

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 116: ANTONIO NIETO-RODRIGUEZ

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

Our guest today is Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, a leading expert on project management, author of *The Project Revolution*. Antonio is passionate about helping organizations and individuals succeed with their projects.

Whitney: Welcome Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez to the podcast. We are delighted to have you.

Antonio: Thank you, Whitney. The pleasure is mine. I'm accomplishing a dream today being in your podcast.

Whitney: Aw, that's very sweet. Well, we are so happy to have you. Um, so let's start off by asking you, where were you born, and when you were a child, what did you think you wanted to be when you grow up?

Antonio: I was born in Madrid in Spain and my father used to work for the Spanish airlines so he was moved to Mexico when I was two years, so I spent 10 years in Mexico. Then we moved to Italy, I spent four years in Rome, then I went to Germany, then the US, so, I'm Spanish, I'm, I'm, I'm really happy to be Spanish but I consider myself a very global person, um, thanks to that kind of experience which, um, in a sense, is just good luck.

Whitney: How many languages do you speak, Antonio?

Antonio: Well, fluent, about five, uh, Whitney. Spanish, of course, Italian, English, French, German and a bit of Dutch.

Whitney: Okay. So, you're a global citizen is what you're saying.

Antonio: Exactly.

Whitney: But you call Spain your home. I don't know if you knew this, but I was born in Madrid. Did I tell you that?

Antonio: Mm, wow, no, I've never heard that, Whitney. Really?

Whitney: Yeah. I was born in Madrid, so I feel like I'm Spanish even though I only lived there until I was six-months-old, but, nonetheless, so I feel this kinship with you because you're Spanish as well. Okay, so, Antonio, what did you want to be when you grow up?

Antonio: Well, I wanted to be a sports player, football, soccer player. That was my dream. I was... gifted, I was not too bad, but my mother, you know, in Spain the mothers are very strong characters. She said I should not do sports. I should study and have a career to be a decent person, so that's what I did. I don't know if I would be a star today, but I just follow the advice of my mother.

Whitney: Was that hard to do? I mean, you know, it sounds all very antiseptic now. Like, "My mom said to do it and I did it." But was that a struggle for you?

Antonio: It was a struggle, yes. It was a struggle, and... but I think, yes, the chances of being successful in sports are, are so limited that, uh, probably was the good decisions to do, but yes, I struggled for a few years.

Whitney: So, when did the switch start to come? So, how old were you when you started to think about college and university and what you would do there?

Antonio: My dream was to be an architect. I loved design, I loved creativity, but with my background where I was speaking so many languages and I went for something more transversal, like I did business and economics at, Spain, in Spain in Madrid, at the university. I wanted to go back to Spain to study in university and, and so I went for that and then I started working for Price Waterhouse.

Whitney: When did this idea of projects started tickling your brain?

Antonio: When you work for a consulting company, most of the work is done through projects. Projects that you carry for clients, telecom or energy or public sector in... I started from the bottom so I was basically just bringing coffee to the project leaders, and I found project leaders and project managers being so amazing people. They were coordinating, like, a bit like I was on the football soccer team, but they were coordinating so many people, there was so much pressure, uh, and there were always delays. And I started to wonder why projects are late most of the time and why such a struggle. So, I became very curious very early in my career around is still.

And, and then you keep progress and at one point you become project manager, and I was project leader in PWC and the same I was traveling to, to make projects work and, and then I also came to the kind of realization that if managing one project is difficult, companies were running three, four hundred projects at the same time, so that was a big mess too. So it became an interest and I, I launched the first global research for PWC in 2004 to understand better, um, what's behind projects and, and the complexity of managing one project or 100 projects at the same time.

Whitney: So, in your career, you've been fired. Can you tell us a story-

Antonio: Oof.

Whitney: ... about what led to that firing? Because I think it's an important part of your story.

Antonio: Sure. I'm, I'm happy to share this painful moments. I realize that for a while you don't talk but then, um, I, I often do that even when I'm talking to large audiences and, and my story, I guess, will resonate with people is, in a partnership, uh, we all wanted to be partners.

In the PWC if you grow up in the company and you go through the career path, uh, you come to a point where you're close to become a partner, basically owner of that company, and I was close to become a partner, and, and, and to become a partner you need to have like a business plan or a business case - an idea that the partners will back and say, "Well, we're going to make business with this person and, and we're going to fund it and support it and we make him partner or her partner."

And my big idea, Whitney, was, we should develop project services, project advisory service for PWC, because it was a challenge I saw everywhere. So I prepare my keynote or a speech, um, to the partners, very serious people, I met about 12 of them at the same time. It was like a jury and I was very convinced I could make it. I love my topic, I had research, I had cases, I had good projections. And so I did the presentation. I was super happy.

I went out partying, Whitney, I went out partying because I was so happy, uh, that I could become partner, and the day after the managing partner from PWC calls me in and say, "Antonio, I want to talk to you." And I, of course, I run to his office and waiting for the good news, and, and then I sit there, and his name is Roger, and he says, "Antonio, we loved your presentation. We loved your passion. However, you're fired." And-

Whitney: Whoa!

Antonio: Yeah! I could not believe it. I was, "Can you repeat that, Roger, please," and... And, and that was the reason for that decision from the partners is they thought project management was something a bit, uh, I don't know if the word exist, mundane or tactical or not fancy for a consulting firm to set. It's anybody can do projects. You can find project managers very cheap. Is not something interesting for us. Is not a help topics, so it was a big drama for me spending almost 10 years in the field and, and then I, it questioned my career.

I, I really struggled for two, three months to say, "Well, should I just drop it and go into marketing or sales or finance, uh, areas where the career path is more clear, where there's recognition about the value of this, uh, the professions, or stay in what I like?" And that was the big decision I had to take when I was about, what was it? Maybe 32, 33. Yeah, I had to make that call.

Whitney: What did you do?

Antonio: Well, it was tough to decide Whitney, to be honest, is, uh, you know where these are moments where you need to take a big decision and feels uncomfortable and, and that's where it felt, but I follow my gut, my, my passion, basically. I did try and say, "Well, I'm going to focus on projects, I think there's a big area here. If partners don't understand the value of projects, I will teach them. I will show them. I will learn why they don't understand it and how can they use it better and, and appreciate the, the, the value that projects brings to organizations, to individuals, to entrepreneurs..."

So I did, I think, the right choice. It didn't look like the right choice at that time, but, uh, looking backwards, I'm very, very happy about that.

Whitney: It's so interesting, Antonio, 'cause that's what disruption looks like, right? You're in a place and you get pushed off the curve that you're on and a step back, um, it's a huge step back, but then it allows you to slingshot forward, and what I find fascinating from the theory of disruption is that, this was an opportunity for you to play where no one else is playing. You were taking on market risk. No one saw the value of projects...

Antonio: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Whitney: You're, like you said, this is, you know, 20 years ago, no one saw the value of it. And, was it 20? Yeah, it was 20 years ago, right?

Antonio: Yeah. Yep.

Whitney: No one saw the value when you went and decided, "All right, do I go and they push me off? Do I go do something traditional that people do value, or do I play where someone else... other people aren't playing?" Do you double down and you double down, and now, today, you are the world's premier expert on project management, which I just think is fascinating and, and wonderful, and so, so, kudos to you.

Antonio: Thank you.

Whitney: So what I'd like to do now is, um, read a quick quote that you included in your book that is fascinating to me. It's, you quoted Roger Martin. I'm actually going to read two quotes because I think they're both interesting. He says, "At least 80%," you're quoting him, "At least, um, 80%, perhaps as high as 95% of jobs are an amalgam of projects. But instead of thinking my life as projects, the average person in the office building thinks that their life is some sort of regular job and that the projects are getting in the way of their regular job. And so projects are put off and mismanaged. In fact, in an organization, the entire decision factory should be thought of as nothing but projects. Managers should organize their lives around projects, they should look more like professional service firms."

And then, you say, on page 15 of your book, "Progress has traditionally been measured based on purchasing power or per capita income, but what really marks progress is something else in the background. Throughout history, both societies and individuals have gained a greater capacity to carry out projects."

What are your thoughts on that?

Antonio: In corporations or central functions, people have a job description but thinking that their job will be regular and, and you can meet all the job, um, the, kind of responsibilities. But actually that's not true that people at the decision-making factory, they're working in projects. And, and not just one but many at the same time, so, I found that very inspirational.

I've... one part of my research, to try to find out why project management was not relevant is looking at thinkers like Roger and, and I went back to, uh, Taylor, and I look into all these big thinkers to see what they talk about projects, and nobody was talking about the importance of project. Roger Martin is one of the first ones I've seen talking about the importance of projects and project management. So, that's the first point, and then the second quote, Whitney, I- I'm becoming more and more convinced, and, that countries, companies, enterprises, they need to have like a big project. That's when, when people, uh, feel part of something bigger. That people are challenged to do their best, that they're happy to contribute.

That's where you get the highest level of commitment and you know that you've been writing about A-teams and, so you know these kind of situations which doesn't happen very often and should more, uh, is about this big projects for a nation. Big projects for a company. Big projects for a start-up. That's what I'm trying to enforce through the book, uh, with some tools and techniques to make it happen, but, I, I was talking recently to the Spanish press, and I said, "When was the last time we had a major project in Spain? A project that everybody wanted?" People don't remember.

I talked to European Union and, and, uh, leaders, and say, "When was the last project that you engaged the whole European Union to be proud of themselves?" This happened only when the Euro was introduced in, in 2002. So, this is almost 20 years ago. That project created a huge, huge movement around a positive change. I can ask you, "When was the last time the US had a massive, big project," and I don't recall. Of course, the man in the moon is one of the highlights, but when was the last one?

So, this is kind of topics that interest me a lot because it's how you can... inspire and, and bring cheer the people up, if you know what I mean.

Whitney: Yeah. Absolutely. I love that you shared this idea of we need to have big projects that in- that inspire us. Is there one or two statistics that you can share on, just, to help people put this in perspective? The importance of projects but how difficult it is actually to execute against projects. You've got a lot of statistics in the book, but there's one or two that really stands out, to help us understand how high the stakes are in terms of our inability, in general, to execute against projects?

You know, about a year ago I spoke to, um, an event. I think it was for Gartner, for project managers, and I didn't have a very clear sense of what project managers did. So can we start off by talking about, um, when you need a project manager. We have lots of different projects, so how do you know, in a business, when you need a project manager? And, um, when you do, what does the project manager do? Let's start there.

Antonio: Okay. So, it's an excellent question. There's, there's two type of project managers - there's the people who are dedicated to project management, that they're... yeah, they've been trained, they're... they're certified. They spent many years doing projects, and the other one is the, the kind of occasional project managers which is everyone. Um, we are all doing projects. So I'm going to focus on the first one, the professional project manager.

What's the added value and when do you need them? Uh, related to your question. A project manager is when you need some kind of coordination. When you're trying to change, uh, the status quo. When you're trying to introduce a new idea into, uh, the business, into a product launch, or, uh, when people are doing their work but you need to over, like, coordinators. So, if you're working on your home and you're, you're busy doing your day job and your family and you're doing some hobbies and some traveling, clearly you would need the professional project manager, if you cannot dedicate the time, if you don't have the, the competencies and the skills, then you'd better outsource that and you pay somebody who are going to make sure that there's a clear plan, that things are decided, uh, where potential risk might happen.

So, you want to look for a project manager when first, you don't have the time, you need an expert to carry out an activity from the beginning till the end. There's a clear deadline. And you care about it. So, if it's an important project for you, then you will also invest in a professional person.

Whitney: Interesting. Okay, so, all right, that's very helpful on a basic level. Now, in terms of in a business, um, you have some criteria that you've listed in the book, um, that talk about, how do you know when it's time to have a project manager, you know, how, the size of the project-

Antonio: Yes.

Whitney: ... the length or duration of the project. How many people are involved. Can you just talk us through those quick criteria?

Antonio: Sure. And this is something, uh, what you see more and more frequent is that companies tend to call projects a lot of things. Like, I was working with a biotech company, and, and they had a, I think it were 80 employees, and 10 management executives, and, and they had like 500 projects in total. So, I, I wonder how they could have more projects than people working in their company. So, the challenge with projects is that it's very easy to start a project. You just need to have an idea and say, and call a kickoff meeting. People love kickoff meeting.

Whitney: (laughs)

Antonio: Let's have a kickoff meeting tomorrow, and everybody will show up. The second meeting, half of the people will not be there, because you asked them to do some work, but, um, that's one of the big challenges. You need to make difficult, uh, choosing projects, you need to make it difficult going forward with an idea into a project. If you make it too easy, then this is just going to go over the place, and this happens personally, too. If you are already running three projects which are important, and you can start tomorrow a new one because you heard your friend that this is a nice project, I want to do that too, then that's going to have an impact on that project plus the three that you're running.

So, that's why I propose some criteria, especially for companies. Um, so, uh, the numbers I give are based on my experience but can be adjusted. One of the criteria is how much is the investment? If it's more than half-a-million, for a corporate, then, yeah, this is an important criteria. Um, what's the duration? Is it, uh, is there a clear deadline between six, nine months, in the past? Just a small note on this one - In the past you had projects that would last for three, four years, five years, uh, where I'm recommending to have projects of nine months. If you have a project of five years, break it down. Make it in manageable pieces. Six to nine months. People remember what, what will happen in six months and nine months, but five years, nobody knows. So, uh, I recommend to have criteria on, on duration, between six to nine months.

I have a criteria which is very important is, is this a transversant project? By transversant I mean, do I need people from different parts of the business? Do I need an IT developer? Do I need a legal person? Marketing? Sales? Finance? Um, all from different regions. Do I need somebody from, uh, South America, North America, Asia?

This is very important, uh, criteria, because then you most likely need to prep- a professional project manager. The coordination of people, uh, it's one of the major task, and people who are not fully dedicated to the project, who have other priorities, and you need to engage them to work for you, so the transversality of the project is very important. I recommend that if your project has two, three, four, uh, or more, uh, key departments, then make sure there's a project manager.

So, I would stop with this three. The duration, the investment, and the transversality. Um, these are, uh, I think, key criteria. There's a few more but if I need to focus, this are the three one.

Whitney: Such a great starting place, and I think, for me- for me, and, I, I suspect, you know, anybody who's running a business unit, whether, you know, in a very large organization or someone who's more entrepreneurial and they're building up their business, this is incredibly helpful for us to think about, because it's one of those things that, like you've said, you have this idea and you just think that the idea is magically going to execute on its own-

Antonio: Yeah.

Whitney: ... and not recognizing that you need to have someone whose job it is to make sure it happens - what's the ROI of having a project manager? And actually that makes me wonder, I didn't see this in the book anywhere, but have you ever done any research on what's the ROI of having a project manager versus not. Have you done any research around that?

Antonio: Not really, but this is an excellent point. I love it, because it has been in my mind, but you phrase it very clear. I've seen the, the ROI of, yeah, what's the cost, but I've not calculated, on average, what will be the return on investments. I love it. Thank you very much for giving me this gift. I know what to do next.

Whitney: Yeah. I mean, 'cause you think about it. Like, I look at coaching, there's research out there that says, you know, the ROI on coaching is on average, for every dollar spent, you know, 7x, and there's a range. It goes from 1x to 50x, but I think... yeah, it would be fascinating for people to say, "Okay, the ROI on a project manager is X." Super, super interesting. Okay.

Antonio: Thank you.

Whitney: Yeah. Yeah, it's fun for us to-

Antonio: (laughs)

Whitney: ... create this as we go. So, um, for people now who are thinking, "Okay, I, I'm drinking the Kool-Aid. I get it. Um, I want to have projects. I want to think of our business in projects." I've a couple of quick questions. Number one is, once you have a project manager, how many projects can a project manager manage at any given time? And do it effectively.

Antonio: I have this question often, Whitney, and it's interesting, um, because people think that the more projects you have, the better, and actually, I don't have facts but suggested experience that the less projects you're managing, the better. And, especially if it's an important project. If you're, I don't know, if you're expanding your business, if you're doing an acquisition, if you're doing, uh, a digital transformation, that person has to be full-time. Uh, full-time and just full-time, and, and not part-time or doing other projects or doing a side-work in marketing or sales, so, that's one of the challenges.

See, the companies are always a bit skeptical or, or not free to have people full-time, fully dedicated to projects. So, I think if it's an important strategic project, full-time, and not just a project manager. The- this is a, a lot of common sense what I'm going to say here, Whitney, but, but full-time team, not just the project managers, deliver projects better than a part-time team and a part-time project manager.

The challenge for companies that they often go for a part-time team and a part-time project manager, so that's one of the reasons why so many projects fell aside. I have to insist that if you have... I'm, I'm not talking about all the projects, I'm talking about the two or three big projects that you have in your company, not just assign a full-time project manager but a full-time team, and you will see a big difference.

Other type of projects you can have up to three to four. I would reckon that's my experience, you could dedicate one day a week per project, if you have started well and if you have a team that is committed, so, one to four, I would say, one day for free to, to just catch up on things. So, maximum four projects-

Whitney: Okay.

Antonio: ... uh, important projects. That's my kind of maths.

Whitney: Okay. Great. Now, and for people who have a project that they're about to undertake, you've got a whole project canvas that you outlined in your terrific book called *The Project Revolution*, um, and we're actually going to give away one copy of the book, so, um, we'll talk more about that in

the outro, what that will look like, but just, everyone, it's terrific. If you've got any kind of project which as we now know, your life is a project, so you've all got projects. And we're excited to give one of these away.

But to get people started is, they're really feeling, um, interested around this. What are... one... Can you give us three suggestions to get people started? What are the first, you know, step one, what are some things that you need to think about?

Antonio: I would always start with the why of the project. You cannot imagine how many times I talk to project leaders or project managers. I ask them, "Why are you doing this project? Why are you implementing a new HR system?" Well, they tell me to do it. Or, the other one was, too old. No, we are implementing a system to make life easier and to have an impact into our employee engagement and to have better performance. So, the why of the project we should not underestimate this, is closer to the purpose of the project, because if you don't have the why clear, then people will not engage in the project. People need to know. That's how people will connect, the people that will work on you or will be impacted by your project, and will be resistant to change. If they understand the why, if the why is clear, it makes sense, then you will have... see that your project will have much better results.

Whitney: It's such an important point. I was thinking about that as you were saying, this is like, you know, the projects that we have in our business. Do we know what the why's are? I mean, you, you have this idea, and sometimes we do... you know, we, we don't remember why we're doing it, and even if I might know why we're doing it, am I communicating that to the people throughout the team. So...

Antonio: Correct.

Whitney: So, in the words of Simon Sinek, start with why. What's the second step for people as they decide to initiate a new project?

Antonio: The second step is, a reflection. Is it the right time to do it? Do I have the time? Do I have the resources? Um, when you start a new project, that means that you need to remove time from somewhere, and not just for you but the team, and from the leadership team. So, where is that time coming from? Uh, do I have so much free time that I can launch the project? No. So, where are the trade-offs? Where am I going to make sure that, uh, I take, um, some time, or I pause in some projects that were not going as, as well as they should, and that's fine. Pausing projects is great. Stopping projects is great.

So, this is something that is culturally badly seen, but these things should happen more often. So, is it the right time? Do I have the capacity to deliver? Not because you have a good why the project will succeed if you don't have the capacity. So often, we think that people are Supermans and then doesn't matter if there are already 150% of their time busy, they... because the excitement of the project, they will do it. Maybe they will do it the first weeks, but afterward the reality will hit and back again to prioritization of time and priorities on, on their work.

So, where is the extra time coming from? That's the question. Is it the right time? Can it wait three months? Let's finish that project. Phase out that project, let's stop that project that we're running, and then we move and shift the attention, not just for the team and the project leader, but management attention, too. So...

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Antonio: Very important reflection. Where are the resources coming from? You need that.

Whitney: You know, you remind me of a quote from Seth Godin, who says, "Winners quit all the time. They just quit the right stuff at the right time." And I think that's super-relevant in this particular situation is, if we're going to launch this new project that we have a strong why around, it means that we're going to quit something, but that means that we're, we're making the choice to quit it. It's not that we're giving up or we're failing, or choosing this new project over another project. So, interesting.

Okay. Number three. What's your third suggestion?

Antonio: Well, the three is, um, it's what we, maybe the core of project management, the theories that you will find out. There is defining the what, and the how. I call it, what, how and when. So, but, let's focus on the what. What do you want to achieve and how concrete is that? Do we really know what we want? There's a problem or there's an opportunity, but how, how much... how we visualize. How, how much are we clear?

If you launch a project and you don't know the what, that's going to take ages because you will use the project to define the what. And the what should be defined before the project, uh, uh, is even started. It's, it's, uh, the more concrete the better, and I can give you a couple of examples on the what. One, one which I call one of the most amazing projects, business projects, commercial projects, which I could research was the first iPhone, um, launched by Apple, and it's not easy to find a lot of information.

They call this project the Project Purple and the idea of having a phone developed by Apple was from, according to my research, 2001. The Project Purple started in 2004, uh, when Steve Job decided to go for the project and then set up a, a full-time project manager but a full-time team. The best of the best, to develop a phone. But the why it took them two, three years to find out? They didn't call it a project yet. They were experimenting, they were prototyping. Then doing, they're doing kind of the design thinking, uh, kind of the testing, and, and then, once they had two options, they decided to go with the project.

So, how concrete are you with the what? Do you know how your house is going to look? Do you know how the transformation that you're building is going to look? The new company? If you don't do that, maybe, don't go for a full-blown project. Maybe experiment. Do some exploration, innovation design thinking. Agile. Agile concepts are very good. So I think this is the key of the essence. How much do you know of the what? How is it going to look like, and the more you know, then, uh, the better chances are for your project to succeed.

Whitney: That's very interesting. So, as I listen to you talk about that, I think about the S-curve of learning, that, that we use, and how, as you're describing this, it's almost as if the, you know, those first three years from 2001 to 2004, they were at the low end of the curve and they were experimenting and figuring out, "What do we have here? What does this look like? What do we think we want it to look like?" And the project, uh, is, really, that the point at which it becomes a project is not actually at the lower end of the curve, it becomes a project once you hit the knee of the curve, and you're moving it to the sweet spot, and it's time to start executing. So, that's very interesting to me-

Antonio: Very interesting.

Whitney: As soon as you have an idea, that's not a project. The, the idea is lower end of the curve, let's experiment, let's even see if it's even the right curve for us so we know from disruption theory that the odds of success are six times higher, but there's still a 64% chance it's not the right curve. And so, as you're thinking, and I'm thinking and processing-

Antonio: I love it.

Whitney: ... thing to me is, it's not a project when you start. It's a project once you have the why, you've made the decision that you're going to commit the resources, and, and take them from something else, and, you have enough information to know what the what is, because you can't know what the information is immediately, so it's only when you hit the knee of the curve that you can credibly call something a project. Does that resonate with you when I say that?

Antonio: Is brilliant, Whitney. I've, I've never heard this but I think is spot on. It's just saying with different words what I was trying to explain. Even more clearer. I think that's, that's on- that's one of the bigger challenge of projects. They don't have that phase of exploration, innovation. They start the projects like there's a kick-off and let's start. And then, let's do us a project innovation. You cannot do a project on innovation because you don't know what you're doing.

That happens afterwards and I love your analogy with the learning curve, and, and... I love it. It's, it's... you just gave me another idea for another article.

Whitney: Interesting. Interesting. That one we could maybe co-author which could be starting

Antonio: Co-author. Yes.

Whitney: We've been talking about it. Maybe we finally found our idea.

Antonio: I love it. Yeah.

Whitney: Um, okay, so, as we wrap up, any other thoughts or advice that you would like to share with people?

Antonio: Um, yeah, I think there's, there's one thing which is very important, uh, beyond what we've been talking is, uh, in projects, uh, the mindset or the way we've been looking at projects so far is that, okay, we have an idea, we've launched a project, we finish the project, and only after the project is finished we start capturing benefits. So, we start seeing improvements and results but this is only after the project and maybe six months after the project is completed, the system is being used. I think that with the times that we're going nowadays, the benefits that a project should deliver should come much faster.

You should be able to start a project and you should be able to see already some benefits after three, four months. It challenge the way we think. It's not because you complete, then you see the benefit. No, you need to think on top of that and I'm going to give you another project example which I love, here, Whitney, if I may, but... This is, uh, it give me such a lesson when I was researching, uh, I research maybe thousands of projects, but this one I love because it just makes the point of I'm trying to share here.

It's about a church, uh, in Spain, in Barcelona. Uh, this is a, called Sagrada Familia. People who have visited Barcelona, they certainly remember this church which is half-built. It's a beautiful, not traditional, very kind of modernistic style church, which was initiated in 1882 by an architect called Gaudi, and this project started in 1882. Is not finish yet, so if you go to Barcelona you'll see that they're still building the church and they've claimed or they, they say that they will be done by 2024.

Still, it's a very, very long project and I went to talk to them and I say, "First of all," I talk to one of the, the leaders there and I asked, "Are you not ashamed that your project is not ten days late, ten weeks late, ten years? Is about 100 years late. Are you not ashamed?" And he said, "Antonio, no. We're not ashamed." And I say, "You know who is our client?" They told me, and I said, "No,

who's your client or main stakeholders." "Our main stakeholder is God, and God is not in a hurry." And I found that, "Wow! Okay."

So, yeah, we're always busy on the time and on the schedule which is right for many times, but some cases, not. Some cases it's about quality and some other projects and the rest. But the second point I want to make on this example is, a project which is about 100 years late and will be completed in maybe seven years, they're making benefits every day, Whitney. Every day there's visitors. There's thousands of visitors. They're making millions of Euros, and the project is not finished.

So, how can you translate that to your project? Your project just started and, how can you start benefit from that, even if the project might be late later on, then... who cares? Because you're already capturing benefits much faster than what traditional project management will tell you. So, I think this is a nice way to close it. We challenge the way we think about projects is, how can we capture benefits much faster, and not at the end?

Whitney: Beautiful. I love that. God is our stakeholder. Um, last question is, so, your life is a project. Um, what benefits are you capturing from your life every day in the project of life for Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez.

Antonio: Well, my... my joy is, is to learn. I, I love to learn and to share, so, the, the nice thing about projects is that they're always something new. There's always a new project that I have to carry out which is a challenge and, and is mentally, uh, difficult, but it's that kind of active, uh, always active thinking about solutions and using my past experience, uh, and talking to my colleagues and contacts to see how can we do things better. So, there's a lot of room for improvement and every day is a, a great opportunity to learn and, and to do things better, so, I, I really, I'm very lucky of being where I am and, and doing what I like.

Whitney: Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, thank you so much for being with us. It's been a pleasure.

Antonio: My pleasure. Whitney, Muchas Gracias. Thank you very much.

Antonio is such a perfect example of taking on market risk. When you play where no one else is playing, it can be lonely. No one else initially sees the value of what you're doing. But that's the only way to build something that has never been in the world before.

Since talking with Antonio, it's been really interesting to look at my life and work as a series of projects. I have so many ideas, but to take those ideas and turn them into projects is a deliberate step I don't always formalize. If you're wondering if something is ready to move from idea to project, here again is the checklist:

Ask why - Why are you doing the project? What is the purpose?

Reflect - Is this the right time? Do I have the resources? Do I need to pause something else so I can take this on? And third,

Ask what - Do you have a clear picture of what the end result will be? Do you know what you're ultimately trying to create or build?

As you think about your ideas, are there any that it is time to formally turn into a project?

Practical Tip:

Antonio says the fewer projects we are managing the better. One day a week per project and a day for catching up on things. When you take a look at the projects you're managing at home or at work, do they fit in that structure? What if you paused some projects and fit the most important ones into this framework, would you progress more quickly?

Now, If you're new to the podcast, or not, and have been enjoying the episodes every week, would you take a moment and leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts? This would be incredibly kind of you! If you've left a review already - thank you! And, thank you for continuing to share the podcast with your co-workers and friends.

Thank you again to Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Melissa Ruddy, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributors Emilie Davis and Nancy Wilson, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson
And this is Disrupt Yourself.