

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPIISODE 344: STUART CRAINER AND DES DEARLOVE

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you grow your people, to grow your organization because organizations don't Disrupt people do. The building block of that growth. It's you. We throw around this term a lot in the management profession, in the coaching profession, really everywhere in business. Top thinker. There a top thinker. She's proving herself a top thinker in her field. But how often do we really interrogate that title? What's the impact of a top thinker and who makes the call? Because really, wouldn't we all like to think of ourselves as top thinkers?

In politics, it's the journalists that hold politicians to account. In the world of management, there are two former journalists who are holding these top thinkers to account as well. Stuart Crainer and Des Dearlove used to write columns for the London Times when they realized they could have a bigger impact, connecting these thinkers directly.

As the founders of Thinkers50, an organization that comes together every two years to celebrate the true top management thinkers. Stuart and Des have brought their skills of commentary and curation and humor from the front page to a much larger audience. So what makes a top thinker truly? I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** I want to start on a vague note. What makes for a good thinker? Are there bad thinkers or maybe less useful thinkers?

**Stuart Crainer:** Well, all thinkers aren't created equal. That's clear that some are more effective, more persuasive, and more influential. And those are kind of the issues that kind of attracted us to this field in the first place, in that we were involved in people writing books and helping people write books. 20, 25 years ago, we worked as ghostwriters, we worked as writers, and from that we kind of learned that the book was only one part of what they were communicating to the world. And so I think the thinkers that we admire have a solid purpose, a good intent. Fundamentally, they want to change the world for the better. I think they have an ability to distill complicated ideas down to not soundbites, but phrases that are evocative and memorable. And they're able to communicate with, communicate them successfully,

and communicate them in a variety of different areas and through different media. So those are just some of the skills I think.

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah, I mean, I would add to that just to build on that, I mean, when we when we put the ranking together, you know, kind of we have a number of criteria that we look across and we talk about the four R's. So. Rigor. You know, the research has got to be has got to be good and has to stand up. Relevance is really important. You know, timing, whether the thinker and the topics that they're tackling are in step with what's happening in the world and with what, you know, business leaders and other leaders actually need. But then we also talk about reach. You know, if you if you've done a great study in one industry, that's, that's fine. But we're looking for, you know, reach across industry, across geography. We're really looking for ideas that that are that have currency, you know, globally. And then we also the fourth one we talk about is resilience. You know the idea needs to be an idea that's not just will of the West. That's going to be here for six months. You know we like them to have roots and we like them to, you know, ideas that are going to stick around. So we look for those things. And I think Stuart's right. It's not enough just to have those things. I think the the great thinkers in our experience also have, you know, a kind of bit of magic dust and think an important component of that is intellectual curiosity.

The really good ones are always curious about what's going. If you set up to film, if we were filming this, be asking questions about who else is here, wanting to meet the film crew when we when we interviewed C.K. Prahalad in the late, great C.K. years ago, I remember him remembering everybody's name in the room, and I remember him at the end of the interview, he said. So did that kind of make sense? And I obviously said, yeah, of course it was. And he said, no, I wasn't really didn't really mean you. I meant I meant everybody else in the room did, because that's my job is to communicate my ideas. And if I'm not doing that, I'm not doing my job. And, you know, I don't think I've ever seen a film crew ask for autographed copies of a book, you know, by a management thinker. You know, they were used to filming celebrities, but they were really taken with him. He he, the charisma was there. And that's a strange word because, you know, charisma is it doesn't have to be, you know, a big, showy charisma. Sometimes it's a quiet charisma. But I think intellectual curiosity is definitely a big factor.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's so interesting. This idea of being able to not only have the rigor around the ideas, but also be able to distill them, to communicate them. And one of the things I hear you saying is, I if I tie both of what you both said together is that part of the magic of communication is the curiosity about the people that you're communicating to.

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah. And it's amazing. Well, a couple of points on that distillation. We always used to talk about the difference between Scottish whiskey and Irish whiskey. And as you well know, Whitney the difference between Scottish whiskey and Irish whiskey is that Irish whiskey is distilled three times and therefore.

**Whitney Johnson:** We all know as a teetotaler, Stuart.

**Stuart Crainer:** So Irish whiskey is smoother. So we always think the people who communicate their ideas and distilled their ideas down that one more time. Yeah, make makes a lot, lot of difference.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love how you did that, how we often do that with people. We're like, as you well know, and they're like, no, I actually have no idea what you're talking about, but you make us feel good in the process. So the two of you

have worked together for over two decades. I'm curious about what's something that still surprises you about the other person. We'll start with you, des.

**Des Dearlove:** What's something that still surprises me about Stewart? Um. Gosh. Um. Cool. You could have given me some sort of warning. I think I'm surprised. Yeah, I think I'm genuinely surprised sometimes by questions that come out of the left field when we're doing something like this and I've, you know, I know a lot of his lines, I know a lot of his catchphrases, but occasionally and I'm always surprised at how insightful it is. I mean, I don't mean that to sound quite as bad as it does, but he's got a great knack sometimes for tying two ideas that you wouldn't have tied together. And I do think if we can be a little bit immodest, I do think one of our perhaps journalistic skills is the ability to connect and do lateral jumps. But every once in a while, he does a double lateral jump. That surprises me that he's put two things together and they and they do, you know, two plus two do make five when he when he does it, you know, not all the time. Sometimes they don't make any sense at all. But sometimes they're very profound.

**Stuart Crainer:** And I would say if there's that he's still curious and he knows a lot of stuff. And I'm always surprised when he throws something in Bruce Springsteen lyrics from the 1970s, for instance, which are which are hugely germane to whatever we're talking about. But he knows a lot. And I think that's I like people who know a lot of stuff about a lot of different things because it suggests curiosity, you know, kind of broad range of curiosity. People who are curious in one dimension, it's great, but it's not really curiosity, is it?

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So now I feel like the gantlet has been thrown down. We will expect you at some point in the conversation to des, throw in some Bruce Springsteen lyrics.

**Des Dearlove:** Okay? And Stuart's got to make a say something profound as well. To be fair, it's only fair that he has to.

**Stuart Crainer:** We only have 45 minutes, so.

**Whitney Johnson:** The distilled whiskey didn't count. Has he thrown that one out at us before? All right. So Stuart, let's talk a little bit about the impact that Tom Peters has had on your on your view of the world. You worked with him for a time a few decades ago, I believe, and just talk to us about how he's impacted you. You just retired thoughts? Yeah.

**Stuart Crainer:** Tom. Um, one of my last jobs when I had a proper job was around 30 odd years ago. And Tom had a newsletter called On Achieving Excellence. And I worked with the British guy who was doing something in that area, and he was helping with the production of the newsletter. And then des worked for the same publication after I left as well. And then I wrote a biography of Tom. So I spent time with him in the late 1990s, and what I always liked about Tom was I agree to a lot of his ideas, but I liked his positivity, his enthusiasm and his energy. His energy was incredible and still is.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Well, while we're talking about that, I will say I want to just give a shout out to Tom as well. Probably 4 or 5 years ago, I was speaking in, I think it was Columbia. He was speaking as well. My daughter was with me, who's 22 years old now, but at the time I think she was 18. And I think one of the things that I would put in the

biography is his generosity in terms of nurturing and being aware of people who are 18 and 19 and 20 years old and noticing them and being curious about them and who they are and buoying them up. It's quite magical. And he did this with my daughter, and I suspect he's done this with a lot of younger people. And I think that's a beautiful, generous act.

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah, now I can affirm that because when he came to the Thinkers50 gala in 2017, I think it was when we gave him a lifetime achievement award. Um, we he spent time with some. There were some much younger thinkers there, um, the corporate rebels, Stuart. And he spent, you know, he was so well, he was excited to talk to these young people who were who were, you know, talking sort of in their late 20s, probably who were sort of rediscovering the world of business and trying to rewrite it a little bit and, you know, with the sort of rebel swagger and, and he spent an hour just sitting talking to them, you know, sort of. But it was very much a two-way exchange. He was getting as much out of it as they were. They were thrilled, of course, because they knew him and knew how famous he was. Um, no. So it was outstanding. And I think that interest in the next generation, I think Tom's always had that that sense that, you know, of passing the passing the torch and the and the generosity, as you say.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, so good. We'll have to share this with them. We're like as we're praising him.

**Des Dearlove:** One other thing I would say on that, I think Stuart's right. I think he is on a par. He's up there with Drucker. If you actually, and I think perhaps we don't fully realize it, some of the things he's said will be will be taken and handed down in the way that that Peter Drucker is now venerated, but wasn't, particularly when he was writing, because he wasn't considered to be a serious academic in the same way that the, you know, some of the more established and more academic, you know, professors were and I think Tom will have Tom's work legacy will be similar.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, I love that. All right. So what's the difference between a manager and a leader or is there one?

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah, I think it's I see leadership as a subset of management. And what was the what was the Warren Bennis line about Warren Bennis comment?

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah, yeah. Um, managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing. Is that right? Managers do things right. That's right. Leaders do the right thing. And I do think that's that's a significant difference. There's leaders have a have a sense of purpose and a moral compass. Um, good leaders, if they're effective leaders, well, it can be a bad moral compass as well. Of course, if you use charisma in a, in a, in a, in a, in a way that is harmful to the world. We've seen plenty of that and we continue to see plenty of those.

**Stuart Crainer:** I think management is underestimated I think.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, and, you know, one of my favorite quotes, and probably yours as well, is Clayton would always say management is the noblest of professions if done well.

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah.

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah. And I think if --

**Whitney Johnson:** Done well is the leadership piece.

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah. Yeah, that's good.

**Stuart Crainer:** But nobility doesn't apply to most management jobs and managers I guess. But it's a good aspiration.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, absolutely. Um, so the two of you, um, founded Thinkers50 in 2001. So over two decades ago now. Was there an idea for what you wanted it to look like or function like today in 2023? What was your vision?

**Des Dearlove:** I think the vision was very short term. I mean, we were both working as journalists. We wanted something that would make a good story. Um, and to some extent and, you know, it's a kind of a classic journalistic technique. We wanted to set the kind of the, the management and business thinkers of the world, almost in competition with each other. So, you know, you can only have one number one. So it was it was a it was a kind of a competitive ranking. Um, we were fortunate at the time, in 2001 because Peter Drucker was, you know, no one was going to argue with the fact that Peter Drucker was, was, was going to be number one, you know, so that made life simpler, that gave it kind of, you know, corroborated what we were doing, but it was intended to be that competitive. What we certainly didn't envisage is that and, you know, you've been part of the community for a while now. Um, is it would turn into the collaborative and collegial community that, that it's become. You know, people aren't don't see themselves as necessarily as competitors now. And we're always thrilled when people say that they're collaborating across the community. So to the extent that in 2021, you know, we decided that that actually having, you know, 1 to 50 ranking didn't really serve, you know, the cause of the community.

So we still have a top ten for a little bit of drama. Um, but everybody else is, you know, you're in the 50. It really does it matter if you're 22 or you're 31 in the in the ranking. You know, we'd rather we'd rather encourage now the, the sense of, of being a community that hopefully can work together to, you know, move the needle a little bit in terms of tackling some of the thorny issues facing the world and most of those issues, if you break them down, as Stuart was saying, that management is underestimated. They are management, you know, issues, management challenges, just as if you like, you know, building the pyramids. It takes management to do big tasks and it takes leadership. And if we're going to tackle, you know, climate change and global warming, and if we're going to ever, ever have a chance of tackling global poverty and some of these big issues, it will take a better level, a better quality of leadership and management. So it is a noble profession, you know.

**Stuart Crainer:** And that's the big thing that's changed over the 20 years. 20 or so years since we started, that when we started all the management thinkers, their emphasis was on improving corporate performance, maximizing shareholder value and those sorts of issues. And that's where all the research was. That's what people were talking about now. And over the 20 years that's changed. And the people, people we feature want to change the world, want to make the world a better place, mean whether they can do that and whether their ideas are the right thing to change the world. That's open to debate. But their aspirations and ambitions are much bigger than improving shareholder value, which is which is progress.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. So good.

**Des Dearlove:** I guess our aspiration for the community is also, you know, grown. But it's certainly no true to your original question. We had no sense that it would still be going, you know, 22 years later, let alone that it would have taken on this, this really exciting, inspiring life of its own. Um, do.

**Whitney Johnson:** You ever do you do you ever, like, proverbially or figuratively, pinch yourself and go, wow, like, we just started this because we're journalists and we wanted a good story and wow, look at what we created. Do you ever take a moment and celebrate that?

**Des Dearlove:** I had that very a very strong sense of that. The first time we got everybody together for the gala and everybody was in black tie, and we walked into the room, um, and we hadn't seen the room sort of dressed. It was, you know, it was absolutely. And it and just looking around and, you know, there's Tom Peters at the bar and Henry Mintzberg and Chan Kim and renamed Byrne and all these, all these people who were in our niche in our world were, you know, really quite famous. And, and I just remember thinking, walking through a bit like a ghost, you know, because at your own feast sort of thing and thinking, wow, this we did this, you know, this is not we did this because we didn't do all the hard work of making it a fantastic event. All we did was come up with the idea in 2001 and then invite a few people to join us. But I remember then thinking, you know, this has definitely taken on a life of its own. And also in Denmark. Stewart when we the first when we flew into Denmark and they had the first European Business Forum, there was a sense of that. And Michael Porter was, was going to be the speaker. Um, and they, they let all the students from the local university in to see Michael Porter. So, you know, so people who would never have had a chance to see Michael Porter normally, you know, the great Harvard professor. And suddenly these students were and there he was in the third city in Denmark, not a place that he would probably normally go to lecture, but it was all it had all happened through, you know, sort of a thinkers<sup>50</sup> involvement.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm. All right. So let's go way back. I know we went back two decades, but I want to go back way, way, way. So I'd like to hear from each of you. Where did you grow up? Um, and ideally, a formative story. Something that really shaped. You know, who you are. You were. You were making a quip earlier, Stuart, about Drucker met Freud. So do a little bit of a like what shaped you? What's a formative story for each one of you?

**Stuart Crainer:** You realize you're asking two old English guys for that?

**Whitney Johnson:** Wait, I don't understand why that matters.

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah. Well, yeah. So I was brought up in Lancashire, in England. And I think what shaped me, actually, it was interesting that des and I both had the same boss when we were. That's how we almost. We didn't actually overlap. We worked for the same, same boss. I came down to near London to work and I worked for this guy who was called David Clutterbuck. And he was a and he was a very idiosyncratic boss. But what he had was generosity and freedom. He allowed you freedom. He gave you responsibility and let you get on with it. And he was really important for me because I saw that you could earn a living by writing about business, but also as a kind of management model. He had had his deficiencies as well, but he gave you an element of freedom and responsibility, which I'd never encountered before, and really opened my eyes. And he was deliberately setting you up in many ways. And des had the same experience. He gave us freedom and responsibility and, and enabled us to to leave and do what

we wanted. So he knew we weren't going to be there for the long term. And so he was a real. I didn't think so at the time, but he was a real help in my life and career and an inspiration. Looking back in in how you manage and nurture people.

**Whitney Johnson:** How old were you, Stuart?

**Stuart Crainer:** Was about just 20. Odd. Just early. Early 20s.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. As you're thinking as you're saying that I'm thinking about. You know, conversations that you have with a manager. A great manager remembers talking to a fellow by the name of Raju Narisetti, who's who was at the Wall Street Journal, and now I think he's at McKinsey. And he I interviewed him on one of my very first podcasts, and he said, what I look for is, where are the people? Who worked for me. Where are they now? And I think that's a hallmark of a great of a great leader. Not just a manager, but a great leader is they create opportunities for people to grow and develop, and they feel a sense of pride. Looking back of, I made it possible for this person to go out and do what they did.

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah. I wonder how many how many managers actually think like that. It'd be interesting in practice. Not, not very many have that confidence in their own.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Stuart Crainer:** In their own ability in place in the world.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, we could spend a whole several hours on that. But I do think that there I've actually encouraged people when they're interviewing for a job and trying to decide if they want to take that job or not, because they're trying to, you know, because I'm always thinking about growth upside is to ask them, who's worked for you in the past and what are they doing now? Because if they can start to give you this whole, you know, litany of people of this person and this person, they're doing X, Y, and Z, and I helped sponsor them to do that. That's a person you want to work for. Mhm. So good. All right. So shout out to David Clutterbuck. What about you des. What's a formative experience for you.

**Des Dearlove:** Um well I grew up in Sussex which is in the south east of England. Um, if you draw a line between London and Brighton and you put an X in the middle, that's kind of where I grew up on the Ashdown Forest. The Ashdown Forest is famous for Winnie the Pooh. Um, AA milne lived a couple of miles from where I grew up. So the scenes that you see even in the Disney, that's that's Ashdown Forest hasn't got that many trees. Actually, it's an unusual forest in that regard. So I grew up there, um, and a formative experience. Well, now Stewart's put David Clutterbuck in my mind. I can think of a couple of moments with David. We might as well stay with that, because, um, we probably haven't had an opportunity to cross paths with David very often to say thank you, but I think we probably do owe him a huge debt. He had a he had a knack of it was a double edged sword because he had a knack also of dropping you in the deep end. That was part of his. And always remember he was he was the chairman of the company. And, you know, I was kind of lowly researcher and but I was assistant to him in the same role that Stewart had had been in. And he would call in, he'd say, I've got a what did he say, a management development opportunity

for you, which meant he was going to give you a really tricky project and leave you to sort of, you know, paddle your own canoe.

But that was always his phrase. I remember him sending me off to Sweden, to the home town of Ikea and, you know, when Ikea was I'm going back a few years when Ikea was first becoming, you know, a really sort of famous case study. I remember getting on the, you know, the airplane in Stockholm to fly to this obscure town, you know, one of those planes with propellers. And it was iced, iced up twice. They had to de-ice it a couple of times. And you're thinking, well, this is quite exciting. You know, it's an adventure. I remember him sending me. We just Stewart and I have just come back from Helsinki. We were at the Nordic Business Forum, at least I was at the Nordic Business Forum. And I remember him sending me to Helsinki as well to follow up a case study, funnily enough, for the Tom Peters newsletter. So it all a surprisingly small world when you put it together like that. And the other thing I remember about David in terms of a formative experience was he'd started writing an article for the London Times and he'd kind of mapped it out, and then he'd given it to me to finish it.

So I'd finished it. So I called it in to the editor at The times, and he called me back and he said, I called Michael Michele Serra, and he called me back and he said, um, this article is really well written, but I can only put one byline on it. Whose byline should I put on it? So I was I was all of a dither. I was very pleased that he thought it was well written. So I called, I said, I'll come back to you. He said, I can either put David Clutterbuck's name on it, I can put your name on it. So I called David, you know. Great. And I explained the situation to him and he laughed. He said, oh, you can have it. He said, that's your Christmas bonus. It was just before Christmas. So that was the first byline I ever had in the times. I then went on and, you know, I had quite a history with the times and later on brought Stewart and we shared a column in The Times. But that was an act of David's generosity. And that probably did have a big you know, it helped my certainly helped my career kick on because they then later invited me to be a commissioning editor. And it all kind of stemmed from that moment.

**Whitney Johnson:** Now that is a Christmas bonus. I'm thinking about that. So I sense a distinguished award of some kind coming on for David Clutterbuck at some point in the future. That's beautiful. Um.

**Des Dearlove:** Now there's a thought.

**Whitney Johnson:** Now there's a thought. Maybe it's already happening. And I just got super lucky. Okay, so since you grew up in the Winnie the Pooh land, which Winnie the Pooh character do you. Stewart, if you had to give des a Winnie the Pooh character, who would it be? Who is he most like? No.

**Des Dearlove:** No, I was going to say. Tigger.

**Stuart Crainer:** Oh, yeah. That's it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, there's a little surprise. Who would you choose, des?



**Des Dearlove:** I'm still trying to work out whether that's profound or not. Um, yeah. I wouldn't have thought. Stewart, I was about to say is is potentially has got has got an element of Eeyore. Not entirely, but an element of Eeyore. Um, and, um, who else is there to think about? And probably a combination of or an owl. He is got.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh.

**Stuart Crainer:** That's a good thing, isn't it?

**Stuart Crainer:** Oh. You're wise.

**Stuart Crainer:** Um, I might be.

**Whitney Johnson:** Beautiful. All right, so the Thinkers Hall of Fame, it doesn't just include modern day folks. This year you inducted Maggie Walker, who founded her own savings bank in 1903 as the daughter of an enslaved woman. Can you talk a bit more about the effort to go back and give credit where it's due? And also, are there any other people or gems you'd want to highlight that we don't know about?

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah. I mean, it's really it's really interesting. Um, we I wrote a book years ago called The Management Century, which was a history of management in the 20th century, and obviously so that came out in 1999, and it had a very Western American, European look at management history, which I was kind of comfortable with. But then the more you look at it, you realize that we've done a lot of work in China and Japan over recent years. You realize that those countries have their own management histories, their own management heroes, their own management thinkers. And then a few years ago, we talked. We met with Leon Prieto and Simone Phipps, who authors of a book called African American Management History. And we were talking to them. And it's very interesting. So some of the examples they highlighted in their book, Charles Clinton Spaulding, uh, was one is who have also put in our Hall of Fame, and Charles Clinton Spaulding was championed the idea of cooperative advantage. And that was back in the 1930. Cooperative advantage. And so Leon, Leon and Simone have done a really good job of bringing the idea of cooperative advantage into the kind of modern context. And they've related it to there's an African idea called ubuntu, uh, kind of all for one and one for all sort of sort of idea.

And so then you realize there's this entire world of management history and management ideas that is global and universal. And Maggie Walker is part of our, uh, it's part of our curiosity to learn more about people who had influence on management thinking and probably an unacknowledged influence. I mean, she was a publisher, a retailer. She ran a department store, then started a bank. So her kind of entrepreneurial achievements are staggering and deserve more, more attention. I mean, she's obviously known to some extent in the States, but she's unknown outside of the States. So I think the stories like that throughout the world. I was in Tokyo earlier this year, and they were telling me about some very advanced take on capitalism, more kind of social form of capitalism for some Japanese entrepreneur and investor from the 19th century. And this guy had rebuilt his house in the middle of Tokyo as a, as a and he was quite he's quite well known in Japan. I'd never heard of him. Um, but each country, each region, each continent have their own traditions and their own inspirations. So I think it's beholden on us at Thinkers50 to highlight as many of those as possible, where the stuff we can learn from them, which there always is, I think.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's continue and talk about Archie Green. Um, shortlisted for the National Book Awards. And I'm curious about where did the seed for writing these three fantasy books come from, des and why a pen name?

**Des Dearlove:** Okay, so Archie Green, so when my children were very little, um, you know, I used to make up stories for them, as you do, trying to get them to go to sleep usually. Um, and this was one of the stories that I started to make up. There were others, but and I had this opening line. Um, that was on my, you know, the computer. And there it sat. And it was literally an opening line because it was about a gift that a young boy receives on his, um, on his ninth birthday. And he opens it and it's got something, you know, something magical inside it, but which had been stored for hundreds of years waiting for this boy and this moment. But I was stuck because I didn't, for the life of me know what was inside the package. So this, this funny little idea traveled through various computers over, you know, over ten years. And then one day I just thought, I know what's inside. So I started writing it and reading it to the children, and then one thing led to another. Now, the problem was when I when I got in front of, I was fortunate to get that Faber and Faber were interested in publishing it, and they said, there's only one problem, or there's lots of problems with the manuscript, but there's one particular problem.

If children put you into Amazon as Des Dearlove, they're going to end up buying, you know, the Financial Times Handbook of Management, which probably isn't what they want. So have you considered having, you know, a pen name so that you're not going to confuse the two markets? So I said, yes, that would be great. Yes, please. I'm, you know, sign me up. So hence it became Everest. And a very curious thing is when you're put on the spot and you've got 24 hours to come up with a new name, which is sort of how it works, because I agreed in principle, but I didn't really think it through. And then of course, they called one day and said, and what is the pen name? And I said, when do you need to know? And they said, tomorrow. And then you're kind of because it's quite a big thing to choose a name for. I mean, we're all stuck with the names we were given at birth, but if you want to actually reinvent yourself. So anyway, after a lot of umming and ahing, I took my two initials, the two DS, and I took my mother's maiden name, which was Everest, and I got Everest and that was that's the name that the books are published under.

**Whitney Johnson:** How is Everest different from Des Dearlove in real life?

**Des Dearlove:** Well, he writes children's books. Anything else though?

**Whitney Johnson:** You're channeling him. How is he different?

**Des Dearlove:** He goes into schools and, you know, talks to children and tries to inspire them to, you know, that they can be writers if they want to. And he I think he he's trying to get in tune with his five, six year old self and visit that child and tell them that it's okay, you can be a writer. Just because you didn't go to all the expensive schools doesn't mean that you can't do it. So if I come out of those sessions, I don't do it as much as I used to now. But when I come out of a classroom with little kids, if there's one, there's usually one out of 30 who sits sitting there quietly just looking at you, and you think, I may have just planted the tiniest of seeds? As Charles Handy once said to me, he said, that's what it's all about. To link it back to our other world is if you sometimes, as David Clutterbuck did all those years ago, if you're planting a little seed and it can grow, but you've got to plant the seed and you've got to you've got to, you know, nourish it. And that's what I'm trying to do. I guess that's what Everest is trying to do in those classrooms.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, and I love that it's Everest and this idea of climbing the mountain and, and in my language climbing an S-curve, which goes to my next question for the two of you is what comes next. What are some, what are some new s-curves that the two of you want to climb? You're still relatively young. What are some things that you still want to do, still want to accomplish?

**Stuart Crainer:** Well, running. Running a business like Thinkers50 is kind of evolved. As we said before, it kind of evolves over the years. One thing leads to another. And so I think for about the last 25 years working together, one thing has led to another inexorably and hopefully we'll carry on doing so. But yeah, I still feel. I still feel a slight, um, opportunistic. You've got to be you've got to be able to follow areas of interest, things that interest you and things that you want to do. You want to build in that kind of flexibility to everything you do.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, that was super vague. Do you want to give us any insight at all, Stuart? Yeah. Wow. That was vague. Okay. Spoken like a true athlete after a game. So is there something specific that you're excited about?

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah.

**Des Dearlove:** What about your. I mean, put words in your mouth, but what about your research at reading?

**Stuart Crainer:** Oh, yeah. No, no, I'm excited about that. Yeah. Obviously. Yeah. Okay. No. I'm just I'm just about to finish doing a PhD on Ezra Pound, the American poet Ezra Pound letters. But that's personal. I was talking professionally about the. That's why I was. Yeah, I was being serious.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, okay. All right. That's super exciting. Why is. I mean, of all the people you could have chosen, why did you choose Ezra Pound to write a dissertation?

**Stuart Crainer:** I spend quite a lot of time in Italy, in a place called Rapallo, which is where Ezra Pound lived. And so I was interested in why he chose to live there and why there was a group of other writers and artists kind of assembled there, and I thought it was a bit more. It was a bit like a Silicon Valley cluster. So we've written about clusters in the business world for many years, one way or another. And I was interested. Why did a cluster of artists and writers assemble in Rapallo in Italy? So what were the dynamics of it? And then through that, I discovered that there wasn't really a cluster, and it was really Ezra Pound's letters were holding things together, and he wrote 100,000 letters in his life. And so I just looked at kind of 20-year period of his letters.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. And you're doing a PhD around this?

**Stuart Crainer:** Yeah, just about to finish.

**Whitney Johnson:** This is amazing. And I love, like, talk about a brand-new S-curve because you're like, you don't need to be getting a PhD right now, but you're doing it and you're writing this amazing book. I love that okay. So I'm going to give you the opportunity. Is there a curve that Dez is jumping to that he's not going to disclose that you need to disclose for him.

**Stuart Crainer:** As he's jumping to it. Not that I know of.

**Des Dearlove:** Yeah. All right then.

**Stuart Crainer:** But that may have more novels. Well he has got more novels inside him.

**Des Dearlove:** I should say that I was obviously I knew that Stuart was doing a PhD, but if Stuart doesn't want to talk about doing his PhD, that's why the hint. Because I think he'd just forgotten that he was doing a PhD. It was it wasn't I wouldn't out him if he didn't want to talk about it. We've known each other too long to do that. Um. What's my. I think I would like to write more. Um, I would like to write some novels for adults, you know, as well as children. So that would be another S-curve. I mean, I've always written fiction, but it would be nice to have a bit more time and space to dedicate to it. Um, I think I also still get a, I think there's a lot more to be done in terms of what Thinkers50 can help facilitate in the world, and I get a real pleasure perhaps linking it back to the classroom and the Archie Green story out of the sort of work that Julie Carrier is doing. Someone who we had on our radar and Julie's work is taking leadership development into schools, particularly, you know, girls and young women and really helping them. And basically she's saying that that you're learning about leadership and becoming a leader starts in the classroom. And it would be wonderful to see those sorts of if we can help in any way with those sorts of initiatives. And it's so rewarding as well to see these, these young women talking about, I mean, just Julie sent a note through, I think it was yesterday.

And these teenage girls have written out what, like a constitution for themselves and their classmates. And at the bottom there's a reference to psychological safety because they've, they've we've shared our, some of our content so they know Amy Edmondson's material. So I mean, and I hope I'll share that with Amy at some point. I'm sure that that's hugely inspiring for her as well. To think that that what started off as kind of management and business ideas actually have a life outside of that. And actually they're entering the mainstream particularly, you know, for young people. And Julie's point is that if you if you become familiar with your leadership identity when you're young, you, you carry that through, you know, if you if you're identified, if you identify yourself as a leader and other people identify you as a leader and say you can do it, and it doesn't have to be a noisy leader. I remember one of the girls in the group saying, I sit at the back. I don't say much, but I'm still a leader and she's obviously I can appreciate. She's a she's a bit of an introvert, but to realize that you don't have to be the person who stands up on the stage. We can all be leaders and we all have different ways of being leaders. So I'd like to get more involved in that sort of work. I think, you know, and try to try to. Create a kind of a groundswell from the --

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, I agree, I think Julie's work is so, so, so compelling, so powerful. And I can't think of a better spokesperson than Julie to do this. And I just had a I maybe you're previewing again something else you're going to do, but maybe reading one of those stories from one of the students for Julie on stage at the gala with Amy. That would be amazing. You're probably already doing that.

**Des Dearlove:** That's a very interesting thought. I had thought about taking it into to show Amy possibly on stage, but then I don't know if she'd like the surprise.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, think you'd be amazing. Surprise and delight. Um, and so you're going to write more fiction as well?

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. All right, so the Thinkers50 gala is coming up on November 5th and sixth. Are there tickets left?

**Stuart Crainer:** There are a small number of tickets left. Okay. It will be a fantastic event. It's a two-day event. This time for the first time. We have more than 500 people from throughout the world. Parties coming from China, Japan, America, some people coming from Australia all the way for the event in London. And it's being held at the Guild Hall in London, one of London's most historic and prestigious venues. It's got Roman ruins in the basement, it's got an art gallery and the big event happens in the Grand Hall, which is one of the most famous rooms in Britain.

**Whitney Johnson:** And I've been several times, and it is so, so fun. It's like something that I look forward to every, every two years. Okay, so final two questions for you is what was useful for you in this conversation. It might be something that you said, but it's probably something that you thought, an idea that came to mind, an observation that you made.

**Des Dearlove:** I think it was interesting that you've drawn out our much more of our personal stories. So, so we've done a lot of interviews over the years, but this one had, um, kind of much more of the human touch, to quote Bruce Springsteen took a while. So I think, I think you actually had to get it in somewhere. You've managed to, um, you know, even get Stuart to talk about his PhD. So you should be as an interviewer. You've done a very good job.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you. What about you, Stuart? What's been useful for you?

**Stuart Crainer:** It's. Well, it's useful, I think, to think about to link what we did, what we were doing 25 years ago, 30 years ago in our lives with what we what we do now. What the. Because we don't spend much time thinking, making sense of your own life in a way, because there is a kind of a things are always happening, you're always busy. And so putting things in context, making sense of it is actually really important, though not necessarily something you're particularly one is particularly comfortable with.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, thank you for being a little bit uncomfortable because your stories were amazing. Um, final thoughts I'll give you each an opportunity to have the final word.

**Stuart Crainer:** Uh, my final thought is ideas change the world. We've over the last couple of years, we've done work over the last year with a business school in Kyiv, in Ukraine. And we've done a webinar series with them. Help them with a webinar series because they're already concentrating on gathering ideas together, the latest thinking on innovation and strategy, because they know that ideas change the world. And there will come a time when they need to rebuild. They're in the process when they'll be in the process of rebuilding their country. And the ideas are as important as bricks. And I think that's a really important message from the work we do that ideas are really, really important.

**Des Dearlove:** And I mean, I think the other side of that is that is that, you know, we live in a, in a in a world facing lots of challenges. But I do think. A combination of human ingenuity, which is kind of where ideas come from, and kindness are the other. That is the human touch. If we if we want to continue as a species. And I think that that is our

superpower, that they are our superpowers. They both have dark sides. You know, there's the other, there's the flip side. But I do think and I hope that, you know, Thinkers50 tries to celebrate and champion those two elements. And, you know, the whole S-curve thing, I think has been very powerful, actually, in my experience. So I'd like to thank you for that. Whitney, because that's a very useful tool and way of thinking about things, and particularly about when it's time to move on and do the next thing. And perhaps we're perhaps we're reaching that point with Thinkers50.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, certainly there are some new curves for you. I'm excited for you to write some more fiction and to have Stuart, you publish your dissertation on Ezra Pound. Thank you so much for joining us. It's been a lot of fun and look forward to seeing you in two weeks.

**Stuart Crainer and Des Dearlove:** Thanks. Thank you for having us. Thank you, Whitney. Always nice to talk to you.

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It's interesting to think about the volume of ideas that comes out of every thinkers 50 gala, right? I mean, that's a powerful brain trust to take a turn from. For curating this list of thinkers is one thing, roughly half the job. But the other half is putting these folks together because that's how problems get solved. Whether it's splitting the atom or making a workplace work for everyone. We figure out who has the insight and we get them talking. That's steward and Des real impact. They don't know what the solutions really are. They're not setting agendas and telling people what to think. They're setting up an ecosystem and letting it run, seeing what comes out of it, producing these flashes of genius. And there's something to be said for their role outside of the industry. They're not coaches or managers in their own right. They're, well, journalists. They're observing, documenting. And for a relatively young industry like ours, that's invaluable. And it's clear how they keep that distance. Des has Archie Green, Stewart has his Ezra Pound. For more of a panel on the state and future of our profession, there's our Listener Roundtable, **episode 329** on the entrepreneurial spirit that led Stewart and Des to found Thinkers50 in the first place. There's my talk with another journalist, David Epstein. That's **episode 232**, and I'd be remiss if I didn't mention my talk with Tom Peters. **Episode 300**. Thank you again to Des and Stewart 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.