

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 128: NANCY DUARTE

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

Nancy Duarte is a communication and persuasion expert whose firm, Duarte, Inc., is behind some of the most influential visual messages in business and culture. She's worked with 25 of the world's top 35 brands, helping them incorporate story patterns into business communications. Nancy has been featured in Fortune, Fast Company, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. She's written five best-selling books, four of which have won awards. Her most recent book, DataStory, is available today.

WHITNEY Nancy Duarte, welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast.

NANCY Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

WHITNEY First question for you is, where did you grow up and what did you want to be when you grow up?

NANCY Well, I grew up in a small town in Northern California called Chico. And that was kind of my formidable years. I did spend four years high school and a year of college in Mississippi, but I bounced right back to California. I think a lot of times you want to be what you grow up based on how you play. And I remember I'd found an old abandoned desk, I put it in my room, and I would trace over a coloring book, pictures in coloring books and then I would sort these pictures in alphabetical order. So, I think my play looked a lot like what I do now for a living. So it was at a desk and draw pictures mostly. (laughs).

WHITNEY So how did you translate that? I like to draw pictures at my desk, to what you studied in college?

NANCY I don't recommend this for everyone, but I had a, a relatively hideous upbringing. And just kind of wanted out of my house. So I finished one year of college in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and did what any bright young girl should

probably been never do. And that's how I got married when I was 18 to the man of my dreams, and we have been married now for 37 years.

And I dropped out of college and I actually got a C- in Speech Communication and a D in English. And now I write books in English about speech communications. (Laughs). My, one of my beloved long-term clients, Cisco, actually paid for me to get my MBA from UCLA. So I got to skip all of - my body of work, kind of counted as my undergrad and then they paid for me to get an MBA at UCLA.

WHITNEY Nancy, that is making me cry. What a beautiful story that is.

NANCY Oh. (Laughs). Yeah, it's kind of a big one.

WHITNEY It is. Sounds like you had a difficult childhood. You marry someone at 18 years old, but you've been able to make that marriage work for 37 years, which is stunning and wonderful and congratulations. And then you were able to have a client, invest enough in you and care enough about you that they said, "Okay, we're gonna pay for you to go get your MBA." That is just wonderful.

NANCY So many blessings in that commentary you just relayed back. I think on the marriage front, I think my husband, and I always worked hard on our communication. And I think that also gladly, even my siblings and I had really strong communication 'cause we had to kind of have workarounds around my mom. So I think communicating has been really, really, really important to me.

When, you know, Cisco was a client, we've helped them communicate. We, we write, produce and help them deliver this, some of their strongest and most important industry messages through how they present it. And I think they, I think they just got it. It was really nice. They kind of adopted me through a protégé program and chose to invest in me as a diverse supplier. It was really cool.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm. It's wonderful. And you know what else is really interesting, is that I think so often we can go back to what we end up doing in our lives. And a few weeks ago I had Hal Gregersen on the podcast, and he talked about questions and what's your keystone question? That question that you're trying to always, you know, trying to ask in your life and then also your shadow question. That thing that sort of is always lurking in the background.

And one of the things that I'm thinking about as I'm listening to you talk is this idea of, you had to find workarounds with your mom of how you communicate. How do you figure out what, navigate through the world and, and that difficult experience that you had as a child turned out to end up being one of your super powers. And so, you're able to now teach hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, how to speak and communicate and tell stories. Does that, does that sound accurate?

NANCY Yeah. Mom had a lot of mental illnesses, including narcissism. And I found now as an adult, I realized that when you're narcissistic, you're missing the empathy gene. And through just some of the reading and research I've done is, especially women, young girls need empathy modeled for them. For them to kind of turn out and be, you know, become communicators and, and become comfortable in the world that we're in.

And so, if you look at my entire body of work, almost all of it, if you, in reflection - I only figured this out after my last book - but most of them have models, and they have models that create empathy. Empathy for an audience, empathy toward who you're communicating with. Empathy around a framework, a leader can have in their mind as they're driving change. And all of these models have been my own coping mechanism and ways to become a master of something that was a really big void in my life, I don't think I would have become who I am if I hadn't clawed so hard to fill that void.

WHITNEY That's wonderful. Before we go to your book, I want to talk about how you came to start a company. You know, it's interesting, I, I was having this bit of an epiphany this morning, and you know, the last few days I've just been immersing myself in your work. Which has just been such a privilege and, and pleasure. And I was thinking, you know, people will often say to me, who do you admire and who do you want to be like? And I can think of men that I admire and one woman that I typically admire and, and say is Brené Brown. But as I've been really thinking about you and, and watching you and you were on our 40 Over 40 list a few years ago. I realized, you know what? You're one of the people that I admire, and you're a role model for me as well. And so-

NANCY Aww.

WHITNEY I, yeah, so I just wanted to share that with you and I, I-

NANCY You're so cute.

WHITNEY And I, I'm thinking, okay, so I want to hear about how you came to start this company, because it's kind of an improbable thing that you did. So tell us about how you started it?

NANCY Well, it was 31 years ago, and the Silicon Valley was just kind of a different place and embraced innovation. And my husband was the one who actually started it. He was an illustrator. So, we kind of positioned ourselves as technical illustration company. And we were like, we had lived in this cruddy little tiny little apartment with terrible yellow shag carpet. And yeah, we were probably the only people in a two-mile radius that had a little tiny Mac Plus.

So he started by doing technical illustrations, and I was working my real job. Very pregnant, very angry, screaming at him "This is the dumbest idea. This is not going anywhere!" (Laughs). I was terrible. It was also seven years into our marriage, probably the most difficult part of our marriage. And he literally

begged me, he was, "Nancy, I think this is a big deal. I think these personal computers are really going to be a big deal. Would you please read a Macworld magazine?" So, I did. And I was like, "Okay, maybe this is, but I'll tell you. If I can sell it, you can keep this company, but if I can't sell it, you're getting yourself a real job." (Laughs).

So, I picked up the phone that afternoon, and we won Apple and NASA and Tandem, which is now HP, in one afternoon. And then I never went back to my real job. So, I just, it was almost weird because I tried so hard what, what was history and became my dream, and I worked so hard to abort it. (Laughs). Worked him so hard within a few years, poor guy got carpal tunnel syndrome. And so he just kind of was gracious and let me run it and drive it. And he's my biggest fan.

WHITNEY I love this so much. So everybody who's listening, when you get this book, in one of Nancy's blurbs for the book, right? Everybody has blurbs for the books. Here's what one of the blurbs says, No, no, Nancy, you read it. Do you know where I am? Page 11.

NANCY Oh. (Laughs). Yeah.

WHITNEY [inaudible 00:08:49] your husband said about-

NANCY So my husband [crosstalk 00:08:51]-

WHITNEY it is the cutest ever.

NANCY He snuck in a surprise blurb. So it says, "As usual, I watched Nancy throw everything she had into writing this book. *DataStory* is probably the best work she's done so far. What's most amazing to me though is where she finds the time to be an incredible wife, run a firm and write a truly remarkable work from an equally remarkable woman. Mark Duarte, doting husband and father of her children." (Laughs) It's so fun.

WHITNEY You didn't know? You didn't know this was going to be in there? He snuck it in.

NANCY No, this is probably my assistant. I mean, before it went into the print, my assistant sent it to me, and I just was like, "Oh my God. That's so nice." He just called-

WHITNEY That's the best ever. Okay.

NANCY You know, you know how this is Whitney, we have to have energy and stamina and you, we go, go, go, go and so, Mark is funny. We liken it to like I'm the marathon runner, and he's the super sweet guy holding out water as I fly by, right? And just keeps me-

WHITNEY Aww.

NANCY Kind of hydrated and healthy and grounds me spiritually and just a good guy. So, (Laughs), that was kind of fun. Yeah.

WHITNEY Okay, so the afternoon when he persuaded you, he's like, "Nancy, give this a try." Do you remember what you said when you called up Apple and NASA and Tandem. What did you say when you called them?

NANCY Yeah, so it's interesting because, yeah people don't realize, and you're not anywhere near old enough to realize. Back in the olden days, this is pretty many years ago, people did a lot of their graphics and technical illustrations by hand. Now the Mac was not adopted. It wasn't adopted by graphic design firms for quite some time because they thought it was a toy. So, we snuck in right in this window where graphic designers hadn't really adopted it yet.

But people at NASA were literally making bar charts with black electrical tape and rub-on letters. People don't even remember what that was. So, we were a little bit like digital upstarts. So it was a digital play. I was like, "Hey, we can make closely to photorealistic illustrations of anything you need, and, and we'll give you a digital file back. And people were like, "What? You can do that?" (Laughs). So, but back then that was like a really big like disruptive thing to do. So it was-

WHITNEY Yeah.

NANCY Kind of easy to win the accounts 'cause not that many people had adopted it at the level of kind of fine art, for lack of a better word that Mark had been, had been doing.

WHITNEY So you've written a book, it's called DataStory.

NANCY Yeah.

WHITNEY And you share,

NANCY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY ... that at the beginning of your DataStory workshops, the facilitators ask about a statistic that is important to them. Can you tell us how you set this up and frame it and I, then I want us to have a conversation around that. What do they do?

NANCY Yeah, we break the room in half. Usually there's anywhere from 20 to 35 people in the room. And one half of the room states a statistic that's important to them. And they just state the number. It can be three, seven, nine, like whatever. It can be 456, whatever's the number. They just state the company they work for and a number. And then the other half of the room states a number that means something to them, and they state why.

So it could be three. Yeah, I'm one of three siblings, and I have three children, or I mean, it could be just anything of any kind of scale. And about an hour later to two hours later, we ask for people to recall everyone's numbers. And almost every single statistic on the side of the room that had any sort of meaning attached to the statistic can be recalled.

WHITNEY So what's funny is I was pretty sure you were going to say three. Because you do have three children and everything in this book that you have written is in three's. How to use data, levers of decision, knowing your audience. Act one, two, three of a story, different types of charts, it's all in threes.

NANCY I love that you saw that.

WHITNEY (Laughs). Yeah, so why this book, why now and tell us the basic premise of it?

NANCY Yeah. Nobody's ever actually caught the power of the number three. The human brain is actually wired to process things in three. Even our skeletal structure is mostly in series of three's so I'm glad you saw that. Anyway, this book I think it's going to hit a nerve because we have vats of data, big data, thick data. We have machines that learn data, we have dark data. (Laughs). We probably just have, data is everywhere. It's prolific and almost every role now has data as a key component of it.

Even my creative director who's been a designer her whole life now, about a third of her day is consumed with optimizing her department through data. So, every role, even if that you weren't, (Laughs), even if you didn't think you'd need to, you are doing this and... So even though we have all of this data, I realized that in my own firm, decision making was stalled. Like I would be maybe sitting, standing by the coffee maker and someone would just say like... I, I thought it was just an opinion or like, "Oh Nancy, should know what's going on."

But in reality I was realizing that they actually were trying to elevate to me things where decisions needed to be made. And so I think sometimes the data can be distracting and then our communication around it, it is even blurry. So this is a very, very clear way of taking data, writing it in a story structure, a three-act story structure. And it'll help speed up decision making. As we crawl around the data, people know how to explore it really, really well. But as they advance in their career, they need to learn to explain it.

Once you explain it really well and decision making is done quickly, then as you develop into a leader, you need to know how to inspire through data. So it's like almost three steps in a career. And, this was really, really fun. You know, I've transcribed every talk Steve Jobs ever delivered publicly. I've studied tons and tons of speeches and, and whenever I got to the data, I'd be like, "Oh, oh, that part's just data. I'm going to skip over that and get to the interesting bits." Right?

So I went back even and looked at some of the, all the speeches I've transcribed and looked at the data, and it is actually shaped in a story, or it's shaped in a way that humanizes the data, or shaped in a way that helps you, connects the data to something relatable. And so even some of them were inspirational speeches, actually had taken time to shape the data in some way, so it would be inspirational.

WHITNEY So you said you transcribed all of Steve Jobs' speeches. What was the catalyst that got you to say, you know what? I need to go back and look at the data. 'Cause I've been, I've been glossing over that, I need to go back and look at it and see what it will tell me. Do you remember how that came about?

NANCY I knew that a book about communicating data needed to be written. And I thought we would have a really unique stance on it because we work with the highest performing brands on the stock market, right? And we, we not only get the files in from how they thought they should communicate it, but, but we have the privilege of reshaping things that come in into what we think they should be. You know, the narrative around it

So I have this dataset, thousands and thousands of slides from thousands of companies. And so I pulled just data slides, I just pulled slides with data on it, and started to study it. And I found some patterns. Especially around parts of speech. Like, what, what, what's the noun, what's the s- what kind of verbs are we using when it's associated with data?

I started to dissect kind of parts of speech and the narrative people put around the data. So it was pretty late in the process. Once I finished what we needed to do to explain the data, which is usually done in, in presentations or slide docs. Once I really figured out that, then I thought, "Well, who are the people that inspire with data?" I looked at Steve Jobs, I looked at Bono, I looked at Scott Harrison of Charity: Water, people I really admire.

And it was when I finished cracking the nut on explaining and went to figure out, how do people inspire, that's when I revisited all these transcripts that I have. And, and that's where I found a lot of the insights in the fourth section of the book, which is how do you inspire with data?

WHITNEY One of the things that you brought out early in the book is you talked about a study that had been done by LinkedIn in this huge skills gap. And the big-

NANCY Yeah.

WHITNEY Big skills gap was around the ability to communicate. Which by the way led to an entire discussion in our f- in our household. Because my husband's a college professor and we've got children in college and so we ended up having this conversation of like, "How do you communicate?". You said "As AI machine learning gets smarter, if you only know how to explore data, your role will be at risk. But if you know how to build a case for a course of action

and then influence others to action, that is something that machine learning cannot do." And so, say more about that.

NANCY

You can feed a lot of words, and the machine can assemble a bunch of words. But it, it may not be able to tell you what to do to take action from those words. So you look at some tools are getting pretty sophisticated, like Tableau for example, example, they added AI to their tool. And so it can, we put the data in a plots of chart, and it would say something like, "This salesperson is behind last quarter." Right? And then that's considered artificial intelligence.

Or you know, this, the trend is going up. Well, that's observation. What we're talking about is the action. What is the action humans need to do to change that number? What is it that that human sales guy who's down that Q2 needs to do to change the trajectory of the number or to make that number go up more quickly, or make it go down more effectively. Like the actions that humans do change the shape and the trajectory of data.

The thing that's missing in AI in robots is gut. So I spent a couple of pages about intuition. I, I actually relished the days back when I used to run my whole company just from my gut, I could wake up and be like, "You know now, my heart, my gut, it's telling me we need to go this direction." Some of the greatest moves I made in my business were based on my gut, and they went opposite the data.

So sometimes some things in our future, there will be no data that can tell us how to get there because that thing doesn't even exist yet. Like you have to invent it so that this thing in the future can even create data. I think data is a historical record of the past and yeah, it can help you project what might be the right direction in the future. But I still think it will always take a human with really gutsy intuition and a heart, you know, for human flourishing to actually take us in the future where we need to go.

WHITNEY

So here's another one of your quotes that I have loved. "Communicating data shapes our future truth, our future facts." I thought that was really powerful from your book.

You said some of your most important moves in your business, have been gutsy moves, ones that were based on intuition. What was one of those moves? We'd love to hear.

NANCY

Yeah. Yeah, I think the, the, the best one was, the dot-com crash circa 2000, obviously all, you know, the Valley took a hit. Immediately like 25% of my business just was wiped out 'cause we had a lot of clients that were, you know, back then startups, dotcoms and all of that. And so the economy was crashing and businesses, you know, in a downturn. And Jim Collins' book Good to Great came out, and in there he has a hedgehog concept.

And hedgehog concept is if there's one thing in the world you could be best at, be passionate about and be profitable at, do just that one thing. So here

the economy is crashing, and we have five service, we have four services, presentations, multimedia, web, and print. And in that moment, 2000 when the economy was crashing, I decide to shutter those services of three of four of our services. I just closed them down and said, "You know what? We're only a presentation firm moving forward. And we bounced back so well and so fast, and that downturn 2008, there's hardly any agencies left in the Valley anymore.

And I think I just had this intuitive sense. I as a leader, we're supposed to see about 18 months out in the future. Right now I'm working on a very kind of beautiful and disruptive, you know, prof- possibility for my firm and it's exciting. And that's our job, I think as a leader, is to be a seer of the future and try to navigate where to go. And the data can only give you a hint and a whiff of a direction. So somebody has to say up, we're going to, oh, sounds weird, but we're going to stop doing three out of these four services. (Laughs). And I did it. And the economy, everything would've pointed to that being the wrong direction.

WHITNEY All right. Do you want to share with us what this big thing is you're working on right now or are you ready to do a reveal?

NANCY No. (Laughs). Probably should tell my employee before I tell your audience. But it's, I mean, it's kind of in the same spirit in, in a sense. I mean the company knows that we,

WHITNEY Yeah.

NANCY We love, we love transforming others. And when you are teaching someone how to learn a new skill, and their eyes light up, and it sparkles, and they run back to their job, and they get promotions, or they win a big deal or they... We even had a guy say in the New York Times that our methodology made them 700 million more dollars, you know, (Laughs), in a year. When, when somebody really adopts a new way of thinking and working it, it changes lives.

And, and we really want to change lives at scale, which is going to happen more through our training business. Then helping powerful people get up and be prepared for very critical talks. So we're just, I mean we're going to put the gas on, on getting our training to more people, in a really beautiful and winsome way.

WHITNEY Love it. Okay. What is a data POV and how do you develop one?

NANCY Yeah, that's great. What's interesting is when you start to pull the data, you start to get an impression. Like you synthesize, you bounce around chart, this chart, oh it says this chart. Oh I'm going to go get data on that. I'm going to pull this, this and you...

You can kind of choose your own adventure when you're exploring the data. And once you've chosen your adventure and you form a like, oh, I feel like I

need to synthesize and here's the insight from the data. At that point in time, a lot of people in data positions specifically, they'll just flick a collection of charts to someone else and feel like it's outside of their pay grade to actually form an opinion, about what is the direction that the data is saying to go.

So, as you advance in a career, you actually have to take a position on the data. You have to have a data point of view. And a data point of view does include that verb, I was telling you about that action that people need to take from it. So, you need to decide, wow, do I think we need to change? Do I think we need to continue or do I think we need to finish? I mean there's different modalities. To the different kinds of verbs that you're trying to pick, but it's got to have, it's clear once at stake. What's going to be at stake if they do your idea? That they, if they move forward with this idea and what's at stake if they don't.

So, when you craft a carefully worded data point of view, what's interesting is, is it should be worded and shaped like what the end of your story might be if it was a happy ending. Like here's the data it says to do this, it's going to be really messy. But then, my data point of view is this is what a happy ending would look like. So your data point of view should have a hope of a future. If we take this action, it'll change our future, like blah blah blah. And so, that's what your data point of view should be.

And so many people don't want to do that. Kind of hearkening back to something I said earlier is 'cause they don't want to have to use their intuition. There's no way to come up with a data point of view if you don't have a percent of it mixed with intuition and gut. And there's not a lot of ways to cultivate your gut in business today. There's just not a lot of ways. I think design thinking takes us part way there, but that's also a very analytical process. And so it's scary, you run around with a target on your back when you take a stance on data. And a lot of people don't want to enter into that level of a career, running around with a target on their back.

- WHITNEY Okay. So on page 12 of your book you have a Seussian quote. Would you share that with us? I'd love it.
- NANCY A Seussian quote. (Laughs). It's okay. It says, "Oh, the story's data would tell if there were a teller to tell them well," written by me. I guess not Seussian. I must've thought Seussian-
- WHITNEY Right.
- NANCY (Laughs).
- WHITNEY Yes. Yes. It's written by Nancy Duarte, but it seems very inspired by Dr. Seuss.

For people who want to become better storytellers, in addition to reading your book *Resonate*, are there two speeches that you would recommend or slide decks that you would refer them to that would be like, "Okay, if you

watch this, you, you know, watch and learn," where would you have them start?

NANCY

That's a really good question because I have a hard time finding examples of ones done, ones that were done well. So of course, TED is a great place to go for them. There was one that Bono did a while ago, years ago and it didn't get as much uptake and he wanted to create when he was calling a "factivist" to this movement. Around the facts about ending poverty. And in there, he did a lot of the things that are in the book around inspiring change.

Also up there was a recent talk by a friend of mine now, Rosalind Picard. And she in a really beautiful way explained how data can save a life from someone suffering from epilepsy. And the, how data through the internet of things is used in a way to save lives. And so she actually had done some of the attributes of DataStory really well in there. And so I really love her talk. And then basically almost everything that comes out of Scott Harrison's mouth ever is shaped in a story form in some way. He's my favorite storytelling communicator of this era. And so much of the things he says in interviews and from a stage, he talks about data in a way that humanizes it. Which is a very, very important component of being a really excellent communicator of data, is how you humanize it and make people connect to it in a meaningful way.

WHITNEY

So you would refer people to the Bono talk and we'll include that in the show notes, the Rosalind Picard, which you do talk about in the book.

NANCY

No, actually oddly, I forgot to mention. Completely forgot to mention.

WHITNEY

Yes.

NANCY

Al Gore, Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth, which we did, (Laughs), help him for five years. But here's someone who had vats and vats of data turned it into a narrative and created a global movement. I probably should've started with that one.

WHITNEY

Oh, okay. Those are all great examples - so Bono, Al Gore, Rosalind Picard and Scott Harrison. Okay.

NANCY

Yeah.

WHITNEY

Those - fantastic. All right. So, if people want to engage with you, if their interest is peaked and they're like, "Okay, I, I, I want to do more of this. I want to become a better storyteller. I want to figure out how to not only explore data, but I want to be able to explain it and inspire people." Once they've read DataStory, what would be a next step after that for them?

NANCY

Wow, that's fantastic. We have, obviously we have a training course on it. We actually have services that support, help you transform your data into narrative. We are doing a lot around it right now - we have webinars that get recorded and be posted up online. They can subscribe to the newsletter, we

can and they can just show interest and then we'll keep them informed about other things that are coming out. We have other courses that attach to this like a SlideDoc course and we're just attaching a bunch of other learning paths that people can take as they try to develop their career in data.

I think being a student of story in general is, would help anyone professionally regardless of whether they're an individual contributor, entry level person, all the way to the top, top leader. Really getting your head around story frameworks will help in any situation in a really powerful way.

WHITNEY

What's the most important story that you've ever told in a public forum?

NANCY

Wow, that's a r- I tell everything. I mean, the scary thing is like, (Laughs), people here, we, we open up to Q and A and my facilitators, my training facilitators like, oh my God, she answers everything you guys. Just go there, just ask her anything. (Laughs). So I think, I think, a couple of things I've done, I think there, when I, you know, when the presenter is moved themselves, the audience is moved. I mean it's almost impossible. Just our brains have a default mimicry. You know, we, we are attached to the story through a story.

So, I actually in a lot of the groups I speak to when it's heavily weighted female, I feel like my story and my narrative hits a nerve.

So I do tend to tell more stories and be more transparent in when the audience is heavily weighted female 'cause that gives them more hope. And my story is definitely like - here I am no degree in the Silicon Valley, bootstrap, no investors, none. It, it, it just and you know, married at 18 to a Hispanic guy who's great.

But it's like every single thing was stacked against me. And so when you have to bootstrap and you have to be street smart and you have to be resourceful and that, that brings a lot of hope to a lot of people. So, my story does tend to resonate with females and entrepreneurs a lot.

WHITNEY

Nancy, where'd that will come from? Where did it come from?

NANCY

You know, everyone processes things differently. All of my siblings all processed their childhood differently. Some of us are more victors and some of us are more victims and I think the resolve and resilience. I was in little groups as a kid, you know, Girl Scouts is more famous, but I was in this thing called Camp Fire Girls. And a couple of the local neighborhood moms, you know, made sure I got there and I never wore the proper uniform or anything like that. But, we had to do things like sell Camp Fire Girl Mints. Or these really awesome toffee covered peanuts. (Laughs). They were awesome. And they pushed me out there, made me get out there, made me stop strangers and try to sell stuff.

And the toffee covered peanuts though were quite a fetish of mine and I would eat them all. And then I had to run around and rake leaves and find

chores to do in the neighborhood to earn back the money, so that I could pay back all of the, all the peanuts I consumed. So I just, I don't know. Like, I don't know why I had a father who was my white knight and he believed in me and spoke tenderly to me and let me crawl in his lap and tell me everything was going to be okay. I think that shaped the kind of man I wind up pursuing. I very much I definitely married my father and so I, I, I don't know.

I think just it comes with mindset and resilience and wanting more. And I knew as I observed my mom that if I chose to do almost everything opposite of her, I would expect opposite results to what her life had. And so that became a bit of a sport for me. Choosing the opposite of what mom did. And mom was a stay at home mom, and she didn't really cook or clean or, I mean it was just a mess. But I just knew that if I was industrious and focused 'cause sh- sh- she was the opposite of that, I thought my outcome would be different.

And I think the way I escaped as a kid was interesting. I was, I was kind of always in the future imagining an alternate future for myself and working through ways of, of being that might change who I would be in the future. I don't know why I was like that, but I just did.

WHITNEY

Oh, it's beautiful. Alright. Very last question for you unless there's something else that you would like to share. And that is whose story, it can be a person or it can be a company, but whose story needs to be told that hasn't been, that you would like to tell?

NANCY

Wow. Wow. That's really interesting. Oddly, I mean, maybe this is a cop out, but I think my husband's story. I keep trying to get him, can I just interview off camera, you know? (Laughs). And we want to do kind of an entrepreneur to be married as entrepreneurs kind of thing, but he's an introvert. So that's not going so well of getting him to do that. I think there's people that have been misrepresented. You know, and I think there's a lot of that happening today.

That's a really good question no one's ever asked me that Whitney. I think entire people groups. I think entire belief systems. I think so much of where we're at today is just because of a decay in our moral fabric. And societal moral fabric comes from epic tales. Epic tales that have shaped society for thousands of years. And I think so many of those epic tales that used to knit our society and belief systems and moral code together are also being challenged in today's world. And so, I think if there was a way to help reshape and bring redemption back to some of our deep-seated belief systems, in a way that's so beautiful and so winsome, and makes people believe in them again, that would be a real honor. I just don't know how to do that. It feels big.

WHITNEY

What's one of those?

NANCY

(Laughs).

WHITNEY What's, what's one of those epic tales that, as we close out, that you can think of that would be wonderful to just kind of bring it back to the forefront?

NANCY Part of it it's in my deep seated, my own belief system and the kind of Hebrew, to all the way through to the New Testament Gospels. Think a lot of people forget that the Gospels are a shared, are shared books with even the Muslim faith. And if there's ways that we could at least unite the bulk of the world around all the shared beliefs through redemption. And I think so many times we're expecting everyone to be so perfect and most of the really big narratives are around a human who's flawed and falls and gets back up again and is victorious. And we keep forgetting that.

And I also think, personally I think, Christianity is completely misrepresented. In the public narrative, it's vilified, which I don't think is fair. Because we latch onto the narrative of, of a, of four people or whoever, whoever it is out there representing some of these major religions and major belief systems. And I just think it's gone into an unfair state of decay. But that's also a season if you look historically when large movements happen, people rise up again and, and I would love to be part of that uprising.

WHITNEY It sounds like a worthy goal, a worthy goal. Nancy, any final things that you'd like to share with us?

NANCY No, except how adorable you are. How much I really enjoyed this podcast and your generosity of spirit and studious way that you've framed this whole conversation up to be so amazing. Thank you.

WHITNEY Oh, thank you. It's been, been my pleasure. And Nancy Duarte, thank you for being with us.

NANCY Oh, thanks so much Whitney.

Data is a record of the past. And while it's important to have data in making an important decision, it's nearly impossible to make a great decision about the future based solely on what has happened in the past. But frequently, that's what we try to do. And if data doesn't exist, we don't want to act. But do what Nancy suggests - immerse yourself in the data if it's available. But if it isn't, then trust your gut, make a decision and act. That's how you continue to foster and support good growth. That's how you disrupt yourself.

Though this is an amazing book and if you need to know how to take data and use it to make decisions and inspire others, you should definitely pick it up, but I think I'm most inspired hearing Nancy's story. That she had the pluck and the courage to overcome a difficult childhood, help her husband start the business of his dreams - even though she didn't want to, to take over that business when he could no longer do the illustrations, and to lead and grow Duarte, Inc. into what it is today. It's remarkable. To look at your circumstances, decide what is in your control and

can be done and then take action. Nancy has done that again and again, and it's a great model to look to when it comes to building a life and career.

Finally, I have to point this out again - I'm so moved that a huge corporation like Cisco went out of their way to champion Nancy. A person who didn't work for them full time, who would have been fine without it, who could have at this point gotten it on her own, but they championed her in getting her MBA. Several years ago, I heard someone say that you should invest in people who invest in you. Not as a way of excluding others, but when it came to being radically generous, to focus that generosity on the people who are showing up and doing great work. What a marvelous example of that concept.

Practical Tip:

Having a data point of view includes taking action. Not just analyzing and understanding what has happened in the past, but actually doing something. What's an insight that you've had in listening to this podcast you can take action on this week? I'd love to hear what you decide on. Let me know at wj@whitneyjohnson.com.

Thank you again to Nancy Duarte for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, 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.