

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## Episode 39: Daniel Pink

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. This week's podcast is brought to you by the [Harvard Business Review](#). Its weekly podcast, the [HBR Ideacast](#) features leading thinkers in business and management.

Speaking of leading thinkers, today's guest is [Dan Pink](#) – number 11 on the [Thinkers50 list in 2017](#). And the #1 New York Times Best Selling author of [Drive, To Sell is Human](#) and [When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing](#).

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Whitney: All right. You have a wonderful new book titled [When](#) that's coming out next week. I'll get to that in just a moment, but I'd like to, before we go there is, have you share with our listeners some of your story. In [your wonderful TED Talk](#), you share a bit about your youthful indiscretion of going to law school, but I want to go back even further,

Daniel: Yes.

Whitney: Which is, you graduated with a bachelors in 1986.

Daniel: Yes.

Whitney: What was the plan at that time?

Daniel: Good God. I'm not sure I had a plan. I'll take it back even further. I grew up in Central Ohio, Columbus, Ohio about the most middlebrow, middle class place you could possibly grow up. Columbus is literally in the center of Ohio. I grew up in a town in the center of Ohio. I grew up, literally...this is not a joke. I grew up in the center of the town in the center of Ohio. So you get very few more middle kind of upbringings than I did. I was a pretty good student only because I was pretty good at giving authority figures what they wanted. I did well in school. And I don't know. I'd always thought that I'd go to law school because that's what you did. My parents encouraged me to do that because it would give you some kind of security. I didn't really have much of a plan. I was interested in politics. I knew I was going to go to law school. And that was pretty much it. I mean, I don't think I was particularly self-aware or introspective at that point in my life.

Whitney: What did you study in undergrad?

Daniel: I was a linguistics major. That should've been a hint that I was a little bit off the beaten track. Linguistics is, as you know, and many of your listeners know is a social science, but it's a very mathematical social science. And I was just interested in it. I didn't have any great desires to be a linguist or anything like that, but I did it because it was interesting and it was different. But I was always really interested in social science. In retrospect, I probably should've gone and got a PhD and become a professor. Literally, I don't think I

ever thought about that when I was 20 years old. I sort of have a degree of embarrassment, Whitney, about-

Whitney: Why?

Daniel: The other lack of openness and self-awareness and introspection at that point in my life.

Whitney: Actually, it's fascinating because you know for businesses, 70% of businesses end up with a strategy. The successful ones - end up with a different strategy than the one that they started with.

Daniel: Oh, wow.

Whitney: And college students, I think the number is more like 90%, end up with a different major than the one they started with. That includes ...

Daniel: Interesting.

Whitney: ... people who are undeclared. So you were normal. I mean, like you said, you were in the middle of the town, in the middle of the state, in the middle of the city.

Daniel: America. Yeah.

Whitney: Yeah. You were in the middle in terms of not knowing what you wanted to do.

Daniel: Yeah.

Whitney: Next question for you is, I'm intrigued by the fact that you were a speech writer. Was this before or after law school?

Daniel: It was after. I graduated from law school. I knew pretty clearly that I didn't want to practice law. I just, I didn't find it very interesting. The people I saw doing that, most of them, were deeply unhappy. As I mentioned, I was really interested, at that point in my life, in politics. I graduate from law school and started working on political campaigns. And again, without any plan, truly no plan at all, migrated into becoming a speech writer.

Whitney: I have to say, I'm really intrigued by this. Do you remember what it was like to write speeches? How did it feel? What was the process like? I know it was a long time ago, but I just watched this wonderful episode on [The Crown](#) about the power and the importance of speeches. And so I'm quite curious as to what that was like for you.

Daniel: Well the last job I had was working as chief speech writer to Vice President Gore. That was just a really intense job. We have, I think people have this notion that that kind of job is somehow ... you're breathing rarefied air, thinking great thoughts. It's really like working in an urban emergency room. You're just stitching up bodies and hoping they don't die on your watch. You're writing on deadline a lot. I mean, a lot. Often, multiple

times a day. And you're hoping you get it right. And the consequences of getting it wrong are significant because your boss gets criticized and/or you make some kind of mistake or you setback some kind of policy.

I don't mean to isolate on the negative side of it. There are some good things that happened too. I worked for the labor secretary as his speech writer for a couple of years. At the time, again, people's politics are going to be different on this, but at the time, I don't remember the minimum wage in the United States. It was something like \$5. We thought, "Let's raise it a little bit." And we worked for a year to try to raise the minimum wage because we knew we would put more money in some people's pockets, and that's basically a massive group persuasive act of which I was a tiny part. And so it's kind of cool when you can actually accomplish something. The ground truth of what it was like to work day-to-day was just, it's a constant grind.

Whitney: Constant grind, like you said, emergency room. What a great metaphor. I would argue though, it gave you a peek into the power of words that when spoken, when written well, you were able to change how people think.

Daniel: Yeah. I think that, if you think about what is policy - public policy or laws even, public policy is words, right? I mean, that's what it is. It's like, it's a set of words that say what you can do and what you can't do. Words do have that, just a really extraordinary power in that way. And if you have people who you're working for who by dint of the democratic process, have a certain authority in that moment, right, it can be extremely powerful.

Whitney: What's fascinating to me is, as I think about what you majored in, what you - your impulse for going to law school, your being a speech writer, there's always this common thread of your love of language and love of words. And so I'm wondering, do you remember when you first decided, "Hey, I'm going to write a book"? What was happening in your head and why did you decide to write about what you wrote about?

Daniel: Well, I think that that is the kind of observation you made about this through line, this common thread. I actually think that for me, and for a lot of people, those are only apparent in retrospect. I mean, at least in my view, it's often something we don't do intentionally. That it only makes sense when you're looking, you're looking backward on it. Now as for writing, but let me tell you the story, Whitney, of such as it is of, at some level, how I decided to write. Here it is. Here I am. I'm working at these jobs, these pretty intense jobs in politics. I became a speech writer, again, not intentionally. I just kind of drifted into it because I was, you know, slightly better at it than somebody else and in this hot house atmosphere that I was in, if you can do something reasonably well, they give it to you again, and then they give it to you again, they give it to you again. And suddenly, that's your job. There wasn't that kind of planning and intentionality to it.

But this whole time when I was in college, when I was in law school, when I was working in politics, this whole time, I was always "writing on the side." That is, I would always be writing magazine articles or newspaper columns or that kind of thing. And it was something that I did kind of like as a hobby, as a peripheral activity. So, let's go to my early 30's and I'm working at these, these very demanding jobs, but I'm coming back to

my wife's and my little apartment in Washington D.C. and I'm working on, say, a magazine article. And at the time, certain jobs that I had, there are ethics rules that prevented me from being paid for these magazine articles.

And so, here I was in this very demanding job but at midnight working on a side project for which I wasn't getting paid. And so, there's the kind of thing I've been doing...

Whitney: Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

Daniel: Exactly. The thing is...Exactly! But the thing is I didn't have a ding! That's the thing. My wife had a ding. It just says, "Hey, this thing you're giving on the side, I think you might actually like it." And so, you know 20 years ago, I decided to say, "Okay, maybe, actually - even though I never thought, 'hey, I'm going to grow up and be a writer, maybe I am a writer.'" At that, you discover, at some level, not what you want to do but who you are. And so, a lot of times, people say, "Well, what's your passion?" And I hate that question because I don't even know how to answer it, but I think another very valuable question is, "What do you do? What do you do when nobody is watching? What do you do just for fun?"

Whitney: Right.

Daniel: It turned out that what I did for better or worse was write. And so, 20 years ago, I said, "Okay, let me go and try to be a writer." And I grew very disgruntled with politics and I knew I didn't want to spend my life in that setting. That was, it's not a healthy setting.

Whitney: So you have a new book. It's titled, [\*When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing\*](#). It is an absolute pleasure to read. I have to say, shout out to your wife for reading every single word of it out loud because it reads like it can be read and written out loud. So, fantastic. What's the big idea?

Daniel: The big idea is that we think the timing is an art. We make our timing decisions based on intuition and guesswork, but it's actually very much of a science. There is this enormous body of research out there across many, many fields of science that allow us to make systematically smarter, more evidenced-based decisions about when to do things. And so, in this book, I try to crack the code of good timing.

Whitney: So one of your big ideas or sort of sub ideas behind that is that in any given day, we have peaks and troughs. And for most human beings, the peaks come in the morning, troughs in the afternoons. What are some of the implications of this?

Daniel: There's also a third stage. That we generally move through the day in three stages; a peak, a trough, a recovery. For most of us, as you say, Whitney, the peak is in the morning, the trough is in the early afternoon, and the recovery is in the late afternoon or early evening. For people who are strong night owls, it's the reverse order, but the implications are significant. Time of day explains about 20% of the variants in our performance on cognitive tasks – on things that require our brain. So, this question of

when is material to our performance, is material to our mood. And it has huge implications.

Let's take health. Based on doing this research, I would not let a loved one go to the hospital in the afternoon if that was avoidable. If you look at what happens in hospitals in the afternoons, it's actually quite terrifying. Let's take something like anesthesia errors. Anesthesia errors are four times more likely at 3:00 p.m. than at 9:00 a.m. It's crazy.

Whitney: Wow.

Daniel: You look at colonoscopies ...

Whitney: Crazy.

Daniel: ... and everyone loves talking about colonoscopies. Looking at colonoscopies ...

Whitney: I do.

Daniel: ... and doctors find half as many polyps in afternoon exams than in morning exams even if it's the same population. If you look at things like hand washing, there are some great research showing that doctors, nurses, orderlies, hospital personnel - much less likely to wash their hands during the afternoon than in the morning. And so, you know when we think about our experiences in life whether, you know, as customers, as patients, as people doing jobs, we focus, we think about, "Okay, what matters is what we're doing, how we're doing, who we're doing it with," but the when of what we're doing has a huge effect

If you look at something like standardized tests, there's research from Denmark showing that kids score systematically lower on standardized tests if they take it in the afternoon versus if they take it in the morning. You ask the big idea here - I guess the other big idea is that we don't take these "when" questions seriously enough and they have a material effect on our mood, on our well-being, on our performance, on what we learn, on healthcare delivery, on a whole range of things.

Whitney: I love what you said in the book. I think this is going to be something that people over and over again, "Afternoons are the Bermuda Triangles of our days." Such a great quote. So, question for you then is, is there any test you've taken in your life or speech you've given that went especially well or not so well, and you now know why?

Daniel: I can't pinpoint anything that went especially well or especially poor and because of time of the day, but I'm sure that it did. And one of the things that I do now is that I'm much more conscious of it. So I will try to schedule things where I have to be, you know, alert and energetic away from the trough, so you and I are talking...

Whitney: Before you go there, why don't you talk about what a normal peak, trough, or recovery is for most people.

Daniel: Sure. Some of it is affected by what's called our chronotype, which is, do we wake early and go to sleep early, do we wake late and go to sleep late, are we owls or larks. For larks and people who are in between, their peak period is generally the mornings. Now, it doesn't necessarily mean, you know, for some people, that peak begins at 6:00, for other people it begins at 9:00. For some people, the peak ends at 11:30, for other at noon. For me, it's like 1:00. For me, my peak period is generally between 9:00 and 1:00. Um, that's when I'm most alert, most energetic, and most vigilant. And that's the best time to do certain kinds of what are called analytic tasks that require focus and diligence and vigilance. Then we have the afternoon trough, which is good for nothing, pretty much.

And then we have the next stage, which is called the recovery. Now, that's really interesting because in the recovery period, some of this is mood. Our mood goes up in the morning, drops in the afternoon, and goes back up again in the late afternoon. The combination of rising mood and a little bit of less vigilance than we have in the morning, like in the late afternoon and early evening, that is the little bit less vigilance and the boosted mood are the perfect combination for creative work, for insight tasks.

Whitney: So what kinds of things do you do in the afternoon then when you're looking-

Daniel: ... brainstorming would be a great example of it.

Whitney: You brainstorm.

Daniel: Brainstorming would be a great example of it.

Whitney: Okay.

Daniel: Or trying to do something that require or something where you're generating ideas or you're not trying to ... like don't do proofreading then. Think about like "What are some ideas I'm going to have for my next article?" That kind of thing.

I would do my actual writing writing in the morning, so because for me, writing is very difficult. I have to be completely undistracted, completely vigilant. I would do certain kinds of research and interviews in the late afternoon and early evening. Particularly interviews...not like the interview we're doing now where I'm the interviewee, but when I'm the interviewer, like, I listen better, I'm more open when I do interviews at that time of day. And that's very helpful in finding, you know, non-obvious things. Because the interviews I'm doing, I'm not just marching through a list of questions. I'm kind of having a conversation with people, trying to untangle complicated issues, trying to understand them.

Whitney: So during that trough, what recommendations do you have for people, um, who are not necessarily free agents? For people who are free agents but people who aren't free agents, what do you recommend people do during that trough period of the day?

Daniel: It's a great point because a lot of people, most people don't have full control over their schedule. In the trough, I think you're better off doing administrative kind of work; answering mundane emails, filing away ... you know like, I have piles and piles of stuff that needs to be filed away. That kind of thing. Doing your expense report, that kind of thing. The other thing that you could do though, there's an antidote to that afternoon trough. And that's taking breaks. Um, one of the, if there's one big takeaway from me, from a couple years of looking at this research, it's about the power of breaks. I was somebody who, in the course of working, rarely took breaks. I don't know whether it's because my Y chromosome's screaming out or my American puritanical nose to the grindstone ethic coming out.

Breaks are so hugely important. Breaks are not...I always saw breaks as a sign of weakness or sign of lack of commitment. Breaks - professionals take breaks. Taking breaks is what professionals do. I always schedule two breaks in the early to mid afternoon. I find the most restorative breaks are breaks where I just go out and take a walk. And what the science of breaks tells us is that's actually true that movement is better than being stationary. The importance of full detachment too comes out a lot. So I don't, you know, take a walk around the block looking at my mobile phone. I leave my phone.

And it's interesting there's the social side of it too that is, even for introverts, social breaks are more restorative than solo breaks.

Whitney: All right, so we talked about the basic unit, sort of, when in terms of the basic unit of our lives, which is a day. Then you go in the book and you talk about the larger arc of our lives, the beginnings, the mid points, and the ends. You quote Cervantes and say, "To be lucky at the beginning is everything." What do you mean by that? And specifically, what have been some of your good beginnings?

Daniel: What the research shows is that, beginnings, we, beginnings matter more than we realize and have a greater impact over the long haul than we realize. So you see this in a whole range of interactions. So if you look at something like school start times for teenagers, I mean, we just should not be starting school as early as we do for teenagers. The American Academy of Pediatrics says, "Do not start school for teenagers before 8:30 in the morning" and yet, the average school start time is 8:03 a.m. in the United States. Simply, the time of day of the school starts is increasing the drop out rate, increasing teenage depression, increasing obesity, leading to more teen accidents. So, there's things like that. And I found this really alarming. There is some research from Lisa Conn at Yale showing the following: You take two people who have graduated from college. Let's say, two people who graduate from the same college, the same major, similar ability five years apart. One graduates in a recession, one graduates during a boom time. I don't think it's that surprising - the person graduating in a boom time, will, straight out of the gates, earn a little bit more money. I think what is surprising is that wage difference shows up 20 years later. It's unbelievable.

Whitney: So, how do you correct for that?

Daniel: I set out three principles of beginnings; start right, start again, start together. And so, as much as possible, it's important to start right. This is why I think you have more companies paying attention to what happens in the first week, in the first year of somebody's tenure on the job. How do you on board people properly. How do you...[Chip Heath and Dan Heath](#) write a lot about, how do you take these moments, even, literally, the first day and make that beginning meaningful and useful to people so they get off on a good trajectory. You know, paying more attention to those beginnings. Starting right is really important.

At an individual level, there are times that sometimes we need to start again. And there's some research from the University of Pennsylvania about what's called the fresh start effect, which shows that we're more likely to make behavior changes on certain dates of the year rather than other dates of the year. So you're more likely to make a change - you want to start a diet or I don't know, new exercise regimen, do it on a Monday rather than on a Wednesday. Do it on the day after a Federal Holiday than the day before at Federal Holiday. That there are certain dates in the year that operate as temporal landmarks. And we can use them to make a fresh start. And we're pretty good at that. There's this really interesting form of mental accounting that we do on these temporal landmarks where we say, and you know where we say, "Oh my gosh, I was a total slob. I didn't get any exercise. I over ate. Now, it's the first of the year, the first of the month, the first of the week, and I'm going to open up a fresh ledger and new me is going to be awesome and going to relegate old me to the past."

But then I think on a policy level, let's take the issue of the people graduating from college through no fault of their own at an inopportune time. There, I think, we have to make it not just that person's problem. So there are few things that we can do -

I think that for the graduation issue and I say this as the parent of two college students who, at some point, will be graduating and getting a job, maybe we need to treat recessions, akin to how we treat natural disasters. There's an earthquake, you're going to get some help because through no fault of your own, the ground erupted underneath you and destroyed your property. You know, we're going to help you out. Your neighbors are going to help you, the public authorities are going to help you. Maybe we need to do something like if the unemployment rate hits a certain level for that year or for that certain period of time, people's student loans are forgiven or they're reduced. Or maybe we need to have like an emergency fund to, you know, in the same what the Army Corps of Engineers has an emergency fund for when there are natural disaster. It's manifestly unfair.

Whitney: Interesting. Okay. Before we move on from beginnings, do you have a single tip that you would give to people to either get off to a good start or actually, more importantly, because we're already into the new year and people are going to be breaking their new year's resolutions faster than they want to. What's a good tip for starting again?

Daniel: Pick the right date. Not all dates are created equal. If you have dates that are personally meaningful, that can be great. So, if you want to start a behavior change of some kind, let's say...

Whitney: For me, stop eating sugar.

Daniel: Yeah. Okay, so for stop eating sugar, number one is that, the first thing I'm going to do is try to change the environment. So just get sugar out of your house much as you possibly can. That would be one really important thing, environmentally. I would begin the new regime on a day that is, that has some social meaning to you. So I don't know whether you know beginning it, let's take next month, the day after President's Day would be that personally meaningful to you, but maybe the day after your birthday or the day after your anniversary, the day after one of your kid's birthdays or the day after the death of a loved one or something like that.

Whitney: All right. So let's go to midpoints. What do we need to know about these? In particular, maybe say a little bit about the "Uh-Oh" effect.

Daniel: Sure. Midpoints, sometimes they brings us down, sometimes they fire us up. So there's some great research from Connie Gersick at UCLA and now Yale where she went to look at teams - project teams in the wild. What she did is she followed these teams around and recorded audio or video tape, of what these teams did. And these are teams who are coming up with a new advertising campaign or rolling out a new product for a bank or you know, just the basic stuff kind of that goes on in the workplace. And she found something really peculiar. We have this notion that there's this fairly steady linear process by which teams do their work. And what she found is that it didn't work that way at all. Teams begin by doing very, very little. A lot of post...lot of posturing, um, a lot of um, status seeking and those kinds of behavior. But there was a moment when they really started really working in earnest. And that punctuation mark she found - eerily - came at the midpoint.

So, you give a team 34 days to do something and they get started in earnest on day 17. You give a team 11 days to do something, they get started in earnest on day 6. That over and over again, that midpoint had this galvanizing effect - it had this "Uh-Oh" effect. People look at the clock, and they say - or the calendar or whatever - and they say, "Whoa! We, you know, we wasted half of our time. We better get going!" And it's just eerie how often it happened. She would give - she created experiments where she would give teams an hour to do something. And they would really get started in earnest between the 29th and 31st minute. I mean, it's crazy. That, and I think this is something really useful for, really useful for bosses and project leaders about, you know, how do projects really, really unfold. I think leaders can use that. Um, they can make these midpoints salient and use it to get people to move.

The other thing that's interesting about midpoints is that there is some interesting research from [Jonah Berger](#) at Penn and Devin Pope at the University of Chicago that looked at this very, very large sample of NBA games. And what they found was that, not surprisingly, teams that were ahead at half time were more likely to win the game. Again, mathematically, that shouldn't be a shock to anyone, right? They have more points. Ok? They already have more points. They have a lead. Okay?

Whitney: Right. Right.

Daniel: There was one shock. There was one surprise, one exception to that is that teams that were down by one point were more likely to win. And like being down by one was equivalent to being up by two. Which was really weird. And what they found also in experimental settings is this, that at the midpoint, being slightly behind is advantageous, that being slightly behind gives us a motivational boost. If we're at the midpoint, we're way behind, okay, we're hopeless. If we're way ahead, we're complacent.

Whitney: Right.

Daniel: And so if you're a boss running a project team be aware of midpoints, use that Uh-Oh effect at the midpoint and say, "Listen, we're a little bit behind."

Whitney: Now, you talk in midpoints about a U-curve of happiness, a midlife slump, an American male slump at an estimated 52.9 years. By my calculations...

Daniel: (laughing)

Whitney: ...you are right about at 52.9 years.

Daniel: Indeed.

Whitney: How have you noticed that for you? What has that midlife slump look like for you? And, excitingly, if in publishing [When](#) is your slump, then what do we have ahead?

Daniel: You know, I actually have felt that slump on a couple of different dimensions, I've been doing what I'm doing for ... I've been doing what I've been doing now for 20 years and in the course of writing this book, I was like, "Hey, this is my last book. I can't do this anymore. I can't take it anymore. This is really hard." I probably thought more than any other time in my life except for my late 20s, early 30s about saying, hmmm, maybe I should try to shift the gears considerably and do something different. I haven't charted this, but if you were to chart my overall well-being, it wouldn't surprise me at all if I'm at, if I'm lower than at other points in my life. It's not a big, big dip for me though. And it's, you know, the U is fairly flat.

Whitney: But it's a slump nonetheless

Daniel: I think it is. I mean, I think it's interesting...I wish I would've tested that. It's that analytical part of me wishes I would've tested that like basically taking a mood reading every, twice every year for my whole life and see where I was today. But it wouldn't, you know, there are all kinds of things that happen. First of all, there are added stressors because you have people my age typically have you know, parents who are getting older and then kids who are ... you know, you need to make sure that, not make sure, but sort of assist them in making their way into the world. There's no question that there are certain disappointments that you have when you get to my age. So you, you know, I'm not going to be on - the odds of my being on a 40 under 40 list are pretty much nil. The odds of my being under a 30 best writers under 30. That's not going to happen. I think that my odds are winning a Pulitzer Prize are almost nil. I think we have to reckon with

those kinds of things. The good news though, Whitney, as you say, is that things begin to tick up a little bit.

Whitney: Yeah. But certainly, I think for all of us is, as we look at the midpoint of our lives, how do we set ourselves up so that we are in an "Uh-Oh" place as opposed to an "oh, well, nothing is going to happen going forward."

Daniel: Right. Exactly. Exactly.

Whitney: I would ask you, as we go to the next and final part of the book is, any one or two suggestions that you would have for people to effectively combat that midlife slump.

Daniel: To me, one of the, maybe, the meta takeaways of this book is just simply being aware of some of these phenomena. So for instance, like midpoints - that was something that was basically invisible to me. It's something that never even thought of... maybe it sounds like I'm an idiot, but it's something I never even thought of. And now, I'm like "Oh, okay. This is a midpoint of a project." Now, I understand that midpoints have these kinds of effects and so I'm going to be aware of these things and make sure that they don't bring me down too much. One of the things and I actually took this lesson from my book, there's this, [Warren Buffett has this great technique](#) that I think can combat a midlife slump. He didn't design it - this way where he says, "Okay, here's what you should do at certain points in your life." You should list - what are your 25 goals? What are the 25 things you want to achieve? What are the 25 things you want to, you want to do for, do in the rest of your life? And then here's where it gets interesting, you look at that list and you cross out number six through 25 and focus only on those five. So, I have begun doing that exercise and I find it very clarifying. Because I do think if you say, it's easy to say, "Oh, God, I should do this, but I haven't done it. I should do this but I haven't done it. I should do this but I haven't done it." There's only so many things that you can do. And I, you know in focusing and really being intentional about the things that matter most, that create the most meaning, that are part of who you really are.

Whitney: What's a goal that's in your top five?

Daniel: I have always, my entire life wanted to make a movie.

Whitney: Really?

Daniel: Yes. And um, that's in my top five. Not like, you know, Star Wars but you know, like a documentary.

Whitney: So, are you going to do it? You're down. It's half time and you're down one point.

Daniel: (sigh) Are you recording this?

Whitney: Of course, I am.

Daniel: No, uh (laughing) Yeah.

Whitney: Yeah.

Daniel: I think I think I'm going to try to do it.

Whitney: That is fantastic. Do you know what you're going to do it about yet or that's still kind of...

Daniel: No, no. Well, I have a bunch of ideas on that front. But, umm maybe it'll help me get past this midlife dip.

Whitney: I dare you. I dare you, I dare you, I dare you. You can do it.

Daniel: Yeah. No, I am

Whitney: It happens when you get dared. You have to do it.

Daniel: Okay.

Whitney: In fact, I double dog dare you. I can't wait. All right. I'm so excited for your documentary. All right, so now, it's actually interesting that you just mentioned a film because-

Daniel: Now, I have to do it Whitney!

Whitney: Yes, you do!

Daniel: All your millions of listeners are going to be emailing me saying, "When is the documentary coming out?"

Whitney: That's right. Isn't that wonderful? So it's fascinating that you said that because one of the things that you wrote in the book that I just loved about endings is you said, "The most powerful endings deliver poignancy because poignancy delivers significance. Adding a small component of sadness to an otherwise happy moment elevates that moment rather than diminishes it." And when I read that, I thought, "Oh, that's why I liked the film [La La Land](#) so much because it had that element of poignancy."

Daniel: Yeah. It's interesting. So if you think about endings, endings have some really, really incredible effects on our perception, our behavior, our mood, et cetera, et cetera, but one of the things that ending seem to do in many cases is trigger some kind of search for meaning. And poignancy is, I think, a really under studied emotion, but profoundly meaningful and profoundly human. And you see this at, I feel this way, to some extent, at graduations. I happen to, I happen to love the ritual of graduations, the pomp and circumstance of graduations, the, all of the things that go on at graduations, but I find them kind of poignant because it's exciting because someone has achieved something. They're moving onto a new stage of their life, but they're also leaving something behind. You know, and so when my younger daughter graduated from high school in the spring and there was a graduation ceremony and that was poignant. I'm as excited. It's like "Oh my gosh, Eliza is 18 and she's going to go off to college and she's going to begin her

life." And that's totally awesome but on the other hand, there's something poignant about it because I saw her and a few of her close friends, and these are kids who I've known ... they're not kids. These are young men and women who I've known since they were like four years old, when they were kids. It's like "Whoa, that's gone now."

Whitney: Right.

Daniel: And so, and so, it was sort of that mix of happy and sad is, you know, creates a sense of meaning. It's like, you say, "Is this really what life is about?" Life is about these passages. Life is about you know, somebody you love, making their way through life and entering a new chapter where you are barely a peripheral character. Let alone an essential character. I don't know. Again, this is not, you know, in all the writing and research I've done on social sciences, the emotion of poignancy is not something I've spent any time on. And I find it quite fascinating, but poignancy seems to be a characteristic as you say, Whitney, of meaningful endings.

Whitney: So what are some tips or suggestions for our listeners to have better endings?

Daniel: Well, I think a big part of it is to be intentional, to recognize that endings are a thing. Again, all of this comes back to this idea that we need to be aware of these, of the temporal aspects of our life and not just dismiss it as something that's not important or something that we can't have a role in shaping. So there are few things on endings though. One of them is, is that endings are a source of meaning. And so you should use endings as meaning makers. Same thing is true that endings, people prefer endings that elevate. They prefer rising sequences to declining sequences. This is one reason why if you have good news and bad news, you should always give the bad news first and end with a, end with the good news.

And this is true, you know, on more mundane things. Like the end of customer experiences, are really, really important and I don't think a lot of businesses are intentional enough about that. Endings disproportionately affect how we remember entire experiences. And so, try to create...use endings as meaning makers and try to create endings that elevate. Most important of all, be aware that endings are going to be a huge part of how someone remembers an encounter with you, how someone remembers a transaction with your business, how someone remembers a talk that you gave. Endings stick with us for a very, very long time.

Whitney: You know it's interesting, my daughter said to me this morning, "I'm going to start recording ordinary moments one time a day with this app called [1 Second Every Day](#)."

Daniel: I use that.

Whitney: Well, it turns out, my daughter gets [your newsletter](#).

Daniel: Okay yeah! Okay great, yeah!

Whitney: She said, I'm like "Where did you get that?" She goes, "Well, I get [Dan Pink's newsletter](#)." So that was kind of funny. I thought about that. I think that's really powerful. One of the things you talked about, and I'm not going to be able to say it as well as you do, one of the reasons we look to the future is to make more meaning of the present.

Daniel: Absolutely.

Whitney: By being able to record these very simple moments, I thought, "Tonight, we're having a few girls my daughter's age come over for a dinner with some women that they admire.

Daniel: Oh, nice.

Whitney: I thought, "I need to take one second snippet then because that's going to be a moment that tonight feels a little bit overwhelming and burdensome because we've got to get food on the table and make sure the house is ... but in three months and six months in a year, that will be something that will have some poignancy to it." I guess, one other thought that you said is, "The challenge of the human condition is to bring the past, present, and future together." With that, do you have your book in front of you?

Daniel: I do.

Whitney: Okay. There are two things that I would like you to read.

Daniel: Okay.

Whitney: The first is, I'd like you to go to the acknowledgments because yes, I read acknowledgements. I'd like you to read the very last two sentences. And they're about your wife.

Daniel: "Her brain power and empathy made this a better book just as for a quarter century they've made me a better person. For every time and every tense, she was, is, and will be the love of my life."

Whitney: And then I want you to read one more thing. That's just so beautiful to me. Just beautiful.

Daniel: Oh, thanks. My wife played such a big role in this book and in my life. I mean, it sounds idiotic to say, "Oh, my wife played a big role in my life," but she did. As you mentioned earlier, I'm a very, very laborious writer and it's important to me to read...

Whitney: I didn't mention that.

Daniel: ... oh, you implied it and it's true. I take it as a badge of honor. I don't take it as a criticism at all. I take it as high praise. Well, I think you mentioned that I read stuff out loud. So basically, every word in this book and including maybe 10,000 or 15,000 that

aren't, I read out loud and my wife also read out loud to me. And I'm a giant pain in the neck to be read out loud to. So, what I said about my wife is actually true.

Whitney: Well, it's just a lovely tribute.

Daniel: Well, thank you.

Whitney: So to wrap us up, I'd like you to read the last two sentences of your book, page 218.

Daniel: "I used to believe that timing was everything. Now, I believe that everything is timing."

Whitney: And with that, Dan, thank you so much for being here. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Daniel: Whitney, it's actually truly been a greater pleasure for me. I'm convinced of that.

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It's often said that we write our way to what we think, and more often than not, we're trying to figure out what we think about ourselves. It's so interesting to me that at the midpoint of Dan's life he embarked on a project to understand not what, or how, or why, but when. What's happening in your when that you're trying to make meaning of?

As I thought about his comment that we only become aware of our through line retrospectively, I'm wondering if something like the [1 Second Everyday app](#) is a way for us to see and even create the through line in real time.

I'm continually reminded of a quote from Meister Eckhart. "When the soul wishes to experience something, it throws an image of the experience out before her and enters its own image."

Isn't that kind of what's happening for Dan? By filming one second of his life every day, he's started his career as a documentary filmmaker. One might argue, "Well that's a silly little way to start." But that's how disruptors usually start. And now that he's thrown out the image, here come his words, words that he learned from his days as a speechwriter – despite the grind - have the power to pull him into the image.

Tactical Tip: If there's something you want to do, throw up a picture. You want to spend more time with your family? Take a photo of you having fun with your family. Want to do more speaking? Take a photo of you when you are speaking. If photos fail you, then write down what you want to achieve, as if you already achieved it. If you see it, you can be it.

If you'd like more Dan Pink, including a list of how to more effectively manage your daily peaks and troughs, there is a content upgrade you can download at [whitneyjohnson.com](http://whitneyjohnson.com).

If you like what you hear, will you like it on social media, [leave a review on iTunes](#) (links are in the show notes), or share it with someone you like.

Thank you again to Dan Pink for being our guest.

Thank you to sound engineer Kelsea Pieters, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributor Heather Hunt, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson

And this is Disrupt Yourself.