

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 291: JILLIAN JOHNSRUD

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. We provide strategies and advice on how to climb the S Curve of Learning in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson. My guest today is Jillian Johnsrud, an author, blogger, podcaster, and coach who covers personal finance. But she's not just providing stock tips and savings plans. Jillian wants us to rethink our relationship to money itself. This passion comes from a deeply personal place. When she and her family encountered major medical and student debt, she began to study how the language of finance is passed down, often detrimentally from one generation to the next. Despite major setbacks, Jillian and her family are now financially independent, and it's her mission to help others do the same. She puts herself out there online every day, which inevitably invites some detractors. That's what her new book is about. It's called *Fire the Haters*, and it's a study on how to keep online discourse productive and when to ignore bad faith arguments. I really enjoyed this chat with Jillian, and I know you'll find it valuable.

Whitney Johnson: So, Jillian, tell us about a formative experience for you.

Jillian Johnsrud: The situation that probably makes my adult life make the most sense was I was probably 11 or 12. My mom was in her second marriage, and it was really unhealthy. It was just a really unhealthy situation. And, you know, I came to her, and I just said, listen, we can't stay here. Like, we can't, we can't do this. This isn't healthy. This isn't safe. Like, I don't care where we go. I don't care where we live. Like, I don't care if I need to do a job, but, like, we have to get out of the situation. And she was such a practical woman, and she still is. And she said, Jillian, I can't afford to raise three kids on my own. Like, that's it. And I as kind of an idealist, I went upstairs, and I just cried hot tears into my bed. But I had this epiphany at the same time of, Oh, money gives you options. Oh, money can give you choices. Like it isn't just to, like, buy fancy things or feel important. Like I never wanted to be in that situation again. And I desperately wanted more choices and more options than I felt like I had in that moment. So, I became really passionate about personal finance and saving money, and just, you know, no one in my family was really kind of good with money, really savvy. And yeah, I kind of set out to figure, figure this thing out. And that kind of started me on this trajectory.

Whitney Johnson: Money gives us options.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: That is a formative experience, and I love how you just described it. I haven't heard someone say it that way. Is: what experience have you had that helped explain who you are as an adult? I really liked the reframe of that. That's really, really good.

Jillian Johnsrud: I do a lot of financial coaching, and so I've talked to so many people about their money and their upbringing, and the reality is how everyone manages their money and spends money. Once you know, their story makes perfect sense. I've never met someone that I'm like, I'm so confused why you're doing this. Like, once you know their upbringing and their childhood and their personality. It's like an equation that never fails. And I think for in the financial side, for more of us, if we kind of reflect on our money origin story and our personality. Like, it can really help us kind of rewrite some of that if, if it needs to be.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, that's Act one. Let's go to Act two. So, we know that that background for you and that's really interesting. I love that idea. Now I'm like, let's get three people on here and have you analyze them. But so, let's, let's go to act two the trajectory that you're on. You were, I think you were 19 years old. You had \$55,000 in debt. Is that right?

Jillian Johnsrud: Yes. So, I'm married. I met my husband at 19. Amazing, perfect guy, but he had a little bit of debt. He had some student loans, and he had some credit card bills. And I had actually been hospitalized my senior year of high school, but I was 18. And so, I had like \$10,000 in medical debt from that situation. So, together we got married, and we had \$55,000 of debt. Which was just like, Oh, this is the opposite of what I was hoping for. But we, you know, when we first got married, someone gave us this advice of just save half of your income. You know, you've each been paying your bills on your own, you're going to get married, save half. That'll give you some more options down the road if you decide to have kids or whatever. And I just thought, well, that's simple, easy, prudent advice. And I was like, Yes, we will. We'll do that. We'll just save half. And that was kind of our mantra. First, we used it towards debt payoff and then emergency funds, and we started investing. So, by the time I was 24, we had paid off all of our debt, and we had saved our first \$100,000.

Whitney Johnson: So, for every single dollar that you earned before you paid your taxes, you saved half.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah. I mean, it was a little bit of both. My husband, so, he joined the military because they would, over the course of four years, pay off his student loans, which were about 35 of that of that debt. So, we had like a housing stipend in there too, which was tax-free and all of that. But just kind of a simple rule of thumb. You know, we made about the same amount of money. We were both making about \$30,000 a year, and so we just saved half.

Whitney Johnson: So, what happened next?

Jillian Johnsrud: Here's the kind of mind-boggling hard thing to understand about money is the effect of compound interest and how the money compounds, but also your choices compound. So, it started to grow and grow. And we always had this goal of paying cash for a house. So, we kept saving, and we moved back to the States. We lived overseas for four years with the military, moved back to the states, and found the ugliest house I could find. It was all of my family members were like, Oh, honey, you're not going to live here, are you? But we had saved about \$200,000 at that point, so, we could have bought a pretty nice house at the time. But we bought the \$50,000 like had been foreclosed on, and a smarter person had walked away from it, you know, kind of situation and remodeled it ourselves. We had no tools; we had no experience. We had YouTube. Unfortunately, there was no like Chip and Joanna Gaines there holding our hands, saying, It'll be beautiful, trust us. It was just me trying to talk my husband into it. That rolled into our first rental house, which helped finance our second rental house. And, you know, we kept investing. And so, by the time I was 32, we became financially independent, which was never really the goal or the idea. Like, if you would have told me at 20, Hey, by the time you're 32, like you'll be there. I wouldn't even kind of sort of entertain the thought, you know, I was shooting for like 55. But, you know, we had the good timing of bad timing. You know, we had the good timing and that everything went wrong, like the stock market crash. The housing market crash. Like everything was doom and gloom. So, the biggest advantage we had was, was everything was going wrong at the time.

Whitney Johnson: You were buying when everybody else was selling.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yes. Yes.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. How are you defining financially independent?

Jillian Johnsrud: So, the basic definition of financial independence is that your assets or your passive income can cover all of your living expenses for the rest of your life. And so, we got to the point where we had our rentals, we had our stock market investments, and my husband had also been retired from the military, so, he had a pension, and each of those made about 30% of our income. But all of that together was enough to pay all of our bills.

Whitney Johnson: So, what's interesting about this is that there was a lot of education happening. Did you end up going to college?

Jillian Johnsrud: I went a little bit here and there. Oddly enough, I like in high school, I never had any specific career ambitions. I think I didn't, I think maybe just how I had grown up. I never saw myself as like this extraordinary professional. So, throughout our career, I had kind of just done the jobs that were there, taking classes I was interested in. And it wasn't really until we became financially independent that I stepped back, and I said, What do I really want to do? Now that income isn't the biggest question. Now that I don't have to stress about like getting paid on Friday to buy groceries. What is it that I'm passionate about? What is it that I'm interested about? What kind of impact do I want to make in the world? And kind of carved out a whole new course.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, I find myself very, very intrigued because some would say you need to go to college to figure all this out. Some would say your mom's mindset. You just talked about the origin story. Tell me your background around money, and I can tell you your future. And yet your future is not what you would have predicted, given what we know about your mom's story. So, what did you do? What was the catalyst? How did you make that shift?

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah. So, for me, it, the wild card kind of in my story. One of the things that altered my path significantly is when I was in grade school. You know, I come home every day after school, I'd grab a pop tart. I would sit in front of the TV.

Whitney Johnson: Ooh yum, what kind of pop tart?

Jillian Johnsrud: Oh, I love all of them. But berry flavors, berry flavors especially. But I like any pop tart, it's still a weakness. I can't even keep them in the house. But I would eat that pop tart in front of the TV, and I would watch Oprah. And every day she was like an aunt to me. Every day she showed up in my house, and she introduced me to new people and new ideas and these books. And I didn't know if I could, like, believe all of it. Like, it all seemed too magical and too good to be true. But she gave me what I consider like the most important element in change. And that was hope. Like, I had hope that maybe things could be different. I also as, as a kid, I was very dyslexic. I really struggled in school like numbers and letters, especially grade school. So, I was from kind of this, you know, this low-income, chaotic environment, and I didn't seem smart at all, so, I didn't have a lot of other people being like, You're going to do great things in life. But like Oprah, Oprah believed when I went at 32 and, and decided to think about what it is I want to do with my life, it came back to her. Like, I want to give people hope. I want to give them a glimmer that, like, life can be different. It can look different; it can be bigger and better than what you currently see around you. And just some of the tools to do that. So, she was, she was a little bit of my wild card in, in this tiny Montana town where, you know, we didn't have cable TV or libraries.

Whitney Johnson: Please tell me that you have written to her and told her all this.

Jillian Johnsrud: I haven't. But I keep, I keep thinking, one of these days I'm going to meet her. It just has to happen. Like, I feel like I've come so far. Like, she must just be a little bit up the road now.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, you know what I'm going to say right?

Jillian Johnsrud: No, I don't. I'm a little nervous though.

Whitney Johnson: I'm going to dare you to make a video. Write her a letter, do a solo podcast episode, and forward it to her and share it with her. And even if she doesn't ever respond, you're saying all of that out loud to her will be magical for you.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Will you, do it?

Jillian Johnsrud: Okay. Yes.

Whitney Johnson: Within the next three months.

Jillian Johnsrud: Three months? Done.

Whitney Johnson: I love it so much. And you know what's so cool about what you just said? Is that basically what she did? Well, there's a couple of things. You worked with the resources that you had that were available to you, which was a television, no cable. And she was teaching you the power of visualization.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: And she was mentoring you. And that's a reminder that we don't need to have in-person mentors we can get them off of now, we can get them off of podcasts and YouTube, etc. So powerful. And now, it sounds like you know what you want to do, which is give other people a glimmer of hope. So beautiful. All right, so, we have the visualization piece, but then this. You're not college educated, and yet you are incredibly educated. So, talk to us about that.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah, that started, I, when I was 19, just got married. I was walking through a bookstore, and I bought my first book like that I had purchased, and it was \$17, and this is like 2002. It felt like a tremendous amount of money. And I was with a family member who was like, Oh, honey, like, don't waste your money on that. Like, so-and-so can teach you about this. And I just thought, I know so-and-so, and I haven't learned anything yet. So, like, this might be my best shot. But I bought this book on personal finance, and it just unlocked something. Of like, Oh, I can, I can learn and figure this stuff out myself. So, I started going to the library and I kind of set myself on this trajectory of I read a book every week, just a different nonfiction book, and I would just go through the aisles and, and whether it was personal finance or personal growth or health or gardening or whatever, whatever topic was there. And so, over the course of the last, it's been almost 20 years now. You know, I've read hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of books, but they've really been. It was such an easy access point for me. It was so affordable; it was so accessible. And that kind of just this, this idea of like it's my responsibility to continually educate myself. It's not a one-and-done thing with school or college, but it's going to be an ongoing, growing opportunity.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Shout out to libraries. What was the book? What was that first book?

Jillian Johnsrud: It was Larry Burkett. It was just this really simple book on personal finance. Like, it wasn't anything complicated, but it just. I was like, Oh, I can do this like these things. Like, I can, I can figure this out. There again, it was that spark of hope of, oh, maybe I could be good at this.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, you said that Oprah gave you a glimmer of hope and what you want to do now, 20 years into this is you want to probably more than 20 because you were watching Oprah before you were 19. But what do you do now? What you said, the trajectory you're on. What trajectory are you on?

Jillian Johnsrud: I primarily talk and teach in the kind of personal finance space because I did become financially independent at a pretty young age. You know, I am really passionate about personal finances, not in that I don't believe money solves your problems, but money makes it a lot more possible to solve your problems. You know, if you need to go to therapy, money won't fix that. Having money in your bank account will not do the work for you, but it will help pay for it. Like if you're burned out, it will help. It doesn't fix your burnout, but it will help give you the option of taking a break. And so, when I look at different things in, in our lives that if we master that thing, it makes everything else more possible. For me, personal finance is kind of that, that linchpin. But because I did, you know, kind of accomplish this fairly early, I also had the ability to realize, oh, money doesn't do the work for you; it just makes it possible. So, I talk a lot about intentional living and finding your purpose and your passion, whether that's through entrepreneurship or hobbies or, you know, your family or travel, whatever that looks like, because a lot of people do think, well, if I just had more money, that would fix all of this. It'll make it more possible to fix. But we still have to, I kind of use the analogy of building a house. Money will get all of your supplies delivered to your worksite, but it doesn't build the house like you still have to do the work of building the house.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, well said. In the spirit of fixer upper. This decision of wanting to help give other people hope, that has meant that you're online. And by being online, that has had some challenges, so much so, that you've written a book called, *Fire the Haters*. So, can you tell us about what happened just at a high level, so people have some context? And then give us one or two pieces of advice for when you're online, and you get a comment that is hateful, how should people think about it and what, what would you recommend they do?

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah, I was passionate about writing this book because I think so many people have ideas and stories to share, whether it's just through their own personal social media or through their business, like they want to connect with customers. But we're scared. We're scared of what it means to be online. And, and the reality is most of the things that you're scared about might eventually happen like that is the reality. Like you'll put things out there and they'll be some negativity. And they'll be, there'll be bad actors that lurk online and use that as an outlet, and everything kind of that I worried about eventually did happen. Like I had to, I had to go through the learning curve. And, and I kind of did everything wrong. I wanted to create a book that would be like the field guide for how to navigate this, in those first couple of years. But yeah, all sorts of things. Like I mentioned, I'm dyslexic, so like, my spelling is incredibly creative, but not conventional, but very creative. And oh my goodness, people took so much offense like, like they were personally insulted. They would say things like, You're ruining the English language, like, you're wasting our time. Like, how dare you put this out? Like, how do you think people will take you seriously if you can't spell? Like, like you have no business being here. And thankfully, I had a great English teacher at school who never thought that ideas or stories required spelling to be told.

Jillian Johnsrud: That you can have powerful stories and ideas and things to say to the world and not be able to spell. And that wasn't a deal breaker. And when my business eventually did better, I'm like, Yeah, no, there's people who are great at that. You just hire those people. Like, they're passionate about spelling, and they can help you out, but you get all sorts of criticism. I think two pieces of advice I would give if you want to share more, if you want to put more out there and be a little bit bolder. One, and this is a little bit of a learning curve but give yourself the gift of being misunderstood. Other people will have their thoughts, and their feelings, and their assumptions, and they get to think and feel and assume whatever they want. And it's not our job to fix that or to correct that or to kind of micromanage their thoughts and feelings. You know, it's kind of like the rule of, of biography. Is that everything you say has to be the truth, but it can never be all of the truth. And I think this is true with whatever we put out there. You know, you could write a million words, and it's not going to be everything. And so, people will misunderstand, sometimes intentionally, but sometimes just because, an especially in a small format, a tweet or Facebook like, you know, you will be misunderstood, but give yourself that gift. And it's, it's okay.

Whitney Johnson: When you give yourself the gift of being misunderstood, what does that look like? So, as a practical matter, you've just seen a comment from someone, and you're saying they didn't understand what I said. How are you giving yourself that gift in that moment? Give me give us a really practical example of what that looks like.

Jillian Johnsrud: So, somewhat recently, I had a new experience. I had a tweet that kind of went viral, but the majority of the retweets were negative. Like they negatively retweeted me, which I never had, like the bulk of them

to be negative. It was just it hit a nerve with people, and it was a little polarizing, I guess. On personal finance and debt and things like that.

Whitney Johnson: What would you what did you say? What did you say, Jillian?

Jillian Johnsrud: So, here's the thing. It was like a personal choice we made. It wasn't like a judgment on other people. We had done a cash-out refinance on our house. So, we had done we take it our paid off house, and we had done a cash-out refinance, and people had all sorts of big feelings about this. You know, some found it very gutsy, some thought it idiotic.

Whitney Johnson: So, basically, just, just to be just to define for everybody who's listening, a cash-out refinance is you basically borrowed against your house.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yes. Yes. Okay. So, we just paid off house, and then took out a mortgage on it.

Whitney Johnson: Took out a loan. Just for everybody, so we are clear. So, that's fascinating. So, people had opinions about this.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yes. And the thing is, they missed. You know, it was our situation, I'm not saying this is something everyone should do. Like it's not appropriate in all contexts. It's just that this is what we decided to do. And it's so easy to misinterpret that or misunderstand or not know all the context because it's a tweet. There's not much context there. You definitely can't see our entire financial life and why this makes sense in this situation. So, my rule for giving yourself the gift of being misunderstood is I will answer any honest question. If people have an honest question. But oftentimes people's question looks like, well, that's a stupid idea. Why would anyone ever do that? Like, that's ridiculous. Like you're just taking on more debt. Like, that's actually not a question. So, I don't have to respond to, to people who are just being critical. Like they can just misunderstand. And that's fine. If they want to ask an honest question, I'll answer it. But if they don't have an honest question, I just move on with my life.

Whitney Johnson: So, what I what I find interesting about that, if I, if I pull that apart, is that you're saying, okay, I'm showing up in the online world, and I'm saying something. And if you are going to engage with me respectfully and with dignity, then I will respond back that that's the promise that I'm making you by being here online. And the gift of being misunderstood is giving yourself permission. When someone doesn't treat you respectfully or with dignity to not respond.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah, yeah. And, and be okay that they didn't get it. You know, be okay that they made the wrong assumption or that they drew the wrong conclusion, or they filled in the gaps incorrectly. I had this one situation where I did a guest post on someone else's blog, and after I published it, I realized, Oh, this is a little bit overly flattering. Like, like all the stories I had put together kind of made me sound superhuman. And all the comments reflected that like, Oh, you're so amazing. And then I got to one that said, You're the most selfish human being ever. Oh, and I thought, Wait, what? Wait, what? And she went on to kind of outline why she thought I was a horrible person and to give yourself the gift of being misunderstood. Like, she didn't. She didn't get it. She didn't. She, she filled in my story, honestly, with her story. And she had combined the two and had drawn conclusions. And I don't know what role I had played in her story. If I was the child or the mom or the friend or. But her comment really wasn't about me. And so, it's not my job to go in and, and correct that wrong assumption and to give her more information because she honestly wasn't asking for more information. But being okay with, with people misunderstanding.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. You know, what I love about that, too, is when you give yourself the gift of being misunderstood, that's an invitation to yourself to do a lot of inner work and to get to the point where you actually like yourself enough that you don't need external validation. So, there's a whole growth journey taking place there as well.

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Coming back to this idea of money gives you options, and I love that metaphor. But it doesn't build the house. It gets you the supplies, but it doesn't build the house. In your book, you talk about bad actors on the Internet, so, can you, and that there are some, some personas if you will. Can you just talk about that briefly?

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah. So, on the Internet, there's all sorts of people, and kind of, unfortunately, there's a lot less accountability. And so, people kind of get to live out the worst parts of them online. And for a lot of people, it becomes their only outlet where they can be them, their true selves. And so, it's important when you're working online to realize, like, that's just that person, like, that's who they are. That's how they exist everywhere. And it really doesn't have anything to do with you, even though they're trying to make it really personal. So, I created some characters to kind of prove this point and like illustrate how this plays out. One of my favorites is the CEO of the Internet. I think we've all run across this person who, for some reason, got it in their head that it's their job to tell you what to do. It's their job to be your boss. And everything you do should be exactly to their taste. Exactly to their opinion, exactly to their preference, to their standards. And if you step outside and deviate from their opinions and ideas and standards like they will blast you and they will try to fire you. And, and that's just kind of who this person is and how they show up online.

Whitney Johnson: I actually just finished a webinar this morning about talking to a group of individuals in an organization who are underrepresented, mostly women, also women of color. Do you find that when you're looking at the online haters that we're supposed to fire, is it different for underrepresented groups in any way?

Jillian Johnsrud: Yeah, I. Unfortunately, I think. Oftentimes, especially, especially men, unfortunately, feel more empowered, more emboldened to be the worst version of themselves online, because there's not that accountability. There's not those other people in their life going, actually, that's inappropriate. You know, they can't, they can't be this way in their family. They can't be this way at work because there's repercussions there. But online, they get to kind of live out this. Like the CEO of the Internet, like they really want to boss everyone around and be in charge of everything and make sure everyone's like toeing their line. But it's not appropriate in a lot of contexts in life. And I found as a woman that there's like they almost feel like they're doing you a favor, like, like you need help. I had a situation in a, in a Facebook group. Someone asked a question and, and I normally don't answer questions in Facebook groups. I'm a little selfish with my time that way. But I was like, oh, I'm uniquely qualified to answer this one. Like, because it's kind of a unique question. So, I gave her a response and some guy was like, Actually, I think you're doing your business wrong. Like, I think that you should be doing this and that. And I was like, Buddy, I didn't ask a question like just kind of that CEO of the Internet of like, even though you're not asking for help, let me set you straight and like, let me tell you how to run your business kind of, kind of attitude is, is even more, more common. And maybe it's because a lot of women won't kind of hit back with that. Like, you know, they won't, they won't be annoying or obnoxious in return.

Whitney Johnson: Did you say back to him? I didn't ask. Did you respond to him?

Jillian Johnsrud: I did once. And then I was like, Oh, I'm going down the rabbit trail of like.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, yeah. You know, I think this is one of those things. I'll say one thing and then maybe you might have another comment is, is that, that we can't necessarily change it because systemically there's something happening. But I do think that it is helpful to be aware that it might be there might be a different experience for men and women online or underrepresented groups generally, so that when an underrepresented group says, Hey, I had this experience.

Whitney Johnson: That those of us who are not having that experience say, okay, I that's not what's happening for me. But that doesn't mean it's not true for you. And just being a little bit more aware, a little bit more gentle, and gracious and open to the experience that other people are having. Any thoughts around this?

Jillian Johnsrud: In my entrepreneur social circles, it's a, it's a stark difference between the male and female creators, the amount of aggression. And even to the point of like I don't know any of my male creator friends that have had like threats of violence or death threats. But I know female creators that have. There's just a big divide. And, and I would encourage the men, especially when you see things happening like that online, it's just kind of be, be aware

not that there is again, really much of any way to fix it because there isn't a lot of accountability. But kind of keeping an eye out for, for people that because especially females are probably having a very different experience online.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you for that. I think that's a useful thing to think about and be aware of. And I'm actually reminded we had not too long ago on the podcast, Amanda Ripley, who wrote a book called *High Conflict*, and she talked about we'll include this in the wrap up is she talked about one or two phrases that you can make or state online that help defuse conflict. And so, it's not around this per se, but I do think it's worth having our listeners revisit that as a, as a way to maybe brainstorm or think about, oh, yeah, I could do X, Y, or Z to help defuse this. To help make things a little bit gentler for everyone in the online world. All right? Because we because we're going to we're going to give the haters a gentle warning. We might have to fire them eventually, but we want to give them a warning first. Okay. So, you said something at the outset that really caught my attention. So, I want to circle back to this, this idea of if you tell me stories about money as a child that will help me understand some of the decisions that you're making today, and you shared your story. I would love it if you could share one or two situations that you've seen. When you see why behavior, you're able to almost always very high correlation that X happened or vice versa, just anything come to mind.

Jillian Johnsrud: So, the underlying principle, and this is across the board. But we see, when we things modeled our default is to kind of copy that or reject it. Like it's just our instinct as kids, we kind of do one or the other and it's, I believe, our work as adults to thoughtfully consider what path is good for us. Like the copy or reject model might not be the appropriate fit. But I see this all the time with clients. Like I have one kind of group in an environment where like the father was very organized with finances and always planned and always made a budget and always like, made sure things were paid for. And the mother was very disorganized and always wanted to go over budget and very frivolous. And as those paths diverged, he saw the father be really successful and the mom struggle financially and with their personality, Like he's a very organized, kind of diligent person, of course, in their finances, like he's going to be the one that's like, we have to stick a budget and like, we can't break this and be very rigid. Because one, it fit his personality, but in his upbringing, he saw like, this is the right way to do it, and this is the way that it works out well.

Jillian Johnsrud: And to be fun and spontaneous and like kind of splurge like leads to financial stress and really copied that. But there's a lot of even kind of narratives and stories about money that people will pick up sometimes in high earning families. There's kind of the story of we earn a lot of money so that we don't have to think about money. We earn a lot of money so that we don't have to budget like budgeting is for poor people. Budgeting is for people who don't have enough, like and then they go into high earning careers, kind of carrying that story. Like I'll just earn so much that like I'll never have to think about or worry about money. And then they become, a new study just came out that like I think it was like 30% of people who make 250,000 are living paycheck to paycheck. And I'm 0% surprised because I have a lot of clients who were earning that and living paycheck to paycheck because of this story of, well, I earn a lot, so, I shouldn't have to think about money. And the reality is like, that's an unhelpful story for them. If they want to grow wealth, if they want to become financially independent at some point in their life, you almost always have to have a plan for your finances to do that.

Jillian Johnsrud: Like, yeah, and so, you kind of see where these stories and these ideas originate. You know, some people get this story of like budgeting gives me choices and it gives me options and it allows me to like, save for things and they become super into it. And then other people think, well, budgeting is restrictive, and it takes away all the fun and, and they carry these stories into adulthood. And sometimes the stories that we take from our family of origin or our community, especially around investing, is another big one. Some people were told like investing is the way that you're smart and savvy and you build wealth. And other people from everyone around them are investing for gamble is gambling investing for rich people. Like it's just, you know, you might as well play the lottery. That story left unchecked goes into adulthood with them. And sometimes these stories are helpful for where we want to go, but sometimes they're not. And they're not going to take us where we want to go financially. And we need to kind of figure out where they started and start to rewrite them.

Whitney Johnson: Right. And what's so interesting about what you just said is there is the copy or reject. But in many of those situations you don't want to copy or reject, You want to find it's a both and. There's a there's a third way to move forward. Oh, yeah. All right. So, we have people who are listening who are thinking, you know, I'm intrigued. I think I want to be on this S Curve of financial independence. Budgeting is for everyone, as you said, no

matter how much money I'm making a year. So, for someone who's listening and is thinking, I want to test this S Curve, and obviously, you and I are going to say we should all test this S Curve. But let's assume that we don't necessarily want to. What are one or two things that people can do to test it to get started that they can do today that are very, very, very small. But we'll put them on this path to exploring this.

Jillian Johnsrud: You know, it's very high level, but it's actually the way I start with any, any client is thinking about what's your ideal life? What's your ideal schedule like? What are the things that are important to you that you value? Because the numbers in an abstract sense are just numbers. Like it's hard to become emotionally invested into a spreadsheet. It's hard to care about just numbers on a page, but when you tie it to the things that you care about the most, the things that you value the most, and then we can say, Here's how we make those abstract numbers facilitate you actually making progress in moving your life in this direction. But if you don't really have that, that initial motivation and that clarity, it's really tough to get on board with, with any of the number stuff. Especially if you're not really a numbers person, and just a plug for people who don't feel like numbers people. Like you don't have to be. Like sometimes people think, Well, I'm not good at math. So, like, that's why I'm not into personal finance. The actual math skills are super simple, like addition, subtraction, multiplication, like it's not complicated stuff. It just having a loose framework that will help get you to your goals.

Whitney Johnson: So, Jillian, what's something that you really value, and you've found? Give us a practical example of something in your life that you said we value this and then you've worked toward that and are making that happen.

Jillian Johnsrud: So, another fun question I love to ask people. I'm so geeky with my friends, but I love to ask people what was the thing that you desired the most from your parents? Or as a child, what did you crave the most? Because that also is one of those questions that, like in their current marriage, makes that marriage make a lot more sense, whether they're getting that thing that they desired the most as a child or whether they're denied that thing they desired the most as a child is for me a great predictor of if they're happy in that marriage.

Whitney Johnson: So, let me play this out. Let me let me totally pop psychology on you. So, with your mom, you wanted this sense of stability. So, that helped create a stability in your life. And I'm assuming that your husband gives you stability.

Jillian Johnsrud: Incredibly stable. And there again, I said the environment is a little chaotic. It felt a little unsafe. I and I think even more so than that, I really deeply desired someone to be present and to, like, see me and hear me. And like because I had one, one parent who was very absent, and I had another in this really chaotic environment that like she had to figure out her own stuff. And I picked a spouse who was like, he's if you do the Enneagram, he's a nine, he's a peacekeeper. Oh, he's so low conflict, he's so present. Like, we both know that we're five. Like, we're both at home all day. We travel half the year together, like we spend an insane amount of time together, but like, recreating kind of that thing I desired the most. But growing up without a lot of money. And in the middle of Montana, we didn't go a lot of places like we didn't do a lot of great trips or adventures. And this year we're going to travel half the year with our five kids in a camper. And we do all the museums, and we do all the theme parks and we do all the national parks. Like it's kind of recreating that thing that I desired.

Whitney Johnson: At the end of every interview, I will ask you, and I'm now about to ask you is, what in this conversation was useful for you? I've been asking you lots of questions, but your brain has been able to, and it's a coaching question I ask. So, you may want to do this with your clients as well.

Jillian Johnsrud: I actually ask that question.

Whitney Johnson: Well, there you go. So, you're prepared for it. Is, is, is you, you thought some things your brain may have made some new connections. So, in this conversation, what was useful for you?

Jillian Johnsrud: I'm going to reach out to Oprah. I think I'm going to do it. I think it'll be a really good exercise for me and just. It would be a great practice of gratitude.

Whitney Johnson: Exactly. And if I'm coaching you, you're not you don't think you're going to you're going to.

Jillian Johnsrud: It's going to happen. Yeah. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: All right. Any final thoughts?

Jillian Johnsrud: No, no, I think. I think that's it. To just. Yeah. There again, like I said, kind of a motto. Encourage people to have hope. Like things can be different in your finances, in your life, you know, in your creative life. You can be bold, or you can put more out there. Yeah. Money gives you gives you options.

Whitney Johnson: Jillian, thank you very much.

Jillian Johnsrud: Thank you so much for having me.

What a great conversation with Jillian. Here are my two key takeaways. Number one, money gives you options. As Jillian explained, it's not just for buying fancy things, it's about being able to make the best choices for yourself and your family when life throws you the inevitable curve. Medical debt. Losing a job, even marrying someone with existing debt can transform your financial life quickly. Jillian's childhood made her hyper aware of this, and she urges us to reflect on our money origin story. Like our traditions, habits and vices, the language around money is passed down to us through the generations. Our small choices compound over time like interest. It's time to dispel the myth that investing is for rich people, or that it's akin to playing the lottery. Healthy money habits should be practiced early and often.

Number two only respond to honest questions. If you've ever created something and put it out on the Internet for the world to see, chances are you've encountered someone who disagrees with you. Not only is that inevitable, but Jillian says it's okay. Good faith discussion is ultimately productive. But surviving in a world of endless feedback and criticism requires a new discipline discerning between honest questions and haters. Sometimes it's simple. The commenter saying this is stupid, are not interested in dialog. She says, Ignore them. But on the flip side, do take the time to engage with real feedback. It proves that you're invested in your work and not afraid of dialog. If that makes you anxious. Jillian gives great advice here. Give yourself the gift of being misunderstood. It's not our job to fix other people's thoughts and feelings.

For more about the study of online conflict, listen to [episode 260](#), with journalist Amanda Ripley. And for more on changing your view around money, you can listen to Ashley M. Fox, [Episode 207](#) or Bobbi Rebell, [Episode 282](#). Thank you again to Jillian Johnsrud for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening. Thank you to our producer and engineer, Matt Silverman, audio editor Whitney Jobe, production assistant Stephanie Brummel, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.