Disrupt Yourself Podcast
Episode 15: Asi Burak

W: **[2:10]** Asi, will you introduce yourself and what you do?

A: Asi Burak. I'm the CEO of Powerplay and the Chairman of Games for Change and most of my efforts are on video games and play, and making sure it has the proper place in our culture and our society because I think it's a very, very powerful medium.

W: What is the most disruptive thing you did as a child?

A: Em, hmmm. I mean I think that would probably go back to drawing because I was a...I was drawing to a level that, you know, kindergarten teacher was waiting for my parents at the gate of the kindergarten just to show them. You know, when kids were doing circles and, you know, and kind of nothing meaningful, I was actually making characters. And then I went on to do a kind of conflict drawings and war drawings and....There was one point that it became a bit embarrassing when we visited a family in our village. They were friends with my father and I actually drew something very, very provocative and political and they were kind of...you know, they didn't expect it from me.

W: How old were you?

A: I think probably six at that time.

W: Six years old. Writing, or drawing something very provocative, about the...

A: About the conflict.

W: About the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A: Yeah, and they thought they were going to look at a drawing of trees and houses or something.

W: Can you describe for us what it looked like?

A: It was basically an encounter between an Arab militant and a soldier. And they were very surprised. It was embarrassing because it kind of, you know, put tension in the air. But that was the drawing.

W: That was pretty disruptive.

A: Yeah.

W: **[4:27]** You have a big idea and... actually you already told us the big idea, so never mind. I read your book, *Powerplay: How Video Games Change the World*. It was fascinating.

A: Thank you.

W: I have to say the best part of the story was your story. I don't know if you're familiar with the book *Ender's Game*?

A: Yeah, of course.

W: I...that's one of my favorite books, and I felt like I was reading the story of a real life Ender. Will you share with me and with our listeners some of your story?

A: Yeah, sure. So I think that the tipping point, the point that everything changed, was when I came to the U.S., actually. Before that I've done things, you know, that tied me to tech or marketing, but when I came to the U.S. for whatever reason...you know, looking back I didn't plan to stay here or anything...I came to Carnegie Mellon to do a special program and I pitched my own project, which was a disruption because most of the other kids were doing, um, making projects around things that were given to them. You know, Disney is coming or, you know, a big brand sponsoring a project, and you know, the students feel very lucky to do that. The other thing, I was ten years older than everyone else. I came after the army service; I was a captain in the Israeli Defense Forces and so I had much more experience in leadership, I guess. So I pitched my own project, and what I suggested I'll do is a video game around the Palestinian...the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which drew a lot from my background living in Israel but also my army service and understanding of different perspectives. I was in intelligence, so a lot of what I've done is gaming in a way, you know. I try to decipher what the other side is trying to do and at times it was really puzzle solving, you know, really cracking a big problems that had life-and-death consequences for soldiers in the field. And I took all of that and I put it into the speech and the faculty at the beginning thought, 'It's the craziest idea ever" but at the end they approved it. They took some time and...we have to remember it's 2004, so video games have even worse perception than today, and mostly they're played by teenagers on consoles and kind of that image of the teenager in the basement is pretty accurate in 2004. And I'm coming with this idea not only to do a real world game, but it's also going to be about solving the conflict.

[Pause w/private conversation]

W: **[8:05]** You had this epiphany, and there's something you wrote in the book that I thought was very, very powerful. It's on page 12, and I would love it if you would read it for the listeners.

A: Ok, so it's basically written about me in third person, but it's basically me, right? So ultimately I saw an opportunity. "Imagine you walk in on an art form that most people don't yet fully appreciate but that you know will grow into something incredible one day. A medium that many people consider shallow or violent but whose potential to teach and transform is in fact limitless."

W: That to me is, is...it's your mission statement right?

A: Absolutely, and, you know, even before ??? I started studying that Master's Degree, that's the, you know, kind of the burden or the mission or the mindset that I came with, you know. That was the idea. And you know, choosing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was basically about 'how far can we go.' You know? Can we take the most serious, arguably, the most serious, complex problem of our age and put it into a video game? The most serious thing in the medium that most people take as very unserious. You know, people thing that it's escapism, you know; I'm going to immerse you in the conflict. People think it's violent, and all about war; I'm going to make it a peace game. So it was completely counterintuitive to everything video games were, in people's minds, standing for.

W: Which goes to a really important question, because this is a medium, the gaming community, it's celebrated, it's passionate, like you said, about escape. And so now you're trying to take on this intractable problem—did you have people say to you, 'Why don't you aim a little lower and why are you even doing this?'

A: All the time. I mean, the amount of times I heard, you know, that it's not feasible, that it's not possible, that it's, you know, out of scope—definitely for a student project—that it will never succeed, that...why are you even doing it? Why with video games? I mean, so much. And, you know, some of it goes until this day, to the stuff we're doing with games for change. But, you know, with everything that you disrupt, time helps. It's like an evolution, so you're less and less. But back then, 2004, super strong opposition, and the beauty of it in my mind is that when you succeed or when you break through it actually helps you, because when you do something counterintuitive, many people are interested in it. And I think the press was a major power in that, because for them it was an amazing story to tell. Back then, you know, that video games are what people think they are, and then a group of students at Carnegie Mellon is trying to solve the peace process in the Middle East.

W: **[11:23]** Walk me through what would happen if you and I were playing the game, um, what...who would I be, who would you be and what would we do?

A: So it's...the way it was designed back then it's a one-player game so, you know, we would play one of the perspectives; we would need to choose, select a position between the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President. But

what we're going to do is retake very high level strategical decisions around the situation. Now, um, everything we'll see in the game—there is a map that is, you know, a 3-D map—but everything else we're going to see is real footage that we license from Reuters. We're talking about disruption; when we came to Reuters they didn't even know how to license footage to a video game. They'd never had this problem to, to, you know, to think about. So you see real videos and real images and some of them are, you know, very intense and you need to respond and every decision you make get consequences but also you see what every stakeholder is feeling about you at any time. So it's like an ability to look at different groups and leaders and every action that you do changes their meters and their level of approval of you. And it's very hard to satisfy everybody. So very soon you get into this place where you have all this power as a leader but you feel very limited because, you know, opposition is fighting you and people, you know, interpret you in ways that you didn't necessarily intend to, you know. They look at what you do and they misunderstand your intentions.

W: The psychological complexity, as I'm listening to you talk about this, is staggering. I'm also feeling this sense of *gasp* because you're getting this automatic feedback of every move that you make, of people, you know, boo, yay....

A: Some people got very stressed, you know, when they play. I mean stressed in a positive, engaging way, but you know, they started to feel that every reaction they take there is consequences, and you know, we kept hearing...this is interesting because it wasn't necessarily our goal, because if you asked me before, you know, what people will get from the game, people started coming back to us with, you know, a similar statement, quote, that said, "I learned by playing Peacemaker, your game, about the Middle East more than I learned by watching the news for months. And I think that what that showed me is how strong a video is in connecting the dots for people. So, you talked about this action feedback thing; it's the key to learning a complex situation because you make a choice, you have the agency, then you get the feedback. You take another action—it's very different than watching the news in a passive way, isolated events that it's very hard to make kind of the big picture out of them.

W: **[14:37]** I want to go back to your background for just a moment. You...because it's your background it probably seems sort of commonplace, but it isn't to me. So you grew up in Israel, in Tel Aviv. Is that right?

A: Mm hmm.

W: And you loved to draw; you were an artist and were using your art to capture the world around you. Now when you were in high school, you started studying a language that surprised people. So what was that language?

A: Yeah. That was kind of a mini disruption that everyone expect...I mean I was like very strong in like, very good student and very good grades. Everybody expected me to go to a, you know, to study physics, mathematics, chemistry and I chose Arabic. And it was also not regarded, it was not respected as a choice, and I chose that, and it led to my army service in intelligence later. And it's a language that I learned for years and years and it was all about, you know, learning the language of your neighbors, you know.

W: Do you remember why you chose Arabic?

A: Very hard for me to, you know, to understand why I made that choice. But you know, through my life I made those kind of surprising choices. Another one was to go to art school, so even though I was drawing and all that, most of the people coming out of my unit in the army went and became start-up guys, or you know, went to study law and went to study, you know, business and going to art school was completely outside....

W: **[16:25]** So you go from military intelligence, the most macho thing you can do, to art school.

A: Right. And also the most analytical thing, you know. The army, the intelligence service was all about data and analytics and brain and you know, I go and go to art school.

W: Do you remember any conversations that you had with friends or colleagues that just were flabbergasted at your decision?

A: Yeah, of course. Also with the Arabic. I mean, I remember with the Arabic one, you know, doing it in high school, I remember teachers coming to me and saying, you know, "you're narrowing your choices if you don't go and study chemistry or physics. You know, you won't be able to return to that later, I mean, you're hurting your future." All kinds of....And same with art school, you know, people telling me, "It's never going to be profitable or, you know, business or.... Yeah, I mean, look people...I always have that people don't necessarily look long term and they...and some are very, very practical; you know, people that I speak with and they...it's fine. It's a good perspective to have but I'm, I'm trying to most of the time go beyond that.

W: **[17:47]** Have you come across any gamers who have disapproved of how you are trying to disrupt the world's view of gaming, to use it not just for escape but to, but to...for social good and to move the world forward in a positive way?

A: A lot. I mean, this surprised at how easy for me it is to convert people outside of gaming. For them it's a very good story and they get it on every level once they have a chance to hear about it. To gamers, especially hard-core

gamers, that feel, you know, maybe threatened, maybe it's changing something they love so much and don't think that you need to change. We get a lot of opposition, and, I mean, it's less now, but one example is the game awards, which is the Oscars of video games; it happens every December. They decide to put a games-for-change category and they decide to do it two years ago. So that was a big milestone for us; it's still one category but it was, you know, an acknowledgement. And every time they announce the nominees, every year, you have to see what happens on social media. It's just such a backlash from gamers. And, you know, 'those games are not really games,' and, you know. It's just...they can't—again, it's obviously a group—but for them it's really, you know, challenging everything they know and love about, you know, the blockbuster commercial games they love to play.

W: **[19:30]** What do you do when you get that kind of backlash?

A: Um, you know, I'm a...I'm trying to say something I really believe in. It's not in expense of anything, you know. We have other media to learn from. So, you know, the book actually starts with an introduction that I go to...I was lucky to get to interview one of my heroes, Art Spiegelman, about comic books. You know, that's another equivalent. Look to...look at tv series; look at movies. They...the evolution of a medium makes it much more nuanced, many more genres, across ages, many developed tastes. I mean the idea that we will stay with what we have known about video games is just unacceptable because it will become more diverse. It will become something that will be 9 to 99, you know, and everybody will learn to appreciate it. I mean, even the word 'gamers' for many years...I'm talking about how weird it is that we have a medium where we separate gamers from non-gamers. You know, you don't have it with book readers or movie goers because everybody can appreciate a type of creation that is tailored to their taste.

W: That's an interesting distinction.

D: I have a question just on that note, sticking with the gaming industry. I'd like to hear what you think it's going to take for the most profitable companies to start making games that help social change....

W: **[21:15]** Ok, I'm going to repeat the question for....

A: Sure.

W: What do you think it's going to take for the most...the largest video game companies to be willing to make games that, that....not saying the question very well; say it again.

D: [repeats]

W: **[21:45]** What is it going to take for the largest gaming companies to produce social games?

A: So, in a way it's starting to happen. Okay, so that's the good news. I mean, it took us years, but you know, at the last Games for Change festival, Sid Meier, amazing designer of Civilization announced that they're going to make a Civilization edu version. Ubisoft, another very big game publisher, one of the leading in the world, made a game called Valiant Hearts around WWI. In many ways it's an educational game; there's an entertainment piece, but it's definitely something that Games for Change would appreciate. We have the other projects like Zynga.org, you know, that Zynga started this .org non-profit arm that also funded us, but did a lot of interesting things with charity. There are other examples like Electronic Arts, starting GameLab, which is a whole organization that takes commercial games and makes versions of those for schools and other purposes. I think that these are just pioneering things, and I think that to see it in a big way we'll need to have a commercial argument in the sense that, just like if you look at movies, documentaries started to succeed in the theater in a big way, that attracted the attention of the big studios. I think that we'll have the same here, that something will succeed in a way that is unquestionable in the market, that they will need to go….So far, they are very risk averse; they want to create the same stuff that's proven to work.

W: Which is very not disruptive. Right?

A: No, and in a funny way, it's so the opposite, because video games are known to be about sequels and the reason they're about sequels is because it's so complex and tough to make a good game that you'll actually make the next one and it will be better. Unlike in movies, you do build on the technology, and you do build on the feedback from players; it's all interactive. So the number 2, number 3 will be better, so it's much easier to go that route than to do something completely new that might be a huge failure.

W: **[24:20]** In your book you talk about a number of different games that are helping people change and many of the stories caught my attention. One in particular, um, has to do with helping professional athletes and I'll tell you why. Our very first podcast episode I interviewed Michelle McKenna Doyle, who is the CIO, the Chief Information Officer, at the NFL.

A: Yes.

W: And so I was intrigued to read that virtual reality is helping athletes, and football players in particular, both improve their game and to disrupt their sometimes bad behavior.

A: Right.

W: Tell me more about this.

A: So, in all that work is being driven by a lab in Stanford that is run by a Jerry Benson? And he is doing, by the way, a lot of experiments with virtual reality and empathy, so he also has that very for change-for-good aspect. But very soon he saw how he can actually work with athletes, especially quarterbacks in the NFL on improving their decision-making time. So we all know how crucial it is and how short is the window that they have to make a decision, and one of his big projects showed that he can reduce response time from four seconds to three seconds and he works with the NFL as an organization; the commissioner came to the lab to see some of the VR demos. I think we're only scratching the surface because this idea that you can rehearse in a very immersive environment what you do in real life is super powerful. And the idea that you can also try from different perspectives…so they also do some work with the NFL around domestic violence and gender and trying to figure out how people can get empathy while playing another perspective.

W: So on the domestic violence they put the…they put the athlete in the position of…

A: Yeah, they might do that. They put, they put the athlete in the opposite position, or they'll do a narrative based scenario that has to do with it. Again, it's the closest we have now is virtual reality' it's the closest we have now to simulate reality, and, you know, even immer…kind of, integrate fantasy into it in a way that we can manipulate. So, again, I think it's only the beginning; it's still crude to…if we compare it to what we will see in the future.

W: **[27:15]** What's the most exciting thing you—you personally—have created to date?

A: Hmm, very interesting. It's tough to have one baby, but I think that if…I definitely, you know, liked the disruption and innovation of [Peacemaker](), or later, when we did [Half the Sky]() which was a very ambitious project with Nicholas Crystal around women empowerment. Um, and we did mobile games in India and Kenya that was a very interesting approach to go with, you know, low end devices, not the cutting technology but actually very basic devices to communities on the ground. So those were interesting projects. But if I take a step back I think the work of Games for Change, in general, over years, was probably the most meaningful, because you could really see the change.

W: Mm hmmm.

A: You could really see over the years, where it started and where it finished. You know it was a sustainable, long-term effort that had a lot of outcomes.

W: So you're say the creation of Games for Change itself, the organization….

A: Yeah, and I didn't start it, start it. I joined after there was a community there. But when I came, I would say, that the community was pretty sleepy, very non-profit-y and not necessarily very large and what I did—obviously not alone—but with a team and partners is trying to get it first of all to be more friendly to business. Um, sexier. Again, if it's entertainment, we have to look like entertainment. That meant everything. It meant the brand; it meant the events; it meant the partnerships we did. The quality of the games. You know, I remember when we came to Games for Change there was no awards show. They tried to do it once in, I don't know, five years. And that's it. And we said, the first thing we said we're going to do is an awards show. And they told us, "You can't do an award show because there are not enough high quality games." And we said, "Yeah, but it's a chicken and egg problem; if you don't do an award show, if you don't invite innovation and quality, then people aren't going to try hard." It was all about exposing that at work. It's amazing how every year the award show, and the games submitted, both in terms of quantity and quality, you saw improvement. It was just like, year after year of positive trends.

W: **[30:10]** So 2017 will be what year for the awards show?

A: It will be the 13th.

W: The 13th.

A: Yeah. Maybe even 14th.

W: Close enough.

A: And yeah, it's going to be this time with virtual reality for a change.

W: What will that look like?

A: I mean, what I'm starting to see are things that…you know, we used to think about VR as the kind of a shortcut. You know, instead of going to Barcelona, I'm going to send you to Barcelona in this VR…but this is very basic. I think that what people are starting to do is create experiences that you cannot, you know, achieve in real life. So there's a very famous early work called Clouds over Sidra, that takes you to a refugee camp and it's live action; it's not like 3-D graphics, it's a live action, you know, reality piece that you have a young girl in the camp that is taking you around and showing you around. And she takes you where the bakery is, and where her kids are playing video games, and how everything looks like. And you go around and it's not even interactive; you can look around in 360, but that idea that there's no way that in real life you can get there. But that experience gives you a glimpse on what it looks like and how it feels. Um, so again, it's just scratching the surface, but I think we will

see many more of those and, um, in terms of generating empathy and understanding of, or entering someone else's shoes, it will be very powerful.

W: Agreed. **[32:08]** Can you remember the hardest day that you've experienced as you've transitioned from fulltime game developer to executive director of Games for Change?

A: That was, you know, a very interesting transition because it was dropping a lot of the creative day-to-day making games to kind of oversee this platform. There was a very tough moment when we actually decided to go and produce Half the Sky, and a lot of opposition and challenging from the community, especially because I was a game developer, that instead of being the referee—choosing a team. And the, you know, looking back it was so not important, but back then it was a huge backlash. You know, how come we, the organization that's trying to be the Sundance of video games, is picking up one project and is going to develop it. You know, it's like we're, we're misusing our role, we're….

W: Ok, let me make sure I understand.

A: Yeah.

W: So you are Games for Change and you're saying you're supposed to be bipartisan, agnostic, and you're selecting one project to support.

A: To actually make; to actually create. And, uh, that was never done before, and you know, instead of being this mutual platform, like you said, we suddenly take one project to put our efforts in. But we thought it's the right thing to do because it was a product and with an amazing correlation of partners, and we thought that it will help the whole sector to go forward, just by the exposure and the attention that it will grab. And I think it happened; I think, you know, it was tough, but I think that at the end of the day that was the outcome of that project.

W: For our listeners, what was that Half the Sky project?

A: So Half the Sky's a what's called a multi-media transmedia project, um, but in a very interesting way it was organic…organic development. [It was a book; a bestselling book by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. Half the Sky around women, oppression and empowerment, all over the world](). Then there was a documentary that they made and was screened on PBS for millions of viewers and they came to us, at some point, at Games for Change and we collaborated on making a video game. And actually, we ended up making four games, including those mobile games in India and Kenya. And the main reason that they came to us was that they felt like they were speaking to the same audience—I mean, a large audience, but kind of the converted. You know the people that read Nick Kristof in the New York Times, the people that read the

nonfiction book of that gravity, the people that, you know, that watch documentary on PBS. It's a very, very particular audience, and arguably one that is all over...you know, very attentive to the social issues. They wanted to reach further, and that was the idea to make the game and, you know, reach beyond the converted, reach people that might not even know anything about the social issue and will come to it through the game. We made a game on Facebook that was a game to raise awareness around the issues but also to donate money and we raised more than half a million in donations as a result.

W: **[36:03]** Who are the most exciting disruptors making video games today?

A: I think that, you know, there are definitely in the Games for Change movement, there are people and they're covered in the book. But going beyond that, I think that the main disruptions are presented by the indie movement. So those guys, which I really admire a lot of what they do, um, they went into the, let's say, mainstream four or five years ago. And part of the reason was that selling and distribution became much easier. You know, you can get to the audiences through a platform like STEAM, um, or the iPhone; you don't need to anymore go to a big publisher, so the gatekeepers kind of, you know, became redundant in a way. And those guys, you know, they study at NYU, they study at USC, at other universities, and they work in very small teams. They can sometimes make a game alone or in a team of two, three, four, and they are definitely pushing the boundaries. They create games about anything, everything. Games that are personal at times; games that invent new mechanics, new game mechanics....

W: Any name come to mind? A name or two?

A: I mean, you know, one is Tracy Fullerton **[37:38]** that was in the New York Times just recently, with her game about Walden, which is kind of an art piece. So you have people that are really going very far with what they can do and it's still in the place of being a game that competes for attention like an entertainment product.

D: I'm just curious about what that game is?

A: Walden?

D: Yeah. [discussion]

W: **[38:10]** What is Walden?

A: So, the philosopher Walden, um, lived in nature.

W: Thoreau lived on Walden Pond, right?
A: Right, right, you're right.

W: Ok.

A: So it's….

W: I'm from…I lived in New England for 15 years.

A: No, no, you're right. It's not my history so glad that you helped me. But, uh, Walden is the place that Thoreau lived and it was all about a connection with nature, and that's what the game is about is kind of living that life that the philosopher lived, and trying to get to know yourself but also to get to understand the connection with nature. Tracy got funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, and actually together with Half the Sky these were the first video games that got NEA funding as an art piece. And she worked for it for years; I think it's something like seven years that she's working on this creation and she decided to price it. She's going to actually launch it and it will be very interesting to see what actually happens with it. But, again, Walden gets all the attention because it's also this game that's so counterintuitive to the noisy nature of the commercial games that we know; it's a game about peace and quiet and, you know, almost meditation.

W: Hmmm. Interesting. **[39:51]** What are you reading right now?

A: I'm reading [Daniel Kahneman, *Think Fast, Think Slow* [Thinking, Fast and Slow]](#). It's something that, you know, I'm reading because I read the Michael Lewis' [*The Undoing Project*](#)….

W: I just finished that; it was so good!

A: It's really good and I decided to go to, kind of, you know…

W: The source.

A: …the source. Not an easy read, but really in line with all the things I'm seeing in decision-making and…and even video games, you know. Remission, one of the games we discuss, about helping cancer patients, young cancer patients; you know, I really started to think about that idea that video games can influence you in this emotional, profound way, beyond the rational way and change habits in that case. And it is very relevant to the things he is talking about.

W: So for [Re-Mission](#), just quickly, what does Re-Mission do? It's helping kids battle their cancer but just….

A: It's more about really making them consistent in following the treatments. So, again, rationally they know that the drugs are good. There's no….

W: Right.

A: They don't object or oppose the idea that the drugs are good for them, it's just that, you know, they're young, and it's tough to get them disciplined and they're just not following the treatment as consistent as they should. What the game does is connecting that idea of that in their body there is an epic battle going on, on a daily basis. And, um, and this is something that they don't necessarily see when they go through and doing everything they do in their life, and the game connects the epic battle to the drugs and basically says, "Look, in order to win that fight, you need the ammunition. And we're giving you that ammunition." And what they showed in clinical trials is that kids that played Remission for a month were much more consistent in taking drugs and following doctors' guidelines for six months. So, way beyond the time of the duration of game play.

W: Wow.

A: It for me, you know, going back to Daniel Kahneman and the two systems in the brain and the, you know, being rational versus, you know, getting something at the gut level; I think this is one of the most prominent examples I saw to this type of impact, you know…

W: Yeah.

A: …on people through a video game.

W: **[42:44]** [League of Legends, Madison Square Garden](#).

A: Yeah.

W: What do we need to know? I need to tell you first of all, my son who is now 20, for a time in his life, he was in the 97th percentile in [League of Legends](#).

A: Wow.

W: So I need you to help me persuade him that at some point he should be willing to put that on a college application.

A: Right, exactly. So, by the way, I mean were kind of, you know, joking about it, but he could get scholarship someplace. So there are a lot of places in the U.S. where E-sports is not only acknowledged, it's promoted and, um, they give scholarships to professional gamers. What happened was, I started through Games for Change a partnership with the [TriBecA Film Festival](#). So that's another organization that kind of saw the promise of this new medium and it was a partnership to host Games for Change. And then me and my partner,

Itzik Ben-Bassat, met with the founders of the festival, the film festival, and they said what else can we do with games? And you know, we have this new partnership with Madison Square Garden, Tribeca—obviously we're looking for things that are going to speak to young audiences, millennials. We're looking for things that are consumer-facing just like film, you know, the film festivals. And we said, you know, 'Let's do E-sports. Let's bring a very big tournament to Madison Square Garden for the first time.' Before that there were smaller tournaments at the theater at Madison Square, not at the arena, and they were not necessarily very successful. And we said, 'Look. We want to start with the best. So we'll go to the most popular one which is League of Legends. And together with the team at Tribeca, we basically had this mission to convince League of Legends to consider one of the most expensive arenas in the world, and until then they worked mostly on the West coast, and they did a very successful L.A. Staples show. And we finally convinced them to bring one of the main events of that season—that was 2015—and sold out in 36 hours.

W: Wow.

A: And talking about disruption, obviously it was another case where people at Madison Square Garden said, "Look, it's interesting. How can we sell tickets? It will take months to fill in the arena.' It took basically a day and a half.

W: **[45:18]** Alright, speaking of games, let's play a game. Rapid-fire round; I'm going to ask you some questions.

A: Ok.

W: What food have you never eaten?

A: Cockroaches.

W: Aren't you glad?

A: I mean, some people eat them.

W: Do you find your current work challenging?

A: Yes.

W: What's one book you read at a young age that you still think about?

A: [1984](#).

W: How old were you?

A: Probably 10 or 11.

W: That's young to be reading 1984.

A: I read a lot.

W: You and Ender. Which of your family members do you think of when you hear the word 'disruptor.'

A: My father.

W: Why?

A: So he started the VC industry in Israel. It was one of the first VC's in the 80s and people don't remember but before that, people mainly donated to Israel. And he was one of those who convinced a lot of rich individuals that there could be a real investment with return, and that started the whole IT industry in the 80s.

W: Wow. That's something to be proud of.

A: Yeah, for sure.

W: Alright, this is a gimme. Do you speak a language other than English? If so, how do you say disruption?

A: Oh, my golly. I can say it in Hebrew, I guess.

W: So you speak Hebrew and Arabic?

A: Hebrew and Arabic and English. I'm trying to think if there is actually a word for that in Hebrew. Maybe it's ??????????????? Probably there's something that the Hebrew Academy…so Hebrew is a very interesting case of disruption because you have a language that basically wasn't spoken for 2000 years and every time that need to invent new words to, you know, align with English. So, something like disruption comes and they need to actually invent the word for it.

W: So what word did you use, that you say approximate?

A: I use things that are more in the innovation side. Invention, innovation.

W: And how did you spell the word that you use?

A: In English? It's a very long word.

W: Oh, it is?

A: ????????.

W: ???????

A: ???????

W: Ok, I can't pronounce it. Name something you want to be able to do, but haven't had or made the time to do.

A: I think that, you know, flying would be probably interesting. Something that I thought about but never learned.

W: What did your worst boss fail to do?

A: Delegate and promote others to innovate and…but usually I avoided bad bosses to be honest.

W: How do you avoid a bad boss?

A: I don't know. I never worked for…I never stayed longer than two minutes with a bad boss.

W: So you would just find a way to…

A: Yeah, I mean….

W: …transfer or not take the job in the first place?

A: Yeah. I mean, today I can't even imagine a boss in general, but back in the days it was bosses naturally, they hire you because they see your talent and they want to leverage it, you know. It can't be restricted; it doesn't make any sense.

W: Best boss?

A: I feel that the best bosses I had were my friends and they're actually my friends until this day, that, you know, there was no pose, there was no power game…there were no power games. It was really very, very open relationship.

W: So it's basically the opposite—they saw you had talent and they said, 'Make it happen.'

A: Yeah and you know…I remember one boss that was always listening. There was a board meeting, so it was always hearing everyone out before he said anything and made his decision.

W: **[49:48]** How do you think about risk?

A: I mean, to me that's like a given. You need to take risks to get the biggest gain. I do…I did learn though throughout the years, to some extent, I don't think I'm at the end of this journey, but to mitigate a big risk with execution so kind of working two levels: the ambition and the vision could be completely out there, but on the execution side to eliminate risk as much as possible. So to keep the vision there but on the step-by-step, milestone-to-milestone, try to make things more achievable.

W: Hmm. I like that. How will you disrupt yourself in 2017?

A: So, the thing that I'm trying to figure out now that's pretty new to me, is how to do, like, how far I can go with multiple projects. So in the past it was all about super focus, laser focus on one thing, and one thing only. Now I find myself with five email addresses, doing projects for five different companies in five different sectors. Some of them are mobile; some of them are commercial. Some of them are not commercial. Some of them have to do with e-sports, some of them not. And it's thrilling but it's challenging; it's confusing at times. And it's like a wear many hats and, you know, sometimes I come to a meeting and I speak about different things and people are interested and at the end they're kind of…I see that they're overwhelmed. Ok, there's one bucket….

W: **[52:00]** If I understand then correctly, you're saying you've got all these different projects; you've got time is a constraint.

A: Yeah.

W: And you're trying to figure out…so your personal disruption…so the third accelerant of personal disruption is to embrace your constraints…so you would figure out how to turn this limited time into some kind of tool of creation and what will that look like.

A: Yeah, and basically see how much attention I can give to each one of them; how they can all fit together. How can I start actually leverage one against the other, which is already happening. You know, I'm doing e-sports so I'm suddenly presenting that idea to a whole different company that's never considered it. So, you know, start to kind of…

W: Mmmm. Finding the connections.

A: Create the connections. And, you know, I see how it's also emerging from parts to actually something that is bigger than the sum of all parts, because it allows me to look at different sectors. It allows me to create tons of relationships. I can see one direction turns into a fund that creates cutting

edge ventures, you know, that…and leverages all those relationships and expertise, um, coming from the, you know, the real DNA of knowing how to make products like this.

W: **[53:33]** So do you want to go on record? Is that something you're going to do? So here's what I'm asking: six to nine months from now I'm going to want to call you on the phone and ask you how you did with disrupting yourself, so I'm hoping there's something concrete that you would like to commit to.

A: I would like to make the agency, ok…right now it's really about projects. I want to in six to nine months at the agency Powerplay has become a thing itself. That it has such value because we created that expertise, because we had those top tier clients, because we had established those relationships it became a known…Games for Change became a known thing.

W: Okay. That's great. Asi, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. I'm really excited for people to hear what you have to say.

A: Thank you so much; it was fun.