

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 188: MARCUS WHITNEY

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 Marcus Whitney and what a story he has to tell.

At age 20, Marcus was a college dropout. He had a one year old child and another on the way. He was living in a week-to-week efficiency hotel, but over time, he taught himself software development and became the head of technology for and a partner in the firm, Emma Email Marketing.

Today, Marcus is co-founder of Jumpstart Foundry, one of the most active health care VC firms in the U.S.. He's the CEO of Health Further, a health care strategic advisory firm and co-founder and part owner of the Nashville Soccer Club, Nashville, Tennessee's Major League Soccer team. He hosts the Marcus Whitney's Audio Universe and a YouTube channel, Marcus Whitney's Video Universe, both of which focus on how he's dealt with depression, decades of unaddressed trauma, and how quitting drinking and starting the practice of meditation have turned his life around.

Basically, he talks about how he's disrupted himself over and over and over again. Finally, Marcus is the author of the Amazon bestseller *Create and Orchestrate: The Path to Claiming your Creative Power from an Unlikely Entrepreneur*. Marcus, welcome and thanks for joining us.

Marcus Whitney: Whitney. Thank you so much for having me. It's such an honor.

Whitney Johnson : You've recently written a book titled *Create and Orchestrate*. Will you tell us how you decided that you not wanted, but needed to write this book?

Marcus Whitney: Five years ago, I started the process of looking up as, as you would. When you're climbing a mountain, you spent a lot of time looking down and making sure you don't slip. Uh, the terrain is always changing, and you need to make sure your footing is solid. And so I was really, really focused on climbing the mountain away from poverty where I was when I dropped out of college and had a one-year-old and another child on the way and was waiting tables six and a half days a week to financial security, quite frankly, and being able to take care of my boys. And so, I was just focused on getting away from that situation that I found myself in. And 15 years later, I looked up and I realized, wow, I've been able to learn entrepreneurship without even really thinking about doing it. I learned software development and taught myself, uh, how to be a coder. And a way before the revelation of coding as a path to economic mobility was fashionable. Um, I started to find myself on really influential boards in Nashville, Tennessee, and uh, my, my circles of influence really changing a lot. And I also noticed that I was the only black person in my age group who was in a lot of the circles that I was in. Specifically, leadership and technology, venture capital, professional sports, things of that nature. And so, I realized that what I had experienced over the previous 15 years would be valuable if I could really codify it, wrap my own narrative into a good book and get it out into the world.

And so that was the beginning of a five-year journey of writing, *Create and Orchestrate*.

Whitney Johnson: Did you enjoy writing the book? Was it a fun process for you?

Marcus Whitney: The end of writing the book was fun.

Whitney Johnson: You mean when it was finished, or you mean toward the end?

Basically... Basically when it was finished.

This is the hardest thing I've ever done for several reasons. One, Whitney, you know, writing a book the first time is pretty difficult because you're not really an author when you start. You are when you finish. And the process of learning how to write a book was very, very difficult. I had written blog posts and, you know, lots of emails and memos and notes and things like that, online articles. But a book, something substantial, 50,000+ words, 250+ pages with structure that actually will engage people the entire time and is not just one of these business books that is 250 pages, but could have been 25 is really, really difficult. And then I think it was a revealing process for me because as I started to write the book, I realized, uh, A, I wasn't quite done learning everything I needed in order to write the good book. So that was part of the five-year journey. Part of it was that I needed to be more honest with myself. And the easiest way to do that is being more honest with the reader.

So, um, it was hard to get to the point where I got comfortable talking about a lot of my own failures because that's where most of my really important lessons came from, not the successes that I had. So that was very difficult.

It was a hard process.

Whitney Johnson: You think about your life or anybody thinks about their life and the things that are almost always the best stories, almost always are superpowers almost always come from some type of failure. And when there's failure, there's some type of shame. You'll have these great stories. And people probably were saying to you, as you're writing the book, "You should tell that story." You're like, "I don't want to tell that story." And then it always... It's the shame. It's always the shame. And that's where the gold is, right?

And so, I'm just curious, is there one story in the book that you were like, "I don't want to tell that story" and all of your friends and your family were saying "You have to tell that story!?" Was there one of those stories that you can recall that, that fits that category?

Marcus Whitney: So, I was not very open with the book while I was writing it, but my wife, who we got married right around the time when I committed to doing the book, she really had to be there for the entire struggle.

And so, one of the stories was, was one that she lived through with me that was entirely shameful, which was the way I sort of carried myself around an awards ceremony, for a technology award. And it was it was early in my career as an entrepreneur. I didn't really understand priorities or the press or how to stay focused. And, um, I got really upside-down about not winning an award. I was embarrassed that I didn't win the award, but far more embarrassed looking at my behavior years later, looking at the way that I carried myself and I just was not a good loser.

And it also was a very poor sense of prioritization for myself as a leader of a company to to be valuing this, this award in the way that I did. And so, we were at this award ceremony and surprise, surprise, I'd had too much to drink that night. And that and the president of the Technology Council was a friend of mine.

And I was like, you know, I wasn't like yelling at him, but I was kind of yelling at him, you know, because I didn't win the award. And, and, you know, I had to, like, put it into a cab that night. It's just, you know, it was just kind of bad. And I wrote about it, you know, because that experience, not right away, but over the course of years, really helped me to frame my much healthier relationship with the press and with awards and understanding how to engage with, with that entire phenomena, because it's a, it's a really weird thing that you don't get a ton of guidance on when you're early in your business leadership career.

Whitney Johnson: That's so valuable. And it's just so hard, isn't it, Marcus? You know, I think about our very first accelerant of personal disruption. It's take the right risks, take on market versus competitive risk, which is this idea of create versus compete. And people are like, "Well, but you have to compete."

And I'm like, "No, what I mean when I say compete because I'm not saying you're not going to try to be competitive, but it's, it's when you want to win just to win versus what are you going to create? What are you going to build?" And it is so hard. I find that in our company, and it sounds like you do this as well, is that we're constantly having to say "Create, don't compete. Create, don't compete." Because that siren song of competing and wanting to be better and wanting to, you know, be higher in the rankings, it's just, it's tough. It is tough. So, I am so glad that you were willing to share that. And you also had a little bit of a midwife in your life who helped to birth, to help birth that story.

Isn't that how you came into business as a professional web developer, as you did a swap, right, with a midwife?

Marcus Whitney: That's right. That's right.

The very first gig that I got as a self-taught web developer was bartering a shiny new flash technology-based website with a midwife in exchange for her services with the birth of my second son. And I love that site. Even today, when I think back on that work, it was a fair deal. I'll just say that, it was a fair deal. I worked really, really hard on that site. You know, it ended up being a portfolio piece for my very first job that I got as a professional developer.

Whitney Johnson: I love the symbolism. It was the birth of your son and the birth of your career.

Marcus Whitney: That's right. That's right.

Whitney Johnson: So, in your book, you talk about eight core concepts. Will you talk us through them at a high level? And then you mentioned I think, you can correct me if I'm misremembering, that marketing is your favorite. So, talk us through at a high level the concepts and why marketing is your favorite.

Marcus Whitney: Sure. If I can just maybe step back a little bit and just give a little reason why I even created these core concepts.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, yes, please.

Marcus Whitney: I'm a college dropout who over time has learned that I learn by doing and I then learn by accumulating new knowledge, by wrapping it in the context of what I already understand. So, I'm, I'm really like a generalist, but I use one thing and parlayed it into learning the next thing. And so, software development being sort of the first part of my career was really, really instrumental in the way that I looked at everything that came after it and business was no different. So, somebody who never went to business school, didn't really understand

accounting, didn't really understand operations or any of those types of really important business things. I was learning consistently by making mistakes.

And, and every time I would make a mistake, I would sort of like jot it down and then try to like organize it, say, "Where does this fit in the overall structure of a business? How do I make sense of this wild organism that is this business I'm trying to run?"

And ultimately, what I came up with is something that is very commonly used in the world of software development, which is a framework.

Software developers use frameworks when the very same things are necessary every single time, and you don't want to rewrite them.

You know, something that that if you've been in the software development industry kind of a joke is that programmers are lazy and that's good because they never want to write the same code twice. So they'll write one piece of code that they can use over and over and over again. And my goal with the eight core concepts was to come up with a framework that would capture the most essential things in every single business. It needed to actually work for 100 percent of businesses, regardless of industry, regardless of really, I would say even jurisdiction or anything like that. What are the essential things and then what is the context of those essential things? Meaning how do they relate to each other? What's the most important, what's the least important and how do they flow? So that was that was how I came up with the eight core concepts really over 20 years ago.

Whitney Johnson : Through the lens of a software developer, right?

Marcus Whitney: It is.

The eight the core concepts have, have two high level contexts. There are four in each context. One is inside of the building, one is outside of the building. When I say inside the building, I basically mean you and your team. Outside of the building, I mean the market and your customers.

And they flow in, in an order of priority. And they also use something in computer science called inheritance. I'll explain that at the end. So starting at the top, inside the building starts with leadership. Then it moves to finance, then it moves operations and then it moves to a concept I called growth. We could talk quite a bit about growth, I think Disrupt Yourself has a lot to do with growth and then the outside of the building concepts start with product. So now we're at the fifth concept, product, then goes to service, then goes to sales and then goes to marketing.

So in that list of eight concepts, the most important one is leadership. The least important one is marketing. But the trick to me saying most important and least important is that as you go down the list, the next concept inherits everything from the previous one. So leadership is embedded in everything. So leadership is in finance and then inside of operations, you have both leadership and finance all the way down to marketing. So while marketing is the least important, it is the most comprehensive. Marketing has to contain every single aspect of the business in the way that it operates and that it engages with the market to generate demand for your business. It is just a really relatively simple way to understand all of the core concepts of business and to also look at yourself and say, "Listen, you don't have to be great at all of these concepts, but you do have to understand them well enough to run the business because you can never really delegate leadership. And even if you hire someone in any of these other concept areas, you have to be able to ultimately hold them accountable for the work."

If you don't understand it at the highest level, then you can't really do that.

So when I started, for example, as an entrepreneur off of a really successful career as a technology leader, I thought I was ready.

I was very close to the co-CEOs of Emma at the time, Clint Smith and Will Weaver. And I was like, "You know, I know how to do this." And as soon as I got out on my own, what I realized was I knew technology, so I knew aspects of operations. Um, I knew sales, I knew customer service. So I knew service. And I knew, I knew product.

I didn't really know marketing. In the biggest areas that I had issues in were, uh, finance and, and broader operations really around sort of HR legal, compliance and things of that nature.

And those were the fundamental things, you know, finance and operations. Those were the fundamental things that kept, kept killing me, you know? In the first several years of business, kept really, really messed me up. And so I realized I had to get a layman's degree in those things and learn how taxes worked... How creating business models worked... How creating financial models worked... How, what were the most important reports that I needed to understand every single month from a financial perspective... What was a PNL... Payroll taxes... All of those kinds of things that you just, you have to know in order to run a business.

Whitney Johnson : So first of all, this is so elegant.

I mean, that is the only word that comes to my mind is just the elegance and the simplicity and the order of this is just beautiful. And I love this idea of marketing being the baby. Like leadership is the granddaddy and marketing is like three or four generations descended. But it's just so elegant. One of the things that you said in your book that I found fascinating is that the universal language in the world is not English or Chinese, but business. And then you said, "You don't need credentials or anyone's approval to speak it." And a lot of entrepreneurs, a lot of people I know a lot of my life, I've had total credential. And because I have a music degree, I don't have a graduate degree. I don't have a technology degree. And you say people get hung up on having the right credentials or background to succeed. Can you just talk people through, um number one, how you learned to become a programmer because you're completely self-taught. I mean, you started when you were young, but you're self-taught. And then for people who are thinking, "Well, I have to have the credentials," but they don't really. As you're now a venture capitalist and you're vetting investments, how do you figure out, "OK, yeah, you know, I'm going to take a bet on this person. It's completely nontraditional or background, but I'm taking a bet." How, what metrics do you use? Because you can't use a college degree as a proxy to decide you're going to make a bet on someone. There's a lot of questions there, but I'll let you start wherever you want.

Yeah, so software development worked for me because I started in the year 2000, it was the dot com boom. It was all over the news and I, as a college dropout, was seeing on TV, because keep in mind, iPhone hadn't happened yet.

iPhone was seven years away. So I was watching TV and I was seeing high schoolers riding around in skateboards making, you know, \$80,000-100,000 programming Web sites. And so that was the, that was the hack for me. I was just like, "If they can do it, then I can do it." And so I just went about the process of learning. I also had my back against the wall. I mean, you know, it needs to be said that I was living in a week-to-week motel and waiting tables, six and a half days a week with a one year old and another child on the way. So I had to do something. You know, I did not have the leeway or the slack in my life to let a whole lot of doubt manifest.

I just had to kind of figure out what was going to work, what was the best option I had, and then get to work at that. Generally speaking, having your back against the wall is helpful for removing a lot of the extraneous narratives that aren't helpful and wherever you're trying to go.

Having said that, I had that experience. It was successful. I did get the first job and, um, then got another job and then got another job and was making more and more money. And so that experience really showed me that credentials didn't matter as much as efficacy. And then the third job that I got was at a startup. And that was where I learned about value creation. Um, it was where I really learned about innovation and value creation, you know. 2003, email marketing was a big deal. Again, the iPhone was four years away from that point, right.? And so, um, Facebook wasn't a thing. It's so crazy to think about that, right? But, but Facebook wasn't a thing.

And so the digital advertising space was completely banner ads, right?

You know, so, so the idea that you could market through email was a relatively new idea. And these two gentlemen that I happened to meet and hired me as the fifth employee at their company were early on in that wave and created a unique product with a unique value proposition.

And I've watched them grow their idea into a multi-million dollar business that, you know, when I left, had hired 50 people, but went on to hire hundreds and be acquired by Campaign Monitor and, you know, just do really, really well. And, and that had nothing to do with their credentials. They both happened to graduate from, from college. But I knew them. And it was really clear to me that while they probably got good skills in, uh, writing, that wasn't the core of what they were utilizing. They were learning every day. You know, it was their ability to learn every day and to experiment and try and their bravery. That grew that company. And so I had that experience.

And then I realized, "Wow, you know, entrepreneurship is about creating value in the market and colleges can't really keep up with where technology is taking us." And so the credentials, quite frankly, mean less and less in a world where it is about, as you said, what are you creating? There are angles where they give you core skill sets to create, so you think about engineering and, you know, most of the sciences are really helpful for that.

But the rest of it, you kind of can learn on your own, you know?

I think we're now at this point, especially given, given the pandemic and a lot of the challenges around education and campuses and Google coming out with career certificates where we're finally having the honest conversation that says, "Look, in the last 20 years because of the Internet, uh, the world has radically changed. Radically.

Whitney Johnson : Yeah.

Marcus Whitney: We're still all holding on to the previous century's narrative.

And, uh, as somebody who has experienced unbelievable economic mobility, from where I was 20 years ago to where I am today, um, I just thought it was, it was my responsibility to share my story and share that this is a, this is a universal truth. This is not a Marcus Whitney special thing. This is a "I leaned into this path and part of why it worked for me is because so few people were doing it. More people should be doing it."

Whitney Johnson : Yeah. And something you said that I love this. Entrepreneurship is replacing education as the great equalizer.

Marcus Whitney: Education's going the other way.

The costs for value, the ROI equation is so poor right now that it's not an equalizer. It's burying people financially. The college degree is a really tough future's investment. It's not really an equalizer.

Whitney Johnson : Fascinating to think of it in that context.

Marcus Whitney: And they are just overdue for looking in the mirror and reinventing.

Whitney Johnson : The story that you told in the book about when you were a little kid, you had that IBM computer, so that when you came to teaching yourself, you weren't coming to it completely cold. Can you just tell that story briefly?

Marcus Whitney: My uncle, my mother's oldest brother, was a programmer in upstate New York at IBM. And IBM was computing back then, right? Microsoft Windows wasn't really a thing back when I was a young person. And, um, he gave me an IBM PC junior, which, you know, like all the computers back then, ran on floppy disks and had very, very little power, very little memory. And so back then, you know, ran programs like Oregon Trail across like five floppy disks. So if you wanted the computer to do something, you had to learn how to program it in a language called basics. You had to learn some basic programming.

So nine, 10 years old, it was one of my pastimes. If I wasn't playing Little League Baseball or hanging out with my friends, watching baseball or, or wrestling or something, I was in my basement programming on my IBM PC Junior, very, very basic stuff. Nothing crazy.

But what's interesting is just as learning a language, a spoken language when you're young is more likely to stick just the way that we learned at that age... when I learned the basics of programing at nine and 10 years old, when I went to reapproach it in my early 20s, I was able to recall the, the basic understanding of it.

And I know that there was incredible value created when I was nine and 10 because I've talked to other people who are trying to learn programing from scratch and some of the basics are very, very hard for them to understand. I was very, very fortunate in that way to have had an uncle who was a programmer. And so I understood that it was possible for me to be that professionally and also gave me the computer to be able to learn.

Whitney Johnson : I bet that's been a fun conversation to have with your uncle to, to thank him for that that gift that he gave you. And he probably didn't think much about it. And yet it's been so, so formative for you getting that one gift from your uncle as a child. You know, the other thing I'm thinking about is you're saying that is, as adults, for us to really look at things that we did like to do as children that were fun for us, that were entertaining, because in those things that we enjoyed, there is likely some aptitude, some, the seeds of something that we could be doing now. And I think it's a great place for us to look at our strengths and, you know, kind of uncover, "Well, what did I like to do when I was nine or eight?" And, and those things that we were good at, are we using them? Are we bringing them to bear on whatever it is we're doing as adults?

Marcus Whitney: It is. And we lose connection with that part of ourselves when we become adults. You know, the world gets so serious and we have all these really hard things to deal with. And, and we forget that we used to be kids, you know, and we used to just have fun.

And all of us used to create in some way, shape or form, even, even if it was our own little world with our toys. I love that you are so anchored in the importance of creation. And obviously the title of my book that's about entrepreneurship, but it's called *Create an Orchestra*. It's not called *How to Buy a Franchise*, right? You know what I mean?

Like, um, creating is, is a fundamental human capability, fundamental. Everything that we use and everything that we see that was not produced by nature, a human created it. That's a lot of stuff, so we are fundamentally creative beings and so many of us don't tap into that and don't claim that part of ourselves, right? Especially when we work in, um, arts like finance or operations or law or, you know, things like that. We don't see the creativity in those things. And I, I always want to encourage people to see how they are creating in those things that they're doing.

Whitney Johnson : So we're talking about fun. And now we're going to talk about depression for just a minute. I think it's just so... I know what a great segway. But you've talked a little bit about that and unaddressed trauma and it's difficult for everyone. But I think it's especially difficult for men. And I thought because you were willing to talk about it, I would love for you just to share briefly, how did you decide to get into therapy and was there a tipping point? So that if there's anybody who's listening and thinking, "I can't do this, it's too hard, it's too uncomfortable," that maybe something that you share will help them do that work that they've been feeling they need to do but weren't quite ready to do.

Marcus Whitney: I'm always open to talk about trauma, depression, and I will say I generally have not suffered from a real strong clinical depression, but I drank a lot and drinking definitely exacerbates depression. It is a depressive agent. You know, for me it was I hit my own form of a bottom. You know, there wasn't a particular big blow up kind of thing. My son enlisted in the Marines and he went off to boot camp. And the next day I stopped drinking. For me, it was a buildup of feeling pretty out of control and not just like, you know, in my behavior, but more in terms of my life and the way that I saw myself in my life. And I just knew that I couldn't continue the way that I was going. I also was in my 40s and starting to feel the health effects of, of drinking a lot more. I wanted to be healthy for much longer period of time and started to just connect the dots that I wasn't doing myself any favors by drinking regularly.

I just had had enough. And I think that's where most people get when they decide that they are going to make a serious change. I started therapy and, and I stopped drinking. And I think what had happened in the first session, I went in and I said all the things like the things I had never said to anybody else.

And her response normalized what I said.

And that was huge, right? Because when I said all those things, I was saying all the shameful things that, you know, I, I don't want to say everybody has. But I assume most people do.

Whitney Johnson : We all do. Yeah.

Marcus Whitney: Right?

Whitney Johnson : Yeah. Of course.

Marcus Whitney: I went in and I said, I said all the shameful things and she did not respond like, "Oh my God, you are... Oof. We've got a lot of work to do."

You know, it was much more like, "OK, cool, got it." You know? And, and I think in that instant I realized, "Oh... I am not a lost cause. I'm not inherently bad." And she started to educate me about trauma and how trauma shows up in the way that we show up in the world when it's unaddressed.

And it took me about 30 days to realize that my drinking was a coping mechanism for my inability to deal with unresolved trauma.

And that if I was going to be in therapy, I really didn't need to drink, so I stopped.

Whitney Johnson : Yeah, I just want to say a couple of things. Trauma comes in lots and lots of different varieties and packages.

And so most people have some sort of unresolved trauma. And I think that's, you know, important for us to all acknowledge. And then I love how you described it. Sounds like, you know, they talk about one of the keys to our healing is just to have someone bear witness to our loss. And what that therapist gave you in that moment is that she bore witness to your loss and allowed you to begin the healing process. It's really... it's really beautiful.

Marcus Whitney: I think you nailed it, you know? It is really important and I didn't understand this, but it is really important to understand that most people, especially in childhood, have experienced some, some form of trauma and often have not resolved it.

It shows up in some type of dysfunctional behavior that you probably don't love about yourself, you know?

Whitney Johnson : No, we don't.

Marcus Whitney: You know, and you don't love it because, you know, it's not you. But, but you're kind of stuck with it. Therapy can help you to process these traumas and help you to let these things go.

And then you can actually be free.

Whitney Johnson : That's what growing up is, right? Growing up is finally becoming our self, I think.

In your TED talk, you say something really interesting that sometimes you have to lie.... and I love this because it's embedded within the word believe. Sometimes you have to lie to yourself in order to believe something is true about yourself. And I thought it was interesting because you had talked about this idea of talking about it from a programming standpoint, but it sounds like you had to also do it as a writer.

Marcus Whitney: What I tried to articulate through the whole "sometimes you have to lie a little bit" is that when I started my journey towards becoming a software developer, I, at a certain point, I just started saying, "I am a software developer."

I was doing it every day. I wasn't getting paid for it. I wasn't very good, but I didn't qualify it. I didn't say I was, uh, employed software developer or I was a good software developer. I just said "I'm a software developer." And the more that I said that to myself and the reason why I say it's a lie is because other people would qualify it, right?

And so other people would say, "You're a software developer, but you're waiting tables. No buddy, you're a waiter."

"I am a software developer," and that's what I, that's what I told myself all the time, all the time. What happened over time was the environment I found myself in every day, which was the restaurant and the kitchen and tables that I was serving, made less and less sense. And it really started to increase the intensity with which I was studying and applying for jobs and going to use a group meetings and staying up late, practicing because my environment was not matching what I was telling myself every day, which was "I'm a software developer." I wasn't even negating the being a waiter. It was more affirming what I am.

Whitney Johnson : Did you do that with your book? "I am a writer."

Marcus Whitney: I did. I did. But it was hard. It was hard. Because I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what, Whitney... I'm so glad you asked that you're the first person to ever ask me this, and I hadn't thought about it before. So this is a fantastic question.

I did, but I then started to qualify it when I said. "I am an author. And my first book will be a really good book."

Whitney Johnson : Hmm.

Marcus Whitney: And that was where things got difficult.

I just was not willing for my first book to not be really good. And that made the journey that much more difficult.

But I'm glad that I did that, um, and that I didn't quit because there were times where with, with that qualifier, it just it felt like I wasn't going to get there, honestly.

Whitney Johnson : Did you write a good book?

Marcus Whitney: I wrote a really good book.

Whitney Johnson : Yes, that was the right answer.

By the way, everybody, Marcus is making five copies available, signed copies available, to you all. If you want to be eligible for one of these copies write a podcast review, send it to us at wj@whitneyjohnson.com and tell us what you learned from this episode with Marcus and you will be eligible for a copy. So thank you, Marcus. I wanted people to know where they can buy the book.

Marcus Whitney: I'm selling signed copies. If you don't happen to get one of the five that we'll be giving away, I am selling signed copies of my own Shopify store, which is creativepower.co.

Whitney Johnson : As you were getting ready to launch this, you wrote something on LinkedIn that I thought was very powerful. Read us an excerpt from this letter that you shared.

Marcus Whitney: I hadn't read this post in a long time, so, so this is kind of fun.

All right, here we go.

"No, our inequity cannot be solved through economics alone. Certainly there are matters of justice, policy, and more that must be resolved, but America's inequity issues cannot end without addressing the underlying economic problems either. The systems that perpetuate the wealth gap anchored in slavery are core to the inequity in America. Economic disparities are not isolated to black people, but black people in America feel them the most. And because

I'm black, I understand these disparities deeply. They connect to everything; the quality of the food we eat, the health care we receive, the influence and politics we have, and more are all in some part connected to the wealth gap. Over the last 20 years, I've gone on the journey that has given me many valuable experiences and lessons about economics. I've distilled what I've learned down to the path of 'ownership through entrepreneurship."

Whitney Johnson : And I love that. You also said, "Being an entrepreneur is living from a position of power." *Create and Orchestrate*. Everyone go read his book. So inspiring. Thank you again for being here, Marcus.

Marcus Whitney: Thank you so much, Whitney.

I love his story, a young boy receives the gift of a computer. It makes me think about the childlike wonder that would eventually send Marcus up his steep and exciting learning curve journey. Programmer, designer, digital marketer, entrepreneur and now author.

Children with their wonderful imaginations are constantly looking to expand the parameters of what's possible.

As we enter the holiday season, I wonder about the gifts we will give, gifts that may spark the imagination of yet another generation.

Also, Marcus touched on something that I think we all need to hear... Sometimes success can camouflage unaddressed trauma. Too often we ignore what's happening under the surface. We wrongly believe our achievements mean that the past doesn't matter anymore. But unaddressed trauma will show up, as Marcus said, most often taking the form of some dysfunctional behavior, something that we do that we, we really don't like about ourselves.

Fortunately, he recognized this and sought help with the support of the therapist, he bravely explored the pain behind the behavior. He found healing in the telling. Something I suspect most of us can identify with.

Finally, I love Marcus's take on education, the importance of looking at the ROI of our educational dollars. The world is changing at a breakneck pace. If your careers technology, for example, a traditional four year degree may not be the best option. Other paths may make more sense. Spoken like a true disruptor.

If you enjoyed this episode and would like to be eligible for a copy of Marcus's book, *Create and Orchestrate*, go on Instagram and follow me @johnsonwhitney, then in the post for this podcast, tell us what you enjoyed about this episode and you will be eligible for one of five signed copies.

Thank you again to Marcus Whitney for sharing his time with us. And thank you to our team Jennifer Brotherson, Sarah Duran, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig, Melissa Rutty, and Nancy Wilson.

I'm Whitney Johnson and this is Disrupt Yourself.