

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 345: MELISSA WERNECK

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. The last time you had to navigate change - real, structural change - who did you turn to? Is there a name that comes to mind? When we're working from a place of ambiguity, when we're stuck inside our own head, another person can make all the difference.

But let's be honest, sometimes, painfully... that person is no one at all. We can have this instinct, as leaders, that reaching out is weakness. We can see it as this flashing neon sign that, hey, I have no idea what I'm doing. Someone, please help.

Melissa Werneck's spent her career fighting against that stigma. As the Chief Human Resources Officer for Kraft-Heinz, she's bringing her message of coaching as growth to an international company. Making sure everyone knows, it's okay to raise your hand, it's okay to feel a little lost - whether you're a new hire or the CEO.

I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So Melissa, I want to start our talk by grounding our listeners in your experience, starting with your time in Brazil. You have taken on a wide variety of industries, everything from railroad to beer making. And I said beer making instead of brewery because I can't say the word brewery logistics. So tell me about what were your first career experiences like?

Melissa Werneck: I'm really, I really like that. We are starting with this question. As you said, I am originally from Brazil and I have been living in United States for ten years. You know, I was lucky enough to meet people who believed in me throughout my career and who offered me experiences in different sectors and different functions. My life is definitely a mix of incredible, non-linear opportunities. That said, I have a confession to make. It was not part of my original plan, wasn't the destination. You know, I didn't have a career life all sorted out in my in my mind, I am a chemical engineer by background who found myself working in the people function. And, you know, I originally came to HR as part of an assignment, and along the way I fell madly in love with it. It was not planned, but it became my life choice. So I was lucky in the end. And I soon discovered the reason that I love chemical

engineering and HR so much. You know, in the end they are very similar. And the word that connect the two is transformation from a raw material to a final product from a rough diamond, a young talent. Now to a Jew, you know, someone that is making a difference and an impact in the organization. And that's my passion, my mission in life.

Whitney Johnson: So tell us about this assignment. Like when you first got that assignment and the person was like, we want you to go to HR. Like what? What experience were you having when that happened?

Melissa Werneck: Look, to be quite honest, I was finishing my MBA, you know, and the only discipline, the only subject that I haven't studied during my MBA was HR. So when I was, you know, invited for this assignment, my first question to the crew was, are you nuts? I know nothing about HR, but he said, I know everything about HR. I want your strengths to complement my strengths. So what I'm looking for, the skills that I'm looking for. The function are A, B, C and it was a beautiful match. Then I said, okay, let's try this. And no, years and years later I'm here. The crew of Kraft Heinz.

Whitney Johnson: How old were you when you had that that move to?

Melissa Werneck: I was 28.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. So early in your career?

Melissa Werneck: Very early in my career.

Whitney Johnson: Do you remember what you wanted to be? I mean, you studied chemical engineering, but do you remember what you wanted to be when you were a kid, like when you were ten years old, what you wanted to be when you grew up?

Melissa Werneck: I have always been very curious. My parents will tell you that I wanted to be 300 million things at the same time. So at the same time that I would say that I wanted to be a ballerina, I said I wanted to be a ballerina and an astronaut. And, you know, I always loved to see those people walking in the airports, wearing those beautiful suits and those nice briefcases. And I told my mother, you know, I wanted to be one of those people. Today I am, you know, and I'm very grateful that my family always supported me. When I was five, I decided that I would make shampoo in our bathroom, you know, and instead of my mother saying, you were crazy. Don't do that. She said, okay. So I started a shampoo production with seaweed that I brought from our vacation, you know, and the only rule that my mama put in place was you cannot try the shampoo on your hair or the dog. Other than that, you can do whatever you want to do. And, you know, until today, my husband, my kids, they are very supportive in the life choices that I make.

Whitney Johnson: Wow. So you're five years old and you say, "Mom, I want to make shampoo out of seaweed."

Melissa Werneck: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: And that is so beautiful that she was like, go for it.

Melissa Werneck: Yes. That favored my path.

Whitney Johnson: Did it work?

Melissa Werneck: The shampoo? It did not. But it was a fun experience.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, right. There's something magical about this, and I'm trying to remember we had another guest on the podcast who had a similar experience of, hey mom, I'm going to do X, Y, or Z. And their mother was just like, great, like, how are you going to do this? And I just think there there's some pattern recognition there for me of children whose parents aren't saying to them, oh no, you can't do that. But yeah, how are you going to do it? Tell me more. It's beautiful.

Melissa Werneck: With guardrails. I love what my mom said. "Okay, you can do it. Don't test on yourself or the dog."

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, exactly. Oh. So good. All right. So. So here you are today. Like you said, you started as a chemical engineer. You ended up in for you. Then years later, how did you end up in the United States from Brazil? Let's go there.

Melissa Werneck: I was invited by someone that I met in Brazil I had worked for in Brazil, and he was taking a position in the United States, and he invited me to come, and I had all those butterflies in the stomach, you know, but my family supported me, my husband, my kids. They said, look, that's another adventure. Let's do it. We are going together. Ten years later, we are here now.

Whitney Johnson: Was this Kraft Heinz or was this another company?

Melissa Werneck: Heinz was before the merger. It was Heinz in 2013.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. All right. So let's talk about Heinz. Now, today it's Kraft Heinz. And when we think of Kraft Heinz we think of mac and cheese. We think of Heinz ketchup. Of course the the, you know, the iconic ketchup. But you have a lot more products than that. So as listeners are wondering okay, Kraft Heinz, what are some examples of other products besides mac and cheese and ketchup?

Melissa Werneck: We are a global food company with a delicious heritage. Our founders thought this to pave our beliefs. You know, H.J. Heinz used to say 150 years ago, quality is to a product what character is to a man or to a woman. That is still true today. 150 years later, we have more than 200 iconic food and beverage brands in nearly 200 countries around the world, and our purpose is to make life delicious. So talking about brands, we also have Heinz Beans in UK, Primal Kitchen in United States, Master Soy Sauce in China, Kraft Peanut butter in Canada, and many more brands around the world. And the impact that they have around the world is incredible. You know, I witness it even when I'm going through customs at the airport and they ask me why I'm in town, and I say, I'm here for business and I work for, you know, and I use the local brand to answer this question, and I automatically see a smile on their face as they think about the memories that our brands bring. It's magical.

Whitney Johnson: Melissa, what's one of your favorite memories with a Kraft Heinz product? What comes to mind for you?

Melissa Werneck: My favorite memory was when, you know, one day I was coming from a trip. My husband was traveling and the kids, you know, were fighting over dinner, that they didn't like the food and whatever. And they said, you know what? We are having French fries, burgers and ketchup. And I got that that bottle of Heinz ketchup. And I put on the table, and my kids were so happy. And, you know, all the fight over dinner became a celebration of food. And we had a lot of fun together that day. A bottle of ketchup made my life delicious, you know, and transformed the experience over dinner.

Whitney Johnson: The power of food, right?

Melissa Werneck: The power of food. Bringing people together.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So bringing people together, you oversee all of HR. You're the chief human resources officer at Kraft Heinz. Talk to us about what does your job look like day to day? For a listener who's never seen what HR looks like at a large

company, there's a line cook listening there using your ketchup. But they've never been inside of your building. What does HR look like?

Melissa Werneck: Look, our day to day is to grow our people, to grow our business. You know, here we are in the service model. Industry. You know we love to serve. We put the others ahead of ourselves. Our dream as a function here at Kraft Heinz is to fill the limitless and be the destination for all there is to win. And, you know, being a key partner in the growth of our employees. And of course, the growth of the company is, you know, what makes our life delicious and helping everyone to bring the best version of themselves to their teams. It's really rewarding. You know, good isn't good enough. We want to be great. Everyone wants to be great people. They don't show up every day to work to know I'm here today to be average. I'm here today to be good. You know, they are putting the best version of themselves to try to be great. And really, we like to challenge the ordinary, be disruptive, make bold decisions, you know, supporting our employees along the journey, you know, so we're there. We are there for them. We're there for them. You know, a question that I ask all of them, you know, oh, after 12 months, do you think that you were better than, you know, a year ago? The answer is yes. That's it. We completed our mission.

Whitney Johnson: So good. All right. So let's talk about maybe today or yesterday. So day to day, what does it look like. Do you have lots of meetings. Like what kinds of conversations do you have. Are you interviewing people. Probably some days you have to let people go. I mean, like what? What does it look like for you? Who are you talking to beyond.

Melissa Werneck: You know, the specifics of the human resources function. That's recruitment, talent development, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging performance. No, I would say that coaching and be there for the employees when they need is what I like the most. You know, I believe in managing by walking around. I believe in talking to people in the floors, people. They say that when I am at the office, I'm always late to meetings because I stopped to talk to everyone along the way, you know, and every time that I am welcoming a new internship cohort, for example, I say, you know where to find me. If you have a doubt, please stop by. Let's talk. Let's have a conversation. So those are the best moments for me. You know, the moments that I come back home and I say, oh, today was a rewarding day. And when I see someone struggling, for example, you know that looking for an advice and I am able, you know, to walk them through alternatives that they have or things that they can do. And I see they now getting better and coming to say, look, your advice meant a lot to me and helped me a lot to achieve whatever they wanted to achieve. Those are the days that make me, me happy. Then I said, look, I, I made a difference in someone's lives, someone's life.

Whitney Johnson: Do you go to the factory floors very often? How often?

Melissa Werneck: Being in chemical engineering, I like to say that I was born in a factory floor. You know, my first full time job was in a factory floor, you know, and it's always a very humbling experience to see the incredible passion and love that the factory workers put into the food that we eat every day. So for me, talking to them and seeing, you know, how they love that they put behind it is great. During the pandemic, there was one moment that one of our factory employees shared a phrase that really stuck with me, not only with me, with all of us in the company, she said. We got you, America. That became our rally cry. That gave me goosebumps until today. And that moment is so hard, you know that, you know, our factory workers were essential people. They need food to survive. They were they're very proud, you know, to be able to serve and say, we got you America, you know. So that was a powerful moment that I'll never forget. I've been with the company for ten years and I visited, you know, all factories across the globe. And every time I visit, you know, I feel inspired and energized, and I make everyone late to the next meeting because I'm always asking so many questions and having a great time in the factory. So it's a rewarding moment for me.

Whitney Johnson: Do you know how many factories you have? Approximately.

Melissa Werneck: We have close to 80 factories around the world.

Whitney Johnson: 80 factories? Wow!

Melissa Werneck: From New Zealand to Canada.

Whitney Johnson: Wow! Very cool. Okay, so another question. I remember we had Johnny Taylor, who's the president of SHRM. So the Society for Human Resource Management Professionals, I think I'm not getting that right. But and he talked about the interesting symbiotic relationship between a CEO and a CRO. Talk to us about what that relationship looks like when it's at its best.

Melissa Werneck: I'm very glad that he said that. You know, because when I first came to HR, you know, I remember people saying that, oh, HR is not part of the decision table or HR doesn't have a seat at the table. So I think we conquered the seat at the table. Not sure if you were invited or if you just went there and found our space, but definitely today, you know, we have a big role to play, you know, and a very important seat at the table. And the pandemic accelerated that even more. This is viewed today as a trusted advisor of the CEO and not only the CEO, but the whole leadership team. And, you know, the CEO position can be lonely at the top. So for the CEO to be able to count with a great advisor, a great partner, you know, that will tell the do's and don'ts, will help you think will help to define what's the best approach for the company. I would say that now being able to share those moments in this experience is good for the CEO too. And for the crew. It's a nice it's a nice, it's a nice place to finally be.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, yeah, I think it feels like at its best, the crew is kind of a CEO whisperer, because you have the pulse of the entire company and can be a really trusted, trusted partner. How do the question I'm wondering is we talk a lot about words like diversity, inclusion, teamwork. How do we move them from corporate buzzwords to legitimately to legitimate philosophies that people can believe in? Thoughts?

Melissa Werneck: I would say acting every single day according to the word. According to the belief. Some people, they ask me, oh, why D and B? I think the short answer and the right answer is because it's the right thing to do, right? And in our case, we are a consumer goods company. Our consumers, they are diverse. So in order for me to represent the consumers that I serve, my employees, our employees, they need to be diverse as well. You know, and back in 2019, we were doing a listening tour with our employees. And they told us, they said, look, if we were serious about that, diversity should be one of the company values. And we said, look, you know what? They're right. So we changed our values and one of our values became we demand diversity and we chose the words very carefully. Now demand is a strong word. It's not that, you know, I appreciate I like I act it's demand, you know. And the word demand was put on there with a purpose. You know, beyond my role here at Kraft Heinz, you know, I like to introduce And myself beyond my title, you know, and as you said in the beginning, I'm originally from Brazil, so I am an immigrant.

I am a daughter. I am a mother, I am a wife, I am a professional. And I spent 13 years of my life working for a company that had less than 10% women in the workforce. You know, in a country that everything die and be related is know many, many, many steps behind the United States. And, you know, at that point in time for me, I wasn't able to articulate, you know, what I was feeling or, you know, my lack of know the sense of belonging. But today I can, you know, after studying a lot, moving to United States. And I'm happy to use my voice to amplify it and be an inspiration for others. You know, my experiences, as I said in the beginning, my non-linear trajectory forged my principle that, you know, everyone should be able to speak up on things that matter. Everyone is welcome at the table. You know, I once heard from Chef Jose Andres, very interesting quote. He said, we have to build the longer tables instead of higher walls. And that's beautiful, you know. So I heard this, I don't know, three, four years ago. And I still repeat it every single week to my team, my kids and my friends.

Whitney Johnson: Longer tables, not higher walls. And I, you know, I want to just give you a shout out because if I look at Kraft Heinz from a in the senior ranks, you are much more diverse than most fortune 100, fortune 200 companies, I mean. Shout out to you.

Melissa Werneck: And that links to our value. We demand diversity. You know, it's something that we believe and we represent our consumers that are diverse.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So recently we had Zeynep Tan on the podcast to talk about good jobs. And she's at MIT Sloan. She founded the Good Jobs Institute. And so one of the this is a little bit of a theoretical but also practical question. How do you define a job that's good for a worker?

Melissa Werneck: Look, first, very good that we have a good jobs institute. Didn't know it. So I will ask you to introduce me to her because I'm very curious about it. You know, building good jobs, good workplaces is one of our missions in human resources. And I would say that, you know, to define what a good job is, you have to listen, right? Cannot define what a good job is based on what we think a good job is. A good job for a sales person may be different than a good job for a factory worker, may a different than a good job for a Gen Z or a baby boomer. So going on those listening tours and understand, you know, what they and what they define as a good job, it is important for us. We do that every year, and what they tell us is that they want to do something that has impact, you know, something that matter. They want to grow as professionals. They want to grow as team players. They want to grow as individuals. And grow is not no vertical promotion. Grow, learn, be better today than they were yesterday, you know, and really doing something that matter that generates an impact for their teams, for the company and for the consumers. And I think that's magical.

Whitney Johnson: Do you have an example of that that you can share and maybe from someone or, you know, a team or a person that's outside of the United States, does anything come to mind?

Melissa Werneck: Look, I have an interesting example that comes from UK, okay? Our UK team and being a food company, we have a responsibility of feeding the world. And this employee was telling me that, you know, the team launched a campaign for people who were hungry in the country and didn't have money to buy food. And this idea was generated during the pandemic, and they created, you know, a partnership with another company that the population could go to this place and ask for Henry and ask for Henry was a code of, I don't have money to buy food, but I'm very hungry. Can you please provide me a meal? And they would provide a meal, you know, without exposing the person or, you know, making the person feel embarrassed. And this employee came to me so proud saying, you know, this is a good job because, you know, we are doing good for the consumers. We are doing good for the employees, we are doing good for all the stakeholders. But look, being able to feed people without exposing them, it's beautiful.

Whitney Johnson: So they would go to a restaurant or where would they go?

Melissa Werneck: They would go to this chain that we partnered with and they will ask for Henry.

Whitney Johnson: Henry.

Melissa Werneck: And they will get a meal.

Whitney Johnson: It's beautiful. Okay. Um. All right. So it's it's one thing to coach a person one on one, which you talked about earlier, but you have 40,000 employees. So what are some things that you do to help your to help make good coaches out of managers?

Melissa Werneck: Look, being a good coach, a good people manager in today's world is hard. Everything is changing every single day, you know. And on top of that, you know, Gallup research says that only 10% of the population is naturally wired to be a manager, so 90% are not. It's a scary number, right? So we have to support them. And, you know, instead of giving the solution, we start to co-create the solution with our people managers. And it was interesting that we heard from 80% of the employees, you know, saying that they wanted their leaders to be better coaches. And we learn we heard from 92% of the people managers that they. Wanted it to be better coaches. They wanted it to be developed. They wanted the tools and advice on how to be better

coaches. So it's a nice match, right? So we launched a program that we call the project Win. You know W comes from work as a team. The I is inspire excellence and the N is navigate the future. You know. And we started to better equip and prepare the managers, you know, to really coach their teams and you know, make develop their teams and make the teams, you know, be the best version of themselves in the day to day. And there is another research that says that, you know, one good manager influences 40 people. If we think about that, it makes our life easier. Right? That's a halo effect in the organization. So if you get this right, you know, instead of having to do that for 40,000 people, you know, if you do the statistics, you can concentrate more and less people while, you know, making everyone's life better and develop. Everyone had the journey.

Whitney Johnson: You know, I find that I had never heard that statistic before. Melissa, about only 1 in 10 people is wired to be a manager. I find that incredibly encouraging. Don't you find it scary?

Melissa Werneck: I like that you're articulating it as encouraging because it's scary.

Whitney Johnson: The reason I find it encouraging is because I think we could argue that more than 1 in 10 managers is a good manager, and that means that you can grow. It means that it's a skill set that you can learn. It means that you know, these people who desire to be better managers, can be better managers and are becoming better managers. And I find that encouraging.

Melissa Werneck: Very good. So we articulate it like that as well, you know. Yes, it's encouraging, but also, you know, increases our responsibility.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, absolutely. And and to your point about the, you know, a good manager influences 40 people. I mean, I would argue that it's actually far more than that. I mean, I don't know what the data is, but if you, you know, you look at the contagion effect of like, you know, if you're happier then your child is happier and your child's teacher is happier and your child's teacher's partner is happier. I mean, that ripple effect gets. It's a lot more than 40 people. And to quote Clayton Christensen, you know, he said management is the noblest of professions if done well. I mean, it's something to aspire to do it well, to manage people.

Melissa Werneck: And our quote is Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft as well. He said that, you know, if you wanted to have a better human resources function, invest your money to have better managers, because then they will lead better, will free up time from HR can be more strategic, you know, and help even more the managers to be even better? So it's a virtuous cycle that I think is magical.

Whitney Johnson: So good. All right, so the S-curve. Can you talk? I know you've used it as a language and a tool inside of Kraft Heinz. And a lot of our listeners will sometimes say, okay, I get it. This is really interesting, but how do you apply it? Practically. So can you give an example or two for people who are listening?

Melissa Werneck: Very good. You know, when you understand the framework it makes. The life of a manager easier. You know when to plan and to help people in their careers, you know, because when you were achieving the mastery state of the S-curve, it means that you know, you're starting to repeat yourself or to get bored. So exposing those employees to new areas or new projects doesn't need to be new. A new assignment can be a new project. You know, bring them back to the launch point. That's the learning phase. And with the fresh eyes, they will ask the right questions. You know, that will make people reflect, think and evolve. So it's a virtuous circle. We did we did a move in the organization of a strong finance leader. You know, that we put her in a completely different area. And in the first conversation she didn't understand. She said, I know nothing about this area. That move makes no sense. And I explained to her the S-curve that she had been doing her job for many, many, many, many, many years that, you know, she had to have those butterflies in the stomach again. You know, going back to the lounge point, use her fresh eyes, you know, to relearn and to learn new things, relearn and also unlearn things that she thought were true. And then after this conversation, she

said, oh my God, I get it. I want jump right into this experience. And it was a beautiful move to watch, you know? And the results for her career and for the company were great as well.

Whitney Johnson: So good. So um. What's a new curve that you've jumped to recently that has nothing to do with HR or cheese or ketchup?

Melissa Werneck: Oh, that's an easy one. You know, my son moving away to college. That for me and my husband was hard because especially in Brazil, it's not common for you to leave your parents house to attend college. So that's something that for us, you know, was a little scary having our baby. Okay. 18-year-old, 18 year old baby. But moving away. And he said no, we are based in Chicago. And he said, I'm not applying to any university in Chicago. And I said, why not? Chicago has amazing universities. Why do you want to really go away? And he articulated beautifully why he wanted to go away. So it was a big ass curve for us. You know, I would say that I'm now at the sweet spot. He will. He would say that I'm still at the launch point. You know, I'm still trying to know everything that he's doing every day, but that's. It was a big ass curve for me outside the day to day at work.

Whitney Johnson: How does your younger son feel about that?

Melissa Werneck: He laughs because, you know, he spends two thirds of his life here. And he said, mom, come on, come on. And now he started to say, I'm next. Three years from now, I'm gone. What are you going to do? So I have to figure out what am I going to do when I reach the mastery stage? You know, I will go back to the lounge again with him and, you know, I'll have all those learning opportunities again. And those butterflies in the stomach.

Whitney Johnson: Oh so good. So, Melissa, how has career coaching played a role in in charting your journey after you moved from Brazil to the United States?

Melissa Werneck: It took me a while to believe in coaching.

Whitney Johnson: Say more.

Melissa Werneck: I used to think that, you know, people who got coaches were the ones who were struggling or the ones who were in trouble, you know? Coaching was a responsibility of the leader. I know, very narrow minded, right? Yes, yes, I take it very narrow minded, you know, and yes, coaching is part of the leader's responsibility. But an external coach can be a great partner to the leader along the journey. You know, a good coach puts you out of the comfort zone. A good coach provokes you. A good coach asks the right questions, you know, and make you reflect and know. I changed my mind four years ago and our chief learning and diversity officer. Her name is Pam Bassey. You know, I owe it to her. We were undergoing a lot of changes, you know, including a CEO transition. So being HR, I was under a lot of pressure and everybody was coming to me looking for advice and thoughts and, you know, some sort of stability. And one day she came to me and she said, you need a coach. And I said, whoa. I immediately thought that was her way to give me feedback, that I was doing something wrong. And I asked her, oh, okay, what am I doing wrong? Please tell me I want to be better. She said, you're not doing anything wrong. She said, you care so much about the people. Everybody come to you. You help everyone who is helping you. Who do you talk to? Especially in the moment that we are having a transition. You know who? Can you articulate or vent or ask questions? You know, and that moment, that conversation changed me, you know? And the coaching helped me really, really to bring me the best, to bring the best version of myself every day to to the work.

Whitney Johnson: And who's your coach? Melissa.

Melissa Werneck: You, Whitney.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you. You know what? It's so funny. I didn't know that you felt that way about coaching. And I guess you probably wouldn't have said that to me, but I that certainly was the case. I mean, I remember when I was working on Wall Street, this is probably in the. Late 90s. Late 90s, early 2000. And they said, we want you to have a coach. And it was because they wanted to fix me. So it was it did used to be that way where you only gave people coaches because you needed to fix them, because there was a problem. And it has really flipped over the last 20 years where it isn't to fix people. Sometimes it's to fix people, but more often than not, it's a badge of honor of like, hey, we believe in you. You're a high performer. We want you to perform even better, and.

Melissa Werneck: We believe it as a badge of honor. We were able to see how the combination, of course, the leader, you know, and the coach can be magical to to an employee.

Whitney Johnson: So good. All right, so final question. No second to last question. You know what I'm going to ask? What has been useful for you in this conversation?

Speaker3: Whitney, we talked about coaching before, you know, and I share with the audience the privilege that I have to have you as a coach. So this podcast for me has been an amazing S-curve experience. When you first invited me to the podcast, I said, Whitney, I cannot do that. I'm not ready, you know? And you put myself at the launch point of the S-curve. Then you said, so get ready, you know, for it. So I participated in other interviews, other podcasts, and tried to get myself ready for this day and has been an amazing conversation and sharing my experiences, my thoughts, and a little bit of Kraft Heinz with the audience.

Whitney Johnson: I love that you shared that, Melissa, because it was something that you were reticent of saying, you know, English isn't my native language. You were very reluctant to do interviews, any kinds of interviews in English. And like you said, thank you for saying that out loud. I think that I think that I know for me. I can't imagine doing a podcast interview in Spanish. Definitely not Portuguese, but not Spanish. And so I just appreciate the vulnerability around that. Thank you.

Melissa Werneck: I appreciate you encouraging me to be here today. It has been nice. So it has been a very useful conversation.

Whitney Johnson: Good. Any final thoughts that you'd like to share?

Melissa Werneck: To wrap up, I would like to tell the human resources people listening to the podcast or the ones you know who appreciate HR or the ones who want to join HR. It's a very special moment for the function. The world is changing a lot. You know, we are unfortunately facing all those crises around the world and war and people not understanding each other. You know, so being a serve function, being able to make an impact, you know, and navigate organizations throughout all of this, it's a blessing. I have learned so much in the last four years. Of course, I didn't want a pandemic to happen. I didn't want people, you know, to die from Covid and war. But I've learned a lot, and that has been a very humbling experience. So I feel privileged to be in HR in this moment of the world.

Whitney Johnson: Melissa. Thank you.

It's been absolutely amazing to watch Melissa grow, as both her coach and her friend. It's one of those things, the ripple effects that we can never truly understand. But they're still very real.

I was thinking about what Melissa said, about how being a CEO can really be a lonely position. As much as it hurts to think about, a lot of the issues that we talked about have their seeds in that isolation. The kind that fills our brain and our heart with white, aching noise.

But that is where coaching comes in. Where corporate culture has leaned towards the fleeting image of the stone-cold individual, coaching represents a swinging of the pendulum the other way. Folks like Melissa recognizing that sustained growth looks like sitting on the same side of the table. It looks like speaking up when you know you have something to offer. And as the CHRO of Kraft-Heinz, Melissa's perfectly placed to make thousands of leaders feel less lonely.

Did you notice how many times she used the word listening? Traveling around the world, doing less talking, much more listening. It's easy to prescribe from the C-suite. It's infinitely harder, and infinitely more rewarding, to prescribe from the bottom up. It's that idea of having fresh eyes on the launch point of the S-curve. Like a kid figuring out how to make shampoo from seaweed.

For more on choosing growth as our default mode of operation, there's my talk with cognitive scientist Scott Barry Kaufman, **episode 254**. On refusing to label yourself as the lone cowboy leader, I'd point you to **episode 169** with Dr. Benjamin Hardy. And for a more recent conversation, there's **episode 341** with the host of the HR Leaders podcast, Chris Rainey.

Thank you again to Melissa 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 Tuerk, production assistant Ange Harris, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson,

and this has been Disrupt Yourself.