Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 227: KATY MILKMAN

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice on how to climb the S curve of learning™ in your personal and professional life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

Sometimes the blocker to our personal and professional growth is ourselves. It can be difficult to get out of our own way in pursuit of a new opportunity. That's what Katy Milkman, a Wharton behavioral scientist, is here to talk about: How to change the science of getting from where you are to where you want to be.

Whitney Johnson: I would love for you to share with us a formative experience, some experience that you've had in life that's really shaped who you are today.

Katy Milkman: I think I would go with the experience of doing my first major research project, which might sound like a funny thing for to be a formative experience. But as someone who then devoted her life to research, that was really important. And the first project I did was actually shaped by some strange constraints. I was an undergraduate student at Princeton University where you're required to write a senior thesis. And so that was my first research project. I was forced to do it. And the requirement was even crazier than that. You're required to combine the topic of your major and minor in your thesis. And I had done something unusual. I was an engineer, but I was minoring in American studies because I loved literature and history and I wanted to use both sides of my brain. I was doing operations research, which is sort of statistics and computer science and optimization and then American studies. And that was a really odd combination to try to put together for a research project. So after racking my brain for at least a year to try to think of something I would really enjoy that could combine these two things, I ended up settling on doing a statistical analysis of a decade of New Yorker fiction. So I read about 500 short stories that have been published over a decade in The New Yorker magazine and classified characteristics of those stories. So their themes, their authors, their protagonists, what were the demographics of those protagonists and authors? And I looked at first whether or not there was an effect of an editorial change at the magazine on the kinds of fiction published and second on whether or not the authors of fiction were essentially writing autobiographical stories. So to what extent were the authors writing about characters who shared their demographic characteristics? And it was an absolutely magnificent experience writing this thesis.

So many things went right. First of all, I loved the data collection process because I was reading fiction. It was super fun. Second, I ended up getting an opportunity to go to the New Yorker offices, interview the editors, learn about the fiction department. I got to see a manuscript by John Updike that was had handwritten notes in the corners of it and talk about what the process was like of choosing the fiction. And then I had some really neat and interesting findings that I was so excited to share with the world. I was able to show that there were huge swings in the type of

fiction published when editors changed. There was also a really strong relationship between the characteristics of the authors of the fiction and the protagonists and their stories. But interestingly, minority group members and women were more likely to write about characters who didn't resemble them demographically than white men; suggesting that we can relate better to others when we belong to a minority group, perhaps. And the work was so interesting not only to me but to others, that actually ended up being the subject of a major New York Times article and bringing a lot of attention to this new and then growing discipline of quantitative social science. I loved everything about it, and that was a formative experience for me because I realized I could do something I absolutely loved doing that was so fun and that it could generate dialog, that there could be public engagement, other people would learn and delight in what I was finding. So that is part of what made me want to be a scholar.

Whitney Johnson: Hmm. What I love about that story, that experience, is that you had these constraints, you had engineering and American history, and you had to reconcile them. And out of the reconciliation of those two seemingly disparate objects came something magical.

Katy Milkman: I love that about the story too. And I don't study creativity, but I have since become familiar with some of the research on creativity. And one of my favorite studies that I've ever seen reminds me of my own experience. It involved of all things knitting. People were knitting scarves and they were given the assignment to knit scarves that were as creative as possible. And then they were randomly assigned to groups and one group got all the colors of the rainbow in thread to knit with, and the other group was only given two colors. And then outside raters, rated the creativity of their products. And lo and behold, the people who had fewer colors to work with scored higher on creativity. And the theory behind that was they were so constrained by the way, they were using just white and blue, they ended up building these really fascinating textures and patterns and creations that were more magnificent than what the group that had less constraints worked with. So I do think sometimes, certainly not always, but sometimes out of constraints come forced experimentation that can lead to really creative products and I- not to call my thesis so incredibly creative, but it was one of the more fun things I've done and it was, it was more creative than I would have been, I think, in the absence of those constraints.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, well, and enough it sparked enough creativity that when I asked you about a formative experience, that's what you came up with. So it was formative and seminal, at least in your world. So now you have embarked on another creative endeavor, which is you've written a book called How We Change. And can you talk to us very at a very high level. What is the gist of the book and why did you decide to write it?

Katy Milkman: Yeah, so I wrote it's *How to Change*. I probably should have called it How We Change, *How to change*, How we change would have been, anyway. It's actually, it's interesting that you said that because choosing the title was one of the most painful parts of writing the book. There were so many different titles considered and how we change was certainly a candidate.

This is a book about science and the science of change. But I wanted to convey that unlike some scientific books, this wasn't just a book about interesting experiments, but hopefully a book that could really be helpful to people who had a specific goal. So that's why I called it *How to Change*. And the focus of the book or the central argument that I make is based on my decades now studying change. A key insight that I've had is too often when I work with individuals or organizations trying to create change in their lives, they look for a single one size fits all solution that sounds shiny and bright, like set big audacious goals or visualize success. And they're optimistic that that is all they need to carry them forward. What I found is that the individuals and organizations who instead look at what exactly is obstructing their change, what specifically is holding them back, and then try to find a solution that's well matched to the barrier they face end up getting much farther. And also those that recognize this can be changing in and of itself. Right, that in one year what's obstructing change might be different than in another year. And there may be multiple things that are barriers. The central argument of the book is once we can diagnose what are the internal obstacles to change, I focus on things, the obstacles, things like impulsivity or getting started or confidence or whether or not you have the right social structures in place, whether your habits are obstructing success. So internal obstacles, once you recognize those, you can get so much farther in science has so much to offer. We know a lot about what can help, but it only really helps if it's well suited to the problem you face.

Whitney Johnson: So you've written a book titled *How to Change* and, and really examine the blockers, what stands in our way between where we are and where we want to be, and come up with a number of suggestions that are very

evidence and research-based. And I would love for us to go through a few of those. As I read through the book, a few stood out for me. Obviously, we're not going to go through all of them because all of you need to buy Katie's book and read the book. But here's, here's one that, that the first one that stood out for me is you talk about when to change, when's the best time to start changing?

Katy Milkman: This is one of the things I have studied in my career that I would say has been most exciting. And the, the impetus for studying this actually came from making a visit to Google's headquarters about a decade ago, giving a talk about everything I knew at that point about how to encourage change. And I was talking to their H.R. group. They called them People Analytics at Google. And I got this great question from an H.R. leader. And the question was, "OK, we're convinced that we should be offering up these tools and tactics to our employees, but when is the best time to encourage change?" And I thought it was such an interesting question, one that really hadn't been sufficiently addressed in any research I was aware of. And I started thinking about what I knew about change and people I knew who made change. And that's part of what informed the direction of the research I later did with my former student, Hengchen Dai, now a UCLA professor, and Jason Reece, a senior fellow at Wharton.

I'll tell you one story that I think nicely illustrates this and I'll tell you about some of the findings. And the story is actually from my tennis coach, of all things. I was a very serious, competitive tennis player growing up, had a wonderful coach named Bob Pass, who was an important mentor to me, and he had a really important change that he made in his life. He was a lawyer. He went to Brown and then he went to GW Law School and he, he thought he was going to follow that sort of more academic track. And he had a job with the federal government and he just wasn't happy. He wasn't enjoying what he was doing. He took, I'll call it a sabbatical to, to try some other things, he did a camping trip across the country. He did some tennis coaching because he'd always loved tennis and he had a vision of how he would succeed and have a family and decided to go back to the law. So he just interviewed for a job. And towards the end of the interview, he started feeling unwell. He was rushed to the hospital. And it turns out he had an infection, a really severe blood infection. It was life-threatening. It was unclear whether he would recover. And while he was in the hospital, he got the news that the job was his. He could go back to practicing law. It was waiting for him and that was absolutely what he'd planned to do. But this, this life-altering event, this moment had reshaped the way he was thinking about his path. And he realized that's not what he wanted to do. He realized he wanted to close that chapter of his life and open a new one. And he decided to quit the law and become a tennis coach full time. And he ended up being one of the, the most sought after coaches. And the mid-Atlantic region, most beloved, won many awards, had many students who went on to play at the collegiate and professional levels, and had a really, I think, pretty happy life and was able to support a family doing that as well.

It was a fresh start moment for him that pivoted him towards change, that forced him to see his life in a different way and to recognize he was ready to close a chapter and open another. And what my research has shown, this is, again, research with Hengchen Dai and Jason Reece is that there are moments in our lives that systematically shake up the way we look at time. They make us feel like we're opening a new chapter and they make us more open to making a change. They're not all as dramatic as the story I just told about Bob. That was a really dramatic fresh start moment when he could say that was the old me and this is the new me and the new me is going to live differently. But small moments can do this, too. So we've found in our research that moments like the start of a new year. Right. About New Year's resolutions also give us that clean slate feeling the sense that we've separated from our past failures. We can say, OK, the old me last year didn't quit smoking, but the new me can do it. And you believe in yourself with a new optimism.

We also see that people are more likely to set goals not only at New Year's, but at the start of a new week, which is a small, fresh start at the start of a new month following birthdays, which can make us feel like we're turning a chapter in our lives following holidays that feel like fresh start.

So again, think more like Labor Day or Easter or the start of spring or celebration of New Year's and less about holidays that don't feel like fresh starts like Valentine's Day. But there are moments throughout our lives. They can be calendar dates. They can be times when we face an illness or move to a new community that give us that sense of a clean slate. And, and we see people, for instance, at the calendar dates I mentioned, they're more likely to search for the term diet on Google. They're more likely to visit the gym. They're more likely to set goals about everything from health and wellness to their finances, to their education, their environment. And we also have found that people are more nudgeable at those moments. So if we encourage you, for instance, to start saving for retirement or

start pursuing any goal and and offer you dates when you could do that, if one of those dates corresponds to a fresh start moment like the beginning of spring or the celebration of a birthday, people are more likely to, to take that opportunity because they see the connection and they see that that's an ideal moment for change.

Whitney Johnson: So, Katy, when was the last time you did a fresh start on something? And what was that important date for you?

Katy Milkman: A meaningful one actually was writing this book, of all things. So I'd been thinking about writing a book for a while. I really love communicating about science. In addition to the discovery process, I find the process of sharing those discoveries invigorating and fun. But I hadn't seen the right opportunity in life to do it. I was sort of waiting. And then when my son was three years old, my husband and I decided we were ready to move out of an apartment buy our first house. It was time to, to do that. So we did. We bought a house. And the day that we signed and said, OK, we're going to be homeowners, we're moving. I said, this is the moment. OK, I'm ready. This is a fresh start moment. I'm going to write the book. And I sent emails that day to agents to figure out who I was going to work with on the project. And it started there. And here I am. So that that was a big fresh start that I took advantage of. It felt like the right moment to begin something new.

Whitney Johnson: Also, I remember in your in your research, one of the things you discovered is that people are more likely to make change stick when they have moved.

Katy Milkman: Yeah, absolutely. This is work by Wendy Wood from the University of Southern California, who's an expert on habits. And she's done really interesting research showing that when college transfers actually move to a new college and they're moving. To a new community, so not just transferring locally and staying in their old haunts, but they're moving to a new community and they're their usual routines are disrupted by that move because, again, they've had to end up in a different location with different social structures and so on. Those people's habits are more likely to be disrupted. Habits around things like exercise and newspaper reading. They change more when you make that kind of a move. And the, the logic of this is simple. It's that those cues in your environment that might trigger change, they've shifted. So not only do you have the psychology of a fresh start where you feel like you're turning a new page, opening a new chapter, but there are literal changes in your environment that support you, creating new habits and routines. Right. You used to walk by a Dunkin Donuts on the way to work or on the way to class and had a bad habit of grabbing one. Now, it's not in your way and you can start fresh and you may have been more likely to set goals. And so whatever the structures are that you've fallen back on, it's easier to build from a true clean slate.

Whitney Johnson: So good. Your first story really informs this nicely. So maybe we can talk very briefly about this as you talk about how do we overcome procrastination? And one of the things you mentioned were constraints. So maybe talk briefly about a constraint that you can impose to prevent procrastination.

Katy Milkman: This is one of the most powerful insights, I think, from behavioral science about how we can create change in our own lives and one that I think too few of us use because it's a little counterintuitive. We're very used to our managers or our government imposing rules and constraints and fining us for bad behavior. You're used to the idea that if you give in to the temptation to speed, you might get a speeding ticket. And that is a constraint that's been imposed on you by someone else who wants to make sure you do the right thing and the heat of the moment and for your own safety and the safety of those around you. But we're not used to the idea of imposing constraints on ourselves to help us achieve our goals. And it turns out that can be really useful. So we can actually fine ourselves for future. We can say I am going to find myself if I behave in these ways in the future that I don't like or impose constraints. I'm going to set these deadlines for myself with penalties associated and there's great research showing just how useful this can be.

I'll mention one study in particular by Dan Ariely, who is a famous behavioral scientist at Duke University. So it's done with Klaus Wertenbroch of INSEAD and it's about students and the power of deadlines for students. Now we all know that students are given deadlines, often and courses by their instructors. But they were interested in what would happen if students were offered the opportunity to turn in all their assignments at the end of the semester deadline free, and how that might compare to a situation where students were given the opportunity to self-set deadlines so they could impose constraints on themselves. But they didn't have to, and those deadlines would come

with grade penalties. So there are a few interesting things that they learned in their research. One interesting thing they learned is that contrary to economic theory, which would say every single student to say, I don't want constraints, I'll just turn them in when I get to it. About half of students did want some kind of constraint and a lot of students imposed constraints that looked like what their teachers would normally impose on them, equally spaced deadlines and with penalties of a grade deduction if it's late. A lot of students recognize that kind of structure might be helpful to them. And second, being able to give themselves those deadlines was helpful. So students who did have the opportunity to impose deadlines perform better on the last assignment in this class than students who just had to turn it all in by the end of semester deadline. And that was because they procrastinate, put off that last assignment till the last minute if they don't have any deadlines and then did a worse job on it. So it's just one interesting illustration. There are other kinds of commitments that we can use, like cash commitments, which can be really helpful, where you say I'll impose a cash penalty on myself if I don't achieve this goal by this date, and then I'll have to pay that fine. It turns out having access to such commitments can help smokers quit smoking, for instance, at a significantly higher rate. But there's lots of different ways when we start looking for it, that we can create constraints and boundaries that actually help us achieve more.

Whitney Johnson: And you know what's interesting about that, too, is that when they said you get to impose the constraint, one of the things it did is it allowed for autonomy. So people were able to say, I feel autonomous, I'm going to impose these constraints, I'm imposing them on myself. And so I suspect that that influence the outcomes as well.

Katy Milkman: It may well have. I do want to actually note that the best outcomes were achieved in a situation where the benevolent professor imposed equally spaced deadlines and the that was a little better still than giving students autonomy because many students didn't choose. Right. Some chose deadlines. And that was better than nothing. But many didn't. And it actually turns out to be better when you have deadlines, and this is a really interesting thing because it means we don't all appreciate the value of deadlines. Some of us do and we benefit from them. But those that didn't lost out. And so it does actually argue that some of the structures imposed on us by society, by our managers, do help us achieve more, even if we don't fully appreciate it. And I think that's another interesting takeaway from the study in addition to the one that we can self manage more effectively if we use these kinds of constraints.

Whitney Johnson: So interesting. All right. So let's talk briefly about overcoming laziness and the importance of habit formation. But you found some, there's an interesting twist that you found in the habit formation piece.

Katy Milkman: Yeah, absolutely. So this is what you're referring to is a study that absolutely surprised me more than any other I've done in my career. Honestly, it was a study where I thought I knew what I was going to find. I was sure I had engineered a solution. And this was in collaboration with John Breshears of Harvard Business School. We were both really sure that we'd engineered a solution for building long lasting habits. And we worked on this with Jesse Wisdom, who is at the time at Google with Sunny Lee, who was a doctoral student at Wharton, and Rob Maslowski of Johns Hopkins. Big team, all excited about this idea we had, which was, the habits literature suggests it's best for forming habits if you engage in that habit in a really consistent way. So to build a habit, you want same time, same place, same environmental cues to trigger the behavior as many times as possible. You get that repetition, you get some sort of reward, and then it turns into a habit. So we said we're going to help Google employees build lasting gym habits by getting them on a really strict routine, same time in place every day for a month will reward them for going. And they're going to have a lasting habit, will sort of stop with the rewards and see what happens. And they'll keep going. And it's going to be great.

We thought that would be better than than the sort of typical way you might try to lead a horse to water. And this habits domain, which would be just, you know, encouraging people to do it repeatedly but without constraints on when. So we ended up with two groups in our experiment that due to different reward schemes we offered went to the gym at the same frequency for a month due to our encouragement. But one group, half of their gym visits were at the same time and the other half were all over the place. And the other group 85 percent of their gym visits were at that same place in time. And we really thought that consistency would breed habit and we were wrong. We were really surprised to find that when this month long program ended, people were left to their own devices and we watch to see who keeps going to the gym most consistently. It was actually the group that had had less regular routines and we couldn't, you know, why did this happen? This doesn't make sense to us. We dug into the data.

What we found was the people who had built that really regular routine around exercising, say, at 7:00 a.m. every day, they did actually go to the gym at their regular time, a little bit more than others. But if they didn't go to the gym at 7:00 a.m., they didn't go at all. They had form really brittle, rigid routines.

The other group that was going to the gym, sometimes at 7:00 a.m., say, and other times at noon, well, when they missed their 7:00 a.m. workout, which was their most common time of going, they still found a way to get to the gym and netnet that made for a more robust habit of gym attendance. So what this showed us is the importance of building flexible habits instead of a if-only habit. If only I can go at this precise time and place, I will make it forming habits that look more like no matter what habits, you know, first best I'll go at this time and place. But I have a second best and the third best because life throws those curveballs and we can't expect to always have a situation that's perfect and we need to be able to fall back on on a second best plan and still get it done with something that's important to us.

Whitney Johnson: What an interesting finding!

Katy Milkman: I will say it was truly one of the most fascinating things I have seen in data because it just so strongly contradicted my intuitions. And by the way, we did a poll of psychology professors at the top universities asking them what they thought. Maybe, maybe we were just misled and everyone else would understand. And 80 percent agreed with our prediction that it was going to be better to create that rigid routine. So it really did fly in the face of what we thought we knew about what creates robust, lasting behavior change. But I think it was an important lesson because rigidity is I think increasingly I'm recognizing and write about this throughout the book, one of the biggest barriers to change. When we're too rigid, we're inevitably going to come up against an obstacle that we can't break through. And if we're rigid, we won't be able to bend and find a way to sustain change in the face of that obstacle.

Whitney Johnson: All right, let's go to the last one that really stood out for me, you talk about confidence and how important that is that we have to believe we have the capacity to change. And then you talk a little bit about advice. So tell us the, the role that advice plays in all of this.

Katy Milkman: Yeah. And to, to tell you about this, I actually want to tell you about my amazing mentor in graduate school. I had the great good fortune and the double-positive, great and good really are needed. I probably should add even more adjectives of description to work with someone named Max Bazerman, who's sort of a legendary adviser, and that all of his students succeed. We all do our best for our students, but a lot of times it doesn't work out for an academic career, and somehow Max's students are just real outliers in the academy. He has students who are tenured faculty at pretty much every one of the top universities in the world. And I was lucky enough to be one of his advisees.

He did a few things that were special that I didn't appreciate, I mean, I appreciate that I had a wonderful adviser. But I didn't understand the secret ingredients behind why he was so successful. He did a few things that were different, I think, than other advisers do. And one of them was he actually really rarely offered unsolicited advice. Tended to offer, you know, if you came to him and I have this problem, I need to know what to do. He gave you guidance, but often when his students were struggling with a project or a paper, rather than giving advice, he would put them in the role of coach or mentor to more junior students. He would bring them on and say, you know, well, can you help this other student think about how to solve this problem? And what I think was so brilliant about the way he structured his research group and having juniors get mentored by seniors and so on, and where he stepped back a lot and didn't offer supervision as the, the be all advice giver is that he showed us that he had total confidence in our ability to figure things out for ourselves.

And he gave us that autonomy and that built our confidence that we could do it. Putting people in the role of advice giver does a few magical things. I have since learned from research by Kellogg's Lauren Eskreis-Winkler. One of the magical things it does is it shows us someone else believes in us. They think that we've got what it takes to figure things out for ourselves. The second thing it does after putting us on the pedestal and building our confidence is it sort of forces us to introspect about what might work for this person. Normally we think about what would work for us. So we come up with strategies we might not have been motivated to dredge up if we were alone facing this challenge. Now, I'm accountable to someone else. I have to help them. And so I work even harder to develop good ideas. And then finally, once I tell someone else I think this is going to help you with your challenge, we're going to

feel hypocritical if we don't take that advice ourselves. And so I think Max intuitively understood this, but Lauren Eskreis-Winkler, again, a professor at Kellogg's, a school at Northwestern University. She has done fabulous research. I've gotten to be involved in a little bit of it, showing that when you put someone in the position of advice giver, they achieve better outcomes.

So we have one experiment that I collaborated on where thousands of high school students were randomly assigned to either give advice to their younger peers through a web form. They spent 10 minutes giving advice on how to study more effectively in school, or they were in a control condition where they didn't spend those 10 minutes giving advice at the beginning of the semester. And what we found is that the students who gave advice on study habits had to study more effectively, ended up improving their grades significantly in a class that they said they most wanted to improve in, and in math. And I should say we weren't turning C students into valedictorians. That would be both impossible and unbelievable. But it was a small improvement achieved by just this 10 minute activity, about a one point improvement on a GPA of 50 to 100, just from this opportunity to introspect and offer wisdom to someone else. So I think we should be using advice, giving as a tool more often when someone is struggling with a challenge. Our intuition is always to give advice. And if it's solicited, advice can be invaluable, but particularly when it's unsolicited, it can actually be demotivating. And once we recognize how confidence building it is to put someone in the position of mentor, which, by the way, Alcoholics Anonymous does this when they assign sponsors through their program, the sponsor are not only there to provide support and encouragement to new members, but it's helping the sponsor to provide that coaching. So when we recognize that power, I think we can help other people change and help ourselves.

Whitney Johnson: You know, as I'm hearing you say that, I'm thinking about a conversation that I had with my daughter just earlier today and realizing that it was important not to give her advice, but to make a suggestion. And I also find with my children, I'm sure this is true with everyone, is that when I ask them for advice. That, like you said, it empowers them, it gives them of like I want to know what you're thinking, but I hadn't thought of it actually gives them the possibility that they're more likely to do the thing that they just advise you to do.

Katy Milkman: Exactly right. And it's called the saying is believing effect. Also, we believe it more when we've heard it come out of our own mouth. So it's a really neat I do think it's a great tool with kids in particular and parents where it's always, there's a power dynamic that can be challenging. And when you flip that script and gives your kids the, the you know, what would you advise someone else to do who's in this situation? And can you if you have siblings, right. Can you coach your younger brother or sister? And this way it may help the advice giver even more than the recipient of the advice.

Whitney Johnson: Katy, where can people find you? Besides buying your book, *How to Change*? I have to repeat that out loud so that I can make sure I remember it. Where can they find you?

Katy Milkman: Probably the best places on my website, which is KatyMilkman.com, but with a Y, just like Katy Perry, not with an I-E on my website, you can find more information about the book, about the research center I co-director at Penn Behavior Change for Good Initiative. The research papers I've written in the podcast I hosted called Choiceology, a newsletter I put out called Milk Man Delivers. So it's sort of all there. And hopefully some of those things will be helpful to people.

Whitney Johnson: That's a great title of a newsletter. Well done. I love it.

Katy Milkman: I'm really proud of the Milk Man Delivers newsletter, I will admit. And that branding and you know, it's funny the things that as a child are horrendous and that is an adult we can just embrace. And so I have lots of fun with, with having a crazy last name.

Whitney Johnson: So good. As you've been talking and thinking and processing today, what has been useful for you?

Katy Milkman: I really liked the direction we went in talking about the power of constraints and different ways that they can, they can be useful when we're helping other people. They do better when we think about the constraints that will set them up for success. They could be useful when we impose them on ourselves that constraints can make

us more creative. I think it's been really interesting to talk about, even though we normally think of constraints as an obstacle. And this book is all about overcoming obstacles, how constraints can also be an asset. And I think that's really interesting and something we should all reflect on more.

Whitney Johnson: Any final thoughts?

Katy Milkman: I think the final thing I would say is that change is a journey. It's not, it's not something that can be quickly achieved or even that will be successful on the first try. In most cases, that often takes multiple attempts. And I think that, that can be obviously a source of frustration. I'm really interested in studying how do we get back up again after the inevitable obstacles we encounter that, that we can't overcome? But I'm so excited that there is a great and growing scientific literature that can help us increase our odds of success. And I hope people will not be dissuaded by the fact that there is no silver bullet, but will instead be encouraged by the fact that we know so much and we can do better with the science that's available. So I hope I hope the book and this conversation will be helpful to people who want to achieve their goals.

Whitney Johnson: Katy, you the milkman certainly did deliver. Thank you for being with us.

Katy Milkman: Thank you so much for having me. This is a really fun conversation.

Five key takeaways. Number one, when you jump to a new S curve, there are so many factors to consider. Katie talked about fresh starts that got me thinking about the fresh start that the whole world is embarking on. Post COVID. A lot of time has passed and we're going to be in places we haven't been. If you're ready for a big change, now might be the time.

Number two, crediting your colleagues, I love that Katie was citing her colleague, she made a real effort to say the names of the people that she's worked with reminded me of Justin Osofsky from episode 218, when we're willing to give other people credit. There's a generosity. There's a sense of being comfortable, of being self-assured, of being secure in our self-worth. And so one of the things that I'm thinking about and I would encourage you to think about is what are the situations when you are willing to cite people and where the situations when you're not? And how can you get to the point where you're willing to cite other people's work more frequently, when you're willing to give other people credit?

Number three, this idea of brittle versus flexible habits, such interesting stuff. I'm thinking about how I tend to exercise at the same time every day, but what if I, what if you committed to exercise every day, no matter what? Isn't it interesting how being more flexible can help us be more resilient? For more on habit formation, you can re-listen to B.J. Fogg and Episode 145 and James Clear in Episode 190.

Number four, constraints. We talk a lot about constraints here. You can go back and listen to Episode 140, but I just think it's fascinating about the knitting where people were more creative when they had only two colors versus a rainbow of colors. For all of us are thinking, oh, I have so many constraints right now. Remember that constraints are not a check on absolute freedom, but rather a tool of creation.

Number five, confidence and advice giving. So interesting, I find myself thinking about work that I'm doing and the coaching that I'm doing and thinking I need to invite the people that I'm coaching to give more advice instead of me giving so much advice. Because sometimes that advice monster that Michael Bungay Stanier talked about in Episode 151, wants to come out. I need to put the advice monster back. It's also reminding me of Episode 215 with Julie Lythcott-Haimes, where she talked about her conversation with her son and the advice around that.

Thank you again to Katie Milkman for joining us. Thank you to you for listening. Thank you to Brigitte Madrian for introducing us. Thank you to our team, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig, Maddie McDaniel and Matt Silverman.

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