

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

Episode 40: Solo Q&A Episode

Whitney: Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. My guest for this episode is ... me.

It's an episode in which I'm trying to be a model of disruption in my own life and business to walk the talk. Having done the [live coaching episode with Stacy Olsen DiStefano](#) last year, and rolling out a [beta version of a coaching course](#), I learned that many of you liked this live learning via audio, so we're going to conduct another experiment.

A few months ago, we did a [survey in preparation for an online course we're doing in 2018](#). There were so many great questions, far more than we can cover in the course, I decided, "Let's answer them here." While some of the solo episodes will be focused on a specific theme, this episode's going to be more of a grab bag.

The first question is, do you have any tips for a first-time author? I do. In fact, I have seven tips.

Tip number one, write and talk about what you know, which means I'm going to give advice to first time non-fiction authors.

Tip number two, if you don't know yet what you want to write about, read the book title [Tell It Slant](#) by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola. It's focused on creative non-fiction, but as the title would suggest, they help you figure out how to tell the truth, but move beyond simply transcribing day-to-day life.

Tip number three, pick a topic that you will want to spend the next three to five years of your life talking about. I may be going out on a limb here, but usually when people ask me this question it's because they want the book to be the foundation of consulting and/or speaking work. And yes, if you want to speak, you will eventually need a book. In part because it pushes you to crystallize your thinking, but mostly because there's something about a book that say, "legit."

Tip number four - Start writing now, whether you know what you want to write about or not. And start publishing now, like on [Medium](#) or [LinkedIn](#). When I started blogging in 2006, I had an idea of what I wanted to write about, but I didn't really know. For most people, you will write your way to what you think. You'll also write your way to having a voice. Coming out of Wall Street, my writing was very technical, the stocks to buy and here are three reasons why. So, when I started blogging, it tended to be technical as well, clean but not relatable. About a year in, I got some very good advice from thought leader/strategist Vickie Sullivan. She said, "When people you know read what you write, they can hear your voice because they know what it sounds like. They can fill in the blanks. You'll know you found your voice when third parties - people who don't know you, can hear you."

Tip number five, build up an audience. Last week I reached out to an agent on behalf of a professional colleague who's just finished up a book proposal. The agent's very first question was not, "Is this an interesting topic?" but, "Does the author have an audience?" "How many people follow him on social media?" "How big is his newsletter list?" In short, the agent wanted to know, because the publishers would want to know, are there people out there who will buy the book? I know. it's weird. If you have people who can buy the book, why do you need a publisher? Well, there are good reasons why, but it's a topic for another day.

Tip number six, when you're looking for an agent, the person who's going to represent you in reaching out to publishers, don't query them because you won't get anywhere. You'll feel like you are banging your head against the wall. Find people who have written books in a genre similar to yours, if possible. At the very least, find people who have written books and then ask for an introduction, but only, only after you have a well written book proposal and an audience. That will make the person who is making introduction look good by introducing you.

Which leads me to my seventh and final tip for first time authors. Whether you go the traditional route with a publisher or you self-publish, read Michael Bungay Stanier's article titled, "[How to Self-Publish a Book and Double Revenue](#)." It is an excellent, excellent comprehensive article.

Second question. How do you make changes that are imposed upon you, a positive experience? Sometimes I do this quickly, sometimes slowly, especially if the change is somehow triggered an earlier trauma. But whether quickly or slowly, I make the changes positive by making meaning of those changes. My friend and coach, Laurie Richards once asked, "If this were happening for me, not to me, what would be the opportunity? What am I supposed to learn? How will this make me a better person?"

Three examples, number one, I was in banking, my boss was fired and I moved into equity research.

Happening to me, equity was a step down from banking. I was shoved, not moved. Happening for me, this gave me my first taste of entrepreneurship. As an equity analyst, I was an entrepreneur building a business inside of Merrill Lynch. I also learned how to write persuasively and to invest.

Second example, I miscarried after our first child.

Happening to me, it had been so easy for me to have our first baby, I thought that with our second child I could go into production and nine months later, boom! ... baby on demand. Happening for me, I learned that being a mother, bringing a child into this world is a gift, not a right.

Example number three, one of my freelance contractors recently told me she wasn't happy with her current role.

Happening to me, to keep her was going to require adjusting our organizational structure and probably cost more money. She should be happy with her work and not inconvenience me. Happening for me, the conversation took place during the final edits of my next book, [Build an A-Team](#), a book that spends 200 pages explaining how you build a great team by letting people jump to new learning curves. Our interaction gave me real time insight as to why well-meaning bosses can struggle to let their people try something new - to periodically disrupt themselves. One of my governing principles is that everything that happens can work toward our good. It doesn't mean that a bad thing is a good thing, but even a bad thing can be of benefit. This bad thing, if we will let it, can help us become a better human being.

Third question. How do we get in front of the decision makers in an organization, and a corollary to that was, how does a small nonprofit get in the door of large organizations? To me this is a question of how do I plug myself into a network that I'm not already in? I have a couple of thoughts on this.

First of all, do good work. Some would argue that this doesn't matter, but to me it does. So first, do good work.

Second, before you try and get in front of a decision maker ask, why do you want to be in front of that person? Is it because their decision makers? They have power and if we can just get some of that power, then we'll be powerful too? Or is it because that particular decision maker has a problem that they not only need, but want to solve? This applies whether you're trying to get a promotion inside of your company, get an endorsement for a book, or get funding for your organization. It's always going to be obvious what problems that person can solve for you, but what problem do they need solved that you or your product and service can solve for them? If you've got nothing, then find a different decision maker. A really good-bad example from my life is, I recently reached out to Beth Comstock, former Vice Chairman at GE, to blurb my [upcoming book](#). Crickets. It could be because she was stepping down from GE, but in retrospect, the fact that I wanted her to solve my problem without solving any sort of problem for her, probably didn't help.

Third, you can try for moonshot networking, but whenever possible, look for ways to plug into a different network with the network you already have. Let's say that the decision maker is a second degree connection. To get to them, you need a first degree connection. This is where we actually often go wrong. We're so busy trying to get to decision maker person, that the person who could plug us in feels used, and so they just pull the plug. Whether two degrees away, whether one degree, same rules apply; what problem is your first degree connection trying to solve? Can you help them solve it? If you've got nothing, find a different first degree connection to get to the second degree. A great example of a person who starts with the network they have, is Becky Douglas, founder of [Rising Star Outreach](#), that helps leprosy colonies in India become self-sufficient. She needs to raise money, as do all nonprofits, but when she meets people through her network, which is how I met her, our mutual friend Jane Clayson introduced us. Becky doesn't ask for money. She focuses on what problems a potential donor might need to solve, like doing something worthwhile, spending time with their family, so she begins with an invitation to India. As people spend a few weeks doing something

meaningful with their loved ones, they become invested. By solving a problem that other people want to solve, they become invested in helping her solve her problem.

To recap, number one, do good work. Okay, you don't have to, but do it anyway.

Number two, be clear on what problem you solve.

Number three, identify decision makers that want to solve that same problem.

Number four, if you need a first-degree connection to get to a second degree connection, same rules apply.

Number five, once you've identified that person, be persistent.

And number six, you may also find, or at least this happens to me, that once I become clear on what I want to do, I realize that I have a lot more power to affect an outcome than I thought. I didn't actually need a fairy godmother.

Fourth question. What's the key to success? That is a big question beginning with - how do you define success? Well, however you define it, I think the key to success is to believe that you will be successful. This leads to another question you asked, which is, I give away so much information, but can't land the business. What do I do?

I'm with you. I've done it way too many times. There have been tactical errors like forgetting that you talk to the why and sell the how, but there's a prior concern. I think we sometimes don't land the business because we don't believe that what we have is of value.

We're approaching people as supplicants. It's not their job to put a value on what you do, it's yours. If you value your expertise, they will too. There are some gender issues here. Men tend to have an easier time getting paid for giving advice, for making connections, because it's perceived as generous, and so we want to compensate them. In contrast, women are expected to give advice and make connections, so why pay? And it's not just men who do this to women, women expect women to help for free too.

As for your question, what is my biggest challenge, it's to move beyond wishing that my business will generate \$10 million a year, to believing that it will. If believing you will be successful is your challenge too, I recommend the books, [You Were Born Rich](#) by Bob Proctor, and [Think and Grow Rich](#), by Napoleon Hill.

Fifth question. What's the most important thing I do every day? Number one, it's to read Holy Writ, or Scriptures, whether it's the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, or Book of Mormon. Number two, pray and meditate. And number three, review my written visualizations such as, "I am fully present," or, "I am so happy I'm fully present as a wife." "I'm so happy I'm fully present as a mother." "I'm so happy that I've fully shown up to my keynote at the World Business Forum." And, "I'm so happy that my business

generates \$10 million a year." I have a lot of these visualizations, and I go through them every morning and every night. Those are among the most important things I do.

Sixth question. How do I stay relevant? Well, (laughs) first of all, thank you for thinking that I am. Assuming that it is true, I think I stay relevant because one of my biggest fears in life is to be stuck. Every day I'm trying to figure out how to be unstuck. My faith tradition is focused on continual improvement, I read or listen to books constantly, whether at work or home, I get to talk to lots of interesting people, and then I do simple things like listen to new music.

My friend, David Peterson, has taught this to me. He makes a habit of listening to music that isn't more than six months old. I had Rhonda Vetere, the CIO at Estée Lauder share, "I ask myself frequently, 'Can I take the China test?' Meaning, can I work for an entire day off my phone?" If I can't do that, which I certainly can not right now, then I am going to get disrupted, because things will end up being on our phone. So how do I stay relevant? I continually give myself challenges, things that will force me to disrupt how I'm doing things today to become a silly little thing in hopes that tomorrow I can take over, at the very least, my world.

Seventh question. What's my idea of success? I have lots of big dreams and ambitions, many of which I don't have control over, like the \$10 million business I just shared with you, a New York Times best-selling book, a TED Talk. But if those things haven't happened when I die, I'll be okay.

I won't be okay if I don't have a good relationship with my husband, with my children, with people generally. I won't be okay if I haven't tried to be good and generous, if I'm not good with God. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, the ultimate result of all ambition is to be happy at home. That is true for me.

Eight question. What part of my work brings me the most joy? Ugh, that's such a tough question, because I love all of my work, but I'm going to pick just two.

First is, [I love writing and I love delivering keynotes](#). Structuring and delivering a speech, draws on my training as a musician. You convey information. When it's working, there's an element of improvisation between you, the speaker, and the audience. Delivering a speech is an art form, and if it's a good speech, just like with a great piece of music, people walk away inspired and the melody sticks in their head, and they refer to it, or they hum it over and over again.

The second thing that I love is the analysis part of my work. Using the S-Curve locator to figure out where an organization is on their learning curve, and then once we have all that data, is to figure out how to help them optimize the individual learning curves for engagement, and to lower their "we're about to be disrupted" score. It's so fascinating.

Ninth question. Story from 2017 that I loved. I heard this from a woman named [Sharon Eubank](#). She was reporting on something that had happened in Panama City Beach in Florida. A mother, Roberta Ursrey saw her two young sons screaming for help. They

were caught in an undertow. A nearby couple tried to rescue them, and they got caught. More people tried to help, and they got caught too, and now nine people were in the rip tide.

There were no ropes. There was no lifeguard. They sent for a rescue boat, but it had been 20 minutes and people were tired. Jessica Mae Simmons got the idea to form a human chain. She shouted to people to come and help. Dozens and dozens of people linked arms. Jessica wrote, "To see people from different races and genders come into action to help total strangers was absolutely amazing." An 80-person chain stretched toward the swimmers. I loved this story of creativity and innovation and of humanity.

Question number 10. What am I reading right now? You probably already figured it out, but I'll tell you anyway. Patty McCord's [Powerful, Think and Grow Rich](#) by Napoleon Hill, [4-Hour Work Week](#)" by Tim Ferriss, [When](#) by Dan Pink, and Brandon Sanderson's, [The Way of Kings](#). I'm getting ready to read [Oathbringer](#), but I wanted to re-read [The Way of Kings](#) first, in advance of reading the [Oathbringer](#) because I wanted to relish it even more.

So, that's 10 questions. Any questions you wanted answered that didn't get answered? Any answers you agreed or disagreed with? We'd love to hear. In the meantime, 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 to me, for being our guest, to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, manager and editor Macy Robison, content contributor Heather Hunt, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson, and this is Disrupt Yourself.