

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 220: SARAH FEINGOLD

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice for how to climb the S curve of Learning in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be.

I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

We talk a lot on this podcast about playing to your strengths, playing where no one else is playing. These are the first two accelerants of personal disruption. One of the best examples of this I've come across is Sarah Feingold. Sarah is co-founder of Fourth Floor, helping women become board ready, as well as matching companies who need women on their board. But when I sat down with her a few years ago, we talked about her disruptive approach to becoming the 17th employee at Etsy, the online marketplace for handmade. Sarah's story is so compelling and so relevant to climbing an S curve, we're doing an encore episode. Enjoy.

Sarah Feingold: My name is Sarah Feingold and I'm General Counsel of Vroom.com.

Whitney Johnson: Sarah, thank you so much for being here today. We're actually here in these offices right around the corner from your office at Vroom in the Flatiron District in New York City in a co-working space, so it's fun to be in this area where there's a lot of hustle and bustle and people trying to make their dreams come true. Thank you for being here today.

Sarah Feingold: Thanks. Thank you so much for having me.

Whitney Johnson: What's the most disruptive thing you did when you were in school?

Sarah Feingold: When I was in school? Are we talking about law school or are we talking about elementary school?

Whitney Johnson: You choose!

Sarah Feingold: Well, let's talk about law school, because I think that a lot of people go to law school because they are going down a path of not disruption. And while I was in law school, one of the most disruptive things I did was I petitioned my law school advisory board or whatever that was to let me take a graduate level metal smithing class, because I am a jeweler. And it was very important to me to continue my art education at the same time as I was getting my law degree.

Whitney Johnson: Where did you go to law school?

Sarah Feingold: I went to law school in Syracuse University College of Law. They have a fantastic, I mean not law the school, but the university has the fantastic arts program. That was one of the reasons why I chose the law school.

Whitney Johnson: So, you knew you wanted metal smithing when you first went to law school?

Sarah Feingold: Yes. That's, and for anybody listening, if you're choosing a law school, go by the arts program. That is pretty much what you should learn from my story.

Whitney Johnson: Right. Oh, yeah. Completely logical.

Sarah Feingold: Clearly.

Whitney Johnson: So, what is a metal smith do exactly?

Sarah Feingold: A metal smith melts metal with fire and I pierce metal out with saws, I make jewelry, little, small sculptures. I love shiny things. I love small things, and I've been making jewelry since I was 12. I took my first metal smithing class, and I knew that this was something that I always wanted in my life, but when you make metal things, you tend to have metal things going to your fingers and your back hurts from being hunched over over a jeweler's bench. And so, I realized physically this was not the path for me, but I always wanted to help metal smiths and artists in some sort of way. And I thought through law that could, that could really help.

Whitney Johnson: So, you didn't decide to go to law school because it was the practical thing to do? It was more of, from a physical standpoint, it was difficult to do metal smithing all day long, every day.

Sarah Feingold: Correct. Yes. I knew that physically couldn't do jewelry. It was very, very difficult from a physical standpoint. And I'm a relatively healthy person. It's really hard emotionally and physically. But I also started

Whitney Johnson: So, physically, what, because you're bending over...

Sarah Feingold: You're bending over, you're, you're squinting, looking at tiny little things as you're soldering something, it gets really hot and you'll burn yourself.

Whitney Johnson: What does soldering mean?

Sarah Feingold: That means heating up the metal so hot that the melting point melts the metal. The metal melts. And so, you can, you can combine two pieces...

Whitney Johnson: So, you can burn your fingers when you do that?

Sarah Feingold: Oh, yes. Seriously, when you're...

Whitney Johnson: So, you're bending over, it can hurt your fingers. And why is it tough emotionally?

Sarah Feingold: Emotionally, I think that I became really emotionally involved in my pieces and I couldn't bring myself to sell them and things like that. Which apparently you need to do if you want to be a professional artist, put a price tag on it and let them go, but I like to keep everything. But I started thinking while I was making all these beautiful pieces of art, and some of them that were terrible, what aspects of jewelry could be protected by intellectual property and that sort of thing. And so that's what led me to law school. I wanted to answer those questions for other people.

Whitney Johnson: As you think about your professional life, what's the one thing you've done that those closest to you were most surprised by?

Sarah Feingold: Well, professionally, I think what people really surprised by is how I landed at Etsy and what I did to get there.

Whitney Johnson: Oh!

Sarah Feingold: I was out of law school. I was in Rochester, New York. I was at a firm, an associate at a regular law firm, selling my jewelry on Etsy because I had discovered the website and I fell in love with it.

Whitney Johnson: What does Etsy do? I mean, I know, I love it, but I bought prints on Etsy, but what does it do exactly?

Sarah Feingold: Etsy is an online venue that connects buyers to sellers. It's mainly for, uh, Etsy's mission is to reimagine commerce to build a more fulfilling and lasting world and you can buy handmade goods, vintage items, and commercial crafting supplies directly from really small businesses.

Whitney Johnson: I bought a lot of prints from there which I love.

Sarah Feingold: I love it. I buy everything from Etsy, seriously. Still do.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so how did you get this job?

Sarah Feingold: How did I get the job? I found out about Etsy. I was selling my jewelry on Etsy, and I started reading everything about the company; I just thought was phenomenal. And I realized that they were launching some new policies, and I had some ideas, so I wrote to the customer service team and I offered some insights from my legal background about how they could update some of their policies. And they responded and said, "Thank you so much." I said, "You know what? Why don't I just speak with your founder." And they gave me his number! So, I called...

Whitney Johnson: "The founder needs to talk to me."

Sarah Feingold: Clearly.

Whitney Johnson: What year was this?

Sarah Feingold: This was 2007. Etsy had been around maybe around a year, year and a half. So, the founder got on the call with me. We spoke for, I don't know, maybe a half hour or so. I gave him some ideas. I hung up the phone and thought, "You know what, this company is amazing. I love this company, their business model. I'm a seller. I love this company so very much. I think that I can add value to this company and they clearly need the value that I could add.

I booked a JetBlue ticket from Rochester, New York, to New York City, and I called the founder back and I said, "Hey, I'm coming down for an interview. You need in-house counsel, and you need it to be me."

Whitney Johnson: "An interview with you."

Yeah, "Hey, you're interviewing me. I'm showing up. I'm showing up next week." And he, I flew down. He interviewed me, hired me on the spot.

He said, "yes"?

Yeah. I broke my lease. I got a Brooklyn sublet. I got malpractice insurance and I stayed there for nine years.

Whitney Johnson: So, what did you say to him? Do you remember what advice you gave to him that he his interest was piqued?

Sarah Feingold: I think his interest was piqued because I told him I would take on the headaches so he could grow the business. I would deal with cease-and-desist letters. I would negotiate contracts. I would look over confusing attorney's bills and he could grow the business. I would empower the business growth. I wouldn't be one of those lawyers that would be like, "No. No. No. No. No." Plus, I knew the community. I know, I know the law. I'm an artist myself. I think that if you're going to hire an in-house attorney, you should hire somebody who really understands the business and can add to it and somebody who is able to, as I prove to him, add value and empower growth.

Whitney Johnson: And so, he hired you on the spot.

Sarah Feingold: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: This is such a perfect example of two things from a disruption perspective. The first is to... You play where no one else is playing or no one else has thought of playing. And you absolutely thought of, I mean, this is like textbook. You find a job you want. You figure out how you can solve that problem and then you explain to them how you can solve that problem and then they hire you.

The second piece of this that's so fascinating about what you've done is you're playing to your, not only your strengths, but to your distinctive strengths, because here you were a lawyer, but you said, "You know what, I don't want to be a lawyer at a law firm doing litigation around something I don't care about. I want to go be a lawyer inside of Etsy so I can help other artisans, other makers do their work."

Sarah Feingold: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: Amazing.

Sarah Feingold: That's exactly what I did. and amazing.

Whitney Johnson: So, what's one of your proudest moments there, of something that you accomplished?

Sarah Feingold: I started at Etsy as their 17th employee. When I left a couple of months ago, we were well over eight hundred employees. I was, I was there over nine years, helped grow the legal team, helped to launch different policies, help to deal with litigation, deal with employment issues, negotiate contracts. I like to say that my little fingerprints are all over the website in some sort of way. I really can't point at one particular project that I'm most proud of. A lot of things I literally can't talk about because of attorney-client privilege.

Whitney Johnson: Fair enough.

Sarah Feingold: But really just helping the company grow in mission and values aligned way, it makes me so proud to see, to read, or to even hear people tell me how Etsy has impacted their lives in a positive way.

Whitney Johnson: And you get lots of Etsy stories.

Sarah Feingold: Yes, I'm so lucky.

Whitney Johnson: Is there one in particular?

Sarah Feingold: I remember reading this person sent us an email basically saying, "You know, because of Etsy, I was able to buy Christmas presents for my child and I've never had my own money before." And it was just a really beautiful thing. And another woman was able to put a down payment on our house because of the money she earned from Etsy. And every one of those stories, we just would just well up and just smile and all of our hard work because it's hard it's hard to grow a company, especially a company with such a passionate community.

Whitney Johnson: Let's talk about your current company.

Sarah Feingold: Okay.

Whitney Johnson: Vroom.

Sarah Feingold: Vroom.

Whitney Johnson: What do you do there? Why did you decide to go there?

Sarah Feingold: So, it was a really it was a really tough decision to leave Etsy. I'm glowing talking about Etsy. I'm glad you said that because I love Etsy. I don't have anything negative say that it's an amazing, amazing company. But after nine years, I was getting pretty comfortable.

Whitney Johnson: You were at the top of your learning curve!

Sarah Feingold: I was at the top of my learning curve, and I wanted to be uncomfortable again...

Whitney Johnson: Yes!

Sarah Feingold: ... And learn new things. And so, Etsy had been public for around a year and I just kind of had my eyes and ears open and Vroom came along, and I was just really fascinated by their business model disrupting, buying and selling cars. And for so many of us, buying a car is not the best experience. And so, what Vroom is trying to do is add some transparency and humanity to buying and selling cars, which is a huge purchase. And I just thought that I was really impressed by the team and really impressed by the numbers. And I thought, you know what, "This is the time." And so, I gave plenty of notice that Etsy wanted to make sure that everyone was set up for success, and I joined Vroom. And I've been there for around four months now.

Whitney Johnson: So, it's a secondary market for cars?

Sarah Feingold: What do you mean secondary market?

Whitney Johnson: So, used cars or...

Sarah Feingold: Yes, it's used cars. So, what Vroom does is, let's pretend you want to sell a car. You fill out some paperwork. We make you an offer. You say, "Okay." We wire you the money and pick up the car.

Whitney Johnson: It's that simple?

Sarah Feingold: It's that simple.

Whitney Johnson: And if I want to buy a car... So, my daughter, she just turned 16. We're going to need...

Sarah Feingold: You need a car, clearly.

Whitney Johnson: ... a beater car for her.

Sarah Feingold: Yes! Or something nicer. Or you want something nice! You want something nice and safe.

Whitney Johnson: Well, nice enough and safe. Safe, we want safe.

Sarah Feingold: Safe, nice and safe. Vroom has some fantastic, beautiful cars on our website and it's just the fee, that's how much it costs. No haggling and you can get financing through us and all that and you enter your information. We drop it off at your door.

Whitney Johnson: How do you ensure quality control?

Sarah Feingold: We take the cars ourselves.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, because you take ownership.

Sarah Feingold: We own them. We take ownership of the cars. You're not buying it through someone through us. That, as opposed to...

Whitney Johnson: Oh, that requires a lot of working capital.

Sarah Feingold: A lot of working capital and a lot of human capital. So, we have people who actually physically inspect the cars, make sure that they're up to our standards, correct anything that might be problematic, take photographs of it, put it on our website, deliver all them.

Whitney Johnson: So, this is like real real.

Sarah Feingold: It's real. It's real real. Absolutely. And I've gone to see all of our cars and it's kind of surreal because I'm so used to dealing in an environment that's kind of fake, like, "Wow, there are a lot of cars here and they're all beautiful." Most of them are in Texas. So, we have a big facility over in Texas and that's where the majority of the reconditioning work and all the work gets done.

Whitney Johnson: So, you were at the top of your curve at Etsy, you jump to new curve and you're, you reinvigorated. Are you... What are you learning new now?

Sarah Feingold: Oh, my gosh. I don't know anything about cars. Now, I'm learning so many things. And I'm meeting, I'm meeting people and I'm go, and I'm, I'm just learning a ton and I'm growing a team and growing another company. And it's fun to do things, like a lot of people, once you get in a certain position at a company, sometimes you have to delegate a lot and you become like a subject matter expert in a very niche area. And now I am a generalist again and I'm handling everything. So, you know, an employment issue happens, litigations going on and we're launching a new product, "Oh, this contract needs to go negotiating." I get to do it all.

Whitney Johnson: So, you went from being a specialist to a generalist again?

Sarah Feingold: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: While you're learning a different industry.

Sarah Feingold: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: Fascinating. What's the hardest thing you've ever done professionally?

Sarah Feingold: Oh, what is the hardest thing I've ever done professionally? Oh. I mean, listen, I'm doing hard things every day... You know what, I'll tell you. I'll tell you the hardest thing I've ever had to do professionally, and it was a couple of months ago. I had to terminate several employees and it was extremely hard. It's extremely, extremely hard. Sometimes when you're a lawyer, you have to do things that just.... Send in a lawyer to do some things that are just really hard to do.

Whitney Johnson: Did you know these people?

Sarah Feingold: I knew them a little bit, but I mean, I had just joined Vroom, so not well.

Whitney Johnson: So, you had to play henchmen.

Sarah Feingold: Well, not even that.

Whitney Johnson: It felt like it. Not that you were.

Sarah Feingold: Not even that. Not that I was, but, you know, and I had the support of our, our CEO was there, our CFO was there. But like planning the whole situation is really difficult. And, you know...

Whitney Johnson: Had you let people go before?

Sarah Feingold: I had, but not as many at the same time. So, that professionally, that's, it's really hard because, you know, I always say, "I like being in the startup world. There's so much really cool stuff happening. You're dealing with money; you're dealing with IP." But when you're looking someone in the face and realizing that you're giving them some very difficult news, it never gets easier. It never does. And that was probably the hardest thing I've had to do professionally.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, it's interesting. When people end up having to leave, how do you treat them with respect so that they know that...? Because sometimes you let people go because they're just not performing well and sometimes you let people go because the numbers aren't what you needed them to be or they're on the wrong role. And so, I guess that differs, but it's hard no matter what.

Sarah Feingold: It's hard no matter what. It's hard no matter what. Even, even if somebody is... I've had to terminate people who are clearly doing things that they should not be doing, and it's still very difficult.

Whitney Johnson: What's your proudest moment as a developer of talent?

Sarah Feingold: So, I don't have any Direct Reports right now, but I'm hiring. But I had a bunch of Direct Reports on Etsy and I would give someone a task and they would do it so well with minimal oversight. And I would just come in and look at it and just be so, so thrilled that they were just able to take something and run with it. And they did it in their own way. It wasn't exactly how I would have done it, but I didn't care, because it was amazing. And it made me so proud to see somebody who I helped to mentor and get to a place where they don't need me, and they could just run with something.

Whitney Johnson: Give me some advice. If I want to have employees like that who are able to flourish, could you give me a couple of tips of what you, some concrete things you did to help them?

Sarah Feingold: Yes, invite them to meetings and let them watch you do what you do and kind of show by example and bring them in and coach them one-on-one and, you know, give them smaller tasks and then get them ready for the larger task and then just basically say to them, "Listen, you're ready. I trust you. You can do it."

Whitney Johnson: And when someone is to the point where, so for example, you were at Etsy, you'd reached the top of a learning curve. When you have someone who works for you that reaches the top of that learning curve, what do you say to them? What do you do? Do you move them?

Sarah Feingold: I think it's important when you're a manager to constantly have career conversations with your Direct Reports about like where they see themselves and what they want out of the company and what they want of their career, and as they start to get really good at certain things to try to push them in other directions to keep them reaching.

Whitney Johnson: Can you think of an example where you've done that?

Sarah Feingold: Yes, I had a Direct Report who was fantastic and was really, really good at this one area and we needed some expertise in another area. And I asked her if she wanted to learn about this, and she was basically like, "I don't know anything about it."

I'm like, "Well, you're gonna! Is it something that you're interested in learning about?"

She said, "Yes."

And so, we worked together to try to push her in that direction as well. And she did phenomenal there. And yeah. So, it's really as simple as that.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Sarah Feingold: It's simple and as difficult as that. But, you know, I think it's just a matter of, you know, seeing potential in somebody and really trusting them and encouraging them to flourish.

Whitney Johnson: Best boss ever?

Sarah Feingold: Best boss ever? Okay, so I'm going to go back in time. One of my first bosses who I clerked for when I was in law school. Her name, I'm getting teary because I miss her. She passed away. Her name was Karen DeCrow, and she was the fourth president of N.O.W., the National Organization for Women, and she's a big feminist. She's in the Women's, National Women's Hall of Fame. And I was her clerk, and I was thinking about her today, because, you know, for the Election Day.

Whitney Johnson: It's Election Day.

Sarah Feingold: Election Day. But I really learned so much from her because she just did things. She was like, "I'm going to run for mayor. I'm going to be the first woman to run for mayor," and she did. And back in the day, that was just never done. And so, when I was talking to her.

Whitney Johnson: In what city was this?

Sarah Feingold: That was in Syracuse, and I was, back in the day when I was really frustrated in law school, just wondering, "Where is my career going to take me?", she pushed me to thinking about writing and speaking engagements and thinking outside the box. And I just learned so much from her and her career and how she was able to just break down barriers for equality. And I never really thought of myself like, "Oh, I'm a woman. There's no way I could be General Counsel of a company," because of what she has done. And so, she was probably the best boss I've ever had because of the bigger lessons that I learned from her.

Whitney Johnson: So, she modeled for you how you could be?

Sarah Feingold: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: Did she push you hard?

Sarah Feingold: She didn't push me that hard just because I was in law school and I was her clerk like, you know, part time. But I think after law school, we had this more like friendship and a mentor-mentee relationship, and she would push me, you know, I would tell her things that were going on at Etsy, and she would help push me in certain directions. So...

Whitney Johnson: So, an advisor, a role-model and advisor?

Sarah Feingold: Yeah, that would be it.

Whitney Johnson: How do you think about risk?

Sarah Feingold: Well, I'm a lawyer, so I think about risk all the time.

Whitney Johnson: Right.

Sarah Feingold: I think that a lot of lawyers are risk averse and that's why you go to law school, because it seems like a path towards a job that makes some money. And people think that money is going to give them some sort of freedom and things like that, but when you are a lawyer for a company, companies need to take risks. And if they

don't take risks, then the company's not going to exist anymore. So, I'm always pushing outside counsel, always pushing myself to feel, like, a little uncomfortable and have, we have to take certain risks, either in our personal life, in our professional life, in our careers, otherwise we're never going to get anywhere. And so, I'm always trying to take risks and empower our business to take risks. Enough risks, but you always have to understand what are the consequences of the risks.

Whitney Johnson: And it is interesting to me, because I, having been co-founded a number of startups and been an investment manager, I did definitely see that there were lawyers who would say, "No. No. No. No. No. Here's why you can't do it. It won't work." And then there were lawyers who would say, "All right, I understand what you're trying to get done. Let me figure out how to make it possible for you to get it done. These are the risks, but let's figure out how to get this done."

Sarah Feingold: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: And I suppose that to be a General Counsel, that's what you have to know how to do.

Sarah Feingold: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. I always say, "I would have no'd myself out of a job long ago if I just kept saying no," because your head is in... the legal head is saying, "There's a risk here, there's a risk here, there's a risk here, there's a risk here." And then you have to just come down from a business standpoint and put on your business hat, and I always think, "Business first. Law second." And from a business standpoint, "Okay, so how big is this risk?" And when you're a smaller company, you can take more risks and when you're not regulated, you can take certain risks. And then when you get bigger, you just have to be more thoughtful with the risks that you're taking and trust your advisors, but at the same time, push back at them and say, "Okay, you're telling me no, why? And what's the worst that can happen and what are the chances that terrible thing that you think is going to happen is going to happen?"

And then, exactly what you are saying, I try to work with our product managers or engineers or businesspeople to understand what their goals are, why I am uncomfortable, and then tweaking things so that we're all happy.

Whitney Johnson: So, if I want to, if I'm going out to hire a lawyer, how... Are there any questions I can ask or think through to ferret out a lawyer who thinks "business first, law second" versus "law first, business second"?

Sarah Feingold: Well, you know, there are a lot of lawyers out there and they all specialize in different things and have different ways of going about... If you give a contract to ten lawyers, you're going to get ten different red lines of the agreement. Different people have different issues with different languages. I mean, I could just ask, you could just ask that question, you know, "What do you think about taking risks or what do you think about... What do you see your role as being my advisor?" Because there are definitely times when lawyers just see themselves as being the most conservative, taking the most conservative approach. And that's okay, but you have to know that what you know what's best for your business, so to ask those follow up questions. Or maybe it's time to hire an inside counsel like me, to be the go between. And that's one of the ways that I pitched myself to Etsy back in the day, because, you know, lawyers, they have these giant bills and they're writing these giant memos and they're saying, "No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No." And I'm, and I'm in between basically saying, "Okay, you know what? You're the expert in this area of law, but I'm the expert in this company. Let's take this information and tweak it so that I can feel happy and so will my team."

Whitney Johnson: How did you learn how to negotiate? Because that's what you do all day long every day.

Sarah Feingold: I do it all day long.

Whitney Johnson: You learn how to; you know how to negotiate.

Sarah Feingold: Right.

Whitney Johnson: Is this something you did when you were growing up or this something...?

Sarah Feingold: My parent, my parents are entrepreneurs, so I saw them grow businesses. And I've always been interested in business. So, maybe that's where it came from.

Whitney Johnson: You saw them negotiate?

Sarah Feingold: Yeah, probably. I probably saw them or and I like negotiating, and maybe that's why I went to law school to argue and negotiate.

Whitney Johnson: You enjoy the process.

Sarah Feingold: I enjoy the process.

Whitney Johnson: How did... How old were you when you figured out you knew how to, that you enjoyed it?

Sarah Feingold: I don't know. Maybe right now. I just figured that...

Whitney Johnson: Because I think negotiation, it's something that some people do very well, and some people do really poorly. They don't know how to; they only know how to say "yes." And they sometimes mean "no" when they say yes. Some people only know how to say "no." And it's a very, there's a real art to being able to say "yes" and "no" or "no, but" or "no and" or "yes and." It's a skill.

Sarah Feingold: And you're right, but I think the heart of negotiating is trying to understand why somebody wants what they want and why you want what you want. And sometimes you can get to everyone's happy or everyone or, or everyone feels like they're getting what they need. Everybody's happy.

Whitney Johnson: Or everybody, everybody's getting, everybody's a little bit happy and everybody's a little sad.

Sarah Feingold: A little bit sad. It's give and take.

Whitney Johnson: That's the best deal.

Sarah Feingold: It's give and take, you know, because it's not always like, "I want the most money." It could be like, "I need this done today, because I have to go pick up my kids," you know, or something like that. You know, it's a really understanding what drives a person, what drives a company and where they're willing to give and take.

Whitney Johnson: Right. And one question I've been thinking about a lot recently is this question of when a person wants to disrupt themselves inside of an organization, they may not want and do something lateral, for example, take on a whole new, you know, go from operations to marketing. And it seems to me that that's a time where negotiation is really required because you don't want to give up your title, you don't want to give up your pay or at least hold it flat, and it would seem that's a time where negotiation and the ability to negotiate holds you in very good stead.

Sarah Feingold: Yeah, absolutely. And thinking about why. Why do you want to do this change and what can you sacrifice to get this? Is it, you know, you're just passionate about marketing and you always wanted to go into it? So, maybe you should take a little bit of a pay cut because you don't know as much as somebody else who's coming in. But you know the business and you know all the key players and you can show value added really quickly. But, you know, you just making sure you set expectations for yourself and understanding why. Why is this the path that you take?

Whitney Johnson: So that's the most important word, isn't it? "Why?"

Sarah Feingold: Probably, yes.

Whitney Johnson: "Why?"

Sarah Feingold: "Why?"

Whitney Johnson: What do you wish someone would dare you to do?

Sarah Feingold: Dare me to do? I don't know. I have no idea.

Whitney Johnson: Because sometimes there are things that we want to do, but we need a little bit of an accountability partner.

Sarah Feingold: Oh, okay. Like a gym partner? Like, "Hey, we're going to the gym today. Did you... Are you going to the gym? We're going to the gym today." I'm usually that person. I'm usually the pusher.

Like if somebody says to me, like "I'm miserable in my job."

I'm like, "Why? Why are you miserable? What do you need? Have you been applying for other jobs? Is your resume up to date? Like, what are you, what are you doing about it? Stop complaining. What are you doing? Do something small.

Whitney Johnson: So, you're, you're, you're daring yourself?

Sarah Feingold: I guess so, yeah. I'm always daring myself. I'm doing and I'm, I'm always trying to push myself in different directions. And I ask myself, like, "Why? Why am I...?" Because I you know, I'm a jeweler. I'm a, I'm a lawyer. I'm a speaker. I'm a writer. Like, why am I like my mom? Why am I going in all these different directions?" I just, I'm curious about so many things.

Whitney Johnson: What are you writing about right now?

Sarah Feingold: What am I writing about? I'm writing about my career path. A lot of people have been really inspired by my career path to Etsy and then to Vroom, and I've been speaking a lot about my career path. And so, a lot of people have said to me, "You know, maybe you should turn this into a book." I'm like, "Okay." So, basically taking my talking points from my speaking engagements and so many people calling me for advice and turning it into something more tangible, more accessible to other people.

Whitney Johnson: So, what advice would you give people? What's something you say to people when they reach out to you for advice?

Sarah Feingold: I tell them to create their own opportunities. I tell them to not wait for things to come to them. I think we're all so waiting for the... People say, "Oh, but there was no job description at Etsy. How did you know they were hiring a lawyer?" They weren't. There was no job description. There was no mentor. There was... I didn't have a computer my first day. I brought my own laptop. I didn't have a desk. I had to go buy it on Craigslist, like there was nothing. But I did it, you know, and I just had faith in myself. And so, I say create your own opportunities. And if you don't know something, there's so much out there that you can learn it. Like you, I say, "Use all the brains you have and all the brains you can borrow." Like ask people. I feel so fortunate. I think the story of how I got my job at Etsy is great, but I kept my job for a long time until it's time for me to move on by using brains and borrowing brains and paying for brains, outside counsel. I mean, I'm not I'm not going to pretend I did everything on my own. But just my biggest piece of advice is just create your own opportunities.

Whitney Johnson: Use, borrow, and buy brains.

Sarah Feingold: Yes. Use, borrow, and buy...

Whitney Johnson: I like that.

Sarah Feingold: Pay. You need to pay.

Whitney Johnson: Oh right. Pay for brains.

Sarah Feingold: Totally fine. Totally fine.

Whitney Johnson: How are you going to Disrupt Yourself in 2017.

Sarah Feingold: 2017. I hope to have a book deal by then. I hope to have a book deal in 2017. I'm heading down that path.

Whitney Johnson: Have you written your book proposal already?

Sarah Feingold: I have, I have. It's been, it's finished and I'm finishing it up.

Whitney Johnson: Talking to an agent?

Sarah Feingold: I don't have an agent yet but I'm getting there.

Whitney Johnson: Sounds like it. Sounds like you're close.

I'm close. I have. I have. I have the book proposal. I have. I have a lot of things. It just I have to prioritize my time, right? And my number one priority is this little, tiny person that runs around...

Whitney Johnson: How old your baby?

Sarah Feingold: He is three, and he is delicious. I love his little face. And so, I just, you know, I, I don't want to be working on a book proposal on the nights and weekends when I can be playing trains with him. And so, I just, I need to prioritize everything, and he's my number one priority. And, you know, I have a full-time job and that and, and...

Whitney Johnson: Good call.

Sarah Feingold: Do those little things. But, you know, I'm not in a rush to get you know, and people have said to me, are you? Are you an author, or are you? I'm a lawyer. I'm a lawyer. If I become an author, that would be great, but I'm a lawyer. That's my day job, but I'm a mom. That's, that's really important.

Whitney Johnson: You're lawyer and mom. And you write and talk about your experience.

Sarah Feingold: And I talk about my experiences. I speak every once in a while, and I and I write, but I, I need to prioritize my time. And that, and he's my number one priority and work is a priority.

Whitney Johnson: So, in 2017, you're going to disrupt yourself by getting a book deal.

Sarah Feingold: Yeah. Let's try that. Let's try that.

Whitney Johnson: I like that. I like that. So, that your dare too. Although, you don't need to be dared because you're going to do it anyway.

Sarah Feingold: I know. The proposal is pretty much done. I just have to finish it up. Yeah. And maybe I'll disrupt myself by finally getting my child out of diapers, because he is very stubborn like his mom.

Whitney Johnson: Ooh, that's good. I like that.

Sarah Feingold: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Well, Sarah, thank you very, very much for spending a few minutes with me. I really appreciate it. It's super interesting and I am absolutely 100 percent confident that you will get that book, so I can't wait to hear about it.

Sarah Feingold: Thank you.

Three takeaways.

Number one. Play where no one else is playing. Play to your strengths. Notice the pattern with Sarah. Fourth Floor, before that Vroom, before that Etsy. There wasn't an opportunity, no one was playing there until Sarah started playing at the intersection of the law and arts and crafts. DIY. Do It Yourself. If you want to do more work on the first two accelerants of personal disruption, listen to episode 100, take the right risks and 120, play to your strengths. You may also want to listen to episode number five with Coss Marte, episode 172, with Michelle McKenna, and episode 212 with James Altucher.

Number two. Courage. What Sarah did took courage. Sometimes we know exactly where we could play, but then we don't. Sarah called the CEO at Etsy, she booked a plane ticket, she said, "I want this." If you want more courage, go back and listen to Kara Goldin episode 186, Molly Beck episode 170 and Gregory Haile episode 167.

Number three. Play where people are playing. What? Well, you need to play where people aren't playing in terms of your skill set, but still you have to find the people who need your skill set. This is easier to do than it was 15 years ago. You can now create opportunity virtually, not just physically, but physical or virtual, play where people are playing.

Thanks again to Sara Feingold for being our guest. Thank you to our original producer, David Klatt. Thank you to our current team, Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, and Steve Ludwig.

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