE YOU ACTUALLY LOOKING AT?

Now we have one more layer.

Identity showed us a role this person might be protecting. Meaning showed us what saying no might represent. But neither tells us whether their interpretation is accurate.

We need to look at what’s actually happening.

Let’s say they believe: If I say no, my friend will be upset with me.

Okay. What evidence supports that?

Has the friend reacted badly before? Have they actually said something? Or is this a conclusion based on what the person expects?

Maybe the friend genuinely needs help and will be disappointed. Maybe they’ll understand. Maybe they’ll ask somebody else.

We don’t know. And we shouldn’t pretend we do.

This is where perception becomes important. Because there's a difference between:

What happened. What I believe happened. What I expect will happen next.

Those things can influence each other, but they aren't interchangeable.

And if we mix them together, we can make decisions based on things we haven't actually established.

So ask:

What do I actually know?

Then:

What am I assuming?

And finally:

What would help me find out?

Sometimes the answer is a conversation. Sometimes it's observing a pattern over time. Sometimes it's trying something small and seeing what happens.

But now we're working with reality instead of only the story we've built around it.

06

NOW PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER

Look at what happened.

We started with someone who was frustrated because people kept asking them for favors. The obvious solution might've been:

Stop letting people take advantage of you.

But after examining the situation, we discovered several possibilities.

IDENTITY

They may see themselves as the person who always helps.

MEANING

They may believe saying no makes them a bad friend.

PERCEPTION

They may expect rejection or disappointment without knowing whether that's actually what will happen.

Now, none of those possibilities is automatically the answer. They need to be checked against the person's real experience.

But notice how much more useful the conversation becomes. Instead of arguing about whether someone should say no, we can investigate what's actually making that decision difficult.

And the next step becomes clearer.

Maybe they need to practice a respectful no. Maybe they need to have a conversation about expectations. Maybe they realize this particular commitment is genuinely important and choose to help. That's possible too.

The goal isn't to force a particular answer.

The goal is to understand the situation well enough to make a decision you can take responsibility for.

That's the difference between reacting to an explanation and investigating what's actually happening.

And we've just walked through one example. Now let's look at yours.

07

YOUR TURN: PICK SOMETHING REAL

Don’t pick the biggest problem in your life. You don’t need to unpack your entire existence today.

Pick something ordinary. Something that keeps happening.

Maybe you’re avoiding a conversation. Maybe you keep postponing a goal. Maybe you overexplain yourself whenever somebody disagrees. Maybe you’re frustrated with a situation you’ve tried to fix several times.

Choose one specific event.

Not: I’m terrible at making decisions.

Something more like: Yesterday I asked three people what they thought, even though I’d already decided what I wanted to do.

That’s something we can actually examine. Now walk through these five questions.

1. AWARENESS — WHAT KEEPS HAPPENING?

Describe what actually happened without diagnosing yourself.

What did I do? What happened next?

Your answer:

2. IDENTITY — WHO AM I BEING?

Look at the role or version of yourself that may be involved.

What kind of person am I trying to remain or become when I do this?

Your answer:

3. MEANING — WHAT AM I MAKING IT MEAN?

Look at the meaning attached to the event.

What am I telling myself this situation says about me, someone else, or my future?

Your answer:

4. PERCEPTION — WHAT DO I ACTUALLY KNOW?

Separate evidence from interpretation.

What have I observed? What am I assuming? What don’t I know yet?

Your answer:

5. RESPONSIBILITY — WHAT DESERVES TO CHANGE?

Now that you've looked closer:

What's one different move I can reasonably make?

Your answer:

Take your time.

If one question doesn't apply, don't force it.

If you don't know an answer yet, leave it open.

Not knowing is useful when you're willing to find out.

08

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEEING AND CHANGING

Here’s where things get interesting.

You can understand exactly why you keep doing something… and still keep doing it.

You can recognize a pattern. Understand what it means to you. Even see where your interpretation might be wrong.

And then tomorrow arrives.

Same situation. Same decision. Same result.

So what actually changed?

Maybe your understanding. And that’s valuable.

But awareness by itself doesn’t guarantee anything changes outside your head. Eventually, something has to make contact with reality.

Let’s return to our example.

Instead of promising to become someone who always has perfect boundaries, the person could try something small.

The next time someone asks for a favor, they don’t immediately say yes. They say:

Let me check what I have going on and get back to you.

That’s it. Not a new personality. Not a dramatic confrontation. Just enough space to make a deliberate decision.

Then they pay attention.

What happened? How did the other person respond? What did they learn? Was the original fear supported? Was there something they hadn’t considered?

Now they’re gathering evidence. And that evidence can influence the next decision.

That’s how understanding begins turning into something actionable. Not by declaring yourself transformed. By giving reality a chance to respond.

09

WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE A DECISION TO MAKE

There’s a principle underneath RAC that matters a lot to me.

If you don’t know, you don’t know.

When you do know, it’s your responsibility.

I don’t interpret that as saying you have to fix everything immediately.

Sometimes knowing makes a situation more complicated. You might recognize something that deserves changing but still need time, support, information, or a safer way forward. That’s real.

But once you begin seeing something clearly, you also have an opportunity you didn’t have before.

You can stop pretending it isn’t there. You can examine it. You can ask better questions.

And when you have enough understanding to make a reasonable move, you can choose what to do with it.

Responsibility isn’t punishment. It’s ownership.

And ownership doesn’t require you to know everything. Just enough to be honest about where you are and what you’re choosing next.

So before you close this book, go back to the situation you picked. Ask yourself:

What can I no longer say I haven’t noticed?

Then:

What am I going to do with that awareness?

You don’t have to solve your entire life today.

One truthful observation. One better question. One deliberate action.

That’s a real place to begin.

10

BEYOND THE SURFACE

I don’t think every problem has some enormous hidden meaning.

Sometimes you’re tired. Sometimes your schedule is a mess. Sometimes the strategy really is bad. Sometimes somebody is simply treating you poorly.

And sometimes the thing you’ve been trying to fix isn’t actually the thing causing the result.

That’s why I don’t want you assuming the answer before you’ve examined the situation.

Identity. Meaning. Perception.

They’re ways to look. Not explanations you have to force onto everything.

And awareness is what makes that investigation possible. That’s what Beyond the Surface is about.

Recognizing that the explanation you’ve lived with might not be the entire picture. Being willing to look again. And taking responsibility for what you discover.

If this book helped you examine one real situation differently, then you've already experienced a small part of the work I'm developing through Rising Ambitions Concepts.

There's more depth to it. More situations to examine. More ways to practice.

But you don't need any of that to use what you've learned here.

Take these questions with you.

The next time you catch yourself reacting, assuming, repeating something, or trying to fix a problem, remember:

What's actually happening?

What am I making this mean?

What do I actually know?

What deserves to change?

You might be surprised by what you start noticing. And once you notice it, you have somewhere to begin.

— Justin Yang

Rising Ambitions Concepts

A FINAL THOUGHT

Awareness opens the door.

Investigation helps you see what’s true.

Responsibility gives understanding somewhere to go.

See for yourself.

RISING AMBITIONS CONCEPTS

Beyond the Surface



Justin Yang