

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 214: ERICA DHAWAN

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, stepping back from who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

It's been said that only seven percent of our meaning is communicated through the spoken word, with 93 percent communicated with our tone of voice and our body language. We rely on body language to connect and build trust, which we need. If we're going to climb any S curve of Learning™, we need to do it by ourselves, but we can't do it alone. In real life, we lean in, uncross our arms, smile, nod, make eye contact, but how do we do that online?

That's what Erica Dhawan teaches in her new book titled *Digital Body Language*. She says, "Online, reading carefully is the new listening, writing clearly, the new empathy, and a phone or video call is worth a thousand emails." That's what she's here to talk about today. Erica Dhawan is here to help us decode digital body language.

Whitney Johnson: Erica, welcome.

Erica Dhawan: It's so great to be here, Whitney

Whitney Johnson: And I am delighted because you've written this book. It's called *Digital Body Language*, which is the best title ever, and so I would love for you to tell us why this book? How did this come about?

Erica Dhawan: I grew up as a shy and introverted girl in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My parents immigrated from India to Pittsburgh when they were in their 20s, and at home we spoke Hindi and Punjabi, so that meant I came to school with accented English and often struggled to find my voice. I remember, at home, I would spend a lot of time trying to translate what my parents were saying in Hindi, in Punjabi, using body language as a way to understand when they were angry, when they were fighting, when they were happy with one another. I remember Bollywood movies and not knowing exactly what actors and actresses said but studying their body language as a way to know what people said, and then in school, where I was trying to navigate my accented English. I would watch the popular

girls with their heads high, their shoulders back as a way to signal that they had confidence, and then I would watch the cool kids that were older during school assemblies slouch, signaling their sense that they weren't as engaged as they should be.

Now, for me, as someone who really struggled to find my voice, one of the things that I developed was this ability to observe others through their body language and being someone that was juggling two languages in two, two cultures, body language became something that was not only a critical skill for me to understand, but it became a competitive skill for me. It allowed me to find my own voice after a very shy childhood to get ridiculously competitive job opportunities and graduate school opportunities, but at the same time, I think that there is one story that I've not shared until my new book that I think really opened me up to the importance of body language at so many levels.

And that was right after 9/11. I was in high school, and my father was picking me up from a sports practice and someone had noticed my father waiting. It was right after 9/11. My father was a tall Indian man with a mustache, and someone felt he looked suspicious and they decided to call the police, and I remember coming out of the sports practice and seeing my father being frisked by police officers. He was a cardiologist at a nearby hospital. We lived about ten minutes away, and I remember him with his palms wide open, his eye contact direct to the officer, signaling his respect and deference. And I remember driving home that night with him and being angry. Angry at what I saw as racial profiling and the ignorance and also a bit angry at my father for how, how deferent he was, and he said something to me that I will never forget.

He said, "Erica, body language saved my life today," and then he said, "Wouldn't it be helpful to think about what others are feeling right now?"

And I will never forget that moment and I'll never forget what he taught me about how we can convey empathy with body language, and in many ways, these moments, as well as my own journey of finding my voice by understanding how important our body language is, because it's not just what we say, but how we say, really inspired me to be so passionate about this topic.

Whitney Johnson: So, when your father did that, he said that "Body language saved my life today." Is that what he said?

Erica Dhawan: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Say more about that.

Erica Dhawan: You know, right after 9/11, there was a lot of heated tension, and we are living in a world right now where societal tensions are high, and I think that in many ways, what he taught me, in his words in that moment is, "Wouldn't it be helpful to truly slow down and ask ourselves, how can we step into the shoes of others?" And when we truly step into the shoes of others, using our body language, showcasing that we do care about one another well beyond what we say or what may be happening in the world, we can bridge barriers in ways that our words can't do.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, you know, it's interesting, as I hear you say that, your dad, as you said, he was trained as a physician, as a cardiologist, and so he'd had decades of experience, of empathy and understanding what his patient needed, and I wonder if in that moment, he saw the person who was on the other side of the table as a patient. He had that muscle and that ability to go to where this person was and feel compassion for him and be able to use all of that training that he had to be able to be empathetic in that moment. Any thoughts on that?

Erica Dhawan: I think that that's absolutely right. I remember growing up and going to the bowling alley, my brother and I with my father, and he would just make friends with everyone at the bowling alley. He would talk to everyone, and what I learned from him is just like we were immigrants and having to connect and build stress really causes us to step out of our comfort zones and share with others. I think in many ways I learned so much from him about the importance of body language to build connection.

Whitney Johnson: I have to say, speaking to you today, I'm like really shy, uncomfortable. I mean, it strains credulity, I have to confess, and so as I listen to you talk, I think, "All right." So, was there a switch that flipped for

you where you'd been studying and studying and studying, and it was almost like, "This is my moment."? Was there a moment? Was it that experience with your dad or did something else happen for you that, that turned what was a survival skill into a superpower?

Erica Dhawan: I'll never forget when I was 17 years old and I went to a program on global entrepreneurship. I was asked to speak across a large group, about 100 people, which was more than my own private school high school class and present on some of my business ideas. We had kind of like a Shark Tank idea competition, and this was a group I, I didn't know well. They were not from my high school. It was another group, and I, I went up there and I spoke in front of public for the first time in that way really ever in my life. Most of the time you could barely realize I was there. In school and every report card from kindergarten through 12th grade, every teacher said, "Erica's very studious, but I wish she spoke up more in class." So, I went up there, I presented on my idea, and I sat down, and later that day, all of these other students came up to me and said, "You are the best speaker we have ever seen." I got so much applause and praise after that. And it was really the first time I had used these signals, and I'll never forget that because it gave me the confidence to start speaking up in a new way, and I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that I was in a different space. I wasn't in my high school culture, and I was able to test out and both my voice and my intonation and how I use my hands in a different way, and in some ways I was almost like taking the training of watching Bollywood movies and navigating how actors show presence and competence and my studies of the popular girls versus the cool kids, and I use that in action, and I'll never forget that because I think it, it allowed me to see that I can be a good speaker, that I can share my voice and that it matters and I matter.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, this was your star turn, right? That star turn moment. Had you practiced at home or was it just sort of like a star is born, and you were like, "Whoa, where did, where did that come from?"

Erica Dhawan: One of my passions is dancing, and I know you know this, Whitney. I love to dance. I'm a performer at heart, and in many ways, it was my outlet because I was so shy growing up and connecting our minds and our bodies is so important and I didn't practice for that, it was sort of an on-the-spot speech, but what I think was so powerful about it is I thought like a performer, and because I wasn't so vocal, I think I'd studied the art of performance and how critical it can be to connect.

Whitney Johnson: Now, let's talk about what exactly is digital body language, which is the title of your book?

Erica Dhawan: So fast forward. Twenty-five years later, I became a communication and collaboration expert, teaching public speaking, teaching the art of collaboration to clients around the world, and about four or five years ago, I started noticing that many clients, many leaders, were struggling with the same questions.

Questions like, "Why is there so much misunderstanding at work? How do we connect with those of different ages and working styles?"

And one of the things I realized was that there was no playbook for how we connected with the body of our language in a digital world. Just like I was an immigrant navigating and relearning traditional body language as a child, today, we are all immigrants to the new world of digital body language.

Digital body language to sum it up are the new cues and signals we send in our digital communication that make up the subtext of our messages, from our punctuation to our response times, to how we greet and sign off an email, to our video backgrounds, to whether we use emojis or not. These are not trivial decisions. They're new signals and cues that make up trust, respect, and even empathy in our modern hybrid world.

Whitney Johnson: So, you have a two-by-two matrix in your book. It's called "The Trust and Power Matrix." Can you just walk us through that quickly as we're thinking about this digital body language?

Erica Dhawan: All of our communications, we are actually answering two questions that guide how we read each other's digital body language signals and guide how others read our signals.

And those two questions are, who has more or less power in this situation? And secondly, how much do we trust each other? Are we close and trust or are we far in trust? And I define this in my book as "The Trust and Power Matrix."

So, let me break it down. When it comes to "The Trust and Power Matrix," you can imagine the power level is up or down, the y-axis of a matrix, and then the trust levels is the x-axis. So, on the right side, you may be a high in trust. On the left side, you may be far in trust, and depending on your trust in power gaps with someone else, it's important to be critical of some pitfalls that you may want to think about when it comes to your digital body language. For example, if you are someone that has high levels of power and you're communicating with others and high trust with those individuals, it is important to never confuse a brief message with a clear message. You often may think people can read your mind in a digital world, but they cannot read your mind. I'll give you an example. One of my clients sent a message to his boss, Tom, that said, "Do you want to speak Wednesday or Thursday?" And Tom's response was, "Yes," and this is just a great example of how reading carefully is the new listening and writing clearly is the new empathy but knowing where your power level lies can be important to take that extra step to think before you type.

Let's go to another one. If you have high power but low trust with others, here is where it's important to remember what was implicit in traditional body language. The smile, the head nod, the direct eye contact has to be explicit in digital body language. If you want to showcase that you care about others, you have to be explicit about it. Say it, radically recognize others, give credit where it's due, verbally on the Zoom call and in writing. A "THX." email doesn't feel like a thank you. It's like an acknowledgment of an email.

I'll give two more examples, so if you're on the lower levels of power, but you have high or low trust, here is where it's really important to not get caught up in anxiety. If you get the "yes" response from your boss, don't get emotionally hijacked. Instead, ask for clarity. Respond quickly. That actually helps you improve your virtual executive presence and make sure that you're thoughtful in your messages. Remember, especially in formats like email, emails are visual. People read them like websites now. So, your digital body language is again is not just what you say, but how you say it or how you format it in our new world.

Whitney Johnson: So, if you've got low trust and low power, what do you do?

Erica Dhawan: All of the principles really matter.

Whitney Johnson: Everything matters. Okay.

Erica Dhawan: The most important things that you can do to build your trust and power with others is to prioritize thoughtfulness over speed. One of the things that we can do when we're trying to build a presence with someone else is try to rush a response, but not always think through it in the most effective way. So, if you want to stand out, make sure that you're not using hastiness to get back to someone, but you're prioritizing thoughtfulness.

Whitney Johnson: Interesting. You talked a minute ago about this idea of, "Punctuation matters." So, can you decode for us what does "all caps" mean? When I write in all caps or someone sends me a message in all caps, what are they saying to me?

Erica Dhawan: Ok, Whitney, I'm going to give you the punctuation breakdown, the new digital elements of style. Let's start with all caps. Imagine a message coming in that says, "OKAY," in all caps, the truth of the matter is, for some individuals, that feels like shouting, for other individuals it feels like excitement. Think of all caps as the body language expression of our eyebrows. For some, it can be raised eyebrows as surprise. For others, it's raised eyebrows as anger or frustration or urgency. Today, it can mean a multiplicity of things, and this is where it's especially important to know your audience and not feel anxious but try to get to clarity if you see all caps. I'll give you one final expression of all caps and that's when specifically, my father sends me a text message and he doesn't know how to turn all caps off in the text message, so it's just by mistake.

Whitney Johnson: Right, right. Okay, emojis. What do emojis mean?

Erica Dhawan: Think of emojis as the new range of our facial expressions. Smiles, anger, gratitude, sadness. We use the power of our face, especially our lip movements, to signal these expressions, and today, emojis are not just a trivial tool. They have cascaded, even corporate America. Actually, back in 2015, the Oxford English Dictionary announced that the word of the year was the "joy emojis," and while many professional writers were quite insulted, the truth of the matter is that emojis are here to stay.

Some, some general rules when it comes to emojis is think before you emoji. Make sure you have enough trust with someone else. If you have a higher power level, I encourage you to throw in an emoji with someone else if you want to showcase an expression and you can't do it face to face, and also note that there are some gender differences with emojis. In fact, one research study showed that younger women in the workplace that use multiple emojis compared to a man of any rank level in that company, the women would be more likely to be seen as incompetent and the man would be more likely to be seen as casual or friendly, and while we want to break these biases, because we are not all the same and we should truly be authentic in ourselves, I think it's important to know that even simple punctuation can be read differently.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, so the last one on that is exclamation points. It was so interesting when I was reading your book, I was like, "I am an exclamation point maven." And I was like, "Oh, now, I understand why." So, tell us what exclamation points mean.

Erica Dhawan: So similar to all caps, but in a different way, exclamation points are a full range of a multiplicity of things, from shouting to excitement to urgency, which is, I think, something a bit different than just the traditional all caps, and if you put all caps in exclamations, then it may be really urgent or really excited. One of the things that I think is unique about exclamations is that the number of exclamations you use can also imply different things. So, if you use one, maybe it's, you know, "I'm looking forward to this." If you use two, "I'm pretty excited about this." If you use three, "I'm either really anxious or I'm incredibly excited," and then from there it continues on. One thing that I think is unique about exclamations is just the breadth and depth of how people use them. One study that I found showed that women do feel more pressure to use exclamation points than men, but I'm a big fan of if you don't like exclamations, don't use them. If you do like them, use them at your disposal to infuse tone and nuance, and in most importantly, I think what we, we have to do is just assume best intent and not read into exclamations and in a world where we are more tone deaf than ever.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, interesting. So, I'd love for you to decode the following. "Okay...", O-k-a-y ellipses. What does that mean?

Erica Dhawan: So, we'll have two images. One is "Okay" with it... Does that have a period at the end or...?

Whitney Johnson: Three ellipses. O-k-a-y ellipses. Three dots. What does that mean or how would you interpret that? Because I guess it sounds like there are multiple interpretations, but what's the most common interpretation of "Okay..."

Erica Dhawan: I'll break it down because there are two interpretations, and it is based on your digital body language style. The way that I would encourage you to think about it is it is a bit generational in terms of the interpretation, but I also like to caveat and say that all generations are not all the same, but if a baby boomer was looking at the "Okay...", I would argue or hypothesize that they may think that they are continuing a conversation, "Okay..." It's a continuation of a chat that they are having or an "dot, dot, dot," meaning "I'm interested, Okay..." Now for a millennial or a Gen Z-er, I would argue, especially in text message, that they would assume that this was a passive aggressive or frustrated "dot, dot, dot," because research shows, especially skewing younger, multiple periods, particularly in text message, can signal passive aggressiveness versus just a continuation of a conversation.

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Erica Dhawan: So, the answer is we see it differently, and we can't assume we're all the same. There are just different styles. Digital natives are those that may skew younger, but I also know 50-year-olds that are digital natives where the "dot, dot, dot" does imply a bit of passive aggressiveness or anger. On the other end, I call them digital body language

adapters. These are people that didn't grow up in the world of digital language in their high school experiences but have adapted after they came into the professional world. They think about it as a continuation of a conversation.

Whitney Johnson: Interesting. OK, let's do one more at the other end of the spectrum. "Kk." So, K-k, and then an emoji. How would we interpret that?

Erica Dhawan: Let's think about it, whether you were a woman or a man or across the gender spectrum, because I think that's where it gets a bit interesting. A "kk" with a smiley next to it for a woman speaking to another woman can feel friendly or fun or "I'm with you, sister. I look, I look forward to connecting with you or let's chat more." A man to another man, for example, may feel really uncomfortable or in more traditional masculine language, and I'll be honest that the, the research on communication and different symbols has not truly spanned the true gender spectrum, not binary and beyond. So, I am thinking in binary formats today, but it really is a spectrum, and then a woman to a man. If a woman sent it to a man, he may think, "Oh, she's just happy." If a man sent it to a woman, it could imply something else, especially in the workplace, whether it's flirtation or fun, and so, again, there are differences, and especially with emojis, they can be interpreted differently even across the gender spectrum.

Whitney Johnson: So fascinating. "Okay..." and "Kk [emoji]" mean completely different things, completely different languages.

Erica Dhawan: To different people.

Whitney Johnson: Fascinating. So, in your book, you share several tips for writing a good email. That's one of the things I would tell everybody, is Erika has so many good practical tips. So, give us just a sampling. How do I write a good email?

Erica Dhawan: It starts at the top of the email, the "to" line, the "Cc" line, the "Bcc" line. We used to think of this is just trivial things. Hit a reply all and send something to everyone, but they actually send cues and signals to others.

For example, in the "To" line always include who you expect to respond. This is the signal, "I expect you to respond to this message," unless you say it's an "FYI, no need to respond." The Cc line is anyone that needs to observe it. Maybe those listening or watching, but they don't need to respond necessarily, and when you put them on the Cc line, it gives them the signal that they don't need to respond. The Bcc line, I recommend to only use it if you don't want people to "reply all," but otherwise I would air on the side of not using it.

The next part of your email, the subject line. I have to say that one of the best things you can do to create a good virtual first impression is have a good subject line. People don't want to read another re with no subject line. Be thoughtful. Individuals are reading their inboxes, again, like websites, and if you want someone to open your message, mastering the art of the subject line is incredibly important.

Now, let's go into the body of the email. As I said earlier, email has to be visual today. Did you think about making sure you got to the point at the beginning? Avoid a lot of niceties, "How are you?" Unless it's a sensitive situation and you want to reactivate a conversation with someone you haven't spoken to. Use bullet points. Bold and underline headings. Use the power of the different ways we can showcase what we're trying to get across that will allow others to quickly scan it and be able to respond adequately. I also think even simple things like avoiding a, "how are you" question. I really believe that those are kind of lame questions. Let's, let's either cut them all together or be more specific. Instead of "how are you" or something like "I just saw your website," being specific around what just happened or a blog they just wrote can actually allow you to build that sense of trust very quickly, and last but not least, get to the point quickly. People don't read long emails anymore. If you want to send something long, set up that video call or put in an attachment. Emails have gotten faster now, especially in the last year, and making sure there's a clear who, what, when. Everyone knows what the ask is can go a long way, and even if you just spend 30 extra seconds before you press send, to ask yourself, "Is all the right information in here for the recipient to be able to do their best work?" Well, clearly maybe find some changes that will help you get more work done.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, one of my favorite things about that is dispensing with the small talk at the beginning of just going straight to, "Dear Erika, I'd like to invite you on my podcast." Right? Just go straight to it. So, I think that's

really, ah, great, great etiquette tips and especially, well, I was going to say, especially for people who are coming out of college, but I think it's useful for all of us. I mean, it certainly caught my eye and I've been writing emails for a very long time.

Erica Dhawan: Yeah. Even one tip, if you've just had a meeting, maybe an interview or you're trying to build your rapport with someone you've just met on a video or a phone call, I recommend sending a quick email recap within 30 minutes or an hour of that meeting. It's like the new virtual handshake. It makes a significant difference to send a quick email after a meeting than if you send it a day later, even three days later, it's almost like that recency effect. So, I'm not a big proponent of making you feel like you have to respond to everything immediately. Not at all. But when you're trying to build a good impression and you want to create that virtual handshake, a quick, fast message immediately after a meeting can go a long way.

Whitney Johnson: So good.

Hybrid work. We are about to move into an era where we are not going to be just on site and we're not going to be just remote. Do you have two or three suggestions for how do you make sure that everyone gets included when not everybody is either remote or on site?

Erica Dhawan: What I'm so excited about is that all of the principles in my new book, *Digital Body Language*, lend itself not only to a remote world, but truly a hybrid world here to stay, and, Whitney, you may remember, I told you about the idea that I had for this book back in 2016. I've been working on it for five years, and what I think is really critical is to think about how to apply digital body language in a hybrid world. So, here are a few practical tips.

First key tip is in meetings, especially when, you know, you're in the room with a few people and then a couple of people are coming in on video call screens, is to think about the design of your meeting, almost like a TV show host thinks about preparing in advance and having different individuals come in for different segments. So, what does that mean? Number one, rotate meeting facilitators for different parts of the meeting. Have remote attendees lead parts of the meeting. What this does is it removes visual bias of who's in the room. Otherwise, we tend to, because of traditional body language, listen more than people in the room than online, and I'll give you an example. I never forget. I'll never forget pre pandemic, I was on a conference call. Three of us were remote and three people were in the office, and it wasn't until the 26th minutes of a 30-minute meeting that someone said, "Does anyone on the phone have something to share?" We had been excluded the entire time because of visual bias. So, rotate meeting hosts, even have the remote host lead the whole meeting to switch the nature of attention.

Secondly, when you were doing brainstorming, use the innovation of what I recommend, and we've all experienced as the virtual chat tool in video meetings to avoid turn taking. In the office, we may have heard from certain people turn by turn, but that often excluded introverts who needed time to process ideas or those that were more junior in the conversation. So, instead of saying "Who wants to share?" say, now in the hybrid meeting, "I'd like everyone to go into the chat or a virtual whiteboard and write down their ideas to these two questions," and then as a meeting host call on people that have the most diverse or different ideas. Again, this will remove bias and make you more geographically inclusive to everyone in the conversation, thereby getting better ideas.

And last but not least, my final tip is if you are presenting, especially doing a big speech where half of the people are in the room and others are virtual, I recommend starting questions with the remote attendees first. Again, just understanding that the chronological order can help by making sure that you're more inclusive of those that are online. Those are just some simple tips that can go a long way in making us more inclusive in this time where we are all learning the new norms.

Whitney Johnson: Well, certainly from a momentum standpoint, you timed this book well. I mean, it's good that it didn't come out in 2018 because it's much more relevant to 2021.

Erica Dhawan: Exactly. I think that maybe timing is everything, and I think that's something I learned not only as a principle in digital body language. Actually, timing does matter and your messages, but I never planned to have it apply to not only office workers, but virtually everyone from a parent engaging in parent teacher meetings to doctors

doing telehealth, to lawyers doing negotiations online, to politicians campaigning in a virtual world. I truly believe that if we can build a digital body language skills, we can apply crucial conversations, but in a modern hybrid market.

Whitney Johnson: So, what does executive presence look like online? You've kind of touched on this. You know, I've had a number of conversations with coaching clients who've said, "You know, I'm super comfortable in person and building those relationships, but I'm struggling online. I'm struggling digitally." What suggestions do you have?

Erica Dhawan: Executive presence used to mean a lot of the traditional body language cues: the perfect eye contact, the, the right art of body language, the right voice, intonation and pitch showcasing that you're listening by head bobbing and nodding, leaning in when you cared about someone else and what they were saying. Now, let's be honest, a lot of those cues, especially the lack of direct eye contact, because it's not even available or possible on a Zoom screen when I'm looking into the camera, you're looking at me. A lot of those have really had to transform. So, what does virtual executive presence look like at the top of the list? Executive presence is about always arriving prepared. Now, what does being prepared really mean today? It's being thoughtful about agendas, being inclusive of how you engage introverts and extroverts, always arriving on time, and I know this is hard, but actually we become more punctual in a digital world. When you're in meetings, making sure that you're valuing others visibly, giving credit where it's due. Instead of asking, "Who wants to share, or does everyone agree with this," which is usually a "yes" or "no," having a thoughtful way so that everyone can participate. In many ways, executive presence virtually is not monopolizing or having the answers, it's facilitating a conversation with others so that the best ideas can rise.

And I'll really sum it up with one CEO that I coached in the last year. Previous to the pandemic, he used to run town halls, where he would come into a room, he would use his gregarious body language, read a script from corporate communications that was a business update with some slides, and everyone felt great and he'd shake some hands at the end and that was done. In the first few months after the pandemic started, he'd get on a Zoom call and try to do the same thing and it fell flat. Employees were more disengaged than ever, were multitasking rampantly during it, so we realized we had to reimagine virtual executive presence for him. The first thing we did is he started to tape his business update in advance and email it to all the employees, and then during the meeting, he would instead have an ask me anything where he would pull questions from the whole crowd and answer vulnerable, authentic questions without a script that allowed others to really feel connected and committed to the company's purpose. He also did things where he acknowledged individuals that had done great work in the last few weeks. He brought on people almost like a TV show host to talk about and share their stories and it transformed the conversation. So, instead of being a monopolizer as a leader and executive presence in a face-to-face world, think about how you are truly a facilitator in a way that honors people's time, gives credit and radical recognition, and creates a safe space for everyone to speak up.

Whitney Johnson: You know, what I love about that is that it takes that idea of a flipped classroom. It's a flipped town hall, right? You get the information, they can respond to it, and then in that moment, everybody gets an opportunity to show up, and as you said, it's a facilitated conversation.

Erica Dhawan: And I found that it's not only transformed how C-suite leaders show virtual executive presence, it's transforming how sales reps are mastering the sales meeting. Instead of just giving their pitch on the phone, they may be sending assets in advance, video assets about the quality, demos that some prospects are actually watching beforehand, and then engaging in a more thoughtful conversation in the 30- or 60-minute conference call. The other thing that I've found that has been going very well is when a salesperson Zooms in an existing client to talk for five minutes to a prospect about the quality of their product and then Zooms out. That would have never happened in a coffee chat meeting, but today we can innovate in a way that we weren't doing in the past that will make us better when we go back to the office.

Whitney Johnson: Erica, where can people find you? Tell us more about your book. I know it's probably all the usual places but tell us a little bit more.

Erica Dhawan: My new book, *Digital Body Language*, is available everywhere. Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, Audible, you name it, and internationally, and on my website at ericadhawan.com, I offer a free digital body language quiz where you can understand if you're a digital body language native or adapter or what I call a "digital body language chameleon," which is someone right in the middle. I hope that all of you will be able to check out the

book, gift it to your bosses or your kids, but most importantly, Whitney, I want to thank you so much for having me on. You have been not only an amazing and extraordinary communicator that has allowed all of us to disrupt ourselves, but someone that inspires me every single day.

Erica Dhawan: Oh, thank you, Erica, and I am going to promise to take that quiz before I record the outro, so I will tell everybody what kind of digital person I am. I'm probably a chameleon, but we'll see. That's my prediction.

All right. So, what was the most useful thing to you in the conversation today? Something I learned from our friend Michael Bungay Stanier to ask at the end of every coaching conversation, and so it may be something I said, but probably not, probably something that you said, or you thought, or you observed. What was useful for you today?

Erica Dhawan: The most useful thing that I discovered in this conversation with you, Whitney, was based on a question you asked, not an answer I had, and as I've learned throughout my life, it's all about the questions. It's not always about the answers, and the question that you asked me that I've never actually definitively shared in such a public way was that moment when I was 17 where I got up on that stage and I spoke so eloquently, like a total pro, and for me, someone that didn't believe in myself and didn't have a lot of confidence that I could fake it until I made it and made it in that moment and see myself with new eyes. Really something that I didn't think about in the past and is not in the book, but you've given me an opportunity to reflect on that and how it truly is our stories and questions that allow us to see ourselves in new ways, and my hope for everyone is that they can see themselves in the world of digital body language in their most competent, authentic self, just like I felt in that moment when I was 17, learning traditional body language properly for the first time

Whitney Johnson: Along with Bollywood.

All right. Any final thoughts for us, Erica?

Erica Dhawan: I am so grateful to be part of this Disrupt Yourself podcast, Whitney, and I, I think that the last thing I'll share is for anyone who loves the book and wants to share it with others, I hope you'll spread it on social media. Share it with your kids. Discuss it in your next parent-teacher conference or even in your corporate boardroom. Thank you so much.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you.

Several observations.

First. I loved Erica's origin story. The story about how her father said reading body language saved his life and how for her what started as emotional and social survival at school and at home, reading the 93 percent that was being communicated through the body has become her superpower. I talked about superpowers in Episode 120, look at what you did to survive as a child, maybe physically, but more likely emotionally, to find your strength. If you're wondering what your superpower is, go back and listen to that episode. Also, if you want to do more work on body language generally, check out Episode 195 with Ted Brodtkin and Ashley Pallathra where they talk about attunement.

Second. I loved her suggestion about virtual executive presence. It's good advice in a virtual, real, or hybrid world. Send the prepared stuff beforehand, flip the classroom and then show up ready for the conversation. Ask me anything.

Third. There are a number of things that I've done differently since talking with Erica, so I thought I would report out. First of all, I did as I promised, I took her quiz. I got a medium score. So, I'm making progress, but I have some work to do. I'm observing how much attention I pay in an email. If I send something without really proofreading

what I've written, that's an indication that I think high power, high trust, but it's a reminder to not abuse that. I noticed that when I'm on a call, like a Zoom call with people, that if I know some of the people on the call, probably a good idea to chat to them and say "hello," to acknowledge to say, "I see you." I loved her suggestions and reminders about how to write an email, and I remember Dan Pink saying in his book, *When*, that job satisfaction goes up or down by how quickly we respond to emails. Finally, I am following up after a call with a digital handshake, a lot of very practical tips.

Thank you again to Erica Dhawan for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening, and if you have someone that needs or wants to work on their digital body language, help you share this episode. Thank you to our team, Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, and Melissa Ruddy.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.