

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 120: PLAY TO YOUR DISTINCTIVE STRENGTHS

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

In [Episode 80](#), we provided you with an overview of the seven-point framework for personal disruption. In [Episode 100](#), we then did a deep dive on the first point or accelerant #1, taking the right kinds of risk. Collectively, these are our two most listened to episodes. So, to say thank you for listening, in this episode, we will do a deep dive on Accelerant #2, play to your distinctive strengths.

Let me start by telling you a story.

A few years ago, our family watched the film a Hundred-Foot Journey in which the Kadam family, seeking asylum due to election disputes in India, emigrates to a small village in France. The father purchases an abandoned restaurant - a hundred feet away - from an upscale French restaurant. The second oldest son Hassan is a talented chef. His specialty - not surprisingly - is Indian cooking. But to gain stature as a chef in France, he must master the French tradition. Once he does, he begins to infuse his food with Indian spices and flavors. His ability to cook French-Indian cuisine becomes his distinctive strength. Something he does well that others don't. And it earns him the coveted Michelin award.

Distinctive strengths. That's what we are going to talk about in this podcast episode. You walk through the door of the market opportunity that you've created by taking the right risks, like [we talked about in Episode 100](#) - which is accelerant #1--by then playing to your distinctive strengths, which is accelerant #2 in the framework of personal disruption.

So here's how we're going to do it. We're going to first talk about what a distinctive strength is, or define it.

Secondly, we'll provide you with eight clues to help you find some of your hidden strengths.

Third, we'll talk about how to use your strengths in distinctive ways.

And fourth, we'll explain how to leverage the strengths of people around you.

That's how you will speed up your current S-curve of learning, how you become a high growth individual--focusing on what you do uniquely well.

So--let's start by defining the term distinctive strengths.

And we'll do that by talking about the koala.

This cuddly little animal sleeps up to twenty hours a day. One might have serious doubts about its ability to survive, except that the koala can eat something that almost no other animal can. It eats Eucalyptus leaves. Which are poisonous. This is its distinctive strength. Something it does well that others don't.

But what you do well that others don't isn't always going to be so obvious. Think about Charles Darwin and his finches.

After gathering numerous specimens of finches on the Galapagos Islands and presenting them to John Gould, an expert on birds, Gould told Darwin that what looked like, at first glance, "just finches" were twelve different species. There were similarities, but evolution had allowed them to develop distinctive strengths. Each species had a novel beak structure that allowed it to exploit a specific food resource. Some evolved to eat seeds, others fruit, others insects. In business terms, they all had similar core competencies (feathers, wings, feet, beak), but it was a distinctive, seemingly, subtle strength--the shape of the beak, that allowed the finches to compete effectively for a specific type of food. Rather than foraging for food where all the other birds foraging, they foraged where others weren't, because of their distinctive strength.

So, at a high level, a distinctive strength is, something you do well that others don't.

But it's hard to do this if you if you don't know what your strengths are. You may have an obvious advantage like the koala. But most of us need to do some hunting and pecking like with Darwin's finches.

So, that's what we are going to do for the next few minutes. Think of it like a treasure hunt for your strengths. I'm going to give you eight clues which we'll include the [worksheet](#). These clues are in the form of questions illustrated by stories.

### **Question or Clue #1. What skills have helped you survive, especially those that helped you survive as a child?**

Listen to this story about Scott Edinger, a consultant and CEO advisor, earning over a million dollars a year. Scott never knew his father, grew up broke, living in a trailer park, at age nine his mother also left, he was adopted, but still lives in less than ideal circumstances. Scott learned to survive a difficult childhood by becoming an expert in communication, conflict resolution, attunement to others and raw persuasion. In high school, and then in college (with the help of a few great teachers) Scott discovered that this ability to communicate and to persuade was incredibly valuable. He placed in the top five in over a hundred debate tournaments. He studied communication and rhetoric in college. Scott has been ranked #2 globally in sales in a division of a Fortune 500 company. And how does he earn a million dollars a year? Well, he helps Fortune 500 companies turn around underperforming divisions, by focusing on a critical survival skill in business---how to sell.

Now let me ask you---What do you well because you needed this skill to survive, whether physically or emotionally? Your circumstances may have been more dire than Scott's, maybe less. It doesn't matter, because for you they were hard. So, what was your lifeline skill?

### **Question or Clue #2. What makes you feel strong?**

[Marcus Buckingham](#), the world's leading expert on strengths has said that our strengths clamor for our attention in the most basic way. Using them makes us feel invigorated, inquisitive, successful. If you don't know what makes you feel strong. Here's what you can do. As you go throughout today, the next week, when you finish something up, whether at home or work, make a note of how you feel. Do you have more energy? Feel invigorated? Or exhausted. depleted? Look for where you have more energy. You're going to begin to see a pattern--and that pattern gives clues that point in the direction of your strengths.

There's something else that I want to add here that I think is important--and it came to my attention when I interviewed [Marcus Buckingham in Episode 112](#). Here's what he had to say--

He said that at the microscopic level, learning appears to be a function of neurogenesis: or the growth of new neurons. The brain never loses its ability to create more neurons and connections, no matter how old you are, between those neurons. This is neuroplasticity....What's interesting---and ultimately pretty

intuitive---is that when we examine a brain's growth--you grow more neurons and connections where you already have the most preexisting neurons and connections... Every brain grows most where it's already the strongest."

In other words, you need to know what your weaknesses are so that you can mitigate them, and avoid getting derailed, but it's the doubling down, the tripling down on your strengths, that is key to accelerating up that curve, to becoming a high growth individual.

### **Clue #3. What exasperates you?**

Entrepreneur Alana Cates identifies her strengths by noting when she feels exasperated. She says, "The frustration of genius is believing if it's easy for you, it must be easy for everyone else." Former CEO of Ford Alan Mullaly has been asked how he turned Ford around, how the stock price increased from \$1 to \$18 under his watch. He will then describe a management system that he calls Working Together. He then frequently says after that, "Everyone knows this. Anyone can do this." Well, not everyone knows it. Not everyone can do it. That's why he was named one of the greatest CEOs of our time.

Let me tell you another story.

Kristy was the new executive assistant to a small-business president. She was frustrated at the poor training the out-going assistant gave her, exasperated that the people around weren't more exacting. With contracts, for example, he was told---just print out the old contracts, and send them out. But Kristy took the time to read contracts, and saw that many included agreed upon price increases that had not been implemented. Because of her precise eye, contract revenue went up and she received a nice bonus.

When are you exasperated or frustrated? If you hear yourself saying or thinking, "Everyone know how do this. This is just common sense. And you can't tell people how to do it because you don't know how you know. These are all markers or indicators that you are bumping up against one of your strengths. And because it's easy for you and not for the people around you--it's a distinctive strength.

### **Clue #4. What made you an oddball as a child?**

On this one, I am going to tell you three quick stories.

The first is about Kare Anderson. As a child she was diagnosed as publicly shy and a stutterer. In high school, a kind teacher said to her, "You don't like to stand up and answer questions, so I'm going to put you on the newspaper where you can just ask questions one-on-one and write it up." It turned out she was really good at it. In part because she had seen her father model curiosity. In part because it shifted the focused away from her. When she finished her first interview, her teacher and friends say, "You know during this whole interview, you only stuttered twice." Kare went on to become an Emmy-award winning journalist, she worked for the Wall Street Journal - and get this--she's given a TED talk with 2.5 million views. Kare's stutter may have made her odd as a child. But it gave birth to her superpower.

2nd example is Alden Mills. As a boy, he had asthma. He had two left feet. He was terrible at anything that involved a ball. He was slow. And kids teased him mercilessly about his thunder thighs. But when he's a freshman in high school, a coach lines up all the kids. Looks at Alden's legs and says, "Hey, you have rower's legs." So Alden started rowing. Combine that with the grit he'd developed dealing with asthma, his sophomore year in high school he manages to make the varsity team; he's the only sophomore on the team. Alden goes on to become a Navy Seal, the CEO and founder of Perfect Fitness which makes the product for a perfect push-up, a \$100 million in sales company. The thing that made him odd. His thunder thighs. He thought they were liabilities. It turns out they were a strength.

Example #3. Is Luvvie Ajayi. She's female, black, a U.S. immigrant (from Nigeria), a devout Christian, and has a name no one can pronounce. What made her odd as a child--as an adult has become her distinctive strength. Especially as she combines this with her lifeline skill which was and is her sense of humor.

Luvvie's debut book, *I'M JUDGING YOU*, was released to critical acclaim in 2016 and became an instant New York Times best-seller.

What's that thing that you wanted to go away as a child? Because you just wanted to fit in. Every single one of you listening has something. It's the thing kids made fun of. The thing that was a source of embarrassment, possibly even shame. Yep, that thing. What you do uniquely and exceptionally well is very likely made possible by what made you odd as a child. Or as Liz Strauss said, "What if everything you think is wrong with you is a really a superpower?"

#### **Clue #5. What compliments do you dismiss or just sort of shrug off?**

This is one of my favorite clues. It's so revealing. But it's also problematic, because while 90%% of us like praise because it makes us feel valued. 70% of us associate discomfort with praise. Which means that every time you get a compliment that could be helpful to you, you are so uncomfortable you immediately forget it.

Here's a tip to start remembering compliments from writer Christopher Littlefield. He says "When someone compliments you, it is more about them than about you. They aren't asking if you agree. They are giving you a gift. Saying here's how you impacted me. If you received a birthday gift you didn't like, no matter how ugly or seemingly useless to you, you would NEVER throw it back in that person's face."

So, the next time someone gives you a compliment. Picture in your mind a gift-wrapped box. Accept the gift. Open it. Say thank you. then place it in a corner of one of your favorite rooms. The next compliment. Is another gift. You receive gift after gift. It will become a stack of presents. A totem that tells you how you impact your corner of the world. Your strengths. This is the image I want you to have in your mind.

As a practical matter. I want you to write down what people say. Immediately. Because this is your genius. Whatever that compliment is.

Let me give you some color on this.

During my consulting work at a large technology company, one man raised his hand and said, "People tell me that I'm nice." He, by the way, didn't like that compliment. It almost felt like a pejorative. I'm nice. That often happens with compliments. If we haven't deflected it because it's uncomfortable, we dismiss because it's not what we want to hear. You've heard it so many times. You are tired of it. Why can't people compliment you on things that you are trying to be good at?

But to this man who was told he is nice, the gift people were giving him was/is. There is no drama with you. I like collaborating with you. We get things done when we work with you. There's a lot of information in that single phrase. You're nice. It may be as reflexive as breathing for you. It doesn't mean what you do well, what is easy for you, it's not hugely valuable. And by the way, I'm willing to bet that the compliment you get a lot, is somehow tied to what made you an oddball as a child, or helped you survive. Usually they are related.

At this point, we are more halfway through the clues---you want to think about what has helped you survive, what makes you feel strong, what exasperates you, as a child what made you odd, and then pay attention to the compliments you receive. This is a good time to remind you that you don't need to do all of this at once. You are going to listen to this recording for at least a week. So, just pick one thing to do in a day because there's a lot here. And after listening, you might feel like you learned. But the real learning will happen when you do. So pick one thing. Like, today, I'm going to note when I felt strong. When you do even one thing differently for 15 seconds today, that's a win.

#### **Let's now continue with Clue #6. What are some of your hard-won skills?**

This might relate to your childhood--and survival. But I'm thinking about things you've gotten good at as an adult because the situation required it of you. For example, I recently received an e-mail from my friend

Pam Eagar. She is caring for her aging mother-in-law. Pam didn't say this. But I can only imagine that the work is unrelenting, never-ending, sometimes frustrating, often draining and physically exhausting. I doubt this was her plan. But does she know how to persist? Does she have grit? Does she do it with grace and compassion? 100%.

What about being a parent? I love what Ann Crittenden said, "What could be a greater transformational act than turning a drooling, demanding baby into a thinking, compassionate, hard-working, law-abiding adult? Clearly a parent who accomplishes this, who helps a child develop to their fullest potential is the original transformative leader." I don't think that most people when they conceive a child think--this is going to teach me how to be a transformative leader. And yet--that's what can happen.

So what situations have you been in that have required you to do something hard? Perhaps it's something like caring for a parent or a child? Maybe it's something more benign like I needed to learn Spanish when I lived in Uruguay as a missionary. How has this thing that you did out of necessity evolved into a strength?

### **Clue #7. What do you think about when there is nothing that you have to think about?**

This is the question that revealed to me that I wouldn't be investing for a living forever. Which was hard. Because it I liked being able to say that I was an investor. It made me feel important. Sure, I built a decent financial model. Yes, I was good at picking stocks. But I didn't think about the market when I didn't have to. And I know people who do. I was (and am) far more interested in the human condition. In investing in people. In fact, when I was still an equity analyst. This was around 2002. I had just read Tom Peters' article, "[The Brand Called You](#)." American Idol was also at this point peaking in popularity. During one of our training meetings, I started the meeting by talking about how American Idol contestant had a brand: the diva, the comeback kid, the oddball. I then asked everyone analyst to think about their brand: are the stockpicker, an industry expert, a connector? I loved preparing this presentation. This wasn't part of my job. But I spent every spare minute I had thinking about it and the implications for my colleagues. Several years later, when I was now investing alongside Clayton Christensen, slowly, slowly making the transition to what I do now, a friend Chrysula Winegar said to me--"You invest in stocks, people, concepts and dreams." Bingo.

What do you think about when there's nothing you have to think about? Whatever it is, you are doing it because it invigorates you, makes you feel strong. This is a strength. Remember how much money you make is not only a function of how much need or want there is for what you do. But, how well you do it—which is a function of how much time you passionately, devotedly--spend doing it. What you do when there's nothing you have to do.

**Clue #8. What are your values?** What matters to you, what you believe about the world, is a source of strength. Whether we come from a strong religious tradition or not, we have a basic foundation of principles and beliefs that guide our actions and are an essential part of our truest selves.

Because, as with strengths generally, what you value can feeling a little invisible to you, here are two suggestions or tips to figure out what you value:

The first tip is to track your time for several weeks. After interviewing [Laura Vanderkam for this podcast](#), I tracked my time in 15-minute increments for a period of six weeks. What I learned, or re-confirmed, is that I value my work---deeply, I value time to study, I value my faith, I value sleep, and I value my family. More than I thought I did. Meaning I spend more time with my family than I thought that I spent. As you observe how you spend your time, you'll know what you value today. That's suggestion or tip #1.

Tip #2 to figure out what you value, or who you aspire to be is to start collecting quotes / lyrics that you like or even love.

To get you started, here are a few of my favorites:

The first quote is from Samuel Johnson--To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition.

I am very driven, but when I start peeling back why I do what I do, is to be happy at home with the people that I love.

The second quote is this--You can bet your life, and that, and twice its double, that God knew exactly where he wanted you to be placed. –

This is from Stevie Wonder. Like him, I take the long view. What we are experiencing now on this planet, is just a sliver of our existence. But for the moment, we are where we are supposed to be, so we can learn what we need to learn and help who we need to help. It also reminds me that who we are, and what we do matters.

The third is from Lady Galadriel (Lord of the Rings) when she says I Pass the Test.

When Frodo, encouraged by Lady Galadriel's goodness and wisdom, offers her the Ring, she wants to accept it, desperately. She says, "I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. And now at last it comes... I shall be beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night, stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair." No matter how much I may desire to do good, once I have that power, I know it can corrupt me. I want to "pass the test," as Galadriel did.

The fourth is from Ann Voskamp. She says "Inconvenience is the proof of love. You love as well as you are willing to be inconvenienced.

This is hugely helpful to me. Because I do feel inconvenienced a lot. Maybe you do too.

So, if you want to know what you value. You can track your time. You might want to start by doing this for just 24 hours. What you do is an indicator of what you value. If you want to more on this, we'll include a link to our [interview with Laura Vanderkam](#) and to [her website](#) in the notes.

The second way to know what you value is to write down quotes or lyrics that you love. If nothing immediately comes to come, as you come across quotes on social media, that you find yourself saying, Yes! Or re-sharing. This will get you started. With knowing who you aspire to be.

So, let's do a quick recap of the eight clues that will help you figure out what your strengths are:

1. What skills have helped you survive?
2. What makes you feel strong?
3. What exasperates you?
4. What made you an oddball as a child?
5. What compliments do you dismiss? Do you shrug off?
6. What are your hard-won skills?
7. What do you think about when you have nothing to think about?
8. What are your values?

Just like with the finches who have multiple ways to forage for food depending on their beak, there are so many ways for you to be strong. To be smart. The trick is once you know your strengths are, is to value them. To use them. Deliberately. On purpose. Or as James Oppenheim said, "The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise just under her feet."

So, knowing your distinctive strengths – now you know what they are. That's one thing. Leveraging them so that you become a higher growth individual, accelerating up your current S Curve faster is another. So, I want to tell you now five stories of what this might look like, as you leverage what you do uniquely well:

Story #1. Because Asi Burak was a strong student, his friends and family expected he would study science in school, math, physics, chemistry. Instead he studied Arabic. Not a typical move for an Israeli. And he took a lot of flak. But it was this skill, a skill his classmates didn't have, that led him to army service in an intelligence unit. After serving as a captain in the Israeli Defense Forces, there's the expectation that Asi will go into tech or VC, following the footsteps of his father, who was a founder of VC in Israel. Instead he goes to the U.S. to study the art of video games at Carnegie-Mellon. As a child he's loved art. He'd used it to make sense of the world. When he's tasked with producing a video game---no Grand Theft Auto for him---he wants to produce a game called Peacemaker—a single player game (this was fifteen years ago) where you would be the Palestinian president or the Israeli prime minister and then have to make decisions real-time. Because of Asi's distinctive strengths, an artist with military training, an Israeli who speaks Arabic, he was able to produce a game about which people have said, "By playing Peacemaker, I have learned more about the Middle East than I learned by watching the news for months.

**What is something you do well (like speaking another language, whether that's Arabic or art) that if you could swim in slightly different waters would be even more valuable?**

Story #2. When Jayne Juvan was a 2<sup>nd</sup> year law associate, her mother got sick with cancer. In trying to understand what was happening, she went online and discovered a huge support group. At the same, as a new associate, her law firm had a requirement around networking. She couldn't go out at night because she was with her mom. So, why not network on line? Jayne starts with Twitter. The partners wonder what she's doing. Law firms tend to be conservative, and besides, why would she play where no one else was. Reminder, this was almost fifteen years ago. But she persisted. And because she did, when the economy came crashing down in 2008, and she'd landed clients on social media, she sidestepped layoffs, and when she was up for partner, she made a compelling case.

**What is something you could do or are doing, perhaps out of necessity, like with Jayne, that may not make sense in the short-term? But, in the long-term, it might?**

Story #3. Horace Dediu. A U.S.-Romanian citizen, he's had lifelong passion for smartphones. And believed, phones would disrupt the PC world. So he got a job at Nokia in Finland. But that wasn't the disruption. Instead it was the computing companies that took all the money out of telecom. So after a decade at Nokia, he turned his knowledge of the disrupted (Nokia) to think about the disruptor (Apple), and because of his willingness to iterate out loud, something that Wall Street analysts can't do, he's become a preeminent of analyst of Apple, known for his spot-on financial predictions.

**How might your domain expertise if applied in a different industry allow you to make an unusual contribution?**

Story #4. Shawn Askinoskie is a defense attorney turned chocolate maker. As a trial lawyer, Shawn never lost a case. But being good at the law, also meant he had to deal with death threats. A lot of them. He overcame his fear through his sense of conviction---his belief in what was right. Resolve or conviction may not seem like the attribute of a chocolate maker, but it certainly is an attribute for the kind of chocolate maker that Shawn wants to be, one that does direct trade, one that is connected to his customers and suppliers. So despite the siren song of fame and fortune that beckons to him, he has remained small. For Shawn, chocolate is a spiritual practice. Staying true to this vision takes conviction.

In Shawn's case, it's not domain expertise, that is distinctive, though undoubtedly his legal expertise has been helpful in negotiating direct trade, but there's also his conviction. **How might a leadership skill (commonly mislabeled as a soft skill) be the skill that sets you apart in a possibly crowded field? Or simply give you the courage to play where others aren't. Like deciding to keep your business small because you know that's the right decision for you.**

Story #5. From the time Susan Cain was very young, she realized that she felt differently. How she liked to spend her time wasn't the preferred social structure. Like getting on the bus for camp, loud, boisterous, environment. "We're going to do this." That. That was not her thing. Is it ok to feel this way, she wondered.

After she left the law to become a writer full-time, she started writing about how she felt. What it was like to be an introvert. It was at the time. Weird. Idiosyncratic. But because she was willing to explore and leverage her strength of what made her an odd--that of being an introvert--in a crowded field of extroverted-related literature on how to lead, her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* stood out. Quiet was a runaway bestseller, one of the most popular books of 2014.

**Susan's experience comes back to what made you feel odd as a child. What didn't make sense? Did it need to be that way? Turn that over, understand it.**

Really give this some thought. Once you have a sense of what you do well - how can you apply what you do well in unusual ways? You don't need to change job or role, though you might, but you can start with where you are.

Maybe you are like Asi. At a young age, he had a talent for drawing, but he put it away. Maybe you have a similar experience. Something you did well that you've set aside. But now that you have the stable stakes qualifications to do your job, how can you pull in that natural talent or gift to help you do the job superbly and unusually well?

Perhaps you are like Jayne. Out of necessity you started doing something, like social media, but now that you know how to do something others don't, what possibilities are there for you?

For Horace, he thought technology was going one way, but then it shifted. How can you apply what you learned at one company or organization in an entirely new setting? In a way that surprises others and delights you?

If like Shawn, you've decided to do something new, like become an entrepreneur. You may be thinking. I'm done. No more law. Clean slate. But remember you've spent a lot of your life learning how to do what you did. So how can you use your understanding of what you've done in the past to help you do what you want to do now?

Finally, if you are like Susan, and you want to find your voice. To write. To speak. To share what you know, reflect on what you've been wrestling with your entire life. And ask---does it need to be this way? Over time, you'll have to figure out how to universalize your ideas... so it's no longer your experience, but the human experience. But if you start with what made you odd, you know it's distinctive, that's a good place to start.

Now, we've talked about how to identify your strengths, how play to your strengths where others are not. And the two in play with one another become a flywheel for climbing your current S-curve, for becoming a high growth individuals. Let's now talk about what this means for you as a leader.

It's logical that to think that the people you work with will want to play to their strengths. Why wouldn't they want to flex their strongest muscle? But this is easier said than done, not because you can't easily pinpoint what they do well, but because they don't value their strengths. If it's easy, how could it be valuable. And if you want them to spend time doing something that they don't value, maybe you don't value them. So it's a lot harder than it sounds.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate what I mean--

If you watch football, you will see the coaches talking to each other over headsets during the game. What you didn't know is that during the 2016 season, the NFL made major league-wide improvements to its radio frequency technology, both to prevent interference from media using the same frequency and to prevent tampering. This was a development led by John Cave, VP of football technology at the National Football League. It's been incredibly helpful to the coaches. But it might never have been built, or at least Cave wouldn't have built it, had it not been for his boss, Michelle McKenna-Doyle, CIO of the NFL.



When Michelle was hired, she observed that a number of her people were struggling, but not because they weren't talented — because they weren't in roles suited to their strengths. After doing a deep analysis, she started having people switch jobs. For many, this reshuffling was unwelcome and downright uncomfortable. This is what happened with Cave. He had the talent to create products and build things. But he didn't have time to do it, because he had the big job of system development, including enterprise systems. But Michelle was asking herself, "Why was he weighed down with the payroll system when he could figure out how to evolve the game through technology?" She envisioned a better role for his strengths. The coaches wanted to talk to each other. The technology didn't exist. She wanted Cave to create it. "At first, he was concerned, because his overall span was shrinking. 'Just trust me,' I said. 'You're going to be a great innovator,' and he is."

Often "superpowers" are things we do effortlessly, almost reflexively, like breathing. So when you ask people to use their genius they may very well think. But that's so easy. It's too easy. So instead of feeling like you value them, they think you don't actually trust them. As a leader, it's your job to not only spot talent, but to convince people that you value their strengths, and they should too.

One way to do this is to identify and talk about strengths as a team. Brett Gerstenblatt, VP and creative director at CVS, has his team take a personality assessment (in his case, StrengthsFinder!), then he asks them to post their top five strengths somewhere at their desk on their computer. Brett wants people to wear their strengths like a badge. Not to tell others why they're great, but to remind them to use them.

Dianna Newton Anderson, an entrepreneur turned social good activist at Younique Foundation, shares a story of her college basketball coach, who had her team take shots from different places on the court: the key, the elbow, the paint. He would record their percentages, and then had every person on the team memorize those percentages. This would allow the team to literally play to each other's strengths. You can do something similar with your team.

Or, if you want to go really deep, I learned in my [podcast interview with Zach Obront](#), a co-founder of Scribe Writing, that at their company's offsites, they do an in-depth analysis of everyone's strengths. 2x a year the remote team comes into town. And the core of that few days is to think about strengths and obstacles. They sit in a big group. Each person writes up their strengths, and then everyone in the room adds to that list – it takes about 2 -- 2 ½ hours per person. The idea is to support you in who you want to become.

We'll include a [worksheet](#) if you want to do this in detail, but here's some things that you can do right now:

First, write down 1-2 strengths for each person on your team. Don't think too hard. It should be top of mind.

Second, ask yourself, do you value this strength? As in, are they good at something that you think is valuable? We tend to have certain skills that we think are more valuable than other skills, and if we think they are good at something that we value, then we may preference them over other people. So it's just something for you to be aware of.

Third, ask yourself, do they value this skill? Do they recognize their superpower and really use it deliberately and on purpose?

Number four, analyze – is this person in a role suited to their strengths?

Five, wear your strengths like a badge. Post them so that people can play to those strengths.

And number six, start to measure new ideas, products or projects against your collective superpowers.

Asking, will this initiative leverage what we as a team do uniquely well?

When your team feels strong, they're willing to play where others aren't. To take on market risk. To take on projects, ideas, for which there isn't yet a market.

As we wrap up, here are six things I'd like you to do:

1. Listen to this module every day for a week---and when you get ideas, write them down. Even if they are random. And then pick one a day that you will act on.

2. Write down compliments. As soon as you get them. Make a note on your phone. If it's one you especially love, and you are feeling cheeky, ask the person to repeat it, so you can record it. I've done that. And I'm glad I did.
3. Be aware when you are exasperated. Or you say "This is just common sense. Or everyone knows how to do this. Just say to yourself, 'a-ha! This is something I do unusually well.'
4. Observe how you spend your time. Are you spending most of your time doing things that make you feel strong? It's not that you can't or shouldn't do hard things. But as you do those hard things leverage your gifts, the talents—your very own beak, looking for opportunities to create, rather than to compete.
5. Observe the strengths of people around you. What can you do to nudge them toward using those strengths more deliberately?
6. How does your big goal, your grand plan, play to your strengths? How can you tweak that goal to better leverage those strengths? And if it doesn't require what you do brilliantly well, is it the right goal?

Not matter what your goals are, whether you are listening to this for you, or because you are trying to build a better team, or a better organization. Remember that the organization, even the team, doesn't change as a group. They change as individuals. The fundamental unit of disruption is the individual.

For you to close your knowing-doing gap, for change to truly happen, you'll need to listen to this over and again. Emotionalize it. Intellectual assent is a good starting point. But for real change to happen you need buy-in from your heart, the seat of emotions, your unconscious mind. Because that's where your behavior is governed. And that requires repetition.

Be honest with yourself about what you want. Don't edit. It's okay if you don't know how to do what you want to do. That's part of the fun. Figuring out how to get what you want. As you make your plan, focus on being a creator, not a competitor, not going after what others have, but creating what you want. Leverage what you do well, what you do uniquely well, your distinctive strengths to get what you want.

Let me close with another of my favorite quotes. It's from Ralph Waldo Emerson. He said, "Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself." That's how you build momentum to climb your learning curve. That's how you become a high growth individual. That's how you create something grand.

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Thank you. Thank you for listening. Thank you to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, producer/manager Macy Robison, content contributors, Emilie Davis and Nancy Wilson, and art director, Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson and use your strengths, play to your distinctive strengths to Disrupt Yourself.