

# DISRUPT YOURSELF PODCAST

## EPISODE 322: VANESSA PATRICK

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 is you. No. Have you ever had trouble saying that? No. No, I can't do that. No, I won't. How many times have you wanted to say no, but just said sure. Yes. It's uncomfortable, right? My guest today has worked on saying no her entire life. Vanessa Patrick is an award-winning consumer psychologist, currently the associate dean at the Bower School of Business. Now she's out with her new book, *The Power of Saying No*. Now, let me ask you another question. Have you ever said no? And it felt like you discovered a superpower you didn't even know you had like that scene in *Spider-Man* where he crawls up the building for the first time. It's a superpower. You have to learn how to say no so you can say yes to your life. Vanessa has the secret. She calls it an empowered refusal. And it's a pleasure to welcome her on to the podcast. I hope you enjoy. Thanks for listening.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Vanessa, will you share with us a story from your childhood, one that helps us have a better sense of who you are?

**Vanessa Patrick:** Wow, that's a great question. Whitney, Thank you. Um, I grew up in India, and some of you might know that India is a very collectivist country, and we are very much into each other's business. So, we know what's going on with each other and we walk into each other's houses. It's very close. But now that's great on one hand, but on the other hand you are expected to do what other people tell you to do. So, it's a very high conformity culture. Strangely enough, I'm the daughter. I'm the eldest daughter of three, and my parents were always the kind of person, people who told us that we could do whatever we wanted to do. So, you know, the sky was the limit. And so, I pursued my dreams and pursued my ambitions. Right from the time I was really small, I was always the one who found the places to find books to read and things to do and competitions to participate in. And because of that, everyone in my family had very high aspirations for me. I was the eldest grandchild and had four uncles and my or my mother's brothers and they all thought that Vanessa is smart and she is going to become a doctor like everybody else in the family. So being a doctor, a medical doctor was my destiny as far as they were concerned. And I did what

I was supposed to do. I went to my undergraduate, I did my I did my, you know, my pre-med training. And much to their dismay, I said, no, this is not what I want to do. And I remember so clearly my uncles coming to my living room and sitting with my parents and telling them that Vanessa is going to fail in her life. You have to become a doctor because you've got the family practice, you have a clinic all set up. You're super smart. You have to do medicine. And I said no. And my parents backed me up. And it's probably been like five years ago when my uncles finally conceded that I did kind of okay for myself.

**Whitney Johnson:** You did? Kind of. Okay. You went to get a PhD. You're teaching abroad? Yes. You're writing a book.

**Vanessa Patrick:** But being a doctor was what was expected of me. And so have I realized when I look back on it that, you know, we very often get caught up in others visions of who we are. It's called actually the social identity that people impose a certain identity on you. And you have to work really hard to break free of that identity. And I think my book is very much about being true to yourself and breaking free of other people's expectations and living up to your own expectations of yourself.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, let's now talk about this book that you've written, which I think is very interesting, because if I look at your background, you've been at both ends of the self-control spectrum. You didn't become a medical doctor, but you went into advertising initially, marketing and advertising. So that's about getting people to say yes to buying things. And now you have a book called *The Power of Saying No*. So how did you how did this book come about?

**Vanessa Patrick:** So, at the time I finished my PhD, my main area of focus was self-regulation. And most of the researchers that were studying self-regulation were looking at deprivation as the key way in which you self-regulate. So, if you want to manage how much you your food intake or you want to manage healthy eating, you would have to kind of stop eating stuff. You have to deprive yourself if you. So, it was all about reducing the pleasure associated with consumption. And there was also research that showed that this is not a sustainable thing for the long run. You cannot keep depriving yourself and not actually have these splurges. And so, I came up with this concept in my research that was grounded in positive psychology, that looked at what I call compassionate self-control. A way of managing yourself that actually comes stems from within who you are and gives voice to your values and allows you to be yourself. Essentially self-regulation in a way that aligns with your goals as opposed to depriving yourself. And so, a lot of my work and I've published several papers in this area of compassion and self-control in which I've studied how you can make positive changes in your life that help you stick with your goals but do not have that sense of deprivation associated with it.

So, one of the things I started doing at that time, strangely enough, was actually attending with my friend Tina. We both decided to start our weekends attending Weight Watchers meetings, and so we would sit, and we'd watch, listen to, you know, different people talking about how they were managing their health and their eating and exercise. And in my brain, as I was kind of listening to people, I was thinking, there's a theory for that. There's a

theory for that, there's a theory for that. And then really found by listening to people that the people who are really successful in self-regulation are the people who have embodied this idea that they want to be healthier, that it's part of their value system. It's not a superficial thing. It's very deeply ingrained. And so, when they act, they see themselves as doing things that are good for them, not depriving themselves, not hurting themselves, but actually doing things that they want to do. They have a vision of a life that is more healthy, more fulfilling. And so that's where this idea came in, The germ of the idea came there. And then I spent quite a while trying to figure out, you know, conceptualizing it and thinking about a manageable way to think about this idea.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's interesting. Vanessa So you started so was the advertising before the PhD or after?

**Vanessa Patrick:** It was okay. All right. So, And Whitney, I know you said that advertising is about getting people to say yes to things. I actually see it slightly differently when I teach marketing and advertising. I look at marketing as a way by which we can create value for the customers and finding a match between what a Customer truly wants and the product. So don't see marketing as, you know, pushing products onto people. But more means by which we get to create value by what we deliver to customers.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'm glad that you pushed back on that. That's really powerful. And that goes to I think it's interesting because I just fell into that trap that we so often fall into when we talk about selling or advertising or marketing, which we're getting people to buy things that we don't actually want. And you're reminding me, which I know, but clearly don't know well enough that that's not what selling is about. Selling is helping find a match between what people need and helping them get what they need in order to live a better, happier life.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Absolutely.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Good. Glad that you pushed back on that. So, I want to go back to this idea of emotional self-regulation and this notion of people want to be healthy or they want to sleep more and when they really want those things, they're more likely to do them. And that's where the emotional self-regulation comes in, which is interesting. So now walk us over, because that's the bedrock or the foundation of your idea around the empowered refusal. So, talk us through that now.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Right? So empowered refusal is a way of saying, no, that is persuasive because it stems from who you are, it stems from your identity. And when I say persuasive, I mean that it not only communicates to others where you stand a strong and determined stance, but it also does not invite pushback. When you think about why people struggle with saying no and why we so often say yes when we want to say no. It stems from two fundamental motives that human beings have. One is to be liked by others, to maintain relationships with other people that are strong and positive, and on the other hand, to be seen positively in the eyes of others. So, our reputation matters. And so, when we say yes, when we want to say no, it is usually because we care deeply about our relationships. We are really concerned about our reputation, or we just don't have the language and the we haven't trained ourselves to be able to say no, we haven't practiced empowered refusal.

**Whitney Johnson:** How about if you give me an example of what that looks and sounds like? What is an empowered refusal sound like when, for example, “Hey, Vanessa, um, there is a paper that I want you to write in the next month, and you are going to say no to me.” What does an empowered refusal look like? We work together and actually, you work for me in this particular instance, and you say you're going to refuse me in an empowered way. How would you do that?

**Vanessa Patrick:** So, the language that I use is very important and not only my language, but also my body language. Because one of the things I find is that you can use words that are empowered, but your body leaks power and then you come across as disempowered. So, it's about having the combination of using the right words and being able to convey this this message in a way that is empowered. So, I would obviously have to do the follow the three competencies that I mentioned in the book. One is awareness. So, I need to reflect on why I want to say no to you in the first place. There has to be a reason that's that I believe strongly. And second, I could think about what personal policies or what rules do I have in place that allow me or provide me the infrastructure to be able to say no. So, I might, for instance, have a personal policy which says I don't take on a new project until I finish an old one. And so, when I tell you that and I tell it to you in a way that sounds that that is authentic because it stems from what I believe. I believe that in order to be to do a good job for you, Whitney, I need to be able to devote the time to this project. And at the moment I have other things on my plate. And so, I don't take on projects unless I finish what I already have or I have the space to be able to do it. And so, an empowered refusal essentially conveys in a way that is that that is authentic, very concrete, but also in a way that wins you over. So, I don't want to make an enemy of you. I want to be able to. With you in a way that you understand what's going on in in terms of my own personal policy. And you buy into it. What the research shows is that when you speak from a place of authenticity, when you speak from a place of personal power, people are more likely to respond favorably to you.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, an awareness of why you're saying no, be clear on what your policy or rule is for that. So, it sounds like those bleed into each other. Yes. When you have that revelation, you know, that uncomfortable revelation of all the times that you've said yes, when you actually want to say no. How do you forgive yourself?

**Vanessa Patrick:** Well, every day is a new opportunity to say no to things. And it's interesting because there's work that it's called the psychological immune system that actually helps us come up with reasons for why we did something that we didn't want to do. So even if we've said yes when we wanted to say no, we struggle to learn from it because our psychological immune system, our psychological immune system, which is a coping mechanism, kicks in and doesn't allow us to learn. So, we actually have to be kind of tough with ourselves and say, I really need to learn this and not repeat my mistakes.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So as I'm listening to you speak it, it's almost the experiment that I'm having in my head is you run, you do this for 30 days and you just make a note of every time you said yes when you wanted to say no, and then don't judge, but just analyze what was happening, what were the circumstances at play? Because undoubtedly there will be patterns. And once you're aware of those patterns, it will make a difference. Also, I'm thinking that you

have this wonderful benefit of now being an expert on being able to say no. And so, you're going to have this advantage of saying to people, You know what? I'm going to say no to you because I have to practice what I am preaching. And here's what it looks like. It's going to make it so much easier for you. I'm having complete holy envy right now. Wow, that is so nice that you're going to be able to do that. Do you already do that now with people?

**Vanessa Patrick:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think I think being able to spot, you know, the things to say yes to and the things to say no to and becoming very fluent with that. So, in the book, I have a two-by-two matrix where I talk about the things that you should say yes to and the things that you shouldn't say yes to. Because the big question that people often face is what should I say no to? You know, will I regret it? I think one of the big reasons why people say yes is because they're worried that they'll lose out on an opportunity. Or maybe this was the big thing that they were waiting for. And it turns out that it you know, there are big things. And for those things you should say yes. I call them hero journeys; the Hero's Journey tasks. But then there are other small things that you can probably just, you know, say no to and your life is just better for it.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So. Do empowered refusals. How do they affect the balance of power in a professional setting? So, there's sometimes people say no as a way to as a power move, but sometimes it's a way to own your power. So how does it affect you in a professional setting?

**Vanessa Patrick:** The first thing I'd like to say is that this is not about saying no to the to your job. It is not about saying no to the things that you are being paid to do. The thing is that we struggle with the most are not those things. It is all the extra stuff, all the other things that go beyond. In fact, some researchers, Linda Babcock and her colleagues call a lot of the tasks that that we should say no to non-promotable tasks. So non-promotable tasks are all the things that we do at work or at home that don't have to do with our core role, not what we are being paid for, not, not associated with our role. So, the examples that she gives in her research are things like, you know, someone has to pick up the coffee and the donuts for a meeting. Someone has to clean the break room refrigerator. Someone has to organize and erase the whiteboards. Now those are non-promotable tasks. And, you know, organizing a retirement party is a really nice thing to do. But if you're the only one always spending all your time organizing parties and doing the social activities, it comes at the cost of your own job. One of the core tenets in my book that you cannot read without leaving with is that everything is a tradeoff. When you do one thing, you are saying no to something else, and those things might be important. So, if you spend your time doing all sorts of non-promotable tasks, it might actually affect the job you're supposed to do. And in fact, Linda Babcock and her colleagues find that women are 44% more likely to be asked to do non promotable tasks than men are. And they are 76% more likely to say yes to those tasks, compared to 51% of men. So here, women especially find themselves in this trap of doing all this extra work, but don't actually seeing don't actually see the benefit of it in the workplace.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Your book; it's so good. So, everybody who's listening, I definitely want you to read it. And in fact, in the book, you talk about this and what when someone asks you to do something and you politely refuse, you've got an empowered refusal and they say, No, no, no, you have to. And it's not your boss. It's just a

colleague in your professional circle. And they just kind of corner you into doing that. And and you talk about in that book, which I think is very valuable.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Right? I think it was very important for me not only to give people the building blocks of empowered refusal and the three competencies we've discussed, but also to take that into the real world and look at how does that really play out. You know, when we want to say no to ourselves, how does that work? When we meet people or encounter people at work or at home who just won't take no for an answer, how do we deal with them even though we've mastered all these competencies? So, I talk about these people who don't take no for an answer as walnut trees. And that's a little story that I have in the book, and I draw on companion farming, which is a concept I talk about, which essentially is the fact that in nature there are some plants like marigolds, for example, that nurture other plants. So, if you want to grow a vegetable patch, just growing marigolds on the corner of it can help enhance the vegetables. But because marigolds infuse in the soil these good chemicals that make everything good and you know, we are lucky in our lives because all of us have marigolds that make us flourish and protect us from things.

**Vanessa Patrick:** But for every marigold, there are what I call walnut trees and walnut trees, especially the North American black walnut exudes into the soil a toxic chemical called juglone. And essentially what it does is that it kills everything in its sight. And so, I use that moniker of the walnut trees to talk about all the people who, you know, we would like to call jerks the toxic people who the people who just won't take no for an answer, even though you are saying it in an empowered way. And so, I have a set of strategies to help you identify those walnut trees. So, for example, walnut trees will always ask you something face to face. So, research shows that you're 34% more likely to say yes to something if you are asked face to face. So Walnut Tree will ask you face to face. You have to make it a point to make sure that these conversations are by email or by phone. So, if you're dealing with a walnut tree, avoid the face to face. And the second thing is a walnut tree will want an immediate response. They want to corner you and they want you to say yes now. And you have to do everything you can to kind of defer that commitment and take the time to think about it.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Never commit on the spot. The third thing a walnut tree will try to do is get there you into their own home turf, their home court advantage. Because if you are in a nice restaurant and a walnut tree has just taken you out for lunch and paid the bill, it's extremely hard to say no. And so, like learning from your own experiences, who are the walnut trees? What are their tactics and how can I avoid these situations that get me into trouble essentially and get me to commit to something I don't want to do and then spend all my time resenting that and then really feeling that you're not living up to your own purpose what you care about. I think that that's the worst, worst feeling. And so, what I like about Empowered Refusal is that in my own research, as well as through anecdotes with the women that I coach and the and my leadership classes, you see people just their lives are transformed for the better because they're living, they're doing the things that they care about and living a life on their own terms, and that's a game changer.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Vanessa, why do you think that society generally favors the asker and not the person being asked? The person who will ultimately have to do whatever it is that they would have to do? What do you find from your research?

**Vanessa Patrick:** So essentially, society and from the from ancient societies have always thrived on cooperation. And so human beings do need to rely on each other. And, you know, when there was a scarcity of food, people had to band together to hunt in packs. People would have to look after each other's children. And so, cooperation was greatly valued. And that is still so true because I cannot imagine my own life without the infrastructure and the support that I get from people around me, which is wonderful. Having said that, we have now evolved quite a bit to a point where we can outsource a lot of the things that we need done and that a lot of us need to feel that we are making a positive difference in our lives. We are living a life true to ourselves and that it is only when we take the time to do what is important to us that we can really transcend the ordinary and do things that are fulfilling and meaningful. And so, things have changed, I think, since the since prehistoric times. And I think we can become a little bit selfish. And I actually really love a quote by Sarah Brightman, who is an opera singer, and she says, you know, when we are given a gift, it is perfectly fine to be selfish and protect it so that we can give our best, the best of ourselves to others.

**Whitney Johnson:** And she's probably talking about her singing voice in this instance of when she says you have to sing. You know, it's interesting as I'm listening to you say the reflection that I'm having is that given that we are likely to say yes many, many times in any given week when we really want to say no, one thing that I think that we could do to give a gift to other people is to be very careful about what we actually ask other people to do.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Yes, absolutely. I actually say that that is so important because the same way we want our nose to be respected, we need to hear and accept the nose of others.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hear and accept the nose of others. And as I said, you know, doubling down on this, you know, I just think very simply, sometimes I'll ask my daughter to do something. And she's a very pliant, you know, wants to say yes to me. And she's very kind. And I need to remember, I mean, one of the things that we've talked about a lot is you it's okay for you to say no to. And to practice that saying no and me getting better at making sure when I ask for something, is it something I actually need and need for her specifically to do?

**Vanessa Patrick:** Absolutely. And also, being thoughtful about how choosing the person who to ask I mean, finding the right person to ask not just the first person to ask. I think that that especially when you're a leader, to be thinking about how is that developmental for that person? If I ask them to do something, is it actually helping them grow as an individual as opposed to, you know, let me just get the first person to do this so that it gets off my plate. I actually feel very strongly about this and try to do this in my own job because we always have people who have who at the university who we need to find to do some stuff because there's always a ton of work to be done that's unpaid work. But if you can actually find a fit between what the person likes to do is really good at or is developmental for them, they're learning to develop a new set of skills by taking on this task, then it's an easier case to make as well as to why

you are asking them. So, I really think, you know, finding the right people and putting them in the right seat to go in the right direction is a really important thing.

**Whitney Johnson:** In the book you talk about making rules for yourselves instead of decisions.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Samos.

**Vanessa Patrick:** I love this concept of personal policies. So personal policies are simple rules that we make for ourselves that are grounded in our identity and give voice to our values, priorities, preferences and beliefs. They are the way we choose to live life. Now, when I teach this to our to my leadership students, people tend to confuse this with boundaries and think that is a very subtle difference between personal policies and boundaries. Subtle but important. A boundary is something you put up to prevent something from coming in. A personal policy is a rule that you make for yourself so that you can live in life according to your own values. What you care about.

**Whitney Johnson:** I want to say that again because that's really powerful. So, a boundary is something that you put up like a fence to prevent something coming in or permeating the border. And a policy is something you just decide, this is how I comport myself. And so, there is there's something different there because it could have nothing to do with anybody else.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Absolutely. So, a boundary is a response to an external threat, whereas a personal policy is a decision or a rule that you make based on what you want to see happen.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, after reading your book, I put in place a policy and I really and. So, I'm going to have you expound on this a little bit more. But I did a I don't eat after 8 p.m. And I just repeated over to myself over and over again. And I have noticed because I think I first read your book a couple months ago, and I have noticed that I still sometimes eat it, eat after 8 p.m., but I'm eating a lot less frequently after 8 p.m. Since I put in that, I put that policy in place. I just don't eat after eight period. And so, talk more about that.

**Vanessa Patrick:** So, your personal policies can take two main forms. One is self-talk, which is I don't eat after 8 p.m., but it can also be an announcement, which is when you say, I don't eat after 8 p.m. you're telling everybody else that this is your the rule that you set for yourself. And what's nice about that is that other people can help you reinforce that. So, for example, I don't touch my phone when I'm driving, and even if I'm tempted to touch my phone when I'm driving, I have a little voice of a 12-year-old at the back saying, Mom, you don't touch your phone when you're driving. So, when you make a personal policy and you use it both as self-talk as well as an announcement, you can actually rally some support from others to be able to get people on the same page as you and help you achieve your goals. Right.

**Whitney Johnson:** Which goes back to the empowered refusal if you have some really clear. So, for example, I'll give you one that that has come up for me more recently is when people ask me to blurb a book. One of the



questions I now ask, and I think this goes probably into the arena of Empowered refusal is, well, there's two of them, there's probably more, but these ones come up is number one is that I will ask the question how many people do you have writing blurbs for this book? So, if I'm one of 8 to 12 people, I know that they've been really thoughtful like you were when you reached out to me, really thoughtful about, okay, I, I specifically want this person to write the blurb for this reason. And so, it makes it much easier for me to say, all right, I am therefore going willing to take the time to read the book to figure out if it makes sense for me to blurb it. And so that has allowed me on a number of instances now to say actually no, because it's one of 40 or whatever it might be. That's probably a little bit of hyperbole, but you get the idea. The other thing that I have started doing, which is I will scan the book once I look at doing it and I will look for are there voices of people who are underrepresented, meaning are there quotes, are there citations? Are there stories about? And this has happened a number of times now where if they are not, I will say to people, if I like the book, I'm happy to do it. And these things are not quite in play. Do you have time to make a small change? In which case I can say yes. and so that has become an empowered refusal as well. I'm just reflecting as we're having this conversation, What are your thoughts?

**Vanessa Patrick:** That's awesome. I think we all need to have these rules. I mean, I have rules about things, a lot of rules about a lot of things. And they've just become who you are. They just become the way you manage life, the way you can handle all the different requests that come your way. So having those rules in place gives you kind of a pathway forward that works for you. And that's why I think that everyone needs to think about what works for them and what are their criteria by which they make decisions.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, what's a what's another one of your rules that you'd like to share with us that comes up for you?

**Vanessa Patrick:** Good question. Um, so I have a, I have a lot of roles. Um, I'm trying to think of one that's kind of interesting. So, so one of the things that I think I do well is and I think that this is something that has come as I've, I've become more mature is that I've learned to self-coach so that I don't get so stressed by things. So, I tell myself certain things that kind of put into perspective the feelings that I'm having because the feelings are real. You might get up in the morning and you're feeling anxious about, you know, the day ahead. But I've realized that I have these things that I say to myself that self-coach. So, for example, one of the things I've been saying to myself through the pandemic and even now is be in demand. Stay in control. Because being in demand means that I'm doing stuff right. People want me to be, you know, play all the different roles that I play and wear a number of hats. I'm an associate dean. I'm the executive director of our doctoral programs. I'm a Fulbright specialist. You're a mother. A ton of roles. I'm a mom. I'm a wife. I'm a daughter. I'm a sister. And I take all of those roles seriously.

And there are often times that they're you know; they're pulling me in different directions. And I instead of seeing that as stress, I see that as being in demand. But I also give myself permission to stay in control. So be in demand. Stay in control. Staying in control means recognizing the tradeoffs, realizing that I can't be everything to everyone every day. And so balancing that and coaching myself. So, every time I feel stressed, I kind of tell myself that this is a good place to be and people want you. People want you to be at all these different meetings and you know, you want

to do certain things, but you have to recognize that you have to make tradeoffs. And so I also coach myself into thinking about what are the tradeoffs, what's meaningful, what do I want to do today, What do I how do I want to achieve this? So I think one of the, I guess, personal policies that have become organic is to not let stress bring me down, but to kind of put a positive spin on it and self-coach and use whatever wisdom I have from reading and from learning and from life experiences to coach myself to become better.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, good. Um, all right. Just a few more questions. You talk about velvet ropes. What are those in the book as a metaphor?

**Vanessa Patrick:** So, velvet ropes are those pretty little red velvet ropes that people use in Trader Joe's and at stadiums to guide the path. And, you know, you want people to stand in a particular line. You put velvet ropes in, people stand in line. So, I call those velvet ropes, which are actually called stanchions. Uh, I use the metaphor of velvet ropes to describe personnel policy. So, our personnel policies, the way we set up our lives, need to be like velvet ropes, not barbed wire. We don't want barbed wire that hurts us and forces us in particular places. Velvet ropes are things that we decide that we want, the things that we set up to lead us to where we want to go. And I think that that kind of more gentle, more positive, more pretty way of thinking about things is much better than these hard and fast rules which punish ourselves if we don't achieve things.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that. And the tactile piece of me is just thinking, oh, it feels so good to touch a velvet rope. Mm. So now that you've studied and thought very deeply about how to say no. How has that improved your ability to say yes?

**Vanessa Patrick:** So, I'm much more intentional in what I say yes to. And when I say yes, I give it my all. So, it has actually affected my reputation in a very positive way, because when I do say, yes, I do an amazing job. And I think that if you say yes to the things that truly matter to you, you will do a good job. And it means that you have to say no to the things that are taking away from things. So, I am very, very intentional in the way I set up my calendar. The things I say yes to the time that I commit to certain things. So, I'm not rushed and I'm not doing a, you know, a shoddy job on anything. It's hard to keep. Up with everything. And by all means. Sometimes drop the ball. But I try my best to keep things in order and be, you know, to live according to what I think is best for me. And at this point, you know, I've got a young daughter. I want to be able to be there for my family. I have friends that I care about making. Reading is like a number one commitment. So, taking time to do all those things as well as my job requires you to think quite deeply about what how you want to structure this.

**Whitney Johnson:** Any final thoughts? Any closing thoughts?

**Vanessa Patrick:** I think that we.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Need to all realize, as you talked about, you know, moving along that curve of life. I think learning the super skill of being able to say no and recognizing the tradeoffs that we have to make is more likely to accelerate that journey along the S-curve.

**Whitney Johnson:** I, of course, love that. Vanessa, thank you so much for joining us.

**Vanessa Patrick:** Thank you so much. Whitney. Really, really, really appreciate it. It was an honor and a pleasure.

Have you ever felt more ready to say no to something? But it's not just saying no. It's knowing why you're saying no. Feeling that reason. Let's talk about that. One thing I really took away from what Vanessa said was just how much more we learn when we say no rather than when we say yes. Remember when we say yes to what we really should have said no to. Our psychological immune system kicks in and just blocks it all out. There's no chance to learn from something awkward if you can't even think about it like Groundhog Day. Just saying. A half. Yes. Half no. Over and over. Saying no forces us to overcome that immune system and face down the awkwardness. For once, we can see the pattern. Another point I want to bring up is what an intentional no really is. Not only that, but the respect Vanessa got when those no's were intentional. It took her years to build that conviction and it took her even longer to be able to speak from that place of conviction. An empowered refusal is only possible if you're sure, and it's tough when we're at the start of an S curve or jumping from one to another to be really sure. But the more you understand why you're on the S curve to begin with, the easier it is to say no. And when it comes to folks who just won't take no for an answer, Vanessa had that great metaphor about the walnut tree and the marigold.

Juglone That's the chemical that the black walnut sprays into the soil. It kills everything near it, almost as a protection mechanism. But remember how the marigold does the opposite. She called it companion farming. How the marigold coexists and supports the growth of the plants near it. You've got to protect yourself from the black walnut, avoiding face-to-face negotiations with them, for example. But with the marigold, you want to be near it, supporting you, supporting it in return.

Last thing, and the real aha moment for me is that when we're spending all this time doing the work, figuring out our intention and our power, how do we let others say no to us in the same way? Vanessa laid out a way in which we can let others come to their own empowered refusals without getting defensive in the same way that the black walnut gets defensive. If you want to explore these topics more, there's my episode with Jen Goldman. Wetzlar about Stakeholder Outcomes. **Episode 158**. There's Dr. Benjamin Hardy **Episode 169** On the idea that we can change, which shocker isn't easy to accept. Also, Katie Milkman on how we change according to science. That's **episode 227**. Thank you again to Vanessa Patrick for being our guest and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed this episode, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. And if you know of someone who wants to say yes to no, please share this episode from Vanessa. Thank you to our producer Alexander Turk, production assistant Stephanie Brummel and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson

And this is Disrupt Yourself.