

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 184: SHELLYE ARCHAMBEAU

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we discuss strategies and advice for how to climb the S curve of Learning™ in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

And today our guest is Shellye Archambeau, one of the first African American women to be named CEO of a company in Silicon Valley.

Shellye currently sits on several boards, including Nordstrom and Verizon. She's formerly a chief marketing officer at two public companies, began her career at IBM and has a new book out titled *Unapologetically Ambitious Take Risks, Break Barriers and Create Success on your own Terms*. Shellye Archambeau has repeatedly jumped S curves and epitomizes leaning into our strengths and taking the right risks. Shellye, thank you for being with us today.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Oh, I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you, Whitney.

**Whitney Johnson:** As I read your book, in admiration, I thought Shellye has a superpower and that superpower is, well, you have many, but this is the one that really stood out for me, is that you are agentic. You act and you are not acted upon. Full stop. And there were two stories for me that really stood out, both from your childhood, one about being tested for a gifted program, the other about being bullied and beaten up. To me, it was mercilessly. Can you tell us what happened? And then what did your parents do when it happened?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Certainly. So, my family, we had four children, my parents were crazy, four kids in less than five years. I was the eldest and had just started first grade. We were living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and my father got a new job opportunity, which was significant and made sense for our family, therefore, to move to California. We moved to a far-flung suburb outside of L.A. Now, you have to understand, this is the 60s. It's only shortly after the Watts riots. Lots of things going on with civil rights, Vietnam War. It's a very turbulent time. And for as many people as were pro civil rights, you had people against it. And we moved into a neighborhood where I was the only black girl, like in my entire grade, might have been in the school.

But for sure, my entire grade and every day I had to walk to school. And I walked along a very busy road. I'd walk by myself with my lunch box and my books, right, heading to school and just about every day people would yell hateful things at me, just letting me know that I really did not belong. And one day, to make that even worse, I'm walking home from school by myself along the road.

It's California. It's dusty. It's hot. Right. But I'm just swinging my lunch box, and I'm just walking home and all of a sudden I... I sense them before I actually see or feel them. And two boys are now on top of me. They have knocked me over. I'm now flat out on the sidewalk. Right? My stuff is scattered and all I can do is I'm trying to curl up into a ball because they are beating me, beating me and they're kicking me and they're hitting me. And all I can think of, "Is what have I done? What have I done?" You know, I'm just crying and it's like, stop. And then, it ended just as suddenly as it started. And I don't know why. I don't know if they got scared off. I don't know something happened because certainly there was no adults around that intervened. Nobody driving by stopped, nothing. But they stopped and ran away. And, and I gathered myself up, I collected my thermos, which has fallen out of my lunch box. It's now all cracked and broken. I had my books and stuff, and anyway, I gather up and I finished walking home. I'm cut and bleeding and, and I get to the front door and I always usually walked in the door and I yelled "Mom, I'm home." So, I walked in the door. And I didn't say anything, but mom obviously heard me because she said, "Shellye? Is that you?" And she came to look and there I am, and you can just imagine how I must have looked. And she just shrieked, you know, and comes over and grabs me. "What happened?" Anyway, I tell her. The next day, my mom goes to school and complains because these were two boys that I actually knew they were my class. Imagine that.

And of course, the boys got in trouble, but that didn't necessarily make it any easier on me. Right? So, it was a tough environment, tough experience.

And then a couple of years later, you're now and now in like the fourth grade, I guess, and they start the gifted and talented program and the gifted and talented is everybody takes a test in the class. And the people who score, right, high enough get invited to Gifted and Talented. So, I am one of the select set of people that get selected for Gifted and Talented. Now Gifted and Talented, met during one of the class periods. So, everybody who is in it, people knew because we all get up, leave at the same time and go to the program and then come back.

Well, after a couple of weeks, all of a sudden, they said something happened or was wrong. And anyway, everyone needed to retake the test. So, we all retook the test. I was the only one who didn't get selected back into Gifted and Talented. And now everybody knew it because I'm not getting up and leaving. So, okay, I'm not as smart as I think I am. Right? I'm just, I mean, it was just another reason for people to pick on me and tease me. And but I told mom about that, you know, her reaction was to give me a big hug and to tell me that I just need to work a little harder and maybe next time I'll be able to, to qualify for Gifted and Talented.

Well, it wasn't until I was an adult that mom indeed shared back in those days, she knew that it was racism, that they made people take that test again. And suddenly I was the only one that didn't get in it.

But she wasn't going to say that. She didn't want me to see racism in my race and who I was as the barrier.

But, you know, it's one of those things that having those experiences, my parents were very much trying to help us and arm us with the strength and the power, and the fortitude to rise through things. So they never let us use that as excuse. Their common statement when you said, "It isn't fair." Whatever you get beat up, you get teased, you get knocked over, you get whatever. It's not fair. And the response is always, "You're right. Life isn't fair. What are you going to do about it?" It wasn't to coddle and to hug and say, "Oh, it should be." Right? Or "That's so sad," or

none of that. And so that totally shaped my outlook on life because I realized early that the odds for me to achieve what I wanted in life were just not in my favor. But it also led me to understand that I should control and do what I can. And it's not that things won't happen, it's just that I have to figure out how to make them happen.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that. Thank you for telling both of those stories. When I heard you tell this story about your parents and I understand that there are extenuating circumstances, but there is something so powerful in that gift that your parents gave to you of saying, "It is hard, and life isn't fair." And like you said, "What are you going to do about it?" And I think that is such an important lesson for every single person on the planet.

And so, I'm grateful for you and I'm grateful to your parents that they had the fortitude, they had the backbone to, to help teach you that lesson.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yes, me too, me too.

Whitney Johnson: So, Shelley, you decided you wanted to become a CEO at a very young age. Can you tell us how you decided that you wanted to do that?

Yes, well, you knew from those stories, right, that I became very intentional.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Shellye Archambeau:** And so here I am meeting with guidance counselor. It's the obligatory junior year conversation where they say, "What do you want to do with your life?" And "I want to go to college." "All right. What do you want after college?" I'm like, "Well, I want to get a job. I want to get a job where I can keep the thermostat at 72 degrees. I can eat out at restaurants, I can travel." But those were all things that I couldn't do. And so very, very simple kind of objective. And she said, "Well, what do you like to do?" And for this, I give her immense credit because what I said was, "I love my clubs. I enjoy being involved." I was everything French club, American Field Service, National Honor Society, Girl Scouts, you name it. But more than that, I ultimately will end up leading them. I loved leadership and running clubs. And so, she said, "Well, listen, business is just like that. It's just like clubs. You bring people together to a common objective and you get things done." And I said, "Done, I'm going to go run a business." And when I looked at who runs this business, it was chief executive officers. I said, "Great, I'm going to go to be a CEO." It was literally that naive and that audacious.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love it, and I agree that was quite an insight that your, your guidance counselor had of like you like clubs, therefore you should run a business. Really interesting.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yes. And I think if she had been a woman, I don't know that I would have gotten the same advice. So, I feel very fortunate and that that was a bit of serendipity.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm. Yeah. All right. So here you are. You're in high school. You're going to be a CEO, which led you over the years to take a role in sales straight out of college, which was not the expected thing to do. You eventually took an international assignment in Japan. You have this really interesting approach to your jobs. Can you tell us how you decided which roles you were going to go after in service of becoming a CEO?

**Shellye Archambeau:** So, I always looked at who was in the job that I wanted and what was their path? And then who were in those jobs and what was their path? Because I was always looking for, I call it the current, you know, the path to power. And the reason I started out in sales is because every CEO in IBM started out in sales.

Not because I suddenly said, "Oh, I think I want to be a salesperson." That was not it at all. To me, it was just the right step to be able to get to the role that I ultimately wanted. And so, each time I looked at opportunity, I looked at it through that vantage point. "Was this on path and on track to my ultimate goal?" So, going to Japan was the same thing. I was now a junior executive and I'm looking at everyone who reports to the CEO. At least, everyone who has a line responsibility, a managing P&L, has had an international assignment. But when I looked closer, it wasn't just an international assignment, but most of them had actually gone to Japan.

And that was not obvious because, you know, Japan and Asia, that wasn't our largest market and it wasn't even the second largest market. So why was that? I didn't know, but there was something there and so I said, "Fine, I need to get to Japan." So, every job I took, I looked at it through the rubric of given where I'm trying to go, what do I need to do? And whether I clearly understood it or not, that's what I try to do because, in order for me to improve my odds, I wanted to make sure that I had the experience, the background, the credentials to be able to successfully compete.

**Whitney Johnson:** Do you remember how you hit upon that strategy? I mean, it's so deft and yet pretty unusual for, you know, a 23, 24 year old, maybe you're even younger than that 21 year old coming straight out of college of thinking, "OK, if I want to be the CEO", you, map this. You have the strategy. You have this plan. Do you remember how you hit upon that? Or was it just sort of intuitive?

**Shellye Archambeau:** I really don't remember, like, when I first began doing that. It goes back to knowing the odds aren't in my favor. So, if I want to do something, then I've got to figure out, "how do I improve the odds that I can actually do it?" I took that from the little steps and things that you do in school. For instance, what I [inaudible] to the first club that I ran for president for, I was a sophomore, so a sophomore.

And usually you're in these organizations and it's junior and seniors who lead it. But I was a sophomore and my friend said, "Shellye, you should run for president." And I said, "I don't know if I can become president." "You have to be a junior, senior. Look who's running the whole bit." "She said, "Oh, you should do it." So, I'm like, "All right, fine, if I'm going to do this and how do I win?" And then it was putting the plan in place. "OK, I got to talk to everybody in the club, tell them why I want to do it." If I choose the goal, then I ask myself "What has to be true for me to therefore achieve it? And then how do I make that true?" That's how I approached it, and so I've just basically honed it, honed it, and honed it all the way through.

**Whitney Johnson:** Did you learn that from your mom or dad or kind of this amalgam of experience or just was it you?

**Shellye Archambeau:** I'd probably give my mother more of the credit, not that she told me, "Shellye, here's how to do it," but mom, in her way, was very ambitious. Now, a lot of people talk about ambition and they liken that to a title. You know, if you're ambitious and you want to be a CEO or you want to be the first astronaut or you want to be, you know, whatever it is, but it's typically tied to career when they think of ambition. Well, my mother was a stay-at-home mom, but there are very few people that are more ambitious than my mother. I think of ambition is impact. And she absolutely was intent on making an impact where we went, where we lived, where we moved. On the family, on the community and the church. You know, watching how she tried to make things happen definitely inspired my approach.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok, tell the story really fast, I'm just remembering this, when you would move to a new neighborhood, what did your mom have you all do?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Oh, gosh, it was so embarrassing.

Oh, so we moved a lot. All right. I lived in seven states before I got to high school, so we moved a lot. And what mom would do is literally movers would deliver all the stuff. We'd get in the house. Within the week of us moving in, mom would get us all dressed and when I say dress, it just can't play clothes. We had play clothes and then we had school clothes, right? So, we got dressed in our school clothes, kind of clothes, and she would traipse the four of us with her around the neighborhood. Knock, knock, knock on the door. "Hi, I'm Mera Archambeau. My husband, Lester, and I just moved this neighborhood. These are my four kids." And she did that everywhere we went. Knock, knock, knock. And it was just awful. People would open the door and kind of look at us like, "what? Do people do this?"

**Whitney Johnson:** [Laughs]

**Shellye Archambeau:** Right?

But it's funny, as a kid, I just saw it as embarrassing. Right? But now as an adult, we moved into a lot of neighborhoods where we were the only blacks in our neighborhood or on our block. And I honestly think that part of the reason mom was doing it was, yes, to meet the neighbors, but it was also to let the neighbors know when they see us, we belong. That's something that she and I never talked about. But as an adult, hindsight, I look back and say, "You know, that may be part of why she did that." But she also did it because it's the quickest way to meet people. And she would meet people, and mom was very outgoing and social. She'd invite people over because you invite people over, and they invite you back. And that's how she would get us established. In a neighborhood.

**Whitney Johnson:** Your mom, wow, what a gem, you really won the lottery with her, I got to say.

**Shellye Archambeau:** I agree.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's go to Japan now. If we're looking at pattern recognition, this international assignment, you go on, you are not going to be successful there. And yet you were. So tell us what your assignment was and what did you do there? There's one moment that allowed you to really turn the tables on success or turn the odds in your favor. Tell us about it.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yes, I'm the first woman of color to go on an international assignment with IBM, which was amazing. This was the 90s and I was the first one. And here I'm going to Japan. And it's very clear to me early, because the boss I'm leaving, has spent a lot of time working in Asia. He was Australian. And he said to me, "Shellye, how much do you know about being successful in Japan, business wise?" And I said, "Well, I'm reading books and I'm doing this. But, you know, I'd love your advice." He said, "Well, there's three things that are critical to success. The first is wisdom. Wisdom is age." I'm like in my mid 30s. I'm like, thirty-six. Thirty-seven. He said, "You don't have it. All right?" "OK, got it." "The second is being male." Well, I didn't have that either, so here I am zero for two. And I'm thinking, "This is like my sendoff speech?" And he says, "All right, the third one is intelligence. You only have one going for you and you better figure out how to maximize it."

It's like, "OK, then. So here we go."

Anyway, I get to Japan, and he was totally right. But in addition, I'm also really tall. You can't obviously hear that on the podcast, but I stand 5'10" or so in my bare feet and the average Japanese male is probably about 5'5", 5'6". So, I am taller than everybody over there as well. And I'm black. So, you put all that together and I fit right in.

So, as I'm learning my way around, et cetera, I'm getting ready to meet the gentleman who's now going to be working for me in, in Japan. And he is old enough to be my father. And the way it works in Japan is meetings are really meant to be conversations about decisions and topics that have already been discussed. Unlike in the US, where meetings are you come together to make a decision, there is more of a confirmation. So therefore, when Americans and Japanese meet for the first time, it can be a little rough because everybody has different expectations. So, he had me meet with his right-hand person twice before we met. You know, the first time is talk about the agenda and then the second time is literally just the day before. Just to say "Shellye-san," they call me Shellye-san. Mr. Shellye. "Shellye-san, you know, just remember, this meeting is the first meeting. It's a get to know you meeting." And his English is a little broken. And he says, "It's like..." and he's looking for an analogy and he says, "It's like a first date." Right? I said, "OK, I got it." Because if this meeting doesn't go well, he gets in trouble. OK, so he's really nervous. All right, fine. I said, "Ihara-san, I got it." Well, walking to the office the next morning, I'm thinking about this. The first date. And I passed the flower shop. And I said, "You know what? I went in and I bought the biggest bouquet of flowers I could find and carry it to the office that I put it in my cabinet.

So, Yamamoto-san comes down and he comes in, we bow, for Shellye-san, Yamamoto-san. And "how are you?" We do our greetings. And I say to him, I said, "You know, listen, I've met with Ihara-san, so I understand your agenda." And he said, "This meeting is an introductory meeting." And Yamamoto-San is nodding his head. And I said, "It's a chance for us to get to know each other." And he nods his head. And I said, "In the heart said, said, like, it's like our first date. Right?" And he nodded his head. And so I then open up the cabinet. Now, this is either going to go really, really well or really badly.

I open up the cabinet and I pull out the flowers. And I said, "So I bought you flowers for our first date."

And he looks at the flowers and he looks at me eyes wide open, I mean, he had to be 57, 58 years old, eyes wide open.

And I'm thinking, "Uh-oh", and then he burst into laughter. It was great. So, it was a great icebreaker. It works fine. Yeah, it was funny, but it ended up being a very successful stint for me for a couple of reasons.

One is I'm used to being a minority.

I've been in the minority my entire career, so I know that what I've done doesn't come with me and I know people are probably underestimating me and I know I've got to prove it each time. So going to Japan, I did what I've always done, whereas a lot of people who go on an international assignment assume that everything they've done, their reputation all come with them and that people are just going to listen to them. So that gave me a leg up to, I think, be more successful more quickly. So, I tell women and people of color all the time, take international assignments. You actually have strengths that you don't even realize.

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting. OK, I love that. That's, that's a great story.

As a student of disruption, I frequently mention Blockbuster as having been disrupted by Netflix. And you did a very brief stint there and then you left. And I would love for you to tell our listeners what you discovered while you were there and therefore made the decision to leave quickly.

**Shellye Archambeau:** I left IBM to join Blockbuster for what I thought was the perfect stepping stone kind of job into the CEO job, and my mission was to be president of Blockbuster.com to stand up a division, launch a website that would start as offering information about the movies that they had made some chachkas, etc. and then ultimately could be the platform for when movies became available to deliver via the Internet.

So, this sounded super exciting, again, late 90s.

So, I get there and we get the website launched. We do some great deals, you know, marketing, et cetera. And I meet along the way, Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix. Now, Netflix at the time is a fledgling startup. They have some great technology they're building, but they don't have relationships with the studios. Right? And the outlets and those kinds of things, all of which Blockbuster had. But Blockbuster, we didn't really have technology. We're building the technology. And so, we're meeting each other at conferences. We got a chance to chat, et cetera. And then Reed and his team, a couple members of his team, came out and met with the CEO of Blockbuster.

And some of us, direct reports, and basically pitched, "Let's take Blockbuster, the brand, and Netflix, the technology, put them together and go conquer the world. And my boss basically laughed at that and said, "Oh, if that ever becomes something real, we'll just buy them then."

It was one of those moments where you're sitting there saying, "Wow, really?" So it became clear that they really didn't have the vision for where things were heading, and so that's why that's why I left.

**Whitney Johnson:** The disruption was right in front of them or the opportunity, and they just oh, it's a reminder, isn't it, that things can be right in front of us, but we have to choose to see them. Choose to see the opportunity, choose to see the danger.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, you know, we have thousands of business stories about those opportunities coming and going for companies. You know, IBM passed on buying Microsoft for like \$50,000. There's all kinds of stories about companies that have the opportunity. And it's... it's understandable because at the time they're doing well, they are making money. They are super profitable, and they're looking at something that's not even a kernel. So, it's understandable why it happens. But you're right, you have to have your eyes open and be constantly for who the disruptors could be in order to truly be able to act.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. Because you saw it and Reed Hastings saw it. So, it's just fascinating. I love this quote; I'm going to read it.

"I don't deal in drama; I deal in accepting reality and controlling what I can." But here you are now you're almost 40. You have a goal to be a CEO. By the time you're 40, you've been in the C suite, as a CMO, you're ready for that job. But it's 2002 in the middle and the first dotcom bubble. So, what did you do? What was your strategy to go about getting that CEO job?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yes, you're absolutely right, I mean, the dot com bubble had burst, and therefore, for those that aren't aware of that period of time, this is going back a few years. What that meant was, there were literally hundreds, if not thousands of companies that had gone out of business because they had built companies

based upon a model that did not value revenue and profits, and therefore, suddenly when the economy turned down, they couldn't they couldn't survive. So here you have companies imploding, going out of business. And basically, it was terrible. Just a huge, huge, bad environment for business. So here I am now ready for my CEO job. And the market in Silicon Valley is now littered with CEOs looking for jobs because their companies have gone under. So now I'm competing with a lot of people have had CEO experience. I haven't had any CEOs experience. So, I said, you know what? I'm not going to get a company where the investors believe that the company is going to succeed because they're going to give that to people, they know, folks with track records, et cetera. So let me go after something that's broken, that I can fix, because I've done a lot of turnarounds, done a lot of fix. But to improve the odds for success, I want to make sure that it's a company that is being invested in by top tier venture firms. And my rationale there was, you know, these firms hopefully do a better job of picking the winners, number one, but number two, if the company didn't make it after all, at least I created a relationship and I'd created a track record because I could see what I'm capable of with a top tier firm that would at least help me in my next opportunity. So I figured that risk reward was worth it. So I basically ended up taking a job for a company that was very broke. People like, "Why are you taking this job?" The company was losing money.

You know, it was not it was just not in good shape. But it was a Kleiner Perkins company, Randy Komisar was a partner who had been on the Midas touch list for having created just billions and billions of dollars of shareholder value. And so I said, "All right, this is the right fit. Broken company, good D.C. firm, good venture capitalist. I'm in." And that's why I took that job. So then you get in and of course, it's so much worse than you even think it is. You know, net-net on what I did was I had to find a problem for us to solve as a company that was an important problem that people were willing to spend money for to solve the problem because the current value proposition of the company was not hunting. So first, was find a problem, the good news is we found a problem. Now we've got to get the right company was called Zaplet at the time. I've got to turn Zaplet into the right company to be able to solve this problem. So I ended up combining with another company because I didn't have any money. Combining with another company to strengthen that overall value proposition that basically helped other companies manage risk and compliance, and then on that combined vision, we raised money and basically recasted the company into the new MetricStream and over lots of hard work in many years, but we became leaders in our space and MetricStream for every year, since 2008, has been a leader in governance, risk and compliance and now has customers all over the world, over a thousand employees and doing, doing very well.

**Whitney Johnson:** So you're there for how many years? 10 years. 11 years?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yeah, I was there for actually over a decade. It was almost 14.

**Whitney Johnson:** In our work, we use the S curve of Learning™ framework as a mental model for people to think about how they grow. And I know you're thinking about learning curves because you talked about it a few times in your book. And so when you're at the base of that S in your parlance, you've put yourself into that current, but you definitely fell out of your depth. You're not quite sure what you're doing. And you talked about that several times. And you also talked about a number of times when you felt like you were at the top of that S curve where, you, it was time to jump into a new current and the experience that you had, like when you left IBM. One thing I would love for you to just contemplate for a moment is there have been a number of times in your career when you felt like you're in the sweet spot. You're just right in the current. Can you talk about one of those experiences that maybe you haven't shared yet and what it looked like and what it felt like when you're in that place of the sweet spot and it is just working?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Oh, wow. So, yes, the answer is I've definitely had several, several of those experiences. We were definitely in the S curve in terms of, here we are, it's 2007 and we have been evangelizing, you know, the



whole comprehensive compliance and risk marketplace. We're signing now, big companies and we're working really hard and we're working with the analysts to get them to recognize that we think this is a new market category for enterprise software. So we get word, the late 2007, that sure enough, the analysts are indeed now evaluating this market as a separate market. And we're like, yes, right. It's starting to work.

And in 2008, Gartner, the big industry analyst for software. Gartner puts out their Magic Quadrant report, which basically says, "There's a new market. It's called Governance Risk and Compliance and MetricStream is a leader and it's like, yes, yes, right?"

So now the phones are ringing and it's wonderful, right? We're getting customers to call in. We're going to hire salespeople. We're going to expand our marketing. We're going to expand our deployment because it is now just working. We are in this groove and we are signing customers and it's wonderful. And we'll raise money in 2009 on all of our growth.

Well, that S curve lasted, you know, for about a year, right? 2007 and hit about third quarter of 2008 when the whole world changed. But that was definitely a time where we felt, we felt we were in the groove.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, love it. So tell us what you're up to today. So you've jumped to a brand new S curve, so tell us what you're doing now.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Certainly. So, I am now in what I refer to as my phase two, and I call it phase two because who knows, there might be a phase three. Phase four, I've no idea. But phase two was always for me the time when I was going to pass the baton on the always on operational job to one in which I was doing a portfolio of things where I could optimize for impact and inspiration. And so that is, impact, I serve on corporate boards, public corporate boards. I also serve on the boards of non-profits. It is inspiration, hence the book I wrote, which I hope is actually both inspiration and impact. I coach CEOs, I advise companies, so I am keeping myself very engaged. And then I also have passion projects that take up my time. I'm using my, my confidence and what I've learned to try to make a bigger impact and drive even more inspiration.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, your book certainly does that.

As you're in this impact and inspiration phase, you make some really interesting observations about mentoring. Can you share with us your formula for both finding as well as becoming a mentor? What does that look like? I was very intrigued.

Certainly so mentoring is so important. I have had so many mentors over the course of my career and I was fortunate, you know, about, I don't know, five or six years into my career, IBM decided that they wanted their high potential people to have mentors. And they were going to do something unique. They were going to ask each of these people who they wanted to be their mentor. I said, "OK, so I got a call saying, Shellye, you're on this program. We should have a mentor. Who would you like to be your mentor?" So I thought about it and I chose a gentleman by the name of Roland Harris, who was a couple levels above me. I knew him. He knew me. I thought he liked me. And I said, "OK, Roland would be a good mentor." So I put his name down. Well, several days later, I got a call and it's Roland. And he says, "Shellye, you put down my name to become your mentor." And I said, "Well, yeah, yeah. Roland, I, you know, I thought I thought you liked me." And he said, "Shellye, you've got me pick somebody else." And what I took from that was number one, he's already my mentor, so I have mentors I don't even know about? number one. And then two, I can have as many mentors as I want. Wow. Right. Then I'm going to start treating more people like my mentor. And first I thought, "Oh, great, I can have as many as I

want? I'll just ask people to be a mentor." And what I found was people have almost a visceral reaction when you ask them to be your mentor, because the people you ask are the people that are busy. Right? The people that are engaged and are the ones that don't have time. And so when they hear mentor, what they hear is, "Oh, my God, time commitments." Right? And they don't even know what's going to be worth it, if you're serious. Nothing. So you know what, I said, "I'm going to stop asking people. I'm just going to start treating people like mentors. So I'm going to adopt them." And literally, I spent my career adopting mentors. I would just start easy, which was ask them a very simple question that didn't take any time or any effort on their part. And they give me their answer and then I'd go implement it or try it. And then I'd get back to them and let them know how helpful that was. And then I'd followed up again. And I just kind of rinse and repeated. And what I found was many people are actually terrible mentees. Terrible.

If you're a terrible mentee then people don't want to mentor you, and I think it's one of the things that turns mentors off because a mentor-mentee relationship is a relationship, which means both parties have to get something out of it. So if all you're doing is tapping somebody for knowledge and answers and what have you. But you never give them anything in return, they're not getting much out of it. Now, what can you give them, you say? "Because there are several levels above you there, the set and the other, they don't need you." Wrong. What they want to know is, are they actually having an impact or are you actually taking any of their suggestions?

Is anything they're saying helpful? You know, people don't close the loop and because they don't close the loop, the mentor never knows. Was that 15 minutes even worth my time? Right? So we need to be better mentees. If you ask for advice or you ask for counsel, then take it or don't take it, but then come back to your mentor and let them know you took it or you didn't. And why or what happened. Was it impactful, was it helpful?

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok, couple final questions, so in your book, you gave this lovely, lovely tribute to your husband. It seemed to me you're really clear about all of the things that he did for you and your family. And yet, as I think about it, in good marriages and partnerships, both partners feel like they're getting the best end of the deal. That they're getting way more than they ever give. And so, I wondered if he were here, what would he say about you? I mean, it's clear that he felt from the get-go that he was the luckiest man on the planet, that you were willing to marry him. But what would he say? What did he say that he loved about you?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Oh, my gosh. My husband, he loves my ambition. He loves my courage. He loved how much I enjoyed people, you know, we had a lot of fun. We did a lot of things. I very much, you know, built and expanded kind of what was our social scene. And I know he absolutely appreciated that. He loved how I loved him. And I would say we saw ourselves as partners. I wanted a life partner and a spouse. That's what I wanted, and so that's what I set out to find. And he did too.

He did, too. He wasn't even planning on getting married. He'd been married once before for like three or four years and early, early in his life. And he told me when I met him, he wasn't looking for a wife. Because he didn't think he'd find somebody that would be a true partner and, and that's what we had. So I would have, yes, I would have married... We were married for almost 35 years and I would tell them all the time, knowing everything I know, because, trust me, no relationship is perfect. Everybody's a package.

But I tell my kids all the time, "Everybody's a package. The key is finding the package that works for you." And he was the perfect package for me. And I absolutely would have married him all over again at any point in our marriage.

**Whitney Johnson:** So lovely. I just wanted to call that out because embedded in this book is also a beautiful love story. So you wrote this book, *Unapologetically Ambitious*. How did you hit on the book title?

**Shellye Archambeau:** So I finished writing the book, really, so I thought I was finished writing the book about a year and a half ago now and I still had no title. I knew that I wanted ambition in the book title because, you know, if we're told we're ambitious, especially a woman or person of color and I'm both, it's not a compliment. And I always thought that was ridiculous. Everybody has the right to be ambitious. So I wanted ambition in there, but I hadn't figured out how to put this title together. And I was literally having a conversation with a group of friends, brainstorming, talking about things. And this whole thing about apologizing came up. And I made the comment. I said, "You know, I feel that women are raised from birth to apologize." We apologize, yes when we've done something wrong that's probably five, 10 percent of the times we apologize. All the rest of the "I'm sorrys" are to make people feel better, to show empathy, to smooth feathers, to create a connection. Right. To show people that you understand how they feel. We use "I'm sorry," like people you salt on their food. It just makes it all a little better. A little smoother. Right? And the problem is, we're the only ones that get that. The guys don't get that.

So we're saying I'm sorry all the time. They think that we really are sorry. And if we're sorry, we're probably not capable because we obviously do everything wrong and we have no confidence. You know, it came to light to me with my husband. I mean, he would step on my foot and I'd say, "Oh, sorry," because obviously my foot was in the way. Ok, it was just ridiculous.

And he wouldn't say he's sorry for stepping on my foot. He'd say, "Be careful, OK?" So I said to him, I said, "Babe, you never apologize." This is early in our marriage. And he said, "What are you talking about? I apologize." I said, "No, you don't." I said... he said, "Shellye, I do. If I've done something wrong and it's completely my fault, I apologize." Woah, listen to that statement, "If I've done something wrong, wrong, right, an accident, isn't wrong, and it's completely my fault." So, yes, stepping on my foot, was that wrong and completely his fault? Well, no, he didn't do it on purpose, right. So, anyway, a completely different definition. So we're having this conversation. And then I said, "You know what? That's it. That's it. We have a right to be ambitious and we shouldn't apologize for it." So *Unapologetically Ambitious*.

**Whitney Johnson:** I completely agree. OK, so where can people find this book and where can they find you? And by the way, everybody, she has agreed to give away five copies of her book. So we'll tell you in the outro how you can get them. But thank you, Shellye, for offering to give your book. But where can people buy the book and when is it out?

**Shellye Archambeau:** Yes. So it's out on October 6th, but you can preorder it now. And if you liked anything you heard, please preorder. It means the world to new authors. You can find it on Amazon, Barnesandnoble.com. You can order from your local bookstores and please do because they need help. Just call them up. So it's anywhere, anywhere that you shop for books, it's available. You could find out more information about it at [www.unapologeticallyshellye.com](http://www.unapologeticallyshellye.com). And you can find me on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, please connect. Just reference this podcast and I'll connect with you. I also have a Web site that's shellye, s-h-e-l-l-y-e, .com and I put posts and musings. I'm really just trying to share what I've learned so that other people can achieve their ambitions and their aspirations.

**Whitney Johnson:** Everybody, we will include all of that in the show notes. All right. So to wrap us up today, Shellye, if you will, turn to the last paragraph of Chapter two and read whatever you would like from that paragraph that you think will speak to us.

**Shellye Archambeau:** For now, if you take anything away from this chapter, take this: "Life isn't fair. That's OK. Life isn't impossible either, it's just unfair, it is not your fault that things are harder for you, but you must not let it harden you. Don't blame yourself and don't waste your energy blaming others. If you allow life's injustices to define you, they will. But if you choose to define yourself, to believe in yourself and align yourself with others who believe in you. You will find a way to live the life you want."

**Whitney Johnson:** Shelley Archambeau, thank you so much for being with us.

**Shellye Archambeau:** Thank you so much for having me, Whitney. I've really enjoyed it.

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As we reflect on and often struggle with our own S curve of Learning™ journey, it's interesting to think about Zaza's story. To the outside world, it may have looked like he had reached the pinnacle of his career, his S curve, in his eight years with the Atlanta Hawks, but in many ways, this was just the beginning. According to Zaza, he became a better athlete, a better teammate in and through the disruption of leaving Atlanta, leaving his comfort zone. This jump gifted him new experiences, new approaches to the game, new teachers, game changers, helping him learn the importance of create versus compete when it comes to a team. His career from there went on a steep upward trajectory, but it wasn't without challenges. Now, in San Francisco, he was being eviscerated by social media. Fortunately, Steve Kerr saw he was struggling and helped him refocus. It made me wonder, though. Do I, Do you, do we, when we see people on our team are struggling... Do we help them get their head back in the game? Do we even notice they're struggling? Finally, I loved hearing about the choices that Zaza has made, bringing in a personal coach when he first started in the NBA, being willing to be taught not only by the coaches, but by veteran players who could have been threatened and learning to put his team's success over his own, as he shared in our interview, hard work always pays off.

It may not result in what you expected, but it develops you. It makes you better. It always pays off.

Thank you again to Zaza Pachulia for being our guest. Thank you to our team, Jennifer Brotherson, Sarah Duran, Whitney Jobe, Melissa Rutty and Nancy Wilson.

I'm Whitney Johnson and this is Disrupt Yourself.