

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 333: Sam Horn

In 1984, the world was introduced to the first Macintosh computer in a Super Bowl ad that would go on to make headlines in a dark room full of bald men all staring at a man on a screen. One woman dressed in bright orange and white runs into the room and throws a sledgehammer through the screen like an Olympic event for a fan. On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh and you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984.

Attention is the real currency of all advertising. It's how many seconds they can keep your eyes glued on whatever billboard or TV ad is in front of you at that moment. And then there's the science of why exactly it caught your attention in the first place. It could be a rhyme, melody or both. Advertisers represent this fascinating intersection of business and psychology using that right brain creative thinking. So today we want to find out what we can glean from this unique industry. How can we better communicate our message? Joining me today is Sam Horn, CEO and founder of the Intrigue Agency, where she helps brands craft their communication. She's also an author focusing on how we can navigate conflict in our everyday lives, including her book, *Tung Fu* and the latest *Talking on Eggshells*. I hope you enjoy and as always, thank you for listening.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Sam, we usually ask for a formative story right off the bat, but we actually found one of yours already. The Cuyama branch of the Santa Maria Public Library.

**Sam Horn:** Oh.

**Whitney Johnson:** Can you put us inside of that library? What did it smell like? Sound like? Who was the librarian and what book did you check out?

**Sam Horn:** Oh, what a fabulous question. Whitney And. And I love this because a library's changed my life. So I am in a very small town. More horses and people. In fact, I rode my Palomino Joe to the new Cuyama branch of the Santa Maria Library in Southern California. Now, Joe had two places he had run and he trot. He never walked. He never loped. It was like all out, you know, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

So I ride to the library. I have my backpack on. I tie Joe up to a tree. I walk in. We're talking about a one room library. Mrs. Royce, who was probably in her 70s, was the librarian. And I walk over and I pick a new book from my favorite series, The Black Stallion series by Walter Farley. And those books gave me a window on the world beyond our mountain Valley Valley. And they put the light in my eyes about someday I was going to have an adventurous life like the young character did in that series.

**Whitney Johnson:** It's interesting because your work at the Intrigue agency is centered on the new an idea. So eye poppingly original that well, it generates a good bit of intrigue for a company. So it's interesting to me that what was what already had been written has been so formative for you.

**Sam Horn:** Whitney You're an author, you know that actually, that's the magic of books. It's not about what was. It comes alive on the page and it and it prompts our imagination. So I'm not reading something that was written ten years ago or 20 years ago. It is present in my mind and I'm experiencing it and I'm riffing off it just like a pianist riffs off chords to make new music. When we read books, we riff off the stories and we make new worlds.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, that's so beautiful. So the book was written, but in the moment that you're reading it, you are creating with it. And as you said, you're creating a new world.

**Sam Horn:** See Whitney, I know you have a global audience, and let's talk about how books like Tung Fu is actually the National Public Library in China said it was the most checked out book in 2018. That's almost 20 years after it was first written. You know, these the I'm fortunate you're fortunate. Our work is global in that it is universally relevant, whether it's in Russia or whether it's in Saudi Arabia or Iran or China or Japan. And I think once again, the reason is, is that when we share true first person stories about walking into a room and pitching our startup or negotiating for a contract or a job or walking into a tough meeting, when we share an experience, and especially when we show the shift of what to say, that actually gets a yes about what to say when someone's a naysayer, what to say when someone is resistant or we're at an impasse, then it doesn't matter where you are in the world. If you relate to that example, then you can apply it in your own circumstances. And in that way we set up this ripple effect of impact.

**Whitney Johnson:** You mentioned the book Tung Fu. What's that book about?

**Sam Horn:** How to deal with difficult people without becoming one ourselves? All right. And isn't it ironic? I mean, we're taught math and science and history. We're not taught what to do when people complain. We're not taught what to do when someone blames us for something, that's not our fault. So I wrote that book. So it is what to say when we don't know what to say in the challenging situations we face every day?

**Whitney Johnson:** It's interesting. So we're going to talk more about this in a minute. But it sounds like in many respects, your current book, *Talking on Eggshells*, is a sequel to that book. Everything that you've learned in the intervening 20 years.

**Sam Horn:** That's you just said it. Whitney It's that, you know, I wrote it. Oh my goodness. This is aging me. Whitney, I wrote that before, like social media, you know? So there's no stories in there about cyberbullying. There's no stories in there about Zoom meetings, you know, that go on infinitely ad infinitum. And so I wanted to update it. However, I also wanted to introduce new ideas that I hadn't even thought of back then. In fact, one of the biggest ideas of the book is, is based on your work. You know, you talk about *Disrupt Yourself*. And the goal of this book is to be a pattern. Interrupt is Elvis said, "When things go wrong, don't go with them." We may agree with that. How do we do it? And so this book is how you know, when things are going wrong, how we can be the pattern, interrupt and be a force for good.

**Whitney Johnson:** So. What's a conversation that you had recently, if you'd like to share, where you felt like you just couldn't say anything, right? That you did need that pattern Interrupt.

**Sam Horn:** Oh, what a great question. Okay. Um, well, I. I know that that with your community, we both talk about professional situations and personal situations, so I'll use a personal situation. And then it works, actually at work and at home and online and in public. So my son came to visit me in Austin, Texas. And so we I live on a stream trail. And so we went out for a hike on the stream trail and I was enjoying every minute. It was a hot summer day, though. So on the way back, one of the kids started whining, It's hot, I'm tired. How much longer have you ever witnessed her that her experience at Whitney?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes.

**Sam Horn:** Okay.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thought it was almost a rhetorical question. Of course I have basic rhetorical question.

**Sam Horn:** If we're a parent, we've been around kids. We've experienced that now over. You know, it's easy to be reactive. It's easy to say stop whining. It's easy to say, you know, hurry or stop lagging behind all of those things. They don't help. They hurt. Thank heaven my son did a pattern interrupt is that he stopped and he looked at them and first he said, I have a question for you, which, by the way, is a pattern interrupt if people are complaining or whining or whatever and we talk over them, they'll just get louder, Right? So when we say I have a question, it stops it and it shifts it in that moment. Now they're listening. What *Curious Eyes Up* gets him out of that bad mood. Then he said, How fast can you run? Slow, fast, medium, fast. A really, really fast. I'll race you. And he took off. Guess who took off after them? Whitney. Guess who? 60s

later was animated, energized, having fun. It was. It was one of the best pattern interrupts. So see you said, when was I? I would not have done that in that moment. Whitney He did. And I learned from his example.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. What's your son's name? So we can give him a shout out.

**Sam Horn:** Tom Horne and mission Control at Johnson Space Center.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm, so he's had to interrupt a pattern once or twice, no doubt.

**Sam Horn:** In fact, can I tell another quick story about Tom? And I think it's an international example. I think that everyone will be able to think about whether they're walking into a high stakes communication. Sound good?

**Whitney Johnson:** Please. Okay.

**Sam Horn:** I had an opportunity to see Elon Musk at the National Press Club, so I called Tom. I said, Tom, if I have a chance to ask him a question, what should I ask? And he said, Mom, my job is safe because I'm with the International Space Station. But everyone that was with the space shuttle has been laid off and they're all applying to space. Ask Elon. You know what they can say that will help them get an interview or land a job. I had an opportunity to ask him that. Whitney, he said the most brilliant one sentence response I've ever heard. You ready?

**Whitney Johnson:** I am ready.

**Sam Horn:** Don't tell me about the positions you've held. Tell me about the problems you've solved.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, it's not a lovely shift from how, instead of thinking why we want this job, why we would be the best person for the contract, why we deserve this money? No, no, no, no. What's their pin? What are their priorities? Their interest and their needs? And how can we address them? So they're thinking, Sounds good. Yeah. How do I put a pin in it?

**Sam Horn:** Well said.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. I'd like to drill down on this a little bit more and ask you some specific questions or conversations where there are a lot of eggshells. What do you do when you're pressured to say yes? You feel pressured to say yes, especially with people in your professional network? What does that conversation look like?

**Sam Horn:** First, what it is, you know, the old scale of justice, right? The lady with the plates on both hands and so forth. Often, especially if we're people pleaser, especially if we have a habit of going along to get along or giving in to hopefully get approval or something like that. If someone pressures us, we cave and we say, yes, we go along, okay, we acquiesce. Well, if we picture the lady, I believe the success of any relationship, whether it's personal or professional, depends on whether the scale of needs is kept in balance. So we look at the history with this person, whether this person is our boss, whether it's like a VIP client, whether it's our partner, it's like if we always say, yes, if we've given in and gone along a lot, then the needs are out of balance. That is not a functional relationship. There's a lot of resentment going on here because it's unfair, it's not equitable. So in that situation, it is not wrong for us to say no, It is right because we're taking responsibility for bringing the scale back in balance. That's a healthy adult who does that correct, to make the relationship equitable so it's sustainable. So at that point, here's exactly what we say. We use their name because when we start with Bob or when we start with Julio, or when we start with Parisa or something like that, we're personalizing the conversation and it usually causes a pause. When people hear their name, it causes a pause.

**Sam Horn:** Then we paraphrase some appreciation for the offer. I'm so glad you're giving me this opportunity. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I understand how important this is to you because if we just give in an abrupt no, it's like slamming a verbal door in their face, right? So we say something about the nature of their request, and then we bridge with the word. And, you know, John Mackey, the founder of Whole Foods, said this book is the course correct for today's cancel culture. And there's one little three letter word that cancels out what people said. But it's like, I know it's important to you, but I realize you put a lot of time and effort in this. But, you know, I know that that that that you, you know, are pushing to have this happen, but that cancels it out use the word and then we mention other commitments we mentioned you know you know you've been asked to volunteer. I understand that this is a valuable program and that you're really serving your community. And I've made a commitment to my family to be home on weeknights so that I can start spending more time with them. I think that's a gracious way to bring the needs back in balance. Name, you know, paraphrase the value or the importance of their request bridge with. And then refer to another commitment that prevents us from going along with this one.

**Whitney Johnson:** So I love that. And I'm wondering, as I'm hearing you speak. How do we make sure? Because in my mind I might think it's imbalanced and in their mind they might think it's imbalanced, but imbalanced in their or, you know, away from that person's face. Do you see what I'm saying? Like we how do we make sure that we're being accurate in our assessing whether or not it's imbalanced? I don't know the answer to that question, but maybe you've thought about that.

**Sam Horn:** I see Whitney! I love your questions are so incisive and they take us deeper because we want to be real life here. This is not Pollyanna. This is not like, oh, say this and everything's going to be perfect. It's complex, isn't it? So I believe one way to tell if something is unbalanced is about time. Richard Branson said

time is the new money. And I think that time is the new trust. And I think it gives us a tangible way to assess whether the needs being met or out of balance. I'll give you a quick example. There was a college counselor and she said, Sam, many of the kids at our college are away from home for the first time. They're lonely, they're confused. Sometimes they're socially awkward, they're intimidated. And so I've given a number of them my home phone number. Uh Whitney. You know the rest of that story, don't you? They call. And so over time, it's like her husband is complaining because she's on the phone at night. She's on the phone on weekends. Now look at the scale. Is she serving her students? Absolutely. She's compassionate. She cares. She's thinking about them. Whitney Think about the time. Is she spending time with her husband? No. Is she spending time on her health? No. Is she spending time on her own interest or need to re-energize over the weekend? No. So do you see it's a tangible metric that shows that, yes, her compassion, her caring for these young people is honorable. However, she is, in a way disrespecting the other people and priorities in her life. And once again, it's not rude of her. It's not uncaring of her to bring the needs back into balance. She is taking responsibility for her own mental and physical health.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, let's do another one. Holding people accountable. You've got someone who works for you or with you. Sometimes that's even harder. Yeah, but you can choose. What does a conversation look like when you're walking on eggshells around accountability?

**Sam Horn:** Hey, let's use a common situation. I bet everyone that's listening to this or watching this has an employee, has a committee member, has a coworker who is late, who shows up late for things, late for meetings, late for whatever. And here is the question. Often they have a lot of excuses or good reasons. Oh, there was an emergency. Oh, you know, my car broke down. Oh, I didn't get the message until late. Here's the thing. Chuck Yeager, who is the first individual to break the sound barrier, said "At the moment of truth, there are either reasons or results." So see if someone is mis performing, is not performing up to par, is dropping the ball on task, is coming in consistently late. They have lots of reasons. The company, our team, our committee is not getting results. It's time for us to intervene and do a pattern. Interrupt. Right. The first question we ask ourselves, because there's actually a system for this in the book, number one, were the expectations for this behavior outlined at the outset? Whitney, you know, in many employee orientations, they never talk about the importance of being on time or they don't have a policy about gossip or bad mouthing. So a lot of times it's like, whoa, we never talked about this.

There was no expectation ever explicitly expressed. Okay, if that's not if that's the case, then the next case is we need to pull a mea culpa. Mea culpa is Latin for my fault, right. Because see, if we just try and hold this person accountable, often they'll say, hey, you know, I've been doing it for months and you never said anything. Why now? They will actually resent us even if we're in the right, because they're feeling entitled because they've been doing it wrong and no one said anything. So that's why if we say, you know what, it's our fault, we never explicitly expressed this in the employee interview or this has been not happening now for weeks or months and we never said anything. You ready now for the big pattern interrupt phrase?

Things are going to be different from now on. And then we say starting as of and guess what? It's not starting as of now because if someone is coming in late, they may have daycare issues, they may have carpool issues, they may have public transportation issues. Right. They may have good reasons, so to speak. So we put a date out like in, you know, a week, sometimes even two weeks, starting as of this date.

We use the words accountable. You will be held accountable for the policies of our organization or for the expectations of this committee. You know, and that includes now, you know, two more things at the end. Guess what we do not do? We do not say, do you understand? Because guess what? They may go. They may not. That's not an agreement, Whitney, you know. Right. We say, what are your ex what are what is your understanding of our agreement? I'm going to say it again because this works with kids too. What is your understanding of our agreement? And they have to say it. And this is an HR situation. It's documented, right? They have to sign something. They have to write it out. So we have a written document, not just a verbal agreement. And then guess what? One last thing. We schedule a follow up. We say we're going to get back together again in four weeks to review this so they know it's not just going to go away. There's a date on the calendar where we're going to revisit this to hold them accountable for improved performance.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm, so you've brought up a lot of quotes from famous people and they're so on point. I'm wondering how do quotes or quotations form part of the process of walking on eggshells.

**Sam Horn:** I love your questions, Whitney. Here is one of my favorite quotes and then the rationale behind it. Right? Is that I know you have a lot of participants and community members in India and from around the world, and I believe I have a responsibility to honor the diverse thinking from cultures around the world. So when I quote someone, I'm honoring their contribution to our humanity. And for example, Desmond Tutu said, we've got to stop pulling people out of the river. We've got to go upstream and find out where they're falling in, Whitney. That's one of the clearest explanations of reactive versus proactive thinking. And this this book is all about proactive thinking. It's like instead of reacting, which almost always makes something worse, someone yells at us, we yell back, No, no, no. Why are they yelling? What is causing them to be so upset? How can I fix this at the source and prevent it from happening again instead of just adding to what goes wrong? By the way, you want a quick example of that?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes, please.

**Sam Horn:** Okay. It is my 84-year-old Aunt Kate volunteers at a hospital five days a week. She drives to the hospital to volunteer. And she did this even during Covid. And I asked what it was like. She said one word stressful. And I said, "Well, think of a stressful situation." She didn't even have to think about it. She said a woman had run into the E.R. holding up her phone, saying, "My daughter was in an accident. She just texted me, She's in the E.R. I need to get in and see her." Well, Kate called the E.R. Someone was already

with the daughter. Now, you may remember the policies during Covid. It's no visitors per patient or one visitor per patient. Kate had to tell the mother that she couldn't get in to see the daughter. Now the mother loses it. She's screaming. She's sobbing. Now, if we're going to juxtapose this over on the left, Kate was impatient. She was thinking, how rude, why are you blaming me? I didn't do this. You know, I can't change the policy. And that's reactive. Instead, she used four words. Ready? How would I feel? How would I feel if that was my daughter in the E.R. and I couldn't get in to see her? It moved her from impatience to empathy, from contempt to compassion, and it gave her the incentive. Instead of saying, there's nothing I can do to. What is something I can do? She called the E.R. back. She said, "Who is with the daughter?" It was the Uber driver who had brought the young woman in. Kay was able to explain the situation, thank him. He left and the mother was able to get with the daughter. Isn't that an incredible situation of instead of just nothing I can do? What if there's something I can do? And it transformed the entire situation for all involved.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's a beautiful story. And it really hits me because I think the power in that. When you said it, but I want to underscore it is that your aunt in that moment was feeling attacked. Was feeling attacked. And so it took a tremendous presence of mind and heart to be able to stop. And ask that question, "How would I feel?" But she had to do something before that, which was. This isn't about me. There was something that had to happen for her. It showed great emotional maturity to be able to do that.

**Sam Horn:** Hey, Whitney. I think this is part of the river that runs through your work when you're talking about disrupting. Of course, Socrates said that an unexamined life is not worth living. And what your work is about and some of my work as well is like, folks, let's examine the way we're showing up. Is it helping or is it hurting me? Is it creating cooperation or is it creating conflict? And if there are things that we can do and say in the moment that actually help us create a rising tide community or help us choose to collaborate with someone instead of not speak to them, why wouldn't we do that?

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Have one more for you. How do you show up and speak up when you're afraid?

**Sam Horn:** Oh, well, once again, a great question. It's I'm going to tell the story of Candy Lightner, who is actually the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. And you may remember that her daughter was killed by a drunk driver on the way to prom. And Candy spiraled into depression over her grief and loss. And months later, she realized that is not going to bring her daughter back. And so she decided to start this organization. Well, her very first public event, there were 1000 people in the audience. She standing in the back wings with a friend and her knees are knocking. And she says to her friend, I think I'm going to faint. You know, I didn't sign up for this. And she was very afraid. And her friend went over to her purse and came back, and she held up some keys and she said, Candy, if as a result of speaking, one person out in that audience chooses to hand over their keys instead of drive drunk, will it be worth it? And so Candy spoke that day. And it was because I believe if we're afraid, let's focus on this opportunity to make a



difference with our message is that instead of thinking, what if my mind goes blank? What if I forget what I'm going to say? What if I look 10 pounds overweight or whatever? That's not what we want to think about. If we center ourselves in our mission, if we center ourselves in how grateful we are for this opportunity to make a difference with people, that gives us a purpose, that overcomes our nerves in a way that we're speaking for good.

**Whitney Johnson:** You started to touch on this notion of the physical symptoms of anxiety during a difficult conversation so your heart can be pounding the wrenching feeling in your gut, a swelling behind your eyes. You might have a number of verbal tricks of things. Okay, here's my script. Here's what I would say. Here's how I would navigate the situation. But what do we do about our bodies?

**Sam Horn:** Well, I think we've all heard about Amy Cuddy and superhero and so forth. Good for her. I think that that works. So a quick 62nd story. And then I think something that also works is that I had an opportunity to speak at Inc 500. So there's Seth Godin, there's Tim Ferriss, there's Tom Peters, there's Jim Collins. Et cetera. And it was an incredible morning. They went from 9 to 12 without a break. It was really kind of an interesting programming decision. Anyway, so a woman walked out and by the way, she was the head of a multi-billion dollar company. For whatever reason that day, she walked out to the center of the stage. She had her hands in a fig leaf position. She was standing with her feet very close together, and she started with a very querulous voice. She said, I was talking with my granddaughters yesterday and they were telling me with this upward valley girl inflection Whitney, it was sad to see the laptops shut up. People started walking out and now she's a brilliant woman who has made a real difference. It's just that her whole-body language was not commanding authority or respect. So the first thing I suggest we do is you're an athlete. We put our feet shoulder width apart. Now, ladies, we've been taught to keep our legs together, and that's a whole nother story. However, when we're speaking, guess what? If we stand with our feet together, often we're tipsy, we're off balance. We look and feel like we're a pushover. Think about that language, right? We're a pushover. We're off balance. You know, we're not centered or grounded.

**Sam Horn:** As soon as we put our feet shoulder width apart now, like an athlete, guess what? Now I'm grounded. Even we bend a little bit down in our knees. Now we're nimble. Now we can respond to the situation and react in the moment instead of like being locked into place. Next thing, basketball hands, basketball hands. Because if we clasp our hands now, we're locked in. We're actually rigid. We're actually creating tension in our shoulders when we have basketball hands. Our hands now can naturally, organically. If I talk about shoveling snow, look what happens. I didn't think I am going to move my hands and, you know, pretend I'm no, your hands will naturally gesture if you have this. And furthermore, if you want people's attention now, you spread your arms out, especially if you're on a big stage. And now we never we never point like this, right? No, Our hands are like this in an offering. And then when we move out, I'll move out in the screen. We are welcoming the attention. We are receiving the intelligence in the room. It's a very inclusive gesture. And when we move outside of our plane of their body, if we keep our hands inside

the plane of the body, our gestures become repetitive and a repetitive gesture gets annoying. Right? Uh, move our hands out. And if we want to make a point, move one hand up so that we call people up. And. And those, I think, are tangible ways to be physically present and powerful in a way that is congruent and that commands attention and respect.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So you just wrote a book about talking to other people. So how's this conversation going? How are we doing?

**Sam Horn:** Oh, you know, I'm loving it. And one of the reasons why is because you have honored me by doing your homework. You know, it's amazing to me how many people will walk into a high stakes situation and wing it. Oh, let's not wing it, folks. If we have a job or a contract or an important agreement on the table, let's do what Whitney did is like increase our likelihood of getting a yes. And now can I tell a quick story about the power of like of what I call W5? Okay, what's the situation? What's an action I want people to take? What's a change I want them to make Who is in the room and what is their mood? Why will they say no? Where and when will this happen? If this is an international zoom call, we've got people on different time zones. Let's address that. Right. Why will it be an ROI for them? What are three reasons? This is going to save them time, make them money, you know, give them a competitive edge. Give them increase their market share. Why will it be an ROI for me? We never walk into a situation with just one outcome in mind because they're going to. If we see early on writing on the wall, they're saying, no, we have nowhere to go. No three have three options that are always amenable to us. It gives us that flexibility to pivot in the moment. So do we still have time for that story?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes, we do.

**Sam Horn:** I had an opportunity to do some training for the Learning Channel of Cisco. This is the top 435 executives in Cisco. And now one of them called me on a Wednesday. He was having his all hands meeting on a Friday. And I asked him, what time is it? He said 4:00 on a Friday afternoon. I said, they're not even going to be listening. They're going to have one foot out the door. So those were the first words out of his mouth. He pointed to his watch and he said, I can only imagine, by the way, we do not say, I know what you're thinking. That's presumptuous. Right? That's off putting. Instead, we say, I can only imagine Now it gives them space to like, oh my goodness, he's reading my mind. And so I can only imagine you're thinking it's 4:00 on a Friday afternoon and these things normally take two hours and that's going to put you in the middle of rush hour traffic. I promise you. We're going to bring this in at 45 minutes. Rock and roll. Let's go. He won over the room in the first 20s because he anticipated their mood, why they would be resistant. He addressed it. And if you address it, you put yourself on the same side instead of side against side.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So you have alluded to this, but I want to state it more specifically, which is you are a public speaker. You didn't allude you have said you are a public speaker and a coach in the world of stepping onto that scary fluorescent stage and owning it.

**Sam Horn:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'm wondering, what was your high school valedictorian speech about?

**Sam Horn:** Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Oh, Whitney, Whitney. You have read the book? Okay. I have mentioned I grew up in a very small town, so when I was elected valedictorian of my graduating class. Big deal. Small town, right? So I put together my little bird leaving the nest, flying out of the nest homily. Right. And I gave it to my dad, and I asked what he thought. And now he knew I wanted honest feedback. So he said it was an okay talk. He said, I just didn't hear anything I haven't heard before. And I said, Well, Dad, there's nothing new under the sun. He said, Of course there is. He said, "You know what the definition of original is? If we haven't heard it before, it's original." And that really started me on a lifelong mission to hopefully write and speak about things people have not heard before. So it's not a platitude or cliché. Smart, talented people are not thinking, you're wasting my time. That's obvious, right? No. What's a first person real life example they have not heard before? That illustrates this? What's a framework? You know, words to lose and words to use that distills this into something they can post by their laptop or on their desk. And I think Whitney you do this as well. When we hold ourselves accountable for crafting something that adds value and that's applicable and that's original. Now we're, we're, we're Pablo Picasso in our world, he said the purpose of life is to find your gifts. The meaning is to give them away. We get to do that with our work, don't we?

**Whitney Johnson:** It's beautiful. All right. So let's talk about your work, the intrigue agency. How does it work start to finish, and how does your collaboration with your clients work?

**Sam Horn:** Oh, thank you for asking. It is I got the Holy Trinity. I get to speak, write and consult. So when I speak, I speak for organizations like Accenture and Intel and Oracle, and it's often on whether it's on Talking on Eggshells or Tung Fu or how to speak in high stakes situations. And when I write, I get to write books and blogs, hopefully about topics that really can make a tangible difference in our personal and professional life, whether it's, um, well, let's see, I've mentioned some. So I wrote a book called Concentrate that Stephen Covey said was the best book he ever saw in Focus. Our mutual friend Dan Pink said that Got Your Attention was the best book he ever saw on presenting and persuading and pitching. And then when I consult, often people come to me and they have something they care about. Ted Fellows or Richard Branson's new now leaders. They have a cause. They have an idea, they have a project or a company. And at this point, sometimes it's info obesity. Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah. How can they in 60s open it up in a way that they get people's. Brows up. How can they have a real life story that uses the empathy telescope so other people care about it the way they care about it? How can they wrap up in the final 60s so people

are actually motivated to take action? So one of the great joys of my life is helping individuals do that for something they care about.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Sam, how do you measure intrigue? How do you measure genuine interest?

**Sam Horn:** Oh, okay. Another 60s story, by the way. Whitney. We do this on purpose. You know, Brené Brown said that stories are just data with soul, right? You know, we may be brilliant, and if we're talking too technically, or if we're getting into the weeds of an explanation, guess what? People's eyebrows are crunched up, right? When people's eyebrows are crunched up. Right now, everyone watching, listening, just crunch up your eyebrows. Do you feel confused? Like you don't get it Confused? People don't say yes. Now, if our eyebrows are neutral, it means we're unmoved or we've had Botox. Now, if the eyebrows are up or do you feel intrigued? Curious like you want to know more. That means we got what we care about in their mental door. And I learned this at the Maui Writers Conference and people had flown in from around the world. They could pitch their screenplay to Ron Howard. They could pitch their novel to the head of Simon and Schuster. And they had ten minutes. And often they would start talking because they had rehearsed their speech, right. And they would not stop. And I saw the decision makers eyebrows either crunched up because they didn't get it or then crunched up because they were annoyed because the person was not reading their face and realized it was time to put a sock in it. Time to give them an opportunity to ask a question so they could run the show.

**Whitney Johnson:** The eyebrow test.

**Sam Horn:** The eyebrow test.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So attention spans are dropping. We're spending five or 10s, if that, on every video in our feed before we keep scrolling. How has your agency adapted to this world?

**Sam Horn:** I believe in repeatable, retweetable soundbites, and I believe that if we craft a phrase that pays. Not only do people instantly get it because they can repeat it in the moment, that it will actually resonate, reverberate and it takes our work viral. So you want like three quick ways to do this. So everyone listening and watching can think about what's a message I want to connect? How can I craft a repeatable, retweetable hook, line and sinker that pops it out of the pack? Sound good?

**Whitney Johnson:** Sounds good.

**Sam Horn:** Okay. Write down on your notes if you're taking notes. A i r a is for alliteration. If I say bed, toilet and shower, if I say best purchase, if I say Duncan croissants kind of clunky, right? No alliteration is when words start with the same sound. It makes us instantly eloquent. It makes our language lyrical. Now I

know people speak many different languages. This works in your language, whatever it is. So when I say Bed, Bath and Beyond, Dunkin Donuts, Rolls Royce, Best Buy, all of a sudden it's harmonious. It's melodious to our ears. We're much more likely to remember it. Quick story around the world, people drink coffee or tea and they probably put those cardboard insulating sleeves around it. It's hard to build a business around an unpronounceable name. So Jay Sorensen didn't call those cardboard insulating sleeves. You know what he called them? Java jackets. He cornered the market in two words Whitney. This is not wordplay. This is word profit. Wherever we are in the world, if we're naming something, whether it's a blog or a product or a company, if we make it alliterative, we are dramatically increasing the likelihood. Jay Sorensen said people who meant to call our competitors call us because they can't remember the competitor's name. So I is iambic meter. When you put it in a beat, you make it easy to repeat. So once again, this is not wordplay. This is word profit, because I know we have a lot of executives and entrepreneurs on the call. Las Vegas said that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas has driven more than \$1 billion of revenue to that city. That's what happens when you put it in a beat. You make it easy to repeat. Now R is for rhyme. Rhyme is sublime because it's remembered over time. Now, once again, this is not petty. It's pivotal. The US government was very concerned about injuries and fatalities in car accidents, so they mounted a multi-million-dollar public service campaign called Buckle Up for Safety. Clunky, right? Nothing changed. Those words didn't land. They went back to the drawing board and this time they came up with "Click it or ticket. Guess what? Compliance went up. Injuries and fatalities went down. They actually saved lives by crafting a phrase that you can say in seconds that saves lives. That's the importance of crafting communication. A phrase that pays that is a rally cry that's related to remembered. And then people repeat it with others and they become brand ambassadors for your message.

**Whitney Johnson:** So as we start to wrap up, let's head over to my eggshells for a minute and ask you to tell us about a new S-curve that you've jumped to recently. What's something new that you're doing and how does it feel?

**Sam Horn:** Okay. Well, you already know that. What a great question, Whitney. So --

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you.

**Sam Horn:** Okay. You know, Whitney, I'm on book tour right now. You're, you know, you've been on book tours. Whitney, you know, the noise out there is about metrics. How many books have you sold is often the first question. It's like, did you know are you New York Times best seller or Wall Street Journal bestseller, you know, whatever. And if you believe the world, then what writing a book is about is how many copies the book has sold. And the S curve that I've jumped is return. You remember the Elvis song Return to Sender Address Unknown. Guess what? I have returned to sender Address home. What really matters are the people we get to connect with and reconnect with who tell us that how they're using the book that tell us that they used an idea from the book to prevent something from going wrong. A woman named Elisa

Song L is a song. She'd be a great interview for you. Whitney is the founder of Healthy Kids. Happy Kids. She wrote me yesterday that she is reading, talking on eggshells with her kids as part of their bedtime storytime. And she said, Sam, we have had conversations we never would have had otherwise because I can read him a children's book. However, we were talking about bullies in your book, and my daughter said, that happened to me. And she said, really? What happened? And the book is serving as a catalyst. I put on a book event here in Reston, Virginia, yesterday. My boss from ready for this 40 years ago was in that event. And so what a joy. And so the S-curve I've jumped is E.E. Cummings said in a world that is trying all day, every day to turn you into someone else, it's the hardest fight you'll ever fight and not stop fighting. The S-curve. Is that just beautiful?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, you brought me to tears.

**Sam Horn:** It's beautiful, Whitney. Because you know this. You're in that world about, you know. Are you. You know this, this. This. Numbers, metrics return to center What matters Whitney. We've known each other for years. And look at this lovely opportunity to reconnect and have this conversation. The joy of this, the receiving of the profusion of blessings over this. That's what matters.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you. This was an absolute pleasure. I enjoyed the book, as you know, and we just look forward to continuing to be in touch.

**Sam Horn:** Thank you, Whitney. I just -- so this is a one plus one equals 11. So thank you so much.

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You know, I was thinking about the Cuyahoga Library, where Sam would tie up Palomino Joe outside and read stories of the Daring West. And then I was thinking about Sam's mental library of quotes and quotes and quotes. Everyone from Desmond Tutu to Elvis. Isn't that exactly what makes her so successful? Her intimate knowledge of the human psyche. These quotes stick around and resonate for a reason. Like Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, there's something about these pithy statements that rings true in the human experience. Sam's Librarian of Humanity. She helps us find the book we're looking for, whether that's navigating conflict or getting your message across. Don't know. Ask a librarian. She knows where just the right acronym or anecdote can come in handy. Or she can show you the trailhead for where you need to head next. Sam is what we can firmly call a scholar of the human condition, where humans focus their attention, how we talk and how we interact. We covered so much. It's probably worth it to listen to this episode not just once, but twice. Whether you're advertising the next PTA bake sale or figuring out how to tell your CEO you're leaving. There's something here for all of us, no matter what we're facing. For more on exploring the limits and depths of the human psyche, there's my talk with Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman. **Episode 254**. There's also Shahzad Shamim. **Episode 323**. He wholeheartedly agrees with Sam that just being a human day in and day out is the hardest thing we do. And for more on crafting the perfect pitch, there's Dan Rome **Episode 249**. Thank you again to Sam and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit

subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. Thank you to our producer, Alexander Turk, production assistant Ange Harris, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.