

## Disrupt Yourself Podcast with Whitney Johnson

### Episode 69: Peter Bregman

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak, and live all things disruption.

Speaking of disruption, we were experimenting with two podcasts a week. It turns out, it was too much on the back end, so we're pivoting and going back to one per week. Living disruption out loud.

Thank you to Kris Langbridge for leaving our podcast review of the week on iTunes. He said -

*Whitney's podcasts have hit the sweet spot for me. I found many of her interviews inspirational and they've made a real impact in the way I try to better myself at work and home.*

Thank you Kris!

For those of you have been listening for a while and haven't yet written a rating and review on the podcast, we would be very grateful if you would take a moment and do so now.

Now, onto the interview:

My guest today is Peter Bregman, a CEO adviser and Wall Street Journal best-selling author, whose latest book is [Leading with Emotional Courage](#).

**Whitney:** First question for you today is where did you grow up and what did you think you would be when you grew up?

**Peter:** That's a great question and it depends on when you would ask me when I was growing up. But I grew up in New York city and my mother's French so I, I had a little bit of an, uh, international component and depending on when you asked me, if you asked me when I was like eight or nine years old, I would have said I wanted to be a taxi driver, uh, growing up, uh, and, and I remember specifically having a plan that I would always only charge one penny for each of my customers. I was not a great businessman at that time.

**Whitney:** (laughs)

**Peter:** But I wanted to make sure that I always had a full cab so I, I just really remember very specifically (laughs) this, you know, this idea that I had and, and then, eventually, uh, I wanted to be a writer but more of a fiction writer than, uh ... Like I, I wrote a group of, uh, ghost stories when I was, I think 11-

**Whitney:** Wow

**Peter:** ... and ventured out to some agents but I got lots of really kind rejection letters.

**Whitney:** (laughs)

**Peter:** Uh, (laughs) and, and then at a certain point, I was almost a lawyer, uh, and I managed to skirt that one and, uh, I never would have thought I would have been ... I mean I guess I'm a writer but I, I never would have thought that, you know, that I would have been a speaker and consultant. That wasn't the plan when I was 12.

**Whitney:** Do you self-identify as a writer? How do you self-identify?

**Peter:** I think with this book, this is my 4th book and honestly, like I, I feel that with this book, this is the first time when I really kind of identify as a writer and I don't know exactly what that is but it's ... but I've, it's interesting that you ask the question because I've noticed that in myself.

**Whitney:** I wanna dive into the book, um, but before we do that we have to talk about something really important which is skiing.

**Peter:** (laughs) Ahh-

**Whitney:** You have mentioned in the past (laughs) that you ski about every weekend and you've been doing it for the past 38 years. I love skiing. I do not do it every weekend but I love it and so I want to hear more about that.

**Peter:** You know I grew up skiing. A-and actually when I first started skiing, I was nine so I've now been doing it for 41 years and, and what's interesting is I had a coach. Her name's Mermer Blakeslee, uh, when I was ten years old, who's an amazing race coach and I was a racer, uh, very quickly sort of started racing. And my kids are all racers and we still go up to the same house I grew up going to when, when we were kids and my brothers, uh, between us we have 12 kids and we all go up every weekend in the winter so we're all together.

And I just love it. I just, I, I'm, I'm comfortable on skis like I am walking and I've just done it for so long and it's ... And I'm constantly learning. I'm constantly trying to sort of push the level of, of what I'm doing into getting crisper turn and to be able to, you know, ski with style over cruddier stuff than I did last year and like to you know, to constantly keep learning.

**Whitney:** So do you, do you like to do Moguls? Do you like to do flat? What do you like to do?

**Peter:** Everything, everything. I like moguls, I like flat, I like powder, I like ... I, I'm, I'm strange in that I like, I like ice. I'm fine with everything as long as you know how to ski everything and you ski it differently ... It's like leadership actually, you know, if you have one leadership style, then there's only one slope you can ski but if you have this wide toolkit ... So I ski, you know, moguls very differently than I ski powder which is very differently than I ski ice, you know, which is differently than I ski hard pack.

And knowing how to ski different kinds of conditions and different kinds of terrain is key to really being, uh, you know, a capable skier in no matter what. And I

**Whitney:** So you just have to make that into a management metaphor, didn't you?

**Peter:** (laugh) No, but I did like it's the same thing, right? Like, if we, if we, if we have the wider tool kit, then-

**Whitney:** Couldn't resist. Yeah.

**Peter:** ... then we can approach different slopes in different ways.

**Whitney:** It sounds like, though, too, for you, I mean you love to do it but ... Talk for just a second and, and I know this is a hard question to a-answer, or maybe it's not, is what do you love about the feeling of skiing? How does it make you feel?

**Peter:** Yeah, it's a great question. I, um, I, I feel incredibly free. I, first of all it's really fun to play with gravity.

**Whitney:** Mm-hmm (affirmative)

**Peter:** It's just fun, right? I mean, I, I'm, I, I'm, I also do, or used to do a lot of whitewater kayaking. Now I, I don't do as much but, but it's the same kind of feel, like you, you, uh, you lean over to one side and you angle a certain way and you carve in a certain way and it just feels great. And also I, I love like, when you get a perfect turn, like when you get a turn that just, you know, you hit the edge in the right way, and you, you, you're on a trajectory that's really fun ... I don't even know if I have the language to describe it but I love it.

**Whitney:** That's, uh, that's so beautiful. So, I, I think it's actually a really nice segue into, uh, what, what, th-the focus of our conversation today, which is, it, it's very apparent that emotions and how you feel has been really the focal point of your work for a while, and I'm curious what pushed you to really focus, um, t-to go in this direction, a-and why did you write this book emotional, or, [\*Leading with Emotional Courage\*](#) now?

**Peter:** You know, like I think when I look at my whole career, I, I've spent a lot of time trying to close the gaps between what we want to have happen in the world and what happens in the world, and how we want to be in the world and how we are. And, and you know, what we want to do in the world and what we end up doing. And there's a huge gap, you know? There's, there's constantly a gap and I, I'm trying to close it for myself; I'm trying to live up to my own expectations, and, and I'm trying to help other people close it. And I, you know, it's like, when I work with leaders and organizations, I, I don't ... Like, there's no leader I know who would tell me that it's not important to listen really well.

**Whitney:** (laughs)

**Peter:** Like every single leader I know. And it's so simple in many ways to do it, but it's really hard for some reason, right? And so it's that gap that I find so interesting and, and I, and that gap is an emotional gap. We're not stopped 'cause we don't have opportunity to do it, 'cause there's lots of opportunity to listen, and it's not that we, you know, don't have the skills but it's just hard to do when some, you know, just try turning on. Try, if whatever

political persuasion you are, try turning on either CNN or Fox, whatever's the opposite of that political persuasion, and sit there and listen to it for an hour. And you're gonna feel all sorts of things that make it hard to keep listening and it's why so many of us just try to listen to, uh, the people and things that agree with us.

Your questions about skiing were, um, wise and, you know, like, draws me in because I can talk forever about how I feel when I'm skiing. And, and it's great because I ski because it makes me feel something. I'm in relationship with people because I feel something. I want to achieve certain things because they make me feel things.

We do everything we do in life in order to generate feeling, and if we're willing to feel anything, we can do anything. So if I'm not willing to feel those uncomfortable feelings of listening to someone when I disagree with them, uh, then I'm not going to listen to them. And then I'm going to be a poor leader. And if I'm willing to feel everything - I might feel my anger. I might feel my own defensiveness. I might feel my curiosity or my uncertainty or my fear. I might feel all of that and if I'm willing to feel all of that ... if I'm willing to feel it, then I can sit quietly and listen.

But if I'm not willing to feel those things, then I'm going to interrupt and I'm going to make my point and I'm going to make sure that you listen to me. And that kills what we're trying to do in the world.

**Whitney:** At first I thought you were going to this place of "We don't listen, um, because we know, know ..." For example, we're talking to you're the CEO of a company and you've got direct reports and you're not listening to them and it's not because you don't want to feel something, necessarily, or at least on the face of it that's not what they think. It's more, just, they think they have the right answer and so they, they want to give the answer. But as I'm listening to what you're saying, what you would argue, I think, and you tell me if this is right, that they would ... You would argue that they're not listening, not because the person doesn't disagree with them necessarily, but it makes them feel less in control because they felt like they already knew what the answer was and if they listen, then maybe they don't know what the answer is. Is that what you're saying?

**Peter:** Yeah, exactly, and, and I, I think there's a million things they could be feeling in that moment that makes them interrupt. One of them is, "We don't have enough time." One of them is, "I'm afraid that I'm not convincing this person and they're gonna go off and do what they want to do and I don't want them to do that." So they're, we, we could be feeling the vulnerability of time. We could be feeling the vulnerability of that control. You could be feeling the vulnerability of just, like, "If, if what they're saying is true, then it questions every element of our strategy and I don't wanna question every element of their strategy because I've already invested a lot of time and a lot of energy and a lot of money in this strategy so I'm gonna shut that down hard."

**Whitney:** Mm-hmm (affirmative)

**Peter:** And, and it's like, any number of things that are vulnerable for us when we, that, that, that, you know, shows up, we don't really wanna hear because it, because it makes us feel vulnerable, because we're gonna feel stuff we don't wanna feel.

So yeah, I would say that almost always, when you don't follow through on something you wanna follow through on, or, when you start doing something that you don't want to do, right? So it's either in the positive or the negative. If I don't have that hard conversation I wanna have, um, or if I eat that cookie I don't wanna eat, right? Both of those are caused by an unwillingness to feel something.

**Whitney:** Okay, I have a great example for you, here. I have a great example.

**Peter:** Sure.

**Whitney:** A real life example. Not a real life, but it is real life but it's, like, current. So yesterday ... I can't even believe I'm sharing this on a podcast. So yesterday I'm driving home from, um, Pittsburgh to Virginia, it should have been about a four and a half, five hour drive it, I thought was gonna be easy drive. I use Waze. It turns out that Waze has me, instead of going on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, it takes me down in through West Virginia. I end up on, like, forty or ss-fifty or sixty miles of back roads at dusk, like, it's stressful. Like, I don't know where I am. I feel completely out of control. So instead of, like, just feeling it and saying, "I feel out of control" and doing something logical like calling my husband or calling a friend or stopping or-

**Peter:** (laughs)

**Whitney:** ... going meditative, what do I do? I get a Cadbury chocolate bar out of my bag and I eat the chocolate bar because that is going to make me not feel so bad. That's a great example, right?

**Peter:** I love it. It's a great example. It's a great example. And it's why, you know, I mean people talk about it all the time, we eat in order to stuff down our emotions. But, we also eat because it feels good in the moment and the alternative is to feel something we don't necessarily want to feel.

You ate a Cadbury bar which, actually was probably quite delicious. But it's, but it's, it's doing something that's not helping you move forward in what it is that you really need to do.

**Whitney:** Right.

**Peter:** And, it becomes a distraction at best. And at worst, it actually derails everything that you're trying to do. Like, in your case, it doesn't derail anything, but--

**Whitney:** Well, but it did, but it did--

**Peter:** ...but when people --

**Whitney:** ...And I'll tell you why it derailed. Because I had, and I think this is, this is a great, like microcosm, but it's emblematic. I had plans of some books that I was going to listen to. Because I was so anxious, I didn't listen to those books... I did listen to one book, but, but, it, it, it, it, not f- not being willing to feel what I was feeling, I tried to numb myself so that I couldn't move forward on other projects that I wanted to move forward on.

So I actually do think it is applicable. It's not on a grand scale or grand scheme, but I think we have lots of little micro-events like that and they start to aggregate and it starts to be pretty big. I think from in, in terms of thinking about your book and the topic that you're, you're really trying to explore.

**Peter:** I love the example. You're 100% right and it is, you know, our life is made up of a million of those moments. And, you know, every single one of those moments becomes, you know, an opportunity to either repress something or feel it. And if we feel it, we can move forward and move through it. And if we repress it, then we're going to do all sorts of things that allow us to repress it and to start to feel good. And what we lose is freedom. So what I'm hoping that we get, right? What I'm hoping emotional courage gives us and what it gives me when I'm able to do it. And it's hard, I, it's hard, this is not easy work.

But, but you build that skill. So, I've built this skill where, um, where you are willing to feel that stuff. And so, when you're willing to feel that stuff, you have tremendous freedom to do what needs to be done in the moment. And that might just be listening to a book, right? That's just, it's important. It's not not important. I think you're 100% right. It might just be listening to a book, where otherwise you just can't because you're too stressed out.

**Whitney:** Right. And, you know, one of the things I think, um, I, wh- that I really loved about this book is that you really walked your talk. Um, you, um, were willing to say, "Okay, emotional courage, people". And then you had emotional courage in telling us some stories that did not cast you, you know, in the best light. Like this was not, "Peter Bregman's awesome". It's "Peter Bregman, the man who is very nuanced. Who sometimes does awesome things and sometimes does some things that aren't so awesome". And, I think that I loved that you were willing to, to go there.

**Peter:** Well, thank you. And, and, thank you. And, uh, and it's true that I am, you know, far from perfect (laughs). And like, and I struggle with all these things. I tend to write about things that I struggle with, but--

**Whitney:** As do we, as do we all.

**Peter:** But I struggle with all these things--

**Whitney:** As do we all.

**Peter:** And, yeah, and I think it's, you know, I've, I've had ... it's funny, I'm so happy that you've pointed to this chapter, actually, Whitney, because, you know, this was a chapter that I've had people say, "Ah, are you sure you want to put this chapter in the book?" You know, it, it, it's, uh, and, and, it, and, you know, my answer is, "Yeah". I mean, I think this is as much

a part of it as anything. And I think this is an important piece. I, I mean, it's certainly an important piece of my learning. And, and I'm constantly faced, it's, this is probably, this chapter relates to what's probably the hardest thing for people to learn. And it's certainly the hardest thing for me to learn. And it's certainly something that, you know, I have to keep feeling and pushing myself through.

Uh, the, the name of the chapter is "Embrace your Shadow, How to Avoid Becoming the Person You Hate". And, I, I remember this, I was in this workshop and, and, it was a workshop that was run by a woman named Ann Bradley, who I adore and has taught me a lot around emotional courage. And, um, sort of long story short, there was a guy, So, um, so, it, it was, uh, this guy Gunther, who was a, um, uh, German. He was German. He had a German accent, uh, spoke in German. When I first met him, he spelled out his name, and he said with a German accent, "SS", which was the, uh, German Secret Service during the war, during the holocaust. And my mother is a survivor of the holocaust, and, and she was in hiding for most of the holocaust. Uh, and, and so I have a wh- I have a whole bunch of, um, uh, I have a whole bunch of story, and emotion caught up with, with the holocaust in general, and, and also, uh, Germans, uh, which I've spent a lot of time working through. Germans, and, and, the German language, etc.

And, the short of it is this is a workshop where we do, kind of some deep processes where we're, you know, talking about things that impact us, and we're going deep with them and we were talking about war, at the time. And, and the long story short is, um, th- I was helping someone with a process. Someone was having a hard time and I was helping them kind of move through some, some work that they were doing. And, uh, and, and, this guy, this German guy started screaming in German. And there was a cube, a foam cube and a tennis racket, and he was hitting the tennis racket and he was moving his body, and he started to yell in German.

And, I, every time he, he hit the racket down, I heard, like a gunshot. I mean, I just, I flinched. And, and I, um, and earlier in, in the conversation, we were talking about war, and I had been saying I just don't get it. I don't get how, um, you know, people could go off and kill. And how the callousness of being in war, the cruelty of war, I just, you know, someone was accusing us all of being guilty of it. And I was just saying, I, I, I don't, I don't um, I - I'm not guilty of that.

And so then, I heard this guy and he was sitting and he was screaming, and he was screaming in German, and he was hitting and, and it triggered me. It just triggered me. And I, I lost it. And I, I, you know, kind of turned to him and I told him to stop it, and, and I, you know, "Stop the screaming!" and "Stop the violence". And, and I, um, and, and, I really, like I was triggered in a place where I felt like, here was, like I saw this guy and I saw a Nazi. Like that's what I saw, in my head. And I saw this Nazi. And, and, I, I could have killed him. In that moment. Like, that was the feeling. That was the emotion. Like I will, you know, this is a major threat and I'm going to kill this person.

And I just felt it so in my bones. And, um, when I think about it afterwards, and I write about this in the chapter. Like, this guy, Gunther, wasn't a Nazi. He was a German software engineer. Um, and, What he was actually screaming about, and hitting about, was not anger. I heard it as anger and violence. He was actually in a completely different space than

me. I can't remember if I talk about this in the book, but, he was actually yelling and screaming in joy, actually, about attraction. I mean, he was attracted to someone and he was talking about attraction.

So, here I am, in this place where I'm all worked up because of this conversation about war. And then I hear German and I hear the accent, and I'm triggered from, like stories I've heard and things that I know. And I'm ready to f--, I feel this energy, like I'm ready to kill this guy and, and I realize, in that moment, he's, this is hard for me to even say on the podcast or to say period, but in that moment, he's not the Nazi, I am.

**Whitney:** Hmm.

**Peter:** Like, I'm the one whose ready to kill because of what, of, of, how I see someone. Of someone's accent. Of how they show up for me.

**Whitney:** You said this and it really caught my attention. You said "When we, when we do this, um, we are at worst dangerous and at best, weak leaders. And our underlying confidence in ourselves decreases because this belief about ourselves, it's built on a house of cards. On how we want to see ourselves versus who we are." I just think that's so powerful of, of, I mean, when I think about the whole premise of your book of emotional courage is the willingness to see ourselves as we are not how we want to, how we want to see ourselves. And, and, that's what I was talking about. I feel like you, your call to people is to be that person and you're willing to be that person. And I think that will allow people to actually really hear what you're saying in a way that they couldn't possibly if they thought that you were just talking at them. So, thank you very much.

**Peter:** Well, thank you for that. And it's a...I'm really glad you pointed to that chapter because it feels important, and as you're talking, I'm kind of thinking like – I'm comes back to this, sort of third part of the book, when you think of the book as confidence in self, connection to others, commitment to purpose, and then emotional courage, which is I, I, think understanding ourselves and understanding other people is so important. Like, for me it's such a driving force to say, you know, can I, can I can I find the places that I get in my own way. And then, can I massage them out.

**Whitney:** Hmm.

**Peter:** Can I find the ways in which I am an obstacle to what I care about and, and what's most important to me. And not put it on you and not put it on anyone else, but find the ways in which I am an obstacle to myself and, and, can I, can I look at them squarely in the eyes? And, and, see them and own everything that I can own in order to get to the other side of that.

**Whitney:** You know, you said something in your TedX Flint Talk in 2010, which I think really builds on what you just said, "I hunt in the cracks revealed by my own incompetence for the lessons that I can learn. Personal lessons, leadership lessons, managerial lessons. And this is what I've discovered, if we want to learn, we have to take our hands off of our ears and feel the uncomfortable emotions that naturally come along with learning."

**Peter:** Wow, that's good!

**Whitney:** Yeah. Peter Bregman--

**Peter:** Did I say that? (laughs)

**Whitney:** Yeah, 2010. Yes you did.

So, I, I--

**Peter:** I think that, I think it's true.

**Whitney:** Yeah.

**Peter:** It's think it's true.

**Whitney:** Yeah. It is true and a couple of other thoughts I want to just hit on briefly. There's so much here, and we can't go through everything, but one of the things I thought was really interesting, And just so you know, everyone who is listening like every single page has really interesting stories like this - there was a woman who was, uh, there was a young guy, he's an up and comer, and um, she, you know, they were saying "You should help him", and she was like, "I don't want to help him 'cause he's gonna, he wants my job." And, she's really conflicted and I think this happens every single day. I know it's happened to me many, many times in the workplace and so I suspect it's happened to everybody in the workplace. And you helped her come up with this really great reframe of how to have a conversation, um, and, your, the title of the chapter is "Use Fear as a Guide" and I think this goes back to what you were just saying a minute ago. Could you just talk people through very briefly what that reframe was and what advice you gave her and how to handle this?

**Peter:** Sure. So, I think, you know, using fear as a guide is sort of how you talk about what you dread. The first thing is to sort of notice what you're feeling. And then, understand the underlying problem that that feeling is signaling. So, it's not always all about the feeling. So, if I'm feeling, you know, insecure, for example, uh, or- or fear, or anger at someone, the question is: why? What's it- What's going on for me?

And then, I wanna solve for that problem. I'm not solving to fix my emotion. I'm solving for the problem that's leading to the emotion, so in this way, the emotion is the signal. The emotion is data that something's going on that I need to- to- to address or feel with, or just feel and recognize there's nothing to fix here. I'm just going to have to feel it.

But in the situation with this person, it's really, uh, it was really something that you have to fix. And, and so, um, I, you know, I was sort of talking to her about saying, "Look. This guy may want your job, and you may be afraid of it. It's kind of reasonable that he would want your job. Like--"

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** "Like, he's ambitious, and he wants to move up, and you're in the next level, and it's not surprising and it's not personal. He's not trying to get you. He just sort of wants to keep rising, and can you- can you address that? And so, here's the problem. The problem is, it's kind of reasonable for him to want your job, but you're not ready to leave your job. And he's not ready to step into it. So, you know, how do you fix that? And, and I- And I say to her, like, "Fix it by actually helping him fulfill his ambitions." Right?

So, so I coached her and, and here's what she said. She said, "Joe, you're smart and capable and a strong performer. And my job, when you're ready, could be a great next step for you. But for now, I'm not going anywhere. So, what else interests you and how else can I help you get there? And I wanna help you grow whether it's here or even somewhere else."

So, you know, it- it- it ... it's gonna be hard for her to have that conversation. He might want her job. He might want another job. Um, there's other things to talk about, but to really be straight-forward and address the issue and ... And one of the things that I talk about in the book also is: whenever you have a difficult conversation like this, start with the punchline. Start with the big thing. Like I- I- I- I've gotten caught in this myself, where I'm talking to someone, and 20 minutes later, they say to me, "I'm, I don't, I'm not clear on whether you're promoting me or firing me." (laughing)

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** And like, yeah, I'm really uncomfortable with this. So, it's like, get it on the table right away, and then you can have a meaningful, useful conversation, as opposed to beating around the bush for 20 minutes and then not even, like, becoming even unclear about what it is you're trying to do.

I, you know, my answer might have been like, "I can't remember whether I was promoting you or firing you either, like (laughing) I just confused myself. The way I just painted the picture, you sound really great. I was planning on firing you, but now I think I'm going to promote you."

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** Oh no. I think it's like, you know, to recognize that it's discomfort that makes us do that, and to jump right in.

**Whitney:** Yeah. Okay. That's, that's fantastic. And I think that's a great example. Um, so, I just want to talk about two more quick highlights from the book. I- I actually have a much longer list, but we don't have time to do all of them and people need to buy your book.

Okay, so here's, um, a quote that I love, and I will just read it. It says, "True confidence comes from mastering the exact opposite of what we spent a lifetime pursuing. We need to master irrelevancy." Can you talk about that, Peter?

**Peter:** Yeah – so this comes out of, I know so many people and I, I, I find myself included in this group, you know, who ... like we work so hard in our lives to matter. Right? To make a

difference. I hope this book makes a difference in people's lives. Like, I'm writing it. I'm putting it out there. I'm putting a tremendous amount of energy into it, because I- I think it can make a difference and, and I want to share that with people and I want it to make a difference.

And so, most of us spend our lifetimes becoming actually very good at making a difference, at being relevant, as much as we can possibly be relevant. And it works until... Right? Until we get to that point, where ultimately, we've gotten older. Hopefully, we all get old enough where we become less relevant in the world.

And I know so many amazingly successful people, people who were in, who you all know, who were in very high political positions, who were in very high positions in the arts or in business, and, um, and- and then ... I-I knew them personally, and so I know them when they're no longer on the stage, and when they've gotten older. And it's amazing to me how many of them end up depressed and- and often dying depressed and living depressed for many years.

And I really explored it, and it's, it's this challenge between knowing how to matter and not knowing how not to matter anymore. And we lose ourselves to the identity that we put out there in the world. We even begin to believe the identity that we put out there in the world. And so we believe that our value is in what we can do, and ...

And the example I used in the book and ... and this was an example that literally just yesterday came to me again because I had just put my son to sleep and I looked out the window, and there was the most beautiful sunset in the world. I mean, it was just a gorgeous sunset. And I live in New York City and it was sort of, you know, over the buildings and through the water towers and it just, it was just cool. I, I almost woke up my son, but it took me so long to put him to sleep that I, um, chose not to.

And, and I was thinking about this sunset, and I was thinking, like, "Am I relevant to the sunset?"

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** I'm totally irrelevant to the sunset. Like, I do not matter to the sunset. But the sunset really matters to me. And there's this incredible, powerful, useful, valuable art in allowing the world to matter to you, even if you don't particularly matter to the world.

And if you need to matter to the world for your happiness and for your existence, you will live a desperate life. Right? The people who absolutely have to matter live desperate lives, and I feel that energy in me. So, I'm not just putting it out there. I feel the energy of me where I really want to make a difference. And that is hustling energy, that's as- energy that's nervous, that's, that's both energized and, and, and, and nervous and pushing.

And, and it's like to some degree, it's useful to have that energy in order to create important things in the world. But it's, it's so ... Um, if- if that's all we've got, then we live very, very nervous lives, grasping for, you know, a space that we hold onto with bare

knuckles in order not to let go of because if we lose that relevancy and that importance and that mattering, then we lose our very identity.

**Whitney:** Yeah. I love that. I- I love that what you said, and I- I'm not sure I'm going to be able to recap it perfectly, but just that, that, that you're talking about that sunset and allowing things to be relevant to us. That's just very beautiful to me. And I, I love that image. I-It kind of moves me to tears a-a bit.

Um, so, speaking of tears, let's talk about laughter as we raft up- wrap up. (laughing)

**Peter:** (laughing)

**Whitney:** Um, something you said that I thought was really powerful and this goes to this idea of ... I, I, you know, was thinking about this and prepping for our interview and, and tried to apply it yesterday and just think about, "Am I laughing?" And you said something here.

You said, "Not laughing is a symptom. It's a confidence issue. It's a lagging indicator of an ail that's creating havoc in our lives and in organizations." And then you issue a challenge, and, and why, sorry, it's ... You say it's a symptom, and I think the symptom is that we're not fully present anymore. And so then you issue a challenge of how to be more fully present, and- and I'd love to have us wrap up in, in your talking about that.

**Peter:** Yeah, I, I'm, I'm thinking of this, this very interview where I've been, you know, close to tears or in tears twice so far, and it ... You know, part of this is you're a really great interviewer. And, and part of it is: we allow ourselves to feel things when we can really be present to what's happening.

And, and it was my mother who made this observation to me, which is, Uh, she, she gave me the, the outcome that she was seeing, not, not what she thought was causing it. But she was saying, "You know, people don't laugh as much anymore." And that really stuck with me.

Like, and it's true in my life. Like, I don't laugh the way I like to laugh. And by the way, when I go on vacation or when I'm in a workshop somewhere or when I'm, when I'm really pushing work to the side and obligations to the side and, you know, achievement to the side, I find I'm much more relaxed and much more present and I laugh a lot more. And I realized that laughter is a measure of how present we are to our lives and how connected we are to ourselves and to other people.

**Whitney:** That's so powerful. Oh.

**Peter:** You can't laugh if you're distracted. You just can't. You can't, you can't really laugh and be on text and email at the same time.

**Whitney:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Peter:** Like you just can't do it. But when you're really with someone and they say something funny ... and by the way, it's terrible for our kids I think because when we're half present for our kids, then when we laugh and they do something, it's not real laughter. It's just like a little distracted chuckle while we're kind of checking our texts, and I've really made it a habit. In fact, one of the things that, um, that my son Daniel and I have been doing ... I have three kids and, and my youngest is, uh, my son Daniel, who's, uh, almost 11 now.

And one of the things he's gotten is Nerf guns, which we have felt, you know, somewhat a little conflicted about because he's going around shooting stuff all the time. But I get into these Nerf fights with him. And look, I'm telling you. I cannot text at the same time as this because as soon as I text, I'm going to get, you know, a Nerf bullet in my belly.

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** So, like, I really gotta be completely 100% present to this thing. And I cannot think of a time when I've done it when I haven't belly-laughed. And, you know, felt every, you know, felt excitement, and then felt like, you know, surprise, and felt frustration, and felt uh, you know,

**Whitney:** Well, I have one for you, Peter. You become Nerf-ous.

**Peter:** Uh, become what? Nerf-ous?

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** I love it.

**Whitney:** Yeah, I couldn't resist. (laughing)

**Peter:** I love it. I think it's, Purpose . I'm like, Nerf-ous.

**Whitney:** (laughing)

**Peter:** I like that. Um.

**Whitney:** See, you got me to laugh.

**Peter:** I think it's like, I think laughter is, you know, such a great measure for are we being present? So, I- I've tried to, like, think back on every day and go, "Did I laugh enough?"

**Whitney:** Yeah.

**Peter:** And if I didn't laugh enough, what do I have to do laugh more?

**Whitney:** I love it. It's such a great barometer. Peter, this has been such a fun, fun conversation. Your book is coming out in July of 2018, we're so excited for it. How can people find you? How can they buy the book?

**Peter:** So, if you go to, uh, hopefully any bookseller, but certainly I know on Amazon: [Leading with Emotional Courage](#). It's up there, uh, already for pre-order, so by the time they hear the podcast, it will definitely be up there. Um, and they can go to our website, [bregmanpartners.com](#). B-R-E-G-M-A-N-P-A-R-T-N-E-R-S dot com. Uh, and there, if you click on book, you know, resources and book, you can, uh, get information on all my books, but especially this one. And, uh, and yeah. I'm so, so thankful for your interest in it. And your engagement and your awesome questions and, uh, I, this book does feel ... You know, it's my fourth book, and it feels really like my most important book and, um, it ... I'm still in the part where I hope it matters (laughs).

**Whitney:** (laughs)

**Peter:** And I hope that I matter Uh, in writing it because it, because it does feel important.

**Whitney:** Oh, well, thank you again. We're so, so happy to have had you.

**Peter:** Thank you so much, Whitney. So fun to be on this with you. You're awesome.

My conversation with Peter made me feel things I wasn't expecting to feel. Which is a good thing. It's fascinating to me, his premise, that our willingness or unwillingness to feel something is what creates our problems. When moments come and we repress our feelings, like when I was driving from Pittsburgh and ate a big chocolate bar, I did lose my freedom. We don't lose our freedom all at once. It's in micro actions - that 15 minutes here, that 20 minutes there that we lose. We can't get time back, which I've been thinking about a lot [since my interview with Laura Vanderkam](#). I also thought Peter's idea about the sunset was really beautiful. We don't matter to the sunset, which can make us feel small, and yet, it's what matters to us (like the sunset) that gives our lives meaning.

Practical tip: Do as Peter suggests and listen to someone for 10 minutes on a topic you know you disagree with them on. It could be with someone at work, it could be with one of your children, it could be with a spouse, it could be with a friend. And then don't tune them out, thinking "Oh it's so nice that I'm being tolerant right now," just listen and feel what you feel.

If you'd like a copy of Peter's book, email us at [wj@whitneyjohnson.com](mailto:wj@whitneyjohnson.com), we'll choose one person at random.

If you'd like to learn more about my new book [Build an A Team](#) with Harvard Business Press, download the first chapter at [whitneyjohnson.com/ateam](http://whitneyjohnson.com/ateam).

Thank you to Peter Bregman for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributors Emilie Davis and Libby Newman, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.