

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 103: TASHA EURICH

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. My guest is New York Times bestselling author, musical theater nerd and organizational psychologist, Dr. Tasha Eurich.

Whitney: Welcome to the show, Tasha.

Tasha: Thanks for having me, Whitney.

Whitney: Where did you grow up and what did you want to be when you grew up?

Tasha: Uh, well, based on your introduction of me, it's probably not surprising. I grew up in Denver and for the first, I'd say 15 or so years of my life, I wanted to be a musical theater nerd professionally. Um, I just have always loved the theater, I love singing and, but I also, am a third-generation entrepreneur and I had the pleasure and the honor of growing up watching my mom build a very successful company from scratch. And I would love to just go to work with her and see her in action, and she's always been my hero. So that was actually something that I think has always been there, and that ended up being exactly what I did.

Whitney: Well, what kind of business did your mom have?

Tasha: She started the first school in the country that trained and placed nannies for families that were do ... you know, both parents were working or single parents. Um, and she actually kind of became, the organization was somewhere where a lot of the, the Hollywood movie stars would source their nannies. So it was just uh, an amazing ride and watching her go from literally nothing to the first of its kind of a business like that was just really inspiring for me.

Whitney: That's so exciting, Tasha. So you said third generation, so your mom was an entrepreneur, your grandmother or your grandfather, what, tell us about that.

Tasha: My paternal grandpa had a plumbing business in Bay City, Michigan, which is where my whole family is originally from. Um, so just, you know, salt of the earth people, great values, um, and really got to have those modeled for me growing up, you know, I'm very lucky.

Whitney: Yeah. Okay. So musical theater, when you say musical theater nerd, was the aspiration you wanted to star in Broadway plays, you want-

Tasha: Oh, of course.

Whitney: ... produce them. Okay. All right, of course. Of course, you wanted to star. All right.

Tasha: Of course. Yeah. I majored in theater in college, and I actually recognized that I ended up being a lot less talented as an actor, as I was a director. So that towards the end of my, my time that I did theater in my life, I kind of pivoted a little bit just based on the feedback I was getting, which we'll talk about, right [laughs].

Whitney: Yes, we will.

Tasha: So that, that directing actually ended up being very helpful in running a business.

Whitney: Okay. So one more question on the directing. What play would you like to direct?

Tasha: Ooh, I don't know. I think I ... for me, I love classic musicals, like even classic musicals from the 80s and 90s. And I love it when, um, directors sort of reimagine those. So, you know, taking something like Miss Saigon or Les Mis or Rent and kind of re-imagining it is, is really exciting to me. But in my fake directing career, I think I would take whatever I could get.

Whitney: [Laughs] got it. Okay. So we'll put Miss Saigon, Les Mis or Rent on the list.

Tasha: Perfect.

Whitney: All right, last question on the music, although feel free to circle back to it Tasha. What is your favorite song ever to sing? Like the song that you, when you sing it, it just speaks to you in the deepest, deepest level.

Tasha: Oh my goodness. It's so hard to choose.

Whitney: All right-

Tasha: I think.

Whitney: ... then pick one or two.

Tasha: Yeah, there's, uh, um ... there's a song from Ragtime that I did for a cabaret in college called "Back to Before" and it's just this sort of, you know, like classic soaring Ballad. Um, so those are kind of my favorite, just really juicy, um, ballads to, to sink your teeth into as a singer.

Whitney: Huh. Okay. All right. So we'll have to include that in the show notes-

Tasha: Oh, perfect.

Whitney: So that people can listen to, um ... if you ever recording of yourself, feel free, but we'll also just record or, or link to it on YouTube. All right, so you have written a book called Insight, is not your first book, you've written several books, you're a New York Times bestselling author. Today I want to focus on Insight. I, I've read it, it's fascinating. I want to know why this topic became interesting to you. What was the question that you wanted to ask that you said, I need to spend the next 10 years of my life thinking about this idea?

Tasha: So the topic of the book is, is self-awareness. And I think in some sense it's been something I've been interested in for my, you know, entire life. Even, you know, we're talking about sort of like our teenage years, um, being really fascinated with how people saw me and how I saw other people and just sort of how we move through the world as social beings. But for me, my passion really ignited, um, when I started coaching executives and CEOs. And I've been doing that for about 15 years now. And really for me, I kept seeing example after example of very brave, um, committed coaching clients who wanted to see themselves clearly, who wanted to clarify who they were, what they stood for, who wanted to know how the people that worked for them saw them. And I just kept seeing this over and over where doing that, you know, among some other things, when, when I worked with my coaching clients, they just became successful and confident and, you know, from a sort of financial perspective and an emotional one.

And, and so for me, what I really was wondering after I saw this so many times was what do we know scientifically about self-awareness? And I remember it was, uh, it was a Christmas holiday, uh, probably about six years ago now when I was kind of bored and, you know, all my clients were on vacation. And so I just started to do some literature searches in the, um, in the psychology world to see what the research was, was actually telling us, you know, what do we know about how to figure out who we are and how to discover how we're seen and sort of why that matters and how to improve it. And I was really surprised at how little we knew.

And it's funny because I think self-awareness is such a, a, you know, it's a management buzzword now, but ultimately we actually didn't know very much from a scientific standpoint. So sort of naively, I kind of had this moment of like, well, I'll figure it out. Um, [laughs] we put our research team together and ended up being a very difficult to study for a number of reasons. But I'm really excited with a lot of the research we've done because we've discovered that so many of the commonly accepted pieces of wisdom, um, are actually not true. And so there's a lot of value in, in researching this to figure out what the truth really is.

Whitney: So you, so you had clients that once they became self-aware, they, uh, were able to improve and become significantly more effective. And you just said you had this question that was kind of tickling your brain, but the more you asked the question, the more interested you became.

Tasha: Exactly. And like any really meaty topic, uh, the more I asked the question, for a while, the less I realized I knew. Um, and I think that anytime you're in that type of a situation, you've got to follow the lead where it takes you.

Whitney: So what does it mean to be self-aware? It's one of those words that you hear and I think we all think we know what it means, but we probably don't know what it means. So what does it mean?

Tasha: So it took us, uh, almost a year in our research team to even define what self-awareness was, which was pretty crazy. But what we arrived at was, uh, self-awareness is basically made up of two types of knowledge about ourselves. Number one is knowing who we are internally, and number two is knowing how other people see us. And we named those internal and external self-awareness respectively. But what was really interesting, at least from my perspective is those two types of self-knowledge, right? Seeing yourself internally, knowing who you are, what you stand for and knowing how other people saw you on the outside were completely independent. So we need both types of knowledge to be self-aware, um, but they're totally different skill sets and actions. And we also found that people tend to have one that's more developed than the other. Um, but it's great

because it provides a roadmap of here the two types of self-knowledge we need to cultivate in order to get all of those benefits that we talked about.

Whitney: All right. So if I'm hearing you correctly, there ... you can be really internally self-aware, but externally have a big blind spot and you can also be very ... have a good sense of what people think of you and how they perceive you, but also have a big blind spot internally. Is that-

Tasha: Yeah.

Whitney: ... is that what you just said?

Tasha: And I think, you know, when you start to think about it, most people we see these archetypes and, and we are these archetypes. The first one you mentioned, I call the intro-specter. So it's somebody who may have self-examination as a hobby, you know, they love going to therapy or they read, they devour self-help books or um, you know, they really like to journal about themselves, but ultimately they're not spending nearly as much energy understanding how they're coming across. And so that disconnect can hurt their relationships, it can hurt their leadership effectiveness and so on. And then the other side of the spectrum is, is sort of equally interesting, I call those the pleasers. And those are people who are so focused on how others see them, to be seen positively, to meet others' expectations of them, that they either sort of don't know what's in their own best interest or they lose sight of it in, in the quest to satisfy other people's expectations.

So to me, I think it becomes really interesting when you start thinking about those archetypes. Obviously you can be high on both and low on both as well.

Whitney: [Laughing] Preferably not low on both-

Tasha: Yes, preferably high on both and the world would be a better place.

Whitney: Absolutely. So you talk in the book about being a self-awareness unicorn. I'm about to ask you a really tough question. Do you consider yourself to be one, and if so, can you pinpoint the moment when you did become one?

Tasha: Oh Gosh, uh, whatever the opposite of a self-awareness unicorn is sort of what I discovered about myself. Let me just sort of take a step back. So what we've discovered in our research is that 95% of people believe that they're self-aware, but only about 10 to 15% of us actually are. And when I first started this research, we decided that we wanted to find people who didn't start out as self-aware, but who made really remarkable transformations in their level of self-knowledge because we wanted to say, you know, what are these people doing differently? And throughout the entire process, it was just one lesson after another for me of like, Oh, I'm in that 80%, I thought I knew myself pretty well. You know, I always say that on a good day, 80% of us are lying to ourselves about whether we're lying to ourselves.

And that discovery actually ended up being one of the most powerful precursors of increasing my own self-awareness. And that's what the journey is. The first step is to say, okay, realistically, I think I know myself pretty well, um, but what if I didn't? And what if I instead started to think about all of the things I could discover to help me be a better person? You know, a better leader, a better family member to the people around me. And so I didn't necessarily, you know, there's some discoveries that were a little disheartening, but I actually see that as a really important step for all of us in our self-awareness.

Whitney: I have to say, I think it's really funny. I remember on for our listeners, Tasha and I know each other, we've met prior to this interview and I remember we were having a conversation and I made some statement like yeah I'm pretty self-aware, and like 10 minutes later you trotted out this statistic of like 80 to 90% think they're self-aware and 10 to 15% aren't or are. And I was just laughing so hard cause I was like yeah I probably fall in that 80%. But it was just funny to me that right as I said that. And so one of the questions I had for you is I know you, I think you talk about, um, in your book about how the, um, the less competent people are, the more competent they think they are. And so I wonder if it's also true that the less self-aware we are, the more we think we're self-aware. Are you finding that in your research?

Tasha: It is a bit of a paradox. Um, what's interesting to me is if you ask someone, are you self-aware, as we know 95% of people will say yes. But as you start to drill down into some of those specifics, um, we found for example that people who are self-aware tend to know seven general types of things about themselves. So they know what they value, they know their passions, they know their aspirations, they know what environment they fit in, they know their patterns, their reactions, the impacts they have on other people. Um, what's interesting about that is once you start to ask those specific questions, people actually tend to be a little bit more reflective and honest with themselves.

So it's less evaluative, you know, to say, are you self-aware or not? Nobody wants to not be self-aware. But if I'm asked a question about, you know, do you have a set of clearly defined values that dictate how you want to live your life, that becomes a question that, you know, maybe is a little bit easier for us to answer. And that was part of our, our struggle is, you know, we couldn't just recruit participants and say, "Hey, are you self-aware? Come be a part of our study." Because we knew that, um, you know, again, it's, it's a lot more complicated than that. So we found that by fleshing out what exactly self-aware people knew and also by getting other readings of our research subjects that, that was how we found the, the actually self-aware people.

Whitney: Right, the internal and the external.

Tasha: Exactly.

Whitney: So something that was really surprising from your book is that you said that journaling can actually be counter-productive to self-awareness if not done properly. Um, can you just talk to us about how you can journal in such a way that it is productive?

Tasha: Absolutely. I'm sure the, the, um, journaling enthusiasts probably just heard you say that in like a wave of fear washed over them. And that was definitely what I felt when I first stumbled upon some of this research in, in our findings and work that other people have done. But if you sort of think about it, journaling can take a lot of forms. And for some people it takes the form of almost being a place to vent to say, oh, this was bad about my day and I'm very upset about this. And we sort of convince ourselves that we're, we're working through things. And generally, the, the sort of philosophy that will help us be more productive when we're journaling is to not over emphasize the emotional aspects of it. So what the research on this has found is if we focus on rationally processing what happens to us, so that kind of logical left brain. And then if we, if we explore our emotions, um, but not overly so, that's when we start to get insight from journaling.

And so, you know, it's kind of like the Goldilocks thing is you don't want too much of either being rational or emotional, you don't want too little. If you can balance those two things, that can be, um, sort of a prescription for success. Another thing that's interesting that we've discovered from other researchers, James Pennebaker is one of them. He's kind of

like the guru of, of this area, is to not journal every day because that actually sometimes can lead us down that road of, of overthinking or over-emotionalizing things. Um, so really thinking about it, if, if you have something you want to think about or work through versus putting that pressure on yourself to do it every day.

Whitney: Interesting. So Tasha, do you have an example that you could share with us of, or just kind of scripted for us a little bit of, you know, you're talking about the events and using your logical left brain and then you're exploring the emotion behind it, but you're not over-emotionalizing it. Do you have, does anything come to mind really quickly that you could talk us through, so people who are listening can say, oh yeah, I know exactly what she means?

Tasha: Let me give you an example from, from our unicorns actually. So, um, one, one woman, one of our interview subjects shared with us a situation where, um, she was journaling about an event that happened to her where she and a friend of hers were having a conversation and she made the friend cry and she said, I had absolutely no idea what I had done to make that happen. So in her journal entry, she was focusing on, first of all, here was my perception of the situation. Here's how it made me feel. Um, but then she asked herself kind of more of a rational question, which is what must that situation have felt like for my friends?

And by taking that different perspective, um, and sort of, you know, again, sort of rationally exploring that, she was able to figure out what she thought she had done, um, to make that friend upset. And that ended up being a very helpful insight in going back to this friend and having a conversation and apologizing for what she thinks she had done. And so I think that's a really good example where we can and should process the things that happen, but in a sort of focused way where we're really trying to use the experience as a way to see our situation either more, in a more complete way, in a more holistic way, or even just in a way that, um, we're getting outside of our own perspective.

Whitney: And what you said about that was interesting, if we bring that back to your earlier comment about self-awareness is having, um, the ability, internal awareness and external awareness. Um, the initial way of journaling is just about internal awareness, at least the tip of it. And by having her reflect and think about, well, how was this other person experiencing this, then she's going to the external awareness. And it sounds like from what you're saying, you put those two pieces together and you start to be self-aware and then the journaling ends up being very productive.

Tasha: Yup. Well said. Exactly.

Whitney: Okay. All right. So next question for you. Um, so there's, there's a passage in the book. I would love if you would read that paragraph where it starts the bottom line, page 101 and then talk to us about it.

Tasha: "So the bottom line, why questions draw us to our limitations, what questions help us see our potential, why questions stir up negative emotions, what questions keep us curious, why questions trap us in our past, what questions help us create a better future? And making the transition from why to what can be the difference between victim hood and growth."

Whitney: Boom. I love that, Tasha. All right. Talk to us about this.

Tasha: This was in my mind, one of the most surprising discoveries we made, at least initially. Um, we discovered early on that, ready for this, the people who spent the most time thinking

about themselves were actually the least self-aware. And not only were they a little least self-aware, they were also the most depressed, the most anxious, the least happy, um, less satisfied with their jobs and relationships, less in control of their life.

And this really threw us for a loop. I mean, honestly at the beginning of this process I was questioning is self-awareness actually even a good thing in the first place. But as we drilled down, we started to look at how our self-awareness unicorns introspected or self-reflected, and what they were doing differently than the rest of us. And thankfully what we discovered was it's not that self-reflection is inherently bad, it's just that when most of us do it, we're making a huge mistake that is sucking the insight right out of the process.

So what we learned was when we went through, you know, this is hundreds and hundreds of pages of transcripts of interviews with our Unicorns. We discovered that the word why appeared less than 150 times, and the word what appeared more than a thousand times. And so that was kind of interesting. So we drilled down and what we discovered was the self-awareness Unicorns were almost completely taking why questions off the table.

So let me give you an example. Um, there was one self-awareness unicorn who got a brand new boss and he and she were just butting heads, but instead of asking something like, why are we like oil and water, which would be a normal self-reflection question, he instead asked himself, what can I do to show her I'm the best person for this job? And the profound difference in those two questions, all of a sudden we figured it out. We said, oh my goodness, why questions are, um, they sort of tempt us to go into this spiral of self-loathing or overthinking-

Whitney: A black hole.

Tasha: Yeah, a black hole. I love that. It's an emotional black hole. But what questions help us be action-oriented and insight-oriented and they help us sort of move from that victim-hood to a sense of empowerment of, you know, I can do something about this.

Whitney: That, I would say as I think about and reflect on the book, that for me was my biggest, one of my biggest insights is this idea of ... I tend to be a why person, and I've found myself thinking, okay, what would a what question look like? How can I use what in this situation so that I can focus on the opportunity for growth rather than being a victim? So, so thank you from this one listener/interviewer for that, um, really, um, very, very, very helpful, um, piece of research.

So I want to go back to theater one more time. Do you think that your experience, um, with inhabiting characters and having to analyze the world from a different point of view, the viewpoint of the character, might have influenced your desire or interest in studying self-awareness? It's kind of a why question, but I'm asking it anyway.

Tasha: Yeah, it's funny, Whitney, I have never thought about that until you just said that. And I think that you're absolutely right. And that's, uh, another example of where other people, um, and the way they see us sort of more objectively and from a fresh perspective can really give us some powerful insights about who we are and how we're seen. But yeah, I mean that actually kind of blew me away. I think you're absolutely right.

Whitney: Another thing that you talked about in the book is people with teenagers are more self-aware. And this isn't really a question, it's more just an observation because I have teenagers. We have a 22 year old and an 18 year old. And the other day our daughter said something to me and I'm actually not ready to reveal what she said, but she said, mom, you say that all the time. And I realized that, I did say it all the time, but I didn't know I said it

all the time. And the fact that I said it was revealing to me something about how I see the world in a way that I don't want to see, and yet she just showed me to myself. And I do, I just wanted to say, you know, shout out to teenagers everywhere because they really do, do us a huge favor in helping us, if we will let them, if we don't shut them down, um, helping us be more self-aware. And I don't know if you have any other thoughts on that, but it just really struck me as interesting.

Tasha: Yeah. They can really drop those truth bombs, can't they?

Whitney: They really can. They really can. Um, another question I have for you, and this is, this is you putting on your organizational psychologist hat practitioner. Um, so in, in the work that I do, we get people who we talk about, you know, are you the low end of your learning curve, are you in the steep part, are you in the ... on the high end? And I've had a number of managers come to me and say, "Well I've got so and so and from my perspective there are probably in the sweet spot, maybe at the low end and they've come to me and they're saying they're in the sweet spot trending toward the high end. What do I do?"

And so I'm wondering if you were to have someone come to you and say this is my perception of myself, and you're saying, oh actually that's my perception of you is very, very different. How do you open up that kind of conversation with someone just more generally speaking?

Tasha: And that's, that's a really important question because um, again there's so many paradoxes of self-awareness and another one we've discovered is people who are highly self-aware are able to hold, to hold and question the views they have about themselves and also to be open to other ways of seeing themselves. There's a great F. Scott Fitzgerald quote, that's something like the definition of true intelligence is to hold two opposing views in your mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. I think it's a really good example. Um, and so from my perspective, you know, you sort of think about it as data, um, to, to say, you know, how do you see yourself? Do you mind if I offer you a perspective on what I've seen. And in terms of feedback, obviously, we want to follow all the rules of being, um, you know, non-evaluative, we want to mention the behavior itself.

But I do think that with a kind and compassionate but, but highly specific and candid approach, we can help people maybe discover another way of seeing themselves. And, you know, especially in the example you gave where it's a, it's a manager helping to move their employees through the learning curve. Um, those conversations kind of have to happen. And I think if you treat it as data, even just to say something, don't even say, can I give you some feedback? Just say, do you mind if I offer an observation of something that I've seen? Um, I think that that's down the right path as much as we can present that data without creating that defensiveness. I think that's the name of the game.

Whitney: Interesting. You've, you've used the term non-evaluative a few times, um, for I, I think I know what you mean when you're saying that, I wonder though, but I'm not sure. And I suspect some people might not know exactly what you mean with that term of art. Could you define for us, when you're saying non-evaluative, evaluative, what do you mean?

Tasha: Let me give you an example. So let's say, uh, you have a peer and you're in a meeting with that peer and you kind of come away from the meeting and go, "Oh man, wow. They were being really aggressive in that meeting." That's an example of an evaluative comment where you're not actually focusing on the behavior, you're focusing on your interpretation or your label of that behavior. So if you're not careful, what most people would do is say, I must give this person feedback, right? So then you go to them and you say you are being really aggressive in that meeting, and lo and behold, they're pissed off at you, [laughs]

right? And so the conversation doesn't go well. And then you say, oh, they're not self-aware or they don't want to hear feedback. But if you think about it a different way to say, okay, it's my perception that that person was being aggressive, but what exactly was he or she doing to create that perception?

You might say, Oh, um, they interrupted me three or four times, or they banged their fist on the table, you know, two times when they were trying to make a point. Those things are less evaluative and more behavioral. And I think it, it becomes a completely different conversation where in the first instance you're, you know, if you get that feedback, you're defending yourself, I'm not aggressive. Um, but in the second instance you're saying, Oh, you know what, I did do that. I don't know if I noticed that I did that, but thank you for that data. Um, in my, in my mind, that's the key difference there. And as much as we can have that sort of behavioral, it is what it is, you can't argue with it as easily, um, data. That's what's, that's what's truly helpful.

Whitney: Yeah. And you're pulling the emotion out of it as well.

Tasha: Exactly.

Whitney: All right. So as we start to wrap up, for people who are listening and, uh, besides reading your book, what ... people who are saying to themselves, you know what, I am really intrigued and, um, you know, I just had a coaching client the other day say to me, "I want to become more self-aware."

Tasha: Awesome.

Whitney: What are one or two, and I'm going to give him your book, by the way. But in addition to getting your book, what are one or two things, um, actionable things that people can do right now today after they listen to this podcast that they can become more self-aware, maybe one internal, um, internal self-awareness tip and one external?

Tasha: Got it. I'm actually going to give you three because the first one-

Whitney: I'll take it.

Tasha: Yes, the first one sort of, um, helps influence the other two. So the first is if you're curious, how self-aware am I really, we, I'm really excited about this. We put this together for the release of *Insight* a couple of years ago and we've had, um, I think at this point hundreds of thousands of people that have taken it. But it's, it's an, it's ... we call it the insight quiz and it takes five minutes. So if you go to insight-quiz.com there are, I think, 14 questions that you fill out, you then send a survey to someone who knows you well who answers those questions on how they see you. And once the system has both of those data points, it will send you a report of really your high level of self-awareness plus a couple of tips to improve both your internal and your external self-awareness.

And you know, I tell people please don't make any major life decisions based on this because it's really just a subset of our, of our much longer self-awareness assessment. But I think that can be pretty eye-opening. So I would say that's, you know, one very fast tangible thing.

To improve your internal self-awareness, there's a really great tip that we learned from our unicorns that I use every day and it's called the daily check in. And basically it's, it's designed to help you think about how your day went without overthinking it. So at the end

of the day, whether you're driving home from work, you're on the train, you're getting ready for bed, ask yourself three questions. The first question is, what went well today? Number two is what didn't go quite as well today. And number three is how can I be smarter tomorrow? And the whole exercise shouldn't take any more than a couple of minutes, but if you think about the incremental insight you gain every day, it's, it's pretty incredible.

The external self-awareness tool I'll give you, um, is one that probably will feel scary, but I think can be one of the most positive transformational self-awareness, um, actions you can take. And I call it the dinner of truth. And this was developed by a communication's professor named Josh Meissner, who had all of his communication students over the years do this. And basically what it entails is you take someone, uh, someone who's close to you, who you want to improve your relationship with, out to dinner, and you ask them a very simple question and the question is, what do I do that is most annoying to you? And then guess what, you listen [laughs].

Um, and I've done this. I would never suggest that my clients or readers do anything that I haven't done multiple times. And what I'll say just quickly about it is I'm always surprised at how affirming and empowering that conversation is every single time I've had it. So I think, um, I would even challenge your listeners to do one of those things. And if you want to be a super overachiever and really make a huge impact, doing all three does really ... it really doesn't take a lot of time, but I think it can give you an exponential improvement in how you see yourself.

Whitney: So Tasha, why or how, you said affirming and empowering-

Tasha: Yeah.

Whitney: ... those were not the, um, the, uh, are those adjectives? I think their adjectives, they might be adverbs. I think there are adjectives. Why those words? Um, so to go from I do something that annoys you, you tell me that, and now I feel affirmed and empowered. Can you just give us a little bit more color?

Tasha: I'm so glad you asked. So I think when people ponder this exercise here, here's what we think is going to happen, right? So let's say you take your best friend out to dinner, and you ask them this question, and she says something like, uh, "You know, I'm really glad you asked, what I want to tell you today is I never really liked you, um, you've never really been my friends, and I don't want to ever speak to you again." And we sort of come up with these just complete disaster scenarios. And what we hear ends up being so, so different.

So here's one example. The very first time I did this, I intentionally picked my most crotchety friend cause I thought, you know, I'm going to tell people to do this, I need to do it just all the way. His name's Mike. And so during our dinner of truth here, here was what he shared with me. Instead of saying, I never really liked you, I don't want to be your friend anymore. He said, "Well, here's something I've noticed. I've noticed that I really love you in person, but I don't really like you as much online."

And I thought, huh. Well what I love about that is, you know, he's not damning me as a person, he's providing a data point. The data point probably has a lot of truth to it. And so that actually ended up setting me down a course where I was really thinking about how am I showing up on social media? And I talked about this a lot in the book as being sort of a, a me-former versus an informer, um, focusing on how great we are versus, um, helping other people have a better day. That was so actionable and so concrete, and it actually informed, um, so many positive changes that I think I made.

And so that's just one example. But what ends up happening is it's affirming because that person is brave enough to tell us the truth. They'll usually see a lot of really nice stuff about us, um, and usually they'll give us something very actionable that guess what? We don't have to do anything about it if we don't want to. Our friend Marshall Goldsmith is really famous for this, he says, you know, "Just because you get feedback, um, it doesn't mean that you have to be a slave to it. You get to decide what you do with that information." But, um, knowing, in my opinion, is always better than not knowing. And that's really what the dinner of truth helps us do.

Whitney: Hmm. That's really good. All right, so I'm going to say it's my last question, but I reserve the right for it to be my penultimate question. Um, as you think about all this work that you have been doing for the last really, it sounds like close to 10 years, what has been the biggest change in yourself that you've seen, that you say, you know, to, to quote a Broadway musical, "My life has been changed for good." How has your life really changed in a very, very positive and deep way because of this work that you have been doing and, and, and study that you have undertaken?

Tasha: So I think the, the biggest positive improvement I feel like I've experienced is being better at taking other people's perspectives in the moment. And what I mean by that is, you know, again, being a theater person, I can be a little dramatic, I can be a little over reactive, um, you know, and I think we all, when, when people say and do things that we don't love, we sort of tell ourselves all these stories about it.

But what I really have been able to do is in the moment instead of, and I'm not perfect by any means, but I think I've had like probably a 50% improvement, which I'll take. But in that moment, instead of sort of flying off the handle or saying something snarky, I can take a deep breath and maybe even just ask myself, what is the positive intention behind what I just heard? Or, um, you know, how does this other person see the situation in a different way than I see it?

And, and just that single moment of being able to get out of my own sort of emotionality and perspective I think has, has improved my relationships so much that I've had a couple of people tell me, I'm really glad that you wrote that book, you know, because this gave us the opportunity to have some really honest conversations. Um, and I'm really proud of that. And I think, you know, again, I'm, I'm never going to be perfect, but it's, it's something I'm, I'm happy to say that I think it's gotten a lot better.

Whitney: Oh, that's something to be proud of. Really, really marked improvement in an area that matters to you and strengthen your relationships. Tasha Eurich it has been a pleasure to have you on the show today. Any final words?

Tasha: Final words would be in the journey of self-awareness, uh, we're all in this together. And the beauty of what we've discovered from our, our self-awareness unicorns is that in order to become dramatically more self-aware, we don't have to wait for huge insights that completely changed the way we see ourselves. If we can aim for small incremental improvement every day, every week, every month, every year, the sum total of that effect can really be game changing. And so I think if we can take that pressure off ourselves, realize that we all have work to do, it's positive work by, by putting the time and the commitment and, and having the courage to do it, we're going to be all the better for it. So it can be daunting, but I think it's some of the most important work any of us will do in our lives.

Whitney: Thank you again, Tasha.

Tasha: My pleasure.

So many good takeaways here. But I think the biggest for me is the idea of Why vs. What questions. Which stated another way is the difference between acting and being acted upon. Why turns the focus on yourself. What focuses on what you have control over. Why questions take us into victimhood. What questions empower us.

And the realization, that like the other habits we've talked about recently, self-awareness is a habit that can be built little by little. Like the compound effect of habits that James Clear talked about, getting 1% better each day can make a huge difference.

Practical tip:

The next time you get feedback that doesn't feel great, don't ask Why did they say that? But what is the positive intention behind what I just heard?

Now to thank you for listening, we have a copy of Tasha's book to give away. Send us an email at wj@whitneyjohnson.com and let us know which of her action items you tried, took the quiz, did the daily check in or did a dinner of truth and what happened?

Thank you again to Tasha Eurich 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.