

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 353: TARA SWART

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. Sure, we're building blocks, but what happens when we get in our own way? Isn't it frustrating when we feel like a passenger to our own thoughts and actions? In Buddhist thought, we're supposed to watch our thoughts pass by like clouds in the sky. But that's the ideal after all. It's a hard truth to swallow that the human mind is much more mysterious than we'd hope it to be. So, for today's episode, we wanted to bring back a conversation I had back in 2020 with a medical doctor and neuroscientist, Dr. Tara Swart. She spent her career tinkering with our brains, figuring out how we can harness this mysterious power that we have. The machinery of our minds might be unknowable, but the way it adapts isn't. Dr. Swart's research is in the field of neuroplasticity, the idea that our neurons can be rewired, tweaked for peak performance. So, what can we learn about not being a passenger to our own thoughts about taking the wheel? I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** Tara Swart. Welcome to the podcast.

**Tara Swart:** Whitney, it's so lovely to be in touch with you again. And I'd actually forgotten about that previous podcast, so but I'm pretty sure with where we both are now and the reason that we've reconnected, that we'll definitely be airing this one.

**Whitney Johnson:** Absolutely. And I'm so excited for everyone to hear what you have to say. So one of the things that I love to find out, and I know I've read a little bit about this in your book, but I would love for you to share with our listeners where you grew up and what you wanted to be when you grew up.

**Tara Swart:** Okay. I grew up in northwest London, and it's relevant to the story that I was the first child of first-generation immigrant Indian parents in the UK. And, you know, it's a bit of a stereotype that Indian parents want

their children to be doctors and lawyers. So as the first, I don't remember a time that I didn't think I was going to be a doctor. And yes, my younger brother is a lawyer.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, you were very obedient children.

**Tara Swart:** Yeah. I mean, it's just so fascinating to now come back and speak with you on the Disrupt Yourself podcast, because I went along a path that was laid out for me. I was lucky that I was good at math and science and actually loved being at medical school, and I really cared about my patients. But I woke up at one point in my life, in my mid-thirties, and thought this was never actually what I wanted to do, and I've never actually really thought about what I wanted to do, and that's when I first disrupted myself.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, what did you do? How did you disrupt yourself?

**Tara Swart:** There's a good parallel here with neuroplasticity, which is the ability of the adult brain to change itself. So, I'd had this thought process for two years of this wasn't what I chose to do. You know, it is a huge privilege to be a doctor. There are a lot of good things about it, but what else could I do? And so, I made a list, mostly in my mind, a little bit on paper for two years. But I started having different conversations with people, people who were in different jobs or who'd changed jobs, and started thinking about things that I could actually do. But I was really held back by this false belief that because I'd done a vocational degree, that there wasn't anything else that I could do. So, I literally think it took two years for that pathway in my brain to build up to the point that I actually said, I'm going to quit medicine and do something else. And by that point, I'd done lots of research and found that executive coaching had a lot of transferable skills from being a psychiatrist, which is what I'd specialized in, had some elements that I just like in life, partly of being quite Zen, but also being very focused. And was something that I could start to build up my own sort of freelance practice and then maybe build into something bigger. So, for some strange reason, I really can't explain, because it's not in my family or our sort of social group at all. I wanted to run my own business. So it really was it was disrupting myself, but it was disrupting so many people's idea of what should be that it definitely led to some kind of identity crisis as well, which is really interesting to look back on, sort of how those kinds of low points in your life can actually be real huge turnarounds where you become something much bigger than you ever thought you could.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm. So good. There's so much to unpack there. And one of the things, as I'm listening to you talk about this, is this idea that when you make that decision to do something different, there can be this loss of identity and people who know you and have seen you in one sort of one persona. They look at you like you have literally lost your mind, and it sounds like you had or experienced some of that.

**Tara Swart:** Absolutely. I mean, friends, family, sort of, you know, colleagues like the new people that I met who were advising me. Everybody, you're so right. It's quite actually a relief to hear you say that, because it's still something I feel like I went through alone, because I didn't really know anybody else that did something exactly the same. So, it was bad enough when I first said I was going to do it. But then when I ran out of money, and I couldn't pay my bills and I still wouldn't go and do a weekend locum as a doctor because I just felt if I went back at all that I would have failed. People were really, like thinking I was crazy. And, you know, partly it was luck, but obviously it was a lot of hard work as well. And, you know, that eventually turned round. And then it really made me feel so much better about it that I'd never stepped backwards or let myself down in the way that I felt was letting myself down, even though it wouldn't necessarily have been the case. And I don't actually think that's the right, necessary advice for everybody. But for me, I had a very strong focus on just continually moving forward with the thing that I wanted to do. Although interestingly, part of the story is that I decided to leave something, and that was a big part of it. Um, and I'll tell you a bit more about that later because I might be on another disruption path at the moment.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. I can't wait to hear that. So now everybody is going to have to listen to the end of the podcast so they can hear the whole story. So, something else that you said was really interesting, which is this idea that you were a psychiatrist. You had this moment where you recognized I'm not on the right S Curve. Like, it's a good S Curve, but it's not. And my parents think it's the right S Curve, but it's not the right S Curve for me. I need to jump to a new S Curve. But it took you two years to get to that point. And you talked about this idea of neuroplasticity to get to the point where you were ready to actually make that jump, you had to start to rewire your brain. And so what I'd love for us to do now is pivot a little bit in the conversation and talk about the science behind

the law of attraction and the science behind, you know, what you've documented in your book, *The Source*. I mean, I think about this idea and it's just so interesting. I know for many, many, many years, I was very skeptical. I'd hear the Law of Attraction, and I'd be like, woo woo. And I think for some people, they would be surprised by that because I am a person of faith, I do believe in God. But I also worked on Wall Street. And so I think what would be really good for us to kind of set the stage for the rest of the conversation and for you to really be able to share some of the insights and the knowledge and the expertise that you have is for those who are listening and thinking, this is rubbish. Let's talk about the neuroscience or some basics of the neuroscience behind this idea of the law of attraction and being able to go after and get what you want in your life.

**Tara Swart:** I actually really love the fact that you've said I'm a person of faith. I believe in God. But I also worked on Wall Street. Um, why do we in society feel like those things should be mutually exclusive? And, you know, I resonate with that because probably because of my Indian cultural heritage, I've always been interested in yoga and meditation. Like way before they became like more mainstream and, you know, spiritual type things like the laws of attraction. Um, but I also felt for a long time that because I was a doctor and a PhD, that I had to keep those two things really separate. And one of the things that I've that's really sort of landed for me recently, where I think when I think about who am I, if I can't describe myself as a doctor or a neuroscientist or a coach. And one of the answers to that question is, I'm a bunch of contradictions, like every other human on this planet. And so when someone like you talks about themselves in that way, it really makes me think that this is a huge part of the human condition that isn't really talked about.

**Tara Swart:** And so just to segue in from, from what we were discussing before. The reason that I decided to change my career was because I looked ahead at the field of psychiatry for the next 30 or 40 years and decided that it wasn't going to change. There weren't going to be really many new mental illnesses or that many new or different treatments. And I had worked in different subspecialties because there's quite a lot of variety available, like children, old age, drug abuse, criminal psychiatry. And I'd also traveled to work in lots of different countries. So, I think I had had that period of trying to change things within the paradigm that I was in. But then when I actually quit my job, the chief of psychiatrist said to me, this is a real loss to us because you could do this job in your sleep. And if I needed one last reason to quit, that was he gave it to me because, and you know, exactly.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'm at the top of my curve. And if I don't jump, I'm going to get pushed off because I've fallen asleep on the job, right?

**Tara Swart:** Yeah. Or I'm just going to stay asleep for the rest of my life. And that was unimaginable to me. So that was, you know, that was good. I think, you know, I definitely love learning. I didn't love change that much at the time, but I've, you know, that's become the thing that I've learned, to do better than I was doing it before. And so, it's been a very parallel journey of personal change and really understanding neuroplasticity. So, neuroplasticity is the most exciting thing that's happened in neuroscience in the last 20 years or so. And it's shown us that these previous conceptions we had, for example, that by the age of 18 your personality is fixed or, you know, in adulthood, you can't really change your brain that much, like you can't teach an old dog new tricks. What we've been able to see with sophisticated scanning techniques is that that's absolutely not the case, and that the brain actively molds and shapes itself in response to everything that we experience, everything that we learn, every person that we meet, every emotion that we have till we're about 25 and from 25 to 65, you really need to do things to push yourself through that S Curve. Or I would suggest several S Curves between the ages of 25 and 65. But, you know, there are some activities that people say, you know, what about if I do Sudoku or crosswords? I think if you're a numbers person and you start doing crosswords or vice versa, it's a little bit trickier at first, but they're not really very difficult tasks.

**Tara Swart:** When we talk about things like learning to tango or learning a new language or learning a musical instrument, people say, I don't have time. Like I've got the day job, I've got my family. I, you know, I want to keep fit and healthy, but it has to be something that's sufficiently difficult that it makes you sweat mentally, as it were, to actually change your brain. And that's what I think an S Curve is, because just learning maybe like what's relevant to your job or something that isn't that attention intense, that you can do it quite easily alongside everything else that you need to do? That's not really going to force you through those bends of the S Curve to get to a point where you turn a corner that you didn't expect, and you find these cumulative benefits in your brain. You've got to take on some learning that's really quite challenging. And so, what I believe about what I love about the disrupting yourself idea is that you could wait till you lose your job or your partner walks out on you. Wouldn't it be so much better to

put yourself through that much change willingly in the first place so that if other change is thrust upon you, you're so resilient and adaptable to that. That's what true neuroplasticity is, that I can flex and change the way that I think, the way that I learn the things that I do. And then, if there's a crisis and I really need to be able to flex and change those things, I know that I can do it.

**Whitney Johnson:** So powerful. Tara, as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking, okay, I love this idea. Sufficiently difficult to make your brain sweat. And I'm thinking, what do I need to do that will make my brain sweat? And it doesn't necessarily need to be something fancy, right? I mean, it could be that I'm going to decide how to plant a really great garden. And I don't know how to do that. Right. So, it doesn't need to be. It just needs to be hard for you or hard for me. And that may not be hard for someone else.

**Tara Swart:** Absolutely. I mean, gardening is actually a great one. And it's one of the things that I'm actually going to work on this year. Another one that isn't a difficult one for me because I always do it, but so many people don't. Is cooking like whether it's following a recipe or being an Iron Chef, which is just, you know, making something out of a random set of ingredients. So many of us eat out, get takeaway, or just stick to the same old things that we, you know, we've eaten all our lives. And so, experimenting in the kitchen, as well as the garden can be really great ways of inducing neuroplasticity.

**Whitney Johnson:** You talk in your book about the whole brain approach. And by the way, everyone buy this book. We are going to give away two copies to our listeners and newsletter subscribers. But you should buy this book and give it to everybody you know. In the meantime, Tara, give us a quick rundown of the six neural pathways that you talk about in terms of sort of, you know, you talked about this plasticity, but there are different ways your brain can flex.

**Tara Swart:** Okay. So, *The Source*, the title of the book, obviously has a spiritual connotation. And there was a reason that I chose that word because it kind of goes counter to the very scientific backing behind it. I've described the source as your brain firing on all cylinders, and I've specified six brain pathways that correlate to six ways of thinking that we use a lot in our day-to-day life and work. And they are mastering your emotions, knowing yourself, which is the brain-body connection. So, listening to that, trusting your gut, which is accessing your intuition or inner wisdom. Making good decisions, which is using your logical brain pathway. Staying motivated and resilient to achieve your goals. And then, finally, it's creativity, which is using all of those other brain pathways to manifest the real-world outcomes that you desire. And that's the connection to laws of attraction. So those six pathways are what I call brain agility. You know, we all have emotions, logic, intuition, and we use them to different extents. , we'll have pathways in our brain that are more developed because we like doing it or we do it a lot, pathways that we underuse.

**Tara Swart:** And therefore, it's a bit harder to think in that way. And then, you know, perhaps some pathways that we've actually blocked off from for, you know, many reasons. Often, they come from childhood, but to whatever degree you're using these different pathways, and it's not about being good at everything or equally good at everything. It's just about considering that if you're managing your life pretty well by being very logical and quite motivated, how much more additive could it be if you also listened to your intuition? If you also think outside the box? Um, and that if you're using as much of your brain power as you possibly can, then you actually take more agency in life. So, you move from that feeling of being a bit passive and like life throws things at you, and maybe you cope with them quite well to being much more proactive and stepping back and thinking about what you really want, and then doing things to make that more likely to happen.

**Whitney Johnson:** One of the things I've noticed recently is that we all want to, you know, move along our S curve faster. We all believe in this idea of neuroplasticity, and or we hope that we do. And I've noticed that with myself and also people that I'm coaching, that when they get emotionally triggered, everything breaks down. And, sometimes, they don't even know what being triggered means. But what I would love for you to do is just stop for a moment and not, not for you to stop, for you to talk and tell people what's happening when we get triggered. And what do you recommend people do in that moment? Because that can really throw a grenade. You may be doing great work and moving forward, making lots of progress. You get emotionally triggered, and you throw a grenade in your progress. And so, I'd love for you to talk about that for a moment.

**Tara Swart:** Well, there's a few ways I could speak to that one. Is that any time you recognize that something like that happened in the past, it doesn't, you know, not expecting you to notice it in the moment, necessarily. Journal about it so that you raise it in your awareness. So, the more we can raise from non-conscious to conscious when this happens, and why it happens, we can start to see some patterns about it, sort of in the present day. The other way I would approach it is that when it happens like that, like you're just triggered almost from nowhere, it's because of a neural pathway that's been laid down there for so long that you're not aware of it. But it's really, you know, it's a very easy pathway for your brain to go down. And that's usually some kind of childhood. I'm not going to say trauma, but, you know, a pattern that's been built up from your childhood experience. And so, you may remember that in the book, there's a section on the ghosts from your past. So, I would say that when you get triggered like that, it's because a ghost from your past gets invoked really suddenly, um, because it's something that's very entrenched. So, if you go back and do the ghost exercise, you're more likely to just be generally more aware of the things that might trigger you if you journal in the here and now, then, um, you can just get a much clearer view of when this is happening. Because, what I find happens is if you feel triggered and you acknowledge it even in the moment, you soon forget about it a week or two later.

**Tara Swart:** Whereas if you've recorded it every time it happens, then it's very valuable data for you to read back over. I'm actually a much bigger fan of, well, I think you learn more from reading back over your journal than just writing in it. So, the writing is like downloading, but if you look back through it, you see patterns, and that's data for your brain. Um, and just to go into the science, because I think it's really helpful for people to not just think, oh, I am an emotional person, or I felt angry, and that makes me a bad person to think that when you get triggered, for whatever reason, you might uncover. Your amygdala, which is deep in your limbic system, so it's a little almond-shaped structure in your brain. It's not your tonsils, which is in Spanish; amygdala means tonsils. That part of your brain is the seat of all of your emotions. And basically, it gets triggered by our deepest emotion, which is fear. Now. When we experience fear, the brain and the body communicate with each other, and we release higher levels of cortisol and adrenaline. And that has a cascade effect on all the other brain pathways. And there are hundreds of brain pathways. And it makes us, you know, go into survival mode. So, we're not we won't be trusting and open to another person's perspective. We will completely think only about how we can protect ourselves. And so normally, the frontal cortex of the brain and the limbic system speak to each other, and the frontal cortex keeps the limbic system within a sort of normal range.

**Tara Swart:** If you get triggered, then the emotional response goes beyond that normal range, and it takes much longer, and it's much harder for the frontal cortex to damp that down again. So, there's a short period of time where you're basically not in mastery of your emotions. So, you know, I, I called the top, brain agility pathway, master your emotions. And I like the word mastery rather than control because we can't really always control everything that might trigger us. Even if you've had years of therapy. And or done years of meditation. It. I think control is a bad word, basically. So, I prefer mastery, and the reason that I've even put the brain pathways in that order is that anyone who's listening to your podcast is more than logical enough, and that's why I put the logical pathway quite low down. It's the emotional interaction with the logical pathway that we all have so much potential to improve. And you know it's okay if you get triggered. But what I ask people to do is start off by looking back at the time that you were triggered and just trying to learn more about it. Next time, know that you're being triggered in the moment, but don't necessarily do anything different. But the third time, know that you're about to get triggered and either take a deep breath, walk away, go to bed, whatever you have to do. To not say or do the bad thing, that's going to have even more consequences for you. And then, you know, in the future, going forward, see if you can actually find new and better ways of behaving and being to that old trigger.

**Whitney Johnson:** Tara, that's so beautiful. There's something that you said in there, and I don't know why, but when you talked about this idea of using your logic to help you master your emotions, it actually brought tears to my eyes. It made me feel very emotional. And I don't know why. I think it may be because I think for all of us, in that moment when we get triggered, it's so frustrating for us because we don't want to be in that place. And I have this mantra for myself is in that moment when there's this thing, I feel like I really must, must, must, must do. I must not do it because that's when I know I'm being triggered. But there was something about the way you said that, the way you articulated it that made me feel like. We can still do this like it's frustrating, but our logic can help us in that moment. And we can take, we can take action that it's not, the emotion isn't controlling us, that we can master it. And it was just lovely. And I wanted to call that out so that anybody who's listening, because all of us get triggered,

have a little bit of a tool, after having listened to what Tara just said, to help you master your emotions and not do the thing that you that could make things worse.

**Tara Swart:** Yeah. Thank you so much for saying that. And I think, you know, even when you say something like that almost brought me to tears. There are some people that just aren't in touch enough with their body to even recognize what that means. I mean, you know, I would say that that's landed for you for a reason. It's something that you're working on. And clearly, you know, you then said, I have this mantra. So, it's obviously something that you've been thinking about. And I had a similar experience too, at a party in December where somebody, who I just met, and we got into a conversation, a certain conversation, because of something I was working on. And, and she said that in the theme of what we started discussing, because who are you when you're not doing? And I literally looked at her and said, I could burst into tears right now. And so, I thought I wrote it down, and I, you know, I went away and thought about it, and it's been so profound for me. So, you know, things like that, just like things trigger us. Things land like that for us because it's got some deep meaning for us.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. Yeah. And, what you just said, too, I think is important is this idea of we talked about trigger, and that's sort of the negative piece. But I love the word that you used landed is for us to also be aware of those moments when someone says something to us, or we have an experience and, and it feels like deep inside of us that it's somehow true or real and that we be aware of those as well. And so, I like that you did the point and counterpoint for us to be aware of both of those situations because they're both important data points.

**Tara Swart:** Absolutely. It's very yin and yang, you know, the logic and emotion and the trigger and the landing.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's now go to Law of Attraction vision boards. What are they, the science behind those. If you can talk about those for just a moment. And then I'm hoping we can do a little live coaching around something that I'm trying to get done. So, let's start with the vision boards.

**Tara Swart:** Okay. So, um, the vision board actually relates to one of the pillars of the laws of attraction, which is manifestation. And manifestation is, creating or bringing into reality, um, the things that you really desire. And so, I actually call them action boards, though, because although visualization is a large part of them and they are, you know, you create imagery, you also have to do something on a regular basis to try to make these things come true. It's not about creating a vision board and then sitting at home and waiting for, you know, your life to magically change. So, manifestation is basically about the fact that because our brains are bombarded by so much information all day, every day, there's a natural filtering system that fades into the periphery, the things that aren't crucial to our survival and focuses to the front of our mind the things that are crucial to our survival. So that's called selective filtering and selective attention. And then there's a third process in the brain called value tagging, which is that it tags in order of importance the things that it's brought to our attention. And there's two elements. There's a real theme here to the value tagging, which are the cold or logical elements and the warm or emotional elements. And so, the logical elements are, you know, things you need to get done at work that day, the grocery shopping that you need to do, and the emotional elements are about our sense of belonging.

**Tara Swart:** Do I feel that I really belong in this family and this team, in this community, in this society? Um, and you know, what are the pros and cons of what my sense of belonging is in, in those different sorts of, areas. And so, our brain will focus on absolutely the things on our to-do list that we need to do, but also the thing that's most crucial to our survival, which is that sense of belonging. And if you think about evolution, we had to be part of a tribe to survive. And that's still a very, very strong gearing in our brains. So, if you don't create a vision board, or you don't step back and think about what you really want in life, then there's enough stuff going on that you'll just focus on what you need to do, and you know what's essential to your survival. If you're able to take time to step back. And, you know, I think a really good question is, is your life panning out exactly how you always dreamed it would? And for a small number of people, the answer to that might truly be yes.

**Tara Swart:** For some people, it might be that it's good enough. And for some people, there might be. Actually, there were some things that I always really wanted to do that I haven't managed to do yet, that I'd love to have time for or, you know, space to bring into my life. So, if you create a collage and it's literally like a mood board, you know, on a piece of card, go through magazines, cut and, you know, cut things out and stick them down. I love the idea of doing it in this tactile manner, but in this day and age, it can certainly be done on, you know, digitally. If you

find images that represent, either literally or metaphorically, the things that you really want in life, and you place them in positions that mean something to you on this board, and you decide whether this board is full or whether there's space in it, whether things are connected or whether they're separate. And you do this. I mean, you know, there's a whole chapter in the book on how to do this, but you do it till it feels right. So, if there are things that you know that you want, but when you find the imagery, it doesn't feel right.

**Tara Swart:** Don't put it on your board. If there's an image that you find in a magazine and you have no idea why you want to put it on your board, but it just really attracts you, put it on your vision board. And then there's a psychological effect called the Tetris effect, which is, and people of a certain age group will remember that if they played Tetris late at night, then when they close their eyes to go to sleep, they could see the little bricks falling in front of like, their closed eyes. And so, we know that what you look at last thing at night before you fall asleep, has a very strong psychological priming effect on your subconscious. And that also if you look at this board that you've created once or twice a day. And you visualize everything on it coming true. Then when you're walking around at work or on the street, you're more likely to notice things because your brain's primed to notice things related to those images, and you're more likely to grasp opportunities that might otherwise have passed you by. Because if you'd left it to the nurturing filtering system of your brain, it's not thinking about your deepest desire. It's just thinking about what you need to get done today.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's super helpful. So, the action board and then you talked through the science. There's the tagging piece. And your brain just starts filtering for things that will help you make that vision. What's in your head becomes physical a physical reality.

**Tara Swart:** Yeah. And you know I can tell you from personal experience, but now that the book has come out, I mean, I must literally have thousands of messages on Instagram from people saying, I made a vision board. Look, look at what came true. And it's either stories of, I got engaged, I got married, I got pregnant, I started up my own business, or I've actually received photographs from people saying, this is where I am on vacation, look at what's on my vision board. And it's literally the same picture. I mean, it's kind of inexplicable by science, but the back explanation is what I've just told you about how it primes your brain to look for things.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's do a little practical exercise here. I have a book that I'm working on, and the manuscript is going to be due well, in the not-too-distant future. But I find myself not quite working on it, even though this is presumably one of the biggest priorities that I have for 2020. Will you coach me just for a moment? Beginning with the question, if I were to create an action board, I'm a little bit lost on, like, what should the picture be? Like, I don't know what the picture is for writing a book, so I would love a little bit of coaching. And I know that a lot of people who are listening, who are working on their next book, or want to write a book, and I think this could be really helpful for everyone, including me. Yeah.

**Tara Swart:** So, I mean, I would say that my assumption about you is I'm very happy for you to say that it's wrong, is that you make it look really effortless to write books. And I think in some dark point of writing my book, I actually said to myself, I'm not like Whitney. So, coaching you on this, we're going to keep it general, like as if you're somebody that just doesn't find it that easy. But I'm not.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, you're so, thank you. Thank you.

**Tara Swart:** So, this relates back a little bit too. We covered manifestation as one of the laws of attraction. But actually, the one that I've put as number one is abundance. Which is, it's kind of like positive thinking, but it's feeling like, you know, there are lots of opportunities in the world. There are many resources we're not in competition for, you know, things that we want. The reason it's important is that the natural gearing of the brain is to avoid loss, and it's 2 to 2.5 times as strong a psychological effect on the brain as our desire to get a reward. So, although I'm sure you'd, you know, love to be holding this final product and seeing it on the shelves and, you know, getting people telling you about the effect it's had on them by reading it. The first step is usually that there's something you're afraid of that's preventing you from actually starting writing or, you know, going to the next level, whichever stage that you're at. So, I think a really useful exercise for you will be the what I call the revolution exercise. And this will help you to find imagery for your boards. But you know, often to find the imagery, you have to step back and set an intention or do some journaling or do an unblocking exercise. So, I'm going to go with this. And then I'm going to

leave it to you. And I'd love to hear if you, you know, if you now find an image. So, this is an exercise where you set an intention at the top, so it can be quite general. You know, like, why do you really want this book to be out there in the world? Or, you know, what do you want this book, to look like or do for you or achieve? So, have you got a sort of a succinct phrase that you could give me to answer that?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. I want people to understand how we grow.

**Tara Swart:** Okay, great. Perfect. And so then, I'm going to talk you through it. I don't know if you have pen and paper, but you could maybe I do complete this after. Oh, great. So, you need to write that phrase at the top, and then divide the rest of the paper into three columns. And the first column is called the barriers. So, write down all the reasons that you are not writing a book that's going to help people to learn how to grow.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. All right, I will do. I'm going to do this exercise later. Just go through it quickly now. But this is awesome, okay. Barriers I have to write down. What's the second thing?

**Tara Swart:** So, just very quickly, you know, you might say things like I don't have time or it's not a priority or, you know, it'll get. And I'd like you to fill at least the first page with barriers because this exercise depends upon you really raising all the potential barriers because if you miss something, then it doesn't work as well.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, okay, you know what? I'll do at least one in each category. I think don't have time is definitely one. Another one is like, how do I take all this information and put it together? Like the scope of it just feels complicated. Okay. And then the third one is, like, it just feels scary.

**Tara Swart:** Okay. So don't have time. Too complicated. Feels scary. They're great examples. So, the second column is the opposite statement to your barrier, even if it couldn't possibly be true. So, I'm going to give you the first one, which is I have unlimited time.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay.

**Tara Swart:** It can't just be I have enough time. It's got to be a grand statement. So, you tell me what the next two are.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay? The next one would be is I am very capable of putting complex pieces together, fitting complex pieces together. And the third one is, is that, I am so excited about writing this book.

**Tara Swart:** Great. And so, the third column is, and the language here is really important, what I do differently because column two is true. So, it's not what I would do if column two were true. It's what I do differently from today because column two is totally true. So then, it could have several answers for each point. So, your answers are I have unlimited time. Basically, I'm the goddess of making complex things simple. And I'm super excited to write this book. So, now that those things are all true, what would you actually do? What would I see you doing differently from tomorrow?

**Whitney Johnson:** So, on excited you would see me talking about it, telling everyone I'm writing it. It would be one of the first things I do in the morning. I can't stop, you know, just kind of processing the ideas related to it. On the pieces, I would, that one's harder. I got to figure that out. The goddess of putting complex things together. I would probably, instead of having things stay in my head, I'd be more willing to talk through the ideas out loud with people and have lots of post-it notes up on the wall. I have this big wall that I could use, which is an idea that just came into my head. So, thank you. And then the unlimited time I would be in the present, like when I start flitting future or flitting to the past, I would say, no, I'm going to be in this moment right now, because then my time will feel like I have a lot more time.

**Tara Swart:** So, I mean, to be honest, you haven't really said anything that you couldn't be doing already, even without making a massive commitment, saying, I'm now writing this book for time. So, you mostly said I'd be talking to people about it. I'd be putting post-it notes up on my wall. You know, it sounds like you might create a bit of a mantra for presence, those three things you can do from today.



**Whitney Johnson:** I love it! Okay. Any other coaching piece on that?

**Tara Swart:** You know, obviously, you try to do a longer version of that to really complete the exercise. And then once you've done that, and you've got your third column, either scribble out or tear up and throw away the first two, the third column only, and, you know, have the statement on your wall with your post-it notes, the original statement, and then go back and look on Pinterest or in magazines and look for an image. So, I don't want to influence your brain too much. But when I was looking for my imagery to write my book years ago, I kept looking at pictures of books or sort of shelves with books, and I even thought, you know, of sort of a nice old-fashioned pen or something, and nothing just really felt right, landed with me as the word is. And then I, I found a picture in a magazine of a really old-fashioned typewriter, and it was just so quirky and cute, and it had, I can't remember what now, but funny little things coming out of it. And I just thought, that's it. That's the image. And I put that on the center of my, of my action board for that year.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's fantastic. Okay. All right. This is so good. And I'll tell you, the thought that came to me is I, you know, talking about how we grow. I thought, oh, I could get lots and lots of images of things growing, and maybe even put a plant on my desk so that I'm motivated by what I want to accomplish in addition to the actual writing of the book. So.

**Tara Swart:** And was it? Sorry. Just picking up on something. As a coach, was it a complete coincidence that you actually suggested gardening as the neuroplasticity activity, or is that something that's on your mind or in your life?

**Whitney Johnson:** It was a complete coincidence.

**Tara Swart:** But I think that could be an image for your board.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Okay, now I'm crying again. This is awesome, Tara. Now that everybody's heard your brilliance, where can people find you? They like. They'll buy your book. But how else can they find you online if they want to learn a little bit more after this conversation?

**Tara Swart:** Thank you. So, I have a website, TaraSwart.com, and I'm on Twitter and LinkedIn, but I'm super active on Instagram @drtaraswart. And actually, for me, you know, using imagery rather than words was quite a change. But I find that that's where I feel like I impart my best, um, sort of tips. And I can put links to, you know, other things that I've written or things that I'm doing. So, that's probably the single best place to go.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, I'm going to go follow you right now. All right, so, the last question for you is. What's on your action board right now? What are you going to do to disrupt yourself or to jump to a new S Curve of learning?

**Tara Swart:** A lot of things on my action board for 2020 are still relating to the book. And, actually one of my potential disruptions is to change genres. So, you probably get this a lot. But, you know, a lot of people are saying to me, are you writing another book? When are you going to write another book? And. Writing is, I find it hard work. So, I have Netflix on my vision board. So. I'd like to take some of the content from the book and have it more in a, you know, film or TV kind of streaming-type genre. But that's not actually the main thing. And I promise you, this was not even on my mind when we actually arranged this podcast because, you know, we did that a few months ago. I have actually decided to stop doing some of my consulting work, so I'm on sabbatical. But I've actually started to take a history of art course. And you might have read in the book that I was one of these kids who wasn't good at art. And so I was told that I wasn't creative a very, very long time ago, and I believed it for a very long time. I'm kind of over that now. But studying something like the history of Art from having been a neuroscientist is to me, like, not just that, the subject matter is so different, but also because people's responses to this are so interesting, and I'm really grappling with how do I tell people that I'm doing this in a way that they don't act as if I've said something like. I've, you know, I'm giving up alcohol or something. You know, like when you say I'm giving up alcohol. Some people, a few people are supportive, but a lot of people are like, what's wrong? And like, why are you doing that? And oh, come on, have a glass of wine. It feels a bit like that to say, you know, I've built up my business. I'm writing this book. But now I'm just going to do something totally different. Not for any particular reason other than to disrupt myself.

**Whitney Johnson:** So the history of art. So, it sounds like there's a dot that I'm not quite connecting because it seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to want to study the history of art. But are you also saying that you're looking at becoming an artist? Are you looking at writing a book about art? Like, I play this out for me a little bit, because that in and of itself doesn't seem so odd to me. Is there some piece of the story that we're not hearing?

**Tara Swart:** Well, you know, I think that says a lot about you. It just really interesting because I have had people just looking at me like I'm crazy. You know how you said the first time around, I don't like to limit myself in terms of neuroplasticity, but honestly, I could not be an artist. That's just not possible. So. And no, I wouldn't write a book about the history of art. I'd like to know more about art, and it's possible that I, I might find a way to connect art and neuroscience, but I think it's more about the fact that. It'd be so easy to just stay on that hamster wheel of building up the business, and continue with the consulting work, and I sort of feel like rather than just do the obvious or the default thing, I want to stop doing that because, you know, like quit whilst I'm ahead and just do something totally different. And for me, having believed that I wasn't creative for such a large part of my life, I want to do something that's about art and beauty and culture and creativity, and I honestly don't know what I'm going to do with it. There is, it's actually quite a big thing for me to do something that doesn't have an endpoint or a purpose. I'm just doing it for enjoyment. And learning.

**Whitney Johnson:** You know. And when I hear you saying that, though, one of the things that's interesting for me is thinking about your comment. You said earlier about how your, your social media platform that you use the most is Instagram, and you find that that's really been able to express your ideas and your thoughts, and people are able to connect with you through those visual metaphors that they have for themselves and their action boards. And so I'm really excited for you to just see how, in putting these different pieces of your brain and your mind and your heart, what that's going to look like. It's very, very interesting and exciting. Any final thoughts or words that you'd like to share with us as we wrap up?

**Tara Swart:** Thank you so much. You, like almost made me cry. So, I think it's quite an interesting podcast because I made you cry twice and you've made me cry now, so, um.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, that's good.

**Tara Swart:** There's definitely been lots of, like, emotional mastery and intuition going on. Um. I was having a few thoughts as you were saying that, and I think it did actually trigger something for me, which is. I wrote the book. I've been so touched by the response to it. I think that I thought, it's all very well for me to write about the career change that I did that turned out really well, but I'm not really walking the talk if I don't disrupt myself again now, because that's what I'm asking other people to do.

**Whitney Johnson:** Tara Swart. Dr. Tara Swart, thank you so much for being with us.

**Tara Swart:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been an amazing conversation, really.

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It's interesting how this idea of preconceptions threads its way through Dr. Swart's work in order to challenge the preconceived notions baked into this unique template of how we think, Dr. Swart had to challenge the preconceived notions about how the brain works in the first place. We bring an entire suite of assumptions to every situation in life, so that our brains don't have to sweat too much, so to speak. But those assumptions hold back our own development as much as they do the development of our companies and societies.

And of course, emotions are just the fuel to the fire for those assumptions. Seeing these cycles of our moods and recognizing those triggers is another pillar of neuroplasticity. It's one of the oldest pathways you have. So, of course, it's going to worm its way into all the other ways you react to the world. Instead of treating yourself like a child in a tantrum, we need to see our emotional reactions as clues to the deepest threads running through our unconscious.

We need to face how our own brain hijacks us, how we disrupt ourselves in negative ways to start coming up with solutions.

For more on using the ancient parts of your brain for good, there's episode 330 with Shadé Zahrai on a practical example of that neuroplasticity in action. There's episode 176 with Darrell Rigby. And for another dose of challenging the common wisdom in neuroscience, there's episode 279 with Marcus Buckingham. Thank you again to Dr. Tara Swart and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. Thank you to our producer, Alexander Tuerk, production assistant Etta King, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.