

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 142: A LOOK BACK AT 2019

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 in your life.

This podcast has continued to grow as you've kindly shared your favorite episodes on social media and have taken the time to [leave 5-Star Reviews on Apple Podcasts](#). Our review of the week is from – and I'm going to spell it out so I don't mispronounce it - Huaxc_us.

I've been listening to podcasts for years and this is my first review ever. I get a great deal of value out of Whitney's podcasts. The wide range of experiences of the people she interviews really expanded my vision of what's possible and the paths these people took also offered great wisdom for me. I also hold a professional certificate on coaching so when I listen I also pay attention to the questions Whitney asks. I am sure she does prep work beforehand but still really enjoy many questions that were asked spontaneously in the moment. Thank you team!

Thank you for that kind review! And, yes, acknowledging our team, including Macy, Whitney and Melissa—this particular episode I know for you is a real labor of love.

The end of the year is a time for reflection and looking back at the progress made. We love taking a look at where we are as a team in our S-Curve of Learning as podcasters. Looking back at some of our most popular episodes, which interestingly, include the solo episodes; we also love sharing our favorite conversations and the impact they've had on each of us.

As far as our S-Curve of Learning and the podcast goes, like last year, we're still solidly in the sweet spot - things are hard, but not too hard. Easy, but not too easy. It's an

exciting project and we've had some amazing conversations that have informed, certainly what I'm doing, how I'm coaching and how I'm living my life. And based on our downloads, reviews, many of these episodes seem to have helped you as well, which is so fun to see!

When it was time to look at which conversations to include for this year-end episode, it was extraordinarily hard to choose. We've had some stellar guests this year. So, we looked at the numbers and decided to start with our most listened to episode – it was my [conversation with author and researcher Brené Brown](#).

A little behind the scenes story - the conversation we ended up using for the podcast was actually our second recording session. There were some internet issues due to weather in Brené's hometown of Houston that made it hard to get a clean recording on our first try. Because I have followed her work since before publishing *Dare, Dream, Do* in 2012, it was hard not to be disappointed when we couldn't record the first time. But as is often the case with something that we are excited about (maybe too excited!), I was much more relaxed for the second conversation and really enjoyed the experience.

For this episode, we experimented with [sharing it on YouTube](#). It was fun to read in the comments that listeners (especially those of you who have already been following Brené's work) were able to hear her share things she hadn't talked about in other settings. There were so many parts of the episode that were impactful, but the clip we are about to play is meaningful to me because it's one of those moments where Brené is talking candidly about how she's dealing with an issue in her life in real-time.

WHITNEY So one of the things that you said, I'm setting you up here, so-

BRENÉ Yeah.

WHITNEY Get ready.

BRENÉ I'm ready.

WHITNEY You said, "Joy is the most vulnerable of all emotions." So what about your work, and your life, gives you deep joy?

BRENÉ I've been thinking about that a lot. I've been thinking that- about it a lot, you know, I was even gonna a- you know, it's interesting because I'm coming to this really weird career transition place right now, and so one of the things that I talk about in *The Gifts of Imperfection* that I ha- I need to do my researcher heal thyself a little bit right now, is a joy list, like, what's going on in your life when you're at your happiest?

And I came across my joy list a couple of weeks ago, and realized I wasn't doing almost anything on it, so I'm cooking, I'm practicing photography, I'm editing photos, I'm making family albums. I'm, you know, in what the AA, what the big book would call "spiritual condition," like, I am praying and meditating. I'm with my family, I'm near water, I'm hiking, like, all of those things bring me intense joy.

WHITNEY So, when you read the list, you started to make- you started to make changes, is what you're saying?

BRENÉ I'm definitely making changes. I think, It's interesting because I- I read your work a lot, and I- I take so much wisdom from it because one of the things, if I look back on the last three years, I, like so many people, thought, you know, "I think some of these ideas are important, and I think they can make the world a better place. How do I scale them?" And so I started businesses, and, unbelievably, they did really well, and I hated it.

WHITNEY Hmm.

BRENÉ Like, I hated it. And we even had investors come and say, "How-" you know, "We want to help you go further faster." And what I realized, in this last, I don't know, maybe six months, is that I'm better, more joyful, and my work is more meaningful when I am slower closer. ... And so for me, a big business learning for me was I need to find great partners who are- who are scalars, and who are further-faster partners, Netflix is a great example. But the way I spend my days, has to be about slower-closer, um, for me. Like, I don't ... When the businesses started taking off, and then it was like, "Okay, we need, like, we need to hire an engineering team, and we need to full stack this, and we need ..."

So, for me, it's been this really hard transition, and I think it goes back a lot, to be honest with you, Whitney, to your work, about the Two and a Half Times. I think I've spent a lot of my career proving, and I'm at the place now where I'm trying to inhale, and ask myself, "Am I doing this to prove that I can? Or because I want to, and it brings me joy?" And those two things are not the same all the time, for me.

WHITNEY For most of us, no.

BRENÉ Yeah, and so- so now I'm really trying to make sure that when a new project comes a- along, or when a new opportunity comes my way, instead of looking at what it could do for the work, and the platform, and, you know, I ask myself, "What is it- what is it going to look- what are my days going to look like? What are my next 180 days going to look like?"

WHITNEY If you say, "Yes."

BRENÉ If I say, "Yes." ... And that's really been a changer for me, like, that's- that's been big.

WHITNEY It sounds to me like this is a new arena moment for you.

BRENÉ Oh my God, it really is. I hate it. Like ... I just want to sit in the stands, and have some popcorn-

WHITNEY (laughs).

BRENÉ And, like, kick- kick back for, like, I don't know, six months or so? Definitely a new arena for me. You know, I think I need to be intensely and joyfully in my life, in order to write about things that are meaningful for people.

And isn't that what we all love about Brené? That she writes about things that are meaningful. There are so many good reminders here as we finish the year - Do you have a "joy list?" If so, have you looked at it? And before saying yes, think: What are the next 180 days going to look like? Will I be able to do the things I need to do to care for myself, to show up well in those 180 days if I do this thing? Or will I be making a temporary trade-off? It's an important question, and one that I am asking myself as I plan out the coming year.

Our next episode is with James Clear. This episode had a ton of downloads as well, but for me, this episode had quite an impact. I try to pay attention when I find myself talking about, thinking about, coaching on and implementing new ideas from these podcast conversations. And I found myself doing all four after interviewing James. I highly recommend James' book *Atomic Habits* and love how many sticky ideas are packed into that book. One of my favorite concepts - perhaps because of my background in finance - is the idea of taking advantage of the compound interest of self-improvement by improving one percent a day.

JAMES

I like to refer to habits as the compound interest of self-improvement, and the reason why I like that phrase is that, the same way that money multiplies through compound interest, the effects of your habits multiply as you repeat them over time. So, you know, if you save, like, a hundred bucks for retirement today, that doesn't feel like a whole lot. It's like, "Well, I can't retire on that." Like, you know, it's easy to dismiss it as not being important. But if you're committed to saving for retirement every month, you turn around a decade, or two, or three later, and you start to hit that hockey stick portion of the curve, where the compound interest takes off and the returns are all ... They're all delayed.

And habits are not exactly like that, but, man, it feels like that a lot of the time, and so, if you ... As you mentioned, if you look at the math on this, if you can get just one percent better each day, and you do that for an entire year, so one, point, zero, one, to the 365th power, you end up 37 times better by the time you get to the end of the year, and similarly, if you get one percent worse, you drive yourself almost all the way down to zero, in the same way that it's easy to dismiss saving a little bit for retirement now, or not doing it, habits are very easy to dismiss on any given day.

You know, like, what is the difference between eating a burger and fries for lunch or eating a salad and chicken? Like, not really a whole lot. You know, on any given day, you are like, "Well, my body looks basically the same in the mirror at the end of the night. The scale hasn't really changed. There isn't really very much to look at there." You just kind of, like, make these choices, and they don't seem like a big deal, and then you turn around one day and it's like, "Knock, knock. Who's there? The consequences of my past decisions."

Finally, they start to accumulate 2, or 5, or 10 years later, and so, for that reason, I think that it's easy to dismiss but actually incredibly important, and if you can capture that one percent, if you can make one percent improvements rather than one percent declines, then you'll end up very surprised with how much progress you make in the long run.

We had James on the podcast almost exactly a year ago. Because of that conversation, I made a simple goal. A seemingly ridiculous one. I committed to work out 5 minutes a day, increasing my time by 1% each time I exercised, which initially was six seconds. Some weeks I exercised 4-5x, others only once because of my travel schedule. Even so, a year later, I'm up to 27 minutes, and more importantly, I've adopted the identity of someone who doesn't miss workouts. This episode was our producer Macy Robison's favorite as well. The idea that by small means great things are brought to pass applies not only to consequences we want as well as consequences we may not want, was a huge paradigm shift for her and has caused her to make some small day to day changes as well.

Another episode I found myself referring to quite often this year was my conversation with Donna Hicks. Her work on dignity is so powerful as it relates to how we see one another and interact with one another and battle our own sense of entitlement.

DONNA The reason that we're having these conflicts is people are feeling like their dignity is being violated. So, honestly, I felt like I, I really felt like I touched on a universal human truth, um, and about dignity that we all want to be treated as if we matter and we all want to be treated as if we're something of value and worth. And when we're not, number one, conflict ensues but we just engage in so much suffering around it. I realized that with this word, dignity, that it was one way of addressing these conflicts that people didn't feel embarrassed about, they didn't feel the shame around admitting they've been treated so badly. It was a way, as I said, of sort of legitimizing their experience. And when they would talk about it, um, you know, there was something about getting that story out that helped them heal from those indignities.

WHITNEY I think that's one of the things that's so powerful about that word where you just said, you know, if someone says, "You made me feel bad," I think there's oftentimes a lot of shame around that. But when you can say like, and I can feel it when you, you use that word is, "It feels, you know, my dignity has been violated." There's no sense of shame when you say that, like when I say that, I don't feel it. But when I say you made me feel bad, I do feel a sense of shame. Like just those, those words, and so that's so, so powerful to me.

Can you talk for a moment about you have the three Cs of dignity, what are the three Cs of dignity?

DONNA When I was teaching my class at Columbia, there was an older woman who came and, um, you know, and, and took the course and she was an HR executive. She, you know, she was, you know, in her mid-career, one of these 40 something women who were getting her PhD. And she sat in my class while I was going over all of the dignity material, because it was all about the dignity approach to conflict. And for some reason, she didn't say anything for the first, I don't know, couple of hours of the class and everybody else, all the students are ... you really typically engaged and they're telling their stories, and, and so I, I made a personal note. I thought, "Okay, I'm just going to kind of go up to her during the break and see if everything is okay."

So I went, you know, I was planning on doing that but then right before I took a break, her hand went up and she said, uh, "Donna, you know, I'm sitting here, I haven't contributed anything yet because I'm really trying to figure out how I feel about what you're presenting." And she said, "First of all, I, I just feel, it's wonderful, you know, it's great. This, this idea that we all have dignity and

it's a part of our inherent value and worth, and she said, "Now, the problem is, I think dignity is bigger than you think it is." She says it's way bigger and I said, "Well, tell us, you know, please help, help us. Explain to, to everybody." And she said, "Well, you're focusing on individual dignity and how we all have inherent value and worth."

But she said, "Honestly, I think of it this way," she said, "I think dignity was given to us in a sacred trust when we were born and it is our duty to be the guardians of dignity, not just our own dignity, but the dignity of everyone." You know, we have to be, to be the caretakers, we have to be so careful to, you know, to protect each other's dignity." And she said, "So it's not just about my dignity and the dignity of others but it's also about the dignity of something greater than ourselves, something bigger, something that it's the dignity of the greater good."

And so she said that and I just was, you know, I was, it was just astonishing insight I thought. It was such deep wisdom and that, you know, that let ... Oh and then she said and you know, "Donna, it was given to us in a sacred trust." And she said, "To, to tell you the truth, you know it's so big that I think that it's all it's about life itself."

It's dignity, life has all dignity in all different manifestations and we have to educate ourselves about how, how to get along in the world in a way where we are all the guardians of that bigger dignity.

So, okay, you can imagine how I felt after that. It was just, it was such a powerful intervention that she made. And I, after months thinking about her intervention, I decided that dignity was about dignity consciousness. If you wanted to achieve dignity consciousness and really understand dignity, that it was about three things. It's about connection, connection, and connection (laughing)

WHITNEY

Do tell.

DONNA

Yes. And so the first connection is to our own dignity, we have to have a direct link and connection that we have to know that we have inherent value and worth. We also need to have a connection to the dignity of others because if we are born with it, so is everybody else. And so that connection to others, seeing it in others and honoring it in others and protecting it in others. And the third C is to something greater than ourselves, right? So you know, some people who are religious say it's their connection to, you know, creator, their god. I tend to think of it a little more practically in my practice because, you know, I, I say to people, "Well, look, you know, it's great to be connected to your dignity and the dignity of others and treat others well, but it's also important to have a purpose in your life.

It's also important to do something to contribute to the greater good, and to be mindful that life isn't just about us here, there's a whole world out there including the environment, right? Including nature, we need to protect nature and the dignity of our, our planet.

And so when I work with young people, especially, who are, you know, trying to figure out what they want to do with their lives I say, "Look, just make sure that these three Cs are, uh, in alignment. Make sure you're connected to your own dignity, you treat other people with dignity and, and that you have some kind of connection to the greater good." What can you be doing to contribute to the greater good and they say, "This is what we want to make our lives meaningful." They say, "We, you know, we're searching for meaning. We don't want to just go out and get a high paying job and buy a house and live." We wanted to contribute, you know, Millennials are great that way. They, they really, I mean I don't want to over-generalize, but my students they all feel that way. They understand that there's something greater than us out there and that we have to be the guardians of that.

So powerful. I'll never hear the word dignity in the same way again. I encourage you to go back and listen to all of these, but especially Donna's episode.

Next up, we're featuring the conversation I had with Marcus Buckingham. One of my favorites and the favorite episode of one of our sound engineers, Melissa Rutty. Marcus and I talked not only about strengths and how we can double and triple down on them, but how there are lies we tell ourselves as leaders that can lead to complete disengagement in the workplace. I loved this section on feedback.

MARCUS Well the lie is that people need feedback. And the, the reason of course that's a lie, and it, we're in the middle of a feedback fetish at the moment because one of the problems people saw in the world of work is that people didn't get enough time with their team leader. They don't, they're not focused on one another enough. We do performance reviews once a year and we have a lot of people coming to work and feeling lonely and ignored and, and there's no question. If you want to really disengage someone then ignore them.
And so-

WHITNEY (laughs)

MARCUS ... we've tried to address that by saying we can't ignore people by only paying attention to them once a year. We need to give them constant, ongoing, frequent feedback. And there's no question that's right. I mean people do not flourish when you're just paying attention to them once a year. So the continual more ongoing part of the feedback fetish at the moment is right and real. The problem is, is that we've then connected the continuousness to something called feedback. And feedback is - the way that it's currently practiced - is based on the idea that the way to help you excel is for me to tell you what you're doing wrong and to tell you what you need to do to do it right.

And the premise there is that excellence is defined in isolation from you. I've got a model of it over here. And second that I'm the source of truth about what you are doing wrong and you need the benefit of my point of view on this because if you didn't have me here you wouldn't see the truth about you. I'm the source of truth about you. And then of course the theory of learning that feedback embodies is that my way is your way. That I'm going to tell you how to do it. And you should try and learn how to do it because learning is really just filling up an empty vessel. And that's what feedback is based on. But if you want them to excel, you've got to have a whole different set of interventions.

Excellence in any role, whether it's nurse or teacher or sales person, is idiosyncratic. It's, everyone who excels at being a pub manager, everyone who excels at being a sales person or an emergency room nurse doesn't do it in exactly the same way. So the very first point that I can get you to excellence by telling you to remediate how you don't fit into a model doesn't work. The best team leaders in the world, the best teachers in the, the best parents in the world know this.

If excellence is idiosyncratic, I can't tell you how to do it. What I can do simply is pay attention right now to what's working with you. Because if I want you to get to great, the raw material of future greatness is current goodness. Your current goodness. Which means that the best thing I can do for you as a team leader is to pay attention to what's currently working about your actions or activities or situations right now.

I've got to help you pay attention to those. And so really I'm not a source of truth about who you are. I am a source of truth about my own reactions. So I can tell you my reactions. And in particular, what's really useful is my reactions to when I leaned into you or when I saw something

work with you or when I saw that other people were fascinated by what you were doing or saying or what they were reading of what you'd written. And if I help you pay attention to the reactions of people, then you can use that as raw material to build yourself to excellence. Well that's not feedback. That's attention. And in particular, I'm paying attention to what works about you. Gosh if you do that, you know, we, we tend to think of good job as the end of a conversation. Good job. Now let's focus. No. Good job is the beginning of a conversation.

As a ramp-up to the re-release of *Disrupt Yourself*, our weekly interviews leading up to the publication date focused on each of the seven accelerants of disruption. Our [interview on Battling Entitlement featured Buster Scher](#). He's built a huge multimedia platform called Hoops Nation. He regularly rubs shoulders with and is hired by NBA players and hip-hop legends. The conversation was fun, challenging and inspiring.

WHITNEY So most people have naysayers in their life, unfortunately and they're either people in their life or in their own heads who say you know, you can't do that. What does that look like for you? And how do you manage those naysayers?

BUSTER I don't think I manage per se, but I definitely remember in the beginning even when I had like 25,000 followers back then on Facebook. Everyone thought it was the lamest thing in the world what I was doing. Even the broadcasting too on radio... people thought that was, that was super lame. And I as definitely on the broadcasting side a little bit insecure as to what people thought about me broadcasting. I loved the broadcast. I wasn't insecure a second about that, but more so about what people thought, because I'm sitting by myself, like have to set up a table and then sit watch like JV girls field hockey when I'm like a new kid at this school sophomore year (laughs). I don't know anybody and I'm sitting down there calling plays, you know, by myself when usually no one even broadcast their games. So um, there was definitely that. And definitely got made fun of a ton on every front. All the way dating back to when I was doing the fantasy basketball stuff, to this site called All NBA All Day, which I started in my sophomore year of high school in Connecticut. Everybody thought that was lame.

And I honestly think that's the reason that most kids don't do what they actually enjoy. That's why they don't cultivate these huge audiences, or find their path before college, because everyone is just making fun of everyone before then. So the second someone just tries to do it, everyone just shuts it down. And I honestly think more younger people would be successful if that weren't the case.

WHITNEY Wow! Buster that's really profound.

Okay, so you've thought about this...what tips would you have for someone who is really passionate about something, their peers are shutting them down. What is one or two practical tips around that?

BUSTER Ages 14 to 18 are the literally the best years of your life to create whatever you want to create. I understand that you're young and in school and this and that. But, you're living rent free, you have no overhead, and you're not in school yet. You're not in like real school, college yet, so you have a lot of flexibility. And you have access to the internet. I mean it's ridiculous!

You should just be creating social accounts around whatever you're interested in, interning during the summer for whoever you're inspired by. Anything like that you should be doing, because I think 14 to 18 is when you can set yourself up for the next 75 years. You can make zero dollars from 14 to 18 and set yourself up to make tens of millions from 18 to 50. You know I really believe that and I think it's, I think school should push that harder than preparing for college.

Next, the coaches' coach, Carol Kauffman. Carol is the Founder and Executive Director of the Institute of Coaching at Harvard Medical School. She is a veteran psychologist and Professional Certified Coach who has participated in over 40,000 psychotherapy and coaching sessions. I was so intrigued by her response to the following question, one she is uniquely qualified to answer:

WHITNEY What's the difference between therapy and coaching?

CAROL Well, I'm of course the (laughs) perfect person to ask that question to.

WHITNEY (laughs).

CAROL In therapy what you want to do is, you want to follow the trail of tears to get to a place of healing for your client. And in coaching, you follow the trail of dreams, for this person to live the life they want. And what I think of it as is there's two houses, the house of therapy, the house of coaching. And there's a few rooms that look the same in those two houses, but they are very different houses, and you have a very different headset, and set of intentions, when you're coaching, compared to when you're doing therapy. And it's not just that healing doesn't happen, but what you are doing is you're making that labyrinth of choices in a conversation that supports their vision of the future, supports their strengths. And you do so a lot through your questions. I'm not a coach who believes in just questions, but that's sort of the main, the main pathway.

WHITNEY So, if someone comes to you, let's say I come to you and I say, "Carol, I am looking for a coach, and I would like for you to coach me." What's the first question that you would ask me, or any perspective client?

CAROL First, just really basic, so tell me about yourself, and what you're looking for?

WHITNEY Okay.

CAROL And then I will explore that with them. And then get a, get a sense of that. Now, okay this is going to be weird, but I'll tell you what my first task is when I have a first session with someone. And that is, my goal is to like them. To figure out what is it about this person that's really wonderful, and to like them. Not to be thinking about do they like me, can I impress them? Et cetera, et cetera. Because the key to great coaching is getting yourself in a place of ego-free openhandedness. And much like that minister said to me when I was in my 20's, if this person is supposed to be my client, I don't have to push for it. We'll just have a conversation and if I can find a way to care about the person, chances are something very good is happening. We will form the beginnings of a strong bond, and then move forward.

I'm doing a lot of other things at the same time. But for me, coaching is really about finding a way to care about your client, then using everything in your repertoire to help that person become who they want to be.

I said this at the end of my episode with Carol, but I think it bears repeating - wouldn't the world be a better place if we all showed up and found ways to care about the people in our lives? If we used everything in our repertoire to help them become who they want to be?

Another episode that surprised and inspired me was one we did for the book launch around embracing constraints. This is such an important accelerant of disruption. We took a deep dive into it just two episodes ago on episode 140, but this conversation was a bit different. In it, I spoke to Jonathan Mendonsa, one half of the hugely successful Choose FI podcast about his own story of embracing the constraint of being in debt, and then making decisions that have allowed him to now be financially independent.

JONATHAN So, like, as an extreme example, I know individuals, because they look at the math and they look at what makes up the vast majority of what my life costs, they were able to optimize that. So, for instance, if you look at someone on a median to lower income, uh, 50% of their lifestyle goes to, uh, rent, you know, or- or, uh, housing, transportation and food. That easily makes up 50% of the pie chart. So, what if you could blow that up?

Now the other half of this is if you're making \$15.00 an hour, it- it would be silly to only focus on the frugality piece. You know, what does it look like to earn more? Literally being willing to give yourself permission to ask the question, can allow you to make more. And the answer may be, "Well, I need to learn this skillset. I need to market myself this way. I need to network. I need to- I need to," but just quite literally, being willing to ask the question and then look for the information that serves that up. You know, if you're not looking for this information, you just won't find it.

So, I'm convinced that increasing your zone of awareness opens up the world to you and I have individuals in the community that, hey, they started out at \$15.00 an hour and then they got that opportunity to move out of the call center to then go work in the tech department. And there's strategies that you can look at, but you have to see that someone else, who's been in your position has figured out a way to change the outcome.

You know, I think, very few of us are trailblazers, but we can follow a path that someone else has marked, and that's the key. Increase your zone of awareness and find out what other people have done because there is somebody that has had it objectively worse than you have had it, and the encouraging point is many of those people have figured out a way to overcome, and we can learn from that and we should be learning from that.

Finally, though I'm often meeting my guests for the first time when I speak with them on the podcast, I've had the chance this year to interview some good friends. It's a little tricky to prepare for these interviews since I know them well because I want to make sure I'm asking questions that allow you to be part of the conversation. But one of my most delightful moments this year was my dear friend Liz Wiseman's response to my first question - where did you grow up and what did you want to be when you grew up? I thought I knew her answer, but after completely shocking me with a story of her wanting to be a lawyer after having to defend herself in small claims court at 17 when someone sued her as the owner of her seamstress business, I asked a follow-up question and Liz shared this fun and inspiring story:

WHITNEY I want to go back to the sewing for just a moment because-

LIZ Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WHITNEY ... because it's kind of a lost art these days, don't you think?

LIZ Well, it really is and um, for me, this was like my first, and it's still my, my sort of dearest, creative expression, uh, you know, sometimes people ask, you know, like, you know, I've written a number of books and people ask like, "Oh, did you want to be a writer when you were a kid?" I'm like, "No, I think I just wanted to be a creator." Like I write books because I need to create and, and when I'm not in book writing mode, I actually have to find something to do. You know, Brené Brown is the same way. Brené and I were talking about this once that as soon as she's done with the book project, she starts, redecorating her house. And I'm the same thing. It's like I'm, I've been in this creative mode and I need to, I need to make stuff.

WHITNEY Yeah.

LIZ I've, I've sewn a lot of things. In fact, you know, I actually once melted a woman's wedding gown four days before her wedding, which has been perhaps the biggest mistake I've ever made in my entire career was at 17 years old. That was a doozy.

WHITNEY You melted a wedding gown? How does one even melt a wedding gown?

LIZ It really stems from...I'm as impatient as I am creative. So I got this job sewing and so I felt like my job was to sew and to, you know ... so this woman had come in and she was this little bitty size 6 woman who had fallen in love with this size 12 wedding gown and it was, um, a discontinued gown. It couldn't be ordered and so I got assigned the alterations job and I did it and I had to completely reconstruct this gown and it, it was beautiful and perfect. She came in, she tried it on, was great. So that was a couple months before her wedding. She came back four days before her wedding to pick up the gown and the people in the front of the store called back to me because I was like in the cave, you know, where I, I would do my sewing. And they asked if the gown was pressed and ready. I hated pressing gowns.

WHITNEY (laughs).

LIZ I just didn't feel like that was my job. So they said, "Hey, the gown needs to be pressed." And so I put that gown on the ironing board and I went to press it and I'm kind of one of these people who just like irons everything on high and what I, you know, I vary is the amount of time. Well anyway, so I put this hot iron onto the bodice of this woman's wedding gown and I watched as it shriveled instantly, because this was the 80's, so this is like polyester is the, the fabric du jour and it just like melted a hole through the bodice. And you know, if anyone's listening, who doesn't know what bodice is, like that's the central part. That's like covers the essentials. Yeah. And so I'm now staring at this gown, and it ... her wedding is in four days and I melted a hole in this one of a kind dress.

And I tell you, like, I think that's where I really learned how you fix mistakes? Because there was no hiding this. There was no, like I'm not a very good liar, but there's, there's no lie that I could've come up with that would have covered this one up. And I just walked out and you know, when I told her, name's Cathy, and I still love her to this day, it's like, "Cathy, I just melted a hole in your, in your wedding gown and it's really bad." Her eyes were getting big. And I said, "But I will fix it. I'll fix it." I said, "Come back in two days and it will be perfect." And so I then had to rebuild this dress. But like, I don't know, somehow that experience um, impressed on me, this idea of like, you know, when you screw something up, just claim it right away.

WHITNEY Right. Right.

LIZ Like claim it, claim the whole thing, fix it, fix it fast and, and don't be so much of a prima donna like-

WHITNEY What did she do when you said it? So when you said I'll fix it, how did she respond to you?

LIZ This, this was what was so deeply impressed on me was how she responded because for sure she should've punched me.

WHITNEY (laughs).

LIZ It still blows me away that she didn't go Brideszilla and scream because I really kind of deserved it. She looked at me, she was alarmed and then she said "you can fix it, can't you?" She and I had just a little bit of a track record with her because she knows, she knew I had taken this dress from 12 to 6 and it was, it was perfect. It was just fantastic on her. And she just said, "Tell me you can fix this." And I'm like, "You know what Cathy, I will fix this." Mind you, I'm 17, I'm a high school kid. I had to drive around to every fabric store in the South Bay trying to find fabric and lace and beading that would match this, but I said, "You know what, I will fix it." And then I did and was great. I mean, her confidence in me I think was a mirror of my confidence in myself that I somehow summoned in the moment.

I love that. It's a worthy goal. Always find a way to summon the confidence you need to make the impossible happen.

As we close, we'll finish up with a first for Disrupt Yourself, a mashup created as a result of my [conversation with composer Stephen Nelson](#) (a favorite episode of our sound engineer Whitney Jobe). Stephen graciously agreed to let me put him on the spot and combined two of my favorite songs - Isn't She Lovely and Do-Re-Mi.

(MUSIC)

Thank you to our team at WLJ Advisors who bring these episodes to life each week. Which includes sound engineers Whitney Jobe and Melissa Ruty, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributors Emilie Davis and Nancy Wilson, and art director Brandon Jameson. And thank you to you---each one of you --- for listening.

I'm Whitney Johnson
And this is Disrupt Yourself.
In 2020.
Here we come.