

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 247: HOWARD MORGAN

Welcome back 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 Howard Morgan, who at the age of 13, started his first company today, that company generates one hundred and thirty million dollars a year, and Howard spends about seven hours a year working there. If that sounds like a good time, well, there's a lot more to that story. Howard is incredibly accomplished and has a very strong work ethic. But frankly, those were table stakes. The real conversation for today's episode is about his relentless optimism. He believes things will work out largely because he builds a culture of trust and respect wherever he goes. Howard recently shared 10 wonderful stories from his life with me, and I wanted to learn more about them. I'm confident you will be energized by what he shares. Howard, you and I were in a mastermind group together a few months ago, and during that mastermind, we had a session where you shared a number of stories and lessons learned from your life, and I was so taken by them and found them so compelling and interesting. I thought that our podcast listeners would find them useful as well, and so I would love for you. It's going to be story time with Howard to hear some stories, some lessons that you've learned. And let's start with the very first one, which was the importance of hard work. What's your story around that?

Howard Morgan: Interesting. Yeah, it's And. Thanks for asking. It started all with my grandfather and my grandfather's dad came from Russia. He went to Switzerland. He went to Regina in Canada and ended up in a place called Nelson. And I would describe us primarily as being lower income but rich family life, and we didn't know better. So, for example, we had we had made a full-time diet out of spam or Primm, depending on which part of the country you're in. But you know, one of the things that he had a great influence on is he took a

positive attitude towards everything regarding work. He had eight children. They were over. I think it was 16 years difference in age and they were rich with love. But what was more important is he believed in getting people very early into understanding the value of work. So I, to this day, I always chuckled that he gave me the hard work vibe because what happened was that he would have me. We were in a literally a horse drawn carriage and he'd have me run back and forth to take the coins out of the milk bottle and bring new milk bottles. I think it was probably a trick on his part, but it was highly effective and I loved it. It was great, and that sort of carried on to my dad who.

Whitney Johnson: Wait, wait, wait back up. So you're in this horse drawn carriage and you're going along? And what is he having you do? He's having? Oh yes. So what? I can't quite picture it. So what happens?

Howard Morgan: Oh, thank you. So no, what happened is that in the olden days, if you wanted milk, you put a milk bottle with a token or money on the porch. Yep. And my job was to run from the carriage to the porch. Get that out. Good days where there weren't many tokens. I would then run back, get a bottle of milk and carry it all the way back to the porch and come back. And he would tell me how great a job I'm doing. And there wasn't a day. I mean, he was in true farmer fashion. He would get up at 5:00. He'd work until 9:00. The big meal would be at lunch. It's very interesting how you learn how to work hard when you're around people that don't see it as working hard. It's what he did to provide for his family for us and also the joy he got out of it, even though he had enough hardship in his life. But he saw the value in that, huh? Well, I think sometimes and it carried on even to my dad who we would no matter, even though he didn't have to, he would average seven days a week, 12 hours a day. And his idea of a great family vacation was going in an old beat up Austin between Nelson and Spokane. Let's give you some idea it's probably two and a half three hours of which the car would break down no less than five or six times. We'd be at the side of the road, normally in the middle of the winter and him cussing and us playing games, but it was family time. And even then, he was very good at sort of instilling that question of if you want to get the best out of life, you have to put more into it and then you'll get more out of it.

Whitney Johnson: And so your dad modeled for you hard work. I assume your mother worked hard as well, and you just learned the value of it. But it sounds like you also learned the joy of working hard.

Howard Morgan: Absolutely. Absolutely. Whitney And. And let me tell, because there's many listeners that are going to obviously be women. And, you know, sometimes I think we don't give enough credit to mothers. But let me tell you why that's important. So my mother and this horrifies me this day horrifies me. My mother. The on a Friday, she was getting married on a Saturday in 1946. On the Friday, the boss walked in and said to her, Well, we've organized the little coffee event for you because now that you're getting married on Saturday, of course you have to give up your job for a single woman. And that's how she found out she was no longer working there. You know, one hours notice took it like a trooper was a great mother and to this day, one of my greatest fights with her and she's 98 now one of my greatest fights with her is getting to understand that maybe women can work because she grew up in those times, right? And. And she's come a long way. But I think I think hard work is a model that's good for anybody that you're trying to influence.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Oh, so good. And thank you, R.B.G. Because she's made a difference for women like your mom and for all the rest of us. Lesson number two is, I'm going to say it, and then I'm going to ask you to riff. Never judge a person until you know what is inside.

Howard Morgan: Yeah. This was probably one of the most formative times of my life and. As I went to school, we moved like many people do now. We moved locations, but we're that found me was in a junior high. So kind of I think it was seven to nine, a junior high school of which every other person in the district when they were expelled or they failed got sent to that school because there wasn't much of a population around right, people had moved to different areas. So I found myself in a school where certainly I was probably heavier than I was heavier than I should be. I would be bullied. And it was, you know, people would fundamentally pick on me all the time. And I'm not sure I would ever say that it was a planned event. But one of the things that leads you to is, so who isn't going to bully you? Well, there was this person named Stacey. Stacey was a black gentleman. I think

I was 13 and he was 18. And in my in my grade, he had failed five times. Whatever that works out to and well. You know, really learned. You have to look at what somebody inside and what I mean by that is in his heart. He was a good person. He had a short trigger. He was somebody who hated to be disrespected.

Howard Morgan: He just wanted to be listened to. And he had probably the strength and the stubbornness to uphold that. And as I was probably one of the only people in school that would just talk to him as a person and to this day, I would say with Stacey, if I ever needed something, don't know where he is, but I have every confidence that I could totally trust him. But he had a bad rap. I mean, I'll give you a classic example of it for me. It was my French class because being in Canada, we of course, learn French. And it was my great French class. And what happened was that we had a French teacher you'd never get away with these days, but a French teacher that would ask for an interpretation, a translation and would start rapping you on the head with a ruler if he didn't get it and keep rapping until you gave the right answer. Well, one day she was doing this with Stacy, and Stacy obviously had enough. He picked up the ruler and broke it over her head. So she sent him to the principal's office and I was sitting there and all of a sudden, over the PA of the school comes, will Howard Morgan please come to the principal's office? So I'm fine. I go down there and I get there, and here's Stacy sitting outside the principal's office.

Howard Morgan: I going to see the principal and principal says, You have to talk to Stacy and I'm going, Why me? He said, because I'm afraid of them. And he said he's not going to listen to me, and I said, well, maybe you should try. And he said, Well, I want you to tell him and I said, Well, look, first of all, the teacher is wrong too. So whatever you're going to do. So it's my early days of negotiations is whatever you're going to do to him, you have to do something equal to the teacher. And in those days, the answer was let's ignore it and pretend it didn't happen, right? That was the date. But and it's a lesson that I've really thought about until today. I really try and I'm guilty of it, but I really try not to judge people by the exterior, but who they are in their hearts, what their values are like. They may do things differently, but you never know where does that diamond in the rough and especially applies today, where I believe there are a lot of really great people that have been so suppressed that someone just has to help reach out a hand and give them a help. Mm hmm. Give you another quick example

Whitney Johnson: Before you go on. So what happened in the principal's office? What was the outcome?

Howard Morgan: Oh, it was very simple, the principal said. Well. I'm not talking with them. So you sent them back to class, and of course, then the teacher said, Well, who's well, principal sent me back and in the end it just disappeared. They went away. Except the French teacher didn't hit anybody in the head anymore. Hmm. Right, so so it's sort of like I always say, and this happened to my negotiating years, too. You can't come in halfway through the story and start to make a conclusion about guilt. Hmm. Right. You have to see the beginning and you have to see the end. I mean, in some ways, it's the same as the S-Curve, right? You've got to you've got to figure out where's the real issue? I think we all sometimes, I mean, I'm guilty of it too, right? So I'll give you an another one where we can slip and we can forget about what the person's like. And this this happened probably 15 years ago, 20 years ago. And I was so proud of myself for a minute, only a minute, because this had this phenomenally talented woman working for me.

Howard Morgan: And she came to me one afternoon and said, Look, I am my child till I got to go home. We're not sure what it is. The reason I was proud as I said, Great, I'll tell you what. Go home. Absolutely go home. That's the right thing to do. Do you think you get the project done for Friday? And she said, Yeah, I think so. I think I can get it done. And here's where I failed. She came back the next day and said, OK, I'm back. I, you know, I want to come back, tell you what I've done. My first question was, how's the project going? She started to answer and I stopped her and I said, My apologies. The project's not as important as your child. How is your child? We make those simple things right to her, what would she have heard right now? I had so much equity with her, so I think sometimes we just have to catch ourselves if we're trying to bring the best out in people and say, How do I value something that they find value in? How do I understand what's important to them?

Whitney Johnson: It's interesting because you describe that as never judge a person until you know what's inside. But I wonder if I almost one of the things I want to reframe is. Is it so much judging or just being willing just to see people as a person? I don't know what I'm hearing those.

Howard Morgan: It's a great question.

Whitney Johnson: What were you judging? I guess that's the question. What were you judging in those instances?

Howard Morgan: I was judging. I mean, if I take, well, the first one's easy right, but color. Right, exactly. Yeah. The second one was. That I didn't stop and think about the fact she probably, well, she was one of the best people I had working for me. Mm hmm. And she would solve it, right? It didn't. It's kind of all those things where sometimes as a leader, we do more than what we need to do. And as a result, I've always said we tend to pick on our best talent more than our weakest talent. So in this case, I think it was it wasn't passing judgment. You're right, it was far more. Was I willing to just start with the assumption that she would do the right thing? And therefore, my role in this was not to not ask her about it, but the order in which I asked things right? And that's and that, I think is the real, real heart of the issue.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, they made me think of. So we both know Liz Wiseman and I just spoke to her recently about she was on LinkedIn Live with me, and she wrote the book multipliers and talks about accidental diminishers. And that sounds like one of those instances where we accidentally diminish someone by forgetting that in fact, they will do a fantastic job and by assuming that they won't, we diminish them in some way.

Howard Morgan: That's right, and I think it tends to come out in this when we are pressured. And, you know, if there's one thing and we may talk about later, there's one thing from starting a company when you're 12, you quickly learn how to have other let. It's let other people excel and more importantly, let the story be about them. Mm hmm. So one of the things that that I'm a strong believer of is I and I say this people all the time. People ask me about a person or event and I'll go, That's not my story to tell. Hmm. Right. I'm a great believer of don't take away someone's joy or someone's. If you've helped them, that's great. It's still their story. In fact there's a there's an hysterical movie clip from Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Butch comes back after being away for a while, and there's this person who's reading a news story and Butch sort of cuts him off and says, OK, great. Thank you very much. What? Let's update ourselves. The guy goes, No, no, no, no. We're getting to the good part. And then he gets the part where they mention his name. Everybody needs their moment of their name being in the headline, and we shouldn't take it from them.

Whitney Johnson: Let's go to the next one, which is sometimes you don't have to be political to win.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, this this sort of comes out of. So after I worked my way through school and the way I did, it was in as a rock and roll radio announcer in the late 60s, which many people won't necessarily identify with. But it was dramatically different than it is today because part of it was you could be as creative and fluid as you wanted to. You just lived in the danger zone. But as a result, if you were good at it and I was pretty darn good at it, anything had happened. So my show became syndicated on 73 stations across the country. And as a result, you start getting all this demand right? And people would. It was very interesting because people in that industry are horribly political, all about brown-nosing. Who's going to do what? Who, you know? And I just didn't care. So because don't forget, I was going to school. So what happened was that it and I ended up as a result of that being a really good moderator. So I moderated for a couple of syndicated worldwide syndicated shows. One was Judy La Marche, which won't mean anything to some people, but was a very powerful woman that was a member of Parliament in Canada. And the second was Examiner Hollander, who was the happy hooker who. And it was interesting because. You looked in in some ways, for me, it was never about it was what's the right thing to do? How do I want to conduct myself in the right way and avoid getting into the political drama? It carried through my whole career, by the way. It was horribly, politically still am.

Whitney Johnson: But what was the political drama in this particular situation with those two stars?

Howard Morgan: Sure. Well, the political the political situation was that that there were probably, I don't know, 20, 30 people all trying to nip away at my heels to take the job away. They would find reasons why they thought the show wasn't good and they would sort of go talk to the network and say, Here's what's happening. And I go, That's fine, if you feel that way, I'm OK. There's nothing worse than accepting criticism and saying, if you believe that to be true, then that's OK. And I stand behind what I did. So political probably was it would have been so easy to take on that fight, and I would have enough equity to probably win it. I just wasn't interested in fighting politics, although we all have to on some level, but not politics, to the extent it probably the best way of putting it that it didn't compromise my values. Hmm. Mm hmm. Right. I think that's the difference. I think sometimes and what we're seeing in the country now, right? So how do I how do I stand for what I believe, but at the same time, be an enabler rather than a critic?

Whitney Johnson: Mm hmm. Hmm. All right. And so the two people you mentioned, Julia Marsh and the happy hooker were just store people that you interviewed or moderate high profile. Yep, yep. Were you moderating there? You were moderating their shows or they worked together.

Howard Morgan: We worked together. I was actually their host.

Whitney Johnson: So you moderated the two of them, so you had a happy hooker and two different shows.

Howard Morgan: Oh yeah. I want to correct that. Two different shows. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, OK. All right. So you had Judy Le Marche And where you were working with her and then you were working with the happy hooker.

Howard Morgan: Ok, go ahead. Terribly difficult people to get along with, except for me. I mean, they had.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, because you didn't have to win

Howard Morgan: Because they didn't have to win. Everybody else was playing a game, and both were very smart women, especially Judy. Judy was phenomenally talented, so she would just see through that stuff and whack.

Whitney Johnson: Why is it that you don't have to win because it's not that you don't want to win? You just don't have to win?

Howard Morgan: Yeah, I think it's a great question because I've never really been. I'm competitive with myself. I'm not competitive with others. That's probably the best way to put it. So I will strive to be the best I can be. But I don't need that to be at someone else's price. Mm hmm. Right. Because they're trying to do their thing, too. If I can help them, great. But who's I mean, in some ways, if you start and you're lucky early, which I was, you get to point where you go. This competition is unfair because what are all the factors that came about that allowed that to happen? Somebody else may not have that same opportunity. So for me, it's about how do you how do you help each other as long as you feel in your heart, that person is worthy of your time.

Whitney Johnson: It is interesting also, too, that you said, because yes, you are white and yes, you are a male and you grow up in a lower income family. So it's not like there was. Privilege everywhere. Not at all. And yet you said you were lucky. So that was interesting.

Howard Morgan: Well, it depends on what you define as luck, right? I call luck if you get a lot of love and he laid a lot of caring and you learned a lot of lessons. And you and probably the luck comes into starting a company at 13 and doing phenomenally well. So I think there's a lot of skill. I think a lot of towns and everything we all do. I think there's an element of luck and it's about you just we're in the right time or you had the right circumstances. So we've got to be careful. What we don't do is assume that nobody else could do what I do.

Whitney Johnson: One of your stories is sometimes you also get lucky. So let's talk about that company that you started when you were 13 years old.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, I started with a consulting company on lotteries, OK, when I was 13. So was the right bid in 1963, the Irish sweepstakes was the only lottery in the world. To my knowledge, there might have been somewhere, but to my knowledge and I had a vision that there was going to be somehow something that had to happen within Canada. I wasn't thinking beyond that. Canada, that would have different lotteries as a way of creating money and proceeds for other causes since seem to be all. It was kind of illegal. So what happens is all that money went out of the country and I thought, Well, there's bound to be something here. So I started. This company did nothing for four years, which probably was good because I was young, and all of a sudden it took off because places started doing lotteries, they needed counsel on lotteries. We were blessed enough to probably have the four largest initial ones. So what happens is, like anything, right? You're now, you've got in there before everybody else does. You have a vision, you're defining the market rather than following the market. And so as a result, this company, I mean, I think last year was 130 million in revenue. So it was not it's not a small company, not large, but not small,

Whitney Johnson: And just the second first accelerant, a personal disruption for everybody who's listening, play where no one else is playing take on market, not competitive risk, which is exactly what you did. Keep going.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, absolutely. I was before my time listening to you.

Whitney Johnson: Whispering in your ear from heaven.

Howard Morgan: There you go. That's right. There you go. So, so then, you know, I think then the challenge comes from which really we can go through the whole S-curve is that it's how do I select people? That will fit this industry fit really what is a growing, non-existing defined industry and probably pick people that know everybody else who would think I'm crazy and I got to tell you that's exactly what happened. I pick people that. They were in some ways, the Mavericks, right? They had good values. And the net effect was that they built this phenomenally successful company. I would say I helped, but one of the things that I've always used this company as Whitney is, it's like my little petri dish because it's a company where I really spend, I don't know, seven hours a year, right? It's run by the people. I go to the Christmas party I get. You talk about you talked about sort of rewards of what you get out of it. A while ago, for me, I get letters from people's grandchildren talking about how this company allowed their grandma to pay for their whole school. The average length of service in this company is now dropped a bit. I think it's 21 and a half years and. I think you start recognizing that

even though some of these people would have probably not existed in a normal organization, they had the talents and the insights and what went when you let them loose. It was just a question of building some flexible walls to keep them on the track.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So the one story is sometimes you also get lucky. So you start you. You have this idea, you're 13 years old, you start a company and you were right. And so four years later, lotteries become a thing, and now you've got one hundred and thirty million dollars in revenue. Ok, so that's sometimes you get lucky. Now you've kind of Segway to another lesson, which is, you know, how to hire people. You're able to identify talent, you're able to identify people who are at the launch point of the curve, perhaps, and help them match to a curve that makes sense for them. Tell us about one hire that you've made that people would have looked at you askance. Why are you hiring that person? And yet they turned out to be fantastic.

Howard Morgan: I'll keep names out of it. But the person would be someone who had real trouble keeping a job. They had real trouble with not challenging their boss all the time. Ok? They had real difficulty with believing that they were valued. And I think for me, I've always found and I to this day, I've always found if you talk to people and demonstrate respect, they will return in kind. I really believe that I And this person, I mean, you got to go through that. It probably was a three-month gantlet because there's a wounded right. So there, yeah, but there was something there that said, this person is going to be creative. They're going to come up with solutions that in a startup, they're going to go up with solutions that are going to allow you to accelerate at a rate that's going to get you to that sweet spot real quick. And then you can start being very creative, right, once you get that part. Because needless to say, once you had those lottery businesses start to come into fruition, the problem is it scaled up real quick. So because it right, because it was a lot of money and states and provinces all decided this, this was something they can make a lot of money off of.

Whitney Johnson: Ok, I have two questions. One is during that three months where they're testing you basically, right? They're saying, OK, you say this is going to work, but I don't really believe you yet. So they got in there. So they're going to test, test, test, push the boundaries. What do you do during those three months to help them say, Oh no, this is safe, because that's really what they're saying this. This isn't going to be safe and you're saying, no, no, it will be safe. What are you doing?

Howard Morgan: I think the biggest thing you're doing is you're saying the person this is a we, not an I. Being very careful and articulate why I hired them. Yeah. And saying what I'm looking for is some of the things that probably you're frustrated by you didn't have in your old job. Hmm. What I need back from you is I need not to be screwed over. Yeah. And so I just and I think total honesty, which I mean, probably it took Whitney a month, five weeks. And then the person started saying, OK, what about this? I call the little test, right? What about that? I said, fine is, do you think that's going to work? I'll let you run with it. If you think it's going to work well, eventually they say, Well, no, I'm not sure that'll work. So I think highly creative, talented people need to have latitude. And part of it is they need to also understand I'm a strong believer of they don't do everything well, none of us do. Yeah, right. We do. Hopefully, majority will. So part of it is saying, Look, you help me on this, I'll help you on that. And it becomes a partnership. So I think every good leader scenario for 90 percent of the people is a partnership.

Whitney Johnson: And you were very clear about what you were, what the parameters were. One of the things I'm thinking is I'm hearing you talk about all these people that you've worked with and hired is that you need to go back and pay Stacey from elementary school and the consulting fee because basically what he did is he taught you this.

Howard Morgan: He sure did.

Whitney Johnson: He taught you this. So I think you need to go find him and tell him, you've

Howard Morgan: Introduced a new concept. I did go back about 20 years later. So he was in the 80s, tracked him down. Yeah. And I gave him \$5000 as a thank you. He didn't have huge amount of money. So I tracked him down.

He was, as you can imagine, he was struggling a bit. And you know, what's interesting is and you'll appreciate this. I gave him the \$5000. It's what I said to him. Had more value in the 5000 bucks.

Whitney Johnson: What did you say?

Howard Morgan: I just said, you need to understand that it's rough a life as you had. You made mine better. And while a lot of people probably have not seen that sparkle in you that I did, I just want you let you know I see it, I value it, I respect it, and you'll always be. If anything you need, you know, you just call. Wow.

Whitney Johnson: Ok, I'm realizing there's a part of the story you left out. How did he make your life better? What did he do? Did he defend you against the bullies?

Howard Morgan: Yes, I didn't get bullied. As a matter of fact, it's not only did he get bullied, I had to sort of calm them down because the one time, the one time I got bullied. I remember were in the school cafeteria and these two guys are coming over and pushing me, you know, typical things they do, right? Yeah, I see out of my corner of my eye. I see Stacey coming and I go, shoot. Stacy takes one of these guys by his pants and his back of his collar and throws them down the whole dining table. Nobody said anything. And it is. It's an interesting subject. Whitney. Because I think. We really want to value, and we really want to remember those that are important to us, sometimes we don't do it as much. So pursuant to your question to me, I would give a challenge to the people that are listening to say, go back to somebody, probably a teacher, somebody that made a huge difference in your life. I either find it's a grandparent, could be a parent, could be a teacher, but I challenge you to go back and write a note from the heart, not to their head to their heart about why they made, in essence, a pivot point in their life, right? And trust me, it's there's a price to pay for most people that do that.

Howard Morgan: I was thinking companies. So let's take in companies the best people don't always get to the top. There are some people in the middle that do everything. They're disruptive. They're doing everything they can to make this a good place for talented people. And the company doesn't value it. They just go, Well, you got, you know, short term, you're not getting as much done with the people you have. Yeah, because they're getting way better. They're learning something. Mm hmm. So I think those people do it for the story that they hear in the future. Yeah, right. The one that you're going to write for them, that you're going to say, look, you made a difference when we all sit in our rocking chairs, two or three of those stories and I'm happy with my life.

Whitney Johnson: All right. I'm thinking about who I'm going to write my letter to. So let's go to overhead is evil.

Howard Morgan: Oh, well, yeah, it's you know. Every time I've worked in a company, one of the things that's happens is we have a tendency to go and invest in nice little office and desks, and we'd write and hire staff and all of that's not bad. It's which order are you doing it in? If it's a one that's coming after the demands there, that's great. A lot of people do it. So I'm ready. What I've always found is if. You develop a lot of overhead. It causes you to make bad decisions because you have to pay your overhead. And you know, there's a company that I can think of where I won't name them, but I went in to work with them and they were something like \$50 million in debt, so 50 million bucks. I said, well, why? Because what they were doing was something it didn't make sense because it was a profitable business. Well, they had boats. They had apartments. They had everything else. And in the end, all I did is said, Look, why don't you just reverse that and how much your client's really going to care if you got a boat? I mean, you know, you're buying it for somebody in the company. You're not buying it for somebody, you're serving by the company. So I've always said that overhead is you need it. You just don't want it to control you. You want to control it. Probably the best way to put it,

Whitney Johnson: I would love for you to talk about the future is great and happiness abounds if you learn from the past.

Howard Morgan: Ok. Can I deal with one quick one before that?

Whitney Johnson: Absolutely, which one

Howard Morgan: I want to do with one, if you treat someone as an adversary, there'll be an adversary. Ok, go for it. In my early formative years in my 20s, I ended up in the labor relations industry and I was a I was somebody that got, as I've done three or four times my life. I always went into jobs where I dropped my pay in half to take something I never done before. Well, in this particular case, I took on a labor relations role in Canada, which is heavily unionized. Not as much anymore, but it was, and I

Whitney Johnson: Need you pause you for a second. So everybody notice how what he said he took a job in an industry that he'd never been in before at half the pay that is stepping back in order to grow. Ok. Keep going, Howard.

Howard Morgan: Yeah. And by the way, done it three or four times. Always works. You have to believe in yourself and you know, and be willing to invest in yourself. So I arrive my first day in the job having never done this job for I end up with all of a sudden the union person walking in with 225 grievances and saying, Here you go, deal with these. And so I ended up from the Labor Relations Board for like three months, you know, which really was not conducive to me learning much other than dealing with the conflict. Well, the longer give you the short story, the short story was that over a period of probably two years, I became very well known in the labor relations circles that somebody that always would do what was right. For example, we went in the company from spending. Five days a week, having meetings with Union to two hours because I'd say I'm never talking about something twice, if I need to check on it, we'll table it, but I'm to get it twice. The other thing was that was brought into the scenario because there had been

Whitney Johnson: Sorry, rewind. So an issue would come up and you'd say, we're going to talk about it once and we're going to resolve it and then we're going to move on.

Howard Morgan: Right. Oral tablet and fix it and come back. But in other words, we're not going to keep dealing with something that's disruptive. Ok, guys, it's keeping us from going where we need to go. Got it. Ok. So what happened was that that this isn't it was in the in the beverage industry. It was an industry where it was very capital intensive. They had had work stoppages every two months for 50 years. Wow. So what have fundamentally started doing was just saying, OK, we're going to stop this and if so, the best part of this was that that they had a work stoppage at the cafeteria and all the people are doing a sit in. So this is probably 9:00 in the morning, and of course, so I got a range of other people to serve the meals because they say health care, so other people did the meals and they phoned say, Where are you coming over? I said, Sure. So I came over and I talked and said they said, Well, we want you to talk to us. As in union reps and people in there, we want you to talk to us before we go back to work, and I said, not a chance. You go back to work, we'll talk. You have my word. So it got to be four o'clock and some people are already left. The little sit in and they fold me. They said, Are you coming over? And I said, No, actually, I'm just about to go home, but I'll see you in the morning. Nobody was there in the morning, but they also knew that I would do what was right. So over time, I ended up having such a good relationship with things like Teamsters, really hardcore unions that they would actually hire me to work with their office unions. Not because I was union leaning, but I was fairness leaning. So I think you have to look inside yourself and say, OK, can I be part of the solution or am I part of the problem? Huh. Official right now, right with what we're going through. I have to take ownership for me.

Whitney Johnson: That's so interesting. So why do you think that worked when you said, I'm not going to talk to you now, but I'll talk to you when you go back to work, what? What was what was in your brain around that?

Howard Morgan: Well, it's a little bit your model, right? It was breaking the normal thing. Here's the normal thing they would sit down because they were mad at something. Mm hmm. They would have management

come over and talk with them. They would say, OK, we'll go back to work. They would then if you do everything we want. They would sort of say, yeah, or and then they'd go back to work right and then they wouldn't quite live up to everything and, you know, all that sort of stuff. I think it's about it's recognizing in this case, a union is an employer. It has people it serves. So for me, it was always about I can always remember there was a phrase that head of the Teamsters said to me once, and he said, You know what you've turned out to be is my best friend because I it's a membership I can't always go against. But what you've done is make it so that you can be the whipping boy. And that, I think is the issue. The issue is a lot of the time. Here's another activity for your listeners. This activity is to take a piece of paper and write down the five people. In their life that they say would be with them thick or thin. Hmm. And then take the five that they don't, they think, would probably fade and go away. Hang on to it for about 10 years and see what happens because what I do this all time with clients, especially executives because they'll go, OK, I've got a solid team there. They're the people that end up staying in contact with them are the ones they least expect. Why? Because they're not telling them what they want to hear. They're telling what they need to hear. Right. So therefore, so therefore, sometimes I think we need to surround ourselves by people that are really trying to help us. And sometimes we shut the door too quick.

Whitney Johnson: Right, right. Ok. So basically, what you're saying with the Teamsters or the unions in general is that you would say we'll talk, but you need to go back to work. And once you go back to work, we'll have a conversation. But they trusted that you would then do whatever is needed to be done in order to move things forward.

Howard Morgan: Right? Yeah. No matter what. So for example, if I if I made a commitment, I would, no matter what I need to do, I would live up to that commitment. And all I did, if you think about it, Whitney is ask them to do the same. That's all I was doing. Again, it comes back to if I want all of us to be happy, we have to respect each other and not play games.

Whitney Johnson: Ok. So the future is great and happiness abounds if you learn from the past.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, it's interesting. I have a phrase that I use for myself. I'm not sure it's any good, but I use it, which is we can't change our past, but we can use it to influence and design our future. Hmm. I think a lot of the time, what we do is we live too much in the past. I think we have to take there's plenty of good things that happen to all of us, right? We, unfortunately are. We let ourselves get captivated by either listening to people that are critical.

So case in point. You and I could publish something. First thing we do is go look and see who said bad things. Sometimes what we don't do is say, what's the good stuff? Uh-huh. Sometimes a challenge I give to people I work with. I say, I want you as a family once a day over the dinner table to talk about one thing each of you did that day that you feel proud of. Hmm. It is amazing how it transforms everything, right? How simple is that? Just talk about one thing that you thought you made a difference.

Whitney Johnson: When you think about your life in the various S-Curves you've been on, which was the most challenging for you and why?

Howard Morgan: I can talk about the circumstance. I think the most challenging is the one we sort of touched on a little bit a second ago. I think the challenging one is saying when you're in that sweet spot, it's about saying. How do I separate good data from bad data? How do I, in essence, disrupt but disrupt based on something that should happen? Because I think one of the things I find is everybody tries to craft your solution. I'm all about help them figure out what's right for them. Because each of us has such a background, we have differences. I believe in the value of every person. It's how that gets manifested. So for me, that was the big challenge. It's so hard to get in those critical things. Or, I mean, I had I've had three or four bosses in my life that have said, You do know if this doesn't work, you're getting fired

Whitney Johnson: Really three or four times?

Howard Morgan: Well, the one's my one's my favorite one would hide from me for four months. He hid from me and he said, I know you're doing something that you know, I wouldn't approve of. And if it doesn't work, you're fired. I said, I can live with that. I'm not saying everybody has to go to that extreme, but I think you have to figure out what do I stand for? And I think one of the things we don't talk about enough in our field is it's a continuum. So if it's about taking risk, where can how far can I go? I maybe I can't be crazy like Howard, but I can go 20 percent of the way. Well, that's a victory. And what we should do is acknowledge that right when it happens, say And said, don't go well, that's great, but you've got another 80 percent to go.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. All right. So your most challenging S-curve was negotiating with unions.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, by all means.

Whitney Johnson: But that was 20 years ago, you haven't had something really big and challenging and hairy in the last 20 years.

Howard Morgan: Oh, you just ask my the biggest one. I didn't. I have them all the time. Another one more recent is. How do I want to spend my time for the rest of my life? For me, it's about learning to be a positive influencer, not an expert. I have probably I probably started 10 years ago. I'm not sure exactly when I started this, but is how to help other people, uh be the best they can be without me. Being, I can be the conduit and help that, but I'm not the answer giver. I think it's one of the things it's hard in our business is to avoid giving answers, right? My job is simple. It's to get people to places they never thought they were capable of.

Whitney Johnson: So basically, you're now focusing your time on coaching and when what kinds of problems do people come to you? So what's a typical like? They come to you and they say, Howard, I need your help. Who comes to you?

Howard Morgan: Well, I think a lot of the time it is people that probably have it's almost back to my early days, right, that have phenomenal talent. It's how can they disrupt when they're living in a box where the walls keep coming in, right? So it's helping them understand again. I think what we're not good at is separating the five percent from 100 percent. So maybe they start with five percent. So I help them with that. I think in some cases, I just give them the courage that what they're saying is right. They're going in the right direction. I see me as a facilitator of the action, not the driver of the action. I think you have to find out from people what's in their heart and what they want to do and help them discover it versus say to them. Here's what you ought to do. I'm out of the here's what you want to do in business. I'll throw out one example that I think is important is especially as we're going through the challenges of work at home. You know, there was an example that happened, which on a Zoom call as we all perfect now and this woman was working and her child came in. Person was absolutely horrified. Apologized, and my comment was, like your cat, my...

Whitney Johnson: As you're talking, for our listeners. As soon as Howard said that my cat walked in.

Howard Morgan: Yeah, perfect. That was well done. So and the poor woman was horrified. I'm sorry that I tried to keep them out. Lancers, why are you horrified? And by the way, why shouldn't we support that, right? So I think what we have to do, I think now is the time where we have to take a look and say we can either make a great step forward or a great step back, and it's all about. If that person, I could say I'm hopping around, but I'll tell you, it's just such a funny story. I literally almost got fired once for hiring a pregnant woman.

Whitney Johnson: What year was this?

Howard Morgan: Oh, in the 60s. 70? Yeah, the good old days, OK? Because what happened is I knew it. She was good, she said. Just, you know, Howard, before you hire me, I'm three months pregnant. I said, Fantastic, you know, I'll need a few months off. Fantastic Boss found out and said, you hired a pregnant woman. What are we

going to do for four months? And I said, same thing we've done for the last four months. Somehow, we made it work.

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Howard Morgan: You know, I think we just have to see this moment we're in now is a huge opportunity to take leaps and bounds from then leaps and bounds from my mother and having to lose her job and say, How do we look at each other and take a look and rely on people's commitment, their values to do the right thing and recognize there's going to be some bumps?

Whitney Johnson: What advice would you give every 20-year old who is listening,

Howard Morgan: I would say never give up on being committed to self-improvement. Hmm. I think that the fact it was it was interesting. But Nicosia, read your newsletter last week and it that the story of the university and the first thing it triggered to me, it's a discussion for another day was the relationship between commitment to self-improvement. And disruptive, disrupting yourself, right? Because if you you've I think, 20-year-olds we come out of school with, I know everything and that's OK. Right? There's reasons for that and we're OK. But how do you how do you say, I'm going to find some, I'm going to find the right people to attach my learning to and grow with them and pick people that are interested in my success, not people that are interested in me as a work conduit. Mm hmm. So that would for 10 year old's because I think if they can, if they start that early, they're kind of like me, they'll reap the benefits later.

Whitney Johnson: What advice would you give to a 40 year old because I think it's very different advice, right

Howard Morgan: Well, first of all, I would say the same thing to start off with. But yeah, I think it's different advice, I think by 40. We've accumulated knowledge. My question is, have we figured out how we can apply that knowledge to build understanding to help others and also to build our success in whatever occupation is? I think it's a major point where you can disrupt at 40 because I think you've most people by the time they're 40 they've had families. They've had to kind of do. They've had to drive all the millions of kids around to the event. It's kind of a rediscovery age. Yeah. And I think part of it is avoid settling in and being complacent. Treat it as something where this is your chance to really get paid back for those sacrifices you've made up to 40.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, I think about, you know, Erick Erickson and developmental psychology. And I think, you know, at 40, you do have this impulse to want to make a big shift. And that's why sometimes people go out and make really stupid decisions and do stupid things. And I think if you can be aware of it and acknowledge it and say, I'm having this yearning, I want to do something different and honor that and recognize that you do need to do something different because you're going to end up doing something different regardless. So just make sure that you use it as an impetus to do something productive and Disrupt Yourself in positive ways.

Howard Morgan: I think this will put, I think the, you know, the real challenge sometimes comes from we go to try to find something that's fun. Hmm. I don't believe in fun. I believe in satisfaction. If you can have fun while you're being satisfied, that's great. But fun is a very you. We go to some night, we go, we have fun. We're forgetting about it in two days. Satisfaction comes from it made a difference in my life, and I'm going to incorporate that piece in my future.

Whitney Johnson: So what are you reading and or listening to right now that's compelling that you would recommend?

Howard Morgan: Well, first, I listen to Oodles Martin and his you know, the

Whitney Johnson: Martin Lindstrom?

Howard Morgan: Yeah, yeah, his book I thought was wonderful, but

Whitney Johnson: The minister of Common Sense?

Howard Morgan: Yeah. Ok, thank you. Yeah. Drawing a blank. I also think I also have read a book because, as I said, I got a 98 year old mother who's a sweetie reading, you know, being mortal. Hmm. Great book if anybody has parents over the age of 75 or as we start to get there. Phenomenal book. Hmm. It's an old book. Just because it kind of deals. I think a lot of what we're talking about, too, which is if we're not careful, we try to organize others lives rather than help them lead their lives.

Whitney Johnson: And organize our own.

Howard Morgan: And it's absolutely right.

Whitney Johnson: That's right. Right. We distract ourselves from managing. I've definitely noticed that whenever I start to micromanage my children's lives, it's almost always because something feels out of order in my own and it's easier to manage them or to pretend like I'm managing them. Yep. Do something about my own life.

Howard Morgan: Well, it's sort of it's a little bit like when we're threatened. We tend to go back to our security blanket. I always say, if you're a leader, look for when someone spending too much time on something they shouldn't. It means they're uncomfortable for some reason.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, well said. And for me, it's like they're clinging to the old S-curve instead of being willing to jump onto the new one. Exactly. What was useful to you in this conversation?

Howard Morgan: Well, let me include both of us in this, so you don't, you know, because I think I think every dialog potentially has a wonderful positive impact. I believe that what you're trying to do, what I'm trying to do to do together, if we don't establish and have honest, candid conversations, our world is doomed. Hmm. And you want to have it with people that don't have an agenda. I think this conversation is about neither of us have really an agenda. We're just trying to do our part to help the world kind of needs that positivity, and it needs that it can be OK because unfortunately, like we said before, bad news gets the front page, good news gets the 42nd page. And I think we all have a responsibility in our field to say, how do we help people see that positive light? If you take 20 percent of the people and these figures are obviously made up, but they're probably close to 20 percent of the people that would buy in everything we're saying and 20 percent of the people think we're crazy. It's the 60 percent of the middle that we really have to work collectively at saying that they don't get bogged down and believe things can't change. It's like anything. If I get, I'll speak for myself and I'm sure it's no different for you. If somebody gets one thing out of this podcast, that's a raving success. Yeah, right? Because I've long ago given up on these sit in front of a group of 500 people in all 500 people think you're wonderful. I could give me one person that changes part of their life in a positive direction. That's a worthwhile use of my time.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, you realize that you just went back. I mean, it's the bell curve, the standard distribution. But going back to the S curve, if you've got 20 percent who are absolutely not going to agree with anything, you have to say, 60 percent who are like, I'm not sure, but 20 percent who are like, Yes, this is super helpful, then that's a lot of progress. And I think that's why we have to, you know, that's why we continue to read books and listen to podcasts and we go to church and we do. All these things will allow us to reinforce being better because we're not going to get better once we're better in a process. And so it's day by day by day by day by hour by minute. Any final thoughts as we wrap up?

Howard Morgan: I would just throw it a thought. That's consistent with what we're talking about, which is recognize every person listening to this podcast can make a difference. And if they make a difference in their sphere of influence, the world tomorrow will be better than today. And I know that sounds kind of corny, but I

believe it. I think I think people in I believe in positive attribution. I think people are fundamentally good. We just hold them prisoner and I get really scared when people go, well, I'm not going to associate them because they believe X. Well, that's not the way to change things, right? The way to change things is to have an open dialogue. Hmm. Let people talk, hear their perspective. Try to understand their perspective. You can't be them, but I can understand it. I can work hard to understand it. So that would be my.

Whitney Johnson: So good. All right. Howard Morgan, thank you so much for joining us on the Disrupt Yourself podcast.

Howard Morgan: It was an honor and thank you very much.

Three takeaways from my conversation with Howard. Number one, be an enabler, not a critic. It is hard to stay out of the politics of work. Everyone wants to succeed. Conflict is unavoidable. But Howard shared the value in being a moderator rather than being embroiled in workplace politics. Even when people don't agree with him, he can instantly defuse criticism by respecting opposing viewpoints a powerful skill. Don't play the game. Be competitive with yourself. Not with others. As Howard says, be the best you can be, but not at the expense of other people.

Number two. Hire the Mavericks with good values. When building a team, it's easy to go with safe choices, but the best results come from a diversity of backgrounds and ideas and different stages of the S-Curve of learning. Hiring a maverick, as Howard explains, also requires time investment. Mavericks are wounded. Their ideas are not always heard, but in a fast-moving company, these are the people with the creative solutions that can change the game. About a month in, they'll probably give you a little test, Howard says. But good leadership. It's actually a partnership. Give people the latitude to think critically about their own work. And if you talk to people and demonstrate respect, they will return your investment in them tenfold.

Number three, trust, fairness, respect. Even when working with people he disagrees with, Howard always makes good on his commitments. He's fair to all parties, especially with contentious issues like labor relations. Being known as reliable and fair. Taking sides is not always the answer.

If you enjoyed this episode, check out episode 233 with Jacqueline Novogratz, founder of Acumen and Episode 211 with Stephen R. Covey on the importance of trust for the accelerants of growth I mentioned, go to episode one hundred, take the right kinds of risks and episode 180 step back to grow. And if you were ready to get smarter about your growth, our new book Smart Growth How to Grow Your People to Grow Your Company is now available for preorder wherever books are sold. We'll include a link in the show notes. Thank you again to Howard Morgan for being our guest and to you for listening. Thank you to our team. Matt Silverman, Producer, Whitney

Jobe audio engineer and Editor, Steve Ludwig, assistant producer. And Cassidy Simpson, production assistant. I'm Whitney Johnson reminding you that if you want to be an agent of disruption, first become its subject Disrupt Yourself.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.