

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 125: ALI BROWN

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

My guest today is Ali Brown. Ali has been dubbed the “Entrepreneurial Guru for Women” and created a global enterprise devoted to empowering women entrepreneurs. She provides leadership and business coaching to over 250,000 followers via AliBrown.com and her Glambition® Radio podcast.

Whitney: Ali Brown, welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast.

Ali: Thank you. I'm delighted to be here.

Whitney: We've been trying to schedule this for quite a while, so it's fun that we were able to finally, finally be able to connect.

Ali: I'm ready for your question cause now I've been listening to your shows. (laughs)

Whitney: (laughs) Okay. So you know what I'm going to ask?

Ali: And I know what's coming, kind of spoiled the surprise, but I think it's better.

Whitney: Okay. So where did you grow up and what did you want to be when you grew up?

Ali: So I grew up in a little town in Connecticut called Monroe, Connecticut. And when I was little, and I know, cause my mom always told me this, I wanted to... I mentioned two things. I wanted to be a pediatrician and a backup singer. I don't know where that came from, but maybe you watching growing up, the Sonny and Cher show and-

Whitney: Oh yeah. (laughs)

Ali: (laughs) ... the Osmonds. And I know people were like, "Oh my God, are you a dinosaur?" Um, but it, it-

Whitney: (laughs) The Donnie and Marie show, yes.

Ali: I, I know what if but I mostly saw women doing the backup, but I always thought that be kind of fun. I'm like, "You know, if you mess up, no one's going to really notice you still get to wear the sparkles." And you know, it looked like a lot of fun.

Whitney: So backup singer and pediatrician. Okay, got it. So you obviously did not become a backup singer, nor did you become a pediatrician. What did you study in college?

Ali: So I went to uh, a small liberal Arts College in Boston called Simmons...

Whitney: Oh yeah?

Ali: It was all women, which is kind of wild looking back that I didn't know my, my business now most of my clients are women. It gave me great context. And I majored in communications because honestly it looked like so much fun. And there was so much variety.

And I remember when I was looking at the all the different options at the school, there was just the comm students got to do writing animation, journalism design and um, you know, by the end of school, I have to say, I still wasn't sure what I wanted to be when I grew up, but it's, it's kind of wild that my career over the years has evolved into a place now that I'm using absolutely all those skills. It was one of the best majors I think I could have chosen.

Whitney: Yeah, it's interesting. And almost serendipitous. You weren't sure what you want to do and yet you're now drawing on everything you studied.

Ali: Absolutely. Yeah. There was one point in my twenties, I mean I was working three different jobs and, and really not sure. I was working at a publishing company. I was riding my bicycle around selling vitamins. (laughs) I joined a network marketing company.

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: And then I was teaching step aerobics. I think we undervalue though, trying things on and, and I always envied the kids though, who said, you know, "I'm going to go be a lawyer, I'm going to go be an accountant, I'm going to get an MBA and have the corner office."

I always felt a little lost - what does the saying all who lost, all who wander are not lost. That's, that was me and little did I know that it was just leading me to a place of wanting that variety of my life and the only way I could really get that was working for myself.

Whitney: So, you weren't lost, you were just figuring out and putting all those pieces together. So you tell us now about, you go- you graduated from college and at one point you're working in an ad agency and you decide to start your own business. Tell us, set the stage for us. What- what were you doing? What did it look like? How did this decision come about?

Ali: My decisions have always come from... like most of us, I think a shift in you- in your awareness and, and I was at this last job for about two years, it was this little ad agency with like 10 to 12 people. One bathroom, I was one of the few women, you know, it was just kind of, (laughs) it was kind of a mess.

They had a few good clients and I was working on these newsletters for a client of theirs. It was a big healthcare system in New Jersey and I was, I was a really good writer. So I did the writing, I interacted with the clients, I kind of managed the projects and you know, it was a pretty big deal for someone in their mid-twenties to have like that much responsibility, this little agency.

And then what shifted my awareness is there was a freelancer that was coming and going, his name was Eric. And one day I just said, "What do you do? How do you get to come and go all the time?" You know, and I knew what he charged.

And so I was very intrigued by this whole freelancing thing. And he said, "You know, you could probably do what you do in freelance too." I said, "Really?"

And, and this is how the conversation began. I think people don't ask enough questions these days. We're scared to look like we don't know anything or we'll just go to Google. But that was a conversation that changed my life. You know, I, I said, let me buy you coffee at Dunkin' Donuts down the street. (laughs)

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: And, and literally I want to understand how to do this. And he said to me, "You know, you, you have these skills and a lot of agencies hire out copywriters, copy editors, project managers who don't want to have them on full time."

And I said, "This sounds perfect." So I don't recommend this to people. But I got so excited that I literally could not stay in the building, like I quit within a few weeks. I was so excited about having that control over my life, over my business and I knew I was really good at something.

And the next step was literally knocking on doors and walking around the city and joining networking groups. And you know, today I see a lot of people when they want to start a business, they jump online. They, they think they need to be on every social platform and they focus everything on the Internet. And I am so glad that I started my business 20 years ago because I couldn't hide behind my computer. I had to learn to talk to people. I had to learn to communicate, I had to learn, you know, I had to put on pants and leave my apartment (laughs) and go like meet with clients and, and I think that really was a great way to get started.

I really encourage people to do more of that. It'll change your life.

Whitney: That said though, Ali, that was bold. That was bold. I mean let's like, you know, I'm assuming you're in your twenties and you've got a full time job. It's paying the bills and within a couple of weeks you quit your job. (laughs) And are you living in New York City at this point?

Ali: Yes. And a fifth floor walkup.

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: It was 750 a month though. It was, it was a, it was a bad place, but um-

Whitney: But still it was bold.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: It was bold. But you did it. So question for you. Cause I think usually when you make that kind of jump, there's a push and a pull.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: So the pull was you were super excited. Like this guy had painted a vision for you of what your future could look like.

So that was the pull. What was the push for you?

Ali: The push away?

Whitney: Yeah, the push for you to do, to actually it.

Ali: That's an interesting way to look at it. Yeah, I like that. I wasn't being appreciated at the job.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: I was, uh, I wanted my own bathroom. I wanted a women's bathroom and-

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: Yeah. You know, (laughs) literally I remember just as there's like, there's just one day that like, you know, it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: It was just one crappy day that did it. You know, I know it, it still does seem bold when I thought about it. But it's funny cause now you know, here I am, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm married, I have twin six-year-olds. Gosh, looking back, I had nothing to lose.

I really think it was an easy decision to- today. That would be a much harder decision I think um, as we age, you know, you're carrying more responsibility, more weight. And back then I had no kids, no pets, no problem. You know, I figured if something goes wrong I could, you know, knock on my parents' door and see if they'd take me in. But, I think sometimes we, we go crazy overthinking and miss opportunities. I know I'm a little different than some, but I just had this incredible feeling that this is where I needed to be.

Whitney: You listened to your gut. And I think it's interesting you've said a couple of times this idea of awareness. So just be being focused and conscious of what experience your internal experience you were having.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: So you become an entrepreneur. What are some lessons learned, you know, for people who are listening to this and saying, "Okay, I'm going to be bold. I'm going to jump off my current learning curve as I would say I'm going to disrupt myself and there's something that's pulling at me, but there's also something that's pushing me." Um, what are some lessons that you learned as you first started this business?

Ali: I do think that especially for women, I mean it's the only perspective I have as a woman. I'm going to comment on something and also working with a lot of women is that sometimes we make our best decisions when we're backed against a wall.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: And, um, I know that I've been probably at my boldest when I'm provoked a bit when I realize, "Okay, this project isn't working so I have to go with the bigger idea."

You know, it's something interesting when I look back that I really observe in, in my career and when I'm working with the, the women I work with today, my clients are typically women who've broken the seven figure mark with their business, which for women, it, I mean is less than 2% of all women business owners. It's a- it's a different mindset.

Whitney: That right Ali? Less than-

Ali: It's, it's sad. Two to 3%. It varies each year, but it's, um, you know, when they've gotten to that place, they've really got their mindset shifted that they've made some bigger decisions, that they've done things a bit differently and been okay with that. They know who their friends are, they know who their friends aren't.

It's, it's more the person they've become than the money. That's the fascinating part to me in all of this. Something else I want to mention is that when I got started and still to this day, I think there's more value in doing the opposite of what you see everyone doing than following the pack.

Gosh, what changed everything was social media, Whitney. It was really interesting when I started my online business and was doing the newsletters and selling courses and kind of this whole underground info marketing thing and what changed everything was social because suddenly it was a platform where everyone had a voice and everyone could be a publisher.

And you know, there's a great concept to that. However, there's so much noise right now. Even you and I now on this podcast, there's now, gosh, how many podcasts in existence, right? I mean, just probably hundreds of thousands. I'm just going to guess maybe your producer would know it seems like it.

Whitney: (laughs) Easily.

Ali: And how do we stand out right now in all the noise - it's become just- just crazy. And so when I'm working with clients and when I look back on my career, I really always looked for things that people were not doing.

And sometimes it could be the opposite thing of what they were doing. And I'll give a quick example. I have a client right now who has so much competition online. She decided to take most of her marketing offline again. So actually sending things in the mail, you know, doing more in person meetings, making changes in her events and doing live events and get doing real seminars instead of doing it online simply to stand out and people are getting more high touch experience. Great advice to take is if your industry or even in your job and look at what the norms are. And look at which ones that if you broke those norms could dramatically change the results that you're getting.

Whitney: So what's an example? I know I'm asking you to go back 15, 17 years.

Ali: You keep taking me back to my 20s.

Whitney: I know.

Ali: (laughs)

Whitney: I want to take you back to your 20s then we'll bring you-

Ali: I'm happier now but okay. (laughs)

Whitney: I just, I, I think it's so interesting. I, I'm just fascinated by origin stories and just, um, you know, what's something you said break the rules. In my parlance, I would say play where no one else is playing.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: You start out. What's something that you did that like other people weren't doing?

Ali: Do you know what I love? I have to just bring it back to something you said. I was watching a clip of you speaking and you said really, you know, the, the disruption has to start with you personally, right?

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: It- It's not the company, it's not the concept. It's really the, the person. And something I did very consciously, even when I was still in that job, was look for ways to get out of my box, get out of my circle. So, you know, if I wanted to, uh, be a business owner, I needed to go hang out with other business owners. I needed to get ideas and be around them and learn how they thought. I needed to find new circles of friends. Honestly, I love my friends, but they would come home from work and just want to talk about what's on TV. I decided very clearly then to do things differently than the people who are immediately around me. And, and I think that's, that's really critical. It, it changes how you think it changes how you operate. Um, and, and does that answer your question a bit?

Whitney: It does. It does. I think now in hindsight, it probably doesn't feel like a super big deal, but I suspect there were some tough decisions to be made.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: Some people that you weren't going to associate quite as much, and that must have made you a little bit sad. And then also decisions of people that you wanted to hang around. And what did that look like and how did that feel? And it- and it does remind me actually, we had on the podcast, oh, actually about a year ago now, Benjamin Hardy, and he wrote a book called *Willpower Doesn't Work*. And one of the things he talks a lot about is that our environment shapes who we are.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: And so we like to think that we internally shape it, but we very much, if we really want to change, we use our conscious mind to put us in ourselves in an environment that will then shape the decisions that we want to be making. And so when I hear you talk about that, I hear you saying and doing things that probably people weren't focusing on so much 15 or 20 years ago, as you made this conscious decision to put yourself in an environments that you could become the person that you, you in your mind had thought that you wanted to become.

Ali: Absolutely. I will still fly across the country, across the world. Uh, if there's an event or seminar or person, I think I should be around to meet with them. It's, it's incredibly important and, and you know, technology is great, but it's not the same. It is really not the same.

Whitney: So what's an event that you've been to recently that was like that for you?

Ali: Mmm, I have been part of the EY Winning Women for a few years now. It's a wonderful program and they run a conference every year called the Strategic Growth Forum. And you know, you're in the audience, you're hearing from people right on stage in front of you, like Richard Branson, like the founder of LinkedIn. Like, like those are the types of thinkers. Um, I one of your most recent guests, Brené Brown. I flew to an event that Dell was hosting to hear her on stage and be able to meet her personally. She's fantastic. Um, you know, to be around those bigger thinkers and those types of people is, is, um, it's something that you just can't get online. Just to be in that room with them and see, "Oh my gosh, they're real. This is who they really are."

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: And I could absorb these ideas from them. And, and I know that, you know, um, the women who come to my events say the same thing. There's a reason that I do events live still. People, they fly from it and from around the world. It's a different context when you're together, something magical happens when you are in a room together.

Whitney: Yeah. You know, it's interesting too. You I, I found a quote that you, um on CNN business where you said the biggest area for me is mindset.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: Um, and I think what I'm hearing you say is you want to put yourself in a place where you can get the mindset right.

Ali: Yes.

Whitney: You also say something too that I think it's interesting you say, um, "Entrepreneurs are handling a lot. It's completely different to their previous lives. People don't typically come to me about this. Usually the first thing is how to grow the company. But thinking differently is key. Women often feel they need people to like them. I say they don't, you say they don't, they don't need to be respected as a small shift in awareness that can help people make good decisions that help their businesses grow."

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: Any other thoughts around that or stories, maybe a story of someone that you've worked with and you've just that you have permission to talk about-

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: ... where you seeing this big shift?

Ali: Yeah. Well, and here's what this comes from and then I'll give you a specific example. You know, when we are in school, when we are in grade school or even university, and then in the corporate world we ascend step by step - they're going to first grade, then they'll go to second grade, then they'll go to third grade university, freshman, sophomore, junior.

We go into a typical corporate job, right? You're an assistant. Work your way to be an associate, the manager. And, and so this is how we're programmed. We don't even realize it. You go to

start a business and you do not realize now that you are making up your own rules, you can create many of your own laws of nature.

So I had a client who came to me and was really looking just very step by step in growing her business and we quickly realized that the category she wanted to grow in was very saturated. There's no way she could compete with the other people around. She didn't have as much experience. She didn't have enough capital to market the way they were doing. So we looked, how do we put her in her own unique category? And once we figured that out, we looked at her strengths, the type of clients she worked with, where she should belong. Then suddenly it occurred to her, she said, "Oh my gosh, I'm at the top, then. Aren't I?" I said, "Yeah." It's- it's an immediate leap. It's an immediate leap-

Whitney: Wow!

Ali: ... to being that expert. And you could just see she had to get her head around it and I said, "You're walking out this door now - you have to be that expert when you walk out the door. You're a leader of this category. You're the expert in this. You're the pioneer in this." And so it was a total reframe that she still had to get her head around and on the coaching calls every time I'd have to kind of lift her back up there cause she get back down to well first I should do this and then I should do this.

She was even thinking of going back to school to get a degree, which she really didn't need. She was completely qualified to go out and do this, work with people and with companies. So it's, it's often, I have a British friend who I love the way she says that she goes, "You know you can go ABC and or and, and then get all the way to zed." And I love, I just love saying zed, but she said, "Why not just be at zed and, and I love the way she said that. So I'll say that to clients. I'll just say, "Let's be at zed, be at zed right now. What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Let's come from that place.

Whitney: I love that. I was just going to ask you, so if I walked in and I was trying to like inhabit that role, what would you say to me? And it sounds like you would say to me, "Let's be at zed."

Ali: Be at zed, just be there.

Whitney: First of all, let's talk about your podcast or Glambition Radio and-

Let's say I'm- I'm going to your podcast to Glambition Radio right now. I love that name by the way. How did you come up with th- th- with that name? Glambition.

Ali: I, I was watching, it's kind of embarrassing. I would never share this. I was watching the now defunct Style Network when I was home sick-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: ... in LA-

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: ... and single with my cat. You know, you could just set the whole stage for you here. It was probably right before a lifetime movie came on. And, um, so I'm sitting there and they were flashing just these fun words on the screen and I know what I was watching something fun. And um, one of the words that flashed was Glambition and I was just thinking, "Oh, oh that's, Ooh, I like that." Cause I liked the, the Glam was the kind of the fun-

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: ... and female and-

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: ... fearless with the ambition. And, um, I sat with it for a while cause it, cause I, you know, I, I some people do think of musical land but I'm not overly girly. But I loved, I just loved that, the feeling of that cause it blended the two concepts together and, and, and here we are and that the show's been on the air now for four years.

Um, I'd love to have you on there too by the way. I hope my team has mentioned that, but we'd love to have you on. We have a key concept thinkers, entrepreneurs, founders, uh, really interesting women. I just love conversations with fascinating women.

Whitney: Well first of all, I would love to, and then that goes to my next question is, um, for people who, I mean, you obviously have four years' worth of episodes. So for people who are listening to this or I'm thinking, "Okay, I want to go over, I want to listen to Ali's podcasts." What are one or two to get them started so that they can know, you know, cause it can be overwhelming, I find. Where would they start?

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: What are a few episode they can start with?

Ali: Some of the recent ones um, we just had on, um, my friend Reagan Moya Jones, founder of Aden and Anais and if- if those of you who've had kids, you know, those beautiful muslin baby blankets that everyone has now, Prince George was brought out in one and then her business went crazy.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: She just told a very profound story though that she admitted that said she was just fired from her own company. And, uh, the VC partners she brought in did, they did not see eye to eye and it was an incredibly emotional story. And so if you'd like to get a real depth of like where we go in the show, listen to that one, it just came out. And then we have business building stories like Ellen Latham who founded Orange Theory, which I was fascinated about because she- she was teaching just fitness classes in Florida. And a serendipitous moment was the wife of, um, the guy who helped build up Massage Envy. You know, that huge franchise.

Whitney: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: He came and said that you could make this into a franchise. She's like, "No, that's nuts. This is a fitness class and it changes every day."

So I had so many questions for her, like how do you take something like that and build it out and systematize it and then ensure quality when people franchise it. It was a fascinating, more very practical, step by step type discussion. So, you know, we go both places cause that's the fun part of all this to me. It's the person in the process, but then we also do get into the process cause there's a lot to look at and you can learn from.

Whitney: Right. Okay. Excellent. So we'll include those two um, episodes in the show notes. Now, one of the um, clips that I listened to, which was really interesting and it was a more emotional

moment for you, I just wanted to share it and just have you talked about this a little bit. It was, um, you, you made the comment, "Today I don't have the energy to be an activist." And you are kind of choked up when you said that. And I just wondered, is that, where, where does that come from? Um, in terms of, I think it's around trying to support female entrepreneurs, but I just wondered-

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: ... just talk about that for a minute.

Ali: Yeah. And I remember that was the interview with my friend Claudia Chan, who founded She Summit who is just her, her energy is, is endless. I just, you never have friends who are around your and you're just thinking, "Well, can I have some of that please?"

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: And, and I think that interview as well was on a particular day, like, you know, the kids were more toddlers then they just turned six. So they're probably four. And you know, I'm, you know, managing the house, managing them, those of you who are moms, no, it's just there's different energy we carry and, and meanwhile we're in the middle of all the election craziness. Right. You remember the-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: ... the energy going around that and the emotion and you know, what's, what's happening. There was just so much volatility and anger and sadness and you know, and, and just all over the place.

I mean, everyone's going nuts on both sides and I just want to crawl under the duvet. I mean and hide all day. (laughs) That's really, really what I felt like. But then you feel this calling like, "Oh, if I have a platform I should be doing this and doing that." And, and this push pull and then, you know, that's when I mentioned to Claudia, cause she was just saying, you know, we're, we're, we have to be an activist and we have to be taking responsibility and mobilizing people.

And, and I really was just being honest saying what if I don't have the energy today to be an activist?

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: You know, really what if I'm just kind of getting through my day, like trying to stay off social so I don't want to cry or hurt somebody and, and really just get some stuff done. And her response really was helpful.

She's like, "You know, in what you do every day Ali, you are an activist, you are leading people." So it's in whatever category you're in. Cause I, I think at first you feel this pressure like should I go run for office? You know, (laughs) you have like that.

Whitney: Right.

Ali: Cause you see people up there and you're like, "My God, they need, we need some good people let's get involved." Which is happening. I mean-

Whitney: It is.

Ali: ... some great people are stepping up on, on all in all categories. But it's an energy thing because I think we feel this pressure when we do have a platform that we need to be using it, um, for possible, you know, political things and saving the world and you've got to find your own lane and do the best you can in that lane. And we can't be all things to all people.

Whitney: Interesting.

Ali: But now I do feel like stepping up into leadership and empowering other women leaders, that is my form of activism.

Whitney: Yeah. I didn't realize it was- it was around the time of the election. So that was a bit of a watershed moment for you of like thinking through, "What does this mean? How do I show up?" And, and like you just said-

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: ... this is your way of being-

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: ... an activist.

Ali: It may have a bit still after but... you know what? I think it was, I think it was a week of one of those big shootings or something.

Whitney: Oh, okay Got it.

Ali: I mean just to, stuff's always happening right, that it can. Um, if you watch the news somethings going to upset you probably every day now. Its- its-

Whitney: Right. I haven't watched the news for a really long time and I felt, you know, I had, I have friends who are very focused on watching the news and I felt incredibly bad about it until Tim Ferriss said he didn't watch the news either because he was trying to manage his information and flow.

And I like, "Yes, that's good"

Ali: Yeah. Because you feel just assaulted.

Whitney: Yeah. Yeah. It's just too much.

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: And I was like, "Okay, I want to manage what's information's coming into me."

Okay. So next question for you. So your business, um, here's what I understand about it and I, I want to do kind of a rapid fire question for you. You do radio shows, so your podcast, you do training programs, you do seminars, you do events, which are may be kind of the same thing you do mentoring. I want to go through each of these and maybe I'm missing something and have you tell us what do you like about each of those? Cause it's very much a portfolio. What do you enjoy about the podcast? What do you enjoy about the training? What aspects of these do

you enjoy? Both in terms of what you're able to give to people, but also what you, you feel like you receive from it?

How does it fill your- fill your bucket.

Ali: Okay, good. These are good questions. Okay I'm ready.

Whitney: So let's do radio.

Ali: Okay.

Whitney: Let's do radio podcasts first.

Ali: Yes, I love that I don't have to put on makeup-

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: ... and I love that I get to talk to amazing women and I can do it from anywhere in the world and sharing great stories with great people.

Whitney: Okay. Training programs.

Ali: Getting amazing women in a room together live and just seeing what happens. It's always magic.

Whitney: So that's kind of training, seminars, events, that those, those all kind of are amalgamated together.

Ali: Yes. Yeah.

Whitney: Okay. So when you do a training program, how many people do you put in a room just give set the scene for us a bit.

Ali: I used to do, I could share with you, I used to do like 500 person events and we had like, we would hire acrobats and cowboys and have a lot of fun. And then, when I changed my business to focusing solely on the women generating seven and eight figures revenues in the- in their business, then I do smaller events now because it's what they need.

I think more people need high touch, they need high level advisory, they need someone to really care about them. And so now we have about 70 to 80 women in the room at my events. Uh, the co- for example, Iconic, which is coming up in November.

Whitney: So you do you prequalify people?

Ali: I do.

Whitney: Okay. So that, because I mean, part, that's part of the magic, right? I mean, I just, I just went to TED for the first time and I will be honest, I love the [crosstalk 00:32:36]

Ali: The real TED? You went to the real one?

Whitney: Yeah, I went to the real TED. It's on my bucket.

Ali: Oh, what was like?

Whitney: Well, okay, so here's what it was like. I loved it. I hated it.

Ali: (laughs)

Whitney: It was overwhelming. It was amazing. I mean that's just what it's like and I, and, and you know, you're hearing all these fascinating people up on stage, but part of what makes it magical, and this comes back to you, what you're doing with Iconic is everybody else who's in the room. So you can turn to anybody to your right or left and have a conversation. And they're going to be interesting-

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: ... because they curated who's in the room. And so you put on this training program, and it sounds like some magical things happen when you bring these women together.

Ali: Especially when there's a different conversation that happens with someone who's been in business for seven years and this ain't their first rodeo. And, you know, they're at a place where they're trying to make some big decisions and, and I do think to getting to a certain age, you know I work with women in their younger thirties and, and they operate a certain way and then I work with women in their forties and, and you know, in our forties we're starting to think now about like, what is my great work of this lifetime?

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: You know, what am I really here to do? And, and so these conversations, people come up to me during the breaks and just say, I didn't even know there was a room like this where I could have these conversations. I didn't even think about it until now. You know, cause they're going to, you know, large events, which are great, you know, but, but being in a curated room, I think I'm going to predict, we're going to see a lot more, um, smaller forums for especially women and other leaders to get together. The online has been great. You're connected to everybody, but we need safe spaces to really talk in.

Whitney: That's interesting. That goes back to something you said earlier and actually I heard you say as I was preparing you said, um, if you're hitting a brick wall on your business and you were giving advice, um, and you basically said, "Maybe that brick wall's happening." And I'm going to paraphrase and you can, then you can elaborate.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Whitney: Maybe you're hitting that brick wall because you're not thinking big enough.

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: Or differently enough that there are rules that you need to break. And so what I'm hearing you say is it was online, online, online, and you're like, "Okay, online's good and we can keep doing online. But what happens if we put people in a room together?"

Ali: Yeah, yeah. You said it. Perfect.

Whitney: Okay. So we've got radio shows, training, seminars, events. Sounds like you do mentoring, coaching, you do coaching?

Ali: I do. That's the bulk of my work now.

Whitney: Interesting, okay.

Ali: Um, so the previous version of my business was these large online programs. We had 52 modules and you join up and you know, a lot of people are doing these now. I, I decided to do the opposite. Um, I work high level one on one with, uh, mostly women and a few cool dudes. (laughs)

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: And uh, uh, work with them, you know, one-on-one in their business. And then I run a- a private women's group called Premiere that meets quarterly, um, of the high end women and they fly in from Switzerland, Australia, Canada, um, UK and- and some of them have not missed a meeting. It's quite extraordinary. That's how great a forum it is when, when women of that level get together.

Whitney: Hmm. Hmm. That sounds fantastic. Who are some people that you talked earlier about like jumping on a plane and going to be in a room with someone who are some people that you admire and if given the opportunity, you would jump on a plane tomorrow to go meet those, that person. Who's on your bucket list?

Ali: Let's see. That's a good question. I'm disrupted. (laughs)

Whitney: (laughs)

Ali: Whitney Johnson has disrupted me. Um, that's a really good question. Who do I really watch now and love? Um, you- you know who? Okay. And I'm thinking of the ones who may, you know, we don't know how much longer they'll be around, not that they're ancient, but like I actually am thinking of like mad- uh, I, my mind is going to some musical artists-

Whitney: Oh, okay. Please.

Ali: ... that I just admire for their boldness. So like I like Madonna-

Whitney: Okay.

Ali: ... Beyoncé, who's an amazing, they're both amazing business women-

Whitney: Oh, yeah.

Ali: ... by the way. I'm always watching the business on the back end. Like Beyoncé's deal she just did with Coachella, Ariana Grand- Grand- Is it day or Grande or Grand I don't know what it is...

Whitney: Yeah, Grande. Uh-huh (affirmative)-

Ali: ... Okay. Apparently got paid, paid more for Coachella than Beyoncé. But Beyoncé negotiated all the streaming rights and did the movie with Netflix. And you could just see the thinking that goes on there. So those types of women who I truly feel are, you know, iconic, who have, who have, they're expressive, they're bold, and the business is fueled by creativity. I think that's the

biggest juiciest part for me. There's a lot of women business leaders I respect, but the ones who really thrive on creativity really juice me up.

Whitney: Interesting. Okay. I want to ask you a couple more questions as we wrap up, but before we do that, let's do a few logistics. If people want to find you, where should they go?

Ali: They can just go to alibrown.com and uh, I'm pretty active on Instagram. That's probably where I hang out the most. So that's Alibrownofficial.

Whitney: Okay. Excellent. So Alibrownofficial, all one, sort of one word?

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: Okay, good. So what are you excited about right now in your business? What are- what are you trying to figure out? What are you thinking through right now? Um, as you for 2019 and 2020? Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: My next evolution, I, I seem to have like a three year creative cycle. So when I disbanded the other portions of my business, um, I had my twins in 2013. That's when I wanted to make some changes. And I have been the coaching for a few years now working with the high level women, just kind of quietly running, you know, these incredible groups.

And, and now I'm ready. I- I just came back from New York where I met with my book agent. By the way, I can't believe you've, you've come out with like what, four or five books? I'm still-

Whitney: Three. (laughs)

Ali: Okay. It looks like four or five. I- I- I'm still trying to get through one, so I have immense respect for you. And I know the book is going to be the hint to, uh, some things that are coming, but I'm in this interesting place. Like I have the vision and, and that's what I'm holding. And the steps there, I'm very open to what happens, but I do feel like the energy is shifting and some like magical things have happened lately. Some special introductions. You know, some people reaching out about possible partnerships.

And so it's very often I don't have specific goals or steps even for myself. I very much just keep stepping into the vision each day. I make the decisions that are best in front of me and um, I know it's going to have to do with women in leadership that it's, it's in that lane.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: But I'm, uh, working on some juicy details behind the scenes.

Whitney: Hmm. Okay. So on your book, have you gotten your agent and stuff already or where are you? How far do you have an agent?

Ali: Have an agent. Yeah, it's been, it's been an interesting process.

Whitney: Uh-huh(affirmative)-

Ali: Um, and here's where I've struggled with it too, that, you know, I have, I'm used to doing things my way. I've been doing for twenty years since I walked out that door and...

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ali: (laughs) The ad agency.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)- That old door. You're ...

Ali: And so, yeah. And they're bringing the perspective of here's what the publishers want. And I think every author can relate to this, you know, I'm saying, but this is what the people need, right? So we're in this dance right now of how do I feel like this is instilling complete integrity for me and the message I want to convey and it's still me and my writing, but tweaking the framing of it, tweaking the packaging of it.

So it's been a- a good experience for me to be more open minded in, in how my content is brought to, you know, brought to people.

Whitney: Interesting. So there's the, the give and- the give and take that comes with that.

Ali: Yeah.

Whitney: Now are you, um, are you going with a traditional publisher or are you going to self- publish.

Ali: Traditional, yeah.

Whitney: Okay.

Ali: Which, which, which is really the, you know, I could self-publish any time-

Whitney: Yeah.

Ali: ... and the reason I wasn't interested in a book before is I just really had no need for it. Like, "Wait, why am I doing?" You know, you're going in your mind in the circle, "I'm I doing the book to get more speaking to get more business? But I have the business, do I need the book?" And I was kind of going round around.

And then there was just this moment I knew that this message has to be brought to the women out there and, and, and the message in this book I'll give you just a nutshell is that we focus, I think we're focusing on the wrong conversations right now.

There's been a lot of conversations that have been needed like the Me Too Movement and, and gender equality and the pay issues and things that need to be fixed and it's getting there. It's not perfect, but we're, you know, we're making improvements. For the women that with me and I resonate with them, it's typically though we shift the conversation to that bigger picture. Like, "Really what is the great work you're here to do? How do you step into true leadership? How are we bolder?" Because there's a lot of people making noise right now that are saying things that aren't making sense. I want more women who make sense to be heard. That's essentially the goal of the book without saying it in the book. But that's kind of the gist of it.

Whitney: Okay. I think you are uniquely positioned to do this because your life is like you're- you're going to be talking about something that you have done. And I think, you know, it's interesting to me, it's a little bit of a side note, but one of the things I've noticed, and I perhaps you have too, is that, for women in particular, I think, I think this is true for men, but I think it's more true for women, is that before they will listen to what you have to say, they need to know about you.

They need to know about your story. They need to feel connected to you. You've got to have the credentials, but they need to feel connected to you. And only when they feel connected to you, um, and know about who you are and believe that there is an alignment with who you say you are and what you're saying. Then they'll actually really listen. And my sense of you is that you are a person who they'll listen to because you're going to tell them to do something that you've done yourself.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Accurate. Thank you.

Whitney: You're welcome. Ali any last thoughts for us? Any suggestions that you would have, maybe one or two tips that you would like to give to people who are listening to both the women and men who are listening to this podcast and are not quite doing what you had said they might want to do is to step into their space? Any suggestion?

Ali: One giant tip if that could suffice. And that is, um, more of my success and- and has been from letting go than taking on. And, and I think that if you're in a position right now that, that something's not working or you're thinking of taking a leap, you know, look at what you're resisting.

Look at if there's something you need to walk away from, let go, stop doing. We'll justify in our heads, you know, a lot while we have to hang on to something, for example, a division of the company or you know, a bad team member, even a bad relationship on the personal side, things like that.

But look at, if you can't tell where you need to go yet, maybe you can look at what you need to let go of and that, that's the best place I think to start.

Whitney: Great Advice. If you don't know where you want to go, think of where you, what you need to let go. Wonderful. Ali Brown, thank you so much for being with us.

Ali: Thank you, Whitney.

I know I say this a lot, but I'll say it again - if you're wondering what you should leap to next, take some time to examine your roots. What you wanted to be when you grew up. What made you feel strong and capable as a child.

Take a look at what Ali said she wanted to be when she grew up. A pediatrician or a backup singer. At first glance it may seem that those two professions are worlds away from what she does now. Pediatricians work with parents - usually the moms - to help the health of their children thrive. Backup singers do what they are great at and love to do while also supporting the person out front. As a leader and coach for female entrepreneurs, I think Ali's doing a little bit of both. She's works alongside women so their businesses can be healthy. She also knows what her gifts are and uses them to support women as they walk onto their stage. Ali even has a little bit of that Donny and Marie sparkle in her branding and in the way her own business shows up in the world. In the looking back, you will often discover what you need to do to move forward.

And staying in the music realm, I thought it was so interesting that Ali looks to Beyoncé and Madonna as role models. Both have taken on market risk and played where no one else was playing. To become one of the 2-3% of businesses that generate more than 1 million dollars, you have to think big and you have to take on market risk. So if something isn't working, figure out how to play where no one else is playing and think bigger.

Practical tip:

Is there a space in your life where you can consciously “break the rules?” Zig where other people are zagging? It could be a conscious choice to change your social circle like Ali’s was?. Or if you have a course or product that has done well online, is there a way to offer it in person? Can you flip the script on what you’re currently doing?

If anything I just said made your heart start to race a little, we have a resource for you. It’s an audio on preparing for change that we’ve created using several of our most impactful episodes. If you decide to sign up, the lessons will be delivered directly to your inbox. Visit whitneyjohnson.com/change to enter your email address and get started.

Thank you again to Ali Brown 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.