

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPIISODE 141: JIM FERRELL

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption, providing you with tools to move up the S Curve of Learning in your career and life.

The Disrupt Yourself podcast has continued to grow as you've generously shared your favorite episodes and takeaways on social media and have taken the time to leave 5-Star Ratings and Reviews on [Apple Podcasts](#). So, I want to take a moment and read our review of the week from Isrek in Mexico.

*Hello Whitney and Team, I just want to tell you that you are doing work that matters and that your work has been essential in my own personal disruption. In this life, if you are not growing, you are dying and your podcast surely has helped me to find inspiration and vital information so I can continue chasing a better version of myself. One thing you have pushed me to do is to start a podcast in Spanish. I want to be an influence to change the mindset of the Latino community in my home country, Mexico. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

Thank you Isrek, will you send us an e-mail at [wj@whitneyjohnson.com](mailto:wj@whitneyjohnson.com) and share a link to your podcast Que tenga mucho exito! Felicitaciones.

I'm really looking forward to sharing our interview with Jim Ferrell. Jim is a bestselling author, sought-after speaker, and renowned thought leader on mindset and organizational change. He has degrees in economics and philosophy and is a graduate of Yale Law School. He is managing partner of [The Arbinger Institute](#) and has authored or co-authored multiple bestselling books, we are talking millions of books, including [Leadership and Self-Deception](#), [The Anatomy of Peace](#), and [The Outward Mindset](#).

WHITNEY     Jim Ferrell, welcome to the podcast.

JIM Thank you, Whitney. It's great being with you.

WHITNEY First question for you today is, tell us a little bit about where you grew up and what you wanted to be when you grew up.

JIM Oh, wow, that's an interesting question. So I grew up in Seattle, Washington, and I wanted to play in the NBA growing up. That was my life, I was NBA bound, that one, that one didn't work out (laughs) so I ended up doing something else. (laughs)

WHITNEY How old were you when you decided that, that-

JIM Oh...

WHITNEY ... NBA was not gonna be the, uh, the job for you.

JIM Well, look, how old was I or how old were other people? Uh, (laughing) So, for me it was at probably 21, uh, for other people probably more like eight, I don't know. But I was really serious about basketball as a big part of my life and played it into college, and yeah, love it, but, yeah. Eventually even I couldn't deny, I didn't quite have the skillset to make it. (laughs)

WHITNEY So you wanted to play basketball. You realized, okay, this isn't going to work out, so you go to Yale Law School instead. How (laughs) did you decide that you wanted to go to law school?

JIM Yeah. So, what happened there was, I was getting my undergraduate degree, I was about to go to law school but I, I got connected to a philosophy professor who really became my mentor at that point, and I ended up staying an additional year as an undergraduate to get a philosophy degree and that year was amazing because it got me into the work that, that's forms... it's the foundational work, really, it's for my entire career ever since.

Wo, I almost went and got a PhD in philosophy and became a philosophy professor myself, I went to Yale, and it was an amazing three years.

And then, you know, like a lot of people who go to law school, I didn't go with a grand plan, necessarily. It was sort of like, you know, law school is a good next thing to do if you're not exactly sure what you want to do, uh, (laughs) you know, because it opens up additional doors, it's a really great additional education as well.

And I think for me, looking back, two things happened at law school that became formational for me in enabling me to do what I've done ever since. One was, that along with that year in particular studying philosophy, taught me how to think. Taught me how to think critically, taught me how to think logically, really taught me how to write logically as well, and tightly. So, those were really important.

And then, the other piece, uh, at Yale for me that was very important was that, uh, to graduate you had to have what's called their supervised analytic writing. Think about a sort of a master's thesis level writing, it's a requirement to graduate. And so, for the first year or so, I was really kind of searching for what in the law spoke to me enough that I'd want to devote, you know, a year-and-a-half to really diving in to this issue and writing about it.

And what kept coming to me was, what I really care about was this work I'd studied, this philosophical work I'd studied around this issue of the problem of self-deception, how people blind themselves to problems they themselves are helping to create and blame all those issues on other people. I mean, that was so fascinating to me, and what I wanted to do was write about

that, think about that and write about that and apply it to race relations in this country, historically, presently and in the future.

So that's what I did, and what that did for me, Whitney, was it gave me the space to dive in to this body of thought that I'd studied as an undergraduate but to know, I mean, you can, you can think about things and even speak about things in ways that you can keep your own blindness, your own lack of understanding a bit opaque that way.

But it, it's impossible really when you start writing about a topic to remain ignorant about your own lack of understanding, right? I mean, you, you, it just gets clear as you're writing. You get muddled, you take way too long to explain things, and that's what started happening with me. I, I got my old class notes out and, and a few other resources just trying to figure out this body of work and write about it, then apply it to race relations. And so that's what I did, and it was a great experience. In retrospect, I'd no idea it would end up being important, actually, for my ongoing career later, that I did that, but it ended up being that.

But then, after graduating, I went to one of the really big mega law firms for a few years before my mentor reached out to me and two of his other former students to see if we would be interested in leaving our careers and banding together and building this Arbinger project, this Arbinger... Then the Arbinger company. Now it's The Arbinger Institute is what we're known by, and so the three of us all left our careers.

I was the youngest of those three. We didn't know each other. We all, we all connected through this, this professor that was common to, to each of us. So, that's what happened. That was early mid-90s and, and it's been quite a ride ever since.

WHITNEY Do you remember the moment when this idea... So what was the name of your professor, for everybody who's listening?

JIM Yeah. Terry Warner.

WHITNEY Terry Warner. Okay. Do you remember the moment when some experience that you had when he was teaching these ideas around self-deception and you just had this aha of like, or paper you wrote, or just some moment where you said, "This, this is good. Like, I, I have to understand this better."

JIM So many moments. So many moments. I mean, one was, Terry had a sort of very unfinished manuscript that, that people just copied for years and years, called "Bonds of Anguish, Bonds of Love." And it never became an actual published book, but it was just brilliant, and reading that, just page after page, was so revealing. I mean, it was so interesting and so practically instructive about everything. I mean, at the time, you know, I was a student, so I was applying it to my sort of student life. I was newly married, I was applying it to marriage, I had a job, too, on the side, that wasn't at the center of my life yet, but all of those ideas applying int- these various directions was absolutely stunning.

One of the things that I find really fascinating about this body of work that now I've devoted my life to is that it has this what I think of as this kind of simple elegance to it. It looks very simple on the surface but has this deep complexity to it that's elegant, but you have to really get your heads around it, and your minds around it, and, and ultimately your hearts around it, and when you do, what it enables you to do in all of your relationships everywhere in your life, how you work with people differently, how everything goes differently when you do, all of that really becomes illuminated by it.

WHITNEY So, everybody who's listening, I know you're now wondering, what is the big idea? Wow, so, the book (laughing) and you probably all know because you've looked at the, the show notes, but the book, *Leadership and Self-Deception*, it sold millions of copies and it's written by The Arbinger Institute. And I'm wondering two things, is, where did the name Arbinger Institute come from, and why the decision to have the book be authored by an institute as opposed to an individual? Is there some purpose *raison d'être* behind that? And, then what's the basic premise of the book?

JIM Okay. So, first of all, yeah, why in the name of the organization? Uh, and it's because there're really a few reasons. One is, these ideas are bigger than any one person, and you know, it's funny, we live in a world where people are made into celebrities of one kind or another in different sorts of areas, and, and it didn't seem right to us that, that someone in an organization or, or individuals in an organization happened to be writing with their time, are getting all this attention when everyone else is working just as hard and their work is just as important. You know, no one knows their names and, and it creates sort of this stratification, or at least there's a risk that they can do that inside an organization.

So, we didn't want that to happen. We wanted everyone to feel completely valued, we're all in this together. These ideas are not about a person. They're bigger than a person. And we wanted to keep readers' attentions focused on the ideas and not on individual personalities. So, that was sort of the big reason number one.

Big reason number two was that, we didn't want to get out front of, at the time, Terry himself had not published a work out in the world. There was no way we were going to write something that was based on his foundational work with, with names on it that weren't his, right? I mean, there was just no way we were going to do that. So, that was the second thing.

And the third was a bit of a guess. Those first two came from these really strong personal convictions we had. This third reason was really a hunch. It was a guess, and it's turned out to be really good. You know, if you write in your own name, well, there two things come out of it, and you get Whitney yourself the benefit of this, too, because you've become well-known and so, for example, in speech circles, you know, you're going to command really, really big fees because of the quality of your work and the quality of, you know, all of your presentations. Well deserved.

So that's the upside. We thought through that, we thought, if the, the potential downside of that, let's say it's me who's out there on the circuit, for example. And now, now everyone's saying, "Okay, if, I've got to have Jim. It's gotta be Jim Ferrell. Gotta be Jim Ferrell. Gotta be Jim Ferrell."

And at some point I get tapped out, you know. I mean, I, I can't do more and the world's a really big place, and if you really want to scale in a massive way and be helpful all around the world, we want, we want to position tons of people to be able to go out into the world with authority and with this work, and have no one feel like they're getting kind of the second string, you know.

WHITNEY I wondered if it was something like that, so I wanted to just find out, and it's interesting to hear the rationale behind it. Okay, so, let's go to the big premise of the book, and what is self-deception?

JIM Yeah. So, self-deception is this paradox that, uh, that has stumped scholars since the time of Freud. People, they're writing it about it since the beginning of time, but Freud really coined it and his entire work was an attempt to solve what's known as this paradox of self-deception. So here's the paradox. Well, let me, let me tell you what self-deception is sort of in one line first, and then I'll get into how it's a paradox and then how Arbinger's work speaks to it.

So, the problem of self-deception is the problem of not knowing and resisting the possibility that I have a problem. And, that's a big deal because, if the problem we have is simply that I don't know I have a problem, let's say, Whitney, you and I work together, for example, and you say, "Oh, here's Jim. He's got a problem. He just doesn't know he has it." If that's the only problem that I have, then the solution's pretty simple. You just tell me, right? (laughs) You tell me that I've the problem. I go, "Oh, Whitney, well, thank you. Okay. I got it."

But because usually what's happening is we're carrying this problem of self-deception which is, yeah, it's a problem not knowing I have the problem, but it's the, also the problem of resisting the possibility that I have it. So when you now tell me, "Hey, Jim, you know what? You've got this issue," very often, and, and everyone who's listening, you can just consider in your own experience, whether you don't find this to be the case when you make suggestions to people. How often do people actually push back against those suggestions? Even when they're the very suggestions that might be exactly what they need, they push back.

And so the reason this is a paradox is, and Freud actually located it as a paradox, it's because, what he noticed was people often create their own problems, and, of course, you know, you think about that, we probably, we can all think of examples sort of that. Second, people, when they're creating their own problem seem to be unaware that they're creating their own problems, which, you take those two observations together and, and you might conclude that, "Oh, then people are somehow blind. We have certain blind spots that we just don't see about ourselves."

But that's contradicted by a third observation which is that, very often, people who are creating their own problems and seem unaware that they are, resist solution to those problems. And what's interesting about that and why it's a paradox is, we don't resist solutions to other things. Like, let, you might tell me, Whitney, you might say, "Jim, I just went to this restaurant today down the street. It's fantastic. You might consider that." And I, I might not go, but I'm not going to like resist you. But if you start giving me some opinion about how you I need to change in an area where I have this problem of self-deception, I will resist your suggestion systematically.

And so, one of Freud's, one of the folks really studied for its work, a scholar himself, said, "You know, you have to, you have to know the truth very precisely in order to resist it so perfectly." And, and that means that we're not blind. We can actually see. And that's the paradox of self-deception. How do you explain in the same person, in the same point of time, such that they are both blind and sighted? How can you account for that? And no one had been able to figure that out until Terry did. His work is the answer to that. It really took a philosopher to figure it out rather than a psychologist because it took a philosophical worldview to be able to see what's actually going on there.

So that discovery of how that is, is a massively important academic scholarly discovery, but even more for me, and for us at [Arbinger](#), what's really amazing about it is its practical implications. So, here- for example, here's, here's what happens.

One of things what happens, that happens when we have this problem of self-deception is that we end up blaming the things we are in the middle of on other people. Other people become objects of our blame, and because they do, we're no longer really fully seeing them as people. Not like we're seeing ourselves as human beings. We see them as, as different than that. It really, you know, may be objects in our way, obstacles in our way, there may be vehicles we can use, they might be irrelevancies, for example, that we, you know, that, that can't really help us.

And that general stance, and anyone who's listening to this, you might consider in your organization, in fact I'll give an example of this, consider this question. Who in this organization likely feels objectified? Like they're seen as objects. I'll give you two examples of this quickly. So I

was working here, with a, with a hospital system. They wanted to revamp and improve the patient experience in their emergency room. So, so we had a group in this particular, uh, consulting engagement. We had doctors in the room, we had nurses in the room, we had other folks in the room. And so, I just wanted to get clear on, who are the groups of people who exist in an emergency room?

So I said, "Okay. So, who's in the emergency room? Just help me out." So I hop up on a whiteboard, and they say, "Well, there, we've got doctors..." So I write doctors up there. They say, "Well, we've got nurses." So I write nurses up there. Someone said, "Well, we have technicians of various kinds." So I write technicians. And then someone says, "Oh, and we've got ancillary staff." And then I start writing, ancillary staff. (laughs) And I, and I pause halfway through the word ancillary. Because think about that word. I mean, it's like superfluous. It's about the people on the side that don't really matter quite like other people matter. I mean, the objectification of other people is built in the word. And one of the things that's fascinating was, was really fascinating to me in the moment about that, is that the people that are called ancillary staff are the people that you, you and I spent most time with when we go to the emergency room.

I mean, my, the patient experience in the emergency room, for me, as a consumer of those services, has at least as much to do with the "ancillary staff" as with anyone else there. And so, what that system came to realize right from that moment was, the patient experience in those emergency rooms could be no better than the experience of the so-called ancillary staff in those rooms. And we might begin by considering how we might change that title, (laughs) change that category.

Here's another example. I was at Madison Square Garden working with their sports division, and same thing. We asked this question, you know fairly early on in our time together on this particular day, who in this organization likely feels objectified by others in the organization? And they all got into groups and gathered back, and it was very clear, there were two groups in particular that they all agreed on. They were the ticket takers at their venues, at Madison Square Garden, and at Radio City Music Hall, and the ushers.

And, uh, and what mortified them when they realized this was, those are the two groups of people who actually touch their customers.

And, and, you actually, this gets into another part of our work, but you actually tend to pass on, you, you're not made to do this, but it's made easier for a person to pass onto other people that they're interacting with the way of seeing them, the way we feel like we ourselves are being seen. So, if I feel objectified as an usher, that just invites me to turn around now and handle our customers in a simpler, similarly kind of objectifying way which is death to an organization.

So, that, if you take it at very, is a very basic level of our work, but you take this basic distinction. We can see people as people, that's the truth. They are people that matter, everyone is. Or we can see people as objects. That's not the truth. They actually are people but we are objectifying them instead. That's part of our self-deception. That our self-deception is not only a deception about ourselves, it infects and perverts how we see everything around us. So, so, when we're in this place we're actually unable to make the best decisions because we're not seeing what's real.

I mean, the, the people around me are people, in fact. They matter, and when I, when I'm not seeing that way and in particular when I don't even realize I'm not seeing that way, I'm not actually making decisions based on the facts. I'm making decisions based on my own self-justifying, uh, worldview at the moment that I'm blind to. And, and so, helping people to see that that's what's going on, helping them to figure out how to get out of it, is a, is a massively important move. In fact, if you think about just basically about any organizational problem that

a person's, that an organization's facing, there's just no way you can crack the problem in a sustainable way unless and until the people who are responsible for creating those problems can see that they're responsible (laughs) for creating them.

I mean, you just can't do it. Until then, you're going to have all kind of sort of maneuvers to get a get out from beneath responsibility, you'll get a whole bunch of half-baked measures. So this, cracking this problem of self-deception, it turns out, is at the heart of cracking any organizational problem that a company might be facing.

WHITNEY So, how do you do that? So you walk into an organization and they've hired you and there are, and I think, actually, requires us to talk about the definitions of in the box or out of the box, but-

JIM Yeah.

WHITNEY ... what do you do when someone comes in and, and, I love one of your phrases, as far as I'm concerned, I'm the problem. How do you get to that-

JIM Right.

WHITNEY ... point, and maybe it's the starting point of like who feels objectified? But, what's something that you do to help people realize, "Oh, there's, there's a struggle here."

JIM Yeah.

WHITNEY And, how do you help people realize that we're deceiving ourselves? Because we're all deceiving ourselves. So how do you get us to that point?

JIM Yeah. Okay, that's a great question. And, and, by the way, when we're in the middle of self-deception, it's rarely out of ill intent, by the way. It's just, we just end up getting narrow in a way. We, we start not seeing the truth about what's happening around us and even inside of us. So, let me, let me give you, a little bit of a... Well, let me tell you a story to illustrate this, um, of what it looks like or what it can look like, and then I'll back out of the story into kind of the level of process and principle, okay, that guides it.

So, here's the story. It's in one of our books, our latest book, *The Outward Mindset*. And by the way, the way we speak about our work now it's that, you mentioned these terms in the box and out of the box, so, um, when our term in the box, being in the box, is synonymous with being in the having this problem of self-deception, I'm, I'm self-deceived about something, we call that being in the box.

The way we talk about it now is we talk about it in terms of mindset, that when we're clear-minded, we, we have what's called an outward mindset. That is, we're seeing ourselves in the context of the people around us, we realize we have responsibilities and obligations to others, we do our work in ways that aren't making it harder for our colleagues to accomplish their objectives, it's better, in fact, you know, uh, helpful to the people around us as opposed to, when we have inward mindset, that's which means in the box, we get closed off, we get narrow.

We might be really skilled and focused in our own narrow piece of what we do, but we're not alive to the impact of our work is having on the people around us, and therefore, without, usually without ill intent, we're actually creating difficulty in an organization which... And, and then when other people feel like their lives are being made harder, that tends to be cycled back and they end up not working collaboratively back, and that spirals into all kinds of issues.

So, so how do you break out of that? How do you break out of what, you know, what we call inward mindsets to... and, and become more outward in our work and therefore get out of the box? Well, here's an example. So, we were engaged by an energy company. We'd been working with their executive team on some executive team matters, and then they, they wanted our help starting with a matter that involved about 50 folks that went beyond the executive team. And it was their capital budgeting process. And here was the challenge. Their capital budgeting process... This is really hard to believe, but it, it was the case, is a large energy company.

It took, their top 50 people in that company spent 70% of their time, every year, planning the budget, the capital budget, for the next year. What energy projects are, are needed or necessary, you know, how are we going to engineer for them, and everything, you know, what monies are we allocating to all of that... I mean, all of that was 70% of the time of the top 50, and they said, "We've got to shorten that down. Can you help us do that?" We said, "Sure."

So, here's the basic problem. Whenever we get narrow, whenever we are in this problem of self-deception, here's one way to capture it. It's that we're not seeing. We are actually not seeing what's real, and one of the ways we're not seeing what's real is we're not seeing the people around us. We've gotten narrow. We've objectified others without realizing that we have. The good news is, because we're not usually doing that with ill intent, it's not too hard to break people out of that. They don't, they're not bought in to be doing that when they just awakened to what the, the way they've been doing it is actually gotten them so they're not seeing the folks around them.

Then we work with a series of tools to help people then really to see and integrate, collaborate, et cetera. So, here's a very basic process that we've, that we use to crack this one. So we first broke down the capital budgeting process into its steps. There were eight of them, as I recall. And then we just got each of the groups, starting with step one, pull them up to the front of the room with those 50 people, and then it was the project for everyone else in the room just to see as much of what these people's jobs were as they possibly could.

Understand, the first group was the planning department. So, so, you know, everyone, we've got the engineering department out in the group, we've got, you know, the project managers are out in the group, and they're all just asking questions of the planners about to try to understand what their job is like, what kinds of... how they go about it, what kinds of challenges they encounter. They're just going to school getting curious on the planners' job.

Well, we're five minutes into this, Whitney. I mean, literally, we were only five minutes in, and here's what we learned. The planners started January 1st planning which projects needed to be built for the following year, and then, historically, would hand off those projects to the engineering projects engineering department rather, that's step two of the process, on May 1st. So you've got four full months of the planners doing their planning before step two can even start. Wow. What we learned is, the planners actually know, 80 to 90% of the projects that are going to be built, they know that by the end of the first week of January. It's just the next 10 to 20% is what takes the, the bulk of the four months.

Well, when they all saw that, it's pretty, it's pretty easy to realize, "Well, wow. Look, we could just hand over the 80 to 90%. Let's hand those over on January 7, and engineering can start on January 8th." (laughs) Right? So, that's what they did. I mean, they, they recovered almost four months just, you know, within five minutes. And, so, none of that's rocket science. In fact, when you're speaking about working with human beings, it's making it into rocket science what's actually is part of the problem. The key moves that are sustainable aren't hard. People just have to be awakened to the issues that they've been, uh, in, in, in, sort of mired in, and be given tools to break free of them. And, and they'll have the will to do it, that's our experience.

So, so that, that's, that tool there is when we call "meet to learn," actually. There, it has various different, um, forms that it can take, but we just did a meet to learn with each of the, each of the teams in the process, and didn't guide it any more than that. It's just the groups, then, just learning. They just, all of a sudden, discovered things they could do to be more helpful to each other.

Uh, and that's an example of how you start to break out of this problem of, of not knowing you're, not knowing you're resisting the possibility you have a problem. You just help people to see. Help people to see others, help people to wake up to the impact they're having on others, to wake up to the responsibility they have to have a positive impact on others, and then you equip people with tools to be able to do that kind of work ongoingly.

WHITNEY Have you ever had an experience where you had a CEO call you in and say, "Okay, I really like this. I like [The Arbinger Institute's](#) work. We've got, you know, self-deception issues in our company, like every other company. Can you fix the people on my team, because we're all self-deceived?"

JIM (laughs)

WHITNEY What did you do in that instance where you needed to help the CEO heal himself? Heal herself?

JIM Oh, it's so common, because, I mean, the first thing to realize is that, so, can you come in and fix the people on my team? Well, sure, and you're on your team. (laughs)

WHITNEY (laughs)

JIM Let's start there. In fact, let me tell you a funny story. This is in [The Outward Mindset](#) book as well, because it goes to this point. Then I can say more about it. So, we are brought in to work with this company. It was in the steel industry, and there was a consultant who's world-renowned that most people listening to this podcast would actually know this person's name, who'd been working with this particular CEO around his corporate issues for about a year, but they'd not made any headway. So the CEO had said, "Look, you know, I like you, but this really isn't driving anything. I feel like we've got to go deeper somehow. Is there anyone you know you think maybe can help us?"

And this, this consultant said, "You know, actually, there is." And, so he brought us in. And, so, the very first meeting, you ought to read it, so we have the executive team. And this company was in trouble at the time. They were really in trouble. It was sort of an existential moment for them as a company. And so we just took on that first day various corporate issues they were facing, and, and we said, "So, we're going to take on a series of issues. We'll work through them one at a time. But, on every issue, everyone in this room, the single rule is, we're going to attack this issue, each of us, individually, from this perspective. And that perspective is - as far as I'm concerned, the problem is me. Okay. So every problem we're going to encounter, no one's allowed to start going out and casting and looking around outside of themselves for the problem. Everyone's going to look inside deeply and say, 'How have I... How am I contributing to this?'" That was the process.

Well, it ended up being an amazing day. That isn't, by the way, a normal part of our process, necessarily, but that's just... that, for a whole bunch of sit- reasons with that particular group, it felt like that's where we needed to start. So, that's what we did, and by the end, it was an amazing day. Really powerful. They made huge headway on a whole bunch of issues, and the CEO, his name was Jack, was so excited by this, and, and Jack was kind of the guy you're describing, Whitney. I mean, he was the chief guy with the problem, and he'd been blaming his

company woes on everyone but him because he's really smart, he started the place, you know, he knows how to do things the right way. I mean, it's sort of the standard story.

And so, Jack gets up in the end. He says, "This has been an incredible day, um, and so, I, I want you to know how much I believe in this, how important I think it is, so what we're going to do is, we're going to put posters up all over the company, we're going to have our computer screens are all going to have the screensavers that say, everything is going to say... Oh, and then, he, and then he summarized it this way. So... "And just remember, so here's the message, just remember, as far as you're concerned, the problem is you." (laughs) That's what he said. "As far as you're concerned, the problem is you." And of course, all the executives were like, oh, their heads sort of fall like, "Oh, my word, Jack, it didn't penetrate you today at all."

And that's the problem of self-deception is that, and we encounter this all the time with leaders.

WHITNEY So what happened? What happened?

JIM Oh, what happened there was-

WHITNEY Did he get it, eventually?

JIM Oh, he definitely got it eventually. That whole company, we, we helped them turn it around in this massive way and they became the juggernaut in their industry that's sustained over two decades. They, they just recently sold. Uh, Jack has now passed away-

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JIM ... but, um, but yeah, yeah, Jack was a little slower than others in the room, but that just told us we needed to spend more time with Jack.

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM So what typically happens in a case like that is, we get a call and it'll be, you know, here's this problem, you know, here's our problems and so we want you to come in and start working with this group. And we will do everything in our power to start first with the, with the, the, the people or person or people that are highest up in that structure that we possibly can. Um, if, if we're speaking to the CEO and the CEO wants to start us, to start with someone else, we will, we refuse. We won't do that.

We'll start with maybe the CEO alone or we'll start with the executive team, but we'll start there. Sometimes, many times, we're not contacted by the CEO, we may be talk- contacted by some, you know, division leader or whatever, and it will be the same principle there. We're going to start there. You might think, even if there're challenges out there in the field that need, the people need to start working differently, that, that's always the case. But those folks out in the field are in response to the leaders, and, so, partly what's happening in the field is already a reflection of the leadership in the organization.

You have to work on that together. So, we're going to start with the leadership, that's the big leverage point, and when you start leading differently, we get leaders out of the box and get them out of inward mindset ways of, of thinking about things and, and trying to lead an organization into our mindset ways of seeing and leading, giving them the tools to do that. In fact, we have a study now from Cornell and Georgetown together, have done a study on our work in healthcare system, that, that, it shows that if you have teams that don't even go through Arbinger's work at all, all that happens is the leaders of those teams go through the work.

You get this massive change on the team side of how they start working differently. And it's because that we're always in relationship with each other.

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM And that's one of the foundational things about our work. I'm in response to you, you're in response to me, so you change a leader, get a leader and he or she starts working differently, their teams will start responding differently to them as well. If you don't start there, what happens is, the teams will be... it just gets cynical. "Well, why, why aren't you working with the leaders?" Or they think they're above this and, and teams will just shut down.

WHITNEY Completely self-defeating. Right?

JIM Exactly right. Or even worse, there's a related challenge here, Whitney, it's that, you can start working with the leaders but then move quickly to move on with, too quickly to move on with others. You're only ready to move on beyond that particular leadership level you're working with when the people who are on their teams are noticing change in them.

WHITNEY Mm. Yeah.

JIM That's your clue about when you're ready to move forward, otherwise, people can start going to their work and they can think, "Well, wow, I mean, you've been working with Kathy, but... pff, (laughs) I haven't seen any differences in Kathy, uh, so, why should I expect anything that would be different around here?" So, it sort of breeds a kind of cynicism. So, really being purposeful about the process. I mean, there's a content side of it, but there's the process side of how you actually work the real change in a way that doesn't create resistance to change that's equally as important.

WHITNEY Yeah. Love it. Okay. So, let's go through a couple of quotes, ideas in the books that really resonated with me and I'd love to, to just talk and have you riff on them. So, one of them, I'm going to paraphrase a little bit based on some of the language changes you've made, so, it says, "There is the assumption that when we're out of the box or have an outward mindset, our behaviors are soft. And when we're in the box-

JIM Mm.

WHITNEY ... or, um, you know, inward mindset they're hard." So, how do you sustain a business that way? And one of the things you say is, well, actually, I'm going to let you respond to that one. If our outward mindset we're thinking about other people, we're soft, if we're inward mindset, we're hard like, we've got to run a business that way.

JIM Yeah.

WHITNEY What do you say to people who say that?

JIM Well, yeah, that's a common... Early on, when people are kind of work- that's a common misunderstanding they can have. But of course, when you're talking about seeing someone as a person or seeing someone as an object, it- it doesn't follow from that that I'm either soft or hard either way. I mean, I can be hard with people who are people to me. They matter to me and what they need is some sort of, they need to be... I need to give them tough feedback right now. I'll give you an example. When I was a lawyer, I was on the side... I wanted to do real social good as well. I was out in California so I created this, this mentoring program in the city. I was in San Diego. So, I was lining up, my organization was lining up, sophomores, juniors and

seniors from San Diego Unified School District with professionals around the area, in their areas of interest, and that kind of thing.

And it started to get a lot of traction, actually. Got written up front page of the, of the newspaper, the Union Tribune of San Diego and everything. So, I had to hire up an organization. So, I hired one person essentially to lead the outwardly facing part of the company, and someone else to, to lead the inwardly facing part of the organization. And, and I, I hired them both in a hurry. I didn't really do due diligence. It turns out I got really fortunate with one of them. He was fantastic. He was the internally facing person. The other person, that was a massive challenge, and it turns out he was sloppy, he was... he cut corners, there were all kinds of challenges.

And I, I could see them. I'll call this guy's... his name is John. If John was going to succeed in that organization there were a number of things he had to change, and fast. And that's true even if he was going to succeed somewhere else and not there. And so, if John was really a person to me, at the very least what would have happened, if I really cared about him and saw him as a person, we would have had a conversation. And it might not have been a comfortable one for him, but I would have cared enough about him that we would have had it.

But instead, that's not what I did. I, instead, I just started hoping really hard that John would move. (laughs) Okay? I mean, so, that was my management strategy. I know it's pretty impressive.

WHITNEY You were young.

JIM And behaviorally, that's incredibly soft, but that doesn't mean I was seeing him as a person. In fact, it's obvious in that case, my softness was, was evidence he was actually an object to me. So, the real question is, what would be helpful here? And very often what's helpful isn't soft at all. Letting my kids have everything they want, that would be soft and easy, but that does, that won't mean I'm seeing them as people. That would be a very-

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM ... that would be a very inward stance to take, you know. So, take, you know, so people would be surprised if they were to see Arbinger meetings here, too. We can be very direct with each other. It's amazing how direct you can be when no one questions that people care.

WHITNEY Mm.

JIM It's when people, when all of those moorings are sort of detached and no one feels really regarded and whatnot, then you have to now get very political and worry about what people are saying, what do they really mean, when none of that's in question at all, you can dive right into issues, very directly. You know?

WHITNEY I have a challen- Something, a challenge that came up for me as I was working through your material, and I wanna throw it out there and see if I can articulate it.

So one of the things I think is hard is that, when I'm trying to get something done and you know, working with someone in some capacity, want to get something done, it's not working, and so, it feels like it- I'm being thwarted, or the project is being thwarted. So I was out of the box, but as soon as it starts to get thwarted, actually I had an outward mindset, it gets thwarted, I start to get inward mindset. And it starts to f- so, in that moment when they start feeling like they're not, they're blocking it, then they become objects.

Now, here's the challenge, and here's what I want you to think about is, when... that minute they start becoming objects and I'm triggered in some way, then, I feel guilty (laughs) that I'm treating them as objects, and so, then, instead of being hard and kind of saying, "Okay, this isn't acceptable," I go soft because I'm worried that I'm in the box. So-

JIM Yeah.

WHITNEY ... I'm wondering, does that resona- does that make sense what I'm saying?

JIM Sure. Absolutely.

WHITNEY ... and I'm curious what you would say to that, because it's a challenge.

JIM Yeah. Have you read our, our book, *The Anatomy of Peace*?

WHITNEY I have, but it's been a couple of years.

JIM Okay. So that, that book actually, of our books that are out there, that's the book that would get most into this issue, because actually a char-

WHITNEY Interesting.

JIM ... a character in that book who actually deals with that exact issue, and so you'll encounter that issue. If you read that book with that question in mind, uh, Whitney, I think you'll get a lot of equipment, I bet. But let me just say this, first of all. Look, in a moment, uh, you know, we can find ourselves in a box, right?

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM And it's hard, once you find, what... All of a sudden you're there, it's hard to kind of get it right, right? Because, we're not seeing clearly. I mean, by definition, it's a bit of a challenge, and then, then it kind of affects all the things we might thinking about doing. So, here's strategy number one, and it's a strategy that you have to put in place in advance of that, so that that happens less often. It will happen, but the best strategy is, "Let's, figure out how to help that happen less often."

So, in *The Anatomy of Peace*, as well, there's a, there's a tool called the Influence Pyramid. The whole book is built around that, and, the Influence Pyramid, if you think about, think about a triangle, you draw a triangle or a pyramid on a piece of paper, and if you were to divide that shape into two chunks, two areas, and those two areas represented, uh, the time I spent dealing with things that are going wrong, and the time I spend helping things go right. Just think about that triangle. That's my available time. How much of my available time am I spending dealing with things that are going wrong, how much of my time am I spending helping things go right?

So, the scenario you just raised, I find myself in the box, now I've got to something about it. I'm in the dealing with things that are going wrong space now right?

WHITNEY Mm.

JIM So when I ask that question, which of these areas do you spend most of your time in to organizations? Almost everyone, and I've only had... of my entire career, there's only been one group of people, ever, who ever said, we spend more of our time do- helping things go right.

Every other time... And I know they were lying, for cultural issues, (laughs) they're kind of the culture of the place-

WHITNEY (laughs)

JIM ... the culture of the place was such that-

WHITNEY Said no one, ever.

JIM Well, because the culture of that organization was, "We don't have problems." You can't be seen to have problems-

WHITNEY Right.

JIM ... so, so, but, but, every other case, um, people will say, "I spend more of time dealing with things going wrong." And here's the challenge with that. You'll get more of what you put more of your time to. So, the more time you spend dealing with things going, that are going wrong, the more things that go wrong.

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM And the more, the more time you spend helping things go right, the, the more things will go right, and the less often you'll get into situations like the one you mentioned. So, in that structure, there are a number of, that, the helping things to go right sections include a number of areas to think about. One is what we call teach and communicate. How's my communication been with this person? Am I putting in a good communication? Are we in contact so we don't end up misunderstanding? Beneath that is what we call listen and learn. So, have I really listened to this person's or this group's perspective to understand where they're coming from? Do I know what they're up against? Do I know what their challenges are?

And then the next levels down are, are two relationship building levels. One is the strength of this relationship with this particular person, or a group of persons, and the strength of my relationship with other people I have influence with these people. So, and then, at the very base of helping things go right is this idea of getting out of the box, seeing other people as people, having an outward mindset.

WHITNEY Yeah. Interesting.

JIM So, the more you spend your time in advance of the problems coming up and those lower levels of the pyramid, the fewer, the, the less often you'll face the issue you're facing. Now, if you face it, here's, let me give you an example, because this happens, is like, I'm out with groups all the time, either giving speeches, or doing workshops or doing consulting, and this will happen. I mean, sometimes I'll find myself, I'll find myself starting to be, getting bugged by somebody, and I realize in that moment, "Oh, my word, I'm in the box right now, and I'm supposed to be (laughing) talking about not being in the box, and here I am in one."

In fact, I was with this one group and there was this older gentleman, and he was kind of getting under my skin. And, what I've realized and what I know, and this is a strategy is that when you're feeling bugged, what's happening is, I'm not seeing the person as a person. I'm just not. There are things going on for them, I don't see, I don't understand,

And so, I, um, so I realized, I've got to get to know this guy. So, at lunch, I made sure I sat next to this guy because I wanted to just get to know him.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JIM This guy that I was feeling bugged by. And so, we spent the lunch, uh, eating and all together, and by the end of the lunch, you know what I discovered? What I discovered was, in many ways, this guy was my dad.

WHITNEY Mm.

JIM This was my dad. And I could, I honestly say by the end of lunch, I love that guy. Now, he still did things that, you know, I didn't think were, you know, perfect, but, but the rest of that experience with him, I wasn't bugged at all. So, if I find, if I find, "Man, someone's getting in my way, or they're slowing the process down and now I'm bugged about it," it's not like go soft or hard. That's not the point. The point is - What can I do right now to see them more?

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM Now, when you see them more... Maybe it's go sit down with them, have a conversation. Maybe it's do what we call a meet to learn. There are a lot of different strategies you can follow. But what follows from that might end up being behaviorally hard or behaviorally soft. I mean, it might be what you realize is, "Oh, you know what? Now I see what's going on with them." And what's going on with them is, they're failing to step up right now in a way that they really need to, and it's not helpful for me as the leader, here, to allow that, to continue happening.

They're not going to be growing if they do that. They're going to be getting in other people's way. That won't be good for them or for this person, so, we're going to sit down and have a conversation. I mean, it might be that's what you do, but-

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM - what I realize now is I'm not actually seeing this person clearly. I've got to bust into a strategy that's going to help me see them clearly, and then you decide what to do behaviorally. It might be hard, it might be soft.

WHITNEY It's interesting. So, a, a few months ago, we had Donna Hicks on the podcast who does negotiation and conflict in the Middle East. You may have heard of her. She wrote a book called Leading With Dignity, and one of the things-

JIM Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY ... she talked about is that whenever you're in conflict with someone, you're at the edge of your interpersonal expertise, and-

JIM Mm.

WHITNEY ... as you were just saying that, the thought that came to me is, when you're trying to get something done, it gets thwarted, you find yourself in the box, and some of the strategies that you suggested are a way of, basically, you've got to, or in my case, I just say, not you, me, develop a set of tools so that you don't actually get to the point where you're in the box, is what I hear you saying. So, that's, that's very interesting and helpful.

Okay, a couple of other ideas I want to throw out and have you comment on, because I think they are-

JIM Okay.

WHITNEY ... fascinating. You say, Arbinger Institute says in the book, stress is a symptom of self-deception. Whoa! Talk about that.

JIM Yeah. So, I'll give you an example. So, when we were just starting, we had no clients at the time. We just banded together. We had been invited to ... There was an RFP came out, there were 30 different firms and, somehow, someone was familiar with the philosophical underpinnings of this fledgling little Arbinger organization, so we were invited into this RFP and we put that in, and we ended up getting selected as one of the final three. And the other two organizations were two world-known brands, and then this company that no one had ever heard of.

Each organization had two hour presentations to make to the body that was making the decision of which company they were going to hire to help on this massive culture change initiative, and we'd heard in advance that the HR director of this company had told this body of 14 or 15 people, he says, "I don't care which of these three you choose as long as you don't choose that, that company no one's ever heard of, because when this doesn't work I don't want to be blamed for a bad decision." (laughs) This is... that's what we heard he'd said, so, we knew we were up against it, you know, because we didn't have a track record yet.

And so, we were in the green room waiting to go on, and we were so nervous. We were feeling stress, right? We were so stressed because, you feel stressed when you don't have money in your bank account, for example, and you feel like your entire company future depends on how well this presentation goes. And all of that, but of course, that's all self-concern, you know. It's all just worrying about me. And so, one of my colleagues said, "Hey, hey, guys. We are nervous right now. You can feel it. We're nervous." And we're like, "Yeah, we are nervous." (laughs)

And he says, "Look, we know what that's about. I mean, our entire work informs us what's that, what's that about. We're worried about ourselves right now. Our mindset is entirely inward." "Look," he said, "We don't know if we're going to get this contract. We don't make that decision. The only thing we know for sure is that we have two hours with this group of, you know, 14 people. That's all we know. So, what if our entire focus was simply, how could we be in the next two hours as helpful as we can possibly be to these 14 people? Around the issues they're facing. How can we just show up and be massively helpful to them? It's not about whether we get the contract or not. It's not about that. We don't know about that. We don't decide that. We just decide how helpful we're going to be to these 14 people."

And that reorientation totally... I mean, it got us out of the box. It got us out of self-concern. And so, you can see, that's what happens is that, you know, very often our anxieties, the stresses we're feeling and whatnot, are, are actually a symptom of our own self-concern, of our own box, our own inward mindset. And, and to really getting out from under that is actually... there- there's no way to actually do it without getting out of that box, without turning outward in our mindset. So, that's what we meant by that.

WHITNEY So, another one. When we're feeling overwhelmed, it generally isn't our obligation to others, but our in the box desperation to prove something about ourselves that we find overwhelming.

JIM Yeah. That's right. So, so very often, um, because there's, there's this idea we talk about. How, how it is we actually become self-deceived in the first place is very interesting how it happens. It's a very, um, common, uh, experience that we have most of us multiple times a day, and it goes something like this.

Let's say, you and I work together, Whitney, and I might have a sense at some point that, "Hey, Whitney could really use this little piece of information I have for her. If I share this bit of

resource, or whatever, it would really be helpful to her." So, I, it might occur to me that I have to share that with you.

But of course I now have a choice. I can share it or not, and, and whenever I violate my own sensibility toward the people around me, and it's my own sensibility, it's not written in the sky anywhere, it's just, it's just my own sense that I'm bringing to something. Whenever I act contrary to it, what happens is, I now enter into a place, into a way of being where I, or into a mindset, the way we talked about it now, where I have to justify why it is I'm not doing the thing I felt like I should do.

So, now, in this moment, I'll start finding problems in you, why you haven't shared things with me in the past so why should I share with you. I'll find reasons why I'm, I don't need to do that, anyway. I mean, my whole, my whole rubric becomes around how I justify my own actions. So, and that's, that's this box we talked about. That's this inward mindset. Now, one can take from that a misunderstanding, and the misunderstanding is, "Oh, then I need to... anything I feel to do I need to be doing for everybody." It can feel like there's, there'd be this sort of, uh, multiplication of obligations, these felt obligations I've got to be scurrying around doing for things for people all the time. But, in fact, that's not the case.

What's, what's actually the case is this. There's a particular kind of box we get in, and there are different kinds of boxes we can get in, but there's a very common one that we all get in plenty, that has a need to prove itself for being a certain kind of a person. Maybe being a thoughtful person. I need other people to think that I'm thoughtful, that I'm caring, that I'm kind. And, it's a different thing for me to be a person who's simply thoughtful and caring and kind, versus being a person who needs *other people to think* that I'm thoughtful, (laughs) caring and kind. It's a very-I'm a different person.

And if I have the need for other people to think that way of me, I will feel... There will be a multiplication of felt obligations I've got to be doing all the time because I'm trying to prove something of myself. I need people to see me in a certain way, so I feel I've got to do this things, I've got to do that thing, and I have to do this thing over there, and, oh, my word, I'm stressed because I'm not able to give these other 10 things that I've got to do. And it's all being driven by this need to manage the impression in other people's minds of who I am.

As opposed to, look, I mean, if I'm a person, other people are people, I do the best I can. There might be a lot of things I wish I could do. I just don't have the wherewithal to doing them all, but because I'm not being driven by some desperate need to prove myself another person's mind, I'm able to do what I'm able to do. As an example, I was, after one of my many flights I'm on, I was on this plane and I just happened to notice, after I sat down, someone was loading on the plane after me, I looked at, looked at him as he went by.

And then looked at the next lady as she walked by, and the next lady, and then the guy, and I, I noticed a few people and I, I realized that I was having a thought about each of these people, and it was, "Oh, my word, these people are headed home, like, just like I am right now, from work or whatever. Or they're, or they're just leaving home like I did a couple of days ago," and it was just that thought that all of a sudden I felt connected to them. Like, "Oh, I kind of get what's going on in their lives."

Now, I didn't know anything more than that, but, but I sort of felt like I'd seen them in a way that usually I'm sort of head down on a plane not really noticing. And by the time, you know, the doors are closed, I could honestly say on that particular flight, actually I was grateful that day to be with those people. With that particular group of people. I've felt, "I'm grateful I'm with them." Now, that didn't mean, at that point, that I had to immediately start get up and hand out all the, all the peanuts to everybody because I was seeing them as people. It doesn't mean that. I

mean, a lot of times, our mindset's outward, it just might mean, "Hey, you know, I'm, I'm grateful I'm with this group," you know.

WHITNEY Yeah.

JIM And I'm not stressed. I'm not stressed about it. I'm going to do what's, what's needful. I'm going to do what I'm able to do. I'm going to do whatever my job is in a way that's not making their jobs harder, certainly, and better yet, if I can make it easier. But I'm not being driven by this desperation to prove myself in other people's minds in particular, and that's what we meant by that.

WHITNEY Yeah. So good. Okay, so, I have a couple more questions for you as we wrap up, but before we do that, where can people find you?

JIM Sure. So, I'd say the best is to go to our website at [arbinger.com](http://arbinger.com), that's A-R-B-I-N-G-E-R.com, and you can find all kinds of resources there. I mean, really interesting res- We have free assessments you can take, a mindset assessment, a mindset styles assessment, all kinds of white papers, case studies, and you can find information about courses that you can take, either public courses or the kinds of things we can do within your organizations or speeches, et cetera. So, all that information is there.

WHITNEY Ok.

JIM You can find us too, I mean, we have YouTube channels, vide- Vimeo channels, all kinds of video resources that people can access, or, you know, if they want to get into our work first in book form, we have the three big trade books. Our *Leadership and Self-Deception* was the first one. *The Anatomy of Peace* was its sequel. And then *The Outward Mindset* which is our latest book. All of them really big best-sellers. Really interesting reads. I think people will find really valuable things.

WHITNEY Oh, yeah, they're terrific. Terrific. Absolutely terrific. Okay, so, I think, three more questions.

JIM Okay.

WHITNEY Well, first of all, I want to share an observation. So, one of the things that I thought was really interesting, and I want to share our learning that I had is, um, it talks, you talk about in, um, how we value other people's failures because they give us an excuse for why we shouldn't have to help them. And I value my own failures because they give me proof others have done me wrong.

One of the things that was really helpful to me is, I thought a lot about my father. So, my father's now passed away and he was, um, someone who had embezzled money. He was a womanizer, and, you know, I have cast a lot of blame at him. And one of the things that was really interesting to me, and I don't know how I'll work through this because it's just a kind of realization I've had in the last couple of days, is, I've been reading and preparing for our conversation together, is that, by having those feelings, there are some behavior that this is allowing me to justify which is terrifying, actually.

JIM Mm.

WHITNEY It's delicious but it's also terrifying. And so, the really interesting thing for me to start to think through, not only with my father but I think in general, every time I'm blaming something, for someone for something, I'm using that as a way to justify. And so, it's just really, really rich stuff, and I think where your work is certainly valuable at work and in the organization I think the

place where it's most helpful is with the relationships and the people that we're closest to. And so, I wanted to share that with you.

And then ask you, I think this is a really important question as we wrap up is, as you do this work what has been one of the hardest things for you, personally? Who do you struggle with? Where are you in this journey? Because you're talking about this work, you're teaching this work. My question is, in what ways are you living this work?

JIM

Yeah, that's a great question. First of all, to your first, uh, what you just shared about your father. I, um, there's a video I want to send to you, Whitney, so I, I'll just do that. I'll just mention it now. Um, there's a story that we write about in *The Outward Mindset* of a gentleman who had an issue with his father. His father, actually, took his own life, and this now man, but when he was a young, uh, was like a teenager, ended up starting to blame all of his problems that he was experiencing then on in his life on his father who took his own life, and, it's really quite a story.

And then, we went and captured that on video. We took him back to where this happened which was in this big ranch in Nevada. We took this, now, you know, a fully adult man back there and filmed him back in the original place, and he retold that story. It's pretty powerful, and you might find it helpful in your own situation, so I'll send you that video and you can take a look.

WHITNEY

Thank you. I appreciate it.

JIM

Now, on your, on your question, when I was first contemplating leaving law and doing this, I spent a week with Terry and, and a few other people. At the end of the first day together, Terry put his arm around me and he said, "Jim," he said, "You know, you're just sick enough to be here." (laughs) This is what he said, um, which meant I took it that yeah, I've got enough of this problem that we talk about that I can maybe helpfully talk about it with other people.

I'm able to write about these ideas, able to talk about these ideas because... not because I don't have the problem but because I have it and, and I'm, I'm willing, at least enough of the time, to face up to it and to start to ask honest questions about myself. So, yeah, look, I've, I have, I've had in the past, and continue to have certain relationships, certain situations, that I struggle with. There's one, there- that you can locate this work both in terms of particular relationships, you can also locate it, um, in terms of a particular kind of style of box that a person might carry a lot, that has impacted a whole bunch of directions.

And here's one of my biggest ones. So, we write about this in *The Anatomy of Peace*. These four fundamental self-justification styles, uh, of inward mindset. They are - I can view myself as being better than other people. That's one style I can get myself in. I can view myself as what we call an I deserve box, I deserve things other people don't deserve. I can view myself as being worse than other people. Or I can view myself as, as needing to be seen as a certain kind of a person. I need to be seen as smart, or I need to be seen as nice, or I need to be seen as kind, or I need to be seen as driven, or whatever.

And, for me, one of my biggest box styles is the need to be seen as kind of style. And what that means and how it shows up in multiple directions is that, when you have a justification style that's like, I need to be seen as likable, for example, or as kind, what that will mean is, when what's needful and helpful in a situation is my being direct in, and maybe a bit tough, I won't be able to do that.

WHITNEY

Hm.

JIM Which means I won't be able to be helpful to a person in that case. I'll be too weak. I'll be too soft. And because I'm too self-concerned, I don't care enough about them enough to, to be with them the way they really need which might be to be a little tough right now. I'll wimp out, you know, and that's, that for me, it shows up in a lot of ways.

So, one way that I can show up is I'll get quiet, for example. Maybe mope and won't speak up. I'm just sort of, uh, let things happen to me or whatnot. And, and then blame others for why it's happening when I'm... and I'm failing to see how... Wait a second, I, I... if I'm, if I'm just staying silent and moping around, I, I actually share responsibility in what's happening to me. I mean, you see why that is? (laughs) I mean, I, I, there's something I'm doing that's inviting that to stop or to be different.

I'm no change agent in the world at all. I'm just, I'm just cementing in the current patterns and finding justification in them. So, so yeah, I have, I have enough experience in that kind of a box and all the others to be able to speak intelligently about them, unfortunately. (laughs)

WHITNEY (laughs)

JIM And that's really kind of a prerequisite here at Arbinger, is just being able to sort of have that life experience but then being willing to talk about it, you know-

WHITNEY Right.

JIM ... because, because that's what helps other people. That's why I think our books really resonate with folks, is people read the books and the books have stories like those in them and they invite people to see themselves in them. Right? I mean, it sounds like you've had that experience too, with your reading.

WHITNEY Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. They've just been terrific. Okay, so Jim, thank you so much for being with us today. I appreciate your candor around that. I think the four justification styles of The Anatomy of Peace I think are really powerful and useful. So, as we wrap up, any final thoughts, um, that you would like to share for our listeners?

JIM Yeah, I would say, at least from my perspective, every bad thing that's ever happened in the history of the world has at the heart of it the objectification of other people. Every single one of them. And, so learning how it is that we do this to each other, individually and collectively, culturally, corporately, and then figuring out how not to do that. How we're going to actually honor each other, we're going to help each other grow, we're going to hold ourselves accountable to each other, to, you know, step up in ways that are helpful. That's massive. To me, it's the most important work in the world, and, the big challenge to it is this -

It's so easy to respond to someone who's in the box toward us, in an in the box way back. I mean, it doesn't take any work at all. I mean, it's just kind of natural, right? (laughs) And it's also simple to respond to someone who's out of the box toward us, and seeing us as people. To respond in kind to them, right? I mean, we all have people in our lives that are that way, it's like we show up as our best selves. We don't have to think about it, it takes no work.

The thing that takes work, and, and to me, it's the thing that takes leadership. In fact, it's really the big leadership move, it's the only move that actually takes real leadership, and that is this one. It's the move where someone else has an inward mindset, or a whole group does, and I'm going to have the courage and wherewithal to be outward, notwithstanding. I'm not only in response in reflecting back to the other side who they're being toward me. No, actually, I'm

stepping in, in the leadership kind of way and I'm going to see another person as a person, because that's who they are.

There's nothing they can do to me that's going to keep me from seeing them who they are. You can- they can, you know, there might be a lot of choices that can be taken from me, but you can't, you can't take from me how I'm going to see you, no matter what you're doing to me. And that's holding ourselves accountable for that foundational choice, showing up that way, being the leader is...I'm not going to wait for everyone. I don't need everyone else in this organization to turn outward before I turn outward. No, I'm going to turn now.

That doesn't make me worse off at all. All that it does is it helps me to be able to see what's really going on. Now I can start making better decisions. I don't have to wait for other people to turn. That's what the world's needs most of in my view, is people who don't wait for other people to turn, but they turn themselves. And that's what we call the most important move, actually, and equipping people to be able to make that most important move is key from our point of view.

WHITNEY      Jim Ferrell, thank you very much for being on the podcast with us today. It's been a pleasure and we wish you the best.

JIM              So fun, Whitney. Thank you for the opportunity.

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My big takeaway is that this is about personal disruption. Understanding this concept of self-deception is key to one of the most important accelerants in disrupting ourselves - battling our sense of entitlement. This is where we preference ourselves above others, effectively turning those around us into objects, rather than seeing them as people, resistant to their feedback and ideas, preferencing our wants and needs above all else. This is a learning curve killer.

And powerful to think about the four self-justification styles outlined in *The Anatomy of Peace*---Am I in the “better-than” box where I see myself as superior to others? The “I-Deserve” box” where I feel entitled and resentful or perhaps see myself as the unappreciated victim? The box Jim mentioned he finds himself in - the “need-to-be-seen” box. Where we need others to think well of us. Or, are we in the “worse-than” box where we see ourselves as deficient and helpless and all the world is against us?

When we give into self-deception, we put ourselves in one of those boxes. Get out of the box.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas speaks of “The Other.” When we come face-to-face with an ‘other’ we are confronted by their difference from us, and it is the recognition of this difference, not the similarity, that causes the disruption for us, forcing us to reexamine ourselves.

Levinas says “I am not free to ignore the meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced me.” He also asserts that the request of the Other in this initial meeting is that we not ‘kill’ them. There are literal examples of this, but the figurative ways we ‘kill’ each other are more applicable here. Backstabbing. Undermining. Taking credit that rightly belongs to someone else. The opportunity for us, though, is this: “In front of the face of the Other, I always demand more of myself.”

Practical Tip:

This week, how can you demand more of yourself when face to face with someone who you might be tempted to view as an object and not an individual? That might feel like a lot to ask in a week that is busy and chaotic as many of us are right in the middle of the last work week before we celebrate the holidays. But I can guarantee that among our family and friends there will be opportunities to confront the Other. And if we can we see those that might confront us as people and not “other,” we keep ourselves open and out of the self-deception box, giving ourselves the opportunity to truly connect. Which is the best thing we can do on a week where so many traditions and celebrations fall. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa or something else next week, I hope it’s a week filled with love and joy.

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

I’m Whitney Johnson  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.