

Disrupt Yourself Podcast with Whitney Johnson

Episode 70: Benjamin Spall

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak, and live all things disruption. Today's guest is Benjamin Spall, co-author of the book [My Morning Routine](#).

Whitney: I would like to start by asking you what you ... Well, first of all where you grew up and what did you think you wanted to be when you grew up?

Benjamin: Yeah, so I grew up in England, uh, southwest in a small county called, uh, Dorset. And I didn't really know that I wanted to be writer, I would say, until my first year of university or you say college here a lot more. And, um, I was doing a marketing degree, kind of just outside London and a lecturer of mine ... We were like doing a group project and she came to me at one point and she really complimented me on my writing.

And at the time I had never really thought about writing. I'd actually only at the last minute decided that I actually wanted to go to university, which I know here in the U.S., my wife is American, it sound- kind of sounds crazy, but it's really kind of a last minute decision to actually want to go. And then I was being complimented on my writing and from that point forward, uh, during my degree I really focused on the copywriting element of marketing more than anything else because I actually enjoyed, you know, playing with words to try and get people interested in something or kind of change people's opinion on something.

Whitney: Interesting. So, you weren't gonna go to college. What were you going to do?

Benjamin: To be honest it was- it wasn't really a case of not going. It was more- more just a case of I have to say the- the British, uh, educational system is very different to the U.S. educational system in that it- it's not as, um, there's not always that massive goal of going to college. Uh, like a lot of people go to training schools. A lot of people just, uh, do drop out, uh, um, and don't go to college. Uh, so I think I would have gone eventually, but it was kind of like maybe a year or maybe even like nine months beforehand I was, like, oh, I need to really, really think about doing this and get- get a move on.

Whitney: Oh, so it would have been kind of an unofficial gap year.

Benjamin: I- I, yeah, no, I- I- I did go straight from, uh, I did go straight from school into college, but it was definitely, um, I could see what you're saying. It was definitely more of a, uh, what shall I do? I guess I'll do this, kind of thing.

Whitney: Yeah, interesting. So when you were growing up like when you were 10 years old, what did you think you would be?

Benjamin: I was really into space. So, I wouldn't say- I wouldn't- I wouldn't say right now, I thought I'd be an astronaut, but I definitely didn't rule that out. Um, I- Yeah, definitely around

that age. Ten's a good age actually. I was super into space. I was like bringing books about the outer space and stuff to school and I was definitely boring some of my classmates. Uh, but yeah I- I was super into space. Um, but yeah like writing definitely not until much later was that something that actually came into my forefront as something that I- I really wanted to do.

Whitney: Okay, so fast forward you study- you study copywriting and marketing in college-

Benjamin: Right. Yeah.

Whitney: And then, you moved to ... Well, you study marketing, but with an emphasis on copywriting, and you end up moving to the United States for love it sounds like.

Benjamin: (laughs). Yes, that's right. Yeah. Yeah, so basically I was in, um, I was in, um, I was in London for a long time. I was in London for about, uh, six or seven years and then a friend of mine moved to Spain and in the EU or at least, you know, the U.K.'s in the EU for about a few more months after this, but in the EU you can move between countries. You can live between countries, you know, without any- any problem there.

So, a friend of mine had recently moved to Spain, and I was just like, "Yeah. Why don't I do that?". I was working freelance at the time for the most part, and, you know cost of living is much cheaper. The weathers much nicer. I was like this is the perfect time in my life to do this. So, I moved to Spain and the very next day, after arriving in Spain, I met who is now my future wife. And, uh, so we were living in Spain for about ... I don't know. Uh, four or five, six months and then eventually she went back to America. She was studying at the time. I eventually came here. It was a long process, but, um, I've been here for about three years now in, uh, California.

Whitney: Mmm. Interesting. So, how did you get the idea for [My Morning Routine](#)? How did- How did this start to evolve?

Benjamin: Yeah. So, my- my co-founder and co-author, now co-author of my, uh, Michael Xander. He came to me with this idea probably about six years ago, five and a half years ago now of ... We wanted to, um, find out what people do in the morning, and it took us very- It took us a while to realize, oh, this is people's morning routines 'cause as strange as it sounds now 'cause it's all over the news. It's all over, you know, journals and magazines. Morning routines wasn't something that people were actually talking about that much. It would maybe talk about productivity and getting things done, uh, but morning routines is a subject really wasn't being handled much. So, about yeah.

When we started [the website](#), I think it was December 2012, we initially just started interviewing our friends. We had this list of questions that we kind of made on the fly and we would email some of our friends and just say, "Can you do this just to help us establish something, to help us get something going?", and since then every single week a part from one - we did miss one one week - but every single week since then we have published a brand new morning routine every week including your own and, um, it's just- it just kept rolling, and it's- it- in the beginning we were very much having to, um

(laughs) sometimes scramble like. We- we always promised on Wednesdays were sometimes scrambling on a Tuesday to get one to publish, but, uh, now we have a very long queue.

Whitney: So, the idea, do you- 'cause you said you just kind of had this idea. Do you remember the conversation? Do you remember like ... Take us back to that moment where you started to say, "Let's look at this", 'cause I mean when you said you were going to do this, you made a big commitment. We're gonna do this every week.

Benjamin: (laughs).

Whitney: And-

Benjamin: Yeah.

Whitney: You've got a hundreds upon what- 300, 400, um-

Benjamin: Around 300. Yeah.

Whitney: Of these- Yeah, 300 on your website. So, do you remember that moment or at least the time and the conversation and what- what was- what was rolling around in your head?

Benjamin: Right. No, I- I would definitely say that at the time when we came up with the idea and we decided to publish every week, it's certainly ... I don't think we thought we'd still be doing it six years in the future. Um, but the- the reason that we were so excited is I- he- um, Michael came to me with this idea and I had recently, uh, just finished reading the book called [The Power of Habit](#) by Charles Duhigg, and-

Whitney: Oh, yep.

Benjamin: In the book- Yes. It's a really great book. It was released around that time, around six years ago. And in the book he talks about, you know, how a habit it starts with a, uh, cue followed by routine followed by reward, and when Michael then came to me with this idea of asking people what they do in the morning, I was like, oh, this is effectively morning habits, morning routines. And I was like this is a great way to really find out how people are successful.

And even though you can be successful, you can have this habit at any time of day. In the morning is really when a lot of us, not all of us, but a lot of us really have our most energy and can really, you know, kind of- kind of just make the most of the day from that point.

So, that is what kind of triggered me to be like, okay, let's do this, and from there and I have to say, it just- it just kept growing and it was always a side project. So, that's, um, that's what made it easier. It was always a side project. Just a few hours each a week to actually get these interviews and interview people and publish them. Um, and there-

there was a long lull of just a couple of years of like we would just do that and nothing else was happening, but we would just build up this archive slowly over time.

Whitney: So, actually now that you've- you've raised that with Charles Duhigg, I'm curious as I'm looking at the selected bibliography at the back of your book, you have a number of people or a number of- of books that you're recommending people read. Do you have a copy of the book in front of you 'cause I don't expect you to have it-

Benjamin: I do. I do.

Whitney: Okay. So, what would be really fun is if you mentioned perhaps one or two- two- two other authors, ideally a female and a male, and just talk to us about how they influenced you and why you're suggesting that people also read those books.

Benjamin: So, I will start with, uh, this is in the biblio- bibliography, uh, [How to Have a Good Day](#) by [Caroline Webb](#). And that book came out ... I think it came out just a couple years ago or at least I've read it a couple years ago. And, um, it's a really interesting book. It's very dense. I took a lot of notes, and, um, I've only been through the notes once 'cause to be honest, it was- my- the number of my notes was always as big as the book itself, but, um-

Whitney: (laughs).

Benjamin: It was- Yeah, I know (laughs). It's a little intimidating. Maybe a little too many, but um ... It was a great book 'cause it really focuses on like as the title says [How To Have A Good Day](#). It's not how to have the most productive day ever. Not to have the most motivated day. Not to do all these things, and do this and that. It's really how to have a good day in terms of what makes you feel good, and that is often for most people ... It's often being productive. It's often getting some work done, but it's often having relationships and having some down town and exercising, and even though it's a bit- It's a very different format to our book, it was very- it was great in terms of actually helping me realize that when we think of our own most realistic, most best, uh, best day, we really aren't thinking of, uh, the most productive day in the world, but we're thinking of the things that actually make us feel good alongside that.

Whitney: Mmm. Interesting. Love it.

Benjamin: So, the next book I would mention is [Deep Work](#) by Cal Newport. I'm actually publishing Cal soon or depending when this comes out, we may have already published his routine on the website. Um, but [Deep Work](#), I've read it a couple years ago, and it is just- it- it kind of makes you really read ... I guess, it's kind of different to Caroline's book in terms of it really is talking about productivity, but the way Cal talks about it is you really work hard when you're supposed to be working, and then you can have the rest of the time to yourself. So, I can't remember the exact hours he mentions, but he does say that he's, you know, he's always home for dinner. He never works late for the most part, and that's just 'cause she works incredibly hard while he's at work. And he kind of puts the effort into what needs to be worked on and kind of if he can delegate stuff, he delegates

it or he can completely eliminate stuff if he can. But, yeah. [Deep Work](#) is a highly recommended, as well as his first, uh, his book pre- prior to that which was, uh, [So Good They Can't Ignore You](#).

Whitney: Mmm. Great title. Do you remember Benjamin when you first, um, started your blog in 2012, um, it looks like December 2012, what was your morning routine like then? Do you remember?

Benjamin: Yeah. It's actually funny 'cause, um, it's- it's changed a lot because, uh, like since I started the website, you know, I've been married, and I've moved to a different country. So, back then it was- it was a lot a bit all over the place. I would often wake up and just be very tired, and I would often go to bed late. So, that'd be part of it. I would go to bed late. I would wake up late, and I would generally just not really get into my day very fast. Um, so part of that is when- when I then started the website. It kind of seemed a little ironic that I was being a part of that, but at the same time is a great tool to actually help me get this information of how to help myself.

And it's interesting in as people who read the website and who read the book, it's interesting that you can be given the same piece of information from many different people over and over and over again, but it'll take you a while to actually- for that information to actually sink in and for you to do it.

So, one of the biggest changes I've only made in the last year is so many times people have taught us to keep the phones outside of their bedroom every night. Keep it in the kitchen. Keep it anywhere where it's not actually right beside your head as you sleep. And I- I heard that advice so many times, both from the website and the book, and it was only last year after my wife bought me an analog alarm clock that I finally started keeping my phone in the kitchen. The great- The great thing about that is now it means that in the evening about an hour or so before bed, I will take it into the kitchen and it means that as I'm getting ready for bed or as I'm kind of falling asleep, I'll be reading a book instead of reading ... You know like going through Instagram or reading Twitter on my phone. It also means that in the morning, as soon as I wake up, I- I can't reach for it 'cause it's not there. And we- we receive that advice so many times, but it took me maybe four, four and a half years to actually follow it.

Whitney: Now, I have a question for you, and I don't know if you have an answer to this, but I have my phone by my bed not because I check it, but because, um, uh, when I get up in the morning, I like to put in my headphones and listen to some like motivational tapes or, you know, scriptural types of, um, meditations. So, my question to you is in your research has that- is that problematic or is it only problematic to have it in your room if you actually check it?

Benjamin: I couldn't see that being problematic. I- I would say that if it's- if it's not too much of a bother to get up and then, you know, get it and then go back into bed then just do that, but it's- it's if ... Um, I- I've had many periods when I have, you know, like you say I've had it beside my bed and I've actually checked it several times during the night especially when my wife and I were different parts of the world. Um, but like it-

Whitney: Right.

Benjamin: If I were to have my phone beside my bed now, I don't think I would be checking it overnight, to be honest, because there's not ... You know, I, I've kind of conditioned myself. I know that there's not much good to be, to be had of doing that.

Whitney: Right, right.

Benjamin: So as long as you're not checking it, I, I don't think it's that much of a problem. But I, I also personally just like the, like the fact that there's nothing digital beside on my bed, ah, on my, ah, bedside table. I kind of like that.

Whitney: Okay, so I, I kind of digressed a little bit. So you said that when you first started to write the book, you had your routine one way.

Benjamin: Yes.

Whitney: What does your routine look like now? Your morning routine?

Benjamin: Yeah, it's, it's very different, but I'd say it, it's certainly not as impressive as some of, some of the people that we actually feature in the book. Ah, so, for example, I typically get up at around 7.30, which is kind of late for some of the people in the book.

And the first thing I'll do is I, I'll go to the bathroom and then I'll come through to the kitchen and allow my wife a little bit longer to get up. And during that time I'll do some pushups, I'll do some jumping jacks, and then I typically do a 10 minute meditation. And I speak about this a lot in the book because, um, many people think that when they're setting out a morning routine, they need it to be super long. They need to do a, you know, half an hour run, a, a half an hour of meditation. Ah, but that's not the case at all and you're really not going to be able to stick to many things if you think about it in that sense.

So when you actually keep your routines short and easy to accomplish, especially in the beginning, it actually greatly increases your chances of sticking to it. And this is the same with my 10 minute meditation. Um, so I'll do my 10 minute meditation. If I, if I don't have time for it, which sounds crazy 'cause it's 10 minutes, but if I don't have time for it I can fit it in easily the rest of the day. And after this I'll typically just make breakfast, I'll do something easy or maybe my wife has made it the night before. And then we'll just chat.

And the nice, the nice thing about that, about chatting over breakfast, is I put my phone on airplane mode overnight when it's in the kitchen. And unless I have an interview or a, you know, a call coming up at nine, 10am, um, I don't actually check my phone until, you know, I start work. So the nice thing about that is while I'm chatting with my wife over breakfast, I'm not actually thinking about, you know, emails or notifications or anything that's come in overnight, ah, because I haven't seen them yet. And it's just kind of you,

you continue that nice, calm, ah, you know, relaxed atmosphere of overnight. Ah, it can continue a little bit longer into my day.

Whitney: Mm. So how long does your morning routine typically last? About an hour it sounds like?

Benjamin: Ah, it's ... Yeah, that sounds right, a little right or maybe a little bit less. But something like that, yeah.

Whitney: So you, um, mentioned actually you, you just kind of said there were some morning routines that really, you know, like, were so impressive. But I want to ask you the question, not so much what was impressive, but some routines of people that just really like, you were like, "Wow, that is so interesting." Do you remember if there are one or two that really stood out for you?

Benjamin: Yeah, Dave Asprey, and he is the creator of Bulletproof Coffee. And, um, his is very interesting in that he talks a lot about driving his kids to school, ah, which is lovely. He talks about how he creates a story where they're the characters and this, and this, um, the story continues every single day.

So every single day when he takes them to school it like just continues on. Um, but then he ta- (laughs) he talks a lot about, ah, ah, these kind of these wacky things that he does when he's traveling. So, um, he talks about covering up all these light fixtures. Ah, you know, the buttons on, um, I don't know, like TVs and stuff. Like the tiny little lights. Ah, because of the kind of light energy that that brings out and makes him unable to sleep.

Um, and he also, needless to say, he drinks a lot of Bulletproof coffee throughout the day. Um, but, yeah, his, his was a little bit, his was a little bit wacky. But there was a lot of sense in it and he even made, he made the point to me which, um, after recently traveling quite a lot made a lot of sense. He says that even though he works out while he's at home, um, he never, he never works out while he's traveling 'cause traveling itself is a big stressor on the body. And after doing some recent traveling I was like, yeah, that makes, that makes a lot of sense.

Whitney: Mm, interesting. So his was one of the ones that surprised you the most?

Benjamin: Yeah, I, to be honest, I wouldn't say it surprised me 'cause I, I, I, I followed him online. I kind of know what he's like and I've actually spoken to some of his friends. Um, but it was, it was one of the most interesting.

Whitney: Oh, interesting. Okay. I'm going to share a couple of things that really kind of caught my attention. So it's interesting you just mentioned Cal Newport 'cause one thing that caught my attention was, um, for anybody who's looking at the book, page 146, where he has a ritual. This is actually at the end of the day, that pr-helps prepare him for the next day.

He says that, um, ah, he says "Ensure at the end of the day every incomplete task, goal or project has been reviewed and that you've confirmed either that you have a plan for its completion, it's captured in a place where you can revisit it at the right time. The process should be an algorithm, a series of steps you always conduct one after another." And that's something that really stood out to me is this idea of having, basically, I think you said stacked experiences where it's something one after another.

And then he said, "When you're done, have a set phrase. You said it indicates completion. And my own ritual, he says, I say, shutdown complete." I love that. Like he said, "It sounds cheesy." But, ah, there is something powerful, right, in those words of just saying, at the end of the day, shutdown complete. And I'm so glad that you talked about at the end of the day, um, a ritual as well. Because I think sometimes, certainly for me, I will have a plan for my morning and my morning routine, but my morning starts the night before. And so having some rituals in place is really helpful.

Benjamin: No, that, that's exactly right. And I, I love that quote from Cal. And I, I've started doing it myself. I, I have to confess, I don't say shutdown complete. Ah, but I do, one of the things that I really do is I try my best to, ah, write down my tasks for the next day. Um, and sometimes that doesn't you know, sometimes I don't have the time so I'll do that the next morning. But if I can do that, that's ideal.

And one thing that I do every single evening is, instead of just closing my, my laptop lid so it kind of sleeps, I completely shut it down. And what I like about that is if my laptop is sleeping, I almost feel like I, I feel like I can open it, you know, at any moment and type in my password and everything will be open. All my internet tabs, everything's there. Um, but when I completely shut it down, kind of like what Cal was saying, I really feel like I've shut down for the evening. You know, no more work, I can just relax now.

Whitney: Yeah, that's nice. That's interesting and there's a wonderful symbolism to that. If you want to start a new routine what are some tips that you suggest? So people, you know, I've got a routine that I have right now. Everybody listening has a routine. If they want, they're thinking, "Okay, I'm inspired. I want to start a new morning routine." What suggestions would you have for them?

Benjamin: Yeah. So the first thing I would say is having a morning routine is really all about starting your mornings with intention and bringing your morning winds with you into the rest of the day. And the best way you can do this is first of all figuring out the kind of things that you might want to do in your morning.

And the book helps with this. You know, we talk about workouts, we talk about meditation. Ah, we also mention evening routines and sleep, so that's something else. Ah, we talk about self care, all these different things that you could bring into your day. And then, kind of as I mentioned earlier, you want to keep your routine short and easy to accomplish. Because when it's short and easy to accomplish, you can really, ah, actually get past the kind of barrier of if, if you want to run for half an hour, that isn't going to happen right away. It may happen in several months. But to begin, to actually start making it into a practice, you're going to want to keep it really short.

So, ah, for example, if you wanted to bring meditation and running into your morning routine, ah, you could start out by saying every morning I will meditate for five minutes and I will run for 10 minutes. And both of those things, especially meditation, may seem incredibly short. It might ki-it might seem kind of ridiculous, um, but over time if you could, if you can keep that going for a week, you know, five days, every single day, you will over time think, okay, I can, I can keep this up.

And you may choose to increase it. You may ch-choose to increase both. You may just, ah, choose to increase one. And over time that can really, the, the ones that you enjoy in particular if you're really enjoying the running but not so much the meditation. Maybe keep meditation at 10, 15 minutes and increase running to half an hour or so. But in the beginning you really, really wants to keep it short. Otherwise there's a high chance that you'll just, ah, miss it and mess up.

Whitney: Hm, hm. Okay, anything else on, on changing your routine?

Benjamin: Yeah, I mean, I think the one thing as well as keeping things short is you really don't want to add a bunch of stuff at once. So adding a couple of things at once, if you're keeping both things short, is great and that's fine.

Um, I wouldn't add three or four in one week because that is kind of, that's kind of what we want to do. We kind of want to be like, "Okay, this is my brand new morning routine. I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that and I'm going to start it all on day one." Um, but when you do that, kind of again, y-you're not going to end up doing it all or it's gonna take longer than you hope it will so you'll kind of feel bad. And then you'll, you're gonna kind of go into your day more stressed out than if you hadn't done it in the first place.

And somebody quoted this in the book, and I can't remember who, but it was along the lines of, 'The morning routine is working, is to work for you, is to make your day better. It's to bring these winds into your day.' So if it's really not working for you and if you're creating it in the beginning where it's actually just stressing you out, that's kind of not, that's the opposite of what it's supposed to do. So you ki-might want to, um, scale back a little bit in that case.

Whitney: Right. Thinking about, um, you know, reading your book and, and thinking through this, I, I will say you, you talked a little bit about this idea of stacked experiences. And this builds on the work of Charles Duhigg of, of the power of habit. And I have a list of questions that I ask myself every night. You know, did I do this, did I do this, did I try my best to do this? And this is based on what I learned from Marshall Goldsmith.

But what was really helpful for me as I read through your book is I realized that, ah, right now on my spreadsheet of questions I ask myself at night, they were kind of all over the place. And I realized, "Oh, actually after reading [My Morning Routine](#), one of the things I need to do is do my questions in this stacked way so that I have this repetition of I do the same thing in the same order every day." And that was really, really valuable to me to read.

So, so that I've got, you know, five things I want to do every morning, I do it in the same order every morning so that I'm chunking as much as possible and I'm going on automatic as much as possible. So the probability that I get it done goes way up. And that was super valuable for me.

Benjamin: No, that, that's exactly right. And, ah, it's kind of like driving a car, and I'll say to you now I, I actually got my driver's license last year. Um, which I know is incredibly late, but I, I got it last year. And in the beginning kind of I'm sure people can remember, ah, back then. In the beginning you're kind of focusing on everything. And I remember I would barely remember to breathe 'cause I was on the freeway.

Um, but now everything is, you know, completely normal. I know what I'm doing. I, you know, don't forget anything. And it's the same with actually just putting stuff in order in your morning routine. One-once you know, you know, when one thing finishes another thing begins. And it's the same with your questions. It just makes it so much easier and you're much less likely to forget about it.

Um, one thing I would say is if you're starting out with a brand new morning routine, um, write stuff down in the very beginning, either on an index card or just somewhere where you'll see it. Because you, you'll remember it with time but you might just want that little pointer to begin with.

Whitney: Mm, I like that. That's a nice, that's a nice suggestion. So a couple of things. Um, I, I had asked you this question. I'm going to share a couple of things with you. So as I was reading through it, a few things that really surprised and probably delighted me were, um, Tim O'Reilly who's the founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media.

And he talked about how over the last couple of years his routine has included. So he goes running every morning. And actually he loves doing laundry and chores in the morning, which I thought was quite nice that he, that's part of his morning routine. But one of the things he does is when he goes running, he tries to find a flower to photograph. And he said, "You know, there are lots and lots of different blossoms. And when you look for a new one every day you see the changes of the seasons." And then he said, "I remember reading many years ago C.S. Lewis wrote a parable about a man who after death is walking along a road and realizes the flowers simply appear like colored blobs. And he's met by a spirit guide who explains that's because you never really looked at them when you were alive. I don't want to make that mistake."

And so he, you know, how he just said, "Okay, I'm going to start taking pictures of all these flowers and it's sort of a meditation." And I, I thought that was just kind of a surprise and delight moment. Um, another couple of things is, oh, I love this.

Do you mind if I'm telling you some of the greatest hits for me?

Benjamin: No, go ahead. I love it.

Whitney: Another one was on page 66, so Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert. He says, "It turns out that the worst thing you can do with an email is answer it because you get more back."

Benjamin: (laughs) I love that too.

Whitney: That was very fun.

And then another one that really, um, caught my attention. This is kind of random but still fun. So, um, this was from Bob Moore, who's the founder and president of Bob's Red Mill. And he said that in the morning he actually reads biographies and histories. Um, he feels like it's a really great time in the day to read things that he's interested in. And he said he discovered this biography, um, or book, excuse me, um, ah, by Mary Soames who wrote an autobiography that includes her father and her activities with him, especially during the Second World War. And her father happened to be Winston Churchill.

And so it's partly, the surprise and delight was partly about the routine of reading really substantive work in the morning that actually has nothing to do with his work. But also the, the discovery of this biography which I, or autobiography, which I hadn't heard of.

All right. So I have just a few more questions. Um, if people were only, they only had five minutes, um, or you know the opportunity to read one chapter in the book, which chapter would you have them read.

Benjamin: I would actually have them read the sleep chapter. And I've said this before, and honestly, in terms of sleep you, you can start to build a morning routine, but if you're not getting enough sleep, you're not really doing yourself, any, any sort of good service. Because, um, so many of us, and I, I was at a conference recently. I have a kind of office hour situation where people kept coming to me and, um, asking me, you know, how to improve their morning routine. And the first question I would ask every single one of them is, "How many hours of sleep do you get a night?" And it actually shocked me. I knew it would be low. You know, I knew their numbers would be low. But a lot of people were genuinely saying, you know, four and a half, five, and six hours. And I know that a lot of people sleep six and I'm just like this isn't enough. This really isn't enough.

And there, there are such called people called short sleepers who can get by on kind of five to six hours. But that is such a tiny percent of, percentage of the population. I often say that if you feel like you're one of those people, you almost certainly are not. And, um, yeah. Many of us, we need, we need seven to nine hours.

And I personally need eight. I get eight, I get about seven and a half. But, yeah. Sleep is just so, so important. And prior to, uh, way back in the early stage of this book it was actually gonna be a huge part of the book, but we figured, you know, there's so many PhDs and actual sleep scientists that write about sleep, um, that, you know, I, I, I'm not really coming from a great place to write about that. Yeah, it's just incredibly important. And you can have the best morning routine in the world. But if you're tired, and if you're

consistently tired every day of the week, it's really, it's really not gonna help you. So that would be my recommendation.

And I would certainly also recommend reading a book called, uh, [Why We Sleep](#), uh, by, uh, Matthew Walker. And he just writes about the importance of sleep. I mean, it's kind of a terrifying book, because he kind of tells us that being constantly tired is even worse for us than we feel like it is. But it's, it's incredibly important. And once you get the sleep you need, your morning routine will, will definitely benefit.

Whitney: Yeah. You know, it's interesting. I, I'm remembering that when I was reading through the book there was an idea that I had that I need to act on. And I'm gonna say it out loud so that I'll do it the way our way our house is configured for whatever reason, our bedroom gets pretty warm at night. It just doesn't cool down. And I realized that I have to go out and buy a fan today.

Benjamin: Right. That's a great idea.

Whitney: And so that is something I am committing to do, because what you said in the book is that, um, you, it has to, the room has to be cool, because if it's not cool, or your body has to be cool because otherwise, you don't sleep as well. And so I might be getting, you know, seven and a half, eight hours of sleep, which I do typically get. But it might not be the best kind of sleep.

So that was another thing I'm going to do as a consequence of, of having read your book. What's been one thing that has surprised and delighted you about being a published author?

Benjamin: I think the most delightful thing is right in the beginning we were like, so there, there were a lot of people in the book. So we actually sent a copy of the book to everyone in the book and some, a bunch of other people as well. So kind of in the, in the week or two before the book came out and then in the weeks after, we were seeing a lot of pictures of the book on Instagram, people tagging us, you know, people using hashtags. And that, that was really cool. But then it was even cooler when we just started seeing people tag us and tag the book. And we're like, "We don't know how these people are." And then we'll, we'll see their description, and they're like, "Saw this book in the store and bought it today." And that sill-, that sounds so, you know, it see, it seems like, "Of course they did."

You know, that's the point of the book is to buy the book. But to see that for the first time just thinking oh, they saw it in the store. They, you know, they picked it up. They bought it. They're reading it. They're enjoying it. That, that was pretty amazing. And I, I would say that's definitely the most, that's the best feeling. And even now, still seeing that now still feels pretty amazing.

Whitney: Yeah. It's that third party validation. Um-

Benjamin: Exactly. Exactly right.

Whitney: Where can people find you?

Benjamin: Okay, so yeah. You can order the book right now by going to MyMorningRoutine.com/book. And that has links to Amazon and everywhere else. Um, or you can go to your local bookstore, Barnes and Noble, anywhere books are sold. And you can find me personally at BenjaminSpall.com.

Whitney: Okay. And my final question for you is, um, what's a quote right now that, eh, is really, um, resonating and speaking to you that would kind of encapsulate how you're feeling about the world.

Benjamin: I, I, I cannot 100% remember who said it, but the, the quote was it's on the lines of, the measure of the man is he who treats those who can do him no good. And, of course, of course, the caveat to that is everyone can do you some good in some way.

Whitney: So Benjamin, thank you very, very much for, um, joining us. And we wish you all the best with this publication of your first book and may many people have much better morning routines and have much happier lives as a consequence of doing so. Thank you, again.

Benjamin: Thank you. This has been great. Thank you.

What really stood out for me in this conversation is that we can hear about something a lot, even think it's a good idea. Like - Don't sleep with your phone by your bed. Like meditate. But we don't do it until there's a pain point. In the case of Michael and Benjamin that pain point was that they were writing and talking about morning routines. If you write about something that you're not doing or talk about something that you're not doing, cognitive dissonance kicks in. And so you either have to stop writing. Or you start doing.

And once you start doing, good things happen. For the past three months, because I've been doing those daily questions from Marshall Goldsmith, I've added to my routine – did I do ten push-ups today? Do I do it in the morning? Well, it can be any kind of push-up. It can be a push-up on the kitchen counter. Fine. It doesn't matter. It just has to be that I use my arms to lift the weight of my body off the ground in some form or fashion. And guess what. Because I've done this everyday for a few months, for the first time in my life I can do a real, on the ground, full body push-up.

Finally, I loved that Benjamin and Michael got their kernel of an idea in reading Charles Duhigg's [The Power of Habit](#). It's a great book. We get our ideas by swimming in ideas. By listening, by reading, by talking to people. And then once you get those ideas--[take Philip Sheppard's advice from Episode 66](#). Live by the goosebump economy. If it's something that moves you, if it gives you goosebumps. Then it's worthy of your time. It's worthy of you.

Practical tip: Pick three things you want to do every morning and do them in the same order every morning. If you're traveling, cut yourself some slack.

Thank you to Adeline (Nina) for leaving our review of the week on iTunes. She said -

I love Whitney's podcast. She covers terrific topics with amazing guests, and that she relates back to prior episodes. I enjoy listening on my commute to work.

Thank you, Nina! send us an email at wj@whitneyjohnson.com, we'll send you as a thank you a copy of *My Morning Routine*.

For those of you listening, we'd be so grateful if you would take a moment and leave a review so that others can discover this podcast so we know people are enjoying listening to it.

Thank you again to Benjamin Spall 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.

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And this is Disrupt Yourself.