

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 215: JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

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.

And today our guest is Julie Lythcott-Haimes, former Dean of Freshman and Undergraduate Advising at Stanford. She holds a JD from Harvard and an MFA from California College of the Arts. Julie wrote The New York Times Best-selling *How to Raise an Adult* in 2016, *Real American*, a memoir about coming to terms with her racial identity in 2017, and her most recent book, published in 2021, is titled *Your Turn: How to Be an Adult*. There is a common theme running through her work. It's to help us disrupt our mindset around coming of age.

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

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Whitney, thanks for having me. I'm always interested in disruption.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, because you are a disruptor. So, let's talk about what you're disrupting, Julie. You've just written a book called *Your Turn*, and I'd love for you to share with us what's the big idea, first of all, and why did you decide to spend so much of the past several years dedicating your life to writing this book?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** The big idea is compassion for millennials and older Gen Zs who are feeling, "I can't adult. I don't want to adult. Adulthood is scary." The big idea is also adulthood is simply the phase of life after childhood and before death. If you survive childhood, you're an adult.

So, I'm trying to break down this seemingly mystifying concept into concrete, actionable steps while also taking a philosophical approach about the meaning of life and what really matters, so there's a lot in this book. It is, in fact a long book, but it really does come from a place of compassion and respect.

Look, the world is chaotic. Much is out of our control. We have been reminded of that lately in America, in this moment. Just recently, we've seen the verdict around the murder of a black man at the hands of law enforcement. Those kinds of issues and realities frighten us, as does widening income inequality, as does climate change, as does a pandemic. I'm just naming a few issues that are causing all of us stress and strain and that are largely out of our individual control to solve, right? So, in this book, I'm trying to acknowledge all of these forces at play and then

bring the reader back to themselves. "Who are you? What do you want out of this one, wild and precious life," quoting late poet Mary Oliver. "How can you be in charge of that self beautifully so that you can live the adult life you dream of?"

**Whitney Johnson:** You're making me cry. And we've been talking for two minutes, Julie.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Why are you crying, Whitney? What's coming up for you?

**Whitney Johnson:** It was just really beautiful the way you describe that of this notion of there, there is a lot of chaos around us, and I have children who are 20 and 24, and I think your children are about that age as well, and just saying there's all this out there, and yet, and yet, it is a wild and precious and wonderful life, and what I hear you saying is that's why you wrote this book, because you want to remind people of "Yes, it is hard, but you can figure it out and I'm going to help you do that."

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Right on you. You got me. You're grokking me right now, Whitney. I appreciate it.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, why does this matter to you? Why is this topic important to you?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** I'm 53. Which I say to you because, for all my life, for at least 45 to 50 years, for all my conscious life, I have known a deep caring for other humans. I'm not unique in that. Many of us have that sense of, "I care about others. I am here to try to help others on their path."

When my older half siblings asked me, when I was seven, they were in their 20s and they were joking about their nicknames for each other, and one of them turned to me and said, this would have been in the 1970s. One of them turned to me and said, "Julie, what's your nickname?" And I said, "Bridge over troubled waters." And they all dropped their mouth open like you just did. Like, "What?" Like, "Hey, little sister, what's going on?"

**Whitney Johnson:** You're seven!

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** And I was And Simon and Garfunkel was in the air at the time, so I didn't pull this phrase out of nowhere, but there was something in me that knew that I had this work of trying to be a bridge and of I think implicit in that is trying to serve.

So, I care deeply about all of us Whitney. I'm also black and biracial and I have other identities that that can put me on the margins of life, and so I have grown up as "the other." My life was not contemplated by most. Being the child of a black and white person, my parents transgressed the rules of their time just to fall in love, let alone to marry, let alone to conceive a child like me. So, I was sort of born not fitting in, born being outside society's boxes. I have always lived in the liminal spaces outside in between, and so I'm a questioner and I'm a rebel, and I'm somebody who believes deeply in trying to ensure that all of us, regardless of where society classifies and places us, to ensure that we all know we matter and that we all make it.

So, I'm interested in my work and the obstacles in the path of humans, whether those obstacles are external or within our spirit, within our mind, within ourselves. I've contended with that personally. I have a lot of compassion and empathy for humans, and, you know, my most recent work before being an author, which I think directly led to this writing work, was being a Dean at Stanford, Dean of Freshman and Undergraduate Advising, my job was to route like hell for all those students to make it. Not to "make it" according to society's definition of success or to what their parents always wanted them to be, but to help each soul listen to the stirrings within them and hate that voice.

So, rooting for humans is what I do, and I'm trying to write books that assist humans on their path and hold a mirror up to them. Make them feel less lonely and more seen.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, when I heard you say that in this book that you've just written, *Your Turn*, which we're about to, to dive into, is this idea, you are with this book striving to be a bridge over the troubled water from childhood to adulthood.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** I love that. Yeah, I mean, I have not told that story out loud in a long time, so I haven't used it in connection with this book, but it's just what came up as you asked me that question, I had to summon sort of my own origin story around this.

So, yes, it's another metaphor is I feel that I'm just shining a warm light back. I'm older, meaning I'm farther into this life thing, and so I've got a warm light in my hands and I'm turning around and shining it to illuminate options, pitfalls, possibilities. I'm trying to show everybody that, you know, everything you're dealing with is normal. Do not despair. It is going. It is happening. You're all right. That is the abiding message. You're all right. You're all right.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** You're all right.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that.

Let's look at this process of adulting through the lens of the S curve of Learning™, which our listeners will be very familiar with, is whenever you start something new, you're at this launch point in your gangly and awkward and figuring it out, and then, so everything feels really slow, and then you move into the sweet spot and you're like, your neurons are firing, you're figuring it out. It feels like you're going fast and it's exhilarating. Then you get to the high end, and you're like, "Now I've really figured it out. I've, I've mastered this. I'm a little bit bored, and it's probably time to do something new." And for you, having come out of academia, you will recognize this, that's how a freshman feels or a first year student feels, and that's how a fourth year feels in mastery, and then it's time for them to graduate and do something new. So, that's the context.

Now, I had a conversation with my daughter, who's 20, with one of our interns, who's 22, and so the next few questions I'm going to ask, you were seeded by them. "What do you want to know from Julie?"

And so one of the questions that we had was, what does the process of becoming an adult look like, and more specifically, what are some of the markers for an adult, a parent, a teacher to say, "Oh, OK, they're starting to want to adult?"

What are some of those markers that you can say they're beginning that process?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Beautiful. I love your S curve of Learning™ model. It reminds me of a model I learned about when I was on the board of Global Citizen Year, a gap year, bridge year organization out of Oakland. They talk about a different three stage concept of comfort zone, growth zone, panic zone. So, they don't want anyone to get to the third stage, and I think in some ways, mastery for you has that sort of pitfall of boredom. So, there is a point when we realize that third stage is really not the ideal point, and I think both of you have the sense of the sweet spot in the middle and Global Citizen Year calls it "the growth zone," and I was mulling this over when I was preparing for my conversation with you.

The first thing I want to say is I love that your daughter, your twenty year old, and, and your intern, who is 22 are engaged in this. I'm grateful that you went to them, because I think we definitely want their questions in this mix. My own kids are 21 and 19.

The second thing I'll say is I don't ever want us to master adulting and get bored. That is "adulting," now to be diving into the actual answer of the question, entails continual learning and growth. I don't ever want to make partner and coast. I don't ever want to make tenure and coast. I'm not saying people who make partner and make tenure do coast, some of them do. That's not for me. I am here to squeeze as much juice out of this life as possible until I take my last breath, and that philosophy and way of being is very much infused in the pages of *Your Turn*.

When we get to that place of mastery, I think that's when it's time to say, as I ask often my guests, when I'm allowed to gather with people, I say, "Who are you becoming? What are you working on within yourself?"

And that's not a, you know, "What title do you want or what salary level do you want?" It's, "Where are your rough edges and what are you doing to pay attention to them or your growth edges?"

We've talked about the existential out of our control. We've talked about you are in charge of the self and you're OK, I said at the end of the last question. What I would add to that in answer to the young people who asked is since our purpose is to learn and grow a growth mindset. Carol Dweck, right. We're not perfect. None of us is. We're to take a growth mindset, to know that our effort is everything. OK? So, then it's what am I trying to make effort around? Where do I need and want to learn and grow?

So, for parents and teachers and young adults themselves, the markers are that they are or you feel they should be, if they aren't, taking care of the basics. They are able to get themselves up. Get themselves fed. Get themselves to wherever it is they need to go for work or school or whatever their day comprises. Take care of their belongings. Track their own deadlines. Be accountable for their own actions when things went awry. Converse with others with respect, but also be able to advocate for themselves, to these others, often strangers. We've raised a generation of "kids don't talk to strangers." Turns out, that undermines their ability to thrive out in the world, because the world is full of strangers. All right? These are the basics.

OK, then we get into things like workplace. We've got a wonderful chart in my book and I don't have it handy, but a Silicon Valley private equity guy was like, "Look, there are five stages of employee behavior in the workplace.

And the first one is sort of sit there and wait for them to tell you what to do, and we don't want you at that stage very long. We want you on stage two. Look around and ask, 'How can I help? Do you need this?' And step three is, you know, just intuiting what's needed and doing it and then showing them you did it, and step four is just doing it and not even needing to show them. That's the progression. You get to this place of, 'I know what needs to happen. I'm confident I can give it a try. I will try hard. I will learn from my mistakes. I will keep going.' That is an emotional and workplace degree of maturity and usefulness that every employer wants to see, and so the stirrings are when a young person is like, you know, 'How can I help?'"

One of the things we can say back to them is, "Terrific. So glad you want to help. What do you notice might need help here? What are your ideas?" Like, we can invite them into the critical thinking about solving the problem or addressing the situation or getting the work done so good.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, there's a longing or like you said, a stirring that's happening of wanting to help and then part of the engagement with the, the other adults that aren't fully adults, because we're never fully adults...

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Right.

**Whitney Johnson:** ... is to say, "Well, what do you see? What needs to be done?"

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Yeah, you're inviting... In other words, childhood has often been a process of being spoon fed, and we should really only be spoon feeding our toddlers, but in our [inaudible], Whitney, too many of us are spoon feeding our 4th graders and 8th graders and 12th graders. That is, we're doing the thinking, we're doing the handling, the managing, the problem solving, so we're depriving them of developing the skills and the critical thinking ability that will allow them to propel themselves forward. Fundamentally, we're talking about having agency and agency should develop through childhood. If it's been an over-managed childhood, they will lack agency, but also resilience, the sense that I can cope when things go badly.

So, we've got to be really invested in bringing them through to that space. It's not abandoning them, you know, on the edge of the cliff of life and turning around and saying, "Good luck." I mean, that would violate our biological imperative to see this person through to adulthood. Nor does it mean straight jacketing them and or holding them in our arms their entire life. OK, so we've got to desire, we've got to have a stirring in us as parents that our young person will be able to fend without us. We have to stare into the abyss of our own eventual demise. As unpleasant as that is, parents, we will be dead and gone before our kids. We want it that way. We do not want the reverse. You need to have complete confidence that your offspring that you've left behind can adult, and we're supposed to be

teaching them at every step of the way to do and think and solve and handle and cope with the stuff of life. That is, I think, the most loving definition of parenting.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. I'm going to read a quote that you have in the book.

"Too much of a safety net leads to learned helplessness, which leads to anxiety and depression for our children. It's wanting to adult that springs open the trap and liberates us from the malaise."

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Indeed, and so this sentence is, I think in the chapter, *Get Out of Neutral: The Tragedy of Unused Potions*. It's the hinge of the book. It's Chapter six out of 13, and it's where I'm addressing why a generation might not want to adult.

What have we done, Whitney, lately such that stepping from 17 to 18 to 19 to 20 to 21 feels terrifying instead of freaking exhilarating? What have we done to make adulthood look so daunting? What have we done to make childhood feel so cushy such that they don't want to leave it? This book is trying to address why you may be stuck at this transition point and trying to entice them, not just to know the skills about making food and paying rent and, and so on, but like you need to want this stage of life.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. What's interesting about it, if you go back to the model that you talked about earlier, you're at the top of that S curve, the panic zone, for me, you're in mastery. So, you're mastery as a child. You're now in this panic zone, and what you're saying is that we, our generation has created a situation where they're like, "I like this plateau. I don't ever, ever, ever want to jump."

And so I have a couple of questions for you on that. What have we done in your estimation to create that? That's the first question, but then the second question, an observation, which is, I think as a parent, one of the most difficult things to do, and I think this is where we get into the sweet spot as a parent. One of the most difficult things for us to do is, as you said, let them go out and really have it be hard. Let them screw up, but in that screwing up, we don't abandon them, because I think it's very easy as a parent and maybe I'm revealing way too much about myself, but it's very easy as a parent to toggle or flip flop between complete engagement, because it's our own anxiety and complete abandonment, because we're like, "Oh, this is too hard. I just don't care." So, the sweet spot seems, to me, what you just described is this just you're engaged, but the engagement means you're pulling back.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Let me break it down, Whitney, and first of all, you're talking to a memoirist, so when I hear you say, "I might be revealing too much about myself," I'm cracking up because I am on the page as a memoirist, being vulnerable for people to read about and not because I'm an exhibitionist, but because I know that if we can dare to share the truth of our existence, we feel less alone. We also help others grow. So, I'm right here with you. Thank you for sharing that brief glimpse of your personal self that you did.

OK, so what have we done to create it? I mean, I wrote an entire book on this called *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Over-Parenting Trap*. I broke down the historical roots of helicopter parenting, I describe it. I describe how we got there and why it's problematic, and in a nutshell, we have started hovering over childhood since the mid 1980s, the creation of the playdate, ribbons and trophies just for every little thing they do. We're just sort of made childhood, very precious, very coddled, fewer children, more attention. A lot of us have our egos wrapped up in our kids existence, like our child is our pet that we've entered into the Westminster Dog Show. We are going for best in show, so that we can raise the trophy over our heads. "Look what I've done. Aren't I great? I've raised this dog to jump through hoops.", but our children are not dogs, and they are given to us by God or the universe or however you believe we arrive here, and they are separate beings from us.

So, that philosophical point and very literal point, they are not us. We are not them. We are not supposed to be enmeshed in their lives, controlling them, micromanaging them. This over parenting, this doing too much is the equivalent of micromanagement in the workplace, and anyone who's been micromanaged in the workplace knows it sucks, so why are we doing it to our children. Well, we're doing it because we love them and we think we know more and we do know more, and we're doing everything for them because we're more competent.

"I can cross the street more safely than you."

"Yes, of course. You're the grown up. You've done it twenty million times."

Your child needs to learn hand-in-hand and then voice-to-voice, you know, how to cross the street unless you intend to always cross the street for them. So, the point is, we're supposed to be transferring our skill set to them, not deluding ourselves that somehow they're just going to magically learn it one day.

So, let's talk about that sort of, the difference between letting them go and not abandoning them.

There's a four-step method for teaching any kid any skill, and I would love it if we could put a link at some point to a little cartoon in the Atlantic that depicts these four steps.

I am the voiceover voice, and then they gave a cartoonist the task of animating it. It's adorable.

Four steps. First, you do it for them, then you do it with them, then you watch them do it, and then they can do it completely independently. In other words, you're not going from completely doing it for them to them doing it independently. That would be abandonment or just really, really scary for the kid. We are overlooking steps two and three.

First you do it for them. Picture teaching a child to walk to cross the street. You do it for them. You're carrying them in your arms. They are infants.

Step two, you do it with them. They are toddlers. You're holding their hand or maybe they're three, four or five, whatever, right? And you're narrating, you're now teaching. This child is now listening and paying attention. You're entirely in charge. You're keeping them safe, but you're teaching with your voice about how humans look left and right to make sure it's safe, and you go slowly. Don't do this when you're in a hurry, OK? Yes. If you're in a hurry, you'll scoop them up and race across the street. That's not teaching, OK? You've got to be in a teaching mode enough time so that they learn the skill.

Step three is you let go of their hand and that's terrifying. You've got to know they're not running out into the street anymore. They have passed that milestone. You're still there, though. You're going to say, "Hey, buddy, we're going to practice crossing the street again, but guess what? Today, I'm not going to hold your hand and you're going to be the one to look both ways and decide whether it's safe. I'll be here just in case." And you watch your little one, painstaking. They're going to go, "I look left, right, left." And you say, "Slow down, buddy, slow down. You got to look." Teaching, teaching, you hear me? Little one says, "I'm ready, Daddy," steps out. You see that there's a car about to... You say, "Hold up, Buddy. You missed that one." You put your protective arm out. You're still there for the just in case.

You do step three enough times, you can get to step four. You can be enjoying a beverage of your choice with your friends one afternoon and know that your child out there in the world can safely cross streets. Whitney, we have to get to that step four about every single thing. All right? Everything, OK? We have to want that. If they're not there, they will be helpless. To quote Joe Maruszczak, a former superintendent in the Mendon-Upton school district in Massachusetts, "If we don't do that, our young people are like veal, chronologically adult, and prepared only to be slaughtered by the world."

Do we want that? No.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's amazing.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** It's devastating, but that's what all of the help and none of the skill building and resilience, that's what all of that does. We don't intend that.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, no, we don't. OK, so if you'll definitely send me that link, we will include that in the show notes. So good.

So, we've got the sweet spot and one of the questions that Emily asked, and I love this question, I think that you'll know you're on the sweet spot when this is happening.

She said, "How can I focus more on the joys of adulthood instead of the anxiety that it causes?"

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Yeah. Being able to hold competing feelings, competing perspectives, competing bits of information in your brain all at once is a skill and it needs to be practiced, and the better we get at it, the more calm and content we can be in the face of chaos. So, to be able to say, "Yeah, there are things that are chaotic or challenging or frightening and wrong, and wow, look over here, I am planting this garden. I am learning to make this meal. I just saw this awesome video and I'm going to get the ingredients going to cook this meal for myself and my roommate know I have decided to learn a new language. I am pursuing the study of this." You know, it's "both and." To know that the bad stuff is normal, it is a part of this chaotic life over which we have very little control, but what we have a heck of a lot of control over is our own actions and reactions, and the better we can get at reframing, "Oh, I can't do this." "What can I do?"

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** You know, the better we can get at adhering to the design school principle of, "Just start fail your way forward." You know, just taking action in some direction stimulates us and makes us feel like, "Well, I'm doing this, and I'm not saying it's perfect and I'm not saying it's right, but I have chosen to give this a try," and that gives us a sense of, a little bit of sense of control, and we're activating our agency, and we're probably feeling some delight from the thing we're doing. So, we never take that other thing away. We're just sort of putting it in context of what we're in charge of and what we're not.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, I love that. It's a "both and." That's where our conversation started, right? We talked about how the world was full of chaos and it's a wild and precious life, and I think to answer Emily's question of maybe a lot of people who are listening, you know you're starting to grow up when you can hold those opposing things together. That's part of emotional maturity, is that ability to do that. Things aren't binary like they are when, when you're a child, but as you become an adult, you're able to hold the "both and."

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** That's right. Thank you. That's a beautiful summary.

**Whitney Johnson:** In your book, you talked about a few things that you can do to practice fending or adulting, and I flagged a couple of things that I would love for you just to touch on quickly.

One is you said, "Keeping your options open is a trap."

Number two, you said, "Don't bolt at the first sign of a problem."

And number three, you said, "Reply and show up."

I'd love it if you'd comment on those three.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Sure. Um, keep options open as sort of a trope these days. Typically a young person hears it when the older person doesn't like what they're about to do, right?

"So, I'm going to major in blah." "Oh, no, honey, keep your options open."

"Oh, I think I'll do this for the summer." Oh, don't you want to keep your options open?"

It's sort of this thinly veiled critique or judgment. Is it Harry Schwartz at Swarthmore who writes about the fatigue of choice, paradox of choice? Who talks about, you know, when you have so many options, it can become paralyzing. The obligation to keep all of one's life options open is just anxiety producing, because life is full of infinite possibility, and even if they just want you to keep six or seven options open, that's a hell of a lot of options, and we can't possibly. It also implies that there is a perfect option, which I reject there. I don't think there is a "perfect

option." There are options and each one offers different things that are positive and things that are pitfalls, and you've got to decide which one you're going to try. So, don't bolt at first sign of trouble. For me, the interesting question is why do they bolt? And often if they've been in a childhood where adults have handled the play and the playing and the play dates and the disagreement and any difficulties, they don't know how to deal with conflict and struggle.

In fact, my 21 year old said to me and my husband just this week, Whitney... He heard us talking about a third party with whom we're having kind of a difficult, complicated set of interactions, you know, and we were talking about "How are we going to talk to him? What do we want to say that's respectful, but also clear?" And our son was making food for himself and he turned to us and he said, "Thank you for having this conversation in front of me. It's really great to know that adults are struggling with this stuff, too." And we said, "Absolutely, honey, and we wish we'd had more of these conversations in front of you. We were taught to take all the difficult conversations away from children, so their childhood was perfect, and we've deprived you of the knowledge that adults do have challenges and how adults work them through how adults solve problems."

So, we have to be modeling this. Take the very scary conversations away from your children, but the run of the mill, humans just sorting through stuff, let them see us. We are their freaking role models. All right. And reply and show up.

**Whitney Johnson:** You had a quote that I love that I have to show people. It was, "Conflict with another person is the only way to make progress as a human."

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Yeah, yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Love that.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** We want to avoid conflict, but, hey, we're complex and we don't all agree. Lord knows that. So, we've got to learn how to be respectful and kind. Treat other people with dignity. Get our own point across. All of that. Those are skills that have to be mastered.

And then reply and show up. I think I do say in the book, Whitney, literally, and I did mean that as I'm typing this, I get an email from a college professor who knows I'm writing this book who says, "Can you tell them to reply and show up?"

Look, it's discourteous. In some ways, it's like you're keeping all your social options open. So someone has asked you, "Do you want to come to this meeting? Do you want to come to this party?" And you don't even reply because you're keeping your options open. That's so rude, right? You need to say "yes" or "no." "Maybe" is slightly better than not responding, but this person is trying to plan for, "How many chairs do I need? How much food do I need? How much money do I need to spend?" Right? "Do I let in other people?" You know, maybe it's limited in size. So, we, we have to be people of our word. We have to have an answer, and if you don't know, it's OK to say, "You know what, I'm not sure," but then get back to them, like, figure it out, and never, ever say, "Well, I'm free for now," because that implies that you're saying, "But something better could come along."

I mean, Lord, when people say that to me, I just want to say, "What is wrong with you?"

"I'm free right now."

"Well, no, I'm asking you, like, do you want to come to my event?"

If so, the answer is yes, and then you book it and then you show up. Unless something comes up. If something comes up, you courteously try to let people know in advance. If you can't, try to let them know as soon as you can after. I know, that's hard if you have social anxiety. I know it's hard, it's hard if you may have a mental health situation. I acknowledge all of those possibilities in the book. I'm trying to be deeply inclusive of all human conditions and experiences, but these common courtesies, Whitney, are the red carpet that opens the doors of life,



so the better we get at replying and showing up, the more kind we are seen to be. The more people will delight in our presence and invite us to do more things that want to be with us.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's the mantra. "Reply and show up." I love it.

For you and your husband, have you had a moment recently where you, you turned to each other in you're like, high-fiving each other because you're like, "Yeah, we're doing a really good job of parenting our children as they are adulting." Any moment recently that you're like, "It worked, it's working"?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Yeah. So, that thing in the kitchen, when my son gave us feedback right there on the spot, that was sort of a high-five moment. Our daughter is back east at school. She's constantly giving me feedback that I'm trying to fix. Whenever she has a problem, I'm trying to fix it, because I can, right, Whitney? I know a lot of things. She doesn't want to be fixed. She wants to be held in her emotional reality, she wants to be seen, and every time I manage to not fix, but just be like, "Oh, honey, that sounds so frustrating. Oh, yuck. Oh, I really feel for you," and then I shut up, I'm high-fiving myself.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'm high-fiving you too right now.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Thank you, and I'll say sometimes, "You know, you may just want to vent. If you also want ideas, I'm here for that. You let me know."

And I work so hard to say that in a way that's not, "Do you want my great ideas honey?", but just, just emotionally a little detached, so they can have their life.

Yeah, and then we are involved in some family therapy with my other kid, and we got to a place where we realized because of some of his challenges around ADHD and anxiety, which he's given permission to tell people about, we've been inadvertently walking on some eggshells around him, presuming a fragility and an inability to handle things, and we've been called out on that, and we have immediately deployed some repatterning into our family dynamic. This may sound a little, you know, ambiguous, esoteric for some of you. OK, it sounds wonky, but it's...

**Whitney Johnson:** I love it.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** One final example. I just have to say this. He was like, "Mom, I'm nervous about this conversation I'm about to have with my boss this summer. I'm worried," and he told me why he was worried, and I looked at him and I was like, "Yeah, that sounds like it's going to be hard, but you know what? You do hard things, and I know that no matter what, you're going to be OK."

And he just looked at me with wide eyes and like, "Wow, mind blown. Yes," and I high-fived myself as I walked out of the room and didn't fret about my son in this conversation he has to have.

**Whitney Johnson:** I am so with you, Julie. I am so with you. Every time I don't proffer advice, I give myself a high-five, too, because it is so hard. Michael Bungay Stanier calls it "the advice monster," and I have to work very hard to keep that "advice monster" caged.

You have now written three books on this topic. So, you wrote *How to Raise an Adult*. You wrote *Your Turn*. You wrote this exquisite, it is exquisite, a coming of age memoir called *Real American*. What's the thread for you and what do you most want your body of work to have accomplished? When you think about the legacy of your body of work, what do you want it to have accomplished?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** I appreciate your kindness, Whitney. I appreciate that you've taken that middle book into your being and described it that way. It is, certainly the memoir is, of course the most, the most vulnerable share. I am, as I said at the outset, just trying to serve humans. I have been alienated and alone. I have been judged. I have done bad things. I have done things I regret. I have learned and grown, so I'm trying to pass the lessons I've learned on to other humans. I have a fierce passion for young people thriving. I am a former freshman Dean.

On the pages of *Your Turn*, I am trying to be respectful and compassionate, but also insistent and blunt. "It's your turn, kid. It's your turn. Let's go." It's happening. It's happening now. I am deeply interested in the human journey and I'm deeply interested in its complexity, and Mario Cuomo comes to mind. I was a kid when he was governor of New York, and he said something like, "We don't make it unless we all make it." You know, we're not in a race where one of us wins. I'm not... I agree with that comment. I am interested in all of us making it. So, I'm just trying to write these books that I think largely come under the realm of human development to do my tiny part to ensure we all move forward.

**Whitney Johnson:** Back to the bridge. All right.

So, Julie, for people who want to engage with you, what's the best way for them to connect with you and your work?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Come sit in my backyard and tell me what you're working on in terms of your own growth. Man, do I love those conversations.

More practically. Come to me online. I'm at @jlythcotthaims, everywhere. Social media is happening, including clubhouse, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, maybe even Tik-Tok. We shall see. @jlythcotthaims and my website, julielythcotthaims.com, is where you can learn more about my books and the upcoming talks I might be involved in, and please do connect. I do my best to respond on social. I am a one-on-one person and so I will try to show up. If you ask me a question, I will try to respond thoughtfully and with useful information. So, please do connect. I have a TED talk that's on the over-parenting thing. So yeah, please check me out and let's connect if my work resonates with you and the things you care about.

**Whitney Johnson:** Final two questions. Something that I, I'm always curious about is I've just been asking you lots of questions and you've been enlightening me and all of our listeners, and at the end of a coaching session, I always ask what was useful for you? So, what, what's kind of bubbled up for you? So, as you were thinking and talking and processing, what's something that you're going to take away for yourself from this conversation?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** It's a funny answer, but it's the importance of preparation. Life is busy and I'm launching a book right now. I'm on a lot of podcasts and a lot of conversations which I'm grateful to have the opportunity to do, and I wanted to be sure I understood your S curve because I didn't want to wing it. I didn't want to disrespect your work by not being familiar with it and not being able to properly address that type of question in the context of my work. Sometimes we have to wing it and sometimes circumstances are such that we end up just showing up and doing our best, but when we can give ourselves a few moments to center ourselves, pay attention to what's about to happen and get clear "What, what is my objective? How do I want to show up to be of greatest use and to be respectful of the context I'm showing up in?" You know, I think that's my takeaway from today.

**Whitney Johnson:** Any final thoughts?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** You do a great job of synthesis. You are doing a magnificent job of synthesizing what I'm saying, and I'm serious. I talk to a lot of people and, Whitney, you've got a, more power to you. You're doing it's just beautiful. Just how you brought the bridge metaphor back in a few times and you're just noticing you're seeing imagery and synonyms, in my words, such that you're able to package them up and bring them back in a, in a really succinct way. I need to be more succinct, so I'm paying attention to that.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'm going blushing, Julie. I'm blushing. Thank you for the compliment.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** Yeah, Whitney. We all want to know we matter. This is universal. Regardless of our race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, degree of education, mental health status, et cetera, religion, I've left out important identities, I realize, I'm sorry. We all are desperately hungry to know that we matter, not to everybody. Only narcissists have to matter to everybody, right? We just, each of us needs some folks who care about us, and about whom we care. We are so hungry to know we matter, and so I think that's my parting work and, and advice.

What can you do to show up in the lives of your loved ones, family, friends, colleagues, to demonstrate to them that they matter? Asking people what they need is a great way to do that. Little eye contact. Little smile on your face. My amazing life partner, Dan, rolled over one day on a Saturday morning in bed during the pandemic. I mean, we're in the pandemic, but this was early. On a Saturday morning when I was already doing work from our bedside while still horizontal in bed on my phone dealing with stuff, he rolled over and pressed his forehead into my back and he said, "Baby, what can I do to make today easier for you?"

And I think over 33 years of fierce love, that was definitely one of the top five things he has ever said or done, and we can all do it when I tell the story, people say, "How can I find Dan? Does he have a brother?" And my response is, "I think the right question is, 'how can I be like Dan?'"

**Whitney Johnson:** How can I be Dan?

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** For one another, right? That's how we actually level up this human community, and it's possible, and it's free.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, well, my third round of tears for this interview.

Julie Lythcott-Haims, thank you so much.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims:** My pleasure. One hundred percent my pleasure. Thank you, and thanks to everyone who listened.

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I'm going to rapid fire what I loved. Eight things.

Number one. "Rooting for humans is what I do." What a great tagline.

Number two. I loved her question, "What are you doing to pay attention to your rough edges, to your growth edges?" I have so many. Where to start?

Number three. Adulting defined: take care of the basics, keep track of your belongings and deadlines, advocate for yourself and show up at work not asking what you can do, but figuring out what problems need to be solved and finding ways to solve them.

Number four. So hard not to have our egos wrapped up in our kids existence. It's not the Westminster Dog Show where we are going for best in show holding the trophy over our head. Guilty.

Number five. Thinking about the messy middle. That place where we let our children go, but we don't abandon them. As I share to Julie, the memoirist, ah, I struggle with that too. A reminder that it takes a lot of work to be in the sweet spot of our S curve as a parent or any sweet spot for that matter.

Number six. Respond. Reply to emails.

Number seven. I love how she said to her son, "Sounds like it's going to be hard, but you could do hard things."

Finally, number eight. "Common courtesies are the red carpet that open the doors of life." The better we get at replying and showing up, the more kind we are, the more people will delight in our presence, and the more they

will invite us and want to be with us. Those are courtesies that Julie practiced with me. I enjoyed being with her, and I'm confident you did, too.

Thank you again to Julie Lythcott-Haines for being our guest. Thank you to you for joining us. And thank you to our team, Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig and Melissa Rutty.

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