Disrupt Yourself Podcast with Whitney Johnson
Episode 80: Disrupt Your Self Today

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. Which if you've been a long-time listener, you know sometimes includes disrupting the format of this podcast. And that's what we are going to do today.

In the work that I'm doing with organizations around building high-performing teams, there is something keeping people from making the progress that they could. I'm finding that what is needed is a common language around the framework of disruption. Building blocks. A foundation. Before you can be an agent of disruption, you first become its subject by disrupting yourself.

To give you this common language, I'm developing an online course that will coach you step-by-step through my framework of personal disruption. But rather than launching the entire course fully formed, I had this idea. Why not do the introductory module here and get your thoughts? See if it's even helpful to you, while also providing you a sneak peek. Think of it as one of our live coaching episodes, except that this time I'm coaching you.

Now, before we go any further, I want to issue a warning. Just a few days ago I had a friend say to me---"One of our friends is avoiding you." "Why? Why?" I asked. "Because she said that if she talks to you, she knows you'll dare her to do something, and she's not ready to take your dare."

So if you don't want to take things to the next level, stop listening now. If you do, and I suspect that you do, which is why you are listening, then I am committed to helping you, I am daring you to disrupt yourself. As C.S. Lewis one said, "Do not dare, not to dare."

So here's what we are going to cover in this episode or course, and don't worry about taking notes; we have the entire transcript in the show notes. For now, just listen.

First, I'm going to give you five reasons why you might want to disrupt yourself. Second, I'll talk about the what—what personal disruption is. And, third, we'll get to how. How do you get started?

So, first question—why would you disrupt yourself? It's a lot of work. It sounds scary. Why would you invite change and chaos on purpose?

Reason #1 - It will make you happier
When you disrupt yourself, you are deciding to focus on who you can **become**, not on who you are. You are deciding on purpose to learn, you're actually forcing yourself to learn, jumping from one learning curve to the next. When you learn, you get a squirt of dopamine, a chemical in your brain, a neurotransmitter that makes you feel happy. It literally feels good to disrupt yourself. Now let me ask you a question -- is there any reason why you wouldn't want to feel happy?

Reason #2 - Your newfound happiness will spread to others

This happiness is contagious. Motivational speaker Jim Rohn famously said that "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Which means that you figure into the average of people who spend time with you. Emotions are contagious. This includes the feel-good effects of disruption. So, consider this. Is there is someone in your life you would like to be happier? A friend, a parent, a child. If you are willing to try something new, you will be contributing to their happiness.

Reason #3 - You'll start to improve in all facets of your life. You'll level up.

Think about when you play a game against people who are better than you are, you improve. The twist with personal disruption is that before you move up, you move sideways, backward or down. You crouch before you jump. You bring a fist back to punch. Rebecca Jackson wrote in my book *Disrupt Yourself,* she asked the question, "Have you ever let go of something that protects and strangles you? That defines but also suffocates you?" So like a snake shedding its skin, to iterate to the next version of you, you have to lose something, leaving yourself vulnerable and exposed in the process. Stepping back or sideways from your ego becomes a slingshot. For you and those around you.

Which goes to Reason #4, this improvement deepens your influence on those around you, including your influence on the team you lead, the company you work for, or the company you run. Disruption breeds innovation. Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal said, "Doing what we already know how to do take the world from 1 to n, adding something more of the familiar. But every time you create something new, you go from 0 to 1. It's going to feel fresh. It's going to be strange. But unless you invest in creating new things, you will eventually fail, no matter how big your profits are." The fundamental unit of disruption is the individual. You challenge the status quo, and your organization does too. Think for about the last time you took on a new role, or even introduced a new idea on your team. Isn't it true that this shift, this movement, even if it was minor, opened the door to doing things differently, to innovation, in your organization?

Reason #5 – You'll create opportunity for yourself and others. In the long run (disrupting yourself—think the butterfly effect) will impact the economy and society in general. Consider the number $86 billion. That's how many dollars have been earned by developers for Apple's App Store since 2008. Or think about this number. Two million. That's how many U.S. jobs Apple has created or supported. That's just one company. A big one. To be sure. Innovation caused by disruption (a willingness to do what you haven't done, to play where you haven't played) not only keeps the economy healthy, it creates opportunity. Lots and lots of opportunity.

So before we continue, think about something you'd like to do a little differently. How would you like to disrupt the current version of you? It might be something big. Or it may be small. The more potent disruptions often start with a something small. Like my decision to start doing ten push-ups a day six months ago. At the time, the best I could do was 10 push-ups against our kitchen counter. Because of

this small disruption (how I allocate 30 seconds in my day), now I can do ten full body push-ups. By thinking of what would make me happier, allocating time to it, and showing up consistently for six months, I'm a new person in this area of my life. I've disrupted myself.

When you force yourself to learn, to try new things, when you disrupt yourself, you are more engaged, more productive, and you're happier–a powerful, positive force pulling yourself and those within your orbit up to the next level.

That's the why. What's the what? What is disruption?

What I've learned having been an analyst on Wall Street and co-founding the disruptive innovation fund with Clayton Christensen is that the theory of disruption (a theory that states that your odds of success are 6x higher when you pursue a disruptive course) is that this theory we apply to products, it also applies to people. At a high level it's a framework for managing change. I've since spent several years researching and codifying a seven-point framework of personal disruption so that whether you are trying to get to the next level with your business, career, or in your life, you've got a structure to do this.

What exactly is disruptive innovation?

At its simplest, it is a silly, little thing that takes over the world.
Like what the telephone did to the telegraph.
The light bulb to the gas lamp.
The tractor to the plow.
And the automobile did to the horse and buggy.

More recently, we've seen Toyota disrupt General Motors.
Netflix disrupted Blockbuster, and now cable TV.
And Uber and Lyft - they're disrupting cabs.

It feels chaotic, but it follows a framework.

The disruptor secures a foothold at the low end of the market, think of Netflix in the 90s. The product inferior – its position was weak. Blockbuster could have crushed them like a cockroach, but they didn't. Market leaders, they rarely bother. It's just that silly, door-to-door DVD rental service that almost went bankrupt. Let's go after bigger and higher margins and better. The bad news, or the good depending on your point of view, is once a disruptor gains a foothold it too is motivated by biggest, better and Stranger Things, and so it goes.

Personal disruption is how you take all these ideas and make them meaningful to you. It's like that children's game, chutes and ladders. You can start at the bottom of the ladder, climb to the top and then you jump to the bottom of another ladder.

You can be a disruptor at the bottom, or you disrupt yourself at the top.

Take a look at Lady Gaga.

In 2008, she was at the bottom of the ladder, and from there she rises to the top of the charts. What does she do for an encore? She doesn't just stay there, at the top of the ladder, she jumps the bottom of a new ladder—she collaborates with Tony Bennett on a Jazz album, she does a *Sound of Music* tribute at the Oscars, and then she produces a country album! That's personal disruption.

It's change supplemented by a cycle of learning—you Learn, you Leap, and you Repeat.

Now the biggest difference with personal disruption is that...

You're Toyota AND you're General Motors.
You're Netflix AND Blockbuster.
You're the silly, little thing AND you're taking over the world.
Because you are disrupting you.

So now you've got this conundrum—this problem that doesn't seem to have a solution. A double bind.

On the one hand, you know that you're going to have to do things differently, to shed the skin of who you are today.

On the other, you know that stepping back to move forward, will allow you to become more of who you are, to take things to the next level.

We've talked about five reasons why you want to disrupt yourself. You know what disruption is. Now, we get to the how. **How** can you disrupt yourself? What are the steps? What pattern should you follow?

Here's where the S-curve of learning curve comes in. Popularized by E.M. Rogers – in 1962. It looks like a hill for a roller coaster that levels off at the top.

At our disruptive innovation fund we used it to help us figure out how quickly an innovation would be adopted. It helped us make what seemed unpredictable, predictable. To create a structure.

At the base of the S, growth is slow until a tipping point is reached, or the knee of the curve, that knee of the roller coaster. Once the tipping point is reached, typically at 10-15% of a market, you enter hypergrowth, the steep part of the roller coaster. At 90% of the market, or saturation—now you are at the top of the curve–and growth tapers off.

As we were investing I had this insight, this a-ha, that's now become foundational to all of our work, is that the S-curve could also help us understand people—they psychology of how we learn, how we change, and how we grow. And we'll include this graphic in the show notes for you so you can take a look at it.

In the meantime, I want you to picture an S in your mind. And if you can (as in you aren't driving) I want you to draw an S. And then draw a stick figure of you at the base of the S, the bottom of that hill. Because that's where you are every time you start something new. If you are person who likes puzzles, you've effectively just spilled 1,000 pieces of a jigsaw puzzle onto a table. It's a huge jumble. It seemed like a good idea to jump to this new curve at the time, but you may find yourself thinking "Why did I take this on?" You may even be feeling a bit discouraged. This bottom of the S can feel like a slog. Which is exactly how it's supposed to feel at the low-end of the curve. But if the task is meaningful and relevant to you, which means you are motivated to learn, you will eventually be able to put these pieces together, see the bigger picture, to move up onto the steep part of your learning curve.

In her gem of a book, *Mindshift*, Barbara Oakley, drawing on neuroscience, provides two practical tips for the low-end of the curve. First, she says, "do a quick overview of what you think you are going to be learning—like looking at the cover on the box of that jigsaw puzzle, or scanning the table of contents of a book—even a cursory look will help your brain start to create a container for what you are going to learn. And second, becoming an expert, she says, whatever the subject, requires small chunks of knowledge. So, fifteen minutes a day for six straight days, is much more beneficial to your learning, than 1 ½ hours on one day. What happens is that during 'neural resting periods, your brain is processing what you've learned. Even better if you review before you go to bed. While you are sleeping, those neural pathways will grow."

Number 1, then, create a picture of what you want to learn. Who you want to be. Where you want to leap. And number 2, Start working toward that picture. A little at a time. Like my daily pushups for six months. Show up. Every day.

Remember, because of the math of the S-curve, at the low-end you'll do a lot and it will feel like nothing is happening. But, as you put in the work, what was a jumble of pieces, whether you're learning to play golf or understand blockchain, trying to figure out how to be a parent, will slowly, then quickly start to form a pattern. You'll start to see—oh, this is how things can look. And as you move into the sweet spot, or the steep part of your learning. You'll do a little, and a lot will seem to happen. This is the exciting part of the curve. You are increasingly competent, and with this will come confidence. All your neurons are firing. You're feeling the effects of dopamine. And that feels good.

Once you reach the top of your learning curve, it again flattens out. You may do a lot, but little seems to happen because things have become easy. And because your brain is creating less of the feel-good chemicals that come with learning, you can get bored. Hence the case for personal disruption. When you are at the top, there's always the risk that someone can come from below and topple you, but there's the bigger the risk that if you are no longer having fun, you can become the cause of your own undoing. Your plateau becomes a precipice.

At the end of the podcast, we'll tell you how to download the S-curve of learning locator, a proprietary diagnostic that will tell you where you are on your current learning curve. If it's it time to power up the

curve you are on or try something new. You can also use the diagnostic to analyze where the people are around you. This is what we use to help organizations around the world build high performing teams. Again, we'll tell you how to take the diagnostic at the end… but for now, I want you to go back to the S that you drew a minute a go, either on paper, on your computer, or in your mind's eye and draw a circle around where you are on your current learning curve.

Are you at the top? Either because you're late in the span of your career. Or you are early in your career, but at the top of the curve in your current role. To everyone around you, this is easy street. You know what you are doing. But you feel it. You are cranky, you're bored, you're restless. You know there's more for you. You know you can contribute in a bigger, more meaningful way. That's what the top of the curve feels like.

Or are you in the sweet spot? You're fully engaged and loving your work. You feel confident. Competent. Happy. Things are hard but they're not too hard. Easy but not too easy. Work is meaningful, relevant. You are right where you are supposed to be. That's what the steep part of the curve feels like.

And the low-end? You've just jumped – or you've been pushed. Either will do the job of getting you there. This reset - you'll have moments of discouragement. You trust the process. That whether you jumped or were pushed, you will look back and say this is what I needed to do. This is where I needed to be.

Now, that you've thought about your current learning curve, think about your life up to this point.

Think about high school. You started at the bottom, climbed to the top, and then you jumped.
College. Start at the bottom, climb to the top, and then you jumped.
First job, and throughout your career.
Do you see how this pattern plays out over and over again?

It's because you are a learning machine. You were meant to not know how to do things, to figure them out, to master them, and start all over again. You were meant to learn, to leap and repeat. You were meant to disrupt yourself.

But how do you move from what is at this point an intellectual assent, you agree that disrupting yourself will take you to the next level, how do you move from there to actually believing it in such a visceral way that it becomes a part of who you are, your programming? Like your programming around brushing your teeth. You don't think about it, you just do it.

There's a story told that in Africa when an elephant is born, a chain is put around its leg. A 3 foot chain attached to stake in the ground. For days and days, the elephant tries and tries, to break away, but it's too weak. So, eventually it gives up.

Years later, when the elephant is grown and now capable of pulling loaded railway cars, 10x its own weight, at the end of working day, like every other day, since it was small, the chain goes back around its ankle. The elephant could now EASILY could pull the stake out of the ground.

But it doesn't move.

The only thing it'll move for is fire. It will stay until it starves.

What is holding the elephant?

Why can't it pull out the stake and go where it wants to go?

More to the point, why can't you pull out the stake, and jump to a new learning curve, or climb the one you're on more quickly?

A hundred years ago, you could have argued, well, that's just the way I am, even maybe fifty years ago.

But a hundred years ago, we didn't know how our brains worked, that our brains can change. Religion had suggested it was possible, but science hadn't yet proven that our brains are plastic. Nor had science concluded that things like meditation, mindfulness, could interrupt and change brain patterns. That we can change our programming.

We didn't know that while we can control what comes into our conscious mind, everything that comes into our brain, like choosing to listen to this podcast, what controls our behavior is our subconscious mind. It's why we find ourselves saying, "I know what to do, but I don't do it."

We now know that, if you really want to change, you have to reprogram your subconscious mind.

What I've learned from studying the work of Bob Proctor is that there are two ways to do this.

The first is you can have a vivid emotional experience, an epiphany of sorts, like a near-death experience - Paul on the road to Damascus. Which is pretty difficult to plan for.

The second way to do this, and one I alluded to earlier, is through repetition. Listening, saying, reading something repeatedly, you reprogram your subconscious mind. Which is also your heart. That's why James Allen said "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." As a woman thinketh in her heart, so is she. The neuroscience says it works. And my own experience over the past year says it works. When you eat and breathe an idea it becomes a part of you, your DNA, a part of who you are.

Here's what you want to do next:

First, take the S-curve of learning locator diagnostic at *disruptiondiagnostic.com*. We'll include a link in the shownotes.

Second, listen to this recording every day for the next seven days. When you are listening, ideally in the morning or right before bed when your subconscious mind is more open and aware, as you get ideas, which you will, write them down. We've included a worksheet and the transcript in the shownotes which may be of help.

I know that writing ideas down sounds easy. But it takes to pay attention to them. Once you've written them down, choose at least one to act on. Provided of course that it's a good idea. Meaning that it will benefit all involved. Then set a reminder on your phone for 4 or 5 pm to make sure you've done it. It was adhering to this process, by the way, that I got the idea to do this experiment with you. Don't give your conscious mind time to debate. Write it down. Do it. For the next seven days, listen every day.

Whether it's time to jump to a new learning curve, or persist along the curve you are on, this podcast, this course will provide you with some structure. It may feel like chaos for a time—but out of chaos comes order. And once you start, momentum builds momentum. What you do to change today, even in fifteen-minute increments, will affect your ability to disrupt yourself tomorrow. This is how you iterate to new versions of you ever more quickly. It's how you not only level up, but live a next level life.

As we wrap-up, what insights have you had over the past few minutes? If you can't write them down, say them out loud.

And, what suggestions do you have for us?

If there are parts of this podcast that didn't make sense, if there are ways to improve it, let us know at *wj@whitneyjohnson.com*. If you've e-mailed me in the past, you know I'll answer.
If this course is something you would share with your friends or use with your team, let us know.
And, when you've listened to this episode for seven days straight, let us know what you've learned, and we will send you a small prize!

Thank you again for listening. For being willing to experiment with us! Thanks to my producer Macy Robison, sound engineer Whitney Jobe, editors Emilie Davis and Libby Newman, thanks to Adaora Udoji for suggesting several years ago that we do something like this, and finally thanks to Bob Proctor and Gina Hayden for their generous mentoring and coaching.

I'm Whitney Johnson.
And this is Disrupt Your Self. Today.