

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 232: ASTRID TUMINEZ

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. Where we discuss strategies and advice for how to climb the S curve of learning in both your professional and personal life. Disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

Today, I get to talk with Dr. Astrid Tuminez. The president of Utah Valley University and its first female president. Astrid's journey is incredibly inspiring. She was born in the Philippines and raised in extreme poverty through a series of pivotal choices and influential mentors. She immigrated to the United States to pursue her passion for international relations. At Harvard and MIT, her focus on Russian Soviet studies and political science made her an influential voice in Cold War policy. She's devoted much of her life and career to peace negotiations during one of the most tense political climates in U.S. history.

Astrid has been a leader at AIG Global Investments, the U.S. Institute of Peace. The Council on Foreign Relations, Microsoft, and the Bank of the Philippine Islands. It goes without saying that Astrid has been mastering countless S curves on a global scale, and I am thrilled to learn more from her today.

**Whitney Johnson:** Astrid, you're such a great storyteller, I decided that we're going to Disrupt the format of this podcast and just go with the number three. So three influential people, three important books, three pivotal choices. And I wanted to start with three influential people in your life. Who are those people?

**Astrid Tuminez:** The first person that I would single out is my fifth and sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Elsie Garcia. I grew up in the slums of the Philippines, but when I was about five years old, nuns from the Daughters of Charity found my family in the slums and invited us to attend their very special, very expensive school for free. And for the first time in my life, I learned to read. I learned to do numbers and was just exposed to this whole world of learning, reading, music, culture, religion, which is, of course, very important in this Catholic school. And it was a school primarily for wealthy kids. And so I was a little bit of an outsider, but in fifth grade and then even more so in sixth grade, she really became my primary teacher in sixth grade, Mrs. Elsie Garcia.

She was the most beautiful, most fashionable, most articulate teacher who taught English and writing. And she was also a dance teacher at the same time. And just from afar, you know, I would look at her as if she was someone who'd stepped out of a fairy tale book. She had no children, and she took a very specific interest in me. And that very specific interest took the form of mentoring me and having me work with her. She would actually have me help her grade team papers and exams and have me lead the speech festival.

She just opened a lot of opportunities for me and she made me feel like I was part of her fairy tale world. I could see that she was fairly affluent. And, you know, she was someone people in the Philippines would call me [INAUDIBLE], meaning that her skin is fairer, her nose is taller. It's it may sound silly, but those are the definitions of, of beauty in the country and in the culture. And so being part of her world and her showing me exceptional care, she took a very personal interest in me. At Christmas, she would give me gifts. And so it just made me feel really special and it wasn't a superficial thing that was just about fashion or beauty. It was also this very intellectual thing going on where she knew that I was capable of a lot and gave me responsibility and challenged me to be an even smarter student. It gave me confidence and it made me feel like I was worthy of attention. And part of that was because, you know, my own mother left when I was five years old. So this teacher played this really critical role of a caring person, a caring adult. So she's one of the people who made a huge difference in my life.

**Whitney Johnson:** So in some ways, she was very much a mother figure for you. And she, she saw you. And so she saw who Astrid was and who Astrid could be.

**Astrid Tuminez:** Absolutely. So the next person that I would talk about is Professor Gary Browning, who became my mentor at Brigham Young University. I came to the United States as an 18-year-old, really not knowing anything about America or knowing very little coming to America was a gigantic change, because, for the first time in my life, I had electricity around the clock and water around the clock and plumbing. And it was just an amazing time for me to be an 18-year-old in the United States. And I went to Brigham Young University. I didn't have a scholarship there. I had two older sisters already living in Utah. And they helped me with my tuition. But I knew that I had to get a job fairly immediately in order to make college life work.

And so I knew that I wanted to study Russian because I started looking into that language even while I was in the Philippines. And so I went to the Russian department. It was actually the Germanic and Slavic languages department. And I applied for a job. And Professor Browning was looking for a secretary, and I applied for the job. And one of the things that they asked me to do was to take a typing exam. And a typing test consisted of writing a formal letter, dear so-and-so, have the date, the address. And I had no idea where those things went. I knew that I had to have the address. I didn't know how many spaces between this line versus the next line between the closing salutation and then the name of the person.

So basically, I got everything wrong in that particular typing exam. And it has to be a miracle because, you know, he didn't know me, but he kind of saw something in this 18 year old and he kind of looked at my chest and Professor Browning in all these decades that I've known him now, I have never heard him say anything mean or harsh about anything or anyone. He's a very, very gentle and kind and compassionate person. So he looked at the typing test and he was probably, you know, shocked at my lack of skills that he looked at me and he said, "I want you to take another test. Why don't you go downstairs, go to this room, and they can give you a spelling test there."

So I went downstairs and at that point in my life, because I was so hungry for knowledge when that Catholic school took me in at the age of five, I was illiterate once I learned to read. I basically read and devoured hundreds of books. I sometimes had to be kept out of the library. So my grasp of of spelling was was actually quite good and of the English language. So I went to this other room in the Jessenia Humanities building at the time at BYU, and I took the spelling test. And of course, I aced that test. And so Professor Browning gave me the opportunity to have a job. And really, from that day on, since he hired me to this day when I'm president of Utah Valley University and he is in his 80s, we continue to have a very strong, high and very open relationship where he continues to mentor me.

And I remember applying to Harvard University as a senior at BYU. I was also in the first cohort of BYU students to, to do the first study abroad program in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the former Soviet Union. And that was the project of Professor Browning. Anyway, when I applied to Harvard, I asked him to write me a letter of recommendation. And he had done his Ph.D. at Harvard himself. And so that letter that he wrote me, I'm sure, was

a big factor in my getting into Harvard and therefore positioning me for all of the other things that I was able to do later on, doing a Ph.D. at M.I.T. and working in New York and, you know, doing some pretty interesting things in life. And so so this gentleman was [INAUDIBLE].

So I often like to say that no person in this world is self-made, it's a delusion. Whenever someone tells you they're self-made, it's completely impossibly untrue, because at every step of the way, somebody said you, somebody wrote a letter for you. Somebody helped you with homework. You couldn't do. So Gary Browning was that person to me as a new immigrant to this country. And the other thing, the finally that I would say about him is, you know, similar to Mrs. Garcia, it wasn't just this role of being my professor and being my mentor in Russian language or in various other jobs that I ended up doing for him. But he was also an ethics and values kind of mentor.

What do I mean by that? When I was a major in political science at BYU, I was very, very concerned about the Cold War and the nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States. And I was looking into this and the statistics that, you know, we had enough nuclear weapons at the time to blow up the earth so many times over. And I just thought that was absurd. Why should military arsenals be that big? And we kept building them when we knew we would end life as we knew it on Earth. And so I was very concerned about that from a political and moral perspective. And even though Professor Browning was a professor of Russian language and literature, he was also very involved in these issues and was, in fact, kind of a conscientious objector to the nuclear arms race. And then as his assistant, I would see these horrible things people would write to him, even death threats and people. And I just thought, wow, you know, it takes a lot of backbone to have moral conviction about something, to believe that we could behave better as humans, to believe that our foreign policy could be better, to believe that our military policy could be better, to believe that Russians were people, too. And maybe we should be listening more to a group of people that we had branded as our enemies. And so I just I just truly respected his courage and his equanimity, because Utah, Utah was a very homogeneous in many ways still. It was a very healthy kind of place. And you don't necessarily rock the boat in those ways.

So I admired that because I think they changed the world and to lead and to influence others. You have to have that kind of of courage and conviction and self definition that allows you to face things that are important. I've studied issues that are that you think are important for yourself and the world and to be able to stand your ground in a humble, courageous and powerful way.

The third person I talk about is my sister, Marley. There were seven children in my family at the time that my mother left. I was only five years old, and the youngest was 18 months old and the oldest was almost 16. And we all lived in this hut on stilts in the sea. And when my mother left, my next oldest sibling, Marley, basically took over the family. So she was so young. And when I became a mother, you know, I, I had to ask myself, how did she possibly do that, where she had to take care of so many siblings and go to the well and wash our clothes and, you know, remind us to say our prayers, who were very, very strict Catholics.

**Whitney Johnson:** How old was she?

**Astrid Tuminez:** She was 15. So it fell on her because she had the the desire to be that kind of sibling in the family and really taking care of us. We didn't have a lot of food, but at least making sure we didn't starve. But she played that role of being the operational parental figure, and she was very, very strict.

On Saturday, she would make us take a nap. She would attend physical discipline, which is a part of our landscape. She would pinch our ears and pinch our sides. And if we didn't take our nap and she would make sure that we washed our clothes, she would she would make sure that, you know, we scrub the bamboo floor. We probably ate chicken just a couple of times a year, because it was it was incredibly expensive. But I would watch her like buy the live chicken and she would kill the chicken. She had amazing skills. She would kill that chicken. She would cut its neck and she would dip it in the boiling water so you could pull the feathers off. You can't pull the feathers off unless you soak it in hot water. I'm watching the older sister just, you know, just really resourceful. And I remember one time we were trying to think about how we could get some cash and because we had no money at all, and she would take condensed milk and cook it, cook the can in water just on top of the fire and caramelize it, and we made this candy that's called Yima in the Philippines, and then she would make me and my oldest, my older sister sell it in

school. And we we kind of were amazed that we could sell it for so much more than what the ingredients cost. So my was enterprising, hardworking, strict, and had very high expectations.

I think that I absorbed from her, you know, these qualities of making do when you don't have a lot, but also thinking through your what you do have, and what do you make of what you do have and how do you impose really high standards on yourself. And it's really funny. I was listening to a podcast from Nietzsche, the philosopher, last night. And, you know, at one point the podcasters said, you know, Nietzsche told everybody that the reason people don't listen to their higher selves is because it's a very demanding self. And I think of my sister Marley as my higher self. She's so demanding and ... but that was, that was really very powerful. I think for me, a very powerful influence. [INAUDIBLE]

**Whitney Johnson:** So let's go to three pivotal choices or experiences, one, you know, you were in the USSR when the wall fell. I don't know if that's the experience, but I'd love to hear three experiences for you that were just really pivotal or choices that you made that really stand out for you.

**Astrid Tuminez:** I think the first pivotal choice that I made was to come to the United States and let me explain that a little bit. So as I mentioned earlier, I grew up in the slums. My father made less than fifty dollars a month. And I think in that situation, there was very little room for any kind of luxury or even the solid basic needs that that you have. And yet because I had access to a library, a school, you know, I got to read magazines like Time and Newsweek. And then I joined the Latter Day Saint Church, about 10 years old. And I was able to learn about this place called Utah. And I made the decision really quite early that I would go to the United States, that I would live in New York, that I would work for the United Nations, because I read about them in in Time magazine. And that's pivotal that I made that decision early in life, because when the time came and I felt that I could apply to a university and get in, I couldn't get a visa. And I tried the first time. I couldn't get a visa. The second time I couldn't get a visa. It was the same story where I was told, you're a young person, you're poor, you have no assets, you are an immigration risk because you may not return to the Philippines and therefore we don't want to have you go to the United States.

I was just very lucky that some American citizens who knew me were able to, you know, for the third time vouch for my character and vouch for my potential. And on that third try, I was able to get a visa and I never gave up because the decision was so firm in my head that my own country wasn't going to give me the opportunities that I wanted and that my own country had this culture that kind of welcomes meritocracy to some extent, but it's welcomed inherited wealth even more, or an inherited family name if you really belonged to one of the prominent families. You immediately had the respect and all doors open for you. And I saw myself as an outsider. And coming to the U.S. was incredibly liberating because it was the first time in my life people didn't care about, you know, whether I was flat nose or brown skinned or whether my family name was important at all. And to be able to go to BYU, great university where I could just excel was amazing. So I think that was a critical, pivotal decision. And then the other critical, pivotal decision for me was marriage. I got married young by Harvard standards. Nobody at Harvard gets married at 23. And that's a very unique journey.

My husband was twenty-four the time. And And life is pivotal, is pivotal because of the partner that I ended up sharing my life with. It is so important for anybody hoping to have a life of adventure, and especially women who want to have a profession and leadership experience to to choose your partner very carefully. And I remember being engaged to my husband now, Jeffrey Talk, and we were walking at Harvard Square and he said, you know, he said, I don't want to be responsible for your happiness. He said, I want you to be responsible for your happiness. And my first reaction to that was shock. Like what? I thought I got married and that man was going to be responsible for my happiness. And he was just so honest. He gave me clear and honest feedback early in the relationship, and he doesn't even remember telling me that. But it stood out so much for me because I'd been socialized in this idea that, you know, if you get married, you get your Prince Charming and you'll have this great family, you know, forever. And nobody ever told me, hey, marriage is the hardest thing you'll ever do in life. And having marriage, family and a career that's just going to try you to your utmost limit. And then since we both really pretty much powered up our education, both at Harvard and MIT and then careers in New York City, he was like there every step of the way for me. He's a partner who, who really is proud of what I accomplished. Like genuinely, genuinely proud. And I kind of think of me with my Marty Ginsburg, if you think about him. But it's so moving to see that, you know, her biggest fan was Marty Ginsburg.

The third pivotal decision that I want to talk about is the decision to work in the Soviet Union in 1990. I'd been married three years and I had this opportunity to go and live there as a as an employee of Harvard University and the person running the Harvard project at the time in Moscow was going through some personal things in his life. And so somebody else was needed. And I raised my hand and there were many people who did not understand that decision, that I would leave my husband in New York City and I would live in Russia. But I did that with some design and that I told my boss, hey, you know, I live in Russia, but I said every six weeks you're going to have to fly me to New York because I can't be away from my husband that long. And Jeff was beginning his own legal career at the time at a big law firm in New York City.

So what did that do for me? I think, one, it exposed me to, you know, really what what was just the biggest, baddest job anyone in their 20's could have. It exposed me to this massive sociopolitical and economic change going on in a massive country that loomed large in the imagination of the whole world. It gave me, I think, some wisdom in how things change or don't change. A humility in knowing that we don't have the answers, that we in the West don't have the answers because the country imploded. And while we were there to give all these advice and privatization and arms control and how to create a market economy. But at the end of the day, political culture is so deeply rooted and things take a long time to change. Secondly, it gave me a massive leadership opportunity where I was working with the foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, and then from that job. And later on, I was able to meet with President Mikhail Gorbachev. I worked with Grigory Yavlinsky, who was at the time a very critical economics adviser to Robert Chubb, and that group came to Harvard. So it gave me really a massive amount of leadership opportunity. I worked with a chief justice of the first constitutional court of Russia. So I had the chance to do things and operate in a difficult environment where we opened up an office in Moscow. We had to bring our own computers, our own printers. There were days when you couldn't buy any paper in the whole city. Deficits would prop up. And so it was a lot of problem solving. I hired people. It was just an amazing adventure, amazing experience in leadership and problem solving. So that's the second reason why that decision was important. And then the third reason that decision was important was that I built a network that has served my career for decades.

The next job that I had after Russia was actually with a president of Carnegie Corporation of New York. And the reason that I knew him, Dr. David Hamburg, was because I met him when he was in Russia. And Carnegie was one of the funders of that Harvard project that I worked for. So early on, I had this opportunity to appreciate the importance of humility and in leadership, the importance of problem-solving and being able to take initiative under difficult circumstances and still being effective and then having a network, because all the people that we meet in our way up are, they say, are the people we meet on our way down. And we have to, we have to create a track record that people can respect and that therefore they will work with us again or take our phone call when they need to talk to them.

**Whitney Johnson:** Can you think of a major setback? What it was, and what did you do? So one of your biggest you're like, whoa, I don't know what to do with this. And then what did you do?

**Astrid Tuminez:** In 1997, I already started thinking about, hey, you know, I'm I have a masters of a PhD. I, I can rise. I can speak. But one thing I don't understand at all is money. And yet my field of study to Russia and the former Soviet Union was all about money. There was a capitalist system that was being built. There's a stock market. Companies were being privatized that were formerly state owned, and I just thought, I don't understand how this works. But I didn't want to go back to school for an MBA. And so the question in my head was, you know, who could give me a job? And so I looked at my network and I got some interviews with some of the banks. And at the end of the day, I had an offer from Morgan Stanley and from Brunswick, which was a bank half owned by SBC Warburg at the time. And they had an office on Park Avenue in New York, about just two blocks from my own office at Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In hindsight, I think I should have taken the Morgan Stanley job because it's bigger bank and more diversified, probably better training as well overall. But I kind of opted for safety. So I went to Brunswick because they they were one of the very first investment banks in in Moscow. And I knew some of the people who worked there, you know, especially one of them who was a PhD student at Harvard, the same time that I was in Cambridge. And and so I went to to that bank. But and so I was just learning the ropes of being an equities broker, as well as doing some research on the Russian equities market and, you know, talking to money managers and so on. And then there was

the rude awakening of the 1998 collapse. And if you remember, the ruble collapse and all the currencies. Asia was very heavily affected. And, you know, it seemed like the whole world was teetering on the brink of collapse. And so once the ruble collapsed, there was no market. And I remember I was just very naïve sitting there in the Park Avenue office and in a Mies van der Rohe building and somebody in the tiny trading floor coming up to me and saying, you must leave now. You can't even look through your folders.

And I couldn't even tell you -- he was just so horrible. And and I felt so betrayed by the friend. It was just that moment when you think this can't possibly be happening. I have. I was summa cum laude. I have a Harvard degree. I have a, I speak six languages. I have an MIT degree. And you just think this can't possibly be happening to me. And I remember I immediately called my husband and I just wondered the streets of New York for a little bit of time. I was trying not to cry. And the more important thing was what I did after that. I could have given up on trying to learn about money because it was such an unpleasant experience, the six months. But instead I said, no, I'm going to do this. I'm going to learn how money works. I'm going to learn as much as I can about banking and all of that stuff.

So this time, I went about it a slightly different way. I looked at the board of trustees of Carnegie Corporation, where I had worked for six months, and I asked myself, who in this crowd that already knows me would probably be helpful to me. So I made a phone call to Vincent Lay, the CEO of AAA investors, and I went to his office and he was just so kind and generous. And he said to me, you know, he looked at my CV and he knew that I was coming from philanthropy, not from banking. And he said, he said, let me introduce you to Hank Greenberg. And Hank Greenberg with the CEO of AIG and was also the chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations. And again, that was an amazing pivot because once once he set up that meeting with Mr. Greenberg and Mr. Greenberg offered me a job. It was just, it was just fantastic. I had a wonderful four years of education on Wall Street doing credit risk and then subsequently private equity. I can honestly say it's not my forte. It's definitely not the thing that comes naturally to me. But it just made me a much better educated person. It's made me kind of understand better how capitalism works and how it works well, how it works horribly, when it works horribly and, and, yeah, it just made me a better person and a more educated person.

**Whitney Johnson:** Do you ever think about what would have happened if you hadn't lost that job? So what are what are some like good things that happened to you because you got fired?

**Astrid Tuminez:** It helped me become comfortable with failure because my childhood left practically no room for failure and I say this to the people that that my childhood and we are all products of our childhood. My childhood was about surviving or make a mistake and you die. So make a mistake mean, you know, you fall off the walkway and get tetanus from a stray nail or you drown because you don't know how to swim and because you've never had any swimming lessons. So when you make a mistake, it could be a really big mistake or you are in the wrong place when a stabbing or a shooting happens in the neighborhood. So I had this mentality that I can't make mistakes because if I made mistakes or if I fail, I'm going to die. And it turned out that this failure, I didn't die. And so so it made me learn that there were other things from my childhood that I should focus more on, like resilience. And then having all of that happen and then realizing afterwards that, yes, it was important to feel all that, but that wasn't the end of the story. Right. There's more to this story, and I could shape it.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Astrid, when you're at the point where it's time to do something new and you've jumped to a lot of different S curves in your life of starting the bottom, climbing to the top and then jumping. When you make a jump to do something new, is there a calculus that's going on in your head of trying to decide what you're going to do and as you're preparing to make a big move? How do you prepare yourself mentally and emotionally?

**Astrid Tuminez:** The first thing that I do and this is really important is I pay attention. So when I find myself in a new field like finance, and I didn't know any of those ratios for looking at the credit worthiness of banks or the credit worthiness of sovereign obliga, the first thing that I have to do is pay attention to every word that is being said by the people who know what the subject matter is about. And paying attention means that if I don't know something, I've got to ask what that means. I've got to find out what it means, because I only have three months here to learn all of this and then be functional and be contributing. Paying attention also means paying attention to the ecosystem. Who here can be my ally and could be a mentor to me? Who here looks like me, utterly disrespect me, and won't even give me the time of day? And then the next thing is, I would probably say just working really, really hard, because

when you are the beginner. You are the one who's ignorant and you have to work harder and run faster and jump higher than other people.

So you have to put in the work, and I think your colleagues will begin to respect you when they see that you are making that earnest attempt, an effort to be a learner and to begin contributing, because as you show that work ethic, you you are really able to contribute to. Pay attention, have a strong work ethic. And then I think maybe just the third thing I would say is, you know, have a sense of humor and be forgiving. Because my hardest times have been when I can have that sense of humor and forgive myself. And I just feel completely ignorant. And I've gotten better over the years where, you know, I joke about patting myself on the back and saying, you did your best, it's OK. And that tomorrow is another day. And because if you're just paying attention and having the work ethic and you're not having fun, you can completely you cannot sustain what it takes to to lead or to be effective in what you're trying to do.

**Whitney Johnson:** So in that moment, when you find yourself, you're doing something new and you're like, oh, I want to get this right. Is there something that you say to yourself or you do to kind of reset and say, okay, relax, Astrid. You got it. Is there something that you, a mental exercise that you go to to get to that place?

**Astrid Tuminez:** The mere act of breathing is my mental exercise, if I am so, so, so tense, I have to go into my room and just, you know, do some deep breathing. And we know there's a lot of research about that and we have the ability to breathe almost immediately, brings your attention down and almost immediately slows your heartbeat, your blood pressure, clears your mind. And so that's something that I do. I also always keep dark chocolate in my office and at work. And when I was living in New York City for 13 years, it is true Mzungu chocolate on Madison Avenue. That was my go to place. It was like my drug dealer. And I would just go there and and, you know, they have the melted chocolate that has nothing else that melted chocolate. And you just, you know, drink it and you feel, you feel good right away.

And there are other things that I do. You know, I became a runner at the age of 45. And in that, I've run five 1/2 marathons in one fall. And running, I think I literally saved my sanity. So I think the pleasure principle, the meditation and breathing principle, the exercise principle, those are some of the things that as we get frustrated. And it's really important as we're learning and we get so frustrated and we're not breaking through. I think that is sort of the moment you need to go for a walk or a run. And you'll see I compose entire speeches when I run, and it's crazy when I'm back after running, I can write that whole outline of that narrative of a speech down. And it really makes a lot of sense. And it's funny. I think it's because, you know, I'm oxygenating my brain and my brain just works better.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ha! So running is doubly productive because you get the exercise, you calm down and you compose speeches at the same time. So you get to the high end of an S curve. Is there a time when you were, you were at that place and you were really productive and you were doing really well. But you also knew it was time to go. And when that happened, how did you know it was time to go?

**Astrid Tuminez:** I have a boredom threshold. And when I hit that, I know it's time to go. So how do I know that it's time to go? I think I just become less inspired about what I'm doing. I either feel like, you know, I've done everything that I can here or I've learned everything that I can here or the people that I'm working with. I'm just kind of done with that as well. Or the boss that I'm working with. So it's sort of different things because the trade offs for me in my work life is that, number one, it's got to be interesting. Number two, it's got to pay pretty well. Number three, it's got to have people that I want to be with.

If you look at my career every four to seven years, I'm kind of moving. And I always find an area that I've never done before, because all of a sudden I get so excited again that it's this whole new discovery and adventure. And I can deploy everything I learned in my past three jobs that I can learn, part seven is completely new. I get so excited about that. I try not to wait till I am just so frustrated and so desperate. So I kind of feel that coming. And then I, um, you know, one place that I did not feel that was actually Microsoft, my prior job, because technology.

**Whitney Johnson:** I was going to ask you that. So you were at Microsoft and you weren't necessarily ready to go, but then this this opportunity came up to be president.

**Astrid Tuminez:** Yeah, absolutely. So it's what I discovered there in the tech industry was, um, one just the pace was so fast. Number two, the subject matter is so rich. Everything from the technology itself to, you know, governments and regulation to philanthropy and or how technologies can power up disabled people. They were just so many things that were so interesting. And and, of course, the challenge of competition in the corporate world. So I loved it. And and again, I think that's probably the place where, yeah, I could have done that much longer if this university presidency hadn't come up. But um, and Microsoft, it really was a very difficult S curve for me. Very difficult. And it was the first time making a transition that I felt I made a mistake, that I really had taken on more than I could chew. And the good thing was I didn't give up. And so, um, it took about six months in that S curve. I mean, the company was so open to to you and your own ambitions. That's how I felt. And um, and I loved it. That was very liberating. But um. Yeah, that was also my hardest S curve.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Astrid, what's your why? What's your purpose on this planet?

**Astrid Tuminez:** So that's a relatively easy question to answer, and, you know, in my leadership class, at UVU. I tell my students about a three by five card, that I was 19 and a student at BYU, and I was sitting at my desk in the Russian house, and I asked myself, what is my why? What's my purpose in life? And, you know, I wrote I wrote, I wrote three things. One was to be happy. That's my purpose. And then the second one was to be useful. And what I mean by that is I should be doing good. It's not just about me. It's about other people and more importantly, to be useful. And then the third thing that I wrote was to be charitable and charity, meaning that, you know, the best lived life is... This is where I will not quote Nietzsche about the overmanned, because you can be an over man. But, you know, I think it's also really important that there is compassion along the way and that what you do also has reverberations for other people, hopefully for good. And that in our quest for success and to be the best selves that we can be, that we are not trampling down people. And I need to be, you know, really aware of that, because in a leadership position, we put other people in hard spots. We demand a lot of ourselves and we demand a lot of them. And so these three things know I've got to have fun, I've got to be happy and I've got to be useful and I have to be charitable somehow balancing that.

**Whitney Johnson:** A final thoughts?

**Astrid Tuminez:** Any final thoughts? I, I actually thought about books that I might recommend.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, we would love to hear. Please do tell.

**Astrid Tuminez:** So when I was 11 or 12, I read *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. And that had a really big impact on me. And, you know, you know, that's a book. Some people say, oh, that's so hokey, but it's really a great book. And I think the younger you are when you read it, the better. Because you have such great principles in it. Like, I will persist until I succeed. I will laugh at the world. You know.

Another book that I would recommend is, *Care of the Soul*. And this is by Thomas Moore. And *Care of the Soul* is a book that I, I just go back to. It's about finding the sacred in the everyday. I read a ton of novels, and one of my favorite writer is Marilynne Robinson and her book, *Gilead*. I've read almost all her books, but *Gilead*, which I think 13 years ago, was still selling very well, probably today. But *Gilead*, it's just the perfection of language in that book, and it just speaks to you so quietly. And I'm pretty certain that you could read that 10 times and still continue enjoying it and lots of other books. But I thought, you know, those books are ones that I would mention.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, I'm so glad that you you made sure to include that. I'm going to go look up *Gilead* right now and *Care of the Soul*, as well as *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. Any final, final, final thoughts?

**Astrid Tuminez:** I feel like I am where I am, because of so many people who have been great exemplars to me and also great mentors and great risk takers alongside me. And so, yeah, so I'll just I'll just end with that. And thank you so much.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you, Astrid.



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In keeping with the rule of threes. Here are my three biggest takeaways from chatting with Astrid.

Number one, no one is really self-made. Everyone gets help. Everyone is part of a community, no matter how successful we become. It's so important to acknowledge the people and the institutions who made us who we are today.

Number two, getting comfortable with failure in the world Astrid grew up in, failing at something could mean death. I found it fascinating that she needed to recalibrate the stakes around failure in the corporate world. For many of us, failure is the beginning of growth with Astrid's global perspective, we're reminded this isn't a luxury everyone enjoys.

Number three. Be happy, be useful, and be charitable. When you really think about it, what else is there if something in your life is interfering with these meta goals? Step back to grow.

Four. I'll break the rule of threes here to add one very important takeaway I learned from Astrid. Always, always keep some dark chocolate hidden somewhere in your desk.

I hope you enjoyed this conversation with Astrid as much as I did. I loved it so much. She's the very first story in my next book, Smart Growth.

Now I want to know from you, who are the influential people in your life whose kindness has changed your trajectory? I'd love to hear from you at [WJ@WhitneyJohnson.com](mailto:WJ@WhitneyJohnson.com). I take the time to read and respond to every single email.

Thank you again to Astrid Tuminez for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening. And thank you to our team. Matt Silverman, producer, Whitney Jobe, audio engineer and editor. Steve Ludwig, assistant producer, and Maddie McDaniel, production assistant.

I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.