

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 236: PAMAY BASSEY

Hi, it's Whitney, and I have a favor to ask. We are seeking to better tailor our podcast to meet your needs, so we're conducting a quick audience survey. The first time ever actually. A link to the survey, which takes less than a minute, is in the show notes. And as a small gesture of appreciation, when you complete it, you'll get a free PDF listing 10 podcasts that can help with career changes. Thanks so much, and onto the show.

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.

Our guest today is Ekpedeme M. Bassey, the chief learning and chief diversity officer at Kraft Heinz, board member Houlihan Lokey, formerly the head of learning platform and professional development at BlackRock and author of the daily journal, "*Let's Learn Our Way Through it, Shall We?*"

While her resumé may look classically corporate, her background is anything but. Pamay is a first-generation Nigerian American born in New York City. Her heritage has deeply informed her approach to diversity and inclusion. But her first professional love was not in corporate learning, but in comedy. Specifically standup and improv. I'm eager to get her perspective on how laughter, loss and learning affect everything she's accomplished. Here's my conversation with Pam Bassey.

**Whitney Johnson:** To me, I'd like to start with a crucible moment. You were at Andersen Consulting, its 2000 and you leave to work at a startup. What happened and what did you learn?

**Pamay Bassey:** Ah taking me back Whitney. So yes, I remember very clearly having worked in consulting for a number of years and determined that I should be doing something more innovative. And so I jumped, if you will, and went to a mobile technology startup in Chicago, and after a year it died. Startups die sometimes. They don't always last, but it really was a moment where I thought, okay, I'm in a very... When I'm at the top of my S curve. If I want to just jump right in and use your language, and I want to try something different. I had a lot of peers who are doing really cool things in Silicon Valley. I thought, Well, why not try something different? And so I went from doing, that was the one time in my life where I moved from doing learning and development to doing voice user interfaces and mobile user interfaces. And like, imagine Siri's grandmother or our smartphone's great grandfather. And I just learned then that I had the courage to do that. And then I learned that when things don't work out because the startup did not flourish, my stock options did not multiply into wealth abounding, that I had the wherewithal to say, "okay, what do I do now? What's going to be my next step?"

**Whitney Johnson:** And what did you do next?

**Pamay Bassey:** That's a great question. I did certainly cry and freak out and scroll through many things. It was trying to find a purpose. I did a couple of things. I started studying comedy. I'd always wanted to be a startup, stand-up comedian, and I live in Chicago, and so I went to Second City and started there. I started studying improv there. Which is probably not what you thought I was going to say. And I started doing a series of kind of independent projects that turned into my own company. So it was just doing educational research here and teaching at the online university here. I looked up after a while and I said, Hey, I'm going to turn this into the Pamay group, which ended up being an independent consulting company that I worked for and with and drove as president for 13 years.

**Whitney Johnson:** You decide to try improv, and by the way, I noticed that you almost said I was a startup comedian, so I thought there was a fun Freudian slip in there. But if you can talk for just a minute about why did you decide to do stand-up comedy? I mean, that's an interesting response to I've now disrupted myself. It didn't work. Let me try improv.

**Pamay Bassey:** Sure. I mean, any time something ends that I remember very clearly the day that my manager came in and said, "Hey, your position is being eliminated," which is what happened. I did not love that. So much so that I decided I didn't ever want to have a job again, which is interesting because I do have one now. And I thought, Well, what happens when someone blows up your life? You're supposed to do something you've always wanted to do. And I have always loved comedy. Anyone who knows me knows that my original goal and love and love for life was stand-up comedy. I come from a background and parents who I didn't really know how to tell them that. I had very high expectations set on me academically and professionally. And so being a stand-up comedian didn't seem to fit into the set of expectations. But once I had that kind of failure moment, I thought, Well, what the heck, if not now, then when? It's something that I love. I spent a couple of years studying and performing and auditioning and doing all the things that actors do and being rejected and making new friends, some of which are doing amazing things in the... They stuck it out and are now entertaining all of us. So it was kind of just, what do you do when life kicks you in the face? You try something that you love.

**Whitney Johnson:** Alright, we're going to come back to your startup stand-up comedy. Alright, it's 2009, so we're fast-forwarding about seven years, and it was one of those years that you have described as everything went wrong. What happened and what did you learn?

**Pamay Bassey:** Yes, I call that my personally challenging year. I once called it the worst year of my life, but I thought I didn't want to tempt fate. Like, don't try to top this, please universe. I lost my father in 2009. He had cancer, and after a long illness, he passed away. While my family and I were in the middle of that, I lost my grandmother, who I think as you know, but maybe everyone doesn't know my parents are Nigerian and West African. I am first generation, so I only, this is the only grandmother I ever knew. She was my only connect. She and my father are really my, my cultural connections. And of course, I have an enormous family and they continue to be a connection. But they were real giants for me. And a relationship ended, which at the time seemed like a really big thing. So it was kind of a holy triumvirate of personal pain. And much like what happened in 2000. I kind of said, "Well, how am I going to figure out how to pick myself back up and become the person who I am when I'm not mired in grief?" And that's when I launched one of my first personal projects, my 52 weeks of worship and learned an enormous amount

about who I am and how, what I believe, and what do I do when I get kicked in the face? How do I stand back up and keep walking?

**Whitney Johnson:** You have to tell us about the 52 weeks of worship. That sounds too interesting and tantalizing to not dive a little bit deeper on that.

**Pamay Bassey:** Well, luckily for you, it's something that I love talking about. It's my best friend so far, one of my best things. So basically, what happened was I was really questioning everything after that really tough year, and I decided that I would find my way back to myself by investigating and immersing myself in the process of learning about as many different ways of worship as I could. So I made a personal commitment that every week I would find myself in a different place of worship, whether or not it reflected my own personal tradition. So churches and mosques and synagogues and temples, a few living rooms from the south side of Chicago to South Africa, from Brazil to Brooklyn, so all over the world. And really just, in a time where I felt not a lot of hope, looking for goodness everywhere and in ways and places that I might not generally interact. And it started out being just kind of like, I need to figure out how to get up out of bed in the morning and turned out being something that was amazing. I learned so much and it actually became, I think, the foundation of what I call my inclusion practice as I walk through the world and just try to learn from everyone and be an inclusive leader and be someone who, who really revels in knowing as much as I can about, as much as I can.

**Whitney Johnson:** Is there one experience you said, you were "looking for the good in the world?" Is there one experience that you had, one worship moment? One church? One mosque? There are probably many, but does one stand out that you would like to share and perhaps informs the inclusion practice that you're talking about?

**Pamay Bassey:** I think it is more kind of the experience I had repeatedly, is that I was an other. Every week I was an other. Even when, I mean, I was raised as a Christian non-denominational. But if I walked into a Catholic church, I was not raised Catholic. If I walked into, you know, really traditional Christian church, that was not my experience. And what I say was the foundation of my inclusion practices really was all of the goodwill that was extended to me when I walked into a place and people said, Hmm. She's not a regular here, right? And a lot of places, I stood out like a sore thumb. I went to a beachy Amish Mennonite church. Well, you know, I covered my head, but I certainly didn't look like the rest of the congregation.

And the fact that there was always someone who reached out, I call this like just I would make eye contact with somebody. I remember going to a synagogue and someone looked at me and they said, "Hey, let me just show you how the holy books are stacked. Which one do you want?" That sort of thing. Or like sitting next to me and reading Hebrew with me phonetically? And I think that is the lesson is first, to be silent when you don't know what's going on. Know that there's always someone to help you. Look for the helpers, if you will. And that there's something to learn. Even when I was confused and I didn't miss it. You know what? I'm not coming back here, but let me just sit here and listen and learn and see what I learned about myself by being the place that's so different than who I am.

**Whitney Johnson:** And something you also said that I thought was so lovely is that "there were most instances where someone reached out to include you."

**Pamay Bassey:** Absolutely. I mean, you'll see in a lot of places of worship, it says 'all are welcome,' but I really put it to the test just showing up. And I try not to be someone who, I didn't want to disrupt what was going on. Sometimes I went to services that were not in English, and I said, You know what? Just do your thing. I'm just going to kind of try to to to move along with the flow. But every single time someone kind of looked at me and said, "Hey, are you new here?" Or they just kind of slid me some information, or here's a bulletin or something to make me feel like we're all in this together. Whoever you are. And that was wonderful.

**Whitney Johnson:** So out of your grief came this experience, this 52 weeks of worship, of learning, and of learning about how to include and be included.

**Pamay Bassey:** Absolutely.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's zigzag back to your college years. You're 16 years old, which, okay, high achieved much? Because for anybody who does not live in the United States, you don't typically go to college until you were 18 years old. Your first year at Stanford, you later go to Northwestern, but at Stanford, you said you studied symbolic systems and artificial intelligence. Tell us about the experience that you were having as a 16-year-old starting college studying this really complicated topic, early on in the, I don't know, software revolution if you will. Talk to us about that experience.

**Pamay Bassey:** Sure. As you might imagine, when you are someone who goes to school that early as I was, I had a lot of experience with people telling me how smart I was. "Oh, you're super smart." "Oh, you're so smart for your age." Just fill in my head, right? And I dreamed about going to Stanford from the time I was 10 or 11, so I really was a nerd. I dreamed of studying AI. I lived in a house that was pretty strict, so I found a school as far away from home as possible and said, "Hey, it's a really good school. You said education's important. So I'm out there." But when I got there, it was extremely humbling and not in just the normal ways. And you're surrounded by excellence. So many really smart people around me, not because I was young, because at that time I didn't really think of it as a liability. I was ready to go.

But what I didn't realize at the time is the majority of my courses were really around topics that were focused on creating something that had never been created before. So just to take you back, not to age me, but you know, I graduated in 1993. There was an internet boom that some of the companies that we now know that are just fundamental to how we are, we're being created out of nothing. And I didn't realize at that time having been someone in traditional like I took a test that did well on it. I can memorize it and give you back the ... Like my intelligence was not tested to the point where you had to create something out of nothing, so I felt like I must not be that smart.

And I muddled my way through, I got a degree, I felt gratitude, which is amazing. And I thought, Well, Northwestern admitted me. Let me get, let me go before they find out that I'm not as smart as people thought I was. So there was enormous imposter syndrome. I did not stay in the Bay Area, so I thought, Well, maybe I'm not that good at it. I'll go do something else. And I found a program, luckily, that took that knowledge about AI and applied it to a new context, which was corporate learning. That then I was able to flourish, but that feeling of not being as smart as I thought I was really was the first seed that was planted because we talk about growth mindset. We talk about Carol Dweck and that and her theories about having grit or thinking of yourself as someone who can learn your way through it versus thinking you're smart or not smart.

I thought I was smarter, not smart. And at the end of my time at Stanford, I was like, Maybe I'm not smart. But if I fast forward to now really realizing it's not about kind of some innate, unchangeable intelligence, what's really exciting is if you think of yourself as somebody who can say, "Well, what do I need to know? And how can I make my way to that knowledge that I can be great in whatever context I need to apply?" But young Pamay had a hard time at the beginning because if someone fills your head with, "you're smart, you're smart, you're smart." And that's challenging. And it wasn't calculus for me. It really can shake your foundation.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So there are two things I'd like to pull out here. One is, my understanding is that you went back to a number of class reunions and had some conversations with some of your classmates, some of whom are very well known at this point, and discovered something. What did you discover in those conversations?

**Pamay Bassey:** Well, I discovered what I wish I had known when I was an undergrad, which was everybody was feeling that way. And even people, I mean, I can think of specific people who I thought were just brilliant beyond like I would sit in class with them and just want Marvel at their intelligence. They were also like, Oh yeah, that logic class was crazy, or that class was so challenging. I went home after that exam and I cried with my best friend. Like, we were just sharing stories of how we were all going through challenge. But for me, I felt, well, it must just be me. And so years later, hearing that, was just it was wonderful.

And I thought, well, from now on I'm going to tell people, I mentor young students, Hey, don't think you're the only one going through that. And if you apply that to just any role, not just in school, but in work or in life where you think, Oh, maybe I just can't hack it. You know a lot of people are just doing the best they can to, to show up, and

they feel the same way. And so that was a real moment for me when I was talking to people who I thought were brilliant and they are. But the struggle was not just mine. We were all just kind of doing the best we could.

**Whitney Johnson:** Is it fair to say that making meaning of this experience that you had as a college undergraduate has really informed the work that you do today?

**Pamay Bassey:** I think it's fair to say that. Because it takes courage to feel like that and just show up and have a certainty about you that you know what, I'm just going to keep learning. If I keep learning, I will find my way through this. If I keep showing up and thinking of myself as a learner and having learning, be my superpower, that it will neutralize these feelings of imposter syndrome, or I can't do this or whatever the case may be. And that's what I do every day, is encouraging people to have a learning practice to be continuous learners. And most recently, one of the things I love reading articles about is that learning is actually hard. Not knowing is difficult. And so of course, you're going to be stressed out. Of course, you're going to question because you're doing something that's difficult moving from not knowing to knowing. And so, now learning is who I am. It's, you know, if you put learning side by side with laughter, then you're pretty close to describing me and what drives me. And so in some ways, I'm honoring young Pamay, who was struggling out there in Palo Alto, who now understands that, you know, it's hard to do things that you don't know.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. In the spirit of what you said earlier about the grandmother of Siri, Young Pamay is the grandmother of learning. Your learning and laughter are your superpowers. I I, I love that. Alright. So speaking of laughter, you talked earlier about after the failed startup, you took up improvisation comedy and there is a delightful story that you tell, and it's delightful now. It probably wasn't at the time of when you were at Stanford. Will you share that story? And again, what did you learn?

**Pamay Bassey:** Right? You are absolutely right that it's delightful now that I'm assuming I know we've talked about this what I call the standard incident. I was a cheerleader. Believe it or not, in high school, but also in college. And so I cheered at Stanford and there was a particular time. I don't know that we were received particularly well, like, you know, kind of this anti-establishment. Like, I don't know, the cheerleaders were the favorite. I actually have a whole, a whole journal from my time at Stanford articles saying, Hey, why don't we get rid of those cheerleaders? I'll show you that articles, articles one day. But one cheer that everyone did with us was kind of very simple. "Give me an s" and [INAUDIBLE] "S", "give me a t, "t" like a lot of the other cheers, they kind of ignored us, but for some reason, people would like, okay, we'll just... And so I was on the microphone that day. My college roommate was on the squad as well, and so I started. Give me an S, give me a t, give me an A, give me an N. And for some reason, I looked up in the crowd. I don't know what I saw. But I said, give me an O.

And my roommate actually had the other placards like she was going to show the F's. And I was like, Oh my, I forgot the F, and the whole crowd just started laughing at me, not with me. And I had to say, Hey, we're going to expel Stanford, and we're going to do it right this time, and I have to do it again. I was mortified. At that time I think I was 17, and so I did the cheer again and then all the articles, all the newspapers were the spell leaders like it was just a mess. And what did I learn? I learned that, you know what? Sometimes you fall off the horse spectacularly and you have to just get back on. And that when people tell you that you are not that smart and they make fun of you and laugh at you, you can still make it through. And frankly, when I did my first stand up routine, I told that story and got a laugh, so it helped me. But at the time, it was mortifying. But I will always remember that nothing could be as bad as being in front of an entire football stadium and spelling my alma maters name incorrectly in the middle of a cheer.

**Whitney Johnson:** And what I love about this is this, as you said, this idea of laughter is that you've been able to retell it and reframe it in a way that there is no shame there; It's just a story of you learning your way through your life.

**Pamay Bassey:** Absolutely, absolutely. I can only laugh. What else am I going to do?

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So it's 2015 and you decide you've been working as a consultant, as an entrepreneur for a number of years now, over a decade. And you decide it's time for me to go back into corporate, which for many people is a daunting new S curve. You've been on your own and you want to go. Usually, people are talking about

leaving corporate, but it's equally daunting to go back into corporate. You decide you want to do this. Can you talk to us about the process of how you did that? Because right now we've got a lot of listeners who are trying to make these changes. Talk to us about what you did and then maybe dissect it for us a bit.

**Pamay Bassey:** Sure. And you're absolutely right. There's a lot of cheering squads for people who are going from corporate to entrepreneurship. For whatever reason, that seems like a direction that people aspire to. I want to work for myself. I don't want to have a job. Going back in the other direction. There's nobody. There are people asking you like, why or what are you doing, especially if you seem to be doing well. And for me, I really looked at my life and I said, Well, it's been 13 years. I've stayed in good work. I've been able to maintain my life in my revenue stream. But am I learning? Am I growing? And the answer was I could do better. And to be honest, I had a personal storm that made me want to just change my life completely.

I live in Chicago for 22 years and I said, You know, I'm going to leave Chicago. I'm going to change the way that I work. I'm going to change everything because as you see, there's a pattern here. Something terrible happens. I'm like, okay, how can I learn my way through it? And first, what I did was reactivate my network right because I had worked in corporate for a long time. A lot of the gigs that I got, a lot of the contracts that I got when I was independent came from my network. So I just put the word out. And then I did enormous work to say, How can I bridge the gap between how I speak about myself as an entrepreneur and how corporate America speaks about the roles that they have and the hierarchies and the career paths, etc.? So I find that one of the things that's most difficult is when you're interviewing anyone who's been in corporate their whole career may or may not understand what you were doing, like wait what were you doing?

I had actually one interviewer where a gentleman said to me, "So you worked for yourself for 13 years?" I said, "yes." He said, "why?" And I thought, Well, I mean, I come from a peer group where entrepreneurship is actually like, it's a chosen path. It's not a default. And he said, "I've never been anybody who did that for more than a year or two, and they couldn't find a job. You couldn't find a job?" And I thought, well, that's not exactly what happened. And so you have to learn how to translate who you are, your skill sets, all of those things into the language of the people who are interviewing you. And I think it goes both ways. Take stock of who you are, what your strengths are, what you bring to the table and figure out how to say, "I see this pain. I can fix that for you, or I can contribute my talents and my skills to address that." And that was what I had to do, and I think it was a combination of my network and being able to say, these are the things that I've done that I think are relevant to what you're asking for. It was not easy at all. It took a lot of kind of just, first of all, balling up resumes and throwing out the window or just feeling no one's listening. And then perseverance and I found my role at BlackRock, which was amazing, and I got to work with an old colleague and I got to kind of re-enter. In an amazing way.

**Whitney Johnson:** So you talked about activating your network. What did that look like? Give us just one example.

**Pamay Bassey:** I mean, literally calling people, emailing people, getting on LinkedIn, you know, really just saying to people, "Hey, I know I maybe haven't talked to you in a while, but this is what I'm trying to do and let me know if you know of anything." It was, at that point. I mean, I don't know. It was only a couple of years ago. It felt very manual. But now people know that I spend a fair amount of time on LinkedIn because I think your network is really, in the most pure way to make sure you know what people are doing, what they want, what you want. Keeping that conversation open can help, help you navigate whatever professional situation that you're in.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So for everybody who's listening to the extent that you want to do something different, you want to jump to a new S curve, recognize that activating your network, having this safety net, if you will, of people who can help you jump is important. But also recognizing that because you want to jump to a new S curve, it means that whoever is going to hire you is also jumping. And so how do you de-risk it for them? And as Pamay said, "speak the language of the people that you want to hire you," which I think is so, so important, and it does take a lot of work to do that translation.

**Pamay Bassey:** It does, but it's worth it, I mean, it has been for me, and I think the most important thing is knowing, especially if you have a self-perception as someone who has a job or someone who works for themselves or has a business to realize it's not a black and white thing. You should just be in a place where you're learning and growing and contributing an overall life that can look like self-employment. It can look like working for a really great team

and a really great company. And then you just move once you realize, you know, that's how you want to kind of navigate your own professional.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So you're a BlackRock. You've just been hired by Kraft Heinz as the chief learning officer. What advice do you have for people who are about to do something big? So, you're about to jump to new S curve? And in this case, you are not disrupting yourself in terms of taking a step back from a role perspective, but you are disrupting your mindset. You are disrupting your belief that you can take on something much bigger. What advice do you have for people as they're getting ready to step into something really big?

**Pamay Bassey:** Two things one is just start to believe that you can be successful in that new role. And I'll tell you what I think, I've told you before me is I literally listen to *Disrupt Yourself* every day between the time that I resigned and the time that I started Kraft Heinz. And, you know...

**Whitney Johnson:** Music to my ears!

**Pamay Bassey:** I said, because I was very clear when you said, this is what disruption looks like, I said, This is what's happening to you, Pamay. Fill your ears with people telling you you can do it. Fill your ears with people telling you how they did it, so that when you step into that new role, you have as much poured into you as you can. And second, surround yourself with people who also are pouring into you. I have a very vibrant personal board of directors, friends, colleagues from all situations from different, across all dimensions of diversity who are they know me. They know me as a performer, they know me as a professional, they know me as a person. And they were all like, "You can do it. Go for it." So when I walked into the doors, I was carrying all that with me. So thank you. I have to say thank you. Because the people you assemble on this podcast who are saying this is how I have stepped into my light were inspiring me. As I was walking. I was packing my bags and moving back to Chicago and showing up and saying hi to the Kool-Aid man. I thought those two things fill yourself with what you need. Your ears should be full of I can do it and then make sure you surround yourself with people who are also saying the same to you.

**Whitney Johnson:** Alright, so that brings us to the present, you are currently the chief learning and now the chief diversity officer at Kraft Heinz. You've got this degree in symbolic systems, a master's in technology that enables learning, a load of personal disruption. You have this mantra of learn your way through it. How have you brought this together at Kraft Heinz? So give us an idea of what this looks like for you personally. But how are you activating all of this knowledge on behalf of all of the employees at Kraft Heinz?

**Pamay Bassey:** When I started as chief learning officer, I said I had my responsibilities were twofold. And first was creating a culture of continuous learning, bold creativity and intellectual curiosity. And then second, was more tactically the programs and the courses and creating the curricula that fill our corporate university. But my personal experiences along the way, from being young and excited to study AI out in California to the present day, have been me looking at things from different perspectives through different viewpoints, different lenses, different disciplines. And so when I started saying, take ownership of your own learning and development. And that was kind of the battle cry as we kind of transformed our learning culture. It was because of that is how I live.

And so I think that you use your life, whatever it is that you have, you know, some may have said I'm not a traditional CLO because some people come straight up through HR or they come straight through learning and development. But I just used all of the, kind of the, disparate experiences I have had, from comedy to technology to finance to now being in CPG and said, okay, what I do know is that having a vibrant learning culture personally or professionally can help, and started with that. And then, of course, now starting to talk about capability, development and skill development and getting more tactical. But starting first with making sure people were excited about learning that craft times is a place where we're learning was a privilege and not a punishment.

**Whitney Johnson:** So is there one specific thing that you did that you implemented an initiative that people can listen to and learn from and possibly incorporate inside of their organization?

**Pamay Bassey:** I will tell you that I had a coach and bless her, who said, who encouraged me to use what I had and apply it to my current situation, and I told her about the 52 weeks of worship. And she said, "Do something like that." Baker, I will thank her colleague. Thank you. And so I thought, okay, you're right. I did learn about the value

of doing something big and small, repeatable actions, and I'm going to raise the ante instead of weekly. I'll take it to daily. I'm going to focus on learning. And one of the things that I had wanted to do at BlackRock, which I didn't do, was really get knee-deep in our offerings to walk into our LMS every day and see what was there. Because if I'm telling other people to learn through the things we're offering, I should know it's high quality.

So I made a promise. This may sound familiar, to learn something new every day and share it with the organization through our Ketch app, which is our internal social media app, and reflect on what I was learning and just bring people along on the journey. I called it 365 days of learning. And I'll tell you what, it was eye-opening. I learned a lot. I was able to really become clear on what we were offering and what improvements needed to be made. But, and I'll talk a little bit about this. I wrote a book based on this experience. 100 went by when I was just learning and posting and reflecting, and maybe there were a few likes and a few comments, but it was mostly me just learning and reflecting. And by day 99 I was like, OK, well, this is going to be a hard road for the rest of the year. But I woke up on the 100th day and a friend and colleague of mine, God bless her, made her own learning commitment. She said, "You know what, I'm jumping on the bandwagon with Pamay. I'm going to make a commitment for one hundred days of learning." And then there was another and then another. And that was just amazing. And it became now, almost three years later, the foundation of our learning transformation called, learn like an owner inspired people to make time for a learning based on that daily commitment of learning and sharing, reflecting and moving on.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm. You now do something, you journal. Talk to us about how that helps. And then the journal that you've created that helps us learn our way through it.

**Pamay Bassey:** There's an article that I read as part of my daily learning from the Harvard Business Review by Dan Ciampa is his name, and the title is the more senior your job title, the more you need to keep a journal. And the idea aligns exactly with what I was doing, which was making the commitment is one thing. Learning every day is something else, but the reflecting on what you're going to keep and what you're going to throw away or give to someone else. The reflection and the determination, what to practice and how to practice that part is magical. Right. And so I encourage people to seek out high-impact learning experiences and commit to a learning practice. Learn something new every day. But one of the magical pieces of that of the learning transformation comes when you think about, well, OK, is this for me or is this for someone else? I did the same thing during 52 weeks of worship. Hey, do I believe this? Is this challenging me or is it something that is for someone else and not for me? And so you're able to really refine who you are, how you learn, what your trusted sources are.

You're able to be generous because if I read something and it's not for me, but it's for you, I can give it to you. And that comes to the reflection and the journaling. So what I did was create a list of 365 things that I learned from my 365 days of learning. And I created a journal that shared the story and then gives people the opportunity to have their own learning moment. Whether it's 30 days or 365 days and journal what they're learning based on or inspired by the things that I learn, so every day I'll say, Hey, this is what I learned on day one. You can write what you learned and that has been the title. Let's Learn Our Way Through it, as inspired by number 17, which is, no matter what the storm, you can learn your way through it. That's number 17 of the 365 days. So there are many lessons, and I think hopefully we'll allow people to kind of have their own learning journeys, whether it's personal or professional, and journal their way through it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm. So good. You're causing me to think I am an inveterate journal writer, but I, as I'm listening to you, think I could do a better job reflecting. And so I want to think about that and chew on that a little bit more. So, Pamay, what is something that you have learned in the last week?

**Pamay Bassey:** Ahh such a great question, and I think all of us are learning how and as I am, to give yourself grace in the middle of what is a really difficult time, no matter who you are, what your situation is. And I'll tell you, I stack the decks. I moved at the end of July and then I spent a month. I'm from Atlanta, I live in Chicago, so I literally moved close the door next. The next day went on a road trip with my mom, which is great, but it took me out of my routine and I've learned to give myself grace. I get my work done, sometimes at odd hours. It's a hard time in general in the world. And so understanding that everybody is going through whatever they're going through and giving myself the ability to say, "So are you." One of the things I love about my company, Kraft Heinz, our purpose is "let's make life delicious," which I love, because who doesn't want a delicious life? So what I'm learning every day is what makes your life delicious on a very daily level, like, what do you have to have? So even if you're working really hard, you



have that moment of delight. You feel like you are contributing to a delicious life. So over the past week, given that I had to give myself a fair amount of grace. I'm learning what makes my life delicious.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, so what's something that makes your life delicious?

**Pamay Bassey:** Oh, that's so great, did I just set myself up for that?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes, you did.

**Pamay Bassey:** I do think, this is going to sound crazy, but I do like put it in my calendar, go outside. I don't know if anyone has had the experience working from home, where like days go by, you're like, I haven't gone outside. So literally just going outside and being in nature makes my life delicious. I try to do that every day. I love flowers, and so I try to have flowers with me talking to my friends. I mean, these are not revolutionary things. I like to read and I've been spending a lot of time like actual books. And so this week I'm reading an actual book, one chapter at a time again, chopping it up because you think, oh, I don't have hours to sit and read, you don't need hours. You need 15 minutes to read one chapter. And so little sprinkles of those things into my day make my life delicious. I also like to ride. I have a bike that I got during COVID times, and so I know I'm making time to ride my bike. So, you know, are they earth-shattering things? Maybe not, but they do make my life delicious.

**Whitney Johnson:** What is a book that you're perhaps the book you're reading right now or a book you've read recently that has been engaging for you? What's that book?

**Pamay Bassey:** Oh! Okay, so I'm reading *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, which is kind of heavy.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, so good.

**Pamay Bassey:** It's real. I mean, I, you know, as a writer, I love when I read writers who just encourage me to keep writing because maybe one day I could be great. And her story, I mean, our story, and what she's sharing is heavy, but the way that she does is it's so artful and it just demands that I keep reading. And so I love that. I'm also reading a book called *Black Box Thinking*, which we're going to have a company wide book lovers day myself and my CEO talking to the organization about learning from failure and being open to that. So those are the two books that I'm reading right now.

**Whitney Johnson:** As we wrap up. I think you've heard me ask this question before. At the end of, an end of a podcast conversation, at the end of a coaching conversation, I asked the question, what was useful for you in this conversation? What's something that you learned? I've been asking you lots and lots of questions, but there's likely something that you processed or some mini a-ha that you had as you were talking. What something that you learned?

**Pamay Bassey:** Always learned something when I talk to you Whitney. And I will say that I have thought about how my 52 weeks of worship is the foundation of my inclusion practice. But until we talked, I really hadn't thought about the experience that I had as an undergraduate and feeling just not as smart as I thought I actually was was really a seed planted in this. This journey to me, really embracing learning as my superpower and encouraging others to do so as well. So I love stories, and I love that I hadn't put those two things together, but certainly will continue to help people who may think, oh, I don't know if I can do this. You can! You just have to learn your way through it. And if you believe that, then you can make it through the tough times, from not knowing to knowing.

**Whitney Johnson:** Pamay Bassey, thank you so much for being with us today.

**Pamay Bassey:** Thank you, Whitney. It's been fantastic.

What a delight. I really enjoyed this conversation with Pamay, and I hope you did, too. Here are my favorite takeaways.

Number one, it is possible to turn something traumatic into something that makes others laugh. In this case, Pam turned her embarrassment into stand-up comedy. This reminds me of Scott O'Neill and episode 219 and James Altucher episode 212, both of whom do this reframe exceptionally well. Laughter can be a superpower.

Number two. Translate your skillset into the language of the people interviewing you. I can use my skills to address your pain points. Activate your network, translate your skills and you may find yourself on a new career path.

Number three. Journal your way through the storm. Reflecting back on hard times that you made your way through can help you get through things today.

Number four, sprinkle small moments of joy into your day. Go outside. Read a chapter of a book, literally stop and smell the flowers, make your life delicious. This reminds me of Jacqueline Novogratz, And episode 233, where she said to look for the beauty.

Number five, make learning your superpower. It can overcome imposter syndrome. Learn your way up and down and all around every single S curve of your life.

For those of you that would like a copy of Pamay reflection journal, email me at [WJ@WhitneyJohnson.com](mailto:WJ@WhitneyJohnson.com) And share with me a reflection from this conversation. We'll make five of those journals available to you, and I do read and respond to every note.

Thank you again to Pamay Bassey for joining us. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our producer, Matt Silverman, audio engineer and editor, Whitney job assistant producer Steve Ludwig and production assistant Maddie McDaniel.

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