

# DISRUPT YOURSELF

# PODCAST

## EPISODE 335: JAYSHREE SETH

What does it mean to advocate for something? Is it to make sure that thing, whatever it is, happens? Is it to make sure that your audience understands this, something inside and out? Is it a catchy slogan and or eye-popping advertising? It's all those things and more. We all know what it's like to give a nervous presentation, but I want to adjust the question a bit. What does it mean to advocate for someone, specifically yourself?

To learn more about it, I wanted to bring in an expert. Jayshree Sett is the chief science advocate at 3M. Her role involves clearing away the brush and undergrowth of misinformation to show the world that science is not a scary monolith and to show us that we're all scientists in our own way. But Jayshree couldn't have found herself in this unique role. Really, no other chief science advocates exist without the experience of advocating for herself. I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** Jayshree, welcome. Very happy to have you.

**Jayshree Seth:** Thank you, Whitney. Thanks for having me.

**Whitney Johnson:** I noticed in another interview that you had said, quote unquote, you snuck in the back door of 3Meters through their summer internship program. And today you are 3M's chief science advocate. As far as formative experiences go, do you still feel like you snuck through?

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, to be honest, I've had that feeling many times that I've entered through the back door. And what I mean is that it isn't, you know, the normal route or typical way of how it happens. And I've realized it really doesn't matter how you got there. The important thing is you did and what you're going to do about it. So when I got a job at 3 a.m., I didn't go through the formal, you know, presentations and rounds of interviews and all that. I just attended an open house, one of the divisions at 3 a.m. they held for summer interns who were, you know, doing a good job, close to graduation, talked to a few folks, explain what I was doing. And suddenly I had two job offers from that division. And how it typically works is, okay, we need somebody, let's say, in polymer science, let's reach out to the top schools, let's interview a polymer person. And you know, back then 3M did not recruit from my school. So I was lucky that I was on the campus as an intern. I did a good job, and I was very excited to talk about it. So that was lesson one Show

up, do good work and talk about it. You know, second reason I wasn't qualified to do what I was hired to do. My PhD was in developing diamond-like durable coatings that would make, you know, tools and other things last longer. And I got hired Whitney to work on tapes to keep disposable diapers on weekly babies. So I went from durable to disposable, from diamonds to diapers, despite no knowledge of the area.

**Jayshree Seth:** And I joked I'd never seen a diamond and I'd never seen a diaper. But I was inspired by the context of the work, and I knew that the content will follow and it always does when you're inspired. And that is the key to find the context, to inspire yourself, reframe, reframe, reframe. So a third reason I can give you another reason why I thought I came through the back door is because PhD students typically don't do internships. You rarely see them. It's always the undergrads or the masters, if that. And most advisors want their students to focus on the research during summer. But my PhD advisor was very much a proponent of practical experience, and he was a real visionary and he said, No, go, this is good for you. And that really changed my life. So I've tried to pay that forward. You know, you have to let people go and grow. And I love that you used the word formative because there are so many lessons in there. And looking back, it was a formative experience that you go through the back door, but you still enter, you still got in and it's up to you what you make of it. So that's kind of really shaped my thinking. I look at things as learning opportunities. I look at them as stepping stones and in Whitney Joe speak, it helps to mentally prepare to jump from one s-curve to the other because you've done it before.

**Whitney Johnson:** So how did you make your way from India to get your master's here in the United States?

**Jayshree Seth:** Just applied? You know, I was getting all these questions from my classmates, "Are you applying? Are you applying?" And I'm like, "Why are you interested in knowing that?" You know, well, if you're not applying, we can say we're top of the class. And I was like, dang, no way are you going to do that. So I said, "Yeah, I'm applying." And just for the fun of it, I actually looked at the dollar figure and I applied where there was \$10 application fee. So you know how kids these days, they plan everything and they look at colleges and they've got to visit. They got to do all of that. I just looked at the dollar figure and applied to the lowest one because I thought I was just sort of, you know, punching. And I got in and the admission went home and my parents were like, what is this now? And I said, "Well, I was just applying." And my dad said, "No, you can go. We'll start looking for a suitable boy in the US then."

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, okay. I have two questions on the back of that. First is that's fascinating that your classmates said, well, if you don't apply to a school in the United States, I can say I'm top of the class. Basically they're saying I'm the top of the class, the people who are applying to school abroad.

**Jayshree Seth:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting.

**Jayshree Seth:** And it was all guys and I was like, dang, I'm at the top of the class. I'm going to show you. It was super funny. You know how funny things happen, you know.

**Whitney Johnson:** Your competitive juices just started to flow.

**Jayshree Seth:** So they did. Yeah, especially because they didn't think that, you know, we could be at the top of the class. And there we were, two of us. Two girls at the top.

**Whitney Johnson:** Did your parents find you a man to marry here in the United States?

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, you know, we had a few discussions, but then once I was doing my project I was so into my work, I never got out. In fact, there was one piece of equipment that two students needed to use, and my option was to fight him or marry him. I eventually ended up marrying him, he says, just so that I could fight with him and he could never win.

**Whitney Johnson:** Um, all right. So let's talk about 3M you. We've all dealt with them in some form tape, sticky notes, even N95 masks. Do you find that being a leader in this giant, expansive, sprawling conglomerate that you end up getting siloed? So in other words, if you're succeeding in industrial adhesives, is there an opportunity for you to branch out and go to another part of the company?

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, first off, I'm glad you have used our Scotch tapes and Post-it notes and N95 respirators. What you may not know is there are many, many ways our industrial adhesives and abrasives and films are around you at this time. So to answer your questions, you know, oh, my gosh. Yes. So much opportunity. So just for me, as an example, I started, like I said, in the business that worked on diaper closures. So I worked on adhesives and release for diaper tapes and then diapers started having more and more elastics for fit. So I worked on Elastic, so stretchy materials. But then diaper closures evolved to be hook and loop. So I worked on making tiny hooks that had nothing to do with how you make adhesives. And then I worked on loop materials and that is a completely different technology platform. That's Nonwovens. But with Nonwovens experience, I worked on disposable wipes and then cosmetic wipes. And once in cosmetics I worked on face oil remover films that have nothing to do with nonwovens or adhesives. We had a completely different market to learn about all in the same division. And then I came to Industrial Adhesives and then I worked on identifying new growth opportunities for industrial customers.

I worked on industrial insulation; I worked on composite materials. Then I went back to adhesives, but for industrial applications. So things that go into the table you're at and the device you're using so much to learn, so much opportunity. And I just rattled off a few. We have 51 of these technology platforms. So bottom line is that if you want to be an expert and stick to one technology, you can, especially if you are in the area of the R&D, you know, research, if you want to be a generalist and work on many things, you can and you typically will if you are in D or product development. And that one was the right one for me and I wanted to identify problems to solve. I wanted to collaborate with others to solve them. And I didn't care if it was an area, I knew nothing about because I had done it before. I had jumped from one area to the other. And you may appreciate that all of this is only possible because we have a strong culture of empowerment and an emphasis on collaboration. Without that, without that structure that facilitates that, people like me would not be successful. So we have 15% culture, which means you can spend 15% of your time on any problem that you think is important for 3M to solve.

And it may have nothing to do with your day job. And then we have Genesis and Discover grants. So you're encouraged to have ideas and you get money to pursue these ideas. We have Tech Forum, which is a forum for and run by the technical community that pulls us together constantly. So we have a great way of putting, let's say, the the AI

people and the T people for what I call the IT factor. In fact, you and I had discussed Dave Epstein wrote about this in his book range, and he interviewed me, and I was so exciting to be in his book. But it's honestly like jumping from one S to the other and it empowers you to say, bring it on. So for leaders who listen to this Whitney, and I know many do, I want to point out that more people in your organization will be more innovative. They will take the leap if there is a structure that upholds them, if there's a culture that minimizes that sense of risk, and if you nurture learning opportunities which lead to growth.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's absolutely fantastic. And I was going to ask you, what's made it possible for you to be in one organization for 33 zero years and it's because you've been able to jump to lots and lots and lots of new S curves. And so I'd love to drill down on that and ask you talk to me about one of the instances where you jumped, you did something new. And let's get really specific around the nuts and bolts of, okay, I want to move to a new area. I want to do the D. What does that conversation look like with my current manager? How do you orchestrate that? Walk me through the steps as if this were a technical manual for having that conversation. And what's the mechanism by which that move gets made? And maybe share with us one of your specific instances.

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, I'm thinking fast here, but I'm going back many years. I was working on tapes and release materials for diaper tapes. And at that point, there was another team looking at mechanical fasteners, which is hook and loop. They haven't really been commercial, but we're always preparing for the technology that is likely to come. And when parents apply oils to their babies, those oily hands then allow the adhesive to sort of be rendered nonfunctional because the oil messes the adhesive up. So we knew that there is a requirement for something that can be oil tolerant or oil resistant. And the best thing to do that is make mechanical fasteners like hook and loop. So we were already working on that, but they had asked me to initially when I joined, actually, I had come up with the idea of making a more sustainable solution by eliminating some solvents that were used in our release materials. So I was working on that project, and I actually had a Genesis grant from the corporation to work on release materials that could be made without using solvents as the hook and loop. Acceptability outside in the customer base started growing. I was very interested in understanding how that works because that would be completely different from what we were doing in tapes. And so I had a few conversations with the people who were working on hook and loop, and I tried to understand the area, and then I started thinking about it. I wonder why they don't do that. I wonder why they don't do this. I wonder why we can't put that in that together and do that. And so I would have these conversations. And finally, one of the people said, you know, you should come join us because we're just starting.

You have all these new ideas. We want all these fresh ideas. So I said, no, but I'm working on this other stuff. So I went and talked to my supervisor at the time, wonderful man, and he said, Gee, Sri, you've always worked on 15% stuff. You can do whatever you want in your 15%. If you want to get interested in hook and loop, go for it. So I started in quote unquote 15%. And of course, before you know it, I was deep into it because I had so many ideas. I was writing invention submissions. I was working with the teams. I was beginning to be on the patents, and I realized that there were a lot of things we could do that could make the hook and loop closures better. And I showed how these ideas would be better. I discussed with the teams, I got everybody on board, and I was able to join that team when the hockey curve started for hook and loop fasteners, there was so much excitement, so much to do, so many things to learn, so much development needed that people were like happy to have somebody on board who was excited to work on it. And I knew nothing about extrusion. I knew nothing about everything that was done. But I went through the process that I normally do read as much as you can, talk to as many people as you can, figure out what your ideas are,

consolidate them, crystallize them, learn how to communicate about them, be excited about the area because you're genuinely excited. Show it.

**Whitney Johnson:** So I'm as I'm listening to you, one of the things that I continually think about is how do you how do we as employees surprise and delight our manager? And I can imagine that the folks over in the hook and loop were surprised and delighted continually. My question is, is your former manager over in tapes is saying, sure, Jayshree, 15% go for it. But now that manager is going to lose you. How did you navigate that piece of it?

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, that was just the thing. People knew that it would be good for the business, so I honestly didn't have to do much navigation. When I was talking about hook and loop, I was talking about my ideas I was presenting on them. People kind of saw this as a natural thing. They knew that this was a new area that required a lot of energy, a lot of passion, a lot of development work, a lot of interacting with people. And I mean, I'm assuming people saw that I was already doing that and it was just so natural. Natural, yeah. And in looking back now that you're talking about it and looking back, I realized the things that I organically did that made it sound like a perfect fit. One of the things I did is when I was able to work with someone and make a small sample that was super exciting. I walked into the boss's office, and I said, I know you have no time. I know you must be busy, but I have to show you this sample. And I didn't realize that. I was just sharing my excitement.

But years later, he said, and Jayshree walked into my office with this sample. Things that people can touch and feel. Oh my gosh, the excitement that they give. I mean, there were all these little things that I did, which now, in looking back to me, seems like, you know, when I found out the problems they were having, I was like, well, why don't you call this person? And they said, well, I don't know this person. I said, I don't know either, but I'm willing to call them like my barrier or threshold is extremely low. Whitney Yeah, very, you know very well I do. Because you just called me. No, Yeah, I'm excited about something. I'm genuinely excited about doing something. People can say no, but nine times out of ten, you know, Whitney people don't say no when they see something that is worth. Joining or collaborating or communicating. People love it. And I just naturally did that. And so and I have to say, we have amazing managers. I had amazing managers who just saw the potential more than I did in many times.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So what for you was enthusiasm and this, this wanting to share. Um, in retrospect, for many people it looked like audacity. So how about audacious enthusiasm that we just put those two words together?

**Jayshree Seth:** All right.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Let's continue on this topic of science. So if I think about a farmer in India irrigating their land and fertilizing the soil, they are a scientist, too. They use science the same way, quote-unquote, that real scientists do. So how do you persuade more people that they are, in fact, scientists?

**Jayshree Seth:** Excellent point. They are certainly doing science. And, you know, we are all quote-unquote scientists. And the scientific method was actually developed based on how children learn. So there and this continual experiential science like the farmer, it's cumulative, it's iterative, it's rooted in data, and the practice is sustained for generations, like food on your face. And it is just as important as isolated experimental science, if you will, or even more so with all the sustainability challenges the world faces. You know, just look at the way the indigenous communities have over the

years, learned how to do soil management and forest management. And then come the so-called modern science, which sometimes strips the context out for the often self-serving purposes and shows, hey, we don't have to do this, this and that, we can just do this, and it doesn't always pan out. I hope there's more and more realization that science cannot be stripped from the context. And that's exactly why we need diversity in Stem fields for people to ask, hey, how have native and indigenous, African and Eastern cultures addressed this issue? And it's not about largely having a Eurocentric view, which tends to be linear, which tends to be short sighted and which tends to be low on context, knowing well what we need now is more of dialectical thinking, which is a hallmark of Asian and indigenous cultures, the kind of thinking that not only embraces the context, it understands that there are going to be rich contradictions, because that is the reality.

You know, it has always been we have just been ignoring it. And I have to say, this was fortified in my mind, Whitney when I had the unique opportunity last year of participating in the Asis conference, which is American Indian Indigenous people in Stem. I was a keynote speaker there. And then another opportunity was to be in Africa for the World Science Forum, and both were just eye-opening experiences. In fact, when I was in South Africa, there was an emotional visit to the Cape of Good Hope, and it really made me think about what the world needs. You know, we have to commit to the Sustainable Development Goals with a long-term perspective. We have to advocate for science with a societal perspective. We have to promote representation with a global perspective. And we have to empower innovation with an inclusive perspective. Mm hmm.

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting. So I wanted to talk to you about diversity. And I think there are two as you're bringing this up. I think two questions. One is a very practical, nuts and bolts question, which is, um, so we can hire Dei officers and stage big elaborate meetings. But if the company doesn't change or the makeup of it doesn't change, it's just expensive lip service. So you've got to build the structure that lasts. You can have feeder programs, early education and college grants that encourage new voices rather than simply elevating the voices of people who are already at the company. My question for you, Jayshree, is what's the role of the chief science advocate in building those pipelines? Part of it's advocacy, like you just did just now in talking to me. But what else?

**Jayshree Seth:** You're spot on. We don't need that performative stuff. We need transformative. And anyone who says they're interested in increasing diversity has to be committed to the entire spectrum. I actually call it the ecosystem. It starts with exposure, encouragement, empowerment, economics, education, engagement, empathy, equity. They all start with E! That's why I call it the ecosystem, but that's what it takes. So we at 3M are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. We're committed to innovation. We want to create a diverse science community and we participate, lead, facilitate activities across the spectrums and from a corporate standpoint. So what can we do? Let me give you examples. Last year, for instance, three donated \$43 Million in Cash and Products to Education Initiatives. In 2020, our CEO announced a \$50 Million Fund for Social Justice to close the racial inequality gap. And a key element there also is stem equity. 3M also has a global initiative to advance economic equity by creating 5 million unique Stem and skill trades learning experiences for underrepresented individuals by 2025. So a big part is also inspiring students. And I know you said you know us for Post-it notes and N95 respirators, but get this we have made two award winning docu series. One is called Not the Science Type, and it shows the story of four women scientists. We wanted to inform and influence and inspire the next generation. We wanted them to know that it doesn't matter what your race, gender, age or ethnicity is, Science will be better off for that. Science needs you to be you. The way I say it, Whitney is our world requires innovation.

Innovation needs science. Science demands diversity. Diversity warrants equity. Our second docu series, it's called Skilled. And in this one, we wanted to help, you know, sift through misconceptions and lift the stigmas and shift the narrative because our world needs more skilled workers, electricians and plumbers and technicians to fill what are high demand, much valued, well-paying jobs. So these are some of the examples of things we have done. We also have Science at Home series where we have, you know, diverse scientists doing experiments so kids can follow along. We are members of the Stem Opportunity Alliance, and I got invited to the White House for its kickoff. That was a great experience. And I realized that if you work at it, you can get a seat at the table. And it's not just about having that seat. It's about having a voice and using that voice to engage with others. Impact change. It's about feeling encouraged to speak up and being empowered to do so. So I'm really fortunate to have this opportunity to be the face of the wonderful Stem advocacy work that 3M does. And maybe I can also mention is that personally, I have written two books which are collection of my essays on all these topics, you know, science advocacy, thought leadership, leadership, innovation. And all proceeds go to a scholarship for underrepresented women in Stem. And I am happy to let you know, Whitney, that enough people joined the cause, enough people bought the books that we have two students pursuing engineering from the sales proceeds.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's wonderful. Oh, congratulations. Thank you. I'm wondering too. So now you've got people who are in the sciences. There's a diversity of ethnicities, of genders, eastern, western, etcetera. Um, but even when you have all of those people in a room, it can still fall prey to groupthink and that is no longer diverse. So when you're in the room, how do you ensure that you get that diversity of thought into the conversation as well? How do you give us something really practical? You Jayshree have convened diverse backgrounds, diverse thinking in a room. What are some practical things that you do to ensure that you don't get groupthink?

**Jayshree Seth:** Yeah, very good point. Group things happen. It happens when you have a homogenous group. Everyone agrees with everyone. You just didn't have the diversity. It happens because you assemble the diverse set of people and you're fooling yourself into thinking that, oh, they all agree. But they didn't agree, and they didn't speak up because you didn't have psychological safety. Group things happen when people speak up, but you don't listen, and you rationalize it away. And you don't have intellectual honesty. So instead, what you're harboring is this illusion of invulnerability. So the key in my mind is to actively solicit and workshop any big decision when you think you have unanimity. You know, you have to figure out, are they agreeing with you? Because the leader said, we're going to do this and they didn't want to disagree. Are they agreeing with you? Because they're not in the right quadrant of the two by two. They may not have enough knowledge about the topic. Are they agreeing with you because they want to be aligned with the group dynamics or they agreeing with you if there are some other stressors at play? So really in a meeting, what you have to do is, okay, we have arrived at this decision. Everybody agrees. Yeah, they agree. Okay, now let's workshop why people will not agree with this outside of this group and what it does, it gives permission to pretend that it isn't my idea.

But I'm thinking some people might say this, but it still gets it out there. And I think every good leader should be doing that. And I will tell you, not many do. And that is okay, too. Of course. Okay. Keep going. You know, to make sure you don't have groupthink, you have to look at the entire spectrum. You can't just assemble a group and say, I think I've got a diverse group. As a leader, you'll have to look at your hiring processes. Are you really hiring for adding to your culture or are you only looking at fit? Are you really practicing empowerment and inclusion? Are you providing

learning opportunities so that people are in the right quadrant when they are making that decision? Are you allowing people to build social capital such that they're not just relying on in-group? They also have relationships outside of the group and with the linkages. Are you looking at your promotion and recognition protocols? Because above all, we need diversification of power at the highest levels. Are you seeking feedback? Are you being a devil's advocate? Are you really getting your people thinking.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. So good. So Jayshree, what were you doing before you hopped on this call?

**Jayshree Seth:** Okay. To be honest, I have a keynote today and it is to a group called Rise Raising Influence in Science and Engineering. It's an event that 3 a.m. hosts at our location and this time it's actually remote. I mean, it's hybrid. No, I think it's all remote. And we invite graduate students from diverse backgrounds and have them present their work. And then we talk to them about 3M about roles and what we do. And the idea is that we want to provide exposure and access to the students who may not have it. They may not end up applying to 3M. This is nothing about that. It's just that we want to have them have this exposure. So it's just one of the Stem encouragement programs. Out of the many we have; we do another one which is also interesting. It's Ascend and that's for undergrads so that they can get exposure to internship processes because you and I know that navigation skills are so critical and many just don't know what. They don't know where to look, how to write resumes, how to apply. So what I was doing before this call was, I was looking at the students questions because I send out a request saying, What do you want to know? Because rather than me talking at them, I want to know what are they thinking about? And that's what I was going to answer.

So I was thinking about what to do and how to answer these questions. They have their great questions. And before that I was actually quickly on LinkedIn sending article I had published yesterday about advocacy to a few people in my network because I felt like I needed more eyes on it. We're all advocating for something, you know, diversity and inclusive leadership and sustainable innovation. But in my mind, I realized they're so closely linked. So I wrote this article that we all need to join forces because we need the allyship of advocates to crank up the dial and combat the diversity fatigue. So I wanted to send my punchline to a few people and say, hey, does it resonate with you? If it does, if it does, can you use this message and lift this message and drive traffic? Honestly, diversity is not about differences. It's a competitive differentiation. Innovation is not optional. It is the only option. Leadership is not just a quality. It is an earned qualification. Advocacy is not a passive act. It's about authentic passion. Advocacy can be the glue holding that three-legged stool of diversity, innovation and leadership together. So that's what I was doing. Thought leadership is a big part of my role. And as you can see, I take it very seriously.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So is that a typical day then for you of your thinking about okay, I've got these thoughts, these ideas. I'm posting them, I'm sharing them, I'm speaking to students. Is that a typical is this a typical day for you?

**Jayshree Seth:** There's a lot of that. But then I also have my lab role and I'm taking a little bit of a backseat there because there's a lot we're doing at the corporate level at this point. But yeah, I've got projects going on where I interact with people. We figure out what experiments are we running. So Monday morning that's what I do and we decide what, what we look at the data together. What did our experiments tell us last week? What do we need to do this week? Who's doing what? Who needs to do what? I'm also on several committees for the corporation, so I participate in a lot of those. I'm on the advisory for the Women's Leadership Forum, the technical chapter of that. I'm on the



advisory for the Asian Forum. I'm chair of our Emerging Tech Technologies and Trends Committee. So that's important work. So yeah, experiments, meetings, events and thought leadership. Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Are there chief science advocates at other companies? Is this or is this an unusual role?

**Jayshree Seth:** No, this is a very unusual role. In fact, New York Times I was part of the series. They did about unusual titles because there is there is nobody there that we know of that has that role. And I know because I looked because the first time when they reached out to me, I was like, oh, I don't know what this is and I can't do it. But then, you know, actually I share the story in my recent Ted Talk, so Whitney we can give the link to that in our episode if people want to hear about it. But yeah, it was definitely an S-curve for me, but I was like, okay, well keep it simple. I looked at social sciences, we're just going to do A, B and C, A is about raising awareness and appreciation and acknowledgment of science and moving them from the apathy they feel. B is about, you know, the barriers and biases and boundaries and beliefs that stop people from appreciating science or being in science and C's about communication, communication, communication about the context and why it's important.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm. Tell us about an S-curve that you've jumped to recently that has absolutely nothing to do with 3M. What's that curve?

**Jayshree Seth:** Nothing to do with 3M. Um, I have an example. My kids will be. That I told you this story, maybe I'm going to regret it. But here goes. So. So 2020 was a tough year, um, especially for us in Minnesota for what played out right in our backyards. And it really impacted me on many levels. So I thought about what to do and I pulled all my essays together. I contacted Society of Women Engineers, they published it, and we got the scholarship going for underrepresented women in Stem. And I was pretty excited because I thought that was an S-curve. But it was interesting. My kids said, Yeah, it's good, but that's really not a stretch for you. And I was like, range of emotions, you know? I was like, It was difficult. It was new. It was exhausting. What do you mean? You mean? But their point was that it was within the realm of what one would expect from you. Because I do like writing, I'm fairly good at formulating my thoughts, communicating them, whether on paper or verbally. So what is it that I could do that could be outside my comfort zone? And actually had a song. I have a song out there, believe it or not. So I had written the song lyrics, you know, ten years ago or more than that. But in a serendipitous moment, I realized that the emotions and sentiments expressed in the words I had penned, they could be truly representative of the feelings of many during the pandemic. So I really wanted to memorialize 2020 because in, you know, the day and age we live in, we just want to forget about things. And that's not some time to forget.

And there are people who will never be able to forget it for what they lived through. And the lyrics really needed to come alive in a song, in my mind. And once that idea occurred to me, you know how it is. You just can't get it out of your head. Even though I want to not to think about it. But it was just too hard to pull off. I have no connection with the musical arts. I barely listen to music. I do not know musicians. I don't have the faintest idea about what it takes to produce a song. And I have a very okay voice and I can carry a simple tune. I don't consider myself a singer. I have no training; I can't read music. So armed with just these lyrics, I needed everything else. I needed music, orchestra, a singer and a platform to put it on. And I collaborated with people I had never met or interacted with before, you know? But this is what I do in my day job. So the commitment and enthusiasm for navigating the journey that helped in influencing others to come along and collaborate. So long story short, the song is called Life is Like a Donut. It is on

a website called Play It forward.com. And every time you download you can donate and all the proceeds go to United Way. So and I have to tell you, the incredulous look on my kids faces when I told them about it, they were worried that I would make a fool of myself and of course embarrassed them. I suppose they even tried to talk me out of the idea. So that's when I realized that must be truly creative. Score.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Jayshree Seth:** Say Whitney. If you or anybody ever has access to Reba McIntyre, let me know. Help me out. She should be the one singing the song. I absolutely love the lyrics, if I must say so myself. But I have to say I don't love my voice. And it turned out that I had to sing it. She would really bring it to life. It could be the anthem of the nation, really. I believe in that song so much.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Well, we'll include a link in the show notes. And my question to you is, even though your children were a little embarrassed, are they also proud of you that you did it?

**Jayshree Seth:** Absolutely. They won't tell me that often, but they absolutely are proud of me because I wanted to show them that you can do anything that you put your heart to. And, you know, once you put your heart into it and it's for the right reasons and I always make the reason something else. Someone else, somebody else. Because the amount of passion that gives me is way more than thinking about just me. And it doesn't matter if you're not as good at this thing as you are, let's say, at science or advocacy. But the fact is that you tried and you were able to accept the humility of not being good at something else.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. And the other thing, too. Yeah, your children got to see you because I'm sure my guess is that your children look at you and see this amazing, competent woman, and it was good for them to see you not know how to do something. But I also think in listening to you, my guess is that it meant a lot to your children that you listen to them. You know, you were speaking about empathy earlier. You were responsive to them when they said, hey, mom, this is not stretching you. They challenged you instead of saying, yes, it is. Or, you know, children are meant to be seen, not heard. You actually did something in response to their challenge of you, which is. Showing tremendous respect for them as people. That's really powerful to me.

**Jayshree Seth:** Yeah, they are my best mirror. I like to say they call me out and I'm perfectly fine with it because you have to have people in your life that keep you grounded. And I don't know why I'm getting emotional about this, but you've got to listen to your children because the way they say things and the reasoning that they have will really make you reflect, and this is a time for all of us to reflect about what we want the future to look like. Listen to your children.

**Whitney Johnson:** Absolutely. I often think about, I think our children, even more so than our partners or spouses, can be our most important truth tellers because they see our underbelly more than anybody really, on the planet. But at the same time, they want us to win more than anybody else on the planet. Yeah. And so that's a wonderful combination.

**Jayshree Seth:** Absolutely. And it's a two-way street. I mean, you know, my house, we argue, we shout, we yell, we get our thoughts across, and we bicker. But at the end of the day, we've all learned something from that argument and that

point. And we think about it and we reflect. And we may be mad in the moment what we come back and say, you know what that you said? And I'm like, Did I say that? And it's like, oh, yeah, I was thinking about that, you know, And so you have to find you have to cut through all the noise and get through really what they're trying to say and then look at it and go, you know what? They're probably.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. So putting your science hat on, analyzing this conversation that we've had, what's been useful for you?

**Jayshree Seth:** You know, I like this discussion of s-curves and I'll tell you why I told you I'm the chair of one of the committees on the emerging technologies and Trends. So I'm very familiar with the Gartner Hype cycle and the S-curve there and the hype cycle and S-curves provide context on a technology life cycle. So the the S-curve measures the effort on the x axis and the performance on the Y axis sorry, X and Y, The S-shaped curve describes, you know, how at the beginning of a technology you have to make a lot of investment time, money, effort with very little performance improvement until there's a tipping point at which the performance increases dramatically. And as is the, you know, the case, the parallel S-curve is arising because this technology will plateau out and eventually overtake some new technology will come in. So the PCs with the laptops and laptops with phones and I've always thought about life as an S curve, right? I have this slide that I used to share. It has three big phases the formative meandering, the road of discovery and the path to enlightenment. And the early years are meandering, but they're formative and they're enriched by, you know, your exposure and your experiences and also your education. And it is about the lessons that you learn, but you don't know where and how you're ever going to use them till later in life.

Then there's the road to discovery, where you learn more about yourself. You're figuring out the beliefs and the biases and the boundaries and the barriers that are holding you back and you break through and suddenly now you're performing at peak. But then you transition into this path of enlightenment. That is when you want to share what you have learned about charting the course on your journey and feel rewarded by helping engineer the future of those who are to come. So I reached out to you, Whitney, because I thought there are things now, now that I have my 30-year ring, I have 30 years in R&D. I've spent a lot of time here. I want to make sure people here so that they can start their s-curves. So that has really been the heart of my journey. So that talking through this with you helps because it clearly tries to get the point across that we're all putting in a lot at the beginning. But don't worry, there's a reason for that. We're going to figure out how we're going to perform at our peak. But at the end, when you start plateauing, theirs is another person's S-curve that you can start. And that's really been the heart of my journey.

**Whitney Johnson:** So any final thoughts?

**Jayshree Seth:** Well, I should say thank you to you because I think I started following you when Rita McGrath participated in yours or you participated in Rita McGrath's. I can't remember. I'm a huge Rita fan and it caught my eye recently when you wrote something on LinkedIn and I reached out and you responded. It just so happened you were in India and you were in the state my family is from and I took that as a sign. And I guess there's something there. Serendipity helps. And if you meet people like you, they can accelerate other people's movement on their S-curve. So thank you for doing that for me in my thought leadership journey, my thought leadership, S-curve. You know, I like to say that many people distract themselves. They distrust themselves, or they simply distract themselves with self-sabotaging thoughts. Listen to Whitney and say yes to the S. Disrupt Yourself.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love it. I forgot you had said that. Say yes to the S. That's so fantastic. Jayshree, thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for your ebullience and your advocacy for science and your advocacy for the human condition.

**Jayshree Seth:** Thank you. Thank you for having me. And yes, I hope we can even title it Yes To the S.

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To advocate for yourself is to know yourself. That might sound like some trite parable, but it's deeply true. When we advocate for others or for an idea, we need to know them inside and out. We're their proxy with all the responsibility that comes with that. But when it comes to getting a raise or speaking up when a higher up puts you down, we need to have the same understanding of ourselves. What do we really want? Why are we doing this? What do we stand for? I loved Jay Sri's answer to this. She just wants to make things better. She sees a diaper that's falling apart because of baby oil, and her mind goes to the hook and loop department. She sees a world that's in part terrified of scientific progress, and her mind goes to documentaries and tuition grants. So it's not a surprise that 3 a.m. gave her this role. Advocacy is not merely bringing attention to something. It's making it better permanently, which means advocacy is active. And as Jayshree said, that means saying yes to the yes for more. Of course, we mentioned my talk with Rita McGrath on inflection points and how to navigate them. That's **episode 146**. For more on learning who you are so you can better advocate for yourself. There's **episode 292**, My talk with David Epstein about what that experimentation looks like. Thank you again to Jayshree 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 Alexandra Turk, production assistant Ange Harris, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson

and this has been Disrupt Yourself.