

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 339: HAL HERSHFIELD

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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. And the building block of that growth. It's you. Who were you ten years ago? How did that person think? How did they see the world? What were they afraid of? What did they want the most? And what about today? How have those things changed? How would you feel if you passed that person on the street tomorrow? Would you recognize them? Now instead of who you were ten years ago.

What if it's who you want to be ten years from now? Someone you have yet to know. Our guest today is here to talk about getting to know that person some more. Hal Hershfield understands that connecting with our future selves can feel like a vague, unfulfilling endeavor. But to hear him say it, it's one of the most valuable ways we have to connect with our spirit and our purpose. I hope you enjoy

**Whitney Johnson:** So one of the things that I found really curious as I was reading through your book, how is that our future selves are unrecognizable to us, that in fact we see them as not being our self. So can you talk to us about that a little bit, the research around that and why it's so difficult to connect to our future self? And then I would really love some ideas of what are some hacks that we can use in order to be able to better connect.

**Hal Hershfield:** Sure. So, you know, I mean, I think the the the first point here is that on some levels, our future selves seem like other people to us. So I don't know that I would go so far as to say necessarily unrecognizable, but rather that they may seem almost like separate people and to some extent strangers. Right. Now, that could result in them being like almost unknowable and unrecognizable, but it could also mean that they're sort of, well, another person from us that we don't really know. And that's by the way, that's really important because. If I'm trying to think about how my decisions today will impact me at some later point in time, called in five years, ten years, whatever it is, if I can't step into the shoes of that future person, if I can't fundamentally relate to them, if they really seem like a stranger to me, then my gosh, what a difficult exercise it is right to try to recognize how our decisions today will impact that sort of stranger, if you will. Okay. So in terms of being practical in what we

can do about it, you know, I'll talk about a number of things and I'm sure we'll get to them. But, you know, there's there's the first step is to basically start by recognizing that we can consider our future selves like a relationship partner, somebody who we can have a relationship with that may feel distant or it may feel close and in the same way that we may want to try to enhance the closeness that we have with a friend from the past or even our spouses or our best friends, we can also try to enhance the closeness that we have with our future selves.

**Hal Hershfield:** So what does that mean? Functionally, it means trying to do what we can to make that future self more vivid and more emotional. So, you know, one of the exercises that I love is about writing a letter to your future self and then writing a letter back from your future self. You know, I used to do some research where we'd have people write these letters to future selves, and then some other researchers came along and said, Well, let's add an element. Let's actually have people write a letter back. And I absolutely love that. It turns out that fosters a stronger connection. And I think the reason why is really clear because it creates a conversation. You know, if you were to just sort of talk to your future self, it's like going on a date where you're the only one talking. But if you have that back and forth, that exchange, then I think it sort of forces you to step into the shoes of that future self. Now, and I've done this before, it's not an easy exercise, in part because we're, you know, we're not trying to solve an easy problem.

**Hal Hershfield:** These are difficult problems. And think about this professionally. I can think about this personally, and it requires some degree of of discomfort because because there's all this uncertainty and at the same time, going through this exercise can really force yourself to start dialing the, you know, turning the dial down a little bit on that uncertainty and saying, okay, well, what can I imagine? What might life be like? I'll add one other element here in terms of being practical. One thing that I think is important to focus on is the things I can expect. When we start thinking about the future, there's a swirl of surprises and uncertainty and unexpected things. And what I don't know and what I know, I don't know. And let me try to like quiet that down for a minute and just focus on just take a couple of things that I can expect to be true in five years, ten years, whatever the time frame is. This is research done by Charles Chu and Brian Lowry, two business school professors who recently discovered that when you ask people to think about expected things, it makes life more certain. It dials up the sort of meaning in life that we feel and think it's a much more pleasant exercise.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. So I'm curious. You said you've written the letter to yourself and then your future self has written a letter back to you. And it's easier if you can think about what's expected. So when you think five years in the future for you, what's expected for you?

**Hal Hershfield:** Right. So, you know, I start and I think really practically, I expect that I will still be at UCLA. Um, of course, don't tell that to my dean, because I think that limits my leverage for any negotiation, but okay, we'll put that aside. Um, so I expect that I'll still be at UCLA. You know, I expect that my wife and I will still be together. Um, and, you know, and then I expect. And then. And then it becomes fuzzier, right? Because, yeah, I expect we'll still be in this house. But we've got young kids now and, well, in five years it will the house still be the right size for them and so on. And so then it starts to, you know, add little questions in, but then take it back a step. And when I've done this exercise, I say, Well, what can I expect about me in terms of my values? And, you know, don't don't think we need to go in the details necessarily. But there's certain things that I say, well, you know, I expect that that will still be true. It will still be important to me, for example, to be in close contact with my parents and my friends. That's something that's really important to me. And it has all these other implications because if I start, you know, a new project that's grueling and it's going to take me away from things, then I'm not going to have as much time with friends, parents, my kids, my wife, etcetera. And so then I can start to say, well, what what changes will I want to make and what changes won't I want to make based on my desire to keep some of those values? True and expected and to have them remain in five years.

**Whitney Johnson:** And one of the things you said that I thought was really interesting and this focus on values is that it's much easier to picture your future self if that future self feels more familiar to you and it's going to feel more familiar to you. If you can say to yourself, Well, the things that I value today, I believe I will continue to value in 20 years or 30 years. And so there becomes this familiarity of that thread that through line of your life. And so then it becomes easier to imagine yourself 20 years in the future.

**Hal Hershfield:** That's exactly right. You know, I think at the same time, it's important to recognize that, you know, I can look back 20 years and say, all right, you know what, Certain things have changed in that period of time. And so there needs to be the recognition that there can be some change in the future. But, you know, for me, it's easier to say, well, what things can I point to and say? That particular value is basically the same from 20 years ago to now. And let's use that almost as a scaffolding exercise to to move forward. And this is a time when, you know, when we can maybe bring in the past self, uh, a little bit there. But to the extent that I feel a sense of familiarity and a sense of similarity, it can make it easier to foster that connection in the same way that we naturally connect to friends who share similarities with us, who we feel a familiarity with.

**Whitney Johnson:** And what else do you and what things do you want to still be true? Right? For me, I look at it, I'm like, okay, well, 20 years in the future, I want to still be true that I believe in God. I want it to still be true that I love my husband. I want it to still be true, that I am striving to treat people with dignity. So some things that I want to continue to be true. And so that's the scaffolding I think you're talking about.

**Hal Hershfield:** Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. That's great.

**Whitney Johnson:** So one of the things I'm curious about is I started putting on my phone a picture of myself when I was less than eight years old. And the reason that I did that is this is based on the the work of being empathetic to yourself and that when I'm having those moments of wanting to be right, my present self, I look at my eight year old self and think, would you really be unkind to that eight year old? And the answer is no. And as I heard you talking, the wondering I had and is that if your future self writes a letter to you, there's going to be a compassion and a tenderness to who you are that will be different than you writing to your future self. And I'm wondering if you believe that to be true? And also, what is one thing that your future self wrote to you?

**Hal Hershfield:** I love the question. Um. I don't have any data on this, right? So I wish that I had the data to say that, you know, that those letters will end up having compassion. Anecdotally, that certainly seems to be the case. And we you know, we also know when we when we look at what people the anecdotally the the experience people have of reading letters from their past selves, you know, we're going in the different direction now. They do experience some of that self compassion and that sort of like sense of going back to the values, um, of, you know, who was I, uh, back then, Right. Um. It's funny that you ask that, because one of the things that I did put in that letter was to. Not be so hard on yourself right now and also zoom out. Right. Because and when I say zoom out, I mean, take what this is a phrase that my colleagues and I have been calling a broad view of time. Right. It's really easy to stay focused on the present moment. And I'm guilty of this. I know so many other people are guilty of it, too, of saying, you know, the things that are happening right now feel so important and. And then that can lead you to to beat yourself up for the things that you did because it feels so important right now. And there's never been a time in my life where I can look back and say, I'm really glad I was so hard on myself because that made things better, you know? And so my future self, I think, has told me. Dial it back a little bit. Take the big picture perspective here, the broad view of time and see how the different pieces fit together rather than stay so sort of myopically focused on the now.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm. Well, and you talk a little bit about this, I think in your book of one of the things that your future self can help you do is to zoom out and recognize that the things that feel very, very important today, some of them will be important, but most of them will be not not be. And so it allows you to show up in a way in how you interact with people that you're proud of and not embarrassed by because you're able to zoom out and say, in fact, I just did this. I think, you know, as I've been reading your book of thinking to myself about an interaction I had with someone the other day, and I thought, how do I want my 80 year old or 90 year old or 100 year old self to look at how I showed up in this interaction? How do I want to look at that? And it was really helpful. All very helpful.

**Hal Hershfield:** Yeah, it's funny you say that. I have this I've been doing a lot more of this, you know, and it's it's in particular, it's with both my my kids, my interaction with my kids. And then I'm really fortunate that my parents live close and they help out with the kids all the time. And it means I get to see them a lot. And then it also means that there's times where I, you know, I almost feel like an adolescent again where I get like annoyed by something that they've done. And, you know, as a full adult, it's a funny feeling. And I've had these moments where I'm about to sort of complain about something and realize there's no way I'm going to look back on this positively.

Like, you know, and sometimes it matters and most of the times it doesn't. And it's like, maybe I should just chill out a little bit here.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Interesting. So do you have a practical example of how this idea of focusing on your future self has helped a company succeed? Do you think about this at all?

**Hal Hershfield:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. Um, so, you know, a lot of the work that I've done, outside work, consulting work, has been with financial services companies. Um, this is of course, a space where connecting to future selves is, you know, particularly important. Right? So, um, I've worked with many banks to try to put these sort of messages into place to help consumers. Well, you know, for instance, save more or at least start the process of saving more. Um, you know, one particular case we, we inserted or injected this sort of framing around taking care of your future self for the benefits enrollment experience of thousands of employees. Right. Because you know, this is that time where I could choose more money in my paycheck or I could choose, you know, the higher 401. Contribution and the whichever insurance that it might be good for me to get and so on and so on. Um, other companies have used this sort of without my, um, my direct involvement, you know, the, the, the one example I really like recently is, um, I think it was ING in Europe, Uh, and they asked people, this is just from a couple of weeks ago, they asked people to describe an ideal day in retirement and upload a photo of themselves and then they use AI to basically just instantly create a portrait of what that ideal day looks like.

So the example that they describe in their press release is this woman who says she wants to, uh, what did she say? She wants to have a day running through fields of poppies with her three golden retrievers. And so instantly they spit back this picture. And it's this beautiful portrait of this woman aged about 30 years in the future, running through this field of I think it was like purple flowers. And there's one dog in front with like a dog smile and two dogs in the back. And, you know, they claim that this is drastically increased interest in their retirement products. This isn't like a well controlled study. I'm not going to, you know, put too much on this. But that's an example where companies have implemented these ideas. Some other wellness companies have. Wait.

**Whitney Johnson:** Before you go on though, I mean, qualitatively, that makes sense, because if we go back to what we were talking about earlier of not feeling like we know or are very well acquainted with our future self, I've now been introduced to my future self.

**Hal Hershfield:** Exactly.

**Whitney Johnson:** And if we look about if we think about neurons and mirror neurons, and this is interesting because this is a conversation I had with Emma Seppala, who I know. Yeah, sure. That's how I connected with you. We were talking about the contagion effect. So now once I see that picture of myself, I feel connected to her. She's not some person I don't know. She's not a foe. She's a friend. Right. And so when you ask me now to invest in her, yeah, I'm more likely to do so. So it makes sense.

**Hal Hershfield:** And I almost wonder, you know, I love the way that you said it as a friend, not a foe. I almost wonder now the decision to invest in her. It's not just a painful one of saying, well, now I have to put aside money today for this. Unknown person who's taking my money away. But I almost wonder, do you get some positive feelings right now from knowing that you're taking care of them?

**Whitney Johnson:** You know, I did. Just thinking about it. It felt different to me. What about you? Did it feel different to you?

**Hal Hershfield:** Absolutely. You know, in the same way that there's a pain involved in setting aside money, you know, for my kids education. Right. And that is look, I'm fortunate to be able to do some of that. Right. But there's also a pleasure involved in knowing, you know, this is going to let them do something good in the future. I'm connected to them now. I'm hoping I'll be connected to them at that period of time as well, in the same way that I think setting aside money for that future self or time or whatever the resource is. In theory should feel good now to know that I'm doing something to take care of them.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So if there were. One thing that as people are listening to this conversation, if you could persuade them to do just one thing. Differently to be able to attend to their future self so that they can in fact become the person that they aspire to become. Because that's what most people listening to this podcast want. What would be the one thing you would invite them to do?

**Hal Hershfield:** Can I make it one recipe that's just like a couple things or --

**Whitney Johnson:** Yes, you can. Disrupt my question. Please go ahead.

**Hal Hershfield:** Um, I think -- let me make it like sort of 2 or 3 quick things. Uh. First, do the exercise of figuring out what you want that future self to look like, whatever that domain is. Is it a professional thing? Is it a health thing? Is it a relationship thing? Let's start there because otherwise it's way too abstract.

**Whitney Johnson:** Sorry. Before you go on though, I want to I want to dive into that because I find sometimes it's really hard for me to be like, what do I want my future self to? How do I want to show up in the world? What do I want that to look like? But I actually think and I'm curious about what you would say to this is that we have a clearer sense than we realize that we do, but sometimes we super self edit. And so in order to think through that person of from a career perspective, from a behavioral perspective, from a just who we are, I think it requires that willingness to kind of go to a place of of real calm and real. Um, reflection and also letting go and not editing because we know more than we think we do.

**Hal Hershfield:** Yeah, and I think that's a really good point. So let, let me, let me ironically edit that because I think.

**Whitney Johnson:** Please do.

**Hal Hershfield:** Um. You know. Let's let's start by saying think, look, can be really hard to just conjure up some future self because there's many different sort of future selves. Let's start by picking a domain that you want to work on, whether it's professional or personal or relationship wise or whatever it is. And then let yourself go engage in a little bit of an idealized fantasy of about what what would an ideal day look like in what call it five years, Call it ten years, whatever. The time period that feels right in that space is. But then you can't stop there. What the research shows is that if you stop there, you ironically may end up doing nothing because you get some energy out of the fantasy.

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting. Interesting. Okay, then keep going then, engage.

**Hal Hershfield:** Yeah. So then engage in what's known as a mental contrasting exercise. Contrast. What is your present day look life look like against What is that ideal life look like? And think about an obstacle that stands in the way and overcome an obstacle. And it has to be overcome, able and then start with that and say, all right. What's the very first smallest piece that I can pull off of that overcoming obstacle? And I want to be like really concrete. And I hope this isn't too low level, but I love the idea of what psychologists call implementation intentions, where I say, I'm going to make an intention for how I'm going to implement my behavior and I'm going to say, okay, what's the smallest thing I can do for that obstacle now that I know it? I'm going to put it down on my calendar that Wednesday at 8 p.m. or next Friday at 10 a.m. or whenever it is, I'm writing it down. I'm going to do that thing. You know, I might as well tell my spouse or my friend or somebody so that somebody can hold me accountable to. And the reason that I like to go so concrete and so like almost on a low level there is that. Otherwise it can be really easy to sort of have created this image of the way you want things to be. But with no action plan, no, you know, sense that I'm going to actually do something. So this was a somewhat long answer to what's the one thing?

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, and that's okay. I love this. So let's get even more practical and and concrete around this. Have you done this around something? Does something come to mind or should we just kind of brainstorm for a minute?

**Hal Hershfield:** Well, I did this when I wrote the book. Okay. This was Tell Us More. This was absolutely part of my process. And, you know, I want to be really careful to say it's not like the way I did. It is the way everybody should do it. But I had. A really hard time at the beginning, sort of sitting down and saying, like, when am I going to actually, you know, do this? And I got really specific by blocking off, you know, blocking off time in my calendar and writing down the things that I was hoping to do on the days that I wanted to do it. And also knowing that I was going to have to sort of edit that and, you know, revisit and change it. But early on when I would sort of just tell myself I was going to, you know, I was going to take care of writing the intro or whatnot. Other things would crop up and be much more urgent and somebody would say, Can we meet next Wednesday? And I'd say, Sure, it's open. And then my week is over and nothing's been done right. And so it's and it's so hard because it also meant at the same time somebody would ask for a meeting, a student, and they would say, Can you meet next week? And I would say, Well, technically all that I have blocked off during the time that you want to meet is that I'm going to work on the intro. And I would have to say, No, I'm not free. And it's like a weird thing to say. The only commitment I have is to myself at that period of time. So this is specific of course, to this, you know, the writing process. But I think it's not so specific because I think it can be generalized to any time we want to do deep work.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So your present self was taking your future self hostage. So I wanted to drill down on this more because I think this is useful and it could be a book and, you know, lots of people listening to this want to write some type of book or start a podcast or something. We all have projects that we want to work on. So, for example, maybe you said and you can, you know, sort of editorialize, I want to publish a book three years hence, right?

**Hal Hershfield:** Call it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. And you said your obstacle was making the time to do it.

**Hal Hershfield:** That's right.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's right. Okay. So then your implementation intentions were I'm going to put on my calendar that I'm going to have the introduction done by such and such a date, which means I need to write X amount of time per day, blocked it off on your calendar, and maybe you didn't do it every day, but then you were making that that decision. I just chose to not write today.

**Hal Hershfield:** That's exactly right. The way that you said that was exactly what my process was. I mean, it was the you know, the one thing I would add is that there was almost sort of a master plan of, you know, okay, I want to write this between this period of time. And I think I had 15 months to write it or something. And I sort of worked backwards and said, all right, what is what am I going to try to accomplish in each six week period or whatever it is? And then had to get more and more concrete. Okay. If that's what I want to do, then I want to write this many words by this day. And of course, the words doesn't matter because, you know, you write a thousand words, 900 of them get thrown out, whatever it is. Um, but getting super concrete was the only thing that allowed me to actually sit down and do those things. Because on the days when I would say, Oh, you know what? Something came up, I'm going to have to not write today. Okay, fine. But then the cost was very clear and it made it easier to say, All right, well, then what's something that's less important than I'm going to have to shift another day so that I can get back to the thing that I was going to do right this day.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. And, you know, you're making me think of something I remember and it seems like I want to -- Katie Milkman -- did she blurb your book?

**Speaker3:** Okay. She didn't, uh -- she's a colleague. I wrote about her in the book. Yeah. Okay. She's a colleague, and --

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, I knew her name was coming up for me, so I just remember. So something that she had talked about. I don't know that it was her research, but she talked about in her book how we change. And and like I said, we had her on the podcast and that you would make a goal of, for example, I'm going to write for 15 minutes a day when you're first starting out and the research shows, if you say, I'm going to write at 15 for 15

minutes between 7 and 715 in the morning, that's more the compliance is a lot lower than I'm just going to write for 15 minutes today because then it can be 8:00 at night and I made a commitment. So I need to keep my commitment and I found that actually really helpful to have a little bit of flexibility around I'm going to do it, but when I do it in a given day is less important. I just need to comply. But I have to make it small enough so that even if it gets to be 9:00 at night, I'll still comply.

**Hal Hershfield:** It's really interesting because I think there's some nuance there. She's obviously she's right about that, but too much flexibility, um, can lead us astray, right? So there's a paper that came out just a couple months ago. Um, Caitlin Woolley was the, the author on that. And one of the things that they found is that when it comes to making giving advice to other people, we recommend rigid goal commitment strategies. But when it comes to ourselves, we often give a lot of flexibility. So one of the examples, you know, you think about like like if I said, okay, I'm going to I want to be healthy, I'm going to eat three healthy meals a week. Yeah, well, if I want to tell someone else how to do that, I'd say, well, Monday, Wednesday and Friday you should plan a healthy meal. And by the way, here's, you know, a menu of six things you could choose from. And you might even want to just say, I'm always going to do it Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Then there's no negotiation. Oh, but for me, look, I want to have some flexibility. Three days a week. I'll. I'll do it. I don't know what it'll be, but I'll get healthy. And the reason I say that there's nuance here is because the example you gave. The time bracketing mattered, right? You said, I'll write for 15 minutes in this span, this one day. Okay. I like that because it's clear to me that as the day goes on, I might I might miss my goal. And I made this commitment, so I should do it. But making it too broad and saying, I'll write for 15 minutes. Sometime this week or a couple days this week. I'll do it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, yeah.

**Hal Hershfield:** There's not -- too much flexibility.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, there's too much wiggle room. Yeah, it's interesting. Yeah. And I guess for me, the last thought that I'm having is curious is, you know, back to this idea of our future self and making our future self feel more attainable is also being willing to say, I think that I want to be like this kind of person in the future, but I'm not sure I'm still going to set some goals around that, knowing that they can change over time. But I'm not going to be, um. I'm not going to. Be paralyzed by not knowing.

**Hal Hershfield:** I think that is so important. Um, because you're, you're essentially giving some flexibility there on both directions, right? So you want to make plans knowing that you'll revisit them. You also want to make plans knowing that, um, you can't be perfect right now. And so. But you have to jump in. Um, you know, if we come back to this analogy of my, you know, my future self as another person, uh, it would be, it would almost be laughable if I said, you know, I'm going to make sort of a plan for my relationship. And I've just expect that everything will be stable and static with my wife over time. And, you know, okay, I can change a little bit, but, you know, my spouse is going to be exactly the same over time. Like that would be crazy, like because nobody's like that. We know that from experience. And so the idea that I would make plans that would be so rigid that I couldn't change them or I'd be surprised somehow I think I think there's an analogy there that that works with our own future selves, you know?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah and I keep thinking about Back to the Future and Christopher Lloyd, how he kept kind of popping in and out and just like allowing, allowing that, that fluidity.

**Hal Hershfield:** Yeah, Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Um, okay, so I'm changing changing subjects for just a minute. I would love to hear an S curve, a new S curve that you have jumped to recently. So in our parlance, it's, you know, taking on something new. What's something that you're doing really new for yourself? How does it feel and what future self part of your future self motivated you to do it?

**Hal Hershfield:** Oh, man. Um, okay, so it's funny because it's. It's new, but old. Um, I grew up, uh, I was, I think I was cut from the soccer team in eighth grade. Uh, and, you know, but my parents wanted me to play a sport, and I think, you know, somehow I started playing tennis, and I lived in an area where we didn't have, like, a super

strong tennis team. But I was. I wasn't so bad. And I, you know, I ended up playing like tennis through high school. And it was like on some some competitive level, but not great. But it was something I really loved to do and it was really fun. And I played even I played a little teeny bit my the beginning of my freshman year of college. And then I said, this isn't this isn't how I want to spend my time. And then I basically stopped and I think I stopped because it was something that I spent so much time in and I was in a groove and I knew I had to do it. And and then I tried again and I was like, wow, I'm so much worse because I haven't been practicing. And that was that was somehow confronting to me. And, and for for years I never played. And then about two years ago, my wife started playing.

**Hal Hershfield:** She'd never played before. And there's a Tuesday night sort of township clinic. And she said, You should join me. And I was hesitant at first because I said, No, this is something I used to do. I don't do that now. And she said, I think it'll be really fun. And so I started going and. Now we play every Tuesday. And, you know, if I could play more, I would play more. And it's been so interesting to me because first off, it's just as as fun as I remember it, even though I'm way worse than I was, you know, it's like and I can remember getting to certain balls that I couldn't can't get to now 20 years later or whatnot. And it's also been, well, you know, from the future self perspective, it's given me an activity that, you know, like another athletic activity that I can do that's fun. It also gives us something to do together that's, you know, then different than going to dinner and having a glass of wine or whatever. Um, and. It's been such an interesting exercise in I don't mean to get too philosophical about it, but it's been a really interesting exercise in witnessing change and being okay with change. Because when I play, like I said, I know, I know how I've changed. I can be I really remember and I can really concretely say like, it hurts Now when I, you know, when I try to hit an overhead too hard or whatever to get really concrete about it.

**Hal Hershfield:** But I've. I've almost taken the tack. I haven't thought about this till now, but I've almost taken the tact of of of laughing at it In a way. It's sort of funny that that thing that could do great when I was 18 I can't do now more than 20 years later. Um, and I've sort of had fun with that process, uh, and sort of also enjoyed the way that the process has changed and how the game I play is different now and so on. So that I think that would be the new, the new activity. I'll also say one more thing, which is that, uh, you know, there's a joke in academia where, you know, when you get asked, what's your hobbies? And people laugh and say, you know, hobbies, it's, you know, reading more papers and for so long, you know, if I had free time, it was to do more work. And it's been so nice to do something that I'm just my I can't even look at my phone. It's I can't even check my email. It's just I'm just fully present in the moment. And that's been so nice.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right, your future self is going to thank you for doing this.

**Hal Hershfield:** I certainly hope so. And you know what? Even if he doesn't, I'm really enjoying it right now, so I can't imagine why he wouldn't.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, yeah. Love it. So. So how what has been useful for you in this conversation? It may be something that you said. It may also be something that you just thought or observed.

**Hal Hershfield:** I'm sorry. Wait. What has been useful? In what conversation?

**Whitney Johnson:** In this conversation. So something that I ask at the end of my coaching calls, but also at the end of a podcast is we've been having this conversation, I've been asking you lots of questions. Um, my curiosity is, is what was useful for you? What did you observe? What did you think of what ideas did you have that hadn't occurred to you before?

**Hal Hershfield:** This is -- sorry. Um. It's a wonderful question because it's not something I've thought about. Uh, in an intentional way before in, in these sorts of conversations. And I love it. The first question you asked me was, why is uncertainty so hard? And, you know, I realized, you know, so two things that were useful to me there. One is that. On almost a meta level. It's such a hard question to answer. And I was thrown a little bit when you asked it. And I think that's telling in a way, because, of course, I don't know. I don't know all the research out there, but it's something that I thought I knew. And as I started thinking about the answer, I realized it's such a difficult thing to give a concrete answer to. And it's just a good reminder that there's always something to be learned even about



the things that we thought we knew. And so one of the things I was thinking about was, I want to go back to some of that original literature and revisit it. Um, I also that also is useful to me because. Um. You know, I think personally, I'm at a stage right now where, you know, professionally I've accomplished some of the things that I've wanted to accomplish. And I'm starting to think about what are the big goals to come. And this is, you know, it's like so much of the focus of my own research, and yet I have found it. A slightly anxiety provoking in part because of the uncertainty involved with going a new path, taking up a new topic, teaching a new course, whatever it may be, even if it doesn't sound that risky. There's a risk involved in my world of doing something like that. And so I think part of our conversation has forced me a little bit. It's forced me to think on a deeper level about, well, what does come next and why do I. Why might I be hesitant to make a change? And why? Why might it be good to.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, it's interesting, too, when you said that about your, you know, going back to this meta perspective. Helping people have the tools to think about their future self reduces uncertainty.

**Hal Hershfield:** Yes, I think that's absolutely the case.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hm. Any final thoughts?

**Hal Hershfield:** Um. I feel like we've talked about so much here. Um. I think one final thought that I have.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Hal Hershfield:** Pertains to something you said, which is that role of compassion and self-compassion. Uh, and again, the, you know, the research on, on it is, is scant, but the idea that that's an element that can be injected into some of these present self future self conversations I think is a really, really important idea.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm hmm. Maybe some research that you can do. Hal, thank you very much for joining us.

**Hal Hershfield:** It's my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

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Usually this is the part of the show where I talk about what I'll remember from the show. And for sure, there's a lot. There always is. But this week I want to leave you with a challenge. And I'll do it too. We all will. Here, I want us all to write that letter to our future selves that Hal talked about. Set it five years from now to make it concrete. And when you write, it really mean it. It's easy to cop out on these things and put down some creative idea of who we want to be. But what do you really want? What kind of person would you want to write you back? I think it's a good place to start, and in a month or two months, we will revisit those letters and see what kind of course, we've set for ourselves. For more on understanding the limits that our opinions of ourselves create. There's my recent talk with Shade Zahrai. Episode 330 on the resilience and self-confidence that you need to stay the course when the waves get choppy. There's episode 298 with Steve Ernst. And for an extra dose of self love, of course, there's episode 323 with Shirzad Chamine. Thank you again to Hal and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit Subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. Thank you to our producer Alexander Turk. Production assistant Ange Harris and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.

