

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 169: BENJAMIN HARDY

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. a podcast where we provide strategies and advice for climbing the S curve of Learning™ in your professional and personal life. Stepping back from who you are to slingshot into who you can be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson, and joining us today is Benjamin Hardy, an organizational psychologist and bestselling author of the book *Willpower Doesn't Work*, as well as the most read author on Medium from 2015 to 2018. His new book is *Personality Isn't Permanent*, which Seth Godin says is a generous, empowering, and purposeful book.

We had Ben on the [Disrupt Yourself podcast](#) when his first book came out in 2018. He was disrupting the notion of willpower, and we're pleased to have him join us again to hear his take on why we need to upend our current belief system around personalities.

WHITNEY: Welcome, Ben.

BEN Thanks, Whitney. Happy to be with you. Thanks for letting me hang out with you again.

WHITNEY So, I want to get to the book, but first, let's just do a quick check-in. What personal disruptions have you made since we were last in conversation in 2018?

BEN So many different disruptions. When *Willpower Doesn't Work* came out, it was, let's just say, a disrupting episode in my life. Big successes or big failures can actually change your personality in many ways. Hopefully, they lead you to becoming more mature, but, to be honest with you, *Willpower Doesn't Work*, for a long time for me was framed as a failure because of just what I put into that book. And it didn't create the outcomes that I was thinking it would initially.

Aside from that, I did finish my PHD. My wife and I moved to Florida. We had twins. My wife's pregnant again. I wrote this book and another book. It's been a crazy time, but, a big thing that I've done recently is a lot of introspection. A lot of it had to do with a growing family, going from zero to five during 2018. Like, zero to five kids, because we adopted three, and then we had twins.

I've learned a lot. I recently reread *Willpower Doesn't Work*, and it's funny because one of my favorite quotes is, "A painting is never finished. It simply ends in an interesting place."

That's how I look at any blog post or any article, like it's never finished. It just ends, you just have to kind of push publish, I'm not saying I don't like the book, but I'm just, I am a different person.

WHITNEY

Say that quote again about the painting.

BEN

The quote is, "A painting is never finished. It simply ends in an interesting place." Even this book, *Personality Isn't Permanent*, like, it, it's, it was never finished. It just had to end, and my future self is potentially going to disagree with a lot of it. But that, that's actually, would be a good sign.

WHITNEY

So, let's talk about this interesting place. You mentioned at the beginning this idea of *Willpower Doesn't Work*, in many ways, or at least at the outset you started to frame this as a failure. And I would love for us to unpack that briefly, because I think one of the things that happens for anyone who writes a book, I know this happened to me. And it probably sounds like it happened to you as well, is, we have these hopes and dreams and aspirations around what the book will do. What influence it will have, et cetera.

And then, sometimes those are met, and more often than not, whatever it was that we dreamed it would be, it's different. So, can you just share a little bit of that experience that you had and some of what you learned?

BEN

A little bit of context. So, like, the book came out in March of 2018. One month before that, so in February of 2018 was when we were surprisingly granted adoption of our three kids.

So, like, February of 2018 we adopted our kids. That same month that I launched my book, we found out my wife was pregnant with twins. And at the time, I was not sure if I was going to finish my PHD. My PHD advisor told me she was sick of me and just told me she was done with me. And so, I was told by the department chair that if I didn't find a new advisor, they were just going to send me off with my masters.

And so, at the time the book came out, I-

WHITNEY

Oh, wow.

BEN

-had invested four years into a PHD program and was actually over 50% certain I was getting kicked out. Luckily the next month, which was in April of that year, I found an advisor and was able to finish. One other thing is just I was so used to my blogs succeeding. You know, it was at that time that, for years, I had just been the top writer on Medium, all my blog posts were always going viral. Like, everything I published got at least 50 thousand views or more, often in the hundreds of thousands of views. And so, I just was expecting it to succeed at an unrealistic level.

I just expected everything to work out, and I was more, I was very much a mess. I just wasn't structured, wasn't, didn't really know enough and just assumed it would work out. And it, and just because you succeed in one area doesn't mean it transfers to a different area, launching a book isn't the same as publishing a blog post on Medium. I just involved too many people, too many people, and so, it just was kind of a mess.

BEN

I mean, it just really didn't work out, and there was a lot of assumptions made on my part. Just kind of desperate for the New York Times Bestseller list.

I was just not ready. I was not ready to make that move.

WHITNEY

This is, well, and it's the whole, there's so much interesting stuff here, and so, one thing I want to say is, I think, given that your Medium posts were going viral, 50 thousand views, 100 thousand views, to expect that your book would have done something similar, I think is a reasonable expectation. So, let's just say that. But I do think it's so valuable, and I haven't read everything you've written. But I'm assuming that you've talked about this now and sort of lessons learned from publishing a book. You have, right?

BEN

I think so. I've written about it in various places, yeah.

WHITNEY

Okay, so I think one of the things I would love for us to do is, if you can share one or two links. And we'll include it in the show notes, because that journey of writing a book, it's such a journey of self-discovery of figuring out. You know, knowing that you have something to say but also wanting to figure out what you have to say, and, and birthing this book into the world and the lessons learned.

I know for me, I've done something similar, when you launch a book, there is this feeling, in fact, I did something similar on my last book. I started to spend more money than I should have on something that didn't make sense to do, and I finally had my team saying, "Why are you spending that money? Like, that doesn't make sense. Why are you doing that?" And it was me being desperate, me wanting something and being desperate around that.

And I think actually, that's a good signal for you, for me, for anybody who's listening. When we start doing those sort of desperate things, I think we're probably crossing over into an area of not trying to make something work, but there's maybe something going on fundamentally. And we're trying to get to our self-worth, or somehow this book or our self-worth or our identity is hinging on the success of whatever that project is, in this case, the book. What are your thoughts on that?

BEN

A lot. Everything you said was great. I mean, Carol Dweck obviously talks a lot about having a fragile identity, and I think that, looking back now, I definitely did have a fragile identity. Like, I've talked to, for example, Tucker Max, who, someone who, he actually edited this book and another book that I've written recently. And, you know, he's gone through his own emotional development. But he and I were talking about what I viewed as the failure of *Willpower Doesn't Work*, and just that I thought I had so much confidence at the time.

And the truth is, I don't, obviously, I did have confidence in that context, but my confidence is very different now. I would say it was kind of, I wouldn't call it extreme ego. But it was overconfidence.

I think I have a much more mature confidence now, which I didn't have before. And I think that failure can often do that to you. Obviously I've chosen to reframe it. I don't actually totally view it as a failure anymore. Like, I think that the past can either be viewed as, it happened for me or it happened to me. I'm a big believer that it did happen for me, because I believe I'm a lot more mature as a person now.

WHITNEY

Fascinating. So, I want to make one comment, and then, ask you what you would do, what you're doing differently as a consequence with this book and then dive into the content of this book. So, editorial comment, everyone. *Willpower Doesn't Work*, however Ben was framing it at the time two years ago, is an outstanding book. My

husband thought it was an outstanding book. My son who's in college thought it was outstanding. We have shared it with so many people.

So, in this little corner or as Seth Godin's, likes to say, "in this little pocket of the world," it was a huge success., so, what are you doing differently? What have you done differently with the, the launch of, of *Personality Isn't Permanent*?

BEN I've done a lot of things differently. I've learned a lot about entrepreneurship. I was doing, it was basically me and one assistant for a long time.

I have, like, five employees now. And you know, it's not necessarily a big team, but like, every person has a specific role. Like, very clear-cut. Like, one person, their only job is my email. That's it. I have another person, their only job is scheduling podcasts and media, and like, working with my publisher.

Like, and I just have a lot clearer and more distinctive, you know, roles that al-, you know, in Dan Sullivan terms, I call, we call it "who not how".

WHITNEY Hm.

BEN And so, like, just having the right people in place is really good. I'm a lot better with my publisher. So, like, I've worked with my publisher a lot longer. I actually pushed the publication date back twice on this book.

WHITNEY Oh.

BEN So, I wanted to make sure that the book was up to par for what I was wanting to do with it. I'm also just not actually gunning for the New York Time Bestseller lists. I'm more interested in selling, hopefully, a much bigger number of books over a longer period of time.

WHITNEY You've now become an entrepreneur. You've moved from being an author to building a thought leadership platform, so you've got this team of five people., one or two things that you're doing specifically, I think people who are listening, you know, they're thinking, "I want to disrupt myself. I want to write a book. What does that look like?" So, one or two actionable tips that you could provide, that you, you're doing, I think would be super helpful.

BEN Basically, I've been talking about this book to my email list for about a year and a half now.

WHITNEY Hm.

BEN So, everyone's been knowing about this book for a long time. I'll be talking about it the week it comes out. I'm going to be running a lot of Facebook ads for the week that the book comes out, and then two weeks after, focusing on like, a challenge, giving away three free online courses.

That's kind of one separate thing, so I'll probably be running, you know, several ads to the right audiences with free giveaways. Admittedly, I'm going on probably 500 or 600 podcasts this year. One of the things that I read from Hal Elrod was that, and he launched the book *The Miracle Morning*, which has sold multiple millions of copies, that from his perspective, going on podcasts. And obviously, the right podcast, but he

was non-discriminative. Like, he would go on big, small, and just that thing really did light a fire.

WHITNEY All right, so, everybody who's listening to this podcast, you are one of the army of people who are going to get out-

BEN Maybe.

WHITNEY -get these ideas out.

BEN We'll see.

WHITNEY All right, so now, let's go to, I don't want to say the meat, because everything you've shared so far actually is incredibly meaty. And I think is a nice lead into your thinking around personality. Just talk to us a little bit about how you're defining it, and maybe how you got ... Sort of finish the story. You started it, but how you got from this idea of willpower to personality isn't permanent. What was the big aha? Just talk us through and give us the context.

BEN It was just a little over two years ago that I launched *Willpower Doesn't Work*. And I was more interested in, I wouldn't call it surface level, but I view *Willpower Doesn't Work* as a behavior design. Very much similar to *Atomic Habits*, or like, you know, BJ Fogg's *Tiny Habits*. Very similar. Probably closer to BJ Fogg, actually.

One of the reasons why I wrote *Willpower Doesn't Work* is because I come from an extreme background of addiction. I may have talked about it on your podcast, but my father was a very big drug addict after my parents got divorced. My younger brother, actually, I recently, we've recently checked him into a treatment facility here in Florida where I live.

And so, addiction is a big part of my life and a big part of my background, and I watched my younger brother ... I actually wrote *Willpower Doesn't Work* with my brother in mind, because he's someone who I believe has, like, all of the talent, all the potential in the world. He was always better than everything than me when we were growing up. All my friends just wanted to hang out with my younger brother. When we were in high school, like, all the girls, like, that I thought were beautiful and hot, they all liked my younger brother.

Our home life was a mess. You know, my dad was an extreme drug addict at the time. There was no stability. And so, I was able to obviously overcome that by going on, you know, a church mission for a few years and ultimately choosing a different path, whereas my brother just got caught up in it all. And he just got caught in addiction.

And so, over the last, you know, he's now 30 years old, his life has just been a struggle. And so, I wrote *Willpower Doesn't Work* for him, in a lot of ways, because it really doesn't matter how good your intentions are. Like, if you stay in that negative situation and that negative environment, and if you're trying to do it by yourself, it's not going to work. Like, the worst way to try to overcome an addiction is through willpower.

But that same principle extends further, like if you're trying to make big leaps, you probably need to put yourself in the right environments with the right inputs. You know, and I learned that with becoming a foster parent of our three kids. So, you know, you

put them in a new context. All of a sudden, they've got expanded potential, expanded options.

I was told to read the book *The Body Keeps The Score*, which is essentially the definitive book on trauma, and I was looking for more information on how trauma leads to addiction.

But the thing that kept popping up over and over and over again is how trauma shapes people's personality, and about how, and at least, that's what I kept hearing.

And about how trauma freezes your personality. Trauma's essentially an emotional experience that you hold onto that kind of shapes how you see and view the world. And you know, it leads you to being emotional rigid, versus being emotionally flexible. It stops you from learning. It stops you from having hope. It leads you to being defined by the past. It leads you to becoming repetitious. It shapes your comfort zone.

Like, so my view of personality is, you know, from a very simple perspective. It's your consistent attitudes and behaviors.

It's what you're comfortable doing. It's safe. It's predictable. Going outside of that creates uncertainty, it creates emotions that you probably don't want to deal with. But that's obviously where you grow.

So, this ultimately led me down the rabbit hole of trying to better understand and explain why personality becomes overly predictable, why it gets stuck, and ultimately, how you can change it the way you want it to. So that was kind of what, that was the transition from *Willpower Doesn't Work* to *Personality Isn't Permanent*.

WHITNEY

Hm. So interesting how the experiences that we have. You're talking about your brother and that was really the impetus for writing the book, but then coming back to your own experience and the study that you were doing. So, talk to us briefly about some of the myths of personalities that you think are limiting.

BEN

I will quickly say that identity and personality are two different things. Identity is enormously more important. Identity is your self concept. It's how you define and describe yourself, and your identity, in large measure, predicts your behavior, and your behavior over time shapes your personality.

WHITNEY

Say that again, just so everybody can, like, really ...

BEN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I can explain, obviously, where identity comes from, and we'll go into that. But identity is your self concept. It's how you define and describe yourself. Usually it's described by stories. It's solidified through behavior. So, in psychology, we call it self signaling, but your behavior signals back to you the type of person you think you are. So over time, your behavior solidifies your self concept, but it becomes your personality. Your personality is essentially your consistent attitudes and behaviors.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

Personality comes from identity, and identity often becomes more rigid than it needs to be. It, it should be very flexible. There's a lot of myths about personality. Number one, it's innate.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

BEN Your personality is who you are, it's who you're always going to be. It doesn't change. Personality is often viewed as stable. Like, stable over the course of your lifetime, if not at least stable over long periods of time. And it can be, or at least, aspects of your personality can be, but it certainly doesn't have to be.

Other myths are that your personality is something you must discover. It's something, you've got to find your true self.

WHITNEY Hm.

BEN And once you've finally discovered who you want to be, you can then fit the world around your personality. You can fit your goals around your personality. Once you've discovered yourself and you know who you are, you actually choose goals that fit you perfectly. You know, you choose the goals that fit who you think you are.

So obviously your view, once you've discovered your personality, that personality then shapes your future. You find the relationships that really fit well, you know, so obviously just like you would discover yourself, the view would be that you discover your perfect soulmate. Right?

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

BEN And that it's just, you find the person that fits you, and hopefully it's natural and that there's not too much friction there. And I think it just, it definitely, one of the other concepts obviously is that it comes from the past.

WHITNEY Hm.

BEN That the best way to discover who you truly are is by understanding who your, you know, who you were in the past and finding the key, you know, who you were as a three-year-old, as an example. Or like, what was your, what were your dreams as a, you know, were, did you want to be an astronaut? Like, just, and these kind of beliefs lead people to, on kind of to a more of a passive approach to life. It's more of a fixed mindset approach.

But this view is one of the reasons why personality types are popular. And personality typing is not actually a good way of looking at personality. Because personality is far more contextual than that. It's not just, you're not just one person in every situation. Like, even who I am in my morning routine is who, different than who I am at night. And like, and so-

WHITNEY Yeah.

BEN --it's not that way. So, these are kind of the, these are the core myths that I think lead people to being passive about who they are.

WHITNEY Yeah, you know what's so fascinating about this, is this idea you just talked about this fixed mindset. And I realized as I was reading through your material in advance of this interview, like, that's the gold here. Right? Because we talk all the time about growth mindset, growth mindset, right? Don't have a fixed mindset, and we all believe it.

And yet, I realize that every time I take one of these personality tests, I'm basically buying into a fixed mindset at some level. That's the gold for you, right? Isn't that where you're going?

BEN

That is a huge aspect of it, yes. If you take these types of tests seriously, or if you overly adopt a label in general, you are definitely creating a fixed mindset for yourself. If you, if you're very definitive about your identity ... So, what these tests do is they give you an identity. I am an X, you know? In this case, I'm a white. I'm an ENTJ, I'm..., your identity is based on the story you tell.

And actually, this is one of the reasons people love the tests, is because it's nice to have a bolted on identity that you can then use to relate to other people and have language to it. But yeah, it very much does become a fixed mindset, because when you have a label, you actually see the world through the label. You see the, labels create tunnel vision, and you see the world through the lens of your identity. You know, Covey said, "We don't see the world as it is. We see the world as we are."

And so, in psychology, we call it selective attention. It's, you see what's relevant to you. You don't, your brain ignores information that doesn't feel relevant. So like, when you're driving on the road, you see the car ... You, it's easy to see other people who are driving the same car as you. I drive a Mini Cooper, so I see Mini Coopers on the road.

WHITNEY

Mm-hmm.

BEN

I don't see all the other cars, because my brain purposefully shields me from that information, or at least my conscious mind from it, because you just can't take in all that input. And so, when you have a label, you know, whether it's introvert, whether it's something else, you see the world through the label. And so, you actually believe that all your behavior is consistent with the label, when it's actually not. In, various situations, so like, Ellen Langer at Harvard is one example. Ellen Langer, and I recommend her work to everyone. Her book *Mindfulness*, and her book *Counter Clockwise*.

She studied, obviously what leads to becoming mindless. And mindfulness is where you're aware of not only yourself, you're aware of the situation. You can, you know, spot patterns. You just notice things that maybe other people don't notice. And labeling yourself is one of the fastest ways to creating mindlessness.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

She's studied people with, you know, who view themselves as depressed. They think that they're always depressed. Interestingly, your identity also shapes your view of your own past. So, like, if you think, if you've defined yourself that's an, as an introvert, you'll actually assume you've always been one. You look to your past, all your memories are coded through that. And your future is also coded through that.

So, you assume that you're going to be an introvert in the future. So, the label creates a lens for your, not only your current identity but your past and your future identity. And it leads you to assuming you're going to always be that person. Two other quick thoughts are, when you have a label, you seek to defend it. You, you seek to defend your identity.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN And you also seek to confirm it, through your language but also through the goals. I'm an introvert. This is why I do this.

WHITNEY So, here's the question, Ben. If you've got, you know, people who are listening to this, and they're saying, "All right, I want to grow as an individual," because I think that's the, the quest that you're on, is, how, what do you recommend people do that is not limiting or labeling? So, two or three things that you, they could say, "All right, so I'm going to try X, Y, or Z, that will help me continue to grow, because I believe that my personality isn't permanent, without labeling myself as part of that exercise,".

BEN Yeah. I mean, the first thing you would, that's a kind of an essential mindset is to realize that the person you are today is different from who you were in the past and will be different from who you are in the future. Like, your past, you are not the same person you were three to five to 10 years ago. You know, you even, Whitney, as a person, there may be aspects of you that are very similar, you know, to who you were five or 10 years ago. But there are aspects of you that are completely different.

And you actually wouldn't, you don't see things the exact same way. You don't see yourself even the same way you did 10 years ago, and you have different potentially priorities, maturity, and goals. And you would actually do things differently, if placed in former situations. I don't know if you agree with all that. What do you think?

WHITNEY One hundred percent, I agree a hundred percent.

BEN Yeah, I think most people actually do.

WHITNEY But even when, yeah, let's hope so. But even when you say that, though, I mean, I agree with it intellectually a hundred percent.

BEN Yeah.

WHITNEY But do I behave like I believe that all the time? No. And I, but when you say that, there's something very liberating about that, right? If you want to change the lens, change the lens of how you view the past. We can do that.

BEN Yeah, so, a lot of this has to do with reframing the past and also choosing and deciding the future. And a lot of this comes from research from Daniel Gilbert. He's a Harvard psychologist. I point people to his TED Talk, which is six minutes. It's called The Psychology of Your Future Self. It's kind of a quick primer to the research on personality development and how it changes. But the basic idea is that you're not the same as you used to be, and you should be very intentional, just like you would give meaning to current experiences. Like, I get to choose the meaning I give to COVID-19. I get to choose the meaning I give to this conversation. And we call that emotional regulation in psychology.

But whatever you dealt with in the past, so like me, as an 11-year-old kid going through trauma, I should have, I should ascribe different meanings to my experience today than I did as an 11-year-old kid. One problem with people and with memory, though, is that often, if they've had traumatic experiences, they remain defined by those experiences years and decades later. And so, like if I was still, let's just say I was not in a good relationship with my father today because of what happened in the past, then I would be actually still viewing the relationship from the perspective of the past, not the present.

And, you know, I have chosen to create a great relationship with my dad. He's also not the same person he was 10 years, 15 years ago. He's not a drug addict anymore. He and I are great friends, and I also now have more context to his past. I asked him a lot of questions, just as an example, what led you to the decisions you made, and I was able to learn a lot of things that I did not know before. For example, he was bullied as a child. I knew he was adopted, but I didn't know a lot of the things that led to him. And I didn't know a lot of the things about his, my parents' divorce that allowed me to have more understanding and compassion. So, like, a key concept in psychology is that context trumps content.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

And getting more context allows you to reframe the meaning of the content, and so your past should be reframed with better meanings. Like I said about *Willpower Doesn't Work*, when I first went through the experience, it was traumatic for me. I was viewing a lot of the experience from the perspective of a victim, that all these things happened to me. It wasn't my fault.

Once I was finally able to get to the point where I was focused back on the future of what my next book's going to be, or where my future, you know, like, I needed to get moving again. And I couldn't keep dwelling in whatever it was. I had to get to the point where the past was happening for me. Okay, this was really good information. I can use this, and so, like, but you have to make that conscious choice. And I think that the two ways to do that are through journaling, like, literally writing about your experiences and getting them out of your head and into paper. Journaling is one of the most effective ways to reframe the past.

But also, just having open and honest conversations with people you feel safe around, so that you can actively choose better meanings. Choose better framings so that you can actually get it out of your system and choose to let it go so that you can actually redirect your attention towards the future, towards having hope again. You actually need hope. You need hope and purpose in order to have meaning in the present. You need a future.

WHITNEY

So, if I'm hearing you correctly, you would encourage everyone who's listening to think about a story that they tell about their childhood or their past. Whatever that story is, but one that, where there has been some trauma around that, and trauma is different for everybody, so everybody has some trauma. Right? So, I think we can agree on that.

And what you're saying is, write that story down, and that's your past self. And then, how does your present self view it, and how would your future self like you to view it, and rewrite that story through that lens., so that you can basically reframe, and that is part of what is going to allow you to continue to change your identity and therefore your behavior, and therefore your personality.

BEN

Yeah, that's a big part of it. I think that that was really well described. I think that if you're going to create a new future self, you actually interestingly have to have a new past self.

You can't keep blaming the past. You actually have to let go of the past. You have to stop identifying with your former self but also have radical compassion towards your former self. You've got to give your former self completely the benefit of the doubt that they were doing the best they could, and that you now are a different person who would make different decisions. Your future self should be viewed the exact same way. There's a lot of research from Hal Hershfield at UCLA, who studies the idea of having a clear future

self and how that impacts decision making. And it's best to view your future self as a different person. They're going to have different perspectives, different goals, different maturity, different priorities.

And it's incredibly important to clarify who your future self is and to view them as a different person. They have different preferences than you.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

And if you make decisions based on what your future self would prefer versus what you prefer in the present, you're probably going to make more intentional decisions in the present. It's also literally required to engage in deliberate practice, and deliberate practice obviously is different from just doing something routinely over and over. Deliberate practice means you're intentionally, deliberately working towards a goal. You can't actually engage in that type of training or practice or process without a very specific future self in mind.

The clearer the future self, the more deliberate and specific will be the process to become that person. And, so, the future should shape the present., there's a really good quote from Dan Sullivan, "The only way to make your present better is by making your future bigger." So beyond replacing or reshaping the meaning of your present, or your former self and choosing better meaning so that you're not defined by a, any former experiences, you also need to very clearly define your future self.

I think that a really good timeframe is, you know, and this would be interesting, given your research on, you know, disrupting yourself. But I think that, in my opinion, three to five years is a really good timeframe to like, view out a future self. I actually prefer around three years. Obviously, it's good to have a future version of yourself near the end of your life, like Stephen Covey would recommend.

But from a practical standpoint, I like, "Where do I want to be in three years from now?" Or like, "Who is my future self three years from now?" But once you've actually sketched that out, that actually then needs to become your new identity narrative, rather than continuing to tell the former version of your self story, and rather than being so definitive in a, in your current identity, saying, "This is who I am," it's actually a lot more powerful to start saying, "This is who I want to be. This is where I want to go. This is what I'm trying to accomplish."

It's not, "Fake it till you make it," even though I have zero problems with that concept. But it's more acknowledging that your future self is a different person than you are today and telling people that that's who you're striving to become. And it creates an environment of accountability.

WHITNEY

So, what's one or two things that you, so, as you're putting all of this into practice, what are one or two things that you are doing on a daily basis that are making this happen?

BEN

Yeah. So, daily morning routines are very big for me., morning routine, wake up, don't plug into the phone, don't get lost in the, you know, digital. Like, I view the internet as like a casino, where you get ping, pinged around like a ping pong ball and you like, those, but the problem is like, some of those, like, BJ Fogg, actually, who has studied habit development. It's not, it doesn't always take repetition to create a habit. Sometimes single exposures create a habit.

And so, like, certain inputs can like, literally change your identity and send you down a path. Like, you know, you might have watched a YouTube video for three hours without intending to get there. And, but that could change your goals over time. So, I'm very intentional about the internet and about my inputs. I like the quote from Zig Ziglar, "Your input shapes your outlook."

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

I'm very big on morning routines. Wake up with a purpose, I have, you know, I journal about my future self. I think about what are the things that I need to do today, or this quarter, to get myself towards the goals, because from my perspective, the, the goal is that your future self is actually the person that's guiding your behavior, not your past self.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

And your future self probably should be dictating your identity, not your past self. And you get to choose who that person is, but your daily behavior, if it's conscious, not unconscious, if it's conscious, the only way that that could actually be happening is if you're working towards a goal. So, I write about my goals, obviously in the morning. I answer various questions and just-

WHITNEY

Like what?

BEN

Well, like, I have five questions in the front cover of all of my journals that I read, and one of them is, "Where am I right now?" The second one is, "What are the biggest wins from my last 90 days?" This kind of just gives context to where I was 90 days ago. And you can actually be surprised how much you can accomplish in 90 days, if you actually just track it.

The next question is, "Where do I want, like, what are the key wins for the next 90 days?" And then, "Who's my future self in three years from now? And what, what do I want to accomplish, you know, by the end of this calendar year?"

The goal is what shapes the process, and so in my case, you know, admittedly, my goal is to sell millions and millions of copies of this book. And so, because, and, and that goal is based on the future self that I hope to be in two or three years from now.

WHITNEY

Mm-hmm.

BEN

So, my future self-dictates my goal, my goal dictates my daily process. And so, you know, I'm on this podcast with you today because of that goal.

WHITNEY

Right. Right.

BEN

Hopefully, you know, and so, like, yeah, so, I mean, what I do on a daily basis is based on my goal. But I use journaling and morning routines and boundaries and things like that to assure that I'm actually taking conscious steps in that direction towards my future self, which is what I'm calling deliberate practice.

WHITNEY

All right. Okay, you just said a word, boundary, that I'm thinking about a lot. Can you just riff on that for two seconds, and then we'll go to the next question I want to ask you?

BEN Yeah. Boundary, well, the thing is if you're very sincere about a future self, then you probably need new boundaries, because chances. There's a really good book actually, called *The 15 S-*, I think it's *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*. I'm not sure if you've read that one.

WHITNEY Hm, I haven't.

BEN It's an interesting book.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

BEN One of the things that they talk about in that book is that commitment, commitment is a statement of what is. So, like, it, commitment is not what you hope. Commitment's not what you say you want. Commitment's actually a statement of what you currently have, so your current weight, as an example, is what you're committed to. Not your goal weight, your current weight. Like, your current-

WHITNEY Oh, wow.

BEN No, it's a hard reality.

WHITNEY Good. Yeah.

BEN Like, whatever you have, that's what you're committed to.

Not what you say you want. And so, when you become genuine, let's just say, or serious, or committed to a future self, what that requires is some hard realities on the present. If you're serious about it, because if you're serious about a future self-that's different in situation and even to some degree in where you are as a person, then you have to un-commit to the present. And that has a lot to do with creating boundaries.

So, as an example, probably like six months ago, I realized that I had allowed way too much extraneousness into my life. You know, I had jumped into. internet in, you know, I mean, entrepreneurially and marketing network, such as Genius Network, Strategic Coach. I just kind of dove headlong into stuff like this over the last few years, and also just with, just my writing and whatnot, just developed a lot of great friendships.

And luckily I have an assistant who, we would go back and forth on me creating boundaries, but I was often letting people squeeze into it. Like, people would text me, I'd get on the phone with people. And I had to ultimately have some serious conversations with people who I'm great friends with and just say, like, "I can't really be in the relationship like I've been." Like, I now, and luckily, I've got a situation, for example, with five kids, where it's an easy out. An easy excuse.

But there's a good quote from Tim Ferriss, he said basically, "Your success in life is based on the amount of uncomfortable conversations you're willing to have." And so, like, I have changed almost all my relationships and simplified my life. Because for me, my future self is very simple. You know, I want way more time focused on my spiritual pursuits. I want way more time with my family, way less time doing entrepreneurial things. I want to keep writing books, but I want to be focused more on my faith, my family, and having way more time for the things that I personally prize and more of those types of goals. And just admittedly, you know, up until about three to six months ago, my calendar did not reflect that future self.

WHITNEY

Hm.

BEN

And so, I've changed almost all my relationships in the form of boundaries, where it's like, I will come to them and I seek to still be a giver, not a taker. And like, very much, like, but the relationships don't squeeze so much into my calendar or my schedule or my smart phone anymore. Because I've had to have the real conversations, but also, we've created systems, like with my assistant, where there's a lot of things that I used to say "Yes" to, but now it's just like, she says "No" for me.

And, I just allow that opportunity cost to occur. You know, like, what a big willpower concept is obviously decision fatigue. And if you're the one who has to make those decisions, you're often going to weigh back and forth in your mind, you know, what you should do. And often, you'll, you'll, you'll fall prey to the situation, whether it be social pressure or whether it's just trying to be nice. Or, you know, or whether it's just ... And so I, you know, I like the idea, make one decision that eliminates all options. And so I've just, we've created boundaries. We've created rules, and I just allow my assistant to make the decision for me, so I don't have to deal with willpower and fail all the time.

WHITNEY

Hm. So good. All right, I want to ask one more technical question, and then we'll do the wrap up. And that is, you know, in the book you talk about how real scientists and psychologists don't put a lot of credence into personality tests, whether it's the Color Code or something like Myers-Briggs. But as you know, companies, colleges, the state department use something like the Myers-Briggs. 1.5 million people take the quiz online every year. What are the implications of this, Ben? Are we hiring the wrong people? Are people in the wrong jobs? What, what do you, what does this mean? How do we make meaning of that?

BEN

Yeah. I would pretty much just say that it's not an effective tool for predicting performance. I can see why people use it. It's actually, there's so many better, more validating scales. You know, I would point people to the Big Five, if they really think personality matters. I'd point people to scales like grit or like emotional intelligence or social ability or intelligence. Like, things where there's actually predictive ability behind it.

But yeah, I think the implications are that you think you're getting someone ... You think you know more about someone than you actually do, and it can be easy to become mindless and to create tunnel vision about yourself and about other people, and to assume that that's actually who they are and who they'll, who they always are, when ... And it can, obviously, create self-fulfilling prophecies in many ways.

But I think that, I think it's kind of a lazy way to hire, and it's an inaccurate view of people. And it, and there's no predictive validity to, you know, the DISC or any of these tests. Just because someone gets a score doesn't mean, doesn't mean they're actually going to be efficient at that job.

WHITNEY

Right.

BEN

You know, you could hire 50 people with the same Myers-Briggs score, and they're all going to do the job differently. So, yeah, the best thing you could do is very, be very clear on what the role is. You know, so from a motivational standpoint, motivation and even hope, but motivation specifically, which people are more interested in in the business world, it requires simplicity. Like, complexity kills motivation.

Motivation also requires very tangible, clear, like, outcomes. Like, you need to know what success and failure look like. And I think when people hire, the role is not very

clear. The role's often too spread thin. There's too many attributes to the role. There's not specific enough outcomes that reflect success.

You know, like, I admit, I've made this mistake. Like, I've hired people without being completely, radically clear and transparent of what specifically the role is and what specifically success looks like in that role from an outcome perspective.

And so, people come in, and they're set up for failure on, you know, and their personality doesn't really matter in that case. It's just bad leadership. Whereas now, I'm a lot more specific.

WHITNEY Yeah, and I think one of the places that our S curve of Learning™ is so useful in that regard is just, you know, what S curve are you on, where are you on that S curve, how do we help you build momentum from there. And so it's int-

BEN I like that a lot.

WHITNEY Yeah, it, it makes-

BEN I think that, because the goal should, the job should be a means for these people as well.

WHITNEY Right.

BEN It's not just for you, it's for them. Right?

WHITNEY Right.

BEN Like, how is this going to help you get-

WHITNEY Right.

BEN -up that S curve, right?

WHITNEY Yup. Yeah, and so, and then you're not looking at personality. You're just saying, "Where are you? Can you build momentum from here? And if you're not building momentum, what's happening either in the ecosystem and, or, maybe it's the wrong curve, and that's okay." Because everybody's gone, on an S curve, and everybody can be successful on an S curve. It's just a matter of figuring out what that is. So, anyway, interesting.

BEN I think that that is so cool, especially because it's more generated towards the person's future, not their past. It's like, where do you ultimately want to go as a person, and you know, how sure are you that this job is going to get you there? You know, like.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

BEN You know, and I ask that, actually, to anyone I hire. It's like, "Who's your future self," essentially, but it's like, "Who, who are you trying to become? How is this job going to be a huge win for you?" Because I already know why it's going to be a win for me, if you're the right person.

WHITNEY Right.

BEN And actually, if you're the right person, it's going to be a bigger win than me, for me than I can currently comprehend. Because you're going to do so much beyond the job description, you know?

WHITNEY Yeah.

BEN And so, yeah, I, for me, it's always, "Why is this the right job for you, and how is this going to help you accomplish your goals?" I think your S curve's a better framing than that, because it's more specific. But I, I like that a lot.

WHITNEY Yeah, oh, thank you. Okay, so, Ben, where can people find you, or more specifically, what would you like people to do? As a consequence, if they've listened to this, they're inspired, they've learned a lot. What would you like them to do?

BEN Definitely read *Personality Isn't Permanent*, in whatever form you like, whether that's listening to it, Kindle. You know, read *Personality Isn't Permanent*. This book has about 150 journal prompts to help you, like, to show you how to reframe any former experience, redefine your past. Your past actually, from, like, from my perspective, it should be viewed more flexibly, and that you can actually redefine the meanings of the past.

And so, we kind of show you how to do that, help you, you know, design your future self, and go through all of the steps to do that. So definitely read this book. You can kind of get the book wherever you want. If you just go to my website, benjaminhardy.com, you will see that by buying the book you can get access to three free online courses. A course where I take you deeper into the concepts of the book. There's a journaling course that over 10 thousand people have gone through at this point or purchased. And that book just teaches you specific journaling strategies, for example, updating your subconscious. And then, there's other courses as well, like if you're interested in blogging.

But my main interest is just getting the book. I think you and I already discussed this. I don't know if I'm breaking the surprise, but maybe you should be the one to mention it.

WHITNEY Okay. Everybody, here's the surprise. So, Ben has graciously offered to provide us 25 copies of his book, and so here's, okay, so, Ben, we need to figure out, what do we want the action item for people to do to get the copies of the book? Do we have them leave a podcast review? What do we want them to do? Hm, hm, hm.

BEN Maybe what they do is, in the review, if they post a review, I would want them to, to some degree, write who their future self is going to be in three years from now, and what they're going to do.

WHITNEY Okay.

BEN Because I, I like the idea of making that public, to some degree.

WHITNEY Okay. Everybody, you are going to leave a podcast review. We'll leave instructions on how to do that in the show notes, and then you're going to share what your future self, or who your future self is going to be. So exciting. We've got 25. Awesome. Thank you, Ben, super generous.

Okay, final question for you. What of your future self are, you just talked about being willing to make that public and say it out loud. Which piece of your future self would you like to share with us, of who, who he is?

BEN

Mm-hmm. Well, so my wife's pregnant with our sixth child, so obviously my future self is going to be a lot better of a dad than I am today. And I'm not downplaying my current self. I just know that my current self is very limited, and it's all, my current self is not the be-all, end-all. Actually, one of the things that Daniel Gilbert says is that human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they're finished.

So, my current self is not the be-all, end-all. My future self's a lot more important. So, my future self will be a better dad and husband than I am today. A lot more involved there, and I'm getting a lot better at that. But one of the things that I already talked about in this talk, is that when I, so I served a church mission at age 20. And that was the transformational experience for me that I needed to obviously relationship with God, but also to learn how to learn and to build a lot of meaning and, and momentum in my life.

And the reason I got a PHD in organizational psychology is because I'm very interested in training and leadership and development, and I think that the, and I know, actually, the future version of myself is going to be back doing more missionary work style things. But maybe from a leadership perspective, you know. So, I, whether that be like, training and development, I'm not really sure specifically what that looks like. But I know I'm going to be making a big pivot, where I'll keep writing books like I'm writing today, but I'm going to be doing a lot more in the realm of missionary work. Or at least, in the missionary realm.

Where I want to go. It's why I got the PHD. I just think, I love that audience. I love that work. I think it's super transformational, and that's kind of what I set out to do in the first place. And I kind of made a deviation to go in this business and entrepreneurial world, and I'm really glad I did because I think I learned the right lessons. But I still, that's kind of the direction I still want to go. Which may or may not make sense to people.

WHITNEY

So, as a volunteer or, well, I, I guess, so as a volunteer or as, in some capacity where you're able to do this and still put food on the table?

BEN

Either, or, and,--

WHITNEY

Yeah, okay.

BEN

You know, I worked at the missionary training center for a few years and, you know, there's a lot of different roles where you know, it could be curriculum development. It could be training. It, who knows? It could be as a volunteer. I'd be definitely open to doing that. I'm not really sure on the specifics. I've got two or three years to get that context.

And get that, you know, but yeah. I mean, everything I'm doing right now is to set my life up for that next chapter. You know, so I, I personally want to sell millions and millions of copies of this book, to set myself up, not necessarily from an ego perspective or from, like, a, "I want to be this big thought leader." It's more from a financial situation and time situation, so that I can, you know, make a huge transition, where I'm not that worried about all the entrepreneurial things I'm interested in.

WHITNEY

Oh, that, that's exciting. And, so I, you're making me think of, we had Jonathan Mendonsa on the podcast about choose financial independence. And as you're talking, I'm like, thinking about that, and that's, that's sounds like exactly where you're trying to go, is get financially independent over the next couple of years, which means not only selling lots of books, but having the lifestyle that allows that to be possible. I think it's really exciting.

Any final thoughts for us, Ben?

BEN

I like the idea that, you know, the Dan Sullivan quote, that the only way to make your present better is by making your future bigger. And just from a Victor Frankl perspective, that without having hope and a purpose for your future, your present becomes without meaning and context. And then the suffering of the present becomes unbearable, or you just distract yourself from reality.

So, I just think, obviously, letting go of the past is big, or choosing a better framing of it. But I just think, the clearer and more excited you can get about your future self, and the less ashamed you are of it, the less you keep it secret, the more you're open and honest about it, the better. The more that that becomes your lens for not only your, how you explain yourself but also your behavior, the less you feel like a fraud.

I've got a lot of learning to do, and it's okay if I fail along the way. You can be really flexible in the process. If you're committed to the outcome. And so, I guess that's just what I, that's just what I would, you know, leave people with, is that your future self-matters more than who you are today. My grandfather, who was one of my heroes, he wrote a letter to my ... He's, he died at age 94. He died about, maybe four years ago.

But we found a letter than he wrote to my younger brother, who's now in the treatment facility. And he said, "You are a wonderful man, but always remember that it is not who you are today that matters. It is who you want in your heart to become." And I, I believe that fully.

WHITNEY

Hm, that's beautiful. Ben Hardy, thank you for being with us. It's been very inspirational.

BEN

Oh, thank you, Whitney.

Like our first episode with Ben, there's so much to unpack here with how it relates to climbing your S Curve of Learning.

I found it so interesting that the propensity to label ourselves with tests and other instruments can actually be a limitation. A tool can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The task for us, then, is to be aware. To actively choose the meaning we give things. To reframe our past and remember that we're not the same as we used to be. Taking Susan Cain's quiz and learning that I might be an introvert can be a helpful tool, but if it becomes an identity I live into or an excuse to not grow, it's limiting.

Journaling about all of this, as Benjamin said and as David Peterson said in Episode 164 can be a powerful tool for reframing our past experiences so we can shape our future. I've always been a consistent journal keeper, but more and more I'm seeing how the self-reflection that comes with journaling is helping me disrupt myself and continue growing.

Finally, I've always loved the way that Benjamin talks about how our environment shapes our decision making, so it will come as no surprise that when Ben was talking about boundaries and commitment - that commitment is a statement of what is - that reframed several things I'm working on right now. As he said, commitment is not what I say I want now. It's a statement of what I currently have. Commitment to a future self requires decisions that need to be made in the present.

If you'd like one of the copies of Ben's book (we have twenty-five copies available!), be sure to leave a review for us wherever you listen to podcasts with what you're committing to today in order to make that happen. Send us a screenshot at wj@whitneyjohnson.com and we'll be in touch to get shipping information. Naturally our future self will thank you for this!
AND SO WILL YOURS!

Thank you again to Benjamin Hardy for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, producer Melissa Ruddy, managers Sarah Duran and Macy Robison, content contributors Virginia Kivlighan, Jennifer Richardson and Nancy Wilson.

I'm Whitney Johnson
And this is Disrupt Yourself.