

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 265: JOHN DAVID MANN & ANA GABRIEL MANN

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. This week, we have two wonderful guests on the show. John David Mann is a writer and the co-author of more than 30 books Ana Gabriel Mann is a professional therapist, speaker, and coach. Together, they've been married for more than 25 years, which also happens to be the subject of their latest work. *The Go-Giver Marriage* is rooted in a framework of gratitude, kindness, and self-disruption that John has been writing about for years. When Ana thought to apply this to relationships, it was a light-bulb moment for them. One-half parable, one-half practical psychology. John and Ana have developed five secrets that don't just apply to relationships in trouble. In fact, they're meant to help an already good relationship become great. I loved their book so much that I'm going to give away ten copies to listeners. Listen to the end of the episode and you'll find out how to become eligible for one of those copies. No matter where you are in your life. You will love this conversation with John and Ana. John and Ana, I'm so delighted to be having this conversation. I read your book; I devoured your book. And I cannot wait for our listeners to learn from you and hear what you have to say. And we're going to give them enough so that they can learn, but not so much that they don't go by the book. So, get ready, everybody. And by the way, everyone, just at the outset, you're going to love this so much I'm actually going to give away ten copies of the book. So, I will tell you at the end how you can have a copy available to you. But I just think it's that important and that valuable and we haven't even started. So, here we go. John, tell us about a crucible moment for you.

John David Mann: My first significant book was a book, I've written over 30 books, but the first book that came out was called *The Go-Giver*, the original *Go-Giver*, which our book is a follow on. And that was back in the early 2000s. And we had an agent, and we had a manuscript. And Ana and I both love the manuscript. And my co-author, Bob Burg, loved the manuscript and she took it out to New York. And 22 publishers said no. And I'm going to say that somewhere between 12 and 21, the crucible moment was couched somewhere in there. I mean, I was devastated, by the way, and number 23 said yes. And since that time, it has sold over a million copies. I think the crucible part of it was that I realized what I'd done wasn't good enough. I wasn't everything that I thought I was as a writer. I needed to improve, I needed to learn, I needed to grow. And that shouldn't have been a surprise. But it was.

Whitney Johnson: After each rejection, did you go back and revisit the manuscript and improve it, or what did that sequence look like?

John David Mann: What a great question, because, you know, many people hearing that story, first thing they take away is like chicken soup of the soul. You just have to keep knocking on the door and be persistent. Yeah, sort of. That's part of it. But you're absolutely right. We did go back and revisit, you know, after about ten, 12 refusals, we went back and took a hard look at the manuscript. And the truth is, I am so grateful that the first 12 said no, because if any one of them had said yes, you would have never heard of it. You wouldn't have ever heard of our book. I wouldn't be a successful author. My whole life trajectory would have been different because the book wasn't ready. When I first asked Ana to marry me, she said, no, we need to wait because I wasn't ready. Sometimes you have a really great idea in its essence, but it's not ready. It needs to work. And that was what that book needed when that manuscript was finished. After that, every page was covered with red markings. We drastically rewrote it and revised it. And then we finally elicited on the 23rd attempt, a yes.

Whitney Johnson: The gift of no.

John David Mann: Nicely said.

Whitney Johnson: You've written 30 books in 20 years that is prolific. Is that because you've had co-authors and so you've been able to work through this together on a team because it takes me every three years to get a book out.

John David Mann: I understand completely most of those books were with co-authors. That is true. But the real truth of that is the way I normally work with the co-author is we talk, I get to know their content, they get to know my content. You know, we have a nice colloquy for, for a few months. And then I go into my room and close the door and I write. It was different for our current book, which we'll tell you about. But I think that the partnerships, the co-authorships have been great because they allow me to write quickly because it's all new. It's always new, it's all new material, discovering new things. Some are parables, some are memoirs. Now I'm writing thrillers that constant sort of turning over the soil and finding new stuff I find makes it go faster because it's like there's momentum on a highway.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, it sounds like one of your superpowers is writing, so, we'll just put a pin in that. And now we're going to talk to Ana.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Okay. So, I was a kid who was reading fifth grade books at five, and I loved learning. I couldn't devour enough. I mean, I took down novels and all kinds of writings at a really young age, and I just never stopped. But when it came to my family, I grew up in a family where no one went to college, ever. My father was the first person to graduate with a bachelor's from the University Without Walls at UMass at 45. And he worked two jobs while going to college full time. So, he was this very ambitious, very directed person who was really going to grow in life. And I love that about him. He was totally somebody I admired, and I was he was my hero. So, my brother, who was the first born, they were absolutely sending him to college. But for me, they had this vision and their dream for me was that I would go to community college for two years, marry a nice boy, get a job as a secretary at some local business, and basically live happily ever after. And for me, I had already moved out of the house, and I was tearing

to go. I wanted a much bigger life than that. So, I went to community college. I aced my way through, I got into an Ivy League college for the second two years, but without any funding.

Ana Gabriel Mann: And I realized after a short time there that I wasn't I was going to go \$80,000 in debt in order to get a bachelor's degree. So, I transferred to another school out of state. And the long and short of the story was I ended up deciding to apply to graduate school without a bachelors. I put all of my collective experience together in a big portfolio of information for this school, and boom. They not only accepted me, but I graduated first in my class. I ended up with an internship that was paid, which was kind of unheard of back then at a major teaching hospital and became a therapist. And I've had multiple. Career changes since then. And I realized that really the thing for me that was pivotal about it was that I refused to stop growing because I was curious. And I value curiosity, and I value the ability to make a shift in your life, and pivot and change a great deal. It's just a real strong value for me. That was a real moment of just deciding that just because that was their definition of who I should be, it didn't define who I would be.

Whitney Johnson: So, your crucible was this environmentally imposed definition of Ana, and you're saying, no, that won't work for me.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Right.

Whitney Johnson: And you were young. 21, 22, 23,

Ana Gabriel Mann: Younger. You know, by the time I, I skipped some grades. And so, I graduated high school early. And so, by the time I was heading to college, I was not even 17. They really thought I'd be married by 19.

Whitney Johnson: A lot of our listeners are either graduating from college or have children who are graduating from college. When people ask me for advice for someone coming out of school, my response is initiative, initiative, initiative, initiative. What did that initiative look like for you of going to a graduate program and saying, Yeah, I know I haven't graduated from college, but here are all the reasons why you should accept me anyway. Do you remember what was going through your head and how you orchestrated that?

Ana Gabriel Mann: Well, they forced me to write multiple reaction papers to to sort of prove my thing. And I took socially very innovative but powerful topics to discuss and to dissect. And I'm a decent writer, so I had a blast doing it. And then I, I also danced professionally prior to all of this, so, I ended up having quite a varied thing to say to them. Look, I took off and went to a foreign country and danced professionally there. And then I did this and then I did that. You know, I know I'm older, but older being like 24, 25 at that time. But I deserved to be here because I know what I want to do. Despite the lack of dream for me, I had too much self-esteem and too much of a sense of self to deny my own trajectory forward. The pivot was just really having people not believe in you, and that's a core element of our book.

Whitney Johnson: Which brings us to a marriage of a brilliant writer, a brilliant therapist, and it sounds like dancer as well. You've written a book called *The Go-Giver Marriage*. Tell us about the genesis of this book.

John David Mann: Well, this is very fortuitous. This segues really nicely, because a little while ago I spoke about that little engine that could the book that got rejected 22 times. The first draft of that book slid out of my desktop printer in 2005. And Ana, who is the first reader on every book that I've ever written, picked it up and read it and said, this is fantastic. And in her next breath, she said, this is what we do. This like describes us. This would make a great book on marriage. And that was really where the idea for the book was born. We wanted to write a book that was a that took the principles of *The Go-Giver*. And I'll do a sidelight here to say *The Go-Giver* is a parable. It's called a business book, but it's really a life book. It's the thesis of the book is that by living with a spirit of generosity that is putting other people's interests in your front sight, focus. Taking your mind off yourself and putting it on them is not just an altruistic and noble and nice way, satisfying way to live. It's also pragmatic. You create reputation. You create goodwill. You create yourself as a person that the world wants to treat favorably and does, by and large, not to wear rose colored glasses.

John David Mann: But we applied that in business context, and the book became a sort of a movement in the business world. We wanted to take that core idea and explore it in the context of personal relationships, particularly marriage, that that long term committed relationship. There are other Go-Giver books that came after the first one that we had a whole sort of a waiting list. We had a queue of airplanes waiting on the tarmac to take off. We had a book on leadership, Go-Giver a book on influence, a Go-Giver book on sales. Ana, and I bided our time and waited for the right moment. We've been together for 25 years, and so during this 17-year stretch from when the first book was finished off my printer and we finally got to do *The Go-Giver Marriage*, we just kind of nestled the idea in our minds and talked about it on long walks and played with it, and it grew. And then finally in the pandemic, we were looking around us and seeing so many couples holed up at home, spending a whole lot more time than they'd planned to spend face to face. Cabin fever it in and we thought, really, this is this is the time. The world has never needed this more than now.

Whitney Johnson: Interesting. So, Ana question for you on this, why did you feel like you needed to wait for 15 years to publish it?

Ana Gabriel Mann: I didn't want to wait. But John had a schedule of books that was running three years in advance. I kept saying to him, we have to find time to slip this in between contracts with other people and other publishers. Because he's, he's really, he is a very good writer, and he is very sought after because of it. So, I was trying to be respectful of that and also respectful of the other books to give them the space to breathe as each one gets published. You want to give it two years to get legs under it. You know, that's the really formative time that you're building the following of that book. And so, it was also out of respect for Bob Burg and for the work he does. He's a, you know, an endless go-giver, teaching it in business circles and things of that sort. And so, it was also respect for Bob. But I also started to get a little more pushy, a little more hands on my hips in the later years because I felt like this is a message that people need so profoundly. And talking to you about it is especially important to me because what we're asking people to do is to consider marriage a growth curve.

Ana Gabriel Mann: It's not a static, romantic love that it is not falling in love and having this romantic feeling carry you through life like some sort of dream. You know, people wake up after the honeymoon when the multiple suitcases of their emotional baggage start unpacking and they're shocked. And in some ways, that's when they enter the collector phase. You know, the Explorer phase is the romance. It's like, oh, it's so exciting. This person is amazing. Everything they do, it's incredible. And they're learning, but they're learning all the fun and amazing things about their partner. But as they become the collector, they're waking up to that moment of like, yeah, he leaves his socks on the floor every morning. The little ways that they start to feel irritated or, or they start to argue, or they start to have conflict. You know, those are the moments where they're learning about themselves. And, yes, it leads to new growth. And if that growth can be understood, then it's going to include a lot of personal growth. A lot of opportunities in that phase to really understand, what are you bringing to the marriage?

Whitney Johnson: Here's my hypothesis is that when it comes to a relationship, you want to perennially be in the sweet spot. And so, what I see your work doing, if I look at your five secrets and I'm going to ask you to share two of the secrets, but not all of them, because we want to keep some of them a secret until people read the book. Is those secrets allow you to stay in the sweet spot of your marriage. But one of the secrets, the fifth secret, the growth secret, is that you as an individual, need to continually cycle through your own growth curves so that you can stay in the sweet spot.

Ana Gabriel Mann: That is exactly right on. That is one of the secrets we want to talk to you about, because it's so critical. And in every Go-Giver book, the first four secrets are about giving. The fifth secret is counterintuitive. Like in the original Go-Giver, it's about receiving the fifth secret. In this book, the first four secrets are about giving, but the fifth secret is about growing. It's about giving to yourself. It's about keeping your growth curve not only alive but brilliantly moving forward. And a lot of times people are like, well, you know, I can't be out. I can't take care of the kids and also have a career. So, that's not going to happen. And it's like, that is not what we're talking about. You could be a master gardener. You could be exploring how to cook Chinese food or gourmet cooking of some sort or another. You could be learning nature photography. You could be painting in your spare time. You know, you could be a specialist on what special needs children need and start coaching other parents who have got them. You know, it's like there's a lot of room for growth in every category of marriage and parenting and being a person in the world. And I call them avocations rather than vocations, but they're still critically important. If you don't remain

curious in the world, you will shut down the very essence of yourself. And then you are not only starving the marriage, but you're starving yourself. And when you starve the marriage, it's that you are not bringing anything new to the marriage because there isn't anything new to find.

Whitney Johnson: John, you pick one secret that you want to talk about and then Ana will have you pick a secret that you want to talk about. So, John, what's what secrets on your mind today?

John David Mann: So, the five secrets I should start by saying that the book is, is in two parts it falls into the first part is called the parable. And that's my job, that's the story. It's the story about a young couple named Tom and Tess who are who are madly in love. But they've also had a really difficult six years and their marriage is in more trouble than they even realize, which is the case for a lot of people. And Tom is going for a business interview with the most important interview of his life. And we trace both their separate stories through the course of a day where they bump into these, these five secrets. The second half of the book is called The Practice, and that's really Ana's brainchild. She wrote that second half, and that's taking the principles that Tom and Tess bump into in the first half of the book and unwrapping them explaining how you can apply them, practically speaking, in your life. And that's where these five secrets are all unwrapped, like, like candies and explored. The third secret we call it, allow. And allow, is what comes up when there is stress, when one or both of the partners are having a rough time. And here's what it is. You know, in a marriage, I think the central challenge of a marriage is you have two people. They're each whole independent, self-contained individuals, but suddenly their lives overlap. You're living in my space and I'm living in your space. We're sharing space. We thought that would be really cool. It was very romantic idea, but now it's a reality. And how to live with this shared space that becomes like a third entity, this marriage, this us, how to live with that and still each be ourselves.

John David Mann: What happens is, marriage is disruption. It disrupts you. It disrupts your life because you can't be just you anymore. When you left your socks on the floor, nobody cared. Now, when you leave your socks in the floor, it's an issue. We're just using socks as an example. There's this wonderful line in the movie Moonstruck where Nicolas Cage says to Cher, Love doesn't make everything nice, it ruins everything. And actually, I'm not sure I would say it exactly that way, because love really does make everything glorious as you explore it and deepen it and grow it and mature it. But it can throw things into chaos because suddenly you're accommodating another person. The temptation is to try to mold the other person to be just like you. Is try to make the other person have the same preference as you have, behave the way you do. I always leave my socks in the floor. You should try it. You should leave your socks in the floor too. Then we'd all be happy. It'd be nice if you left. If you rolled the toilet paper the way I do, it would be nice if you reacted to stress the way I do. It would be nice if you reacted to grief the way I do. But the other person doesn't. They're a different person. Control is the opposite of allow. Allowing means giving your partner space, giving them the benefit of the doubt, giving them sort of an extra measure of comfort, being kind as a default mode.

Whitney Johnson: I think about this idea of, of my husband and I. And one of the things is I am very, very driven and it's something that my husband really appreciates about me. Interestingly enough, he has a PhD, so it's not that he's not driven, but he's on the Enneagram, he's a peacemaker. He's very calm, he's very kind, he's very relaxed. And that is one of the things that I love about him. That is why I wanted to marry him and be with him. And I sometimes want him to be driven just like I am. And so, I think this really very much resonates of he even said to me the other day, Whitney, this is one of your superpowers. And it's important that you remember to be patient with the rest of the family when they're not driven like you are. And so, this is a very poignant is probably too strong of a word, but it very much resonates with me right now. Is that ability to not only allow your partner, in my case, my husband, and also allow your children. And so, you could probably do go-giver parenting as well. But for right now, we're talking about marriage. But that's my response to that. Any, any, thoughts, John?

John David Mann: Yeah, my first thought is you could absolutely apply that to your children. Really, these five secrets are about human relationships. They're about being a human being in the world. So, you can apply them to your kids. You can apply them to, to, workmates, colleagues, friends, siblings. You know, we use the model of marriage because that's what's front and center for us in this book. But it is there, they are pretty universal. And yeah, allowing the person to be themselves the way they are and not try to change them. The effect that that has, Whitney, is it causes me to have to grow. If I can't make you change because I can't make you do anything. Really. I can't control you. I can't change you. I can't. Then I'm going to have to change. I'm going to have to grow. I'm going

to become a bigger version of myself. And I think ultimately that's what marriage does. When it's successful. It becomes a context, let's say, for you to grow, to become your best possible self.

Whitney Johnson: I really want to underscore; I think sometimes the things that we want to change and not allow and control are the very things that we were drawn to in the first place. So, in the Q&A in the book, they asked the question, do both of us need to practice this? And I love Ana, your answer. You tell us your answer and then I'll tell you why I love your answer. Do both of us need to practice this? I'm reading the book, but my husband may not. Do I need him to read the book, or is it enough that I read it?

Ana Gabriel Mann: It's enough that you read it and. I spent years not only doing couples therapy and I worked with a brilliant, I trained with a very brilliant couples' therapist. For many years, I worked with her, and we did couples groups as well as individual couples' therapy. And, you know, when you're in the therapy room, you usually have one very eager participant and one who's a little bit avoidant and not so eager. They got dragged there, maybe, or they're there simply because they want to look like a nice guy or a nice girl. Like I'm really a good person, even though I am dragging my feet and I don't believe in this, and I don't want to be here. But what you're unwinding is the very crucible of the argument. What is it that bothers me about you and what is it that you are doing wrong? And it goes back and forth like a ping pong game, and you can spend a lot of sessions trying to get them to understand that they have to drop the scorecard. They have to move from that place. So, I found that it isn't that I believe in the therapy model, and I really want to say that for anyone who's in any kind of or abusive relationship or where there's serious issues going down, you absolutely need intervention.

Ana Gabriel Mann: But I became a coach and I started working with one person at a time because I found that one person in a marriage can change the entire tone of the marriage. And the other reason is really deeply based in psychology. And that is that developmental theory says that everything you needed as an infant, you needed as a child, you also needed as an adolescent, as a young adult, and now as a full adult, you still need all those primary needs of developmental theory, and every secret is based on a primary need. And so, to, to bring that to fullness, one person can practice it. And when the other person is getting nourished in that way, and I mean nourished, they sort of wake up and start going, wow, what's going on here? You know, you told me something nice about me today or, you know, you, you, are behaving differently. And so, you can change the tone of a marriage. And you absolutely should understand that it's your responsibility to bring your energy, your very best energy to your marriage. And if you aren't bringing your best energy, then it's your responsibility to apologize for the bad energy brought and to acknowledge and to have compassion for your partner.

Whitney Johnson: All of you who are familiar with my work, you hear me say this many times the fundamental unit of growth in any organization is the individual. It always, always, always starts with you. And so, when you talked about this, that is so powerful. And I just want to underscore, double-click, bold on that. If anybody who is listening wants to improve their marriage, just start by improving yourself. So, I love that. The other thing that was really powerful to me and I was going to ask you about this anyway, is that you said the five secrets are based on early narcissism, the developmental stages that touch on our desire to be seen, witnessed, understood, and believed in. I love that context. So, we've talked about one secret, which is allow. What, what need does that map to, by the way?

John David Mann: Well, I think that Ana will probably be able to say this in a lot more intelligent and articulate way than me. And that would not be a surprise to me at all. The way I'll say it is that, you know, when you're when you're a kid, you need the opportunity to make mistakes and to grow and to sort of explore the world without being immediately punished for it. The world is already a punishing place. There's lots of punishment all around us. As you as a parent, you want to give the child a safe space. Well, you know, as a spouse, you want to give your partner a safe space in the world.

Ana Gabriel Mann: And on the S Curve, I think it goes with accelerator. And I'll tell you why. I think that when you get into the marriage and you start uncovering and discovering the things that are getting in between the two of you, if you do not take the time to explore that and to give it breath, to give it the space to exist and to, for yourself, have compassion and have that ability to not only witness your partner. That's when the growth of your marriage accelerates. When you when compassion becomes the rule, when empathy is, is an actual part of your marriage every day, then all the little petty irritations go away, and the speed of trust accelerates incredibly.

Whitney Johnson: My husband and I, we would both agree that we have a good marriage. And as I'm hearing you talk; I'm feeling so inspired to make it a better marriage. And that is thrilling to me. So, I hope that everybody who's listening this isn't just if you feel like, oh, my marriage is terrible, I need to improve it. You can have a great marriage and these ideas are going to make a difference in your marriage. So, this is really compelling and powerful. Okay, Ana, what's your secret that you would like to highlight besides growth? We're going to come to growth in just a minute.

Ana Gabriel Mann: You know, I find that the first secret is disarmingly simple. But it's a favorite of mine, simply because, I believe. And I do want to write about parenting, just so you really understand that that's a deep drive.

Whitney Johnson: Good. Good.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Yeah. I believe that as children, we never get enough acknowledgment or appreciation. Not ever. Do you know that the average child hears the word, no, thousands and thousands of times before they're a year and a half to two years old. I mean, we are being shut down constantly because parents are so frazzled. They're just trying to control these little, as my husband and I joke, these little beasts. You know, and, and it's just a moment of like, you know, I'm going to rip my hair out. Or I don't know what I'm going to do right now. So, you're really at your wit's end in these moments. But, if you really can stay in your emotional intelligence and appreciate your child and really just take those moments where you say, look at you, you're already reading the words of this picture book. And so, when you have that, you know, that child is bursting to read because mommy just said, look at you, you're already reading.

Ana Gabriel Mann: You know that moment of appreciation makes that child's self-esteem go to the moon and back. And it also makes their love for you deepen in every possible way. I remember moments with my own daughter who has special needs, where she would just look up at me with this beaming face because she was getting bullied, she was getting criticized, she was getting left out of birthday parties. But I was constantly building her. Because appreciating a child is an easy thing to do and appreciating your spouse or your partner equally easy. We're talking about 3 minutes a day. I start all my clients with 3 minutes a day. Find three things that you love and appreciate about your husband or your wife. And stop them in their tracks and with great authenticity and care, tell them exactly what it is that they do that you love and that you appreciate so much. And, you know, it's not a passing compliment. It's not like, babe, your butt, your butt looks good in those jeans. You know, it's, it's a real moment to tell them something authentic.

Whitney Johnson: It's interesting. As I'm listening to you talk, I'm finding myself tearing up. And I suspect this happens a lot for you as you're talking about this topic it's so tender and so sweet and it reminds us of what, what really matters. And I think this goes back to those, those, fundamental needs that we have. And you're a psychologist. I'm not. But there's something about that that tenderness that helps us understand that this really matters to us.

John David Mann: I just want to jump in and say, you know, you're so right about the tenderness of it. Because each one of us, and we touch on this a few times in the book. Every one of us still has that little child very much alive inside us, that little boy, little girl. And, and one of the things that happens in, in a deepened relationship like this is you become very vulnerable to the other person. Which is, which is really important to know, because your words have more power to wound your spouse than probably anybody else's words in the planet. The opposite of appreciation is criticism, and your critical tongue can slice your husband more easily than anybody else's can. So, one of the beautiful sort of side effects of building appreciation is that it automatically pushes out the tendency to criticize, replaces it.

Whitney Johnson: Any additional thoughts that you would like to share around the growth secret?

Ana Gabriel Mann: I think it's my favorite. Simply because I feel that if you aren't growing, you're stagnating, and that growth is so critical to discovering new aspects of ourselves. I think that, we are, there's a great line in the book that says every person is an undiscovered continent. There's so much to find. And yes, that's true about your partner, but it's also true about you. And if you're not discovering your own continent, then you really don't even know what your potential is. I remember doing Colby analysis late in life and being shocked because it was like it really hit right

on the head. The things that I care deeply about, but also the things that I'm good at. And I think that when you invest in the places where you're keenly interested, and you want to grow in that area. And marriage is one of those places people really do by marriage books because they want to learn skills. They want to learn more about the dynamics of marriage. The whole word codependence came out of, you know, people reading books on marriage and finally defining, well, what is this word when my partner is trying to control who I am? But growth, even to understand the dynamic of your marriage. And earlier I said, you know, you come to a marriage with a lot of suitcases. I love to share this. And that is that if you try to build intimacy with another person before getting whole on your own. All of your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Now, the magic of that is that attempt to complete yourself is your attempt to heal yourself. If you had a dismissive parent who criticized you, you are either going to be that person or you're going to attract that person. And it's really important in your growth curve when you're in the collector phase and you finally are with that spouse who's bringing all your parental issues to the table. You could run for the divorce court. You could go out on Friday nights and have a drink with your girlfriends and tell them all about it, which is a violation of the marriage. I mean, let's keep some boundaries. But you also could make this an opportunity to learn, to grow, to be self-aware, to explore. What does this mean for me? What is this? You know, and to really take make the effort to learn so that you can reach the accelerator phase. Where you're practicing new ways of being, you're starting to shift the tone of the marriage. And you're, you're accelerating things. So, you can you know, the growth curve inside the marriage is just as powerful as the growth curve of your personal growth about what you're discovering about yourself and also what you're discovering about yourself in terms of your interest and your curiosity in the outer world.

Ana Gabriel Mann: So, there's so many different levels to growth. It isn't just personal growth. But, you know, I have a friend, a dear friend. Everybody knew she drank a little too often. And somewhere in her forties, she just quit drinking. She didn't tell anybody. She didn't go to a, you know, a program, but she stopped drinking and her entire persona changed, her children changed, her husband changed. And one night, while having a sparkling water with me, she shared that she had been on this huge growth curve to become a better person, and she realized that her drinking was inhibiting her ability to be a good parent and a good spouse. And she was losing it at work. And when she quit that one element, she made a huge leap in her growth, and she changed the whole trajectory of her life and her family. And, you know, it sounds like a small thing, but people do this every day. People are constantly making choices and the little choices mean as much just because, you know, you can put that powder in your drink and stir it up and it's a green drink suddenly. And yes, it's going to make you healthier. It's a little choice, but it is going to be a powerful growth change.

John David Mann: I guess I'll add one thing, which is that, you know, we heard this is a sort of prototypical thing that we, we, hear people say. I sacrificed my career; I sacrificed my this. I sacrificed my time doing that for the sake of the kids. Or some other way of expressing this core idea that I gave up some of my happiness for the sake of the children or for the sake of the marriage. And I think that's opposite thinking. I think it's backwards thinking. One of the most important things you have to give your children is a model of what it means to be a whole healthy, growing, thriving, flourishing person. They will take that model with them throughout their lives. They will be emulating you for better or for worse, forever. But it's also an important thing you bring to your marriage. One of the beauties about being on this growth curve, being on this path of exploration and curiosity and endless, you know, new discovery is that you bring a more interesting person to back to the marriage. You know, the marriage is only as healthy. The marriage itself is only as healthy as what you bring to it. So, we just think that's why grow is not only one of our secrets is the fifth secret we describe the five, five secrets of all the different books, Go-Giver books, there's four fingers and a thumb. You know, the four fingers are all about giving to your spouse. The fifth finger is about giving to yourself. But paradoxically, that ends up being the greatest gift you can really give to your marriage.

Whitney Johnson: Ana, what's something that you appreciate about John?

Ana Gabriel Mann: John is one of the kindest people I've ever known. He gives virtually everyone the benefit of the doubt. I have seen him in really difficult situations. You know, he has tremendous emotional intelligence and tremendous self-awareness. He would have made a brilliant therapist. I mean, he can listen and assimilate faster than anyone I've ever known. And I really appreciate that about him because I've seen him in really difficult situations. And he always has the right thing to say that's not only compassionate and humane, but doesn't blame, doesn't shame, you know, just is extremely present. And, and people love him for that. I mean, I've seen, you know, as a

speaker, I've seen 10,000 people giving a roaring standing ovation because he hits on the emotion of life if anyone ever reads his blog, which is on his personal website. You know, it's just a collection of stories that make the person that the story itself is always about people. And you light up reading about these people. And it's one of the reasons why 20 years ago, I told him you would make a great novelist. And because I knew he would. And, you know, he, he would, he would be very polite, and he'd say, well, thanks, hun, that's yeah. But I knew he didn't I knew he didn't believe it, but I believed it. And fast forward 20 years, his dedication to me in his first novel is to Ana, who always knew and always believed.

Whitney Johnson: Hmm. Which is another secret. But we're not going to say that, okay, John. What's something that you appreciate about Ana?

John David Mann: There's a moment in the book, know the first half, as I said, is the parable. But there's also a fable within the parable, kind of like kind of like a turducken or something. And it's the fable is about a young man and a princess. And every day the young man goes off to work and and builds bridges and roads. And every day the princess stays home and paints pictures, which she sells because she's not a wealthy princess. It's not that kind of fairy tale. And every day he comes home and says, I love you. And she says, I love you, too. Lovely, lovely life they have. But one day he comes home and says, I love you. And instead of saying, I love you, too, she says, you do? How? And he goes, what do you mean? She says, well, what do you love about me? He says, well, I love everything about you. And she says, Well, yeah, but, but, specifically what? I need specifics here. And he says, Well, you're very beautiful. And she says, well, every young woman is beautiful. What? What else? And he says, he thinks for a moment, and he says, You're the most thoughtful person I've ever known. And she says, Really? And he says, yes, and she says, thanks.

John David Mann: And that's, I tear up just saying the scene because that's, that's a scene out of our life. You know, this book is really a love letter, our love letter to the world. But it's also our love letter to each other because that's honest. She's the most thoughtful person I've ever known. And I remember the first day I told her that. I didn't have that thought until it popped out of my mouth, and then I realized it was true. She's thoughtful in the sense that she thinks. She really thinks about things. She is incredibly curious. She's the most avid researcher I know on all kinds of topics. She is very methodical in the scientific, and she's very thoughtful in that way, but she's also thoughtful in the sense of empathetic. She is you know, there's, there's this scene in this first Star Wars movie where Obi-Wan suddenly almost collapses. And at that moment, he felt the voices of a million souls crying out because this planet had been destroyed. And he could feel it across the across the galaxy. That would be Ana. She feels it when people are suffering. She, she, feels it so deeply. And I love that about her.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, everybody who's listening, they just modeled for you the first secret. So now you know how to do it. That is wonderful. I'll go to you first, John. How are you currently growing?

John David Mann: A few years ago. And this is still current, you know, sort of a current in my life. I changed my schedule. I used to be a guy who would get up at 8:00, 8:30 in the morning every day. It's just how I live my life. And in the middle of writing my second novel, I suddenly realized this is not going to work. I because there's no time during the day, the only way I'm going to get this novel written is to get up at five in the morning. I heard one of my favorite novelists, Don Winslow, speaking on this thing once, and he said, I get up at five every morning. I thought, Don can do that. I can do that. So, I have, my life has changed. It's like Ana talking about the lady who quit drinking. I quit sleeping those extra few hours and I go to bed earlier; I get up earlier. It's changed everything about how we, how we do anything.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, I love it. Ana, how are you growing right now?

Ana Gabriel Mann: Well, I want to add something to what John said. He's also growing in that he's writing his third novel right now and each one is a jewel. He just got nominated for a Barry Award, which is like getting for his first novel, which is kind of like getting nominated for Golden Globe. And the novel is called *Steel Fear*. I just want to say that I've never seen anybody accelerate their growth as fast as he has in writing novels. And, you know, obviously, his agent loves him, but his publishing house loves him, too. And, you know, they're so good. Oh, my goodness. They are good. So, I just have to say that.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, I can't wait. Okay. All right. I'm going to go to my Amazon account and buy it. All right. So, what's the way that you're going Ana.

Ana Gabriel Mann: I've never been so excited about life, you know, and we're in our sixties. And, you know, I think that when I look around and in Florida, we live in two homes. We have one in Massachusetts and one in Florida. And in Florida, we live in a gated community and it's a 55 and older gated community. And I look around and I see people who have just bit the bullet and they've settled into their easy chair and they're watching TV all day and all night, and they have let go of growing on every level. And it's almost painful for me to watch. So, you know, what's happening for me is that I'm opening up a whole new avenue of research that I want your readers to know about. I mean, your listeners to know about is I'm researching parenting styles right now on parenting. And all of my work in psychology has all been steeped in, in research. I've researched trauma, I've researched eating disorders. I've spent a lot of time researching marriage and what makes people tick. And I learned the most from people. So, when people share what, what works for them, what doesn't work for them, what makes them vulnerable. What it is that they feel shame about in their experiences, parenting, you know, all those things. If they if they're truly honest and are willing to be a blank slate that won't get named helps me to grow even more because I want every book to not just be a resource, but a resource that people come back to over and over again. Because there's richness in the landscape, you can find all kinds of facets for growing.

Ana Gabriel Mann: And I really believe in the S Curve. In the sense of I just want to say that, you know, when you finally hit them, it's okay. I loved your book. I chowed it down. I could not put it down. The metamorph stage of growth. When you're starting to assimilate this learning you've gained, I mean, it's like such a sweet spot. All of a sudden, life feels really different. I feel like John, and I have been waiting to do this, but now that we've done it, we're doing a lot of podcasts, a lot of outreach, and there's a tremendous amount of growing going on. We're, we're starting workshops that are going to be Zoom workshops that people can just sign up directly for our on our website and get included in a workshop. It's just a whole new world of being back where I was in my thirties, where I was teaching at a university, and I was loving every minute of watching my students devour new information. It's like what I feed on. So, I feel like my life is growing in every possible way in that there's a new book on the horizon. This book is so exciting, and you know, I haven't had this much fun in a long time. I'm even new to Instagram for anybody who's listening, I'm new to Instagram, and I'm a natural born content creator. So, it's just been so much fun, even though it's like a new world to me. I'm like trying to figure it out.

Whitney Johnson: Where can people find you? It sounds like if they want to write in about your research, there might be an email address or a way for people to connect that way. And then also, where can people find your book?

John David Mann: The answer to all those questions is the same. The book's website is simply it's all one word, gogivermarriage.com. And that's where you'll see the book. You can preorder the book, you'll see information about the programs we're going to do. You can also contact us through that website. And if you hit contact and go in there to, to, email us those emails, don't go to a staff somewhere. They go to us. We're the only ones who are going to see that.

Whitney Johnson: This is rapid fire. Just really quickly, one thing coming out of this conversation today, in addition to buying your book, you would recommend each person who's listening do, John and then Ana.

John David Mann: I would say, remember, be aware of, that this applies to your spouse, to your partner, to your best friend, but it applies to strangers you pass on the street as well. Everybody in your life. People are suffering more than they let on. So when in doubt, be kind.

Ana Gabriel Mann: And mine is a personal note to to people to remind them, don't be ashamed of the places within you that are unfinished and unformed and that need healing. Because we all have those places. Every single person that's listening and every one of us on this planet has been raised on a diet of shame, blame, criticism, moments of, of praise. And, you know, there's been lots of things in between. Many, many people grew up with tremendous difficulty in their primary home. You know, you could have had a depressed mother or, you know, I mean, there's just so many different dynamics that can go down. I just want people to understand that the part of you that is still uncovering the issues that you personally know need to need to grow and need to shift. Just not to ever be ashamed

of that. To be to revel in that. To, to, to as your self-awareness wakes up, enjoy it. Because that's the part of you that's growing, and every growth leads to the next part of the cycle. And the growth changes, it accelerates, it gets more stable. You know, there's so many levels to it as you as you allow yourself the space to be and to grow.

Whitney Johnson: What was useful to you in this conversation?

John David Mann: There was a moment in passing, in relation to some, some topic we were discussing. You said something about how that's very tender. And that word struck me and it kind of went wang, wang, wang, wang, wang for the next 20 minutes. It's actually still doing that. It kind of hit me in a new way. I don't think we use that word once in the book. It's not a word I've used a lot in our work. But it, and what I realized it made me think is we're all so vulnerable. This is tender stuff. And it reminded me that you're not just an image in the screen, you're a person sitting listening to these things, as are everybody else listening to these things. Everybody, no matter what front they put on and how great their accomplishments and how many degrees they have or armor they wear or whatever they wear on their face. We're also tender at our core, and it behooves all of us in our communications with others to always remember that.

Whitney Johnson: Beautiful. Ana, what was useful for you?

Ana Gabriel Mann: You know, the moment when you said you could feel yourself tearing up. That you were moved to want to take your marriage and your family and the way that you bring yourself to it. To an even stronger place, really touched me. Because I really believe, yesterday we did a podcast with someone that said, Wow. When I read the book, I felt really convicted. Because I see myself as a good husband and a good father. But I realized how much better I could be. And both really shifted me because as we were writing this book, there were many moments like, John and I had to had to record the audiobook about a month and a half ago, and I had to record the very end of the book. And it's been hard for me to read the end of the parable and not cry. I mean, it really hits me because it's such a tender moment between the two of them. And so that moment of self-awareness for you was everything for me in this hour. Thank you.

Whitney Johnson: All right. Any final thoughts as we close out? Anything you want to put a bow on or underscore?

John David Mann: I'd just like to underscore, and I think you both have just been saying it. Which is that, yeah, this, this book and this work can be about healing things that are broken and fixing something that isn't working. But I also want everyone to know that it's also about taking something that's good and plumbing it further for the riches, making it even better, deeper than there is, there is. Even in a great, happy marriage, there's, there's just new territory to explore. And there's your life is so has so much richness ahead of it.

Ana Gabriel Mann: What I want to add is that the research on giving and I'm not talking about giving to a nonprofit, although that's also part of it. But volunteering at a soup kitchen or giving to your child, giving to your partner, to your parent. Giving creates happiness and changes every cell in your body. I mean, it is a primary factor in happiness. So, when you're giving to others, not only every cell in your body changes, but your heart improves, your depression goes down, your feelings of well-being go up. I mean, there's so many and everybody around you also experiences and feels that same impact. So that's, that's sort of my final word is that there's a lot of documented research on giving and it's such a small thing to do. But generosity is, is powerful.

Whitney Johnson: All right. Well, having been a cheerleader in high school, I feel myself wanting to say, go give. Let's do it together. One, two, three.

John David Mann: Go give.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Go give.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you. John and Ana, this was really, really delightful and wonderful. Thank you for being with us.

Ana Gabriel Mann: Thank you.

John David Mann: It's such a pleasure. Thank you.

I have three big takeaways from my conversation with John and Ana. Number one, the sweet spot in a marriage or any relationship is a moving target. In the S Curve of learning you start at the bottom and climb to the top. But in a marriage, you don't really want to get to the top of the curve. You want to figure out what works, then keep doing it in perpetuity. As Ana says a marriage should be a safe space to make mistakes, learn, bring new ideas, discoveries, and ambitions to the relationship. Even when your relationship is already good, these are things that can deepen it further. I say this often the fundamental unit of growth in any organization is the individual. This is also true in a marriage.

Number two, don't neglect the inner child. I loved the conversation around developmental growth. We know that children desire to be seen, understood, and believed in. It's the key to their self-esteem and success. It turns out, grown-ups need this to a marriage is the perfect place to say. I see you. I understand you. As John and Ana said, appreciating someone is so easy to do and can be incredibly powerful.

Number three, the paradox of the Fifth Secret. Ana and John's work revolves around recognizing and appreciating others. But they also share that their fifth secret seems counterintuitive. Giving back to yourself can often be the best gift you can give to a marriage. And for that matter, to any relationship, to a child, to an organization, to a business. In other words, putting in the work to disrupt yourself can have a huge impact on everyone around you. If you want more on marriage and making marriage work, listen to Jennifer Petriglieri, [Episode 163](#). She wrote a book titled *Couples at Work*. Stew Friedman, [Episode 152](#). He wrote *Parents who Lead at Work and at Home*. And Julie Lythcott-Haims, [Episode 215](#) in which her very last story in the episode is a perfect example of love in action. Thank you again to Ana Gabriel and John Mann for joining us. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our producer, Matt Silverman, audio engineer and editor Whitney Jobe and production assistant Cassidy Simpson.

I'm Whitney Johnson

And this is Disrupt Yourself.