

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPIISODE 226: BE DISCOVERY DRIVEN

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 to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

This episode is the final in the series on the seven accelerants of personal disruption. If you're new to the podcast and want an overview of the entire framework, you can start with episode 80 or 196, if you want the encore version.

Whitney Johnson: The big A-HA for me that I outlined in that episode is that disruption isn't just about products, it's about people that if we want to make progress along our S curve of Learning™, we need to be willing to disrupt ourselves in large and especially small ways.

In episode 100, I talk about risk, taking the right kind of risk, market versus competitive risk, the importance of playing where no one else is playing, creating rather than competing. Taking market risk is how you increase your odds of success. This is the first accelerant of personal disruption.

In episode 120, I talk about accelerant number two, playing to your distinctive strengths. Not only identifying them, but also owning them and valuing them. When you feel strong, you're more willing to venture forth to go where you haven't gone. Taking the right kind of risk while playing to your strengths becomes a flywheel for movement up the S curve.

Then there was accelerant number three, episode 140, which is embracing constraints. Once we identify where we're going to play, what growth curve we want to be on, we sometimes think if only I had more time, more money, more buy-in, I could move along my curve faster. Yet we know from the law of physics that friction helps us gain momentum. We need something to bump up against, for a disrupter a constraint isn't a check on our freedom. It's a tool of creation.

In episode 160, we talk about accelerant number four, which was battle entitlement. But after battling with that phrase, we have now renamed this accelerant examine expectations. Taking a close look at our expectations is crucial as we move along our S curve. If we start using the word should, things should be different. We know there's a gap between our expectations and reality and we are at risk of becoming victims and our progress stalling. To move along our curve, we mind that gap rather than competing with what is things should be different, we create with it things are. Amateurs complete, professionals create.

In episode 180, we discuss accelerant number five, step back to grow. There are many ways of stepping back, including stepping back to take a break. But the gist is this. When you disrupt yourself, you're stepping back from who you are today to slingshot into who you want to be.

In episode 200, accelerant number six, it's give failure its due. The key takeaway here is failure doesn't limit disruption, shame does. In this episode we do a lot of reframing. Failure isn't a referendum on you, but rather an opportunity to learn. You didn't fail. You learned.

This now brings us to the final episode of the series, episode 226, where we're talking about accelerant number seven being driven by discovery. If you're wondering why is this out of sequence? That's because about the same time that I needed to record episode 220, my manuscript for the next book, *Smart Growth*, was also due. I needed to prioritize. But of course, I knew this was coming, so I just didn't prioritize well enough. Did I fail? No. I learned.

To start the conversation around being driven by discovery. I want to share a quote with you and I think it bridges really nicely from accelerant number six. Give failure its due, to number seven be driven by discovery. It's from fantasy author Brandon Sanderson. He says, "a journey will have pain failure. It is not only the steps forward we must accept, it's the stumbles, the trials, the knowledge that we will fail, that we will hurt those around us. But if we stop, if we accept the person we are when we fall, the journey ends. That failure becomes our destination. To love the journey is to accept no such end. The most important step a person can take is always the next one."

So, here's the basic idea. As a disruptor, you are in search of a yet to be defined market. Think back to accelerate number one taking on market risk, taking the right kind of risk, you're playing where you haven't played before. What will you end up creating? You don't know yet. You're an explorer like even Battuta, like Lewis and Clark, like Captain Cook. None of them knew where they would end up, and neither do you. You won't be alone. 70 percent of all successful new businesses end up in a different place too. Remember Netflix? They disrupted Blockbuster and now they're disrupting cable TV. Before they were an Emmy Award winning content company, they were a door-to-door DVD rental service. So here you are, in search of that yet to be defined market in this case, a yet to be defined, you. You know, you're more likely to be successful when you take a market risk, when you're focused on creating, not competing, which you want to do and you're willing to do. But it can be daunting. So that's what this episode is about, de-risking walking into the unknown.

First, we're going to talk about how the S curve of Learning™ can help you map this journey. Second, we'll talk about how to use Rita McGrath discovery driven planning along the way. Third, I'll share several stories of people playing where they hadn't played, of being discovery driven. Fourth, I'll talk about the importance of your why how that animates you as you venture forth. Fifth, I'll provide you with a quick hack on how to recognize when you were unknowingly walking into the unknown. And sixth, I'll give you some suggestions on how to get started today.

Number one, using the S curve of Learning™ to map your journey. I'm not going to go into a lot of detail because that's the subject of the next book and I'll do an entire episode on that. But for now, I'll say this. Even when you're being driven by discovery, it still helps if you have some kind of map. And in this case, the map that gives you a sense of the emotional terrain you're about to traverse. That's where the S curve of Learning™ comes in. When I was investing at the Disruptive Innovation Fund, I had the A-HA that the S curve, popularized by Adam Rogers, that we were using to understand how quickly an innovation would be adopted, could also help us understand how we learn and how we grow. Whenever we start something new, we're at the base of the S or the launch point. You think you know where you want to go, but you don't know for sure. And you definitely don't know the who, what, how everything's going to fit together. Because there's so much happening, it could feel like a traffic jam in your brain, which makes growth feel slow, like a slog. You can feel discouraged, overwhelmed, impatient. That's what the launch point of a new S curve feels like. But when you know that, it normalizes the experience.

And the sweet spot, you're increasingly certain about where you're going and you have a pretty good idea about how you'll get there. The traffic starts to clear you're now moving fast. You're increasingly competent and confident. It's exciting! This is what the sweet spot looks and feels like, fast. And mastery, you've arrived. You've gotten where you were going. You're pulling into the parking lot. People are calling you, asking for directions on how to get there. Where as at the launch point you were possibly overwhelmed in the sweet spot. You are definitely exhilarated now in mastery you're happy to have arrived. But with things slowing down, you know, after a stay over to rest and refuel,

it'll be time to take another drive to again, discover. This is what growth looks and feels like when you know where you are in your growth. When you have that map that helps you understand the emotional journey you're about to take, it'll be easier to walk into the unknown.

Let me give you a simple example. Last year, we decided that we wanted to take a vacation. For a variety of reasons, we hadn't taken a proper vacation in several years, not enough time, not enough money. But the real reason we hadn't gone on a vacation was that I was uncomfortable taking vacations. Going somewhere unfamiliar, setting aside what I'm comfortable doing to do things I don't usually do, possibly with people I don't usually do things with. But this was important. I wanted to spend more time with my family, to learn how to step back, to take a break. And more fundamentally, I wanted to get better at doing new things because I want to grow. So I talked myself through the process, using the S curve. Going on vacation, it's the launch point. I'm going to feel uncomfortable, awkward, clumsy. Doesn't mean I shouldn't go on vacation, it just means doing something new. If you too want to get better vacations, you can download my PDF, jumping to the vacation house curve at WhitneyJohnson.com vacation. In the meantime, as you were walking into the unknown so that you can be driven by discovery rather than by fear, use the S curve of Learning™ to figure out where you are to map your emotional journey. That's the first tool for de-risking, walking into the unknown.

The second thing you can do to make your search for the yet to be defined you less daunting is to use, Rita McGrath's discovery driven planning. Most of us tend toward conventional planning. If you've gone to high school, maybe to college, gotten decent grades, you're probably pretty good at conventional planning. Do your homework, study for tests, participate in class, get an A. You've probably done this with your career too. If in high school, you wanted to be a doctor, for example, your checklist was get good grades in school, major in life science, do research in a lab. Go to medical school, complete a residency and you'll become a doctor. Check, check, check off your list. But this isn't the kind of planning that most of us use to figure out the biggest questions of our lives. It requires a different kind of planning. The discovery driven planning. Rita McGrath describes it as more of a make it up as you go activity. Notice it's not that you don't have a plan, it's just a different kind of plan. Instead of, these are the results I expect. Remember what I said about examining expectations? You ask, what has to happen for my plan to work? And then you flush out your plan, as the feedback rolls in.

Here are the four steps. Number one, to achieve this goal, what needs to be done? Number two, count the cost. What kind of time expertise money and buy in do I need to achieve this goal? Is this cost one that I can incur and want to incur? Number three. Ask yourself what assumptions are embedded in my thinking? And number four, prepare a milestone chart. You've got these assumptions that you need to test. You need to know what needs to be learned about these assumptions by each milestone.

In discovery driven planning, learning is the essential unit of progress. So of course, correction isn't the equivalent to failure as it might be in conventional planning. It's just that opportunity to learn, to recalibrate.

So, let's go back to wanting to be a doctor, using the discovery driven approach. Number one, you want to be a doctor, which requires you to get into medical school. Number two, the cost you'll need high marks in your premed courses, zoology, biology, chemistry. You're asking yourself, can I, am I willing to do that work? Third, one assumption you might be making is that you're going to forgo time with friends or sleep to study. You're also making the assumption that you can and will do well on the MCAT. Number four, your milestone chart can be, did I study as much as I needed to get the grades that I need to do well on the MCAT. And if I didn't, am I going to recommit? Or do I not really want to do this?

Let's now fast forward, you've gotten into medical school still thinking about discovery driven, those rotations are going to allow you to figure out what kind of doctor you actually want to be. Maybe you love science and want to understand how things work. So you end up in research. You may discover a treatment for a disease or invent a medical device and become an entrepreneur. Perhaps you'll realize I love systems efficiency and become a hospital administrator. Or you discover that rather than healing bodies, you want to heal minds and become a psychiatrist. By the time you're finished with medical school, you're going to discover what kind of doctor you want to be. But typically, you don't know at the outset. So quick recap, discovery driven planning is number one, what do you want to do, what S curve do you think you want to be on? Number two, what will this require of you? Is the cost one that I can and want to incur? Number three, what assumptions are embedded in my thinking? And number four, what

milestones do I have in place to test those assumptions? What do I plan to have learned in a week and a month, two months or three months time?

We like conventional planning. If I do X, then Y will happen. But most of life isn't like this, especially with decisions and people that matter most. It's more of I will do X, see what happens, then decide on Y. As New York Times columnist David Brooks has said, most people don't form a self and lead a life. They are caused by a problem and the self is constructed gradually by the calling. You take a step forward, gather feedback and adapt.

So now what I'd like to do is share a few stories that will illustrate what a discovery driven life looks like. The first story is from Shea and Syd McGee, of Studio McGee, who I interviewed in episode 187. Shea graduated from college in communications, but she knew that she loved design. So after graduating, she took a class at a community college. She remodeled a room in her home, which turned into remodeling a second room in her home. She posted photos of her projects on Instagram. Someone saw the photos and said, "Hey, can I hire you to steal some bookshelves?" She posted those photos on Instagram, etc., etc.

Syd McGee, he started out in digital marketing. He was having some success, but not really feeling like he was on the right curve. As shea's business grew, he was helping her on the business side, on the side. Initially, he didn't want people to know what they think he was working for her. Also, what would this mean for their relationship? But the more they worked together, they realized they could work together. They wanted to work together. He decided to go all into, which meant they would need to step back, sell their house, relocate to a cheaper part of the country to fund their business, which they renamed as Studio McGee. Over the course of a decade, they have individually and collectively taken that step forward, gathered feedback and adapted. And notice how important the feedback was, feedback that something wasn't working, like Syd not enjoying his career path and digital marketing. And feedback that something was working, Shea discovering that people responded to her post on Instagram. So she kept posting. Today, they run one of the fastest growing interior design businesses in the country. They have three million followers on Instagram, a brand in Target and a show on Netflix called Dream Home Makeover.

The second story is Patrick Pichette, the former CFO of Google. You may remember him from Episode 10 of the podcast. When Patrick was recruited by Google, he had already been a CFO twice. He was in mastery on the S curve. So Eric Schmidt, the CEO, says, "Patrick, we've got a problem. If I hire you after 18 months, you're going to be totally bored and you'll leave to do something else. So I'll tell you what, I'll hire you as CFO. And every time it looks like you're about to lose interest, I'm going to add stuff to your plate." That's how Patrick Pichette ended up with people operations, real estate, employee services and Google Fiber. Not the typical job description for a CFO, but by giving Pichette an opportunity to take the step forward, to get that feedback, to adapt, he spent seven years at Google.

Third story. Julie Lythcott Haims, I interviewed her in podcast episode 215, she started as a corporate lawyer, then she became the dean of first year students at Stanford. This led her to writing a book on *How to Raise an Adult*. And now she's written a book titled *Your Turn How to Be an Adult*. Along the way, she wrote a memoir about being black and biracial in white spaces. She didn't start law school planning on becoming a guide on how to be an adult. But here she is.

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

Julie Lythcott Haims: The first thing I want to say is I love that your daughter, your 20-year-old, and and your intern, who's 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 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 term.

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 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? What I would add to that in answer to the young people who have asked is, since our purpose is to learn and grow. A growth mindset. Carol Dweck, right. We're not perfect. None of us is here 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 taken 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.

Fourth and final stories of Quin Snyder, the head coach at the Utah Jazz who takes a discovery driven approach to managing his players. Here's just one example. During the 2016-2017 season, because of injuries, he had to continually reconfigure his lineups. For the first 75 games of that season. He had 22 different starting lineups. Because Snyder emphasizes adaptability, his players now know how to walk into the unknown, which gives them an advantage. Not surprisingly, Snyder's own career has been discovery driven. After being pushed out of a college coaching job in Missouri over the next seven years, he was the head coach of a development team and then an assistant coach for the Sixers, the Lakers, the Hawks and CSKA in Moscow, before becoming head coach at the Utah Jazz.

Notice how in each of these examples, people are taking a step forward. They're gathering feedback and they're adapting and notice in your own life how you are discovery driven. How you take the step forward, you gather feedback, you adapt. Again, walking into the unknown isn't about not having a plan. It's about having a plan to learn to be driven by discovery.

It also helps if you know why you're walking into the unknown. The current iteration of my why, is that I want for every person that I interact with, to have a greater sense of who you are and who you can be.

During the early days of the pandemic, that meant that I started doing LinkedIn lives in March of 2020, I was doing my weekly podcasts, which you are currently listening to, but it didn't feel like enough. So I decided to take a step forward and do LinkedIn live. Every day for 16 days. It was very intense, very different format, very uncomfortable. After 16 days of gathering feedback, realizing that it wasn't sustainable to do this every day, I went to two days a week. After a year of doing it two days a week, I went to once a week and moved to an interview format. And in August of 2021, we're going to experiment with our Disruption advisors taking the mic. 15 months later, we're in a place we hadn't expected. It turns out it's a good place, but importantly, we're in a place because we were willing to take that first step forward, which is critical. Take the step forward.

Perhaps you, like me, think you were really good at walking into the unknown. Here's where the hack that I mentioned earlier comes in. A few years ago when I was preparing to interview Rene Browne for our podcast, I was rereading her books. She said, "vulnerability is showing up when you can't control the outcome," which is what disruption is. It's what walking into the unknown is.

She then said, "we all have patterns or things that we do when we feel vulnerable." So I asked my truth teller, my husband, "what do I do when I'm feeling vulnerable, when there's an outcome that I can't control?" He said in the nicest way possible. "You micromanage, you overanalyze, and you get hyper critical." That's the bad news. The good news is, is I now have indicators when I do these things, it's an indicator that I am walking into the unknown I'm playing where I haven't played before.

What things do you do when you can't control the outcome? What are your patterns? Brene Brown says sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is to just show up.

Korn Ferry, the executive search firm, did a study to come up with a leading predictor of sea sweet success. Technical skills, he said, were important. But the leading predictor was dealing with ambiguity, walking into the unknown. Ready for it? Taking a step forward, gathering feedback and adapting. We all like to make plans for the future. But choosing a disruptive course, requires that we can't see the top of the curve from the bottom or the bottom from the top. We choose this unknown, we play where no one else is playing because we are driven to discover who we can be.

So as we start to wrap up, I'm going to do a quick recap and then here's what you can do next.

Number one, as you are in search of a yet to be defined you, the S curve of Learning™ provides you with a map of the emotional journey you're on.

Number two, use discovery driven planning rather than conventional planning with your focus on what do I plan to learn and by when.

Number three, think about your own life today and look at where you've taken that step forward and how you've been anchored by your why.

And number four, when you start doing those things you do, like overanalyzing, congratulate yourself. This is you walking into the unknown and becoming more you.

Now, let's do a quick exercise to get you started, ask yourself, what do I want to accomplish this next week? I'll give you a simple example. I want to try the S curve of reading fiction for ten minutes a day. Now, ask yourself what costs will incur to make this happen. Do I take a break during my work day to read? Do I stop working 10 minutes earlier? Do I read before I go to bed? Assumptions, during the day? I'm assuming that I can unplug enough to do something totally different after work. I would be assuming that I won't be so wound up that I won't stop working until I absolutely must in order to spend time with my family. Before bed, I would be assuming that I won't be so tired that all I want to do is just scroll through Instagram. Fourth and final step, prepare the milestone chart, for example, in a week, I'll ask myself, how many times did I read? If I read most days, I can ask, well, what made this possible? For example, with someone else around me reading, if I go for an entire week and I haven't read once, do I need to adjust the goal? Maybe habit stack? I may also want to ask myself, is this an S curve I want to be on? Maybe the answer is yes, but I don't have the emotional bandwidth to do anything new right now. So let's revisit it in three months time.

Notice how the goal was to read, but more importantly, the goal was to learn. Before I share one final quote with you, want to say thank you to you for listening.

Thank you to our team, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig, Maddie McDaniel and Matt Silverman.

Now bookending the episode with another quote from Brandon Sanderson. He says. "We each live thousands of lives. For each day, we become someone slightly different. We don't change in one giant leap, but across a million little steps. The most important always being the next."

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.