

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 86: DAVE HOLLIS

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. Our guest today is Dave Hollis. He's the former President of Worldwide Theatrical Distribution for Walt Disney Studios and now CEO of [The Hollis Company](#), a motivational lifestyle brand with millions of fans around the world and who has the goal of equipping people with the tools they need to change their lives for the better.

WHITNEY Welcome Dave, we are delighted to have you.

DAVE Well thank you for having me, I'm excited to be here.

WHITNEY First question for you today is, where did you grow up and what did you think you would be when you grew up?

DAVE I grew up in southern California, down halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego. And, I thought, well first when I was like six, I thought I'd be a semi-truck driver, 'cause doesn't everyone want that? But when I was in school, old enough to think about what I really wanted to do, I actually thought I'd be a news broadcaster or a sports broadcaster or a broadcaster of some kind.

WHITNEY Well you have the voice for it. So, did people tell you-

DAVE Don't encourage me.

WHITNEY (laughs)

Did people tell you you had a nice voice when you were growing up?

DAVE You know what? I went to, uh, school at Pepperdine, there in Malibu-

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

DAVE And, uh, had a radio show. They gave me the very prime 2:00 AM time slot, so I could really hone my craft. I also, uh, did the evening news for a little bit. It was fun, but it was also like, "Huh." I don't know where I would have to move to, to really break in and I

wasn't necessarily at the time up for like the affiliate in the middle of nowhere. So, I jumped into Hollywood pretty early on out of school.

WHITNEY So, how did you make that jump? So, you realized, "Okay, I'm not gonna go into broadcasting 'cause I don't wanna live in, in the hinterlands." What, what was your trajectory from there?

DAVE Well, in between my junior and senior year, I applied for an internship at 20th Century Fox. It was my first real glimpse at what corporate life was like, working in international research for their television division. And, I never really stopped working. I, I went back to school in my senior year, I had a class load that afforded an opportunity to keep coming to work, which is a little bit odd, and went, uh, for the first couple of years through research, into publicity, and just kind of kept jumping every few years to another job inside of the business, that gave me a little exposure to a bunch of different parts of it, so that I could try and figure out what I wanted to do with my life.

WHITNEY So, were you moving every, like, two to three years or so?

DAVE Yeah. Uh, it was about 18 months to two years-

WHITNEY Yeah.

DAVE Per job. I went from research to publicity, publicity into, uh, um, uh, like, agency environment where I was managing humans who were on television. Uh, I then jumped into grass roots marketing, was kind of on the road a ton, putting people's products or people themselves in front of people at college campuses or in malls. Uh, and then I ended up with The Walt Disney Company when, uh, a recruiter had reached out and started what ended up being about a 17 year journey, uh, at the biggest media company on earth.

WHITNEY So, you were wh- at Walt Disney for 17 years?

DAVE I was. Uh, I came in, uh, in 2001. My first day I want to say was the day of or after 9/11, uh, a hard thing to like anchor your beginning of career at Disney to, but, uh, I started and, uh, had 10 jobs in 10 years, primarily in the package media side of the business, DVD, Blu-ray. And then, after the 10 years of, of the second window, had an opportunity to dip my toe into the theatrical business in a strategy role, and having survived a contentious disruption conversation, made myself a candidate to work in the theatrical business. And then spent the last seven years of my time at Disney inside of the theatrical business as, uh, ultimately the Head of Sales for our studio team.

WHITNEY All right. Back up. What was this disruptive, contentious conversation? Can you say more about that or is that confidential?

DAVE Oh yeah. Oh no.

WHITNEY Yeah.

DAVE Sure. Uh, in 2010 I was in a role where I was working in a strategy position for all of how we might commercialize the content that the studio was creating, across theatrical, the home video window and ultimately the TV business. And we were asking big questions. "How do you take a movie, how do you take, you know, any kind of content that gets created and make it available to as many people as possible, have it earn as much revenue as possible, and make as much profit for the company as possible." And, one of the things

in 2010 that was asked was, "If we were to slide the timing that you make DVD available to the consumer, closer to the time that it comes out theatrically, or shorten the window, uh, might there be an opportunity for us to take advantage of the seasonality of when people are buying discs, uh, if you end up releasing the movie theatrically at a time that's, you know, maybe outside of the traditional summer and holiday time frame."

So, *Alice in Wonderland* was the movie. It came out in March. To be able to get the movie out at retail early enough that we didn't hit the downside of when people don't buy discs as much, the summer, we swung the, uh, window from four months to three months, and I was the person who had to go out and tell movie theater operators that we were going to do something that would infringe on a line that they'd drawn in the sand, and make this media available at Walmart and Target 30 days earlier than it had been previously.

And, I was just naïve enough to not appreciate that it might be a contentious conversation, and since I wasn't murdered, I became a candidate then to step into the theatrical business. I spent about a year in International Theatrical Distribution, where truly my experience in having had this windowing conversation was the extent of my experience on the theatrical side of the business, and it was a job interview of sorts. If I could, you know, learn enough of the business from my boss, who had been there for a, you know, ton of time, when he had decided to retire three, four years from then, uh, I would be a candidate to take his position. As it turned out, about nine months into the role, he decided to retire and I was the candidate that was chosen to take on the Global Head of Distribution role, where for the next six years, we went on the most extraordinary run in the history of time.

WHITNEY So, what does the Global Head of Distribution do?

DAVE Uh, we are the people who take the film product that the studio makes ... And, you have to remember when I came on, uh, the acquisition of Pixar had just happened, while I was there, the acquisitions of Marvel and Lucasfilm also took place. So, for Disney, Disney Animation, Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm, the films of The Walt Disney Company, uh, I was the person who had a team, uh, domestically, uh, with the AMC's, Regal's, Cinemark's, the world and internationally, and, um, markets that were run by the experts who knew their business in each of the individual markets.

Uh, we were selling these movies to cinemas. So, uh, we were taking *Star Wars* and *Avengers* and, you know, a great movie from Pixar, Disney Animation, and showing it to them, and then negotiating the rates. Here's how much, uh, we'll need to keep of each dollar of box office, here's how long we'd like to keep those movies in theaters, um, the fun fighting of keeping them on screen as they get later in the run. And then settling how we get our money when we're done having exhibited the film.

WHITNEY So, how did that contentious, disruptive conversation in 2010 prepare you for this role would you say?

DAVE Well, I mean I think, you know, the conversation was one that had a different part of the conversation being contentious in every room. And so, thinking through every possible way that there could be someone on the other side of the table, frustrated by or triggered by something you are presenting and how you might appreciate the perspective they were coming to that conversation with, and how in answering it, you could respect how they came to the conversation and give an answer that tried to appreciate, you know, their point of view but also explain yours in a way that could be heard.

So, it wasn't that we left and people, you know, felt great necessarily, but hopefully they felt heard and they felt listened to and appreciated. And, uh, every other conversation that

happened in the seven years that followed, um, there were plenty of times where a partner of ours on the exhibition side of things would have a, a point that we didn't necessarily agree with as distributors of film, but we did have respect for us needing them and, and they needing us. And that, you know, we needed to try and lay out our position in a way that could help them appreciate that we weren't, you know, doing this unilaterally, but we're trying to make, you know, decisions that were going to be what as ultimately obviously best for us, but ultimately going to drive a ton of people into movie theaters as well.

WHITNEY It's interesting you used the word triggered. I think in any major negotiation, and it sounds like you really had a master class over, (laughs) the period of seven years of learning how to negotiate, but I think triggered is such an interesting word to use in that context.

Okay. One other question before I get to the big reveal, the big disruption for our listeners, and what is a movie, and I wanna ask you your favorite movie, but what's one of the movies that's been the most meaningful to you in your career?

DAVE Well, I mean there's two that really stand out just in the last couple of years. The 2015 release of *The Force Awakens*, was a thing that I, like, I will forever remember where I was on opening night, the feeling of the record-setting nature of it, that the, the pent up demand from the audience ... It was \$250 million dollar weekend in a universe where nothing even close to that had ever happened before. So that, definitely as a huge weekend that may stand as the biggest weekend ever for a long, long time, uh, was certainly one to remember.

But also, *Black Panther*, when it came out in a less conventional time on the calendar, and ended up being just a massive success, and then ultimately played and played and played. Uh, it was important for a whole host of reasons, but it, um, was just from a satisfaction standpoint, one of the most satisfying movies I've ever had the opportunity to work on, and, uh, is another one where I, you know, I- it came out right around my birthday. I remember exactly where I was when I was looking at the system, at the opening weekend numbers and the feeling as I was talking to press that Sunday of, um, what it meant and how, you know, against the backdrop of just so much success. There had been so many records set in the course of time because of this collection of brands and the greatest team, uh, internally ever assembled, um, that man we had so many high highs, but those two moments for sure stand out as, you know, highs among the highs.

WHITNEY Why was the *Black Panther* so satisfying for you in particular, just the records it was setting or?

DAVE It was I mean, records for sure, but it also, you know, there are certain things that have happened inside of some industries that it, you know, defy some of what the, like, pundits will say is possible. And there you had in Ryan Coogler, uh, an African-American director and a cast that was primarily f- of, of people of color. And, the idea that you could take a super hero movie and have it not feature people that had traditionally embodied or looked like certain things inside of society, uh, was an awesome affirmation of the importance of telling stories and reflecting the audience on screen.

And, um, and, and it just was really, really well executed. I mean it's a, it's a great movie, um, but it also in a world where there just aren't enough diverse voices being captured and put up on screen, uh, was awesome to see, that the buck a little bit of what, you know, the business would've necessarily said you could take to the bank, they took it to the bank for sure.

WHITNEY Hmm. It was a good movie. Uh, I agree. Um, okay. So, here you are, top of the world, a job that many, many, many, many, many people would want and then you disrupted yourself. Can you tell us what you did?

DAVE I left.

Uh, uh, yeah. So, I after having had the biggest year in the history of the business and then the second biggest year in the history of the business, having the most accomplished team of humans ever, that I've ever had the pleasure of working with, bosses that were extraordinarily supportive of me. Uh, I decided to leave The Walt Disney Company. Who in the world decides to leave The Walt Disney Company? Uh, and I decided to not only leave but, um, leave a business that I'd worked in for a quarter century of time. I'd worked in Hollywood basically the entirety of my working career.

And, I decided to go pursue dreams with my wife, and in doing so, uprooted our family, we have four children and a mini Schnauzer, uh, and we drove our family across country and moved to Austin, Texas, where we now, uh, work together on an everyday basis and have this thing, The Hollis Company, that has us focusing on how we can in the media space, uh, deliver tools to people on an everyday basis that will help them change their life and change their life forever.

And so, my wife, her name is Rachel Hollis, she has written, uh, a number one New York Times bestselling book called, Girl, Wash Your Face. She is the producer of live events called RISE. Uh, we have two podcasts that sit in the top 20 on iTunes called, RISE and RISE Together. We're creating content across platforms that hopefully engage the audience in a bigger, longer conversation about how they can reach for a better version of themselves.

WHITNEY Let's go back to the decision that you made for a minute. And, uh, I want to talk about why you did it in just a minute, but before we go there, I'd love to hear what, what, you ... There had to have been a pretty strong internal dialogue that went on before you made the decision to make the leap, and perhaps one that you had with your wife. And, I suspect absolutely you had with your wife. Um, can you talk a little bit about what, what potentially held you back and why it took you a long time to make the decision or sort of just what were the gating factors for you?

DAVE Sure. You know, I, the, the biggest fear of my life, I've told this story, uh, before, but, I sat in our back yard nightly ... I have three young boys. We had a open rule, "Hey, in this jacuzzi, where we are hanging out, at 10, at eight and at five years old, you are welcome to ask any question and I will as honestly as I'm able answer the question." One night my eight year old says, "Dad, what are you most afraid of?" And, he's looking for tarantulas or scorpions and out of my mouths drops, "Not living up to my potential."

And, uh, and it was for me a triggering moment, where I realized against the backdrop of having *Star Wars* and *Avengers* and Pixar and Disney Animation and the live action group making *Beauty and the Beast* and everything else that, uh, the thing that was invigorating about this job as Head of Sales when I was put into it and did not have the resume or the experience, that learning curve, there was an exhilaration in that, that had me using the full amount of potential that God's given me inside of this work space, but that, that same collection of films that would have made many people just want that job and could have had, you know, that job for the next 20 years without, um, having to necessarily put in as much effort necessarily, the fact that it didn't require as much work to negotiate with movie theater operators, that if they were to have missed one of those movies, would've potentially gone out of business, was part of why, uh, I felt myself needing to find something that could create a challenge.

I had a conversation with my wife that came out of me not showing up as well for my life as I had, when I was more challenged by my job. And so, in some interesting ways I let the challenge of my job dictate a little bit of how I was as a husband, how I was as a, a parent. I, I started just pulling back. I'd go on really long runs, I was putting on headphones and playing video games, of like, one after work drink was turning into two or three. I just wasn't, I just wasn't the best version of myself.

And, uh, Rachel and I, my wife, had, uh, a really hard conversation about ... A little more than two years ago, where she'd really embraced personal growth and was every single day determined to be a better version of herself. And I, as I'm going through this weird transition from being in my 30's to my 40's and I'm stuck in this feeling of not necessarily being challenged anymore by my work, am treading water or really sinking a little bit. Um, we had this conversation where she said, "Look. I'm going to grow every day, and it, you are either going to at best tread water or at worst sink a little bit. And that means that three months from now, we're going to be a little further apart than we are today. And at six months from now, we're going to a little further apart and in two years, can you say that we're going to have the kind of marriage that you hoped for? Are we still going to want to make out, are we still going to want to go on a date night?"

And that, if of anything, was the true, like, take my potential conversation, take my dissatisfaction with my job, the way that it's showing up for me as a person who's now not showing up for my life, the leverage that I needed was this idea that, "Oh my goodness, my wife and I are not going to be as close together two years from now, unless I take some kind of massive action." That was a long answer. (laughs)

WHITNEY

Yeah. You know what's really interesting about what you just said is, I asked you what held you back from leaving Disney, and your answer was in both cases, it wasn't the fear of losing Disney, it was the fear of leaving Disney, it was the fear of not changing and what the implications of that would be on your relationship with your children and on your relationship with your wife, right?

DAVE

That's...oh, for sure. I mean here's the, the headline is, the reason I didn't leave earlier, was that I gave more weight to people not understanding a decision I might make that didn't fit nicely inside of a construct of their own world. So, like, I was giving too much of my, like future happiness away to the opinions of other people. And once I finally had enough leverage, that their opinion didn't matter as much to me as my ability to actually find fulfillment, and it took, I mean in all of this, it took having that hard conversation with my wife to have me change the way I thought about personal development and in that, I pushed myself into a personal development weekend.

I went to Tony Robbins, I'm just gonna say it, and, uh, and I went, uh, like, begrudgingly, I just like, I had so many things wrapped in what people who needed personal development must be, like they must be broken, or that as a man somehow, it was bad masculinity-wise or that as a person who was raised in the church to listen to a teacher that doesn't have a bible in their hand, was almost sacrilegious. Like, I was against the current of a bunch of things that I believed - now sitting in an environment where I was challenged for the first time to understand the connection between growth and fulfillment.

And, that, that observation, that like therapy session, if you will, that happened in a stadium of 15,000 people, just broke my mind in thinking that clinging to certainty, a thing that was the most important commodity in my life, would ever provide a road to fulfillment. And the thing that I was feeling as I was treading water, as I was getting further away from the parent I wanted to be or the husband I wanted to be, was certainty.

And so, I, I, I needed to abandon certainty and that was the catalyst for making a big change.

WHITNEY

Yeah, there are a few things in there, you said, I, I want a couple I want to pick up on. One is that your common about your feeling like, you know, growing up in the church, you had to, in order for it to be about development or personal development or change, you had to have a bible on your hand, and I think that's a really interesting, um, idea and something that I've definitely wondered about is, you know, can you reconcile the two? And the answer I've come up with is absolutely 100%, and you have as well, but I think that's an interesting, um, thing that I wanted to call out.

I also, in listening to your RISE Together, um, keynote that you did, um, you said, "Stability can oftentimes," I'm paraphrasing slightly, "Be more important than fulfillment." And then you said, "I could have worked at Disney until the day I died, I would have been rich and miserable. You in this room, talking to the audience, are refuting stability as your business model." (laughs)

I love that. You're refuting stability as your business model. That's really, really powerful.

DAVE

Well, we, in a strange way ... We had a 2016 that was a primer for that aha moment. All of these things of course, like, they all felt like they were happening in isolation, and of course they were all happening in a coordinated effort to get us to this place that I had said today, which is, uh, uh, honestly, the very best version of me is showing up on October 16th, as we record this in 2018.

But, in 2016, we were two and a half years into an adoption journey. And we'd started on an international adoption track in Ethiopia, it didn't work out. We transitioned into a public adoption journey with the County of Los Angeles, and after, uh, thinking we were just going into adoption, we were told that there was a prerequisite for foster care before you can adopt out of the county. We didn't think ourselves foster care parents, and if there was ever something to challenge me or us, as a people who clung to certainty, foster care is an awesome antidote for certainty.

And, there was beauty, and, and just amazing things that came in this experience, and there was tragedy that came in this experience. And, that, if there was a definition of foster care may be it, that like being able to come alongside people who have a need to have children taken care of, is both beautiful and very, very difficult at the same time. We near the end of our, uh, foster care experience thought we were adopting babies, twins, that were abandoned in a hospital, and about a, a couple of months into the, the experience we were told that in fact we weren't adopting them, that there was somebody, uh, biologically who was challenging custody, and they were taken from our home.

And so, the happy, happy ending, we ended up finishing our adoption journey with independent adoption. We have an adopted daughter who is perfect in all ways, but that 2016 journey pushed us into this uncertain space that tested our marriage, but in testing it found us locked together in a trench and proved how strong our marriage could be. It tested the resilience of our children and showed in the midst of chaos that I would not have necessarily thought they needed, how important it is to have them disrupted themselves. Test our faith, was probably the hardest time that we've ever gone through in a dialogue with God, but in having had it tested, proved more than it ever had been, that it existed.

And so, though I never wanna go through 2016 again, I'm so grateful for having experienced the highs, but really even more so the lows, because it was for a person who had clung to certainty for so long, provided unbelievable growth because of the

uncertainty. So, what was crazy as we come out of 16, our daughter's born in 2017, and I get an opportunity to extend my contract at The Walt Disney Company, just after she's born. And, there was something about the commitment of four more years of what was again, the most certain job in the world, that my body just rejected.

WHITNEY Hmm. Did you get sick?

DAVE And so-

WHITNEY Did you get sick?

DAVE Uh, no, I didn't get sick, but I just, I, I'm, I got sad. (laughs)

I got, um, like I was, I was in a, in a place where, um, you know, that, that fear of mine, of not fully living into the potential that was given to me, was something now that I felt like I was actively choosing to not be challenged by picking the route that I knew wouldn't challenge me. I felt like a sell out in some respects.

And so, that, like, that's, the sequence of events was so perfect in having, you know, like really pushed me into a lower point of my adult life that created the leverage to get me to, like one of the highest points of my entire life.

WHITNEY Wow. Yeah. It's a like a perfect storm, right? So, you have the conversation with your son, you have the conversation with your wife, you're turning around, you're around 40 years old, which according to Erick Erickson, developmentally you're re-assessing what's happening. You have this experience with, um, trying to adopt foster children, and then the moment of truth comes. Do you choose this or do you choose that? And so, a little bit, I, I want to say crossing the Rubicon and I may be getting my terms or my metaphors wrong, but it does seem like it was truly a, a big, big point of decision for you in your life.

DAVE For sure. And, and the crazy thing is I, is like I said, like I, and in the, in the midst of living through it, uh, I did not have the, the visibility to see the forest through the trees. So, I'm just like running into one tree after the next, and not appreciating as I can now, the beauty of the providence, the serendipity, I mean I'm going to go more providence than serendipity, but like, that life was truly happening for me and not to me.

WHITNEY Yeah.

DAVE And, the, like appreciation now to look back and see that life was happening for me and not to me, changes the way that I think about life happening for me and not to me now.

WHITNEY You mentioned in your [Rise Together keynote](#), um, that there are some lies that you have told yourself, and you've kind of alluded to them, but I really want to call those out because I think that there are a lot of people listening, um, men in particular, to the podcast, um, that I think it would be really useful for, um, for them to be able to hear some of these lies that you were telling yourself. Could you share a few of those with us?

DAVE Sure. My wife has [this book](#) that is doing as well as it is right now, because she deconstructed 20 lies that she believed that kept her from being the better version of herself. And, in talking about it, it one, created community with people who also may be going through something else, and, uh, maybe, you know, gave them permission to also get past it.

I'm having the same conversation in real time, and in a way that to be honest, is even a little more counter cultural because of some of what's wrapped up in masculinity and gender roles and whatever else, but I'm going to keep having a conversation about the lies that I believed or still am working to get past believing, in the hopes that if there are men to your point that are listening, that also believe them, maybe they can realize the ridiculousness of holding onto these things and how in, in letting go of them, they can get, uh, further along toward that version of themselves that they always are hoping to or wanting to be.

But, for me, the first one was, uh, self-help is for broken people. I really truly like thought that anyone who, uh, reached for a, a book or a podcast, went to a conference, um, did so in an, and, and, in doing so it was an admission of coming from a place of weakness, coming from a place of brokenness, that, um, they weren't good as they were because they wanted to become better.

And I've just totally (laughs) changed my mind on all of it as I've really invested in and seen the power in trying to become a better version of myself every single day. There is no indictment on me being not enough or not good for wanting to be better, and if you were to take it as a man from the perspective of the professional athlete who's working in the off-season, to become a better version of themselves on the field, we'd never criticize someone for putting in work to become a better, you know, athlete on the field, to go back to school and get your MBA so you can advance further in your career. But for some reason if you, you know, are reaching for personal development, that you might be broken, that was a lie. I'm past that and man, I'm so much more fulfilled.

WHITNEY

Congratulations.

DAVE

Yeah. So much more fulfilled for reaching every day for how I can fuel myself. Uh, my work is who I am. I, I mean I had, uh, obviously this big break in my job title or my, my company that I worked for, being who I, I am, and of course that's not who I am. Um, but, truly if I'd been more comfortable about doing what was in my best interest or what, uh, I was called to do as it were, uh, I would have left Disney even earlier.

Uh, I was a little too worried about that identity and how I would be regarded by the people that I gave weight to. Um, you know, you are, you know, as you show up in the world, you are as you show up for your loved ones, for your, for your spouse, uh, and truly as you pursue passion and, and are able to turn your passion into something that gives back value to other people.

Uh, men aren't allowed to have let alone share their feelings. Uh, that's crazy. Of course you are. Uh, you know, like even having a conversation about how going to therapy, was a really helpful tool in helping me understand why I thought the things that I did, and how sitting on a, a, you know, a couch across from an objective stranger, allowed me to unlock a little bit of where I could get out of my own way, like that's required one, feeling. But two, um, there's, there's a stigma around like mental health and anything emotional for, uh, many men or what real men or real guys do, that, uh, if you can get past it, man you can really, uh, one connect better to the people that you care about, but two, especially for a thing like therapy, um, go. (laughs)

It's like, it's such a gift. I, if anyone has any kind of stigma whatsoever around it, I really do promise you that if you go and allow yourself to emote, you're going to figure out your stuff in a way that lets you get from where you are to where you want to go in a much faster kind of way.

Um, I did something wrong so I am something wrong, like, every one of us has done something that we aren't necessarily proud of. People who are stuck tend to be clinging to the identity that's wrapped in their having disappointed somebody, that's wrapped in the way that they, um, were disappointing as person when they were younger to a, whether it be a parent or an ex or some friends that they now aren't in community with, so, um, I mean I can go on for as long as you'd like, 'cause I've got, tw- I've got a list of 20 of 'em, that I'm writing about myself.

WHITNEY You got 20. Oh, is, uh, right, 'cause you're writing your own book.

DAVE (laughs)

WHITNEY [inaudible 00:33:09], is it gonna be Boy Wash Your Face or you're gonna, or?

DAVE It's currently called, Dude Wash Your Face.

WHITNEY Oh, well there you go.

DAVE I'm not sure, I'll let the marketing team let us know.

WHITNEY (laughs)

DAVE It's not coming out till Father's Day 2020, so we got time people.

WHITNEY There you go. You have time. Um, all right. So, so, one other quick quote around this that I think is really interesting, is that you said, um, uh, "Men aren't allowed to share their feelings. Um, we're going to create an empire 'cause I'm willing to say things that men don't say. Being vulnerable is the business model we're living out every day." It's really powerful. So, tell us what you are building right now.

DAVE So, the team, this Hollis Company team, exists to equip people with tools to change their life forever. So, lasting change, uh, and truly it's a, like value exchange model, how can we show up with media, whether it's, you know, we're doing daily live streams that you're welcome to watch 8:00 AM central on Ms. Rachel Hollis' platforms. (Streams on Instagram. Streams on Facebook.) Uh, we're, you know, doing our podcasts, where on Tuesdays there's a business conversation, on Thursdays there's a relationship conversation. We're writing books, there's, yeah some fiction stuff, but for the most part everything going forward is going to be non-fiction in this development space, hopefully equipping you to become a better version of yourself.

There are live events. We've done, uh, events for women, we have done events for couples, we'll do events for everybody. Uh, and it's truly about immersing yourself with like-minded people and in that space, choosing to take steps toward the version of you that you know you ought to be or that you could be, fully living into your potential. Uh, and then we're going to create some merchandise that ultimately helps support continuing education or letting you if you want, wear something that empowers you to feel like the best version of yourself.

So, um, you know, what has worked for, you know, us, what has worked for my wife, uh, you know, even more, has been this concept of vulnerability. Of going first in some of these conversations that other people aren't having about things that are universally affecting people. And so, whether it was a book where she admitted a bunch of things that people

just don't talk about or if it's a podcast where we're talking honestly about the things that real life couples go through as they reach for an exceptional relationship...

WHITNEY Can you give us an example? What's, what's one that's been, um, resonant for people?

DAVE Uh, I mean, the, like, any, any time that we run into something where we're like, "Oh, I don't know if we should say that," we've committed that we're going to say it and we're going to talk about it even if it embarrasses us.

WHITNEY Hmm.

DAVE So, there are conversations about being enough, conversations about having too much to drink, conversations about being a workaholic, convers- like, basically, if you as a human have gone through something yourself, we're going to try and have an honest conversation about it, so they're against the backdrop of a Facebook and Instagram world, that tends to have the highlight reels or people's lives featured. We can say, "I'm sorry, that actually isn't how real life is showing up. Let's give you a chance to connect in a way that doesn't make you feel so alone in the struggle that you're going through."

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

DAVE And so, um, you know, *Girl, Wash Your Face* was these 20 lies that she believed in. Her next book comes out in March, it's called, *Girl, Stop Apologizing*, and it is aimed for women who know they have a tug on their heart for more, they have a want for more, they feel called for more, but because of a voice of authority, because of the society they have grown up in, because of their mother-in-law, because of the, you know, friends that they hang out with, they don't feel like they can fully live into whatever that thing is that's their, that the, that is their true calling. That they can't like go after their business, that they can't have dreams of their own.

And, it's fire, and it is going to be something that for so many women who, you know, either feel like they've lost themselves after they became parents, because their identity was less about who they were before they were a mom, but that they are a mom. Or before they got married, they were this individual who had dreams and then they became a wife to a, to a husband or a wife.

Um, you know, like, the idea that you have a calling or a tugging on your heart, but that you wouldn't full live in, live into it, is part of what she's, um, you know, writing this next book for.

Um, but everything we create, anything we create is hopefully going to give people a set of tools that will allow them to access a better version of themselves. Right now we're going through something called, *Last 90 Days*. It's a 100% free online thing, that has five things hopefully every day that people can do with us, getting up earlier, doing a little exercise, drinking some water, giving up some food, giving some, um, gratitude exercise practices down.

There are 350,000 people who've signed up to hang out and have a conversation about finishing the last 90 days of the year as strong as you, you normally start the beginning of the year.

WHITNEY Hmm.

DAVE There's, there's no charge to it.

WHITNEY No it doesn't, yeah.

DAVE We're just trying to create some positivity and some energy around intentionality and a conversation around habits and the importance of, like, understanding the triggers that show up in your life, when they do, how to get in front of them and replace the action that you normally take with something more productive so that you can just be the better mom, be the better dad, be the better-

WHITNEY Hmm. That's fantastic.

DAVE You know-

WHITNEY Yeah.

DAVE Coworker, whatever it might be.

WHITNEY What a great way to end the year, um, for, it, and, and I, I, presumably you can sign up now, even though it's, if it's past 90 days, et cetera.

DAVE Oh yeah.

WHITNEY Fantastic.

DAVE 100%.

WHITNEY One of the things I've been thinking about is "A Star Is Born," the film, a remake of the film "A Star Is Born" just came out, and I wonder, um, do you ever worry that your now being successful at, at, in the company with your wife will potentially threaten or steal her success? And I think I know what you're going to say, but I just wonder what you say to that or, or think about that? Or has it even crossed your mind?

DAVE Uh, I, I mean, we're, we're like a team first, so-

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

DAVE I mean like 100%, like we have similar goals and a similar mission. Like, I'm very conscientious of the fact that the thing that we're experiencing right now, the success, the team growth, the number of incoming versus outgoing calls, that is, um, it, you know, from an outsider's perspective, if someone were to associate me having come on and the success that we're having as like, being causal, they're making a bad choice. I mean, they're making some bad leaps, because my wife has spent-

WHITNEY (laughs)

DAVE Uh, you know, a good 15 years of time working and listening to a community of people give her, you know, hints, breadcrumbs from where, you know, she was to where she is today. And, the, success of the book or the success of the podcast or the size of the community of the way they feel listened to and connected, um, that's a, that is 100% a function of, of her and how she's just I think really been a great steward of all of, all things in this space.

The, the reality though is, she also appreciated that she was getting to a point where running the day to day, and handling HR and looking at a P&L, and dealing with the business side of the business, was gonna come at the expense of being able to actually create things that we could put in the hands of people. And so- we're-

WHITNEY She would make a gr- you make a great team.

DAVE So we make a great, yeah, so we make a great team-

WHITNEY Yeah. That's awesome.

DAVE And the way that we make sure that we, you know, still want to make out and have regular Thursday night date nights is, uh, we have really defined lanes, right? Like I'm handling the business side of the business, she's handling the creative side of the business, and as much as of course there are plenty of times when we got to work on things together. Um, she, she's writing and she's speaking and she's doing, you know, so much of the work that engages the audience, and it's my job to make sure that we're creating every opportunity to have it reach as big an audience as possible, and, uh, and, and be as sustainable as it can be over the course of time, not dependent necessarily on a book coming out or whatever it might be.

WHITNEY So, what's one of the biggest lessons that you've learned in your career up to this point that you're, you've been able to apply to, to building Hollis and Company? Or is it Hollis Company, not Hollis and Company?

DAVE The Hollis Company.

WHITNEY The Hollis Company.

DAVE Yeah, The Hollis Company.

WHITNEY What is one of the big, big lessons that has really been like, "Wow, I am so glad I learned how to do that, because that's really helping me build this."

DAVE Yeah. I mean I th- I, the biggest thing that I did during my time at Disney was managing stakeholders and, and that, you know, whether it was a customer that you were negotiating with or a film maker that you were trying to be a good steward of their product in the marketplace or an executive or your team or the press, understanding how that person was coming into the conversation and how to serve them well, was the difference between having a good day or a bad day. Managing their expectations, good day or bad day.

So, like, my responsibility now as we are talking to a broader audience, as we're trying to obviously build a revenue model that can continue to grow and help sustain us growing a team, uh, listening to and understanding what the needs of the audience are, how they will respond by platform, how they will respond by medium, uh, has been very, very important. And so, um, you know, the good news is, we get a lot of positive proof points out this approach of authenticity and frequency, right?

We're showing up as ourselves, talking honestly about ourselves, against the backdrop that has more production and more, "Everything is great, trust me it's great, look at my Instagram, isn't it great," kind of world, that it feels like, you know, like, anyone who is a disruptor never says they're a disruptor, so I don't want to say that we're disruptors, but

there's something about the approach that's different than what you're getting when you're watching network television, when you're watching something that's a little more produced, a little more scripted.

WHITNEY What's been, um, something over the last two years as you've really transitioned, what have you seen in your children? Like, how can you tell that this is making a difference for your children and then really, huge transformation that you've made personally, what are, what evidence are you seeing that this is a benefit to your children?

DAVE Well I, I mean it's, maybe even too early to have seen the full fruit of the exercise, but I know modeling, chasing dreams, hustle, like believing enough in yourself to buck the conventional wisdom or thinking and even like leaving something that is sure for something that you know you can fail at, right? Like I have no intention of failing wholesale, but I am positive that I'm in a position here to fail more often and in failing that I'll learn, and modeling the fail till you learn, and so you can learn, um, you know, mentality for my kids, is very important, so that they aren't afraid of putting themselves into spaces where they can learn, because that's the only place that you grow.

I mean I, I mean, uh, hopefully, when they're consumers themselves of some of the stuff that we're creating or they overhear some of the live streams or are listeners at some point to the podcasts, they'll hear us say things like, "Growth only happens outside of your comfort zone." Or, whatever it might be, and, uh, if we're living that life, that that model maybe informs how they are a little more comfortable to raise their hand at school, when they don't know the answer. Or, try out for something that they don't necessarily know that they can, uh, get the part for or put themselves on a field where they're maybe not good yet, but can learn from falling down and have to get back up.

WHITNEY So, you don't know yet, but you're confident and I agree. (laughs) You are, and you should be confident that, um, what we dream so our children can dream. And so, as they see you do it ... I know people have asked me in the past, like, "How do you get your children to dream? How do you get them to go after what they want?" And the answer is always, "If you'll dream, then they'll know how to dream." And sounds like that's exactly what you're doing.

DAVE For sure.

WHITNEY So, so my last question for you, um, as we close out this podcast is, to date, what has been one of the most fun, enlivening experiences that you've had with Rachel as you are building this business, where you're just like, "This is just so fun, this is working." Can you think of a moment?

DAVE Uh, I mean, one moment that stands out, we recorded, uh, our last women's event and turned it into full-length feature documentary, which, you know, is totally normal I know, but-

WHITNEY (laughs)

DAVE It went into movie theaters in August, and, uh, did unbelievably well. And, the like, remembering the nervous energy of releasing a movie, when it came flooding back, 'cause I was watching the way ticket sales were happening and then we attended an event that was like a premiere, except we were on s- you know, mostly Rachel, but we were on screen, this movie that we made was on screen. Um, that was, that was like a surreal circle of life moment, in all of like the four months of time that it happened from leaving to, you know, showing back up to a movie kind of environment.

Um, but that was awesome in part because it was this like story of don't let anyone tell you how big your dreams can be, that we actually then made a movie that was, you know, to anyone on the outside, "What? You're gonna make a movie, you don't how to make a movie, how can you make a movie?" And then here we were, sitting in an audience of people that were affirming, "You guys made a good movie about not letting anyone tell your, or how telling, tell you how big your dreams can be." As they're cheering I'm like, "Oh man, the sky is literally the limit. We can go now and have belief that if we stay true to this mission, no matter what anyone else thinks, if we execute it well, this is going to work."

WHITNEY Hmm. Dave Hollis, thank you so much for joining us today. You've been inspiring and I think that people will really, really, really, um, be grateful for the, um, the time and the experience and the thoughts you've shared. So, thank you again.

DAVE Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

First of all, I love that full circle moment of going from working in the film industry to producing and premiering a documentary about his wife Rachel's live event. To be sitting in the theater looking at what the two of them created up there on the screen had to be an amazing moment. It's a great example what he said the RISE Conference is about - don't let anyone tell you how big your dream can be.

Another takeaway for me is around building teams--- the importance of listening to stakeholders. That everyone at the table may not love the conversation, but can walk away feeling listened to and heard. That's what negotiation is. It's a skill Dave honed in the middle of those tough conversations around the DVD distribution window at Disney, and it's serving him now as he's leading a team that sounds like it's very much in startup mode.

Which, by the way, it's fascinating to hear from someone who is still in the middle of a major disruption. If we think about the S-Curve I talked about in episode 80, Dave has made a huge jump from the top end of the Disney curve to the low end of this new curve as the CEO of The Hollis Company. And while it sounds like things are moving quickly, and he brings a ton of skill to this new curve, there is still a lot to learn and juggle and it's impressive to me that he is willing to talk about it in real time. I can't wait to see this learning curve takes him.

Practical tip: If you're feeling a little comfortable and complacent in some area of your life, can you refute stability as your business model? I love the idea of this challenge that Dave and Rachel are running - the Last 90 Days challenge. Even now, as we're down to those last 30 days of the year - is there something you can do starting today so that the last 30 days of this year are as amazing as you want the first 30 days of next year to be?

If you, like Dave, are in the middle of building a team, check out my book Build an A Team my book with Harvard Business Press. You can download the first chapter at whitneyjohnson.com/ateam.

Thank you again to Dave Hollis 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.