

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 90: END OF 2018 RETROSPECTIVE

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

In last year's end-of-the-year episode, or retrospective episode, I talked about how it felt like I was coming off the low end of the curve as a podcaster. This year, it feels like I'm now in the sweet spot, where it's still hard, but not too hard, and now it's easy, but not too easy. As in there are still plenty of things for me to work on. Like, with my energy shifts. One of our engineers, Whitney Jobe, called that out. Your energy, it changes a lot. Sometimes there's a lot of energy in your voice. Other times, not so much. I'm working on regulating this. By the way, shout-out to Whitney for continually coming up with suggestions on how we can improve this experience for you!

The biggest sign that it feels like I'm in the sweet spot? I can finally listen back to some of the finished episodes. I've never listened to them. I was convinced that my interviewing style would be terrible. Yes, it's true, I am a recovering perfectionist. Anyway, the fact that I can now listen tells me I'm ready to start improving again. We'll give you another where we are on the S-curve update at the end of 2019.

In the meantime, let's take a listen to a few of the most listened to episodes of 2018, revisit some that you might have missed the first time around, and then highlight the favorites of our newsletter subscribers and of our production team.

Starting with one of our most listened to episodes, [my interview with time management expert Laura Vanderkam](#) and author of *Off the Clock*.

**LAURA**

I've had, you know, thousands of people track their time for me now over the years, and I remember this, um, one woman, very busy woman, um, two kids, b- big job, whatever.

She, she goes out for Wednesday night for something. Um, comes home to find that her water heater has broken and there's now water all over her basement. And so she was

tracking this week where this happened for me, and so I could see this on her time log and I could see the time that she then needed to devote to this problem of there being water all over her basement. So, um, you know, she's got the plumbers coming in, she's got, a, a professional cleaning crew, 'cause again, there's water all over her basement, so it's not really a quick mop up job.

And, and so all this is being recorded on her time log. It takes about seven hours of her week. And if you think about it, like if you think a lot of the time management literature that we read, um, it's all structured on this idea, well, we're going to help our readers, or we're going to help our listeners or our viewers find an extra hour in the day.

I'm like, well, wow. She found an extra hour in the day, all seven days of that week, right? She found an extra seven hours in her schedule, um, to, to deal with this water heater. If we'd ask that at the start of the week, like, could you find seven hours to train for a triathlon, or find seven hours to actually set up those seven coffee dates with the seven people who are asking you to mentor them at work. Like, you'd be like, um, no. I, I cannot find time for those things. Like, look how busy I am. But when she had to find seven hours in her schedule because there's water everywhere, she found seven hours.

And, sort of the takeaway from this is that time is elastic. Like, we can't actually make more time, but time seems to stretch to accommodate whatever we need or want to put into it.

And so I challenge people to think about whatever is important to them, um, treat their priorities as the equivalent of that broken water heater, right? That we choose to put in those seven hours, that hour a day, first. Say, "You know, well, I would find the time if my water heater exploded, so let me find the time now." We might surprise ourselves with how we would be able to find that time if we really needed to. Um, so tell yourself you need to.

**WHITNEY** What I love about this is that so often the insights come in the anomalies, right? Thank, you know, thank goodness that her water heater broke because she gave you such a ... I mean, not for her, but you can tell you thank you...

**LAURA** Sorry about her basement! I've been cashing in on this basement (laughs) for two years now.

**WHITNEY** She may, she may need a royalty for that.

**LAURA** I know, exactly.

**WHITNEY** So the thing that I'm having in my head as I'm listening to you talk about this is that I really love tennis. I'm not very good at tennis, but I really like it. At the same time, I find in any given week, oh, I don't have time to do that over, and over, and over, and over again.

And so I wonder, you know, and as I'm listening to you I'm thinking, hmmm...maybe I need to do something a little differently, um, or, or it's maybe not as important to me as I think it is, or I say it is. Maybe it's just a fantasy that thing that you like to do.

So my question for you is, is there something that since, again, that you've elasticized around that you've made time for, because of this learning that you had, or this observation that you made?

**LAURA** Yeah. Well, I think a couple of things. I mean, you know, I've noticed this in my own life. Like, I'm not sure where I thought a fourth child would fit into my life but somehow we've managed to make it work (laughs)

**WHITNEY** That's a good one. That's a good one.

**LAURA** I seemed plenty busy with three and yet somehow there turned out to be space for four, so go, go figure.

I think one of the things I've chosen to do, I run every day. I'm one of those crazy streak people. I've run every day since late 2016. And, it turns out that pretty much any day can accommodate a run. I say, I, I can get to run at least a mile a day and sometimes I only run one mile (laughs), so that is like 10 minutes.

But, you know, how- I would be pretty silly to say like I cannot find 10 minutes anywhere in my life to, to run on any given day. And so it turns out that I have been able to find 10 minutes on any given day.

**WHITNEY** When you say it like that, wow. Who can't find 10 minutes? That's a great one.

After that conversation with Laura, I did the time measurement exercise she references in the story of the woman with the flooded basement. I tracked all my time for six weeks in 15 minute increments. I put in the activities I wanted to accommodate - like my beloved tennis lessons. I put them on my calendar first, and I learned that when I feel overwhelmed, if I will do those activities instead of canceling them or putting them off, I actually feel less overwhelmed.

Another one of our most listened to episodes was [Shawn Askinosie, founder of Askinosie Chocolate](#).

This episode was not what I expected and quite emotional.

**WHITNEY** Do you remember when you had that moment of, "I'm going to be Charlie in the Chocolate Factory?" Do you remember when you had that ah-ha of like this is what I'm going to do?

**SHAWN** I sure do.

**WHITNEY** What was happening?

**SHAWN** I was driving to a funeral of a distant relative, and by myself in my car, and I ... At that point, started, I started grilling on my, on a Big Green Egg, and that's kind of what got me my first hobby, and then baking and then making chocolate desserts. I had no idea where the chocolate came from, but as I was driving to this funeral, I thought you know, I think I'll just make chocolate from scratch. And I had no idea what that meant. I just thought, oh I'll, I'll just start from the beginning point, not knowing. And I remember. I remember where I was driving and thinking that, and um a lot going on kind of during that drive. Maybe an hour each way, and it was pretty powerful, and, and when I got home from that, I found this trip, and within three months of that little light bulb moment um I was in the Amazon and studying how farmers influence the flavor of chocolate by how they harvest the cocoa beans.

And uh that's ... And then of course that really accelerated everything as it often does, right? I mean when we take a step toward the thing besides just reading about it or thinking about it, then it's kind of funny how the universe conspires to help us, and that's what happened. I mean me going to the Amazon was accelerant.

**WHITNEY** I find myself really um curious about this whole process because you were in this state of, of ... I don't want to use, the word that's coming to my mind is despair, and I'm not sure that that word is quite accurate. Um, but this place of certainly wandering in the, wandering in the wilderness, wandering in the desert-

**SHAWN** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**WHITNEY** For years and years, and, and something then just kind of ... And then you had to continue to experiment 'cause you said you were baking, and you were, you know, cooking and then you just had this kernel of an idea that just popped into your head, and you just said, "I'm going to act on this." And then you went to the Amazon, and then things started to accelerate, but it wasn't ... There was a flash of inspiration, but you still had to really act on it, start on it. It wasn't, it wasn't, you know, kind of the choirs and angels singing. Like you still had to take a lot of initiative on your own. Is that, am I, am I representing that correctly? Or am I hearing that correctly as you're talking?

**SHAWN** You are. That's, that's exactly right. This, this was a faint whisper in my head, and often we sort of all have those, but the question is whether or not we recognize them or hear them for what they really are, and I just happen to be lucky that day, and be in the right place at the right time to hear it. And so no. It was not loud. It was not the voice of God, whatever that voice sounds like. It was probably my own voice. And um, and so and it was faint. And but it was also kind of uh part of a process, and it just, it just, like I said, happened right place, right time and then I acted on it.

And I've never been one to not act, and so all through my life I've been one of those kind of people that will take risks and you know, I'm ready for the next adventure, and I don't have that kind of fear. I have a lot of other fear, but not that.

**WHITNEY** Not the adventure.

**SHAWN** And so that really ... Yeah, no. The adventure I'm ready for it, and I was then, and so I was ready to act, and of course be careful. I wanted to be careful, but I knew that I wasn't gonna be able to get to the next place if I didn't leap.

Perhaps because he worked in a field a long time and left like I did. But I think the real reason is that he was willing to go there emotionally. He didn't stay scripted. He talked. And that allowed us to connect.

Next up, Orson Scott Card, author of Ender's Game.

I started reading his books when I was pregnant with our first child, and I have since read somewhere between 30 - 40 of his books. So getting to have a conversation with him was a pinch me moment.

**WHITNEY** Let me ask you the question. Which are- who are some characters that you have learned the most from?

**SCOTT** Well, you know, when- when I think about that, it's ... course all the characters come out of my head, so, you know, what am I going to learn from them? They're not going to teach me anything that I didn't already know. But, I may not have known that I knew it, because there's several kinds of knowledge, and I'm going to sound a little Dick Cheney-ish here, but there's ... there's the stuff that you know that you know.

**WHITNEY** (laughs)

**SCOTT** Just like there's the stuff that you know that you don't know. But often, there are things that you don't know that you don't know that you don't know them, because you don't know that they could be known. And there are the things that you do know, but you don't realize you know them because you've never vocalized them. You've never used it. You- you don't-

And- and as a writer, I don't know, uh, many of the things that I actually know intuitively and instinctively, until a character says them or does them. And so I have had some characters who have, usually by being smart-alecky, uh, given me maxims and ideas that- that, uh, became useful to me.

But it's usually through the long haul, when I am writing about a character in more than one book, and I really explore who that character is, that I come to understand them. And when you come to understand another person, something that is much easier for a fiction writer to do with a fictional character than with any real people, because real people remain perversely independent, and keep doing things that surprise you no matter how well you think you know them. Um, but with- with a fictional character, I come to actually understand them.

Here's the thing that I find.

**WHITNEY** And give us an example.

**SCOTT** Even the ones that are rotten and crummy-

**WHITNEY** Give us an example.

**SCOTT** They, I still love.

**WHITNEY** Okay.

**SCOTT** I- the more I know them, the more I come to love them and care about them.

**WHITNEY** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**SCOTT** And wish that they would make better choices. And, when that happens, your bad guys don't remain Darth Vader. They become something quite more ... quite a bit more nuanced, more real and understandable.

And so, by the end of a book, I rarely have a villain. If I had a villain, then he's probably either crazy or just loves evil, and it's hard to write those guys. I just can't stay very long in their heads, because they don't think like me.

**WHITNEY** Hmm.

**SCOTT** I don't actually love evil. And so, uh, it's ... it's reassuring to know that I am uncomfortable writing those characters. Uh, it's kind of thrilling to find that I become quite comfortable with characters who mean well, whose self-story is one of trying to do the right thing, and then recognizing when they fail, and trying to make up for it. Trying to, you know, take responsibility for what they do.

To name a particular character would be hard, because ultimately they all act that way-

**WHITNEY** Hmm.

**SCOTT** Because they all do what I do, which is do your best to take responsibility for what is your responsibility. For what you caused, for what you did, and then try to make amends. Try to make things better, try to improve yourself and improve the lives of the people around you. I think that's what being a good person is, and when I write about good people, I find that readers who also think that those things are good respond well to those characters.

**WHITNEY** Interesting.

Okay, you're being incredible evasive and not giving me an actual answer to that question, but I'm going to let it go.

**SCOTT** Well, there were no easy answers. I did give you a true answer.

**WHITNEY** You did (laughs).

In prepping for the interview, I had anticipated taking the conversation one way. Almost the minute he started talking I realized---this is not going to go as planned. And because when we first recorded the interview, we were experimenting with live radio (an experiment that by the way was hugely unsuccessful!), I had no choice but to let him drive. Letting go of control means surprises. I also learned, at least in this moment, it can be quite fun.

The most popular episode of the year was  talking about Build an A Team.  In which, instead of me simply talking about what was in the book, our podcast producer / manager Macy Robison interviewed me. Way better than pontificating.. And Macy's a great interviewer, which allowed me to just focus on what I feel so passionately about.

**MACY** You know you say in the book that as you were speaking around the country, around the world, that people were coming up to you and saying, I have a learning curve. How do I get my boss to see it, or boss is saying you know my people don't have learning curves. They don't care about my job, like my whole thing is to get them how to care about my job. But you in the book talk about and you bring your background in investing into play, how you can look at your team of people you're leading, whether it's in the workplace, whether it's in your family, whether, whatever group of people you're leading to look at them as a diversified portfolio.

**WHITNEY** The thing that really occurred to me and I remember I was delivering a keynote and, and this one CEO said to me, he's like, I said everybody is on a learning curve and he's like, no they're not. Like, I, you know, no. I've got 90% of my people who aren't on a curve, they just don't care. I was like, no they're on a curve, it's just that they're disengaged. They don't like the curve that they're on and so maybe they're on the wrong curve, and so really the big insight for me was that every single person is on a learning curve in the workplace. But we're probably all on multiple curves at any given time, but your organization, your team is now a collection of those learning curves and you build a great team when you optimize those curves and, and look at where people are on their different curves at any given time.

So for example, with a team, you want 70% of your people in the sweet spot on, at you know today. You want 15% of your people at the low end, that inexperienced area and you want 15% of your people at the high end. And when you optimize your learning curves that way, what will happen is you have people who are mostly in the stage of learning. So for example, the people at the low end, they're inexperienced, but because they're inexperienced, they don't know what they're doing. They're asking lots of questions, like why do we do it like this? And those "why do we do it like this questions," while they may be annoying and even may be a little threatening are gold, because they tell you, they give you information, like yeah, why aren't we doing it like this.

And this potentially gives you an opportunity to play where other people aren't playing. Then you want 70% of your people in the sweet spot, because these people are as we said a moment ago, very competent. They know what they're doing, but they don't, they're not bored yet and so if you will give them challenges and I'm telling you right now, there's probably someone on your team that's in the sweet spot and you are not challenging them enough. But if you will challenge them more, give them more constraints, they're going to be incredibly innovative, so that's contributing to the innovation of your team of finding ways to play where no one else is playing. And then you only want 15% of your people at the high end of the curve, and we tend to hire people where all the time that are at the high end and you don't want them there.

You want maybe 15%, because they're the keepers, you know the guardians of, of information um, they understand what, they're, they're at the top of this curve. They've got this view, this perspective, this vista that's very helpful. They can bring other people along, but if you want to know as an organization, if you are about to be disrupted, the only thing you have to do is take the pulse of your workforce. Because if you've got too many people behind, like 25, 30% of your people who are bored, then you're at risk. Because bored people don't innovate. They get disrupted. And so for me this, this gives you this wonderful quick, quick back of the envelope way of seeing where your team is. Making sure you remain innovative and in the process, because you're managing the individual learning of every single person on your team, you become a boss that people love to work for.

You're like this talent magnet, because you're like if I hire this person as my boss, I know they are going to make it possible for me to learn. Just this week I was talking to two different Millennials and they said to me, the thing that I want on the job more than anything else is I want to learn. Can you please tell my boss to stop telling me to sit down and shut up, because what I really want is to learn and I want to question it and if you can make that possible for me, I will follow you to the ends of the earth.

**MACY** You know it's so funny. I was listening to you explain this again, um, because I, I have the chance to hear you give your talk and, and . . .

**WHITNEY** Oh just once or twice.

**MACY** But I was thinking like, and so this is going to reveal, I've, I've had a lot of shame for several years around all the different things I've done in my life, um, but then I heard Tim Ferris say, you're not a jack of all trades, master of none, you're a jack of many trades and that gave me a lot of comfort, so I digress. So before . . .

**WHITNEY** Go Tim Ferris, we love him.

**MACY** We do.

**WHITNEY** A shout out to Tim Ferris.

**MACY** Before, before I was a photographer I taught school for about 13 years and hearing you just explain that again, that distribution of 15, that's 1, 5% of the people at the low end and 70% in the middle, 15% at the high end. That applied to my work as a teacher as well. You think about, like if you were standing in front of a class. There are kids that are really struggling. There are kids that are just you know humming along and then there are kids that are bored and the success of a class really depended on how you were working with all three of those groups of people. And were you challenging the people in the middle, because if you weren't they were going to get bored and there were more of

them. I taught choir classes of 90 kids and if I wasn't keeping that middle group challenged, it really became a problem, but then if the 15% fall behind, that's also a problem.

And if there's too many people that are really bored in a choir, like if I had a select choir, that would be a problem too. And so it's just, it's such a fascinating thing.

**WHITNEY** Um-hm.

**MACY** Just like the stuff in *Disrupt Yourself*, I feel like this team thing applies not just to work, to the workplace, but to so many different areas and applying this to education I think would be such a fascinating thing, um.

**WHITNEY** Um, that is so interesting Macy, yeah and it is and I love what you said about the kids in the sweet spot, that middle. You know, I think because everything's working for them we tend to be like, oh well, things are fine and so we ignore them instead of appreciate them. Because like you said, we've got enough problem children and, and it tends, the problem children tend to be the kids at the top, right? The people at the top.

**MACY** They can be.

**WHITNEY** So if you can, yeah, yeah, you're right they can be, but because they're getting bored, they can be, or they just check out. But if you can keep that 70% humming and appreciating, they can actually help bring the 15% at the low end along and so, anyway it's, it's super interesting. I love that you applied that to the classroom.

Now, from the episodes that were some of the most listened to, that by the way, I can't stop thinking about, that's why I chose them to highlight for you - I want to introduce you to some that weren't as widely listened to when they were released, but are real gems.

The first is with Karen S. Carter, the Chief Inclusion Officer at Dow Chemical. The thing that really stood out for me with her is that she talked about boss after amazing boss as she has disrupted herself at Dow. Part of me says Karen is really lucky. The other part says like attracts like. There's something that Karen is doing that attracts these bosses that makes them want to have her as a protege. Here's a snippet of the conversation.

**WHITNEY** When you say authentic, what does that mean to you?

**KAREN** For me, that means being real to yourself [laughter]. And I think people can tell the difference. "Are you just giving me the company line," or "Are you giving me something that benefits you?" That's important to me and I say this to Kate a lot, "I've got to be able to wake up to myself in the morning."

**WHITNEY** Yeah. Yeah.

**KAREN** That's important. I can't be who I'm not. That's not comfortable for me. And I believe people know the difference.

**WHITNEY** Yeah, they can tell.

**KAREN** People know the difference.

**WHITNEY** They can tell.

**KAREN** And I believe that people are hungry for that. "Who are you really?" And when you show up, when you really show up, you really show up, then that's a foundation for us to

build on, to move from. But if you're always showing up as somebody that I don't recognize or that's not real, that's exhausting.

**WHITNEY** Right.

**KAREN** That's exhausting for me.

**WHITNEY** Exactly.

**KAREN** I mean, I don't know any other way to be. Now I think, and I've said this to my leaders before, I'm all about being better, I'm not about being different. And if it requires me to be someone that I'm not, then I better make a change.

**WHITNEY** So human resources then what happened after human resources?

**KAREN** So, after human resources I there was a Vice President by the name of Kathleen Bater. She was one, I think, of the first executive women that we had at that office.

**WHITNEY** Yeah. Your first female boss it sounds like.

**KAREN** Yeah. She wasn't my boss, but she was the boss of my boss. But she was one of the Vice Presidents. And she promised me, she said, "Once you get through graduate school, I will give you a job back in the business." She promised me that. And so one day I remember her taking me to our executive wing. And I can remember her walking me through-- and there's a theme here. Not by design. I don't have this written down anywhere. But there's a theme of you belong, that now I'm-- it's interesting because that's coming to me now that you brought it up. But I remember her walking me through the E-wing. And so we walked in the E-wing and she's talking to me all the time, but I'm not really hearing her because I'm like, "Oh my gosh. I'm in the E-wing. I'm in the E-wing." And so she walked me all the way to the corner office and it was the office of the CEO and he wasn't in there. And she says, "Have a seat." And I'm thinking, "Like, here?" And she's like, "Have a seat. Have a seat in the big chair." And so I was like, "Oh my gosh." And so I sat in that chair.

**WHITNEY** In the CEO's office?

**KAREN** In the CEO's office. He probably didn't even know we were in there. And then she just was sharing with me how proud of me she was that I had gone through school, that I had graduated. She started talking to me about, again, my potential, the things that I'd already done, and what she sees in me. Can you imagine?

**WHITNEY** That's amazing.

**KAREN** And then after that, I got a job to be a global marketing manager. And I had gotten a degree in international business as a global marketing manager for our information technology and equipment business. And one of the things I'm proud of in my career is that Apple Computer was our customer and we got our material in one of the first iMacs back then.

I did a few jobs. I did a sales manager job. I had a number of different jobs in P&L. And then there's a couple of pivotal roles for me. One was game-changing, I would call them. So one was when I got my second P&L job which was in our polyethylene business.

My leader at the time knew me from my previous job. He'd actually been my mentor because when I got my first P&L job, I asked our vice-president at the time, "Who is the

best product director that you know?" And he told me, "Glenn Wright." And I said, "Well, I'm going to go ask Glenn Wright to be my mentor." And I did. And it was through that relationship that we got to know each other.

I told him, I went to him. I said, "Hey, listen, I don't even know how to spell product director, so I really need your help here," because I was coming out of a marketing job. "I need your help. Here's what I don't know. Here's what I want to do. Here's what I'm thinking, etc." He was awesome at that. He was really great. And then Dow sent me to Thunderbird for an executive management experience.

And I can remember the day. I was sitting at the desk in Arizona and I got a call from Glenn on my cell phone. And I'm like, "Oh, what's this about?" And he called. He said, "Hey, I want to offer you a job." And I was like, "Really?" He was a global business director at the time. He said, "Yeah, I want you to come be a product director for me over in polyethylene." And I was like, "That's big time [laughter]. Wow! I'm in the big leagues now."

And it's such a great experience working for him. He was one of the toughest managers I've had, and not shy on giving me the tough feedback. I remember one year when he gave me an average rating on my job performance review, and I just knew-- I just knew I had knocked it out of the park. I had the numbers. I had all of this. And you know what he said to me?

**WHITNEY** What?

**KAREN** He said, "If you want me to give you the highest rating, I'll give it to you." He said, "But if you just want me to rate you based on, again, how you performed this year, you deserved a three. Could you have been a five?" And five is the highest rating.

**WHITNEY** Yeah.

**KAREN** "Absolutely. But you didn't put it all on the field."

**WHITNEY** Wow!

**KAREN** "I know what you're capable of, and you didn't." But then what he said next-- because at this point I was mad. I'm mad [laughter]. And he knew I was mad.

**WHITNEY** Yeah. Yeah. He wanted you to be mad. He wanted to push you.

**KAREN** He did. He did. He said, "But if you want to be a five next year, I can tell you how to do it. This is what you got to do." And you know what I got the next year?

**WHITNEY** A five.

The next little gem is Patty McCord, the straight talking, unvarnished, former CHRO at Netflix. When we talk about disruption, we often cite Netflix rising up to take over Blockbuster's position as the market leader. But to have the chance to dig into that a bit, and to hear that it came from a deliberate choice about culture was so interesting. It's what has allowed Netflix to persist. And to now be disrupting cable.

**WHITNEY** What are your top three tips that you give to, and let's not do entrepreneurs now. Let's do, you go into large institutions, what are your top three tips that you give them, um, as you walk in the door and they say, "I need help."

**PATTY** The first tip is ask why. The annual performance review. Why? What's it for, right? Uh, it's feedback mechanism, okay? If you were starting from scratch, eh, the ... and I agree with you, I think feedback's a very powerful tool. I think it can really help people do their best work. Uh, if you were designing a tool for feedback, would you say once a year we're gonna look back at the entire year and say a bunch of words nobody understands and we're gonna pay you on what you did last year going forward. It's like, the, really?

**WHITNEY** Hmm.

**PATTY** And then people would say, "You know, it's really hard to give, um, negative feedback." And I'm like, "Yeah, because you know how ... What else do you do once a year that you get better at?"

**WHITNEY** (Laughs)

**PATTY** And third of all, (chuckles) like, you know, I'm really good at it, but I do it all the time and I practice and it's not that big a deal. Third of all, how come feedback means constructive criticism means telling you what you did wrong? Because if you really want a system that gave feedback for performance, you would encourage people to go, "That thing, that, Whitney, oh my God. That's it. That's what I'm talking about. That was amazing. You'll go do that tomorrow afternoon."

**WHITNEY** That's right. Hmm, that's great advice. Great advice.

**PATTY** You know, humans ... You know, eh, it's like so feedback also means, "Oh hell yeah." (Chuckles) Okay, that's thing one.

**WHITNEY** Right. Do more of that please. Yeah.

**PATTY** Yeah, okay. Um, thing two, so, so the, the point of thing one was ask why.

**WHITNEY** Mm-hmm (affirmative)

**PATTY** We have this system. We've always done it this way. Everybody else does it. It's best practices. Why do we do it? Thing two. If it's not fulfilling, the function you ... The reason why you're doing it, consider stopping.

Throw it away. You...sacrilege.

**WHITNEY** (Laughs) That's why I'm laughing, because everything you're saying is just so logical and yet we don't do it anyway.

**PATTY** Seriously. (Laughter) You know, I, I remember one time, we were all going out for something and somebody on my team, it was like 7:30 at night or something and she's still working. I'm like, "Could ya get off the computer and come with us. We're gonna play." And then she goes, "I can't. It's headcount night, headcount report night and I've got to do it. You know, it's my responsibility and I know you believe in deliverables and I got to deliver this." And I said, "Why is it taking so long?"

"Well, I gotta wait for payroll to get it, because then I extrapolate the data and blah, blah, blah. Look over your shoulder and it's this spreadsheet." I'm like, "Holy, how many tabs are on this thing now?" She's like, "I think it's up to 40. The two lists is 57 people."

And I look at the two lists and I expand it, I'm like, "Well, four of them don't even work here anymore." (Laughter) Two of... I'm like, "Do you just keep adding to this list?" She

goes, "Patty, will you ... Ill, I'll be there. I'll meet you there, but if you don't go away and stop staring at this, then I won't get it done." And, and I said, "Uh, uh, it's done."

**WHITNEY** (Laughs)

**PATTY** She says, "What do you mean it's done?" I'm like, "Don't send it." She goes, "Oh, heads are gonna roll. Are you kidding? I'm gonna get fired." I'm like, "It would be me firing you and I'm telling you not to do it." So, she goes, "Oh, people are gonna go, you wait. You ... Okay, I'm going to tell them you told me." So the next day, three people came down and said, "Where's the headcount report? It's late. I can't believe it. This has been your responsibility. The entire time you've been here, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Um, I'm so sorry. Now, what is it that you use it for?" They tell me what they use it for. They're all in finance. We get the data from payroll.

**WHITNEY** (Laughs)

**PATTY** And I, I'm like, "What do you do with it?" They're like, "Oh, I cut and paste it and put it into my own spreadsheet."

**WHITNEY** (Laughs)

**PATTY** I'm like, "What? What?" Okay? 40 people never said anything.

**WHITNEY** Wow. Wow. That's great.

**PATTY** I'm like, "This is a good tool." (Laughter) And when I got to the 11 people for whom it was a really critical, um, piece of information for them to do their jobs, I could get them all in the room and go, "How do we do this in a way that's really efficient and effective? And how do we get you this data directly without having to have it filtered through two entire departments ...

**WHITNEY** Right.

**PATTY** ... to make one decision you make based on it. Eh, you know, is ... Are there alternative methodologies? So like the crazy innovative work that I did in HR was often to just stop doing stuff that was stupid.

**WHITNEY** Hmm.

**PATTY** So that's, that's the thing two.

**WHITNEY** All right. (Chuckles)

**PATTY** And thing, thing three is, I think you asked me for three.

**WHITNEY** Yup, I did.

**PATTY** And the third, and the third one is learn from the other parts of your organization how they approach work. So, most of what I, I didn't make up any of my methodologies. I'm not that clever. I just copied everybody else. I hung around with innovators all the time.

Next episode that I think you will love is [Philip Sheppard](#). I felt connected in part because I am trained as a musician. Which makes how he creates all the more remarkable to me. But what I remember most from this episode are the technical glitches and failures, in country thousands of miles from home where my only choice left

was just to relax and record the episode on my phone. We had a delightful, beautiful conversation, and it's definitely one of my most memorable conversations.

**WHITNEY** So, I want to get your opinion on things ... So where does passion come into all of this? Because I ... sometimes people say ... you hear this a lot ... "But I want to do something I'm passionate about."

**PHILIP** Hmm.

**WHITNEY** And, I- I- I have a contrary view on this a- or maybe it's not contrary, but it's a matter of like, how are you actually defining passion?

**PHILIP** Mmm.

**WHITNEY** So, I'd love to get your thoughts on ... how those two intersect and what you think about it, and just riff a little bit.

**PHILIP** That's a really good question because I think- people will use passion as an excuse for doing something crappily and as- through vanity.

**WHITNEY** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**PHILIP** And I think that's dangerous, that's the kind of Etsy school of business, as in-

**WHITNEY** But we love Etsy, so let's not diss Etsy-

**PHILIP** No, I love ... no I love Etsy.

**WHITNEY** Okay.

**PHILIP** But, there's a meritocracy in things being good that will survive, and sometimes when things aren't good they shouldn't.

**WHITNEY** Mmm.

**PHILIP** Um, now, one of the things I wanted to talk about, because I think it's important, which really cuts into this is ... I don't have a job, I really don't have a real job, and there's a security in the insecurity.

**WHITNEY** Hmm.

**PHILIP** The fact that I don't have any form of regular employment whatsoever makes my life very secure. So I've had to- sometimes artificially generate, let's call it passion, for what I'm doing because if I don't believe in what I'm doing, nobody will. If I don't appear to love what I'm doing nobody's going to buy it, and- and I'm selling all the time-

**WHITNEY** Is there an example?

**PHILIP** Um, okay, well, it's all really about ideas that people didn't know they needed so, let's think of a really specific example. If I'm writing music for a mov-... if I'm pitching to write music for a movie I can go and say to the director, "Okay, I can translate your lead character's vocal patterns into the theme that will become his tune throughout the whole show," and they go, "Oh, yes." Now I- I don't know if I can do that, but in selling it to him, him kind of going, "Oh yeah, I have goosebumps let's do that, that's a great idea." It

then gives me the- the license to then to go and try and do that, I've no idea how I'm going to do that.

**WHITNEY** But you had the idea, so you must be able to do it.

**PHILIP** Yeah and- I must be able to have the idea, I'm a great believer that in- in both deadlines an idea in creating pressures where you have to learn how to do those kinds of things.

**WHITNEY** Yeah, and I'm not sure that you actually ... I- I- I've been thinking a lot about this: I'm not sure we have ideas like that kind of persist, that we're not actually capable of doing, somehow somehow.

**PHILIP** That's really interesting, I- I ... I think that all of my ... if I've had any achievements in my life they've all come from me being um, from being the imposter and actually having to learn how to do things that I cannot possibly do, but under the pressure of ... of glorious failure.

**WHITNEY** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**PHILIP** And, the moment ... I mean it's cliché, but the moment you embrace the potential for failure, you- you probably won't.

**WHITNEY** Mmm.

**PHILIP** And where- coming back to your question, where passion comes into it is- I- I'm a believer in, in a goosebump economy, that I believe if something is going to move you, and move somebody else then it's worth doing. And whether they- a- and believe me, I'm a great one for writing- I can write melancholic music till ... it's easy, I'm English, it's what we do, uh, which makes me very happy cause I can inflict my melancholy on you or someone else watching a movie that I've written music for and it's, you know, I'll never need therapy cause I'm basically imposing my misery on other people which makes me very happy. Um, I'm being sarcastic.

**WHITNEY** (laughs).

**PHILIP** (laughs) Kind of. But it means-

**WHITNEY** Not really.

**PHILIP** Not really, um, you know, it- particularly in working- working with moving pictures there's- there ... you've got the ability to surreptitiously, um, move- move somebody from the position they're in before, and that- really I think that's the same in business your- your job is to effect a change, and if what you're doing won't effect a change, won't create a change, you shouldn't be doing it.

Next up. Alison Levine. Her sheer doggedness. Her physical feats. They awe and inspire me. Plus what she shared about being at the top of mountain. Your brain and body literally start to die. It's the death zone. It's the same when you are at the top of a learning curve.

**WHITNEY** Right. Right. Okay, so Mount Kilimanjaro, your very first climb. What happened after that? You-you climb this mountain, and so, then, how did you feel? What plans did you make? Sort of what-what happened inside of you after that experience?

**ALISON** So, the reason that mountain was special, it was that experience of thinking, "Okay, I-I'm not going to make it up this mountain," because I was so, uh, affected by the altitude, I felt sick to my stomach. I had a banging headache, and it was my first time at altitude, where you move so slowly, and you're completely out of breath after just a couple of steps. And I wasn't familiar with that feeling, and I thought, "Oh, something's wrong. I-I need to turn around."

But, before I turn around, I just ... "I'm just going to take one more step to see if the view's any different, you know, one step further." And I would take that step. And then, "Okay, well I know I'm going to go down now, but just one more step before I turn around." Okay. One more step. "Okay, well, wait. Just one more step." And-and then, like I said, I got to the top, and, so for me-

**WHITNEY** Wait, how l... wait, wait, sorry, Alison. How long did that go on? Did that go on for a couple of hours?

**ALISON** Hours.

**WHITNEY** Did it go-

**ALISON** It went on for hours and hours (laughs). But every time I took one more step, I thought, "Well, I just" ... I didn't think I could take ... I didn't think I could go any further, and I just took one more step, so let me just take one more. Okay, well, let me just take one more.

**WHITNEY** Hm.

**ALISON** And that's really where I learned that I had that voice in my head that could help me to keep going when I really thought I should quit. So, the next time I went to a mountain, and I felt like quitting, I was like, "Wait a minute. I have felt this way before, and I was absolutely certain I was going to turn around, and that's how I feel now. But I took one more step. So maybe I can take one more step right now. All right, maybe I can take one more-

So, once you find that voice in your head, and everybody has it. Everybody has that voice in their head, you just have to find it and listen to it. And so, now, every time I feel like quitting, I can summon up that voice that says, "You know what? It's just one more step." And who can't take one more step? Everybody can take one more step-

**WHITNEY** What's been your hardest mountain, and why?

**ALISON** My hardest mountain ... Well, Everest, for sure, was the hardest mountain because, um, in 2002, I was the team captain for the first American Women's Everest Expedition. And, we were this high profile expedition sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, and 450 media outlets were following our climb because we were the first team of American women to climb together. And then we missed the summit by a couple hundred feet. And, so-

Then, you come back, and you're just the butt of Jay Leno's opening monologue joke. And how does that feel? And you feel like this big failure, and you had this dream, and you didn't achieve it, and I felt like the whole team was deflated, and we let our sponsor down, and just feeling like we let America down. And then I went back eight years later and tried again. And, for me, it was the hardest climb because I just felt so much pressure to-to get to the top because I felt like, "Oh, God, if I don't make it again, how's that going to look?"

And what people forget is that the summit of any mountain is only the halfway point. It's never ... It can never be the goal. It has to only be the halfway point, because you still have to get yourself back down. So, um that's why most of the deaths that occur on Mount Everest occur after people have reached the summit, because they use everything - people use everything they've got in them to get themselves to the top, and they don't have enough left in them, to get themselves back down. So, that's why most of the deaths actually occur, um, shortly after people have reached the summit, when they're on their way back down. And I thought, "I really have to make it to the summit on the second attempt, but I also know it's-it's only the halfway point." And, so I put a lot of pressure on myself, and I think was stressed out, and I was climbing in honor of a friend of mine that had passed away very suddenly, a girlfriend of mine who I always wanted to climb that mountain with, and she died, just ... She-she actually died, uh, just actually a few months before I left for the mountain. And that was my motivation to go back, after this friend of mine, her name was Meg Berte Owen, after she passed, I was like, "Oh, I always said if I was going to go to Everest, I would go back with Meg. And since she died, I-I want to go back and honor her."

So, I engraved her name in my ice ax and went back to the mountain. And it was hard, because I felt so much pressure and ... climbing in honor of Meg and not wanting to fail a second time, but what I realized when I got to the top of the mountain o-or I should say when I got... Even when I got back down (laughs), making it back home, um, is that-

**WHITNEY** (Laughs)

**ALISON** Standing on top of a mountain doesn't change anything. And, to me, I learned that it's just not important. What's really important are the lessons you learn along the way, when you're fighting like hell to get up there, and then what you're going to do with that information to-to be better going forward. Because every time you get off a mountain, what you have to realize is that, you know, even if you did your absolute best, there's still more mountains to climb. So, you, you know, you got to keep getting out there.

Then there is Peter Sims. The very first episode of 2018. Peter is a terrific collaborator. When you see how connected he is to all of these amazing people, it's easy to assume that this privilege was handed to him. But really, he works very hard to be a good partner. A good collaborator. He shows up, pays attention and provides value.

**WHITNEY** I read on your website that you're an accidental author. At the same time, you seem to have a pattern in your life of getting access to some really, not just access, but collaborating with, working with, connecting with, some very interesting people. This is not something that everyone can do. Have you ever sat down and tried to unpack what it is you're doing that - It's interesting. I think it's one of your superpowers actually.

**PETER** Oh, thank you. I mean, I'm very curious. I think people appreciate that curiosity. I do appreciate that I feel like I could be a good collaborator.

I thought more about collaboration over the past couple years. I'm 41 now. So I'm getting to be pretty ...you know, I'm much farther along at the learning curve, I guess. I was really curious about why it is that certain people are so productive. Especially Steve Jobs. Why is it that so ... How could Pixar and Apple happen? And how could, in addition to that, a good family happen? I don't believe that Steve Jobs is a god by any means. He has many, many flaws and weaknesses. But he was a good collaborator. And I think the people who I know and respect who get a lot done, are really good collaborators.

I would put people I've gotten to know over the past 10 years in that bucket, whether it be Beth Comstock, who's at GE and leaving later this year. Ed Catmull at Pixar. Anne-Marie Slaughter, who's in the New America Foundation. They're really good collaborators. Lenny Mendonca who's at McKinsey and who we worked together to start a social venture. I have worked hard to think about the discipline of good collaboration.

**WHITNEY** What are one or two things that you've learned, to share with people?

**PETER** I think to be a good collaborator, first of all, it's a really crucial two-way street, and generosity has to be at the core. I worked for years, in the financial sector. Obviously with venture capital, in the heart of the financial markets. There are very few people I came across who were generous people. In fact, as I think about my whole 20s, which I did as an exercise. I met one person and worked closely with one person who I thought would be a good life-long potential collaborator.

**WHITNEY** Wow.

**PETER** Ten year period. And if I'd take the ten year period in my 30s, it's dozens. Because I became very focused on people who had a certain value-set and people who were motivated by more creation than transaction. So I think it's both understanding values and understanding mindset.

**WHITNEY** Are there one or two things that you look for that help you recognize signals to you that this is a person that is focused on creation rather than transaction?

**PETER** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**WHITNEY** Can you think of one or two things that you say?

**PETER** Yeah, absolutely.

**WHITNEY** Bingo.

**PETER** I think it's a set of values. I think one crucial value is they have to be generative. They have to be generous people. They have to be givers. They're not takers. If you use Adam Grant's paradigm, which I think is good.

I think they have to be curious, because people who are really curious and really life-long learners are going to be drawn to people who are other curious people who they think they can at least learn from each other in an interaction.

I think that good collaborators also want to get shit done. They don't want to talk. They want to do. Those are the types of people who I'm drawn to.

What's interesting is that my conversation with Peter about the breadcrumbs people leave to help you find great collaborators [led to the online course I created with Richie Norton](#). Which if you [listen to that podcast episode](#) was yet another experience in letting go. Hmm, there's a sub-theme here. This then led to interviewing our newsletter subscribers favorite of the year, [Benjamin Hardy](#).

Speaking with Benjamin and reading his book had a huge impact on me and how I think about environment. The first thing I did after completing this interview was work with my family to clean up and organize our home. Super compelling idea to consider as you set goals for 2019.

**WHITNEY** So what do you mean when you say, if you're required to exert willpower to do something, there is an obvious internal conflict?

**BENJAMIN** Willpower, you know, how I talk about it is I think it comes from like mostly two sources. One is you don't know what you want. Let's just say for example we're talking about you and sugar. You know, there's something you get out of the sugar that you're not getting somewhere else. So what I always say is willpower is for people who don't know what they really want.

You know, if you know what you want, if you're really clear on your why, then the internal debate is over. Obviously there's still the external environment that you have to deal with, but a lot of why willpower exists is because internally a person's not clear on what they want. So like Michael Jordan said, you know, the moment I made a decision, I never thought about it again. Ralph Waldo Emerson said the moment you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen. You know, if you're required to use willpower, you're internally conflicted because you're not 100% committed to what you want to do.

Now, that's kind of where most people stop. Most people say, okay, so I've got to get committed, or I have to like deepen my why, but no one ever actually told them how to do it. A lot of people think that change happens from the inside out, which it sometimes does, but mostly it happens from the outside in.

**WHITNEY** You have a really powerful, compelling personal story, which I think is really interesting, you don't quite share it until the end of the book. I mean, you've alluded to it briefly, but share a little bit more about that personal story, and why that, you know, sort of your origin story is so important in your being able to say, yes, it is your environment that shapes who you are?

**BENJAMIN** Yeah absolutely, so, you know, when I was 11 years old, my parents got divorced, and that divorce crushed, you know, my dad, and sent him off into a tail spin of going deep, deep, deep into the drug world. I mean my parents are amazing, I love them, you know, and I don't judge them, I mean one of the other components of addiction is you can't punish the pain out of people.

In order for addiction to be overcome, there has to be compassion, and uh, and so, I don't judge them, I know that they went through a lot of pain. It obviously in the time, it was really rough, because me and my younger brothers had zero stability. Which led to just barely graduating high school, and then, kind of being stuck outside of high school, a year out of high school and being nowhere. You know, I barely graduated and I found, and then I was spending 12 to 15 hours a day playing World of Warcraft, living at my cousins house, no job.

I saw some of my friends you know leaving for military or like doing missionary service, and other friends going to college, and it was kind of that point in time where I was like, okay, I need to like decide who I want to be, and I was realizing that I couldn't do what I wanted to do with where I was living. Um-

**WHITNEY** Hmm-

**BENJAMIN** And so, I just couldn't make the change, I mean, everyone tells themselves every day that they want to do something, and 90% of the time, they never do it and so I decided to leave, go on my mission and kind of that's where a lot of the big switches flipped in my head. Like I realized that I could decide who I wanted to be. So like, all of your friends know you a certain way, and I'm not saying that you should totally change your peer

group, but it's really hard for people to see you a different way, and so you get locked into being a certain way, unless you can change the context.

I just changed my life, like literally, instantly, when I was in a new situation, spent two years, you know, serving a mission, reading a ton of books, learned how to journal, and just, came home from that experience a totally different person, and when I came home, I just realized that, I would very quickly revert to the person I was if I stayed in that same situation, because most of the people there were still stuck with the same paradigms, the same views, the same behaviors, and they all saw me the same way.

And so, I was a different person and I needed a different environment, so I decided to go to school away from all my high school friends, and uh, you know, then ended up going into graduate school and kind of a very pivotal component of all of this was becoming a foster parent of three kids. So like my wife and I, we've been foster parents of three kids for three years, and it was really the whole becoming a foster parent, like, putting all that external pressure upon myself that allowed me to finally start my writing career.

The potential of a person is based on the demands of their situation. And most people's situation isn't demanding very much of them. Like when I became a foster parent, and in a graduate program, all of a sudden, like this situation demanded me to become way more than I was. It's like necessity became the mother of invention. And that's what led me to start writing and becoming very successful in my writing very fast wasn't because I had this, these innate gifts, it's because my situation literally required me to succeed. And then I've just been writing ever since.

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As we've pulled this episode together, I've been reminded again of something that happens when you create a new thing - a book, a podcast episode, or whatever it may be. Once you create it and send it out in the world, it isn't yours anymore. It belongs to the people who listen or read and have their own experience with that thing that has been created. Our hope is that you are living a better life because of these experiences.

Now, to wrap up, I asked our team about their favorite episodes. Like you, they have their own experiences while listening. Over and over again. So it was interesting to hear which episodes really stuck with them.

Libby Newman loved the episode with [Richie Norton](#). His energy and his personal story.

Whitney Jobe really responded to [Harold O'Neal](#) and [Dave Hollis](#). "Dave because he was at the pinnacle in his field, and chose to disrupt himself, which many don't have the courage to do. Harold because of his hypnotic delivery and his talent for explaining music in an understandable way."

Emilie Davis, says, "One of my favorite episodes [Patty McCord](#)--probably because what she says is so applicable to my life! I love how she makes communication a bedrock of how she manages, encouraging everyone to understand how their "cog" fits into the whole. And taking shame away from people changing jobs. She said, "If it's not fulfilling--the reason why you're doing it--consider stopping."

And Macy Robison said, "I love so many, but if I had to choose, it's [Dave Meltzer](#). When we recorded that interview, I really needed to hear a lot of the things the two of you talked about around gratitude and abundance. A life changing episode for me."

Thank you to all of you for changing our lives. The podcast has grown considerably this year, and that is thanks to you listening, sharing episodes, leaving reviews, and [subscribing](#). Next year, we are going to have a number of episodes just for our subscribers, so if you haven't already subscribed, [do it now](#).

Again, we are so happy you are here, and can't wait to share with you what we have in store for 2019.

I'm Whitney Johnson  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.