

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 130: CV HARQUAIL

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

This week, in anticipation of the re-release of my book, *Disrupt Yourself* with Harvard Business Press on November 12, 2019, we are continuing our look at the seven-point framework of personal disruption. Today, we will be taking a look at accelerant number two - play to your distinctive strengths.

We covered this accelerant on the podcast a [couple of months ago in episode 120](#), and we'll make sure to link to that in the show notes. In that episode, we define what a distinctive strength is and walk you through the process of discovering, using and leveraging yours.

So, for today's episode, we're going to take a slightly different approach to distinctive strengths. Not only valuing and using them but thinking through how we view and value the inherent and distinctive strengths of others. Our guest today is author CV Harquail. Her book *Feminism: A Key Idea in Business and Society* is now available.

WHITNEY CV Harquail, welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. Very first question for you is where did you grow up and what did you want to be when you grow up?

CV Well, I grew up in northern New Jersey. And most of the time when I was younger, I wanted to grow up and be a veterinarian, because I loved horses, dogs, cats, bunnies. I was in 4-H and I thought, "What a great way to be a scientist and also cuddle animals." That was my plan.

WHITNEY When did it change because you're not a veterinarian?

CV I know (laughs), I know.

WHITNEY So when did the plan change?

CV I think it probably changed sometime in high school when I realized that even though I did AP Chemistry and AP Physics, I didn't do it because I loved it or gravitated towards it, but that I did it just because I could. And then I think I also started realizing that there was more out there in the world that I could possibly do. And that smart women could do things beyond being doctors,

lawyers, and veterinarians. But I think at the time, I didn't really know what else I would do. Like I really wasn't a kid who thought a lot about what was going to happen next, because I was really busy in the now. And it wasn't until I started realizing how much I stuck out and how much I wasn't like the average other kid in my high school, in my high school classes or my 4-H club.

WHITNEY

How did you stick out, CV?

CV

(laughs) Well, I stuck out mostly for two reasons. One is being really smart and not being uncomfortable about that. And, also, uh, being very curious and asking a lot of questions about, uh, why things were this way? What would happen if we did it a different way? Like I was always saying, "Did you read that article in The New York Times?" When I was 14, and who read The New York Times when they were 14? I did, because we got it delivered it every morning. And then the other thing I read, and this makes me laugh when I think back on it, is that I used to read Fortune magazine. And you're like, "Why would a high schooler read Fortune magazine?" And it was because my mom was in advertising and we got maybe 30 magazines delivered to our house every month.

Because she'd get these complimentary subscriptions because, you know, they all wanted her to place ads. And so I was reading widely about crazy things from a really early age. And, thus, I kind of stuck out because, um, I had all this extra stuff I was thinking about that didn't have a place to go in high school.

WHITNEY

Right, so you were processing all this information and wanting to talk about it and people were probably looking at you like, "I don't even know what to do with that."

CV

Right.

WHITNEY

Interesting. Okay, so just out of curiosity, what did your dad do? What was his, your dad's, profession?

CV

My parents are actually the perfect explanation for how I am and who I am. And, interestingly, they divorced when I was very young, so when I was like four. But my mom was in advertising, she was an account executive and she worked herself up much like you did, actually, Whitney. Starting as a secretary and then discovering that she was so much more capable than her job description and her environment expected of her. And she was very early feminist and a very early civil rights activists. So there's that half of me.

And then my dad, he is still an entrepreneur. He started his own business with his brother, um, and he had two or three businesses, through the course of my childhood and young adulthood. And now he has kind of a hustling bustling business that, um, that he's still working in at 82. But he's a guy that-

WHITNEY

Wow.

CV

... makes things, does things, figures things out, always has a, always has an angle on how you could do it differently. From him I learned that phrase, "I don't know, we could make it (laughing)."

WHITNEY

I like that.

CV

I'm like, "I- if I, if I wanted a telegraph that I could use with my next door neighbor, is that possible?" And he would say, "I don't know, you could make one."

WHITNEY

Wow, what a great legacy.

CV

It's a, it's a really funny contrast because on the one side I had my dad who was always, "Let's build something, let's make something. We've got to make money, we've got to earn a living." And then on my mom's side, it was, "The world could be a better place, the world should be a

better place." I'm in an industry where it's about creating, and creating ideas and influencing people. And also I'm in a world that doesn't value who I am and what I bring to the table.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CV So that kind of one two punch in my parents. It's kind of funny, you look back and you're like, "Oh, duh, no wonder I'm the combo that I am."

WHITNEY What did you study in graduate School?

CV Well, so when I went to get my PhD in Leadership and Organizational Behavior, I studied kind of two things simultaneously. So the crazy, or the non-standard stuff that I studied was, uh, diversity in organizations. Because at the time, talking about bringing in people who were from marginal communities or from, uh, different cultural groups, it was novel. I had gone into graduate school intending to examine how race, class, and gender affected organizations and how to change more organizations to be, the words we would use now would be more inclusive or more just. But I was really interested in making organizations equal for everyone.

And that was kind of based on my own work experience between college and graduate school. But then the other thing that I studied in graduate school, which is where I kind of more made a name for myself academically was the concept of organizational identity and identification. So looking at what does this organization stand for and how does it define itself? What are its central and enduring and distinctive characteristics? And how do people connect with that and attach to that and use that, um, often as a way to motivate or shape the things that they do organizationally? And so it was both of those pieces of research that I pursued in graduate school.

WHITNEY All right, so I think that's a great segue to you've written a book called *Feminism: A Key Idea in Business and Society*. Of all the things that you could have written at this point in your life-

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY Why did you decide to devote three to five years, if not more, of your life to this book?

CV For two reasons, the first one is that the world was finally ready for this book, and the second one was that I am the only person in the world who could have written this book. There have been a lot of books written about feminism, a lot of books written about organizational change, and a lot of books written about gender or other kinds of diversity in organizations. And all of these books have danced around a really central question that feminism brings to the fore, which is - why are some people assumed to be more important and in charge of other people? And why do we accept that? And why do we accept it, especially, when we can see the cascade of mistakes and missed opportunities and pain and discomfort and damage that happens because of that assumption. And feminism, as a perspective, or as a, a set of theories, is always asking that question and holding up that question that says, "We have a world that's designed around this idea that men are better than women and that men should control and direct women." That idea we don't agree with, look at how problematic it is and look at how the world would be different if we dispensed with that idea.

And the neat thing about feminism that most people don't yet realize is that feminism uses the concept of gender to expose this fallacy of some people being better than others. But feminism is as a discipline or as a worldview one that challenges the fundamental assumption that some people are better than others. And because they are better, they should have power over others. So feminism really questions the way that we've structured power in our society, and says that there are better ways to think about power and better ways to organize together to get stuff done that matters.

WHITNEY So why do you feel like you were uniquely positioned to write this book?

CV I know that's sort of weird, right? Um-

WHITNEY No, uh, it's not weird, I like it a lot because that it's, it's, it should, that's how it should be when you choose to write something. I just want to, I want to tease that out.

CV Okay. So there were very few, maybe none people that I came across in my graduate career, either as a student or later as an academic, who had kind of in equal measure, the academic or intellectual training to dig into the ideas just generally.

Who had the perspective and the knowledge about feminist theory and practice over time, which I did both from, you know, being a feminist advocate, when I was younger and then also academically. And then the third piece is the critical piece - who has an agility and an interest in business. That was the thing that was weird about me when I went to graduate school. I'd work for six years at Procter and Gamble, I'd worked at IBM, I had a million jobs myself, and I knew how businesses ran. And a lot of people in PhD programs in business schools, they don't have that experience. They didn't grow up reading *Fortune* magazine, they didn't grow up listening to a mom talk about her clients' concerns.

And they didn't have that ability to really look at what it takes to organize, make stuff, sell stuff, earn a profit, share the proceeds, and support people's lives. So in, in a lot of business schools, people study organizations who can do anything versus studying businesses that make stuff and sell stuff and provide for the world.

So it was that, the, the, that sort of triple punch having that feminist background, having that academic and intellectual chops, and having a facility in business.

WHITNEY I love that and I, I love that that is really this, you know, we talk a lot about distinctive strengths in *Disrupt Yourself*. And figuring out what your strengths are and then using them in a way that no one else is. And so it's so, um, exciting for me to look at, you know, your training and your, your background growing up. And then your interests and your passion and how you pulled all of these together.

CV Yeah, it sounds so deliberate, doesn't it (laughing)?

WHITNEY It does sound deliberate.

CV Yeah, no (laughs).

WHITNEY Which of course is not, but it sounds deliberate.

CV Yeah, I know.

WHITNEY A little bit of an editorial for our listeners is that for many, many, many years, and I would say probably until about 10 years ago, if someone asked me "Am I a feminist?" I would have said, "No, I am not a feminist." This is a word that I think, you know, it's often thought that men will think that feminist is a dirty word but the record will show, at least with this person who's interviewing you today, CV, is that oftentimes women think it is a dirty word.

CV Uh-huh (affirmative).

WHITNEY And so it's a fascinating thing to be having this conversation. I finally had my, one of my dear friends, Liz, say to me, "How can you say you're not a feminist?" And then I realized that I didn't actually even know what the word meant.

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY And so for me where I came out and then you are going to go into this in much greater detail is a feminist, at least for me was valuing the feminine perspective. Valuing myself as a woman and not seeing myself or any other female, or to your point as you're going to talk about, any other human being as less than or greater than another human being.

So my hope is, is that as you all are listening to CV talk for the next couple of minutes, is to really have that idea and perspective in mind. And to recognize that if you read this book, which I hope you all will, it is so superbly written. It's so well researched, there is no anger, this is all about... I'm not going to say it because I'm going to let you say it, but this is a really productive, encouraging informative book. So I'm going to say that and now I'm going to turn it back over to you, CV, of what's your goal with this book?

CV

I'll tell you what my goal is but I have to preface that by saying I'm not sure if it's a big goal or like a ridiculously little goal. And that goal is to have business people look at the conversations in feminism and go, "Oh my gosh, I've been either ignoring this or cherry picking this for years. And if I just take it for what it has to offer, there are so many things I can think about now, so many things I can do now, so many things I can imagine now that weren't available to me before. Hey, this perspective on the world and on business is very promising." And then also for feminists to say, "Oh, it never occurred to me that business could actually be an ally in our goals for social change." So the basic thing was one of, um, bringing those two things together and having both sides go, "Oh, there is actually some value here."

And on hand I think like, "Well, what a ridiculous thing bringing two things together and having them meet and talk to each other." And then on the other hand I'm like, "Yeah, well, it's been how many years that they have been either ignoring each other or antagonistic towards each other?" Um, there's like this whole campaign of disinformation about what feminism is. You know, maybe this is actually a, a big goal. And maybe if this could happen, it would be a great accomplishment. I don't know, it's hard to, it's hard to know whether it's big or little or both.

WHITNEY

Sounds like it's both. So, it's time for us to now have you talk us through what feminism is?

CV

It's always a big accomplishment for a person to get to the part that you started with, which is the idea that feminism is about recognizing that women and all people, as humans, are equal. That's a huge accomplishment. And it is a huge accomplishment because of what we might call socially supported ignorance or a, a vast conspiracy of disinformation. Or all of the ways in which the idea of feminist, feminism and the people who call themselves feminists have been disregarded or demeaned or intentionally misunderstood as ways of keeping feminist ideas out of the conversation and on the margins, and unable to challenge the status quo. So getting to that first part where you're like, "Oh, feminism isn't man hating." Feminism isn't about making women more important than then, feminism. is about acknowledging the human moral equality of people, regardless, of their body parts or their self-presentations.

Like that is a huge accomplishment. And for a lot of people, that's where they stay, which was better than where they were before. But in my view not far enough.

Once you start thinking about people being equal, regardless, of their bodies or their languages or where they come from, there's a lot that unfolds from that. And a lot of disinformation, if you will, that has to be challenged. For example, we live in a culture now where when you use the word equality, we believe it's equal treatment under the law. So we believe that males and females need to be treated equally even though sometimes their bodies work differently. So under the idea of equality, we don't give men pregnancy leaves because men don't get pregnant, so why should we give women pregnancy leaves? That's not equal.

But we live in a world where the very definition of equality is diminished to make it less powerful. And so, feminists would look at that question of equality and start challenging what does that really mean? And when we move back to the idea of equality being equally human, equally valuable, then that sets up a whole different cascade, if you will, of questions about how do we treat people if they're all valuable equally, but they all show up in this world different, right? So some people have two legs that enable them to walk, others don't. Some people have ovaries, others don't. Some people have hairy chests, others don't. How do we treat all of these people as equally valuable when they are not the same? And that's the big feminist question. So once we get to understanding equality and that challenge of human equality in a world where people are different and need different things and have different things to offer, then what?

And the next steps are recognizing that we have to end sexism or sexist exploitation, but in truth, all kinds of oppression. Because men and women or males and females can never be equal unless

all sorts of females are equal and all sorts of males are equal. And then it's, um, moving towards the more positive things. So, first, getting rid of the oppression, if you will, and then working to establish a world where people function as equals, politically, socially, and economically. With the goal, and this is the part that most people are like what? When I say the goal of feminism is actually to create a world in which all people flourish. Because all people are treated as equal humans and all people's differences are recognized and kind of part of the equation of how we honor them.

But when you start talking about that definition of feminism to a person who thinks feminism is like man hating, they're like, "How do we get from feminists hate men and are all angry and need to shave their legs to a world where all people flourish. I don't get that." And that's kind of that's like the whole first third of the book is getting people to that understanding. Um, because, again, this is in a world where we've been taught not to think this way in general, and also not to think this way, particularly, about feminism.

WHITNEY Yeah, one of the things you talk a bit about in the book is that, that the opposite of oppression is unearned privilege.

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY And what do you, uh, what I, what do you mean by that? And maybe I think one of the things I think is really interesting is you're very clear as you lay out the argument of the book of what privilege you have that's unearned. Um, and so can you just talk briefly about what that is?

CV Sure. So when I, I say the opposite of oppression is unearned privilege, what I'm really thinking about is if you could imagine, um, a seesaw, and on one end is oppression and on the other end is unearned privilege. So they're opposite ends, if you will, of the same dimension of power, who has it and who doesn't. Um, really the opposite of oppression is, uh, agency like the if we got rid of oppression, what we would have would be agency which is the ability to create life, um, according to the needs and desires of your community and yourself. But in a world where we are organized in power hierarchies, the opposite of oppression is unearned privilege. And the unearned privilege is all that extra advantage that we get because we are able to oppress other people.

And so, um, for me as a white upper middle class, CIS gendered, heterosexual, married person, um, who speaks English fluently and has had all the best education and all that kind of stuff. There are some privileges I've earned, like I've, I've earned the, the right to be respected in a conversation about business. Because I've got years of business scholarship and business consulting behind me. But what I haven't earned is having the TSA person just whisk me past in the line because I'm a nice white lady. I didn't earn that. And then right behind me is the black woman with five different shopping bags of stuff trying to go through the scanner, and they pull her aside and inspect every one. I didn't earn the privilege to be whisked through TSA, I just happened to be a, a wealthy white lady who doesn't look harmless.

And the woman behind me, she didn't earn the, um, extra attention, the extra scrutiny, that measure of distrust. It's just dumped on her because she's black. And that's, that's like a, I experience that every time. It's almost a joke in my family, where we're like, "Okay, here we are in a TSA line, let's see how white lady privilege works for mom." "Oh, no, you don't have to take off your shoes."

WHITNEY Interesting.

CV An- anyway, that's like the, the one that's like in my face all the time.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). Part of I think one of the cases that you're making is when we have unearned privilege, the case you're making is be willing to give up some of that privilege because the tradeoff is much more vast and expansive-

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY ... than had ever occurred to you. Because, because right now I think for many people, you think, "Well, I have this privilege and I actually deserve this privilege," and we subconsciously we do that.

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY And part of the case I think you're making is, "All right, yes, it's true. I have all this unearned privilege, um, but I'm willing to give up a little bit of that. Because if I do, not only will I flourish but everyone around me will flourish and there will be this contagion effect and all of us will benefit as a consequence."

CV Right.

WHITNEY So I think it's an important question for people who are sitting here thinking, "Okay, so I hear what she's saying, but it still feels like I'd just lose if I tried to do this."

CV Right. Well, and, and the truth is that, uh, there's this, um, saying that, um, for people who've experienced privilege, equality is a come down. And there's a way in which it's true because if I'm waded to the front of the line because I'm a white lady who doesn't look threatening, that means that other people are pushed further back in the line, right? So, um, but I still get to go first and I don't have to wait as long, I don't have to wait as long in the line. So there is a way in which that the unearned privileges, if they went away, a lot of us would feel kind of, um, like we didn't have it so good. Because we kind of do have it good.

So, basically, if you're a person who benefits disproportionately, you get more than your share of the profits of a company for the work that you do. If you have to give some of that up to get your fair share so that other people can get more, so that they're at their fair share, yes there is some loss. And I argue that, yes, ultimately, if you look around at the rest of the people around you and you see that their world is improved because you've given up a little of your unearned privilege, maybe that's a good thing. It takes a really mature person, I think, to get there, though (laughs), and it's one of those things that I say and I believe, intellectually. But sometimes when it hits me, um, when it happens to me, I, I get twinges of resentment also.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

CV But one of the things I think is really hard for people when we talk about unearned privilege, whether that's, um, privilege due to your race or your gender or your fluency in English or, or whatever it is, is we all are working hard. And we are in a world that tells us that our hard work is what gets us the things that we've achieved. Um, but what we don't recognize is how the systems around us are either wind or current at our back or current that's in our face. Like sometimes I describe it as, um, we're all swimming in an ocean, and white people happen to have a current that pushes them forward. So, sure, a whole lot of white people are, um, are swimming really hard, they're kicking really hard, they're putting in effort, they're working hard, and that advances them ahead of other white people who aren't working as hard. So you're like, "Hey, I'm working hard, I'm moving ahead, my, my distance has been earned."

And you never even notice that the current is pushing you along. Meanwhile, there's some other person from some other group, they're also in the water, the current is pushing them back. And they are swimming and swimming as hard as they can, and they're just not making the same progress you are. You might not see the current pushing them back, but it's there. And you can also see people from their same group who aren't working as hard, and they're falling further and further behind and you're like, "Well, hey, they're not working hard." No wonder they're not, um, accomplishing, and you don't see the current pushing them back.

WHITNEY Hmm, that's a great example. So you talk about the definitions, you, you know, feminism reserves that women, men, and all people should have equal agency, outcomes, etc.

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY Then it advocates for, for equality. And then the third thing you talk about, um, is why don't you talk through that where it's values women and females and the characteristics and abilities that have been labeled feminine.

CV Uh-huh (affirmative).

WHITNEY I want to hear you riff on that for a minute.

CV In the book itself I described this, uh, thing called the story of gendering and, um, how bodily differences are used to explain social differences. And then social differences are used to position women as being less than men. And that story of gendering is a story of how we create this belief that some people are better than others. So, basically, what happens with gendering is that, um, the first distinction is made between males and females. So males and females are different, they're opposite, they're complementary, they're all that exist. And we attach to being male or to being female certain sets of characteristics that in our culture now we label as masculine characteristics or feminine characteristics. And we say that those characteristics are inherent in people's bodies. So we have these arguments that say things like, "Um, because men have testicles and testosterone, they're always more aggressive and always more assertive and always stronger." And those characteristics always matter, and therefore, men should have decision making power.

And on the flip side, um, women have ovaries and have, uh, estrogen that cycles and peaks and valleys in their bodies. And sometimes they're more emotional and sometimes they're not. But because they have ovaries and uteruses, they're nurturing, they're caring, um, they're empathetic, they listen. Um, and those qualities are said to come from female's bodies, which by the way, they don't. Because I know a whole lot of male people who are empathetic and nurturing and caring and loving, also, right? So, we know that this is not true when we examine it but we live in a world that just takes it for granted. And what happens when we bifurcate, when we separate the world into black and white or to masculine and feminism, feminine? What happens is that we put one of those, um, above the other.

Like when we talk about masculine and feminine, usually, we put them in a chart where there's like a left hand column that's masculine, and a right hand column that's feminine. But, really, they're not that way, they're in a box above another box having power over having more value than the other box. And so one of the important moves of feminism is to say, "Hey, you know how all those feminine characteristics have been said to be less important. They're only good to compliment or to soften those masculine characteristics?" They are as important as those other masculine characteristics and should be valued for those reasons. And also, while we're at it, um, people with uteruses should be valued as highly as people with testicles. Because, guess what, you need both of those things to have the next generation of human beings. One is not more important than the other, right?

So a key move of feminism is to bring up feminine qualities and feminine characteristics as well as female ones and say, "You know, they are not less than." In Western philosophy, there is a long misogynist tradition of talking about humans as males and talking about females as being less developed adults, children in, uh, mature bodies. People who don't have the rational capacity to make decisions for themselves, right? We have a long history of understanding human actualization as something that males can do that women can never accomplish. And part of feminism is saying, "That is a whole crock of oppressive baloney, and we're not, we're not going to let the world continue to believe that."

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CV Because that's just a, that's just a game for keeping some people down. As long as you say that females or, um, African Americans can't ever be rational enough or ever be smart enough or ever be caring enough to hold top positions, as long as you believe that, um, we'll never have equality.

WHITNEY Okay, yeah. All right.

CV

And, and, and, and it's, it's hard not to kind of get off on a pontificating rant here because (laughing)-

WHITNEY

Oh, it- it's fine, I'm just processing. I guess the last thing that I want to touch on this when we're defining feminism is, um, uh, well so two things. One is I've done a lot of studying um, as a lay person of Carl Jung, and his idea of feminine and masculine characteristics. And part of what he was advocating for, I think, really ties nicely with what you're talking about is, is that every single woman and every single man has a, has a needs to develop both the masculine and the feminine.

So if you're a man, you may come more naturally to the masculine but you need to develop the feminine. If you're a woman, you're a feminine, you need to develop the masculine. I talk about it in the context of being a ship and a harbor. And in order for any of us to truly grow up, we have to develop both. And I think one of the things that is the struggle at least, in my experience is that our society is generally pretty comfortable with men being masculine and then developing the feminine. And so we are very accepting of that with our men, whereas it's there, it's different for our women. And I think this goes back to what you're propounding is this notion as we're very comfortable with women displaying feminine characteristics. But we're still really struggling with allowing women to display masculine characteristics, and what does that look like?

So that's my experience, I don't know what you would say to that.

CV

Well, what I would say that that's generally true and that the opposite is also true because there are lots of times when men are not able to take on or display what are called feminine characteristics and women are. And really what we have to pay attention to is what's the context in which women or men are being denied the opportunity to be, be these things?

We deny ourselves and we deny each other these human qualities and these human experiences. Just so that we can keep the categories straight, just so that we can sort people into one group or another group and figure out who gets to be in charge, and then not question it. Because we're not questioning all of this categorization.

We have to ask ourselves, "What's the context in which these qualities are being denied to people and what's the, what's the game behind that?" Like why do we have to feel like those and this particular person can't have those qualities. Because, in truth, like the, and this is important from just thinking about masculine and feminine. The qualities that we put in these categories vary from culture to culture. And so there's no such like there where some cultures where being empathetic is a masculine thing. And being organized and deliberate is a feminine thing.

We can step back and say, "What's the big picture behind that though?" That in order to become fully human beings, we need to have access to all of the qualities that make us human, all of the qualities that make us capable, all of the qualities that make us communal and caring. All of the qualities that lead us to actualize ourselves as individuals and members of communities. And none of that should be restricted from any person just because of some story about how it is or isn't related to your testicles.

Feminism, because it is a worldview and a political ideology that is developed, was developed among people who were subordinates, people who did not have access to power, people who are not treated as full human beings. Feminism looks at the status quo or the worldview that's been presented and finds the holes and the lies and the losses in that worldview. And one of those things that feminism challenges in our culture, in particular, is this idea of individualism and self-actualization and autonomy that is touted as being like the pinnacle of human achievement. So, for example, if you look at Maslow's unscientific and highly culturally biased hierarchy of needs, the very top one is self-actualization. And feminists say, "Well, nice thing, but there's no such thing as a self who can actualize independently. That has to be done in community with others through relationships with other people, and among and within the constraints of the community's needs.

So feminism brings the community back and says, "You know, the pinnacle of human growth and development is your ability to be a full, moral, and capable agent in a community where you contribute and where you acknowledges how the community contributes back to you." So

feminists think about how important relationships are to our growth as individuals, how important our individual strength is to our ability to contribute back to others. Um, because it understands everyone as been equally human, everyone's voice needs to matter equally. So democracy really tends to matter a lot. And then if everyone is equal, the notion that, um, we get things done by some people telling others what to do, that conventional notion of power. Nope, we get things done by finding the power that we can create together through our relationships and coordinate together all done. So feminism thinks a lot more about connection, relationship, community, care, all that stuff that's left out of the conventional model of success.

WHITNEY

You talk about how a feminist perspective can help us redefine work. Um, that's one thing you talk about, and another thing is you talk about how it can help us, um, think differently about our models of leadership. And so, um, I'd love for you to touch on both briefly if you, um, if you're open to it or you can pick one or the other.

CV

Well, I'll, I'll try to address each one of those.

One of the things that, um, feminism asks us to recognize is that there are all sorts of efforts that go into working together, making things, selling things, bringing home a profit, distributing that profit, and using that profit to support our lives. There's a lot of work that goes on that businesses have learned not to acknowledge and also to take advantage of.

So, for example, for any given person, you wake up in the morning, you get dressed, you look at your list of goals in your Franklin Planner or on your bullet journal. You commute 45 minutes into the office, you get your coffee, you sit down at your desk. All of that is work that has been done to get you from your home to your job, but you're not on the clock, you're not getting paid for it. And maybe you should be.

In the meantime, uh, somebody else is at home, or, you know, some TaskRabbit is pulling together your groceries or your dinners for the week and making sure that that food is there to nourish you. So that you can go back to work and do more work at work. And you get paid for the work that you're doing at work, supposedly, but you're not getting paid for and the person who's doing that work for you isn't really getting paid for all that work. That's helping you show up as this capable, um, worker who's rested and fed and ready to roll. So there's that idea that there's all this work that occurs outside the boundaries of business, that the business actually depends on. It's just the same way as all of that work that you're doing answering those emails on a Sunday afternoon when you're supposedly sitting by the pool watching your kids, you're not necessarily getting paid for that work either.

But you're doing it and it's moving the business along. It's creating productivity and profitability for that business, and you may not be getting really your share back for the work that you've done. So there are a couple of ways that we think about expanding the notion of work. One is to go outside the walls of the organization and say, "What's all this stuff that's happening that's making it possible for these folks to show up at work?" But then inside the workplace or inside the work activities, there's also a lot of work that gets done that never gets acknowledged and never gets paid, if you will. And that work is work of, um, sometimes taking care of people's emotions, sometimes coaching them, sometimes stepping back and reflecting yourself. So things that we call invisible labor, emotional labor, um, relational labor.

Uh, a lot of that sort of stuff just never gets acknowledged and, uh, it never gets in your performance review and never gets you a four or a five and never gets you an additional 2% bonus. And, also, oftentimes, especially if you're a woman or a person, a man of color, it never even gets acknowledged. Nobody ever sees it. So feminists say, "Yo, all of this work matters and the way that we value it and compensate people for it doesn't match."

WHITNEY

That's good, really good. Okay.

CV

It's kind of scary too when you think of... I mean, well, it's scary also because then you ask the question, "What would the world look like if we did value this work and if we were financially supported for that work?" That's a really wonderful question for our society to be thinking about now.

WHITNEY Such good questions, and I think we all have experiences. I think probably everyone listening has experiences where they... I, I know, for me, I can think of experiences or situations where there's work that I've done that's relational that I'm not getting compensated for. And there's work that people around me have done and/or are doing that they're not getting compensated for and just to be aware of that. Um, very valuable.

CV It tends to be heavily gendered and raced in the sense of, um, women and men of color or men from marginalized groups are more likely to be doing this work and more likely to have it not be valued. But privileged men also do this work and for many privileged men, a lot of this work is unacknowledged and uncompensated.

The degree and the specifics depend on who you are and what your context is. But it happens all over because that's one of the ways that business stays profitable. By, um, getting us to do work and create value that we don't get fully compensated for.

WHITNEY So the question for you then CV is, is are you arguing that even if or/and when we are willing to compensate people for all of this work that's considered feminine, that businesses... I mean, I think your case is, is that businesses will be even more profitable. Because right now you've got engagement at 15%.

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY Part of that is because people aren't getting acknowledged for all this other work that actually is making the work work. Um, so-

CV It's hard to be engaged when you're being exploited.

WHITNEY Right.

CV It's just really hard.

WHITNEY Yeah (laughs), I like how you said that, almost dead panning it. Okay, so let's now go to, as we start to wrap up, the models of leadership. And I think this is where I was going to just talk briefly is this idea. I, when I wrote my very first book called *Dare, Dream, Do-*

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY ... I was talking about, um, the strengths that we have and the, you know, strengths of the things that we do well naturally or the things that we've figured out how to do. And I talked about how, you know, if you're a female, some of the feminine qualities that you have, um, are strengths. And now understanding your work, I, I recognize that there are some things that I probably categorized incorrectly. But, nonetheless, I struggled, I struggled to figure out what, how women, um, you know, if you're looking at it from this perspective, from a feminine perspective, wields power. What does that look like? How do you show up in the world? And even this week I was having a conversation with my daughter who's 18, and someone asked me to answer this question seemingly very benign, "What is your definition of a leader and what do you look to, to become a good leader?"

And we were brainstorming and we were talking about it, and my daughter really pushed back and she said, "You realize that every single definition that you're putting out there is basically a masculine trait?" And I said, "Wow, wow."

CV Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY Even as much as I've thought about this, and I still was boxing myself into this definition. And it led to this whole interesting conversation about, "Well, you know, do we believe that, that a woman can lead? And when a woman leads, what does that look like?" And so that, um, I realized I probably just stepped into all sorts of puddles and landmines in saying that my opinion,

but now go ahead and tell us what you think and what the research has shown you and so that people can, can be enlightened unlike, um, I was up until our conversation?

CV

I think what your conversation with your daughter shows you is just how powerful this programming is and remains, even though, we've been challenging these ideas for 100 years, right? So it just, it just shows you how strong the programming is. But one of the things that we do in business is that we talk about leaders as having certain capabilities and qualities and leadership as having certain outcomes. And we always forget what about businesses enables this particular definition of leadership? Let's say our definition of leadership is very partial, and we continue with this partial and very well bounded discussion of what leadership is because we're forgetting all the other stuff that a business has going on that supports that leadership. To wit, a hierarchy that also says that some people are more important and more powerful than others in some ways that are legitimate like expertise and other ways that are not.

And, also, a business has a tremendous power to hurt and reward a human being. Because every leader in an organization, fundamentally, is supported by the idea that if people don't follow him or her, they can be fired. They can lose their livelihood, they can lose their job. There's always a threat behind every leadership effort in a business and it's hard to take that threat away. So one can argue, and I would argue, that a lot of our models of leadership, what we call leadership, is really just the kind of the gloss or the extra 30% of motivation and direction that we get in a system that's set up to really be punitive if people step out of line. So maybe 70% of the alignment you get because of the fundamental threat, and the remaining 30% that's possible, you can get through inspiration, through compassion, through shared values, through nurturing, through stewardship, through whatever.

But you're not taking people from zero to 100 with your leadership, you're taking them from 70 to 100 if you're lucky and if you're able to counteract some of the negatives of the threat that sets up ze-, you know, from the point of zero to the point of 70. It's kind of scary to acknowledge but it's, it's pretty damn true.

WHITNEY

Yeah.

CV

We don't even think about how much of our behavior and how much of our, uh, for lack of a better word, obedience, for how much of our compliance is set up. Because if we don't, we're not able to feed our families.

WHITNEY

Right.

CV

And that's scary, when, when we think about it, that's pretty darn scary. So it's kind of nice to ignore it and to think about, you know, that margin of, of motivation, of possibility, of enthusiasm, of creativity, um, that, that takes us away from that and moves us further toward our goal.

WHITNEY

So-

CV

So one, one of the things that really frustrates me about, about so many conversations, about things like engagement and innovation, um, and empowerment in organizations and work/family balance and all that kind of stuff, we want to make better the layers on top of a structure that at its core is punitive, at its core it is a threat, at its core is undemocratic. And feminism says, "Let's kind of do both of those things at the same time. Let's rebuild an organization, let's rebuild a business that's not based on those things, that's based on other values. And then let's also, uh, build a model of leadership that incorporates all those other wonderful things that we're, we're talking about, that we're trying to achieve."

WHITNEY

So is there an example of a business that you have seen that's doing this? That's not just doing sort of the top layers but they're at the bottom of the stack and they're reconfiguring, rethinking their business model and how they're running it by considering this, um, feminine perspective?

CV

Yes, so there are, and I can tell you about a couple but I have to, um, offer that with a caveat. Which is to say that often when, when people or perspectives challenge the status quo, the status

quo turns around and says, "Show us the alternative fully formed (laughs). Show us the, the, um, fish that's able to live on land, not the fish that's able to swim better in the water." I'm sorry about using too many water metaphors.

WHITNEY

I like the water metaphors, continue with them (laughing).

CV

But, but, but it's really an interesting thing, it's like, "Oh, okay, so is there an organization that's managed to put aside all of this cultural programming, all of the expectations of the marketplace, all of the expectations of the bankers that gave you that small business loan, um, all the expectations of the creditors who want to be paid in a certain way? Is there some business that's been able to create itself from nothing and just, you know, survive in an environment that's asking it to be something completely different? Um, there are some organizations that are doing many of these things and, uh, there's probably no organization that's doing all of them. Um, but some of the organizations that I look to, like one that I- I'm really very intrigued by, um, is a company called Loomio, which is part of a, a group of, of, uh, practitioners that are loosely called Enspiral.

And Loomio is a company that is creating, um, decision making software for organizations. That allows individuals in different parts of the business to, um, consider an idea, to track a conversation, to kind of vote or create, um, establish a consensus about an idea, establish their concerns, whatever. And it's a bunch of software designers and organization designers working together, and they have managed to try to recreate in their own practices the sort of democratic decision making. The sharing of the drudgery as well as the fun work, the sharing of the profits, um, the sharing of the mentoring and coaching responsibilities. So that's one organization that I, I look at and I think, "They're really trying to do something different."

And then another organization that, um, I like because I love how they've structured ownership, which becomes a really critical piece of, uh, different kind of organization. And that's a company called Stocksy. And Stocksy is a stock photography, um, artists cooperative. They have 100 or 120 artists who create the photographs and sell the photographs. Then they have a management staff and some, um, kind of founders and executives. And all of those people together participate in the decisions about how the company is going to be run and how the money is going to be distributed. So, for example, the artists get to decide what the criteria are for allowing new artists into the company because they want to make sure that all of the photographs are aesthetically beautiful. So they have their aesthetic criteria, their artistic criteria, and then they also have some personal criteria about what kinds of people, what kinds of values they want these people to have.

Um, and they decide who gets let in and how many because they also want to make sure that they have enough business to support all of the artists fully. So they'd rather have 120 artists that have enough work, that sell enough work that they can all make a living rather than have two or 3000 artists that all make, um, fractional salaries because they're never able to sell quite enough.

WHITNEY

Great examples. Thank you, CV. Um, and it's fun to see and I, I love that you included that caveat of I, you know, I think about whenever you're trying to implement something, there is that tendency to want people to, to show you exactly how it works. And it's, it's not, it's like the low end of that S-curve and you're just figuring it out and you're testing and you're iterating. But you, you instinctively know that there's a better way and you're trying to figure out how that, how that looks.

CV

Right, and, and importantly, that that's done in the group. Like Stocksy, they, and Loomio, they have figured this out as a group. And their organization has figured out how they're going forward, and their organization figures out their next step. It's not an individual person that's come up with it by feat, and it's not a group of three or five executives. Often, a strategy offsite deciding what it's going to be. And that is really wonderful because, of course, it acknowledges that, um, everyone has something to offer. And it also, uh, builds commitment and shares responsibility in a very genuine way.

WHITNEY

I can imagine, I, I can think of some people in my network who will listen to this and let's start with men first. White men, let's start with white men who are listening to this and they're all like, "Okay, I get it, like she has persuaded me. Um, and I want to do something different, but I don't know where to start." What are one or two things that you, in addition to reading your book, that

you would encourage that person to do, um, in the next day or two that could just move this forward a little bit?

CV I have two suggestions. The first one is that I would go to my website or to feminists at work, and I would download this one page two-sided thing that I have that is, um, 21 Ways to Be More Feminist at Work.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CV And there are some really they are just kind of specific actions you can take.

WHITNEY Okay.

CV But then the other way, so some people like to know exactly what to do, exactly where to start, and other people need to know what questions to ask. And so for the group that would be helped by knowing what questions to ask, there are Five Feminist Values that I propose are critical to a business. And I would ask any man or person who wants to start thinking about real equality in organizations to go to those five values and ask themselves this question, "How could we be more, for example, generative in the way that we do this task today? How could we support human's need to create, to grow, and to care for each other by how we run this project update meeting?"

Or we could say, um, "How can we acknowledge people's whole humanness? Their bodies, their souls, their life cycles, their relationships, how can we acknowledge people's whole humanness? In the way that we run this project update meeting today. Does it mean that we, you know, bring in fancy water instead of cans of Coke? Does it mean we take a walk around the outside of the building just to stretch our legs and think? Does it mean we say, You know what, don't get me that update Monday, get it Tuesday so that you can relax on Sunday with your family and friends.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative), okay.

CV So sometimes just remembering what those other values are that we want to bring into the organization can help us make tiny little shifts. And those are important because, you know, we're not going to erase oppression and, uh, negative power dynamics in a day, a week, or even a couple of generations. But we can make the next thing, um, less painful, more comfortable, more inviting, a step towards something better, like I think about Cali Yost's idea of tweaking it, there are a lot of little micro-actions, a lot of little changes that we can make that actually make a profound difference. And I think back to just something that you had written about in one of your newsletters where you had a new contributor and she made a suggestion and you kind of shut her down. And then you went back and reflected and returned and you had a conversation about it.

That act of reflecting on it and returning and having a conversation about it is putting into practice the values of equality and agency. You were like, "Oh, wait, that person has something to offer." And you created an opportunity for her to offer it, to be agentic, to, you know, put forward her ideas, and that made a difference. And it's not a big, it's not a big thing, we're not asking them to like... You know (laughs), we're not asking them to take on some new kind of burden, these things are not that far out of reach.

WHITNEY No, and there's a yearning for it, it's just not being called it, just quite.

CV Yeah, yeah.

WHITNEY So, I guess, the, the question for women, and, and a lot of this applies to women and men, but, uh, my, my hunch is that you would maybe give slightly different advice to a female. And I'm just curious what that... and maybe to a female of color, but I- I'm just curious of what that advice would be? Because I think it might be slightly different.

CV Mm-hmm. Well, I think the thing that I, I would say to, um, women or women identified people would be that, um, they should not, we should not assume that simply because we exist in this world as females or we exist in this world socially as women, that we have the inside scoop on feminism. Or that we have the inside understanding of our larger experiences of being oppressed.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

CV We have our lived experience, but we have to learn how to understand it, we have to learn how to use it, we have to learn how to connect it to other people's lived experience and work together with them. And, honestly, we actually need to understand some theory to accelerate the progress. So sometimes people just assume that if you're female, you're going to walk into an organization and do things that are going to help women and that doesn't happen. Um, that only happens when a person has learned how to see the world differently, and has, uh, decided or made a commitment to practicing leadership or management or shared work or collaboration. Practicing all of that differently. And males and females can do that, and men and women can do that. I think for women, they just have to remember that just because they have ovaries doesn't mean they get it.

WHITNEY That is so wise.

CV And, I mean, and, and it's serious, and then the-

WHITNEY Yeah.

CV ... flip side of it is also, "Dude, you may have testicles but you can still be compassionate, loving, questioning, tired. You, you can still be connected, you can still be a feminist, you can, you can be..." Um, that your body is not your limitation, your body is your position in the world from which you can see the world and how the world... and, and it influences how the world treats you. But it's not the limitation, it's not the constraint on what you have to offer. And, also, what's, um, what's available for you to do to make a difference.

WHITNEY Fantastic. All right, last question. CV, how are you different, um, and what are you doing differently now that you have written this book? How has it changed you?

CV Oh my gosh, Whitney, what a question. Uh, that is a question that almost makes me want to cry, and it's also a question that I will say I have not yet honored and I will honor that question. I'll respond to it now but I'm going to have to think about it for a while.

One of the things, and again, I'll, I'll start to cry, is this, you know, you jokingly said, "Oh, you've been working on this book three years, maybe five years, maybe longer." I've been working on this book since I was 16 or 17 years old.

And, um, it took a long time for I think the world to start to talk enough about feminism and enough about organization change, and enough about the limitations and the business models that we have now, um, to make it possible for them to hear this conversation. And it took me a really long time to bring together these two pieces of work because when I first tried to do it, um, I was told in no uncertain terms by one of my faculty members that the idea of a feminist business or a feminist approach to business was ridiculous, and I should study more serious things. I mean, I was actually told that, and I was told I was contentious for raising the issues and raising the question. And I put it aside, and it, you know, obviously, I worked on these ideas and I worked in social change and, and advocacy for a long time.

And it wasn't until, honestly, that I was so freed from the expectations of the academic career ladder, and so freed from the demand of having to earn money that I was able to go back and, and do the work and write the book.

So there- there's a lot in that to say how I'm different now is that I can say, I can like take the book and hold it in my hands and hand it to people and say, "Here's something that you can use that will help you kind of get it and maybe help free you to start thinking differently." Um, you know, "I know you talk a lot about work, family, tension, and issues. Here, read this book and

start thinking about it." Somebody just, uh, sent an email to a, a faculty at academic group that I'm part of saying, "Hey, you know, we need to start a gender equity initiative in my academic department. Anybody have any resources?" And I'm like, "Yeah, read my book."

WHITNEY

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CV

It's not going to tell you what to do, but help you get a sense of the big picture in which you're trying to make a change. And I also think, help inspire people. And I would say that I think that the other thing that I am so happy about the book and my journey through the book, um, was being able to say to people and even... And this is probably, uh, TMI, but, um, there's a lot of work that's synthetic, where I bring a lot of different ideas together. But there's also a lot of work in here that's completely original and that I made up myself. Like ideas that I came up with myself. And one of them is that distinction that I make between, um, uh, protective feminism and constructive feminism. This idea that a whole lot of feminism and social justice effort, in general, has been about protecting people from harm, ending harm, ending oppression.

And we've been very and understandably really busy with that. But then there's this other element, this constructive element that says, "If we look at the values in this movement, if we look at the values of this perspective and we project into the future, what can we build?" And I think that's the piece that's been missing for so many people. This idea that feminism actually has these values that suggest a different way to build the next thing, a different way to take the next step. And I think that that is actually liberating. Liberation is not simply taking off the "yoke of oppression," right? But it's also having some foundation for moving forward. And when I think about how am I different? It's like I'm able to say, "Yeah, it's not all complaining, it's not all stop that, it's start this, try this, think about this, experiment here, open yourself up."

WHITNEY

Like you said, you really are your parents' daughter, of your mother's, your mother's experience-

CV

Well, my dad thinks I'm crazy. He's like he read, he read into the fourth page and he's like, "Yeah, no (laughing)." Well, okay. You know, he's in specialty gases, he'll never understand, right (laughs)?

WHITNEY

Except that he's taught you this idea of what can we build?

CV

Right.

WHITNEY

And I think that's beautiful. Your mother helped ask the question and your father gave you the tools to answer it, and now you're answering it and it's just lovely. CV, thank you for spending all of this time to discuss this book, *Feminism: A Key Idea In Business and Society*. We will make a couple of copies available to a few of our, um, listeners and newsletter subscribers. It's just a terrific, an, just a terrific, terrific, meaningful, important book in terms of framing this conversation, so thank you again for being with us.

CV

Well, thank-, and, and thank you Whitney and thank you to your team for, um, treating these ideas as something valuable to bring to your listenership. Um, because that matters a great deal, so thank you for the care that you've put into, um, extending these ideas out in the world.

One of the reasons I always ask my guests where they grew up and what they wanted to be when they grew up is that as we heard with CV, our strengths often have their roots in who our parents were and what they did and valued. Many of CV's strengths and her approach to the world came about in part because of her mother needing to launch a career after her divorce, discovering how capable she was and subsequently becoming involved as a feminist and civil rights activist. Combined with her father's entrepreneurial view of the world and solving a problem by making something happen has helped shape CV's worldview and the problems she is motivated to solve.

One thing I loved about this conversation - I now think of my femaleness and the traits associated with a bit differently. I have to admit, that in the past, those traits have seemed more a liability than a strength as I have moved through my career. But more and more I am acknowledging that those traits and strengths that are part of who I am are distinctive and can be used to create a workplace culture that supports the whole individual. A worthy goal.

Practical Tip:

Near the end of the interview, CV talked about how we can make small tweaks in the workplace to acknowledge every person's humanness. Bringing water into a meeting instead of soda. Taking a break and walking around outside. What is one tweak you can make this week that moves your community at work one step closer to being an environment where everyone feels valued?

If you want even more on playing to your distinctive strengths and the seven-point framework of personal disruption, *Disrupt Yourself* is available for pre-order now on Amazon and wherever books are sold. If you find these concepts helpful or think they might be helpful for someone you know or work with, it would be kind of you to pre-order the book today---and share it with them.

Thank you again to CV Harquail 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.