

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 279: MARCUS BUCKINGHAM

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, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson. You probably know the work of this week's guest. And even if you don't, his insights and tools have probably crossed somewhere on your career path. That's because Marcus Buckingham has written some of the best-selling business books of all time. One big reason for his popularity. Marcus is obsessed with challenging common wisdom about human potential. He's a self-described psychometrician on a quest to find the real data behind how and why we act. He spent so much time studying high-performing individuals and teams at Gallup that he co-created his own strengths finder tool, and now coaches executives around the world. But there are some things about human achievement that simply can't be measured. And Marcus has a lot of wisdom to impart about that, too. His latest book is called *Love + Work*, and it's about that special magic that unlocks when you're passionate about anything. This is about way more than finding your dream job. It's about asking deeper questions. What do you actually love to do? And when was the last time you were really there? This conversation really got me thinking, and I know you'll enjoy it, too.

Whitney Johnson: Well, Marcus, I'm really delighted to have you back on the podcast. I was looking back to our interview a few years ago and there are so many nuggets of what you shared, and I'm looking forward to more nuggets today.

Marcus Buckingham: Fabulous. Me too. Thank you for having me back on.

Whitney Johnson: Let's start with a formative childhood experience, something that shaped who you are.

Marcus Buckingham: There's a couple. One is when I was growing up, I couldn't speak. So, I did have a stammer until I was 12. Couldn't say my own name. And when you're like that, if you've never had that, it's the most bizarre

thing because you're just trapped inside your own brain. Everyone else feels normal that you aren't normal because you can't communicate. So, your entire life, you're the enemy to yourself. Or rather, you're living with someone. And the someone you're living with is your stammer. And it's like a, it's a snake that whenever you try to say something, it just coils around your throat and constricts you. It's, it's the source of all your disfluency and it defines your life because humans communicate with one another. And when you can't communicate with one another, you are bereft. You're alone. So, you spend a lot of your time as a kid anyway trying to fit in, trying to make sure that you're seen as normal. And if you have a stammer, then you are very, very, very obviously not normal in ways that surprise people. And when they're surprised, they're unnerved. So, my formative experience is certainly as a kid was trying to figure out a relationship with myself that didn't involve massive and total self-sabotage. So, that was interesting how you kind of experience yourself. So many of us, as we grow up in childhood, we, you know, we don't really develop a language to describe ourselves.

Marcus Buckingham: There's obviously no help from school. There's no help from college at all. There's no self-mastery training or learning at all for kids. So, for many of us, we are sort of distanced from ourselves because so much of school is outside in training and then testing you against what you've been trained on. But certainly, for me, with a stammer, you get to build a relationship with yourself really quickly. It's just that for me it was a contentious one with myself. Again, I wrote about in the book, one of the ways you begin to see what your loves are is you look at your patterns of attention. And it's so weird because our patterns of attention when we're young don't seem different to us. They just seem like us. They seem like it's what we do. We have a pattern of things that we pay attention to, and other people don't. And it's a rare day when somebody comes in, maybe it's a teacher or maybe it's a mother or a friend who goes, hey, no one else is looking at the world quite the way that you are. That's not that doesn't happen. So, for me, I remember watching a bunch of people.

Marcus Buckingham: I was maybe nine, ten. I was at school; I was watching people do the high jump. And I was actually watching the high jumpers, which most of us were. There was 30 of us standing around. You watch people jump over a high jump. But the weird thing was Whitney when they were watching, they instinctively did something with their bodies or the watchers did. They all stood up or kicked their legs out like they were kicking a football, but it was invisible. And I remember looking at it. I mean, even to this day, I can remember exactly where I was going. Why are you all doing that? That is the weirdest thing that you're all doing. Oh, look, when the guy tries to jump over the next one, you did it again. And then when I spoke to my friend and asked him, why are you doing that? It's weird. He immediately denied it. And now of course that ups the ante you and more like well that's now it's doubly weird you're a nice friend of mine and you're denying you're doing something you're very obviously doing. Spoke to my gym teacher, spoke to my science teacher, spoke to the older boys who were standing in the line. And why, why are you doing it? Everyone's like, a, we're not b, why are you even paying attention to that? So, that was the beginning for me.

Marcus Buckingham: You know, we don't we don't really have a language that we're told early about why you're different than your sister. Why are you different than your brother? We're told a lot about race and gender and sexual orientation and religion and nationality and all those differences, which, of course, are really important. But no one really tells you the most important answer to the question of why are you different than the people in whose house you grew up with, with the same genes? Why are you different from them? And so, for me, you know, I'm super creative, musically talented, elder brother and younger sister. And I didn't. Watching these people do something that they didn't know they were doing was the very first sign that I might have a pattern of attention that was different than anyone else. I didn't know what to do with it. I had no idea what that would lead to. We actually hadn't, by that time, even discovered the existence of mirror neurons and that this was people's natural empathy for another human. We didn't know any of that. I certainly didn't know any of that was I was nine, but it was the beginning of like, oh, you may have patterns of attention that are different from anyone else's.

Whitney Johnson: So, let's go back to the stammer for a second. So, one of the things you said that was caught my attention, speaking of attention. Was that because you had this snake coiled around your neck and didn't feel comfortable talking to people, you had ways of being in the world emerge that unnerved people. Can you remember something, what that looked like?

Marcus Buckingham: Well, yeah. I mean, the first day of school when you're eight. And in 12 minutes in the car on the way from home to school when I imagine every other boy or girl was thinking about their classmates or their

teacher or something. I was just trying to figure out how to say my own name. And a name like Marcus Buckingham is a freakishly long name. I can't tell you how many nights I fell asleep cursing my I wanted to be called Steve because I could say, Steve. But I couldn't say Marcus Buckingham and so the first thing that you're trying to do is you're trying to get out of the car and how am I going to say. My palms are sweating actually now just even thinking about it because how am I going to say my own name? And I got out of the car, and I'd had little tricks that you can use. Every stammer has this where you have tricks where you can, if you can't say L's, then you'll substitute a word that begins not with an L so that you can say it. Or for me, I couldn't say C's, but I could say T's, so I would substitute color for color and like little tricks.

Marcus Buckingham: But with your own name, you can't have it, there's no tricks. It's your name. And so, got out of the car, and the elder boy who was sort of wheeling me into the classroom, as it were, welcoming me. He just said, you know, in all innocence, what's your name? And I, I tried for I'm going to say 2 minutes. I tried to say Marcus and I couldn't say it. And he's looking at me. And if you probably all of us know people with a stammer, and to start with, the person's like, Yeah, what? Yeah, what? And then you can see on their face, it's like, oh, oh, oh, this is, oh, this is. And then of course, the sad thing about stammer is no one can help you. Yeah. In fact, the more you try that, the worse it gets. It's like the ultimate irony. So, yeah, that for that, for me, for that day. And then I went in and the teacher was like, what's his name? And the boy said, well, he didn't say, he couldn't say. And the teacher said he didn't say. He's like, no, no, he couldn't actually say.

Whitney Johnson: So, becomes the comedy of errors.

Marcus Buckingham: Oh my gosh. Yeah, I tried to say Buckingham, and then it was Buck. So, my nickname for the next five years was coined on my very first day of school. And it wasn't it wasn't a good one.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, one interesting thing is you've been in the United States for a couple of decades now. Mike Rowe, do you know who Mike Rowe is? Dirty Jobs?

Marcus Buckingham: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Incredible stammer when he was growing up.

Marcus Buckingham: You know, it's funny, since I've written this, and it's been out for all of like four or five days. I've had 30 people. I mean, I've written ten books. Right. And, and a couple of them. You know, the *Strength Finder* book. You know, we've had 10 million people take *Strength Finder*. And so, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, there was millions upon millions of people. And as you know, that's a blessing when you write a book. That's just a blessing. No one has responded as emotionally to any of my previous books as they have with this book. And it's maybe it's a pandemic of a function of that or whatever. Whitney, but, but I've had, you know, people very, very emotionally describe their stammer and, and people doing podcasts with me. I won't mention their names, but I had a stammer too. And you're like, Wait, no, you didn't. Yeah. And then it's like, oh, no, no, no, I couldn't speak. It's interesting what people suffer quietly through and what they overcome. And of course, that's true. We know that these days trauma is, trauma is trauma. But it's been a, it's actually been, I think, a lovely thing to share with people that. Yeah, and of course, the stammer just really quickly on this is a, it's a really interesting one because you, it's a metaphor for everything that we do wrong in regards to trauma. I mean, we live in a world notwithstanding Susan Cain's really lovely book, *Bittersweet*. Actually, we don't live in a world that's fixated on positivity. We live in a world that's fixated on pathology. Actually, that's the, that's what we love to talk about. And we love to talk about trauma. And you are because of your traumas. And let's dive into your trauma. That's there's no you in there.

Whitney Johnson: And we are talking about your trauma, Marcus.

Marcus Buckingham: I know, but the funny thing is, the more you dive into it, Whitney. And the more you try to fix the stammer and the more you get. I mean, I knew so much about the mechanisms of fluency, and the more you try to understand it, the less you can move past it. It's like you become your trauma. You are literally traumatized, you become your trauma. And as I describe in the book, my stammer actually ended up going away in a week, mostly because I didn't try to fix it. I left all that behind. And it was, it so opens you up when you stop fixating on your traumas, it opens you up anyway.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, so good. All right. Oh, this is fantastic. A couple of thoughts. And then, and then we'll, and then we'll move past the trauma. So, Mike Rowe, who's been on this podcast? Scott Miller, who does the On Leadership podcast with Franklin Covey, had a stammer, and Asheesh Advani, who's the CEO of Junior Achievement. And what I think is fascinating and this, this is this idea is that all of you have gone on to become beautiful, beautiful public speakers. And you shared this story that I think is so compelling. And it caught my attention about what you do to allow yourself to speak publicly, the 400 versus one. Will you tell that story?

Marcus Buckingham: So, with a stammer, right, your parents are trying to, as any parent, would they try to help you. They take you to a speech pathologist and you say "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" 400 times and it gets worse and worse and worse and worse because of the pressure to perform. And, and so luckily, my parents figured that out after one visit. They're like, this isn't going right. Maybe we'll send it to a smaller school. But then his elder brother. But that's about all we're going to do, because we're just going to surround them with love, and you can bounce around in it. So, I'm at this school, I'm 12 years old and I still can't speak. And then I see on the noticeboard that I'm picked to read it out in chapel the next week. One of five boys out of the class of 100 and they pick one of them was me. And you go, I mean, talk about fear. You go, someone would say, well, what's the worst that could happen, Marcus? Well, I'd tell you what the worst that could happen is I could stand up there. Everyone's reading what I'm supposed to be reading, so I can't substitute the words because it's in that Bible study books. The worst that could happen is my entire life's over. That's what going to happen. My entire life at school is over. And then, you know, you get to the rehearsal the night before in an empty chapel with the headmaster, and it was a five-minute piece, and it ended up being 15 to 20 minutes of suffering for us both.

Marcus Buckingham: And I'm just staring at the shiny wooden pews in the dark evening chapel. And it was a disaster. So, so, you go to sleep that night and you wake up and you're like going to the executioner as you cycle to school. And. And then I get up. I woke up. I mean, I can feel, to use the metaphor. I mean, I can feel the snake uncoiling as it turns around with me to stare at the, at the page. And I'm standing at the lectern. I look up from the page, and then there's 400 people staring at me. All I can tell you is it felt like a warm glow around my head, almost like literally different synapses were firing. Maybe that was actually what was happening, but it felt like a warmth, like a fluidity, and, and every word came out. With the exception of the word criticism, which felt normal, like a normal, like someone might normally trip over a word, but every other word was perfect. And I remember being I mean; the whole school was stunned because they were waiting. I mean, you know, kids are mean, and they were just waiting for it, somebody else's public humiliation because it wasn't theirs, you know. And they were stunned. And I was stunned. And I realized that for whatever crazy reason, when I'm speaking in front of 400 people, I'm fluent, when I'm talking to one person, I'm disfluent.

Marcus Buckingham: And it took me a while to, initially, I was just happy I hadn't destroyed my life. But then I got to thinking, well, if I can only talk in front of 400 people, why wouldn't I just pretend when I'm talking to one person, I'm talking to 400 people? Why wouldn't they just do that? And then I would just use something that I clearly loved in the book. I called it a red thread. It was like it was made of different material, somehow, I vanished into this activity and, and it was a thing, and it was a really weird thing. So, why wouldn't I use the thing that actually lifted me up to address something that had clearly brought me down? And my stammer using that trick, which I still sort of use today in many ways was gone in a week and I graduated from that school that summer. And then my new school, no one new had even had one. I mean, it was, it was gone, and I hadn't overcome it. I hadn't faced up to it. I wasn't brave, I wasn't strong, I wasn't disciplined. I didn't have grit; I didn't have deliberate practice. I just figured out some particular stimuli that for whatever daft, crazy, unexplainable reason lifted me up. And then I lifted up with it and used that love if you like to, to solve a really big problem in my life. Yeah, we've all got different traumas, but there's a solution in that for all of us.

Whitney Johnson: I love it. So, I'm. So, you found. I brought this in honor of our conversation. A red thread. We'll thread our way to your book, *Love ≠ Work*. I can see why people are connecting to you so powerfully because you write it in a very personal. There's a lot of research in it, but there's a very personal tone. Like, I felt like you were talking just to me, not to 400 people, but just to me. So, talk to us about what this book is about.

Marcus Buckingham: You know, when you're young, you feel and begin to feel that you love some things and loathe others. And I had an elder brother who was a brilliant musician, a younger sister who was a brilliant dancer and

became a Royal Ballet dancer, 20 years brilliant. And initially, you're like, I don't have anything. I don't have anything. And then you begin to have a sense that you might have some things that you lean into, some things that you might not even be very good at them yet. But but you love doing them or you pay attention to them, or time flies by when you're doing them, and you get what Csikszentmihályi called flow. Or you or you feel a sense of innate kind of quick mastery at them. In a weird way, it feels like you've done them before. And you sort of hold out hope that your life's going to be able to be a place in which you get to express some of that, whatever that is. And that maybe high school and college will be places in which you start to discover lots of that. And, and then of course, that doesn't happen. We have so many kids on Adderall and Xanax and Wellbutrin, and we have so much high school and college that is really just outside in information transfer and confirmation through testing. And then we graduate these people into the world of work, notwithstanding, Whitney, that the world of work would love to have kids graduating, who knew how to describe what they learnt into, knew how to describe to a new team what they wanted people to rely on them for, and also where they needed help like you would.

Marcus Buckingham: You would love that if you were any kind of company. But of course, we don't teach any kids any of that. We give them, as I said in the book, like ten years of geometry and zero years on self-mastery, like none. And then you go into the world of work and that sort of continues where you who you are, what you love to do, and how you might turn that. Not all the time, it's not do what you love because there's no data on that at all. The most successful people don't do all that they love, but they do find love in what they do and that's different. So, we could probably wow, wouldn't work be great if we helped you find love in what you do so that you could contribute. We don't do any of that. We actually define rules and policies and competencies and cascaded goals. And 360 tools to measure you against the competencies and progress reports to measure you against the goals and all of that's sort of okay, I guess. But who you uniquely are as a unique human is irrelevant to that. You're not lost at work, you're hidden. Which is why we get, why we get engagement levels and resilience levels in the, in the, in the mid-teens, which is immoral and as well as being unproductive. So, I wrote the book, A because we are clearly messing up our kids and our workers and a return to normal after the pandemic doesn't serve anybody. And of course, with 3.4, 3.5% unemployment, that gives a lot of power to the employee to start changing what work really is for us. And then in terms of the personal nature of it, Whitney was just like, like all of like you, like everyone.

Marcus Buckingham: We've gone down really deep in the last two years or so by ourselves and looked in the mirror. And there's been some dark, dark days where you go, I don't know what I'm doing or even who I am anymore. And then there's other days that are bright and you're like, oh, no, you know what, I'm here for a really short time. I had I better start thinking intelligently and responsibly about what mark am I trying to leave here? What is work for me anyway? And then during that time, I lost my dad. I lost my marriage. I sold my company. And so, I came out of the pandemic going, look, I love data. I mean, I'm a psychometrician I love knowing what's real and what's not. What can you reliably measure about the human condition and what's just opinion? Not that opinion isn't bad, but let's draw a distinction. So, I love all that. But a life is a story. And so, I felt is I'm not going to be able to help anyone live their story if I don't share any of my story. I'm a white, middle-aged male in a first-world nation. And so, I'm massively privileged, but, but I'm also idiosyncratic. Like, I've only got one story. It's got its mine. So, I'm going to share some of it. I'll put some data around it. And as I said, it's like I'm just trying to help you tell yours in a way that's about as vulnerable as a repressed British person can possibly be. So, that's what you got.

Whitney Johnson: You actually earlier sounded like you were a little bit surprised by how people have responded to you telling your story. Are you a little bit surprised?

Marcus Buckingham: Yes, I'm you know, it's nerve-racking. I've had a very difficult time in the last couple of years because of something that happened with my family, with my son and my ex. And without going into detail around it now, necessarily, it, it was. The world reaches into your family and messes with your kids in this day and age so quickly with social media but with constant media. And so, to reveal anything about oneself is I have great empathy for people that choose not to do any of that because then you can't get the judgment and then you can't get the criticism. And you're, you know, you're inside your own little bubble, and you are protected behind your rank or your or your position or your title or whatever. And so, for me, yes, it was scary to, to, to say, listen, you know, I've made as many mistakes as anyone has. This is what I've picked up along the way. This might make you think of something that you might have picked up along the way. There is some rigor to this so here's what the data confirm. It was risky for me anyway to put it out there, and yet it's been so lovely too. I wrote this book in a sense for the 27-year-old. And in fact, a 27-year-old woman that I know. And I was like, you know, if I could write to her, 27's the

return of Saturn, right? It's a very hard time. 27, 28, 29. It's certainly that was the time I started getting panic attacks. It's a weird time. I mean, lots of times are weird, but that one's like, Wow, I'm out of school. It's not new anymore. I'm not good yet, but whatever path I'm about to get on for the next ten years, I'm probably going to have to stay on for ten years. So, 27 is a big one and I've just had so many lovely, massively heartfelt. Kind of reactions to a book that I didn't really know what, I hoped, I guess, but I didn't know it would touch people.

Whitney Johnson: Yes. So, some of the quotes that you share in the book that I think are really powerful, I'll just read a few and then give you an opportunity to respond to them. You say, "when you see someone doing something with excellence, there is always love in it." You say, "the point of love is to create such feelings of safety and connection, that you broaden your outlook and build your strengths." And a third that I love is, "if you have the chance to do something you love every day, even if you're not good at it, you are more likely to be highly resilient."

Marcus Buckingham: Love is a funny word. I mean, one of the reasons I went with Harvard Business Review as my publisher when frankly, you know, a book called *Love + Work* is like there's a lot of publishers that want to publish that book, which is great. But I almost and Harvard has a different arrangement. So, their advances are really different in that by different, I mean way smaller.

Whitney Johnson: Yes. I know.

Marcus Buckingham: Which you know. But, but they do have legitimacy. So, if you're going to try to write a book called *Love + Work*, you better have a friend along with you, a big friend who can help you rehabilitate the word love. I mean, let's talk about love. So, why do we need to talk about love? And I don't mean love of another, of another human yet anyway, we can get into that. I'm in love of a particular thing, a task, an activity, a moment, a situation when you really love to do something that way of love, right? When you are doing an activity that you love, we do see a different chemical cocktail in your brain. We know this it's vasopressin, it's, its norepinephrine, it's there's anandamide in there. There's dopamine, there's oxytocin, it's a cocktail.

Marcus Buckingham: What they seem to think is happening when that cocktail is in your brain is that dis regulates the restrictions of your neocortex, which really makes you very sort of goal achievement, outcome-focused, which is jolly good and sensible. But that cocktail dis regulates that, which really means you stop being quite so egoic and goal outcome-oriented and you're opening, you're literally your mind is more prepared and feels safer, which is sort of part of the oxytocin part of it. It feels safer to let new stuff in. What Barbara Ferguson called, it's the opposite of flight or fight, broaden and build. Like what's happiness? That was her whole thing, right? What's happiness for? What are positive emotions for? Well, they're for opening your mind to new information, new configurations, and welcoming those in as opposed to seeing them as a threat. So, if companies want, and by the way, we know that when your brain is like that, you perform cognitive tasks faster, you remember details better, you identify others' emotions more accurately. So, your empathy is better. Like you're just more your brain on love is more. Now we all love different things.

Whitney Johnson: Wait, stop there for a second. I don't think you said that anywhere in the book. Your brain on love is more.

Marcus Buckingham: No, I didn't.

Whitney Johnson: I just want to call that out. You've got to remember that. That's really good.

Marcus Buckingham: I didn't. But it's, it's I think I did say you're more but it's like your brain on love. Like, what's that thing about your brain on drugs? Looks like this.

Whitney Johnson: Exactly.

Marcus Buckingham: So, your brain on love, you are open to more information. So, therefore, let's just follow that along. Oh, by the way, it's the same chemical cocktail as when you are in love with someone. It's the same chemical cocktail. Which is probably why the evolutionary biological reason why we did, why we developed love in the first place is that when you're in love with someone like that, you do feel safer but also more open. Like love is a really

powerful sort of turbocharger of a lot of your attention. It makes you more attentive. It doesn't make us all the same. I'm not saying we're all attentive to the same things in the same ways, but whoever you really are, love turns you into a bigger version of you. And so, if companies want creativity, innovation, collaboration, resilience. Because although I run this research institute now, which does global research around the world to try to figure out what's real. If you say that you love what you do and you're good at it, you are 4.4 times more likely to be highly resilient. It's like, okay, if you want resilience companies and if you want the creativity and the collaboration and the innovation, and you don't want to talk about helping people find that which they love and what they do, then shut up because you're not going to get it. You can write all those things on the wall all you want, but if you don't take love seriously, and that's kind of why I went with Harvard because it's like the bunch of people will call me up and go, I'd love to do this, but my company won't.

Marcus Buckingham: In which case I can go tell them who the publisher is or read the flipping magazine and we'll put it in there. Because we are humans who have figured out after two years of pandemic that that which we love the unique pattern of loves and lows that sort of make us, that's legit. We need to honor that. And our work isn't the only place in which we get to manifest that Whitney, but it's one big place. And if companies don't want to take that seriously, but they also want resilience and creativity. Ok, they're not going to get it. So, it's kind of that's why starting at a very micro level of what does one individual's brain look like on love, and then playing that out into a system-wide change about how we think about where we're spending 40 or 50 hours a week. That's kind of what I wanted to do, not just with the book, but with everything we're doing around it. The leader series we're doing and the articles and the podcast with like it's all people learn in different ways. So, I was just trying to hit people just.

Whitney Johnson: Hit us over the head with love. So, one of the things that I think is interesting, Marcus. Is in, in our work, we talk about the S Curve of learning, and this is adapting the S Curve, the diffusion curve of Everett Rogers and applying this to the individuals and what growth looks like for the individual. And when I was thinking about your work. This idea of love and how it broadens us and opens us up and we feel safe. If we're at the launch point, when we're at the launch point of a curve, we can focus on what we love about what we're doing that's going to help dissipate those feelings of fear and awkwardness that we have when we're doing something new. It'll mitigate it. And so, I just think that that. So, I'm having that go in my head of, of how when I start something new, can I focus on what I love about it? Because then it'll make it so that I am going to be more effective and enjoy it. And be comfortable not achieving a goal immediately because we don't know what the outcome is going to be. The other thing that I'm thinking about when I was reading in your book about strengths and weaknesses, you have a really interesting definition of what strengths are versus weaknesses. And I don't know if you want to comment on the love at the launch point or the strengths or weaknesses. But those are some thoughts I'd love to hear your, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Marcus Buckingham: I actually think looking at that which you love about anything and by the way, the whole red thread point was just to say to people, your day, I mean, today's Tuesday. And Tuesday just looks like Tuesday, and it might actually be filled with a bunch of things we're supposed to do. So, you wake up on Tuesday, followed by a to-do list that came from Monday, and you just have to get through the day, get through the day, get through the day. You survive the day, you know. But actually, a day isn't a Tuesday. It's made up of many thousands of different stimuli, many thousands of different moments and activities, and situations and contexts. And I liken those to threads just like a tapestry. When you see it on the wall, it looks like a picture, like a Tuesday picture, but you got really close. It's made up of thousands of different threads. So, any day is made up of thousands of different moments and situations. 5 minutes here, 2 minutes, 10 minutes, 16 minutes, whatever. And some of the threads are black and gray and white and brown and yellow, and they lift you up a little and they lift you down. But some of these activities in that day are red, that they're activities that lift you up while you're doing them, or you actually positively look forward to doing them or while you're doing them you seem to be open to more learning. Or while you're doing them, you just seem to instinctively know what to do. Like it feels like innate mastery, not practiced mastery, just sort of innate.

Marcus Buckingham: And you're most you. Those are red threads. The research from a bunch of different sources suggests you do not need on any given Tuesday or Wednesday or any day a fully red quilt. You don't. You need 20% red threads, but a day with no red threads. Oh, don't worry. Just, just suck it up for 30 days, and then one day of the month, you'll have a really good day. No, that's a psychological disaster for you. We know that from all different data sources. What we've missed about love is it's not about finding your passion. It's not about finding your

calling. It's not about finding your purpose. That's up at, I mean, you could, but that's at 30,000 feet. Loves at two feet. Do you love doing that activity or this one or that one or this one or this or that? And, and life is showing that to you every single day. Life's sort of going, hey, look, rather than life being the enemy that you've got to keep at bay and get through. Life's putting on a show for you. Life's trying to show you that which you love. Life's trying to decode you every day. If you would but look, you know. But we don't look, and we don't teach a nine-year-old to do this. And we could and we should, but we don't because of all sorts of reasons. But as a result, we end up not really knowing kind of that which we love. But if you looked at your curve, I actually believe that love flies all the way in and through that.

Marcus Buckingham: So, you're absolutely right. The first anxiety of starting. It's like, I have a relative who's got social anxiety disorder. Like they "shouldn't have it" because they're, they're incredibly, you know, they're smart and they're great and they're handsome and they're like they walk in and people look at them and, and so they shouldn't have social anxiety disorder. But like, what do you do with that? You could traumatize it and you could dive deep into the causes of social anxiety, and you could drug it up. We could give you we could have a pharmacological solution to that. We could dull you down rather than doing what you just said, which is going, wait a minute. Is there any part of any social interaction that you love? Which bit? Because it's not the whole bit. We get that. But which bit? Is there anything? Which moment? Was there a moment recently that you loved when you were talking to someone? What was that? Did it matter who they were, did it matter what you were talking to them about? Did it matter when it was? Like, just start with that little, that little fiery, like that little fiery spark of love. Just start there. Why? Because it's true for you. So, start there. I mean, it's amazing. Sorry, Whitney, I'm charging around. But it's, like, amazing that we teach kids. My master's in social psychology. It's an amazing amount of teaching that we teach about the theory of learning or the theory of relationships or the theory of decision making or the theory of emotional intelligence.

Marcus Buckingham: But what we don't do is we don't talk about your way of learning or your way of building relationships or your way of being emotionally intelligent. We don't talk about any of that. And so, if you could get someone right at the beginning to go, hey, no, I know you're nervous to start. But what is it about this that you might that might light you up? What is it at all? But then all the way through into mastery, I mean, Pablo Casals was he was the inspiration for Yo-Yo Ma. He was probably the best cellist of the last 150 years. But he was, he played the same sonatas every morning and every day that they felt new to him. He was total, a total mastery, but he was always so much detail in love. I mean, if you listen to him talking about what he got out of playing those every single day, the same sonatas every day, and he died at 90, but right up until he died. So, mastery has love in it too because mastery brings with it variety. And Mastery infused with love shows you that variety. He's looking at what he's doing through the lens of love, and now you're seeing a whole different, he is anyway. A whole different world. And that's why I put the story in there about housekeepers at Walt Disney World because you look at even a housekeeping job where you go, oh, that's a boring job. They must hate that. But you look at any job through the lens of love and it looks incredibly varied and beautiful.

Whitney Johnson: You said in the book, I'm quoting you again, your enemy isn't necessarily that you don't have any red threads at work, but in life and generally. But your enemy is distraction. Pay attention to the red threads that you are going to find today. The other comment that I want to make, I think it's very interesting you talked about how both of your siblings were superb musicians and your younger sister, I think you said, was a dancer. But you're, you're a poet.

Marcus Buckingham: Well, I don't know about that.

Whitney Johnson: There's so much poetry in your language and there's so much musicality in your language. So, it's very interesting.

Marcus Buckingham: I love you for saying that. I, you know, it's funny. And I'm sure everyone who's listening has had that feeling where you, if you've got a brother or a sister or a cousin. And you go, why am I different from them? I was always interested. Like, why? You know, why is it that Venus and Serena play tennis so differently? I get it. They, they got worked like crazy by Richard, by their dad. Okay. Why are they different? And, and I love it that, you know, Neil Armstrong had a brother, Dean, who was a bank manager. I love it. George Clooney, who always says I became an actor, an actor because of Rosemary Clooney, my aunt. But his sister Adelia had the same aunt.

And you've never heard of Adelia because she's an accountant specializing in payroll. It's like the really interesting questions we all have we aren't helped with at all. Why am I me? And which bit of me could I change if I really, really, really wanted to? Could I be like my brother? Could I? Because I'm right there with him and I'm living in the same house, eating the same Rice Krispies every morning. And yet I can't see what he can see. And I can learn what the bass clef is and the treble clef, and I can learn what some various annotations mean. I just can't make any music. And so, for me initially, because obviously music and singing and dancing is such an obvious, brilliant talent that people go, oh, that's jolly good.

Marcus Buckingham: You kind of want that. Or I did. Anyway, I wanted some of that. It took me a long time to fall in love with words. And, and for you to say that there's any musicality in, in what I'm sharing that makes me so happy. Because the way in which you take ideas in is through words. And to fall in love with the words is I've done that. I'm sure you've done that. So, you're a writer. It's like sometimes they're your enemy because they won't come. Where are the words? And sometimes you, you delight in a particular word combination. And some people don't delight and like everyone's loves. That's one of the big points of the book is, oh my word, you have 1 trillion synaptic connections in your brain at 19, and you do. And that's not an exaggeration. And when you die, no one will ever have the same pattern of connections, ever. You are unbelievably filigreed, beautifully detailed, unique. So, you and I might have some little overlap, by the way, about what do we love about words and what do we? But I'm not you. I will never be. I'll never see the world quite the way that you do. If there's any poetry in, in helping someone to encounter themselves and uncover themselves, I'm so chuffed to be a part of that discovery.

Whitney Johnson: So, speaking of, of words, you said that the very idea that you could devise a question that would generate an answer that only a person with that strength would come up with. That was brilliant. You've studied questions. So, so tell us more.

Marcus Buckingham: Well, this is I spent 25 years doing this. It's for those you don't know. It's called psychometrics. It's trying to put measurement to certain aspects of the human condition that you can't count. And when, as you know, when you're in the world that we're in, there's a lot of different opinion about what are the four skills that all leaders should have. Or what are the ten strengths that every salesperson should have, or what are the particular gifts that a particular nurse should? So, you kind of have a lot of opinion, and I've always been drawn to saying, well, the opinion is fine, but what can we know for sure? Can we reliably measure something like talent? Can we reliably measure something like empathy? Can we reliably measure engagement or resilience? And as soon as you do that, Whitney, you get into an immediate distinction between traits and states. So, engagement is a state of mind. Resilience is a state of mind, meaning you want it to move. It's movable. No matter who the person is they could be engaged one minute and then you might do something with them over the next week and then they're more engaged. I mean, you want engagement, you measure it so you can move it. Traits are different. Traits, you're trying to discover that which is in a person which won't change, the them. The, what I called in the book, your WRYD, your weird, your, your essence, your spirit's right. What your personality, you could say. How do you measure that? Well, Myers-Briggs does it one way, and *Strength Finder* when we built that did another way Standard does it in a, in a situational judgment way. So, there's different ways to do that reliably.

Marcus Buckingham: But one of the things that, for whatever reason fascinated me was that you can actually learn a lot about another human by asking a very carefully constructed, open-ended question and then having a listen for that you're trying to listen for. And if a certain listener for top of mind the person comes up with, then you can make certain predictions about how they're going to behave. Now, the way in which you do this is you, you take a study group of, let's say, nurses and a contrast group of nurses, and you start experimenting with hundreds of different questions to see whether the really, really empathetic nurses talk differently than the not empathetic nurses. And you could experiment with hundreds of different questions, by the way, hundreds of other different listen fors. You might try out a question with a nurse like how do you feel when someone doubts what you have to say? Which turns out to be a terrible question for nurses. The best nurses don't answer that question in any way similar to each other and different from the not good nurses. By the way, it turns out to be a really, really good question for salespeople, because if you ask that question of really, really, really good salespeople, they all say the same thing different from other salespeople. The best salespeople say, how do I feel when someone doubts what I have to say? It pisses me off. What we call the, the listen for became a negative emotional reaction because a really good salesperson says, look, you can disagree with me, you can not buy from me, but don't doubt me. Don't ever doubt me.

Marcus Buckingham: If you ask teachers, that turns out to be a really good question for teachers, because if you take a study group of teachers in a contrast, group of teachers, the best teachers to the question, how do you feel when someone doubts what you have to say? Independent of one another all the best teachers say some version of I love it because the person doing the doubting is the student and doubting is the mother of learning. So, that's kind of. Okay, that's cool. That's a, same question, different listen for would predict something different about a person. It turns out to be a terrible question for nurses because who doubts a nurse? Your temperature is 102. I don't think it is. You know it's, it's, it's a bad so all my time at Gallup was spent trying to figure out which questions go with which listen fors to predict which behaviors. And for many people that might sound as boring as the phone book but for whatever stupid, daft, unexplainable reason, I love that. I mean, I, I could do that all day. Try to figure out the right wording. You know, why is, do you like to achieve something every day? A terrible question. And are you an overachiever or an underachiever? A great question. Well, we could spend hours talking about why that is, but I love doing that. And there's a whole bunch of other people that really don't care about that, don't care about that at all.

Whitney Johnson: So, it's the power of a great question. So, is there a question that you like to ask, or you have found is useful to ask when you're thinking about is a person able to bring love to work?

Marcus Buckingham: Well, yes. So, I put this in there as an initial starting place, because it's a great question to say, when was the last time a day flew by at work? When was the last time a day flew by? I mean, all the best questions, of course, are open-ended questions. And the other part of a question is, of course, they need to have an extreme in them. Any question needs to be open-ended and then extreme in it. Because when a person instinctively reacts to the extreme, that, that primed to go to a point, a place, a moment, and if that point or place or moment is something that happens frequently, we always say past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior, but that's not true. Frequent past behavior is the best predictor of frequent future behavior. That's all we know for sure. So, your questions have got to somehow get to frequent past behavior. So, if you put an extreme in a question and make it open-ended, like when was the last time a day flew by? Then wherever that brain goes to because you've primed them with a, with a, with an extreme. A day flew by. They go to that moment, and if there's something that's happening frequently for them, it'll be right there. So, that's a great question to get people to start going, huh? Huh? And then in the book, there's a, there's a red thread questionnaire because it's like when I first brought up this idea of red threads bringing love to work, you know, what's a red thread? Well, it's an activity or situation or moment or interaction that you love.

Marcus Buckingham: Oh, I don't know what that is. I'm like, come on, like, write, write three sentences, starting with the phrase I love it when. Boy, try that, Whitney. Try that with anybody you know. Well, I love it when. Just get them to write three. It's amazing how difficult that sentence stem is. And it's amazing how for people initially the first verb after the when is most often something being done to them. I love it when people agree with me. I love it when people praise me. I love it when. But it's not it's not me doing the doing. So, we are amazingly sort of distanced from ourselves and it manifests in us being inarticulate and vague in answering the question or finishing the words. I love it when. And so, inside the book, there's a red thread questionnaire going, All right, all right, all right, all right. Here's ten questions to get you thinking about that which you love. And by the way, you're the only genius. Like, we don't know any of these answers. You know all of them. It's a beautiful thing about love. You're the genius when it comes to love. You're the only genius.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, I have an observation. So, this is so powerful to me of where you just said, I love it when. And so often we talk about when someone is doing something to us. So, we're passive. We're not agentic. And what I think is interesting is that you said very early on in the conversation that when, because you were stammering, you sort of separated yourself from people. And I wonder if without that stammer, without that distance that you felt, would you have gotten to this place where you were so focused on, I love it when I am able to write a book or convey an idea or ask a question of a person that elicits an answer that helps them understand what they really love. I just wonder how all those pieces tie together.

Marcus Buckingham: Well, of course, the, the interaction between genes and environment, non-trivial. There's there's a lot of interaction in the course of someone's life. I don't know that I would see my stammer as a gift per se, in the way that you're describing it. I do know that it meant I had a lot of time by myself and that that time by yourself is used for trying to make sense of the world in a way that if you're just talking, then it probably doesn't.

You're just charging around like a mad prune. But I do, I do know that one of the mistakes that we've made in education and as parents and in the world of work is that we have entered into those projects basically believing that each human is an empty vessel, a tabula rasa, that there is no innate uniqueness. And even though I admire Carol Dweck immensely, the growth versus fixed mindset that if you say to someone, No, no, no, there's a you in there. There's a, there's a unique pattern of synaptic connections that that is only you and leads you to love some things and loathe others, and we don't know why. It leads you, Marcus, to probably be kind of interested in certain things that other people aren't even your brother and sister, and it might be interacted with by your stammer. Yeah, it was probably interacted with by your stammer, but it wasn't created by your stammer. We've got a whole school of psychology. I mean, if you look on Instagram right now, there's a whole flow of basically you are the traumas that happen to you as you grew up and the stories you tell yourself about them.

Marcus Buckingham: So, if you want to know yourself better, tell yourself different stories. And it's like, well, this, yes, there's something to be said for that. But, but what that misses is your traumas obscure you and they might mute you, but they don't create you. You are not your traumas or your reaction to them. You were you before anything happened to you. The clash of the chromosomes that created the unique pattern of synaptic connections that we could see. And you at two years old, those things are integrated with the environment, you interact with the environment. But as any parent with more than one kid knows, I don't care how much my mother would have tried to make me, me, and different than my brother. She wouldn't have known any way how to do it. There's no way she could have created the unique pattern of personality traits and the instincts and the loves that make me, me, and make him, him, even if she'd wanted to. You can't. It's like, what do we know about great parents? They don't write the music. They play the music. And if I came out as a Jazz five piece, my brother came out as a symphony. Well, she could play those things, but she's not going to turn me into a symphony. Sorry to mix my metaphors, but it's, it's like. Yes, the stammer was there, and it was a thing.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Marcus Buckingham: And if there was another universe, Whitney where I didn't have one, like, maybe I would have turned out super different. We'll never know. But that isn't the same as saying it made me, me.

Whitney Johnson: Hmm. Yeah. Absolute fair point. Yeah.

Marcus Buckingham: It's not actually terribly helpful to say that to me because that means that I am empty. And I'm just being filled with stuff. Which means that all the kind of curricula that we could have developed for a nine through 19-year-old to help you wherever you go, there you are. So therefore, who are you when you go wherever you go? Well, we don't, we don't do any of that during that really important time period of middle school and high school. So, our kids are they're trained actually to think about everything. What was your word? Non-agentially. They have no agency. You're just a repository for facts and stuff we'll test you on, or from traumatic experiences that hit you. And that's what made you as though you are a function of your biography. And that's not true.

Whitney Johnson: So, building on this idea of we actually come to this planet as ourselves and yes, we interact with the environment, but as you said, we're not an empty vessel. Let's talk a little bit about feedback and how you say to ignore it, but still respond to the reaction. Say more about that.

Marcus Buckingham: We're living in a world right now that is feedback rich. And some feedback is, is absolutely fine. It's like when you give your, your Yelp review to a restaurant, you're just talking about your reaction to that restaurant. And that's so fine. You are the owner of that reaction. But feedback isn't that. Feedback in the way that I'm talking about it is someone telling you what you're doing right and wrong because they know you better than you because you have blind spots. So, hey, here I am coming in to tell you what I see about you because I have the truth about you. And then the second part of feedback is I'm now going to tell you what to do in order to do it better. So, I don't think that's a stretch to define feedback that way. I'm the other person. I'm going to tell you what you are like and what you're doing because you don't see. And then I'll tell you what to do. Both of those are deeply, deeply, deeply pernicious and wrong and harmful. And the fact that we've got more and more tech tools at work doing more of that for us, and that we have people out there like really respected people whose names I won't mention, saying that we should get better and better and better at both giving it and critically sort of receiving it.

Marcus Buckingham: And that really that's part of sort of growing up is learning how to give and receive critical feedback. Because let's face it, people's intentions are good. So, as long as you tell people your intentions are good, you should tell them where their blindspots are and tell them what to do to fix it. It's like all of that is, is wrong. It's just deeply, psychologically wrong for two reasons. One, we know that human beings are not reliable raters of other human beings. We know, that actually, when I rate you on anything, any quality that you have, if I'm rating, I'm rating you, Whitney, on empathy or strategic thinking or whatever. My ratings reflect me, not you. And we know that because when I rate other people on these same qualities, presumably the ratings should change because I'm looking at different people, but they don't change. My pattern of ratings moves with me. It's called the idiosyncratic rater effect, and it's really strong and it's not unconscious bias. Where I look at you, judge your race or your gender or your age or whatever, and then I'm biased toward it. Although that exists. I'm actually saying when I'm rating you on anything, I don't even see you. I don't really even see you. I am not a reliable and we've known this now for 40 years. Human beings are not reliable raters of other human's attributes.

Marcus Buckingham: We're not. We are only good at rating one thing our own reactions. I can rate if I like that salad, if I like that play, if I like that. But I can, I can rate if I like that book you if I get that book of three stars out of four, you can't come in Whitney and go, well, you're wrong. Because I'm going to go, no, no, no, it was, that's a reaction. I own my reaction, but I don't own the truth about you. I own the truth about my reaction. That's it. So please, let's ditch all these three sixties that ask me as though I'm going to be rating you on all your qualities that you have or with a 360. I Well, don't worry, Marcus, you're sort of, you know, idiosyncratic, but we're going to add five more people so that we take your bad data, your systematically bad data, and we're going to add it to five more pieces of bad data. And at some magical point, it turns into good data about Whitney. That's all wrong. If you have something that's systematically flawed, like a broken thermometer, your thermometer is broken. Then if you have 15 more broken thermometers, it doesn't get you any closer to the real temperature. Humans are broken thermometers when it comes to rating or giving feedback to other people about who they are.

Marcus Buckingham: You don't know who they are, you just know your reaction. And the second part about feedback that's problematic is me telling you what you should do in order to be better at you. Basically, is me saying to you, you would be better at being you if only you were more like me. And that misunderstands what learning is. Learning is not me pouring my information or skills into you. We know from brain science. We know learning is insight. Learning. Whatever learning happens for you, Whitney, happens inside your brain because of some readiness on your part, some attention on your part. I might have created the context for that, which is great, but I'm not telling you what to do because I can't know what to do. So, what every great coach understands, no great coach gives feedback anywhere, ever. What they do share is their reaction. So, for example, if I was trying to help you with, I don't know, this podcast and you said, Marcus, I'd love your feedback, I go, I can't give you any feedback. I'll tell you what my reaction was in that first half hour. I just got a bit lost. And then when you go, well, you shouldn't have been lost because I was very organized. I'm going to go, look, I don't know what you did.

Marcus Buckingham: I'm just telling you; I felt a bit lost. That's what I mean by pay attention to others reaction, because others reaction is completely valid. By which I mean, I mean that in a in a statistical sense. They are reliable raters of their own experience. You don't own that, Whitney. I do. So, if you want to know whether or not your podcast is reaching people, ask them for their reaction. Absolutely. But please don't ask me to tell you what I think your attribute skills or strengths are, because I don't know, and I never will. And please don't ask me to tell you how to be better at this podcast. I can't tell you that. I can just tell you which bits I leant into. Like if the most valuable thing I could ever do to you, Whitney, is go, you know what? And let's say I'm a listener rather than on going that that time that you dove in and that question, that seemed to go nowhere. But you knew that it wasn't going nowhere. It was like, okay, I couldn't I shut everybody up in my house to say, I want to. That's when you had me. If I share that with you. What's amazing about that is you did that. You knew that you were doing that, and you knew how you did it.

Marcus Buckingham: You just didn't necessarily see the massive, beautiful impact of it on me.

Whitney Johnson: Right.

Marcus Buckingham: But that means that any learning will come from within you. It's like going back to your first question, am I surprised by people's reaction to this book? Yeah, but what's cool is now that they're telling me what

their reaction is to the bits that worked. I'm like, Oh! Oh, I know how to do that again, because I did it the first time. So, all of this comes back around to saying right from the get-go, we tell kids really early that we have the we have the right answers and you don't. And feedback in the workplace is part of that same journey. We have the right answers about you, and you don't. And when it comes to neuro physics, we do have the right answers, dear physics student and you don't. And you better read the textbook. But in terms of you, how you learn, what you love, what you, you have all the answers. We just haven't told you how to ask the right questions. So, that in the end is what I was trying to do with the book anyway, is go, let's flip this whole damn thing around and help you become somebody who has self-mastery of all the amazing, beautiful weirdness that's inside of you.

Whitney Johnson: You know what's interesting, too, that you talk a lot about in the book, this idea of pay attention to what you're paying attention to. And reactions are basically telling you, here's what I paid attention to. Here's what caught my attention. Here's what helps me learn. Here's what is gave me that moment of insight. So, there's something interesting around that.

Marcus Buckingham: Oh, completely. I mean, one of the things if I was to, if you and I were to go and do something together for the next ten years, I would say, let's go build a ten-year curriculum for high school or middle school and high school. And let's help kids figure out what they pay attention to. Because you pay attention to what you value. So, if you're instinctively paying attention to something, that's interesting. And you may go, well everyone does. But they don't, not in the same way that you do. So, let's you know, Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*. Good book. But he's wrong, right? There aren't five, there's like 8 billion love languages because everyone's got their own. And so, if we could start teaching people, well, what you pay attention to isn't random. It's part of a pattern and not an environmental pattern. It's a part of a pattern that emanates from you. So, let's help you have a language, a love language, if you will, because your, your loves I mean, whatever the article is, your faith is like God has given you a clue to your love language. And it's anything you find that you love and that you then start to pay attention to. Okay, that starts to demystify you to you. That's cool. Could you do that at nine? Yes, you could. Could you do that all the way up in an increasingly sophisticated way like we do with geometry? So, a person graduates into college and knows how they learn and knows how they add to social relationships, knows how they bounce back from setbacks, stuff that we don't teach anybody but that everybody would want their kid to have.

Whitney Johnson: I think you could write an article of there aren't five languages, there are a billion that would get a headline. People would read that. Have you written that article already?

Marcus Buckingham: No, no, I just.

Whitney Johnson: I think that would be good.

Marcus Buckingham: Yeah. I mean, maybe I should. It's, it's one of those funny things that we are disfluent in our own love language.

Whitney Johnson: That would be a fun article to write.

Marcus Buckingham: And that's what I'm going to try and do that this week.

Whitney Johnson: The other thing that, that caught my attention is I was interviewing a woman the other day by the name of Brooke Romney, and she said she, she wrote a book called *52 Modern Manners for Teens*. And she said, when you meet someone, instead of asking them what you do, say, what do you love to do? And I think this really builds beautifully on what you just said, this idea of the red threads and it takes out the performance piece. It's just. Marcus, what do you love to do?

Marcus Buckingham: You know, it's funny, of all the questions my mentor was, was Don Clifton, for whom the *Clifton Strength Finder* is now known and good that it is. He was both the chief scientist at Gallup, and he was the chairman. But every single interview we did a lot of pre-employment selection interviews. So, we just did millions really in the end of interviews, open-ended questions. And then as we talked about earlier, you code the responses. But the first question in every single interview, whether it was for housekeepers or senior executives, was two, a two parter. Tell me about your previous work, and then people would chat about that. And then the follow up was, what

did you love most about it? So, oh, my gosh. It's so amazingly, by the way, it stumps a lot of people. Well, you mean love or like or what do you mean by that? And so, there's a lot of like, whoa. And we were always taught to go, don't respond. Just go, well, I know what I mean by love, but I'm really interested in what you mean. And you just sort of toss it back. It was called a parry phrase, and so you parry it back and just go, no, what do you love most about it? What a beautiful way to start any introduction to another human. We have to be in awe of them because they're so unbelievably rich and complicated, just like we are. And the best way to be in awe of them is to just start them off talking about something that they love. It's so rich and it's so specific and it's so honoring of each person's uniqueness. It was every single question, every job interview, every no matter where it went after that. It always started with, what was your previous work and what did you love most about it?

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, Marcus, what do you love most about your work?

Marcus Buckingham: Well, in terms of my life, I love it when. I do love it when I'm poring over data to try to find a pattern that's real. I mean, if I was to write one love note, I would start with that one. I love poring over data, going, What's real here? What's real? What's real? I do love, I would call it grinding on a story. I love grinding on a story. Some part of that is writing, as you know. But as you know as well, some part of it is you test it out. You. I love standing on a stage and going, I'm not sure, in the back of my head going, I'm not sure what quite where this story goes, but I'm going to see which bit of it they seem to like. And so, I love grinding. Don Clifton called it polishing pearls. And like any speech, is a string of pearls and you just polish the pearls. So, I love I love it when I'm polishing a pearl. And then, I mean, for me, I love it when I have a chance to answer tons of questions about something that I believe passionately. So, this frankly, time has gone by so fast for me here with you, because you're, you know, you're deeply expert and, and credentialed in your own right. You're asking a bunch of questions that come from your expertise. I would love to keep doing this for the next 2 hours because I love the penetrating angles of attack, triangulation, the consilience, as Edmund Wilson called it, of different disciplines coming together to try to figure out the human condition. Like, I love it when I have a chance to do that. This is a total red thread for me today. So, thank you.

Whitney Johnson: You're welcome. All right. So, final two questions. Did you have any ahas today as you were talking and processing or an idea that you hadn't thought about for a while, that you want to go back and reflect on anything bubble up? And it may be something you said, but it may be a thought that you had that you didn't say.

Marcus Buckingham: The thing that you said at the beginning about starting something and that, and that, and that love is the antidote for fear. So, one of the chapters is called Make Love to Your Fears. Normally with fear we back away from it or we stand up to it or we fight against it, or we say to ourselves, well, what's the worst that could happen? You know, like me with the stammer in the school, and actually one of the things that I should have put in the book that I probably should do moving forward as you're talking, is what are the three questions you could ask yourself that help you realize that your fears are the first messenger of love. They tell you even before you might be prepared to admit it yourself, what you love and what you don't. Which to find thing to say because it's true. Your fear is your life's companion. No one lives with that fear. It's an inhuman thing to live without fear. So, we all live with fear. How do you metabolize fear into something that reveals what you love? Because love is energy, love is nourishment, love is power. We said that your brain on love. That's another thing that was new. I got to think about where to put that.

Whitney Johnson: You've got a number of articles to write here, Marcus.

Marcus Buckingham: Thank you. You've come and give me a whole bunch of work. But, but that's interesting. What are the three questions that could turn fear into? Oh, that's how I metabolize fear.

Whitney Johnson: Any final thoughts to put a bow on our conversation?

Marcus Buckingham: Well other than to say thank you, because this has been a lovely, a lovely hour together. I really appreciate the work that you do, and I appreciate that you've invited me on to be a part of it. I think the most important thing that I could possibly say to anyone who's listening is that whether or not it's apparent to you right now the unique pattern in your brain of what you lean into and what you don't. And where you find yourself soaring and where you find yourself being pulled down. Those things are true. And when we first gave a version of this book

to a whole bunch of 27-year-olds, Whitney, one of the first pieces of reaction that they came back with was, I don't know that I have any loves. I don't know that I have anything in me. I don't believe there's anything there, there, which you could call imposter syndrome. But it was it was more barren than that. It was like I got to be 27. And I have, I don't think I have any confidence that there's any loves in there. So, for me, to your listeners, would simply be to say, no, no, no, you've been blessed with all sources of red threads. There's specific things that you love that you lean into. They're there, and they're part of a pattern that you share with absolutely no one. And that is a gift to the rest of us. It's a big responsibility. Yes, but it's a gift. And you do not want to get to the end of your life and know that you never opened it. Because you didn't believe it was real. You were told it was a lie. Well, if you can disabuse yourself of that, it's not a lie. There's only you in there, and you're the only you that there is. So, please don't get to 95 and turn around and go. I lived a second-rate version of somebody else's life.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you, Marcus.

I loved speaking with Marcus! Here are my takeaways. Number one don't try to do what you love for a living. Marcus says it's almost impossible to measure this or plan for it reliably. But the data shows that you definitely want to try to find love in what you do.

Number two. Your brain on love is more. We know this in our hearts, but Marcus has the data to prove it. When we're doing something we love, we are more focused, more motivated, more prepared, and we remember more details. When your mind is motivated, it feels safer. If you're in the market to build this kind of resilience, Marcus says, do something you love every day. It will literally change your brain chemistry.

Number three. But sometimes that last piece of advice is easier said than done. The things we love can change. The jobs we love can burn us out. If you're stuck, keep Marcus's advice in the back of your mind. Life is putting on a show for us every day. Life is trying to decode us every day. The next spark is out there waiting to be found. A conversation, a hobby, an S Curve jump. A relationship. We just have to be open to every act of life's show.

For more from Marcus Buckingham, you can listen to our prior episode with him, [Episode 112](#). For more on doing something you love, listen to Sumeet Shetty [Episode 205](#) about how his love of books turned into the largest corporate book club in India. And then finally, you may want to listen to play to your distinctive strengths, solo [Episode 120](#). Thank you again to Marcus Buckingham for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening. Thank you to our producer Matt Silverman, audio editor Whitney Jobe, production assistant Stephanie Brummel and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.