

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 294: ARTHUR BROOKS

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where 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. I know many people listening to this show are very accomplished in their careers. You have spent thousands of hours honing your craft. You are at the top of your game. You are an expert in your field. You are in mastery on the S Curve. So, why is work starting to feel less exciting? Maybe it's burnout. Maybe we're still grappling with the new realities of post-pandemic work. Or maybe you are at the top of the first half of your life curve, and it's time to jump to the second half of your life. That's the thesis of social scientist Arthur C. Brooks, in his latest book titled *From Strength to Strength Finding Success, Happiness and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life*. I loved the book. I loved hearing what he had to say. I think you will, too.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Arthur, will you share with us a formative story, something that will help us understand who you are and how your, your future adult self might have written this book called *From Strength to Strength*.

**Arthur Brooks:** Oh, thank you. Thank you for that question and delighted to be with you. I'm so happy to be talking about these issues with you and your audience. We have so many friends in common, and I'm looking forward to making new friends with your audience with this show. There's a lot that's in this book about, and we all could write a book, by the way, this is not a memoir in any way, shape or form. I have no plans ever to write a memoir. My wife has promised to kill me if I start a memoir, but it has, you know, you're formed in your ideas and your philosophy about how the life, how life works by the experiences that you had to no small extent. And I have a number of those kinds of stories in the book. My adult life has been characterized by going from professional vocation and adventure, one to the other, to the other to reinventing myself a number of times. I started off my professional life at 19, when I was unceremoniously ushered from college as a professional musician, and I spent all of my twenties as a professional classical musician. My parents called it my gap decade, and it would have been okay, except my father was a college professor, and his father was a college professor. So, it's not like most of the people I really admire. I'm the first one to go to college. I was the first one to not go to college, actually.

**Arthur Brooks:** A really dubious distinction in my family. And I made it back to college in my late twenties actually to study to become a social scientist. And that was a hard transition going from one thing to another thing and letting

one thing finish and letting another thing start. And, and one of the I can imagine I can remember to answer your question directly, an experience that I had that was quite informative of that that I always used to think about. When I was a kid, I grew up in Seattle, Washington. I'm a West Coast person like you. And I used to, I was the only one in my family who was interested in fishing, and I would fish in the lakes and the Puget Sound, which doesn't have wild waves or anything. And I got it in my head. I want to see what it's like to really fish in the ocean. My aunt had a trailer in a place called Lincoln City, Oregon. It's a very rugged place on the Oregon coast. And I took my little fishing pole, and I went down to visit my aunt, and I went off the rocks, which were crashing waves. And it wasn't clear how to do this, but I got my line in the water and was catching nothing for two or 3 hours, catching nothing. It was very frustrating. And after a while, after a few hours, this old guy from the local town, he comes walking up to me, this wizened mariner, and he says he's an old fisherman.

**Arthur Brooks:** And he says, Hey, kid, I've been watching you. You know, today, of course, he'd be arrested. But the point was that he'd been looking out of his shack at me, and he said, You're not catching anything, are you? I said, No, nothing, not even a bite. It's because you're doing it wrong. And I said, Well, what do you mean? He says, Well, you can't catch anything unless you're in a falling tide. And, of course, I didn't know that was. A falling tide is when the tide is going out especially fast, like rushing out between the rocks. And it's this particular moment, and it lasts like half an hour. I said, Well, when is it going to happen? He said, in half an hour. He had his fishing pole, too. And so, we waited, and he finally he's looking at the sea. He's looking at it. It's like he says now, and we throw in our lines. We start catching fish like crazy, just like he told me we were going to, pulling them out one after another. It's amazing, 20 fish each. And after a while, when it finishes, we're sitting on the rocks, exhausted, and I'm amazed. And this old guy kind of lights up a cigarette, and he's looking all philosophical, and he says, You know, kid, during a falling tide, you can only make one mistake. I said, What's that? He said, Not having your line in the water.

**Arthur Brooks:** And I thought to myself at the time, good advice for fishing. And when I thought back on it later, I thought, good advice for life. You know, when things are changing and a lot of people listening to us, they're facing some sort of loss in their life, whether they've, you know, a romantic relationship has broken up and broken their heart, whether they've lost a job, whether they're retiring, whether they're they've moved from someplace where they loved, and they miss their friends. They're in transition from one thing to another. It's hard. And when I first did that, from music to becoming a college professor, it was brutal. I was incompetent, it was horrible. But I thought back to, Man, this is the falling tide. It looks like everything, I'm losing everything. But that's actually not true. That's an illusion. When, when the falling tide looks like everything is going out, that's when the plankton are all stirred up, and the bait fish are going crazy. Get your line in the water. And that's what I've been able to do again and again and again. And subsequently, I've changed careers radically four times. There are some things I don't change. I don't change my faith as a Christian. Never, never. I don't change my marriage. But I will change, I will just I'll toss away my career. I'll just do it. Because you know what? Falling tides are great, and now I know how to use them and recognize them.

**Whitney Johnson:** I have to say, you told that story better now than even in the book.

**Arthur Brooks:** Thanks.

**Whitney Johnson:** You catch more fish in a falling tide. I love that metaphor. Talk to us then, how you got to this idea of from strength to strength for your book. Give us the basic thesis and why you decided to write this book during the pandemic.

**Arthur Brooks:** I wrote the book during the pandemic because I had time during the pandemic. And ordinarily, I'm just rushing from thinking to thing to thing to thing from, as Stephen Covey would talk about, I was, I was being tyrannized by the urgent. And finally, in the coronavirus epidemic, I recognized that I had an opportunity for importance. I study entrepreneurs, and one of the things you notice about entrepreneurs is that where everybody else sees a tragedy or misfortune, they see opportunity, they see falling tides, for example. And so, when the coronavirus epidemic happened, I'm a big extrovert, I hated it, but I thought I saw some opportunity here. And what it was, was the opportunity to dig into long-term projects and deep ideas. And that's how *From Strength to Strength* actually came about was my looking for opportunity where, where it appears that there was only loss in crisis. So, the way that I was thinking about this is, is over the past few years I've noticed increasingly that hard workers, strivers, sometimes workaholics, that they all kind of go through this weird crisis. You know, you find that in the data on

happiness that in the last quarter half and quarter of life that about half of the population gets happier and happier and happier and the other half of the population gets unhappier and unhappier. Now, you'd think that the happier part would be the highest achievers and the strivers, but it's not true. Disproportionately, people who are very successful early on and identified as high performers early on are on the downward portion of the happiness curve in the second half of life.

**Arthur Brooks:** They're the ones who are most likely to be on the bottom branch of the happiness tree. And I wanted to know why, and I wanted to know how to fix it. And I found that more and more and more, and I really honestly felt, I mean, I've been working very hard, and I've been very ambitious almost my whole life. And I noticed that I was going toward that bottom branch. And part of the reason was because I noticed some years ago that the skills that got me where I had gotten were not as sharp as they had been, that I was feeling a little bit burnt out. I didn't know what the next thing was going to be, notwithstanding the falling tide. And so, I wanted to understand why that was the case, and that's why I wrote this book. So, the premise of the book is life can tell you, and the financial industry can tell you how to build a 401k plan for your money. But nobody's out there telling you about your 401k plan for happiness. And if you're a high achiever, you're very likely to not have very much in that account when you stop working. Because you're not going to be living up to your own expectations, and the party is going to be over and all sorts of reasons. What can you do to start investing now in your happiness 401K plan so that at 75, you're reliably happier than you were at 25? That's what this book is about. And I think I think I cracked the code.

**Whitney Johnson:** You talked about the decline. What's the age of decline for various professions like professional athletes, academics, and professional services on average, what's the age of decline? Talk to us about the age of decline before you go into cracking the code.

**Arthur Brooks:** Yeah. So, this is a bad news and good news story that it has a happy ending, but it has a scary start. And you don't write a book unless there's an issue that you want to address. I mean, most serious nonfiction to help people improve their lives. People are going to read it because they have a problem they want to solve. If I got no problems, I'm not going to go look for a book that's going to help me improve my life, to be sure. So, I was looking at a really common problem that I just talked about before, which is that these high performers, they tend to find themselves on the wrong side of the happiness curve, and that really has its roots in the fact that you can't keep getting better at what you do early on all through life. You know, the world lies. The world tells you that, just keep doing it, man. Keep doing it. Just keep working hard. All will be well. That's a lie. The 10,000 hours hypothesis. It's true that it will get you really good early on, but sooner or later, you're going to hit your peak and start to decline. And it's going to happen earlier than you think. That's what all the data say. I've looked at surgeons and lawyers and classical musicians and financial professionals and air traffic controllers and writers and startup entrepreneurs and, and, and in anything that requires a lot of knowledge, that requires a significant amount of skill, especially brain power, from electricians to almost any profession. Anybody who is listening to this podcast is going to be doing. There's a kind of a magic number out there. And, you know, caveat, your results may vary, but they're probably not going to vary, very much.

**Arthur Brooks:** The magic number is 39. That's the age in which these professions, they tend to be at their best through your twenties and thirties, you're getting better and better, and that's the 10,000 hours. Where you're working memory is very acute, and your creative potential and your ability to focus, and you're just getting better and better at what you do. But after that, most people, they, it's weird, you know, they can't quite put their finger on it, but they just like their jobs a little bit less than they used to. You know, your hotshot dentist is when he's 45 years old. He weirdly just starts taking off Fridays to golf, and you're like, why is he doing that? And he doesn't know exactly. He just knows that he likes being a dentist less than he used to, and he can afford to take Fridays off. So, he does. He wouldn't dream at 35 of taking Fridays off, even if he could afford to, because he wants to get better at it is ambitious and enjoys it, but he's starting to burn out. When he's not getting better, he starts to burn out, and that's actually what happens. You notice that as a high performer, a striver before anybody else notices it. And that's what we see up and up and up and up and up. And sometime between late thirties and early forties, most people in most careers, they slightly start to decline. And if they keep trying to do what they're doing, they're going to decline faster and more. And if they're in their fifties and, God forbid their sixties, they're going to see tremendous amounts of degradation in their ability. And that's the big problem that precipitates why I wrote this book.

**Whitney Johnson:** You talked about success, addiction. And I want to read these questions and then give you an opportunity to comment on them. Question number one, do you fail to reserve part of your energy for your loved ones after work and stop working only when you are a desiccated husk of a human being? That was a great question. Do you sneak around to work, I would add, Do you say you will stop at 6 p.m. and at 7:30 p.m. you eventually stop? And number three is does it make you anxious and unhappy when someone such as your partner or your spouse suggests you take time away from work for activities with loved ones, even when nothing is pressing?

**Arthur Brooks:** Those are the shear signs of the telltale signs of workaholism. One of the things I talk about in this book is that many strivers, perhaps most strivers are workaholics. And what workaholics have in common is that they are tied to their work, much like a methamphetamine, or a gambling addict, or other nasty addictions like alcohol or pornography. They all work in the same way, which is that they work through the dopamine system. Now, dopamine is a neural modulator, and it works in the brain. It's not a, it's not a neurotransmitter of, of pleasure. It's anticipation of pleasure. What it makes you want is what it makes you do is want things, desire things, crave things. It makes you want a particular reward a lot and make it almost impossible for you to not try to go and get it. And so, people who get really good at getting dopamine from a particular activity, they'll be addicted to that activity. So, if you tend toward alcohol abuse, that just means that you're very good at creating dopamine in anticipation of drinking or smoking cigarettes or, as I mentioned before, behaviors like gambling and pornography. And when it comes to strivers, work and success. Why? Because from a very early age, most strivers are taught that they're the special one. They're the high achiever. They get the good grades, they're number one, and they like that. That's a reward. What we find is the neuroscientists find that when you give a person a compliment and compare them favorably to other people, it illuminates the ventral striatum of the brain.

**Arthur Brooks:** One of the reward centers of the brain. It looks kind of like if you take amphetamines, as a matter of fact, compliments do that. And so, they go for it, and they get better at it, and their dopamine surges, get the urge, get the cookie, do it again and again. And pretty soon, they don't know how to feel good. When they're not working hard, they don't know how to feel good when they're not successful. They don't understand themselves, not as homo economicus, not as these really excellent work machines. That's the reason that people become workaholics, notwithstanding the fact that they're sacrificing their relationships and becoming unhappy. When I talk to alcoholics, by the way, it's the same thing. Their alcoholism is just a relationship, and that's how they understand who they are. They would like to go to a hotel room alone with a bottle. That's how pathetic that is. But what that is, is a relationship. And it's the same thing with work. It's like, yeah, and my wife's going to go away to see her mom for the weekend. I'm going to work the whole time. I mean, that sounds pathetic to non-strivers, but all strivers are going like, Yep, yep, yep.

**Whitney Johnson:** Gotcha.

**Arthur Brooks:** That's a success addiction, and it's an addiction every bit as nasty as drugs and alcohol.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, you got my number. One of the quotes that I loved is that we know that objectification of others is wrong and immoral, but it is easy to forget that we do this to ourselves.

**Arthur Brooks:** Yeah, yeah, kids do it. I mean, generally speaking, it starts with parents where the parents tell their kids, you know, you're number one, you're really excellent. You're really very special. I remember I was a classical musician from a very young age, and I was gifted, and I was always the first chair and the best player. And I remember my mother would come in and sit next to me while I practice and say, Pretend I'm Leonard Bernstein, you know, and you're going to win the audition in front of the New York Philharmonic, you know, that kind of thing. And it was just, who is Arthur Brooks? Arthur Brooks, french horn player. Arthur Brooks, excellent french horn player. I'm not person. I'm, I'm an excellent kid. I'm a machine that does this particular thing. And so, the result is that, I mean, one of the reasons I wrote this book is I wanted to be free of my success addiction. Look, success addiction is no joke. It messes with your brain, but it also ruins your relationships. How many people who are listening to us or watching us right now have done the 14th hour of work instead of spending the first hour with their children? I've done it. I've done it. I mean, I'm guilty of that. I was a CEO for a long time. And I mean, my kids were little. I'm not getting those years back. You know, my kids are grown up and married, and I got one in the military, and they're off doing their thing now. And I don't get their little kid part back because I was an addict, and I missed a bunch of it.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, you've cracked the code. You said decline is inevitable, but misery is not right. What did you discover, Arthur?

**Arthur Brooks:** Well, to begin with, a lot of people, when I ask them, so. Okay, look at the data. You're going to decline. Right? So, what's your solution? Strivers will always be like, I'll just try harder. I'll just go against it. Extra effort will reinfect my curve of excellence, and the answer is, No, it won't. I mean, you can go till the wheels come off, and all you'll wind up doing is trying to hide your decline from yourself and from others. That's the bad news. The good news is it's not your only success curve. Here's the real and the most important finding of this entire research. This goes back to the work of the social psychologist Raymond Cattell. He's a British social psychologist writing in the sixties and seventies. He was an expert in genius. He was kind of a genius about geniuses, as it were. And he noticed there are two kinds. There's the kinds of geniuses that manifest really early. So, those are the ones that, that they're the chess geniuses and the music and science geniuses. And they're early on, and they get better and better and better. And sure enough, they peak at around 39 and their abilities, and then they decline. But then he found these older geniuses that weren't really great at the same thing as the younger ones, but they were really good at was using all the knowledge around them, recognizing patterns, and telling new stories. They were really good at forming teams, they were very good at teaching, they were very good at explaining things very clearly and vividly, even complex things because they had a big repertoire like they had the New York Public Library in their head, and they knew how to use it. They didn't write all the books, but they could use all the books.

**Arthur Brooks:** So, that's what, why he called it the first curve fluid intelligence with working memory. And he called the second the second kind of genius, crystallized intelligence. It's all the stuff that's in there and crystallized that you can actually use. Think of the first one as your brainpower and the second one as your wisdom. Your wisdom is all the knowledge that's in there that you can actually, you're not going to come up with a new theory, but you're going to be able to help people use their theories with each other and turn it into something very good and beautiful. So, you find that on the first curve, you have startup entrepreneurs. On the second curve, you have venture capitalists on the first curve, you have the hot litigators in a law firm. On the second curve, you have the managing partners. On the first curve, you have the academic researchers, like I was when I first finished my Ph.D. writing math, that I literally can't understand now. Or and on the second curve, you got the master teachers who can take, like, I can now better a whole bunch of complicated social science and explain it to people who are not nerd Ph.D. social scientists. This is what we're doing right now is teaching, and that's what I'm much better at. The key is to stop trying to stay on your fluid intelligence curve. Get on your crystallized intelligence curve by changing what you do, whether it's your job or your career or just the characteristics of what you do or what you're paying attention to in trying to do. But don't stay tied to that first curve. Look for the second curve. That's skill number one.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Arthur, I know you're not familiar with my work, but I just I am so excited listening to you because what I had done was looked at the work of Everett Rodgers, who I'm sure you're familiar with, and taken the S Curve that we were using and investing with Clayton Christensen to figure out how quickly an innovation would be adopted. And then had this thought of we could use this S Curve to understand how we learn and how we grow. So, for all of our listeners, listeners, what I want to say to you is this is so thrilling, because what Arthur is explaining to you is that when you get to the top of that S Curve and at the beginning of the book, we talked about Mr. Blah and feeling like life is over. What Arthur is describing this second curve is, no, your life isn't over. He's talking to you about how you can make the S Curve of your life meaningful up until the very, very final breath that you breathe. And so, I loved your book.

**Arthur Brooks:** Thank you, you know, that's entirely complementary. It's exactly the same thing. So, for sure, it's flat at the beginning. You're trying to learn, trying to learn. You take off, and you learn super-fast. You get mastery at the top. What my book says is there's a place after mastery on the first curve you're not going to like. It means it comes back down again. But there's a second S Curve behind it with different skills that favors different abilities, and that actually goes up and stays high. And that's the beauty of it. And if you get on that second S Curve, you don't stay in the first one. The world is yours.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Would you tell the story of J.S. Bach? I'm a music fan as well. I actually studied music in college. I was never a professional musician, but I just loved the story of Bach, and I think it illustrates what you've just described so beautifully.

**Arthur Brooks:** Thank you. No, it's, you know, I have a lot of stories in the book about people who did it wrong and were very frustrated. You know, people who are very famous, like Charles Darwin, who peaked out at around 50 and was never able to innovate anymore. And he didn't know why. And the reason was that he was in the wrong place, that his fluid intelligence curve didn't know it had a crystallized intelligence curve and spent the next 20 or 25 years of his life feeling frustrated and angry, and bitter. Now there are people who've done it right. It's not that they have a theory, it's just that they had the humility and maybe the dumb luck to step on to the crystallized intelligence curve. And one of those was Johann Sebastian Bach, maybe the greatest composer who ever lived. He lived between 1685 and 1750. He was the master of the High Baroque period in music. And, and, you know, there's everybody loves Baroque music now, most people do. And even if you don't know anything about music, you know J.S. Bach. You've heard of Bach before. Turns out Bach wasn't the only Bach. And that actually figures into the story. He's the one that we remember today as the great master. But his own life was a lot more complicated than just the great master of the High Baroque. Early on in his life, he was the greatest innovator of the High Baroque, and princes sought him out.

**Arthur Brooks:** He was the big cheese. Everybody, they were throwing money at him. He was very famous and the whole deal. And he was incredibly productive. He, he published more than 1,000 pieces of music, by the way. He also had 20 children, which is productive, I have to say. And I admire that greatly. I mean, that guy, he knew how-to do-good things with love and productivity, for sure. And then and then one of his sons, actually many of his sons and probably some of his daughters, were musicians like him. They were a very musical family, as you can imagine. His third son was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. It turned out Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach supplanted his father by changing the popular style of music to something called the classical style, rendering the high baroque to be obsolete. It sounded kind of like disco sounds to us, sounds to us today. Like, Oh, I remember that, but I want to listen to it. So that's the key. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach became the great Bach and was the famous Bach for a long time. Mozart said, Bach is the father, we are the children. And he didn't mean Johann Sebastian Bach. He meant the son, C.P.E. Bach. Beethoven collected C.P.E. Bach's pieces because he was such a big fan. None of them cared about the father.

**Arthur Brooks:** None of them cared about J.S. Bach until 100 years after he died, when a composer named Felix Mendelssohn found his scores and made him into a big star. And today we've practically forgotten all the other Bach's that lead us back to J.S. Bach. Okay, so how would you feel if your own son supplanted you and you're no longer a big deal? But Bach was about 50 when this happened. The father, said, Well, he thought about it a little bit. He loved his family. He trusted God. He said, there is a plan here. And he retooled his career from master innovator to master teacher. In other words, fluid to crystallized. He didn't do it on purpose. He just looked at what he was really good at, what gave him a lot of satisfaction. He took a job as the Thoma, as the cantor in the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, where he taught, he composed cantatas for every Sunday, just church music. He taught the organ, he taught the choir, and he was this beloved composition teacher. He was writing a textbook, when he died, about the High Baroque thinking, maybe nobody will listen to any of his music, but it's a good thing for people to learn. And he was just he loved writing. This textbook is called the *Kunst der Fuge. The Art of Fugue*, and he was literally, his pen was in his hand when he died writing this thing when he was 65 years old.

**Arthur Brooks:** And his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the one who supplanted him, wrote in the margin of that score. At this point, the composer put down his pen and died. You know, super strong finish. Today we play that very piece in concerts. I mean, imagine we're academics, you and I. Imagine writing a textbook in accounting that's so beautiful and masterful that people read it as literature later on after you die. And that's what happened with Johann Sebastian Bach. And he died happy, by the way. He was completely dedicated to his family and to his marriage. And he was he's often referred to as the fifth evangelist because he was so deeply Christian. His family *Bible* was just filled with notes that he took to himself in the margins in his own hand. He dedicated everything, every one of his scores at the end says to the glory of God. He would write at the end. And he was asked near the end of his life, Why do you write music? And he said the aim and final end of all music is nothing less than the refreshment of the soul and the glorification of God. Those are good values. Those are good, crystallized intelligence values. He did it right. So, the point is, don't be like Darwin, be like Bach.

**Whitney Johnson:** The refreshment of the soul and the glory of God. That's beautiful. So, now that we know there is a fluid curve and a crystalized curve, what are one or two suggestions for people who are listening besides going and reading or listening to your book that they can do in order to move to the second curve?

**Arthur Brooks:** Well, the first thing to keep in mind is that what keeps us on that first curve is the idea that, that you can only add to your life. You can't take things away. And so, that 10,000 hours idea is really a form of subjugation of oneself. Because what it says is everything builds on everything else. You should only do things that are investments, you should add, add, add, add. And the more you have in possessions and skills and relationships and knowledge, the better off you are. That adding idea is inherently incredibly limiting because that leads to an enormous amount of dissatisfaction. Mick Jagger sang in 1965, I was one, and it's the third most popular rock and roll song of all time. *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*. And I try, and I try, and I try. That's add add add add. That's first curve mentality. And it's a, it's a big problem because you have to learn not how to. Add, and add and add, you have to learn how to take things away. Your satisfaction, your happiness as you learn, as you go through life, if you let yourself learn. It's not a function of what you have. It's a function of what you have divided by what you want. So, having is the numerator, wanting is the denominator.

**Arthur Brooks:** And the more you have this add, add, add mentality, the more you add up your wants. You shouldn't have a bucket list. That's a stupid thing, especially as we get older because that's the secret to dissatisfaction that will blow up the denominator of your satisfaction equation. You don't want to do that. You need a reverse bucket list where you make a strategic plan not to hate all the things that you have or might get. You might get them; you might get the money. Great. You might get the power, you might get the fame, whatever. The point is you shouldn't be attached to them to make a plan to detach yourself from those things. You don't need to have more. You need to want less. Don't be adding brushstrokes to the canvas of your life. Be chipping away the marble of the statue that is your life. Because at the end, in the second half of your life, you're a statue that you're trying to find the horse and rider the statue of David inside that block of marble. And you've got to get rid of stuff, including opinions and prejudices and relationships that are toxic, but also possessions and desires to find that person that's you on that second year of life.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that satisfaction is equal to what you have divided by what you want. I like the idea of things getting smaller or being able to enjoy washing the dishes. And then you said, and you have a t-shirt on for those who are not seeing it, it's very fun. It says Real friends are greater than deal friends. And this is a quote made by one of your children, correct?

**Arthur Brooks:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. My son. My son, Carlos, noticed me talking, on vacation, talking to the guy on the phone, I was doing a deal. And he said, Who's that dad? I said it was a friend. He's like, real friend or deal friend? Smart boy. I didn't have very many real friends. I had a lot of deal friends.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Yeah. Children are our truth-tellers, for sure. How does the metaphysical or faith play into your ability to move to the second curve?

**Arthur Brooks:** So, one of the things that you find is that people who are really bereft in the second part of their life is not just because they're in decline, it's also because, as they've tried to add, add, add and they've been success machines and very addicted to success have crowded out the most important element in the happiness 401K plan, which is love. And there's really four elements to love that you find among the happiest people. There's love that we exhibit through our work for other people, which is best on that second curve. There's love of family. There's love of friendship. And there's love of the divine. And those are the four things that really, that people have in common. Now, we interpret those things in different ways, to be sure. And the most the greatest variation in the way that we tend to interpret that, of course, is what the divine means. But the whole point is this: you can't be happy if you're focusing on yourself. It's just let's put it, not to put too fine a point on it. It's just too boring. I mean, it's like watching the same episode of the same television show again and again and again and doing it obsessively. It's like, I'm going to watch the first episode of *Breaking Bad*, again and again, every single time for the rest of your life.

**Arthur Brooks:** My job, my house, my commute, my money, my friends, me, me, me. It's just so tedious. You need relief. And so, I have friends who are not religious at all, but they've gotten very much into a meditation practice and or reading the works of the stoic philosophers. And it's like a breath of fresh air. It's a, it's a new lease on life. That's

not for me. I mean, I do have a meditation practice. I studied with the Dalai Lama, for the last ten years at his place in Dharamsala, India. But the reason is because I want to be better at my prayer life. I'm a, I'm a Christian, I'm a Roman Catholic. It's literally the most important thing in my life. But I also understand that it's one of the key secrets to my happiness, and I have to walk that path more intensively every day. One of the things that I did is I was writing this book because I had I asked I had to ask myself, you know, one of the things is that people who are on the upper branch of the curve, strivers in particular, and those that are trying to simplify their lives and get on that second curve.

**Arthur Brooks:** They have a rich, transcendental life. They have a life that's philosophical or religious. And for me that's being a Catholic. And I thought, well, I got to eat my own cooking. So, I started to go to Roman Catholic. I'm a Roman Catholic. As I said, I've gone faithfully forever. But I started going every day, and it was a game changer. So, I start my day by going to mass in the morning. I end my day by praying my rosary, which is an ancient Catholic prayer, and I've learned techniques to do it from my friends, the Tibetan Buddhist monks. And in the middle of the day, I try to take a couple of minutes away and read something that's really uplifting, whether it's the *Bible*, some scripture from the Old or New Testament. Or it's the writings of people who are not necessarily even from my religion, but what I'm trying to do is to give myself that sustenance and we need it. If you're not walking a transcendental path, it's going to be very difficult to stay on that second curve and to find the happiness that we all deserve.

**Whitney Johnson:** Alright. Let's talk briefly about the role of a partner or your family in helping you move to the next curve. And, and I would love it if you would open up your book to page 144. You were talking about your wife and how pivotal she was to this process. But then also there was a poem from Henry David Thoreau. You can read all of it if you want. But I just thought it was a really in many ways a beautiful tribute to her and your relationship. Would you read that?

**Arthur Brooks:** I will. And, you know, Henry David Thoreau it's interesting. He, he grew up in and lived in Concord, Massachusetts. And he's most famous for living on a, living in a shack or a little house on the edge of Walden Pond right outside Concord, Massachusetts. Interesting that my first ancestor is in the United States. The Brooks family of 1630 started in Concord, Massachusetts, in that very place. And it's interesting, when I first moved to Massachusetts, to teach at Harvard University, I got more interested in family history, and I learned that fact. Henry David Thoreau was a better poet than he was a prose writer. Many people will read *Walden* and say, This is not great writing, but he's a really, he's a lovely poet. And he was especially a good poet about love and friendship. And one of the things that I teach my MBA students at the Harvard Business School is that the secret to a happy marriage is friendship. It's not the passion that they talk about in Disney movies. It's not soulmates. It's not love at first sight. It's friendship. And, you know, there's lots of passion and passion. But by the fifth year, if you're going to have a really successful marriage by the fifth year, you really are best friends is what you find. And so, there's this melding together of family and marriage and friendship. And it all comes together cosmically in the union of, of marriage. When marriage is really what it's supposed to be, I believe.

**Arthur Brooks:** And so, I read this poem about, from by Henry David Thoreau, about two sturdy oaks. And this is about marriage and it's about best friends, and it's about the person who is most important to you.

Two sturdy oaks I mean, which side by side  
Withstand the winter's storm,  
And, spite of wind and tide,  
Grow up the meadow's pride,  
For both are strong.

Above they barely touch, but, undermined  
Down to their deepest source,  
Admiring you shall find  
Their roots are intertwined Insep'rably.

**Arthur Brooks:** There are so many trees that do that that, you know, the giant redwoods, they they actually will will they're autonomous trees, but they hold each other up. They're 250 feet tall, but they're six feet deep. And that's

because they grow out horizontally by intertwining with themselves. Or the aspen tree is literally one tree, an entire stand because there's one common root system. And you and your spouse, you and your partner or you and your best friends, you got to have this intertwined root system. It's the only way. And that's what strivers lack. That's what deal friends lack. Look, your deal friends are not going to be coming to your bedside when you're taking your last breaths. But I will. I'll be my eyes will be on my beloved wife, Esther, as I take my dying breath. We're twin oaks inseparably intertwined.

**Whitney Johnson:** Beautiful.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Arthur, as we start to wrap up the conversation, what was useful for you? And when I ask that question, it's a coaching question I typically ask, and it's meant to be. It may be something you said. It probably wasn't something I said, maybe, but it may be just something that you thought. What was useful for you in this conversation and this conversation?

**Arthur Brooks:** There's a lot because you're really, really good at this. And you know, even when you're interviewing me for the benefit of your audience, what you're doing is you're benefiting me a whole lot by reminding me of some of the things that I've actually written about. And, and that's, I have never actually read the poem you just asked me to read in the context of my life. I wrote it in the book in the context of friends. You know, I wrote a little about my wife in a slightly different way. I wrote about the fact that, that a South Indian Hindu teacher asked me about my wife and then said that you realize she's your guru. And so, I, I dedicated the book to my guru, which makes it sound like I'm a Hindu, I'm not a Hindu, but she's my guru is the bottom line. But what this really has reminded me of is that point that I'm trying to get across all the time of the, the importance of friendship. The importance of friendship with the people who and treating people like friends. And, you know, when I was what you were when you did that, and I was thinking just now we didn't talk about it, that, you know, I need to be a better friend to my wife. I really do need to be a better friend to my wife. You know, I have been. It's okay, but I need to work on that a little bit more. So, you just made me think of that. And I got to tell you, I appreciate that a lot.

**Whitney Johnson:** Don't we all need to be better friends to our partners or spouses? So, any final thoughts that you'd like to share with us?

**Arthur Brooks:** In the book, I review a very famous study that was undertaken over the past 84 years here at my university called the *Harvard Study of Adult Development*. The study started with undergraduates that were graduating from Harvard College guys, men, white men in the late 1930s and early forties. A very non-diverse sample, I have to say, but it was going to follow them over the course of their lives and see how they turned out. Now, it's an ingenious idea because if you follow the same people for decade after decade after decade, you can see how they turn out, then compare it to what they were doing in their twenties, and it's like a crystal ball. What should you do in your twenties and thirties, and forties to help you have a better life in your sixties and seventies, and eighties? Very related to the stuff that I'm talking about in this book, which is why I did it. Well, it turns out it's a very diverse study because it was paired up with another study of non-college guys, usually working class, quite underprivileged guys, and then it included their spouses and their children. So, suddenly it was racially diverse, and it was gender diverse, and it was age-diverse, and it was looking at this huge cohort going over an 84-year period. And it talks about all the stuff that you would expect. For you to wind up happy and well, you shouldn't smoke because it's really bad for your health.

**Arthur Brooks:** You should be very careful about drinking, if you drink at all because most divorces don't actually lead to drinking. Most divorces are actually provoked by problem drinking, and it's almost impossible if you're a problem drinker to wind up being happy and well at the end of your life, which is really, really important. And a lot of people that I've taught this to have actually just quit drinking. Just and so there's a lot of stuff like that, some of it's common sense. But really, the part that matters a lot, and this is what the guy who ran the study for 30 years, the name is George Vaillant, a visionary professor at Harvard Medical School. He was asked to sum up all of the data across the, across the decades and say, okay, just if you can say one thing. He said, it's simple. Happiness is love. Full stop. You know, love is the nuclear fuel of happiness. Perfect love drives out fear, according to Saint John the Apostle. And that's a philosophical, psychological, and neuroscientific fact. You know, there's so much to be afraid of. There's so much to regret about all the things that we do in life. But if we want the secret to growing old better, to having better relationships, to being happier people, I teach the science of happiness as a social scientist.

**Arthur Brooks:** But if I could, if I had only 5 seconds of their time, I would say learn to love and be loved. Say Saint Augustine, the great sage of the fourth-century sage of the Christian church. He was trying to paraphrase the whole *Bible* for all these illiterate types around him. And, and Jesus did this, too, by the way. You know, when somebody when the when the Pharisee comes up and says, you know, what's the most important thing for me to remember about the *Ten Commandments*? And he says, Love the Lord your God with all your, all your mind and all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Love and love. And then Saint Augustine said, Well, it's too much to remember. Let me boil it down, love and do what you will. You take all of my book and all the body of my work, and you put it together. It's just love and be loved. That's really what it comes down to. That's really what we need to remember. Love, sincerely. Love, purely. Love, truly. Love the divine. Love your neighbor. Love your, love your enemies. That's a hard one. Make sure that you actually have the proper relationships and you're in right relation to God and others. And. And a thousand flowers will bloom.

**Whitney Johnson:** Arthur, Thank you.

**Arthur Brooks:** Thank you. Lovely to be with you. I appreciate it a lot.

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I really enjoyed my conversation with Arthur. Here are two key takeaways. Number one, the first step in curing success addiction is recognizing the problem. We have recognized workaholics for decades now, but Arthur puts a finer point on how this kind of addiction works. It's not the work itself we crave but the success that comes with it. If we are successful early in life, perhaps in our childhood or early in our career, that feel-good rush comes easily. We want more of it, and it's hard to feel good unless we're succeeding. Of course, it's okay to feel happy about a big win at work, but if your long-term contentment, especially later in life, hinges on a steady stream of this type of success, you may have a bigger problem.

Number two, decline is inevitable. Misery is not. The bad news is that our fluid intelligence will decline. But the good news. Now we know we're working with more than one curve. When you feel your satisfaction slipping, don't fall into the trap of working harder. Arthur says the key is not just adding things to our lives but taking things away. Fulfillment, which hinges on a bucket list. Not a good idea. Remember, the difference between fluid and crystallized intelligence is fluid. Is the hotshot lawyer on a streak while crystallizes the veteran partner laying strategic plans. It's brainpower versus wisdom. Fluid intelligence may be in decline. Well, it will be in decline, but crystallized intelligence can be on the rise.

If you enjoyed this episode, you may want to also listen to Steve Young, Episode 289. Jacqueline Novogratz, Episode 233. And Howard Morgan, Episode 247. These are all individuals who epitomize moving from strength to strength. Thank you again to Arthur C. Brooks for being our guest. Thank 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.