

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 213: ELLEN BENNETT

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice on 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.

Today our guest is Ellen Bennett, CEO and founder of Hedley and Bennett. In 2012, Ellen Bennett was a line cook and a professional kitchen. When her boss was about to order new aprons, she said, "I'll make them instead." Ellen started with 40 aprons. A decade later, Hedley and Bennett has revenue of more than 20 million dollars. They sell to over 4,000 restaurants, and their clients include Martha Stewart, Mario Batali and Alton Brown. Currently in the sweet spot of her entrepreneurial S curve, Ellen has written a delightful book titled *Dream First, Details Later*, the book she wishes she would have had as a first-time entrepreneur. Ellen describes herself as half English, half Mexican. I would describe her as 100 percent disruptor.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ellen, thanks for joining us.

**Ellen Bennett:** Thank you, Whitney.

**Whitney Johnson:** Tell us a little bit about the title of your book. Why did you title it the way that you did?

**Ellen Bennett:** When I started Hedley and Bennett, I really wanted to find a book that resonated with me and it was really hard. Everything was very much black and white and not super descriptive, if you will. It was very businesslike, and I really wanted something that made me feel like I could do it and I could leap out into the world and make it happen, and it didn't exist. So, I decided to write it, and that's why I came up with the title *Dream First, Details Later*, which is really exactly what it says. It's about giving people the kick in the butt to leap out into life and to get going before you stop yourself.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, a lot of my listeners are going to be brand new to you, and I'm so excited, and just for everybody who's listening, I have on one of Ellen's aprons, a Hedley and Bennett apron. You can't see it very well, but they're very, very adorable and darling and masculine, too, for all you men. You have this fantastic origin story of how you started into business, and it's a perfect example, like you said, of dream first. Can you tell us a little bit of that origin story?

**Ellen Bennett:** Absolutely. And by the way, I will preface it and say that sometimes people hear, "Apron company? Like what does that have anything to do with me?" I could be selling ice cubes for all we care. The whole idea behind it is if you have an idea that you're super passionate about and you believe in it and it's filling a need, whether it's an apron or something else, it doesn't matter. It's just like, how are you approaching people with it?

So, I started Hedley and Bennett eight years ago. I hated our uniforms. I used to cook professionally, and it was while I was working at a two Michelin star restaurant that I realized that our gear stunk. It was bad. It didn't fit well. It didn't look good on men, women, you name it. It just was terrible, and I wanted to make it better for us. I'm also a runner and when I first started running, I got myself this amazing outfit from Nike and I put that gear on and I was like, "I am legit. I am doing this. I'm going to make things happen." And there was such a sort of head lifting for myself, if you will, that happened because of what I was wearing. I wanted to create that in the kitchen too, and these aprons are not they're not girly. They're proper. They're made to be worn and abused in the kitchen, right? They are durable, but when I first started Hedley and Bennett, nothing like that existed. Now it's a little bit more normal, but back in the day, it was quite the wild idea.

**Whitney Johnson:** Take us back to that moment and there's a story that you start the book with where you're cooking in the restaurant and your chef says, "I need aprons," paint that picture for us or cook that meal for us. What, what happened and what did you do and what did you say?

**Ellen Bennett:** I was 24 years old, climbing my way through the ranks of this really fine dining restaurant and my chef comes up to me and he says, "Hey, there's a girl, she's going to make us aprons. Do you want to buy one?" And I had literally just gone and gotten my, my "doing business as" essentially your, your business license in California a week or two earlier, and I felt so legit and official because I had a "doing business as" for my future apron company that I didn't even know when or where or how I was going to do it, and the chef said that to me, and in that split second, I felt like I needed to do something about this opportunity, and so I blurted out, "Chef, I have an apron company. I will make you these aprons. Why are you going to go with somebody else?"

And he's like, "What are you talking about? You're a line cook in my kitchen?" And I was like, "No, you don't understand. I have a 'doing business as.' This is going to be amazing. We're going to make the best aprons ever." And I convinced them right there on the spot to give me this order.

Whoever was going to make it didn't end up making them, and out of the blue, I had an order of 40 aprons. And really that jump started my company, Hedley and Bennett. When I got that order, I had nothing other than the "doing business as". I didn't have sewers. I didn't have a business plan. Nothing. Literally, just a lot of grit and hutzpah, apparently.

**Whitney Johnson:** And you delivered the aprons.

**Ellen Bennett:** You better believe I delivered the aprons, Whitney, but I'll tell you this, that first batch was terrible. He, within 24 hours, called me into his office because we worked together every day and he said, "Bennett, these aprons suck." And I was like, "Oh my God." I almost died right then and there, and he said, "The straps are falling off. They're not working. They're shriveling in a weird way. I don't like it." And I thought, "This guy is my first and only customer. I also work for him. I have a responsibility. I said I would deliver. I didn't. I got to make this right."

It was such a good learning experience for me at that moment, because I could have just thrown in the towel and said, "I'm sorry. I'll give you your money back," but instead I decided to take control of what had happened and make it right and so I did, and I had three or four days where I told them, "Give me half the aprons. Keep the other half. I'll fix these, then I'll return the other half and I'll give you the other ones fixed."

I came up with different straps. We developed the brass hardware that we use to this day. We came up with beautiful American webbing that's thick and comfortable that you are currently wearing, and it was with that sort of quasi gun to the head that I came up with a long-term solution that helped me for, for many, many years, but if I hadn't gone through that and taken the leap of faith, I don't know that I would have started Hedley and Bennett

necessarily. So, it wasn't a perfect beginning, but it never is, and that's the real truth of it. You just have to begin and survive the failures enough and realize that that's part of the journey.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, something that you talk about in your book, you mentioned six steps to go from good to awesome, and in this conversation with your boss, probably at that point it was all intuitive, this idea of going from good to awesome, but you've now written a book that you wish someone had written for you and you have codified it for all of us. What are some questions or steps that you and I can take in order to go from good to awesome? Which is basically your way of saying feedback, but I like how you say it, "good to awesome." What are some things that people can do, questions that people can ask?

**Ellen Bennett:** I think that feedback is a huge part of from going from good to awesome, right? One thing is to begin, and another thing is to evolve. Just because something was great at the beginning in your mind, you better believe you're going to learn a lot of things that are going to make you even stronger along the way. As an organization, we set up a lot of things that allow us to have constant feedback and to never feel like we've "made it," right? And so, there's this kind of belief within us that we have to never stop improving. So, that, that to me is a way to take you from good to awesome.

Another thing is being able to have very honest, candid conversations in general. Right. That's a, it's another form of feedback, if you will, and to be able to listen intently and not be defensive about it, but instead ask good questions and say, like, "Tell me more about that. Like what caused that thing that I did? That makes a ton of sense. That wasn't actually what I meant. So, let me try that again." And kind of like getting back on the horse, if you will. Kind of how what I did with my chef. You'll find that people really respect that, because a lot of times you get afraid when you make a mistake and you run. You run from the situation and this, what I'm saying is they don't run. This is the opportunity to actually dive in deep when the mistake happens.

**Whitney Johnson:** I know you have your book in front of you, so maybe you could open up the book. I think you have like six steps and maybe read us one or two of those specific steps, because I'm actually curious about this. Is this something that you do intuitively, or did you have to learn to do this, to, to be open to that feedback when, when your chef said, "This apron is terrible," and you were able to say, "Tell me more. Tell me more." Is that something you intuitively do, or have you had to train yourself?

**Ellen Bennett:** I have had to figure out how to get back up again and through experience and I guess it's training, right? Life training. You doubt some of these things.

So, the first one is, "What's working? The second one is, what is not working? Third, if there's an issue with the product or service you receive, what would you consider a successful resolution or if you're on the fence about your relationship, what would be a deal breaker for you? If there was an issue, what can we do to specifically resolve it? Is there any other way we can make it up to you? What else do you wish we had thought of?"

That's how it's read in the book, but the truth is, what I said about how I approached it is how I took it and made it real in life, and everything in here is about you adopting it and making it your own. So, what's working? You don't need to say literally what's working. You need to say like, "What did you like about it? How did you like, how did it fit? What did you think about the way it wore? Did you like how it looked? Was there anything that you maybe would change?" That's the same way of saying, "What's not working?"

Don't be so prescriptive when talking to people that you make them feel like you're a robot and they're a robot, right? People want to feel like humans, because we are. Like when you call AT&T and it's the worst experience ever and they're like, "What can I do for you? No, I can't help you with that. Goodbye. Go jump off of a bridge. See you later." And you're just like, "This is the worst customer experience of my life." You don't want to do that. Never make people feel like a transaction while you are going from good to awesome. Like, be relatable. Ask questions that you really want to feel like they're, like you're listening.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good.

OK, you're in your early twenties. You decide you're going to start a business and you pick up and you move to Mexico. Now, I understand you speak Spanish, but nonetheless, you pick up and you go to Mexico City, which is a very big, sprawling, sometimes overwhelming city. Couple questions around this. How did you get a job at TV Azteca, which is the big broadcasting station, as a person on air? That's my first question for you and then my second question is, what is your internal dialog when you're making these ostensibly, crazy....

**Ellen Bennett:** Wild decisions?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes.

**Ellen Bennett:** These giant, leap-off-the-dock-of-life decisions.

**Whitney Johnson:** Exactly.

**Ellen Bennett:** Dream first, details later. Definitely. When I moved to Mexico, I didn't technically "move to Mexico." I said, "I'm going to go for two months." That was the whole plan, and when I got there, I realized this was incredible. Everything about it just spoke to me. The world was so freaking alive in Mexico City and L.A. is vibrant and lively, but there was something about the energy in the air that I, it just, it connected to me, and being of Mexican descent myself, but born in the US, I had gone to Mexico a lot when I was little and this was just like, "All right, I'm an adult and I'm actually allowed to stay here now. I'm going to stay here."

So, it started off as a whim to go for two months that then turned into four years. That is how I got myself there and I think the moral of the story there is you don't always have a straight path in life, and you have to be willing to experience the curves along the way to find the next thing, but that's why forward progress and motion is so important. If I hadn't made the leap to go to Mexico, I wouldn't have realized how much I loved it. If I hadn't loved it so much, I wouldn't have gotten an opportunity to work at TV Azteca. If I hadn't done that, I wouldn't have gone to culinary school. So, there were, it was like each thing was just kind of like inching me forward on my journey, and I was willing to shift pathways along the way.

And let me tell you, as a 20 something year old with all my friends going to college, starting to get great jobs, I was like this weirdo who just leaped off the edge of the iceberg and decided to move to Mexico, wasn't even going to college yet, didn't know what she was doing. People were like, "Oh, I've just graduated and got a six-figure job." And I'm just like, "Oh, God." So, I got into TV Azteca, which is the equivalent of, I don't know, say, ABC and I got a job. One of the jobs was announcing the lottery on television, and it was, it was a job that I actually got because I was a substitute for somebody else who was a friend of mine, and she said, "Hey, I need to take the day off," or whatever, "Will you cover for me in this lottery announcer job?" And I was like, "Absolutely. That sounds so cool." And I went and did it and befriended everybody in the studio, and they're like, "She's awesome let's have her again." I'm a crazy Mexican American lady. You know, next thing you knew, I was like the full-time person and they actually ended up letting her go eventually, and they just gave me the full-time job. So, I became the lottery announcer, and, you know, I have to say, it was such a good experience for me because I learned how to talk to people about anything and everything. I learned how to present myself and sell and talk about things in a way that was really comfortable, because every day was millions of people waiting for their lottery numbers.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, your internal dialog, it sounds like at least going into Mexico City was you weren't moving to Mexico for four years. You were going there for a couple of months and you were going to just test it out and see what happens.

**Ellen Bennett:** That's right. That's right,

**Whitney Johnson:** Baby step.

**Ellen Bennett:** Baby step in the direction of forward.

**Whitney Johnson:** OK.

In your book, you tell a story of something that did not work. One could almost argue it felt catastrophic at the time. It's your volt story. Tell us the story and then I have two follow up questions, which is how long did it take you to get to the point where you could tell the story...

**Ellen Bennett:** Oh gosh. That's a great one.

**Whitney Johnson:** ... and what are some of the lessons that we can all take away? So, this story is fantastic. Regale us.

**Ellen Bennett:** We had an order, you know, at this point of my journey of starting Hedley and Bennett, I was very much still willing things into existence. I thought I could just, like, shine my way through everything, just make it work. If you smile big enough, it'll all kind of fall into place. Well, that wasn't always the case. So, I got this incredible order, 150 aprons for Bryan Voltaggio, who at the time was one of the biggest chefs that had ever ordered from Hedley and Bennett and it was my biggest order to date. He had a whole restaurant transformation that was happening, and he was so excited to incorporate Hedley and Bennett aprons into that transformation. So, we got the order. We placed it. We were working with our sewers. Everybody had everything and we had a deadline coming up, and my team was like checking in and I would check in and the orders, the aprons wouldn't arrive and they wouldn't arrive, and we kept going in there, and there were just stacks and stacks of fabric everywhere, and they weren't being made at the clip that they needed to be for this order to be hit, and the panic started to rise, and I just thought by visiting them enough and going over there and being like, "Come on, guys, we just got to get done."

And every day that went by, it was like monumental volumes of stress by the minute of just realizing that there was an iceberg in front of us and I couldn't steer the ship in the right direction, and then the day came where we needed to get them out and the aprons were not even remotely ready, and I was freaking out with the sewers. I was like yelling in Spanish, "[speaks in Spanish]." And they just kept telling me that they would hit the deadline, but I was staring at the orders and they were not, like they weren't being made, and so I fully lost it, didn't know what I was going to do. And I just thought, "OK, we're, we're about to miss the FedEx truck that's coming. We could just drive them to the airport. Well, we'll get it to the plane. We'll make it work."

So, at this point, I had like my two other employees with me in the room, and the three of us are just like folding aprons as they're coming off the sewing machines, trimming anything we could to all hands it and make it happen. We get them. We missed the cut off. I jump in the car with Marisa, who worked with me, and we drive to LAX and try to get, I don't know what we were thinking, but we drove literally to the edge of the tarmac and we pull up the giant gate and they're like, "What are you guys doing?" And we're like, "We have an order to deliver. Please let us through."

At this point, we had missed the FedEx hub cut off. We had missed the FedEx local cut off, and I thought by driving to the airport, we're going to make it happen. Sad to say, we did not get on the tarmac. We did not get to the plane. And those damn aprons did not make it on, and the opening was the next day, and so I took myself and those aprons home and basically couldn't believe what had just happened. It was, it was kind of the first major catastrophe, and I didn't quite know how I was going to recover because it was our biggest customer. It was an important chef. They had a deadline. We promised it. One of my mentors said, "Your word is gold." Never mess with your words, like if you say you're going to do something, you do everything in your power to make it happen, and I had to call them the next day personally and talk to the chef's assistant and tell them that we had missed the cut off and that it, it had not happened and we did everything in our power to make it right and, but we unfortunately weren't able to do it.

And at that moment, I actually told them, "I will, I'm going to send these aprons to you guys anyway, we're not going to charge you for them, because it was our, it was our responsibility, and we should have made this work and we didn't. Therefore, we're going to take full responsibility and take care of it." And that was a lot of money for us. That was a lot of money, and we shipped the aprons. They received them a few days later. They were grateful that we covered the full cost of them and that was that, and it was so brutal as a young business owner to have failed so miserably, and yet, I look back and I think about just like my chef with the straps. I took responsibility at that moment and it helped me just learn that that was, that was part of the journey. You couldn't not have those moments, and I, and I marched forward from there, and we're still friends to this day, and he also still orders Hedley and Bennett, so it all, it all worked out in the long run, but I played the long game there for sure.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Ellen, how long did it take you before you could tell that story and how did you deal, and maybe you don't struggle with this, but I think when we have those kinds of big missteps where we made a mistake, but sometimes shame kind of wiggles its way, it worms its way into the picture, how long did it take you to recover from that? And like I said, be able to recount the story and tell it because it's such a good, powerful, meaningful, useful story for all of us who are reading the book and listening to this podcast, but it probably took you a while to get to the point where you could work through that narrative.

**Ellen Bennett:** It did. It took me, it took me a while, but I also had this interesting thing happening in my life where I didn't actually have that much time to sit and wonder and it was a blessing in disguise because my time was limited, my resources were limited, and therefore I didn't have time to go home and have pity on myself. I kind of had to, like, feel the feels and be very upset and thoroughly pissed off with myself and everyone around me and my sewer, and I was so furious, but then we had other orders to fulfill, and so it was just sort of like, "Get over it, Ellen, and move forward."

And I just had to push through it, and I got to say that that is kind of a lesson in life, too, that feeling, the feels is important, and I'm not a squish them down at all, just like feel them really, truly, deeply, and then say, "OK, it happened, and now I march forward."

And I just kind of have done that enough times that it doesn't make it any easier the next time it happens, but I just learn to get over it quickly because I had no luxury of time or resources and I had orders to fulfill. Therefore, I felt more pressure to get the next ones right because I messed that one up so severely.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, and I love too how you took such responsibility for that. When it didn't work, there are all sorts of people you could have blamed. I mean, you could have blamed this person, that person, the other person. You're like, "It's on me." You took responsibility, and like you said, you gave them the aprons. They didn't pay for it. So, there was that one hundred percent responsibility, and I think that's what allowed you to repair any sort of breach that set in.

**Ellen Bennett:** One hundred percent. That's such a good point. Yeah, like in my mind, I did everything I could to make it right, and I took no profit of any kind from it, and if I had, I would have felt guilt, but because I did everything I could, I was ready to kind of bury that hatchet and march forward, and as long as in your is, in your own life, you are doing everything in your power to make things right, it is not fair to yourself to hold on to anything past that. Like, "You did your part. You messed it up, you took responsibility, you admitted fault, and you tried to fix it. OK, good job. Cool. Keep going forward."

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, exactly.

In our work, we have this, a framework called the S curve of Learning™, and if I look at your book, it's loosely related to your entrepreneur's roadmap, except for yours is much more zigzaggy and ours is a little, our smooths it out for you. Whenever you start something new, you're at the launch point and your gangly and awkward, and you're figuring it out like you were with that very first order of aprons, but then you move into the sweet spot and you're completely in the groove, then you get to master and you're like, "I've kind of figure things out. I need to take on a new challenge." So, I want to ask you a couple of questions around that.

And the first one is, is there a question that you ask people when you're trying to hire someone that you typically ask to try to figure out, "Does this person have that?" They might have skills, but you want to know, are they going to be capable of fulfilling the promise of their potential that I see? Is there a question that you ask?

**Ellen Bennett:** I pressure test for grit, big time. Gritty resilience. Are you willing and capable to stand up quickly if all hell breaks loose and your plan goes awry? And I do that by recounting stories with them of times when something has happened, how would they react in their own shoes or them telling me a time that something like that happened to them? I also can typically tell if somebody has low ego, they're typically pretty good at being resilient, because if you have a high ego, you're not willing to say you're wrong and you're not willing to learn and you're not willing to shift and adapt because you're too busy putting on a face about something that you are the best at, right? A

combination, I believe, of like low ego, high EQ, like, can they read the room? Do they know how to navigate and feel things out, and are they a good problem solver? Like do they, can they think on their feet and figure stuff out, and have they been in enough situations where everything wasn't perfect? I like to have a balance of people that have worked in really big corporate companies and then have done some sort of startup phase. So, they see the balance because if you've only worked in startups or you've only worked in corporate, you kind of don't know what's on the other side of the hill. And you need to know what that looks like because some people are just better in corporate environments and that's OK. So, we want to ensure that people are going to be happy in the environment that is Hedley and Bennett.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok, you just brought up something, Hedley and Bennett.... How you get the name? I know, but tell our listeners.

**Ellen Bennett:** Yeah, totally. Hedley was my English grandfather and then Bennett is my last name. As I mentioned earlier, I'm half Mexican, very proud of it, and I believe that a lot of my genuine hutzpah and grit comes from my Latin side of, of the family, and so when I was trying to figure out what Hedley and Bennett was going to be called, I really, the idea of marrying my two cultures of sort of English proper, everything in its right place, things to be organized combined with this like colorful liveliness was perfect, and that is Hedley and Bennett in a nutshell. If you look at our colors, our website, it's timeless, but also happy and alive, and it gives you this sense of like burst of energy while also you can't identify that this is from 2020 or 2005. It just feels like it's been around for a long time.

**Whitney Johnson:** One other question on that. You said low ego. How do you know when someone's ego is low? What do you look for?

**Ellen Bennett:** Interestingly enough, it's like how quickly they say what school they went to. Usually....

**Whitney Johnson:** Oooh. Fascinating.

**Ellen Bennett:** If they start the conversation and say, "I went to.. My days when I was at Harvard" or whatever. I'm just like, "No, sorry, next." And we have an incredible team, and by the way, lots of people on my team have been to, went to Stanford or Brown or a different, you know, Notre Dame, whatever, and nobody knows it. Nobody knows who went to what school. And the only reason they do is maybe around sports, and I love that about them because you're in a room with a person who, you know, are, are, one of the girls in our from our shipping team, she came off of a sewing machine and she's now one of the people in charge of a department that has to do with custom orders, and she works with my guy who's from Bain and worked at Bain for almost eight years and went to Stanford.

And guess what? Nobody cares. Everybody's just fighting the same fight and working on the same cause, and I think that's a big, a big reader of can you work with people of lots of different skill sets and experience levels and different backgrounds, and are you willing to talk to anyone about anything? And, like, for Pete's sake, you don't need to mention that you went to a fancy school, like it's on your resume. We obviously know you went to that school. You don't need to talk about it further, so that is always a sure sign.

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting. That establishing of ethos, it doesn't, it's not required in the interview process.

**Ellen Bennett:** It's not, because I'm really there to see your character and how you deal with situations, and I'm not necessarily looking for what school you went to. I'm looking for what, what do you bring as an individual? How are you going to approach things? It's not your schooling necessarily that is why I'm hiring. It's you as a human, and all the experiences that you've had that make you, make you who you are.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. In your book, you also talk about a 90-day plan that when you onboard people, you go through this whole rubric of what you do. That's about onboarding the launch point of the score, but then they're going to get into mastery sometimes, top of their S curve. What do you do when you have someone on your team, they've reached their potential in that role, what do you do then? What kind of conversations do you have with people?

**Ellen Bennett:** Yep. So, it can go a few different ways. Honestly, it's sometimes tough conversations because you're either coaching them up or coaching them out, if you will, and we have a leadership coach for our entire leadership team who works with us individually and then together, and a lot of what she shows us is like you have to have these really candid, honest conversations with people about where things are working, where things are not. It should never be a surprise. You shouldn't raise your six-month review, and all of a sudden, all of these things that you've been doing wrong are now being laid out.

You need to be communicating them with more rigor and having that honesty, and so when we do need to let's just call it coach somebody out there, there's quite a bit of lead up to that moment, and we give them the benefit of the doubt. We're not trying to coach them out. We're trying to coach them to get better, and if they can see that for themselves and they have enough low ego to say, "You know what? I do need to improve," then they're worthy to, like, stay around and make it right because they care about improving and they care about getting better, and I have seen that happen.

We've put people on progress improvement programs and, and they've changed for real, and it's awesome because they're willing to shift and adapt, but it's what people are like so consumed with being right about it and say, "No, I'm actually doing things right. It's you guys that have it wrong," that we've had to go our separate ways with people and find somebody else who's willing to go into this next phase of growth, but that was a hard part of running a business. It's, I would say is the hardest part, because you love the people you work with and you want to be with them forever. And then you realize that it's not a family, it's a team, and if the team is no longer working, you have to do what you need to do to make the business go forward.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, exactly. All right. So, the sweet spot. So, you've talked in your book about a lot of things that didn't work, but I would love for you for just a minute to talk about a time when everything's working. In your book, you have it in that "people love everything we do" kind of phase. Can you describe one of those days where you were just looking around you and things were just working? What was one of those days and what did it look like and how did it feel? Because we don't talk about the sweet spot enough, and so I'd love if you could just mobilize that for a moment for us.

**Ellen Bennett:** Absolutely. And do you want it from the book or from life or...?

**Whitney Johnson:** Whatever you want.

**Ellen Bennett:** Ok, so a sweet spot for me has been, this has been somewhat recent. We hired a chief growth officer, right? And this was like the smartest person I've literally ever worked with in my entire life. Brilliant human being, zero ego and so wicked smart, and when he got plugged into my leadership team, it was like somebody took all these chunks and poured glue on it, and then suddenly the chunks stuck together and then we started moving forward together, and it was spectacular to feel that feeling of, "Oh, my God, coagulation and then forward momentum, not just by Ellen pushing it forward."

It wasn't just Ellen pushing the ball up the mountain. It was a team pushing a ball up the mountain, and it took me so many years and so many failed attempts and bringing on people and not having them be the right people or having them be the right people for a while and then needing to get another level because the company had grown past that point. I truly did have to savor it, as you as you said, like savor that moment and say, "Good work for getting this little, tiny idea of a, of an idea from eight years ago to a place where you now have a chief growth officer who just glued together your entire leadership team, which includes a director of finance and a head of product and all these incredible people, and they're all moving towards your goal, but it's now our goal."

**Whitney Johnson:** Magical.

**Ellen Bennett:** It was pretty magical, and I feel very grateful to not have thrown in the towel earlier to, to get to that moment when I get to experience that, and I know that there's so many more ahead.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, so, Ellen, where can people find you? You've got your... Talk about your book. Talk about your apron. So, people are listening. They're like, "I want to learn more about her company, about her book." So, how do they engage with you?

**Ellen Bennett:** Totally. So, you can go to [hedleyandbennett.com](http://hedleyandbennett.com). H-E-D-L-E-Y-A-N-D-B-E-N-N-E-T-T to check out our aprons and all of our kitchen gear. If you've ever watched Top Chef or Food Network, you'll see the little red patch on the chest and know that that is Hedley and Bennett. That is our signature logo look on, on the top chest pocket. We outfit all of those shows and more. You can also follow us on Instagram at @EllenMarieBennett and at @hedleyandbennett and follow us on Tik Tok, highly entertaining and very educational. We have incredible content all about cooking, and that is the goal of Hedley and Bennett. Now, that we are so direct-to-consumer as compared to restaurants, which is what we first started with, we now outfit all kinds of professional chefs and home cooks alike.

**Whitney Johnson:** Have you thought about opening a restaurant?

**Ellen Bennett:** I had when I first got into cooking, but then after I started Hedley and Bennett, I realized that it was like having a restaurant, but instead of food, we were making aprons, and so it's adjacent enough that I still get to cook and be in the community that I love so much, but I don't have the same crazy schedule. It is a crazier schedule, but in different ways. I can at least be at home on the weekends working versus in a restaurant standing all day. So, I am happy where it landed, but talk about another pivot, right? I started off thinking I was going to be a chef and I turned out to be a chef of a neighboring company.

**Whitney Johnson:** To outfit chefs. So, one of the questions I like to ask at the end of every coaching session and now more recently at the end of a podcast session, is what was most useful for you? So, I've been asking you all these questions. And, and ideally, as you've been talking or listening or processing, there's been some thought that's come in your head that was useful for you. What was useful for you today?

**Ellen Bennett:** I love that you asked me to celebrate the good moments or a good moment, and because I wrote a business book that is not just the glory days of a business, and I was very particular in ensuring that people understood the hard parts of running a company, I think I don't celebrate nearly as many things as, as I would in my normal life, but I appreciated you asking me that because it is a really good reminder to look at, as I say in the book, "Everything you have and not what you don't have," and there's so many things that I'm so grateful for and that I have now and that I had the experience to, to write all of this in a book and put it out there for the world is so special.

So, thank you for the reminder to celebrate those moments, because those little moments are fleeting and they're in between all these big storms, and you've got to celebrate the good with the bad and the ugly and all of it in between, because that is what makes you build character in life.

**Whitney Johnson:** Any final thoughts?

**Ellen Bennett:** You know, for anybody out there listening to this, I hope you know that you are in charge of your life and that no matter what your circumstances are, you can make something out of yourself, and that belief runs very deeply in my bones. And as a, you know, x ten dollars an hour line cook, who now is the CEO of a company that has these brilliant people all on my leadership team from companies like Deutsche Bank and Stanford, et cetera, et cetera. I look around and I think, "Wow, what a crazy world that we are all here together now building this thing." And it's so special. I believe in them and they believe in me, and, and so just remember to believe in yourself no matter what. No matter where you're from, you can, you can do these things you want to do. So, you just got to get out there and dream first, details later. You'll figure it out, I promise.

**Whitney Johnson:** "Believe in yourself." Wise words from Ellen Bennett. Thank you so much for being with us.

**Ellen Bennett:** Thank you, Whitney.

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Five thoughts.

Number one. Notice how Ellen said, "We're going to make the best aprons ever," when she only had a DBA, a "doing business as." It makes me think of something Bob Proctor said in Episode 208, "The future must become present in your imagination." Dream first, details later. In her mind, she was already an entrepreneur.

Number two. Notice how resilient Ellen was when her boss didn't like the aprons. If you're prone to shame, fake it until you don't feel it by reading from her script. Ask those good to awesome questions like number one, what is working? Number two, what isn't working? Number three, what does a solve look like? Number four, what can we do to make it up to you? Number five, what else do you wish we had thought of? And bonus, thank you for your feedback. Because we like to feel effective, when we give feedback and there's no drama, we're going to give more feedback and the more feedback we give, the more invested we are. Meanwhile, when you're curious about feedback, you pull shame out of the narrative.

Number three. Ellen says, "Yes," when she's given an offer, she doesn't hesitate like with the aprons, with TV Azteca, she says "yes." Are you saying "yes," enough? Not to things you don't want to do, but the things that scare you, the things that excite you.

Number four. Think about your failures and how long it takes you to talk about them. If you can close that gap, start talking about them faster, it's a signal that you're becoming more resilient.

Number five. Savor the sweet spot. If you talk less about what isn't working and more about what is, describe it. Celebrate it. You'll prime your brain to get more of it.

Ellen Bennett, thanks again for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it. And thank you to Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, and Melissa Rutty.

I'm Whitney Johnson,  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.