

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 355: ASHLEY SMITH

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. In middle school physics, we learned that an object at rest has potential energy, an amount of currency it has to spend if it wants to move. When you pull back an arrow, the potential energy flows from your muscles to the bow, to the string, and then the string pays all that money in one go to propel the arrow, turning potential into kinetic energy in a single motion. Our lives are organized around those same flows of energy. We dream, we store energy, and then we trade in potential for kinetic. Starting a business, maybe, or a family, or a new gym membership for the new year. Ashley Smith has made a career out of translating these flows of energy and showing others how to do it, too. It's in her dance studio, turning emotion into movement. It's in her partnership with her husband, Ryan Smith, the executive chairman and co-founder of Qualtrics. And it's in her love for the state of Utah, flowing from Ashley's love for community downstream to ownership of the Utah basketball team. How can we better understand the flows of energy in our own life and in our bodies? I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So, Ashley, what does dance mean to you?

Ashley Smith: That is a great question. I grew up with a lot of passion for the arts, the performing arts, and specifically ballet. But I did all kinds of dance, and my dance studio was an extremely safe environment for me to go to in terms of it was consistent and it inspired me. And so, I had a lot of hope and a lot of excitement related to my dance studio. So, it has always had a really important part in my life and played an important role for me. I really, really like that it wasn't about winning awards or being the best or accolades of any sort. But it was about, for me, it has always been about this bigger picture of communicating with each other through art and connecting through art and using my body to tell a story or to feel, to let my feelings come out in that way. Which I did a lot as a child. That

was kind of I would dance through things. I was, at the time, didn't know I was dancing through feelings for sure. But now, as I've kind of looked back on my childhood, that is definitely what I was doing. So, it just was way bigger than any kind of hitting a goal. It was just a vehicle for me to exist and to feel and to communicate and to figure out who I was. So, yeah, it's a really big part of who I am and how I think and how I, how I move, even how I walk.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Ashley Smith: Because it's all communication for me, and it's non-verbal ways of expressing myself.

Whitney Johnson: How old were you when you started dancing?

Ashley Smith: I was about six. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Six. Okay, yeah. Because when I hear you talk about it, it sounds like dancing helps you feel alive and, in your body, in a way. And it's interesting to me because now, today, there's so much talk about people being in their body and connected to their body. But probably when you were eight years old or six years old, that's not something that people were talking about. And yet you were instinctively feeling it.

Ashley Smith: Right. And I definitely was not talking about feelings. But I for sure can now recognize that I would almost reserve feelings somewhere inside of me and then let them have life. Once I was in the studio, that was kind of interesting to figure out and really cool. Now, as I'm able to teach and share what I've learned, to share that so that dancers can be aware a little earlier of the possibility that they have.

Whitney Johnson: Tell me about, um, one of your first early dance teachers.

Ashley Smith: Yeah. I mean my, my studio was owned by one woman who was exceptional and amazing. And she had her life was a path, as they all are. And at some point, she decided her passion was in teaching. And she and her daughter were my primary teachers my entire career. Which is different than these days, where it's kind of about variety and expertise in various certain areas. But it was good for me in that that was part of that consistent aspect of dance for me. Um, and they were, they were motivating and inspiring, and I trusted them. So, it was a good place to be.

Whitney Johnson: You've said a couple of times, consistent, what was happening at home that were, were your parents married? I mean, was there something was there a lot of upheaval at home that this became a safe haven for you?

Ashley Smith: I mean, yes, there my parents divorced when I was very young, and we moved to Las Vegas with my mom, and my dad moved to Texas at that time. And so, yeah, I think everyone was doing their best, and everyone was managing, in their own way. I was the youngest, and I'm very, very, very thankful for all of the experiences that I had through that. Because the things that I'm most proud of in myself, I gained through that. I'm proud that I'm a hard worker. And I think my parents, they already were hard workers, but they then had to be. Yeah, because that's kind of part of what happens. And we had to work young. We had to work. We had to figure things out. And which takes me to the other thing I'm proud of about myself is that I'm scrappy. I can solve problems. I can figure it out, like, give me a piece of duct tape and a ruler, and I'll solve it. Right. And I 100% attribute that to, I had to be. And I'm so thankful and often terrified for my own children because I, I don't know how I'm going to get them those qualities, aside from just trying to exemplify it. Which my parents did, and my parents are also both very scrappy and very hard-working. So, maybe I would have I would have gotten some of that either way. But I know that, like those specific qualities about myself that I truly have pride in, like, yes, I am proud of them because I've worked for them.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Ashley Smith: And because it wasn't necessarily like a perfect drawn-out story that, that got me there. But I'm really thankful and would not trade any of it. And my parents are amazing human beings and managed it well. But it was hard as a six-year-old, right?

Whitney Johnson: Of course.

Ashley Smith: To even know what was going on. Better yet, be aware of my feelings and my emotions and how to deal with that.

Whitney Johnson: So, something I a couple of things that are coming up for me. One is just I appreciate the grace that you're giving to your parents. I think that so often, when we go through challenging situations with our parents, and no parents are ever perfect, we get to make a choice of, are we going to criticize our parents or are we going to give them grace. And I just appreciate the beautiful grace that you're giving to them. And also just this recognition of these qualities that they have helped instill in you of being a hard worker, of being scrappy, of being resourceful. And at the same time, of where there was a little bit of sort of destabilization in your life because you were moving to different parts of the country. You also had this stabilizing force of being able to go to this dance studio. And I think of this as just this precious, beautiful cocoon of a space where you're able to be alive and know that you could express who you were.

Ashley Smith: Yeah, yeah. Well said.

Whitney Johnson: So beautiful. So. Oh, uh, a question. Can you think of a recent MacGyver moment? You said you're scrappy and resourceful. What's something recently where you're like, oh, I figured that thing out.

Ashley Smith: For sure. Uh, well, I mean, I mean, even just yesterday, I actually had a moment. I was driving down the freeway. And we still don't know what happened, but something very large hit my windshield, and it shattered on the spot. And it was terrifying in every way. I was able to, you know, pull over and call to get some people to come help. But I also was able to, like, figure out what was in my car, how am I going to get this cleaned up without injuring myself. And so, I did. That's actually why I said the word duct tape is because I had a roll of duct tape, and I was like, I can get a lot of these shards up. I was a little afraid to move around my car, thinking I was going to not know where everything was. So, you know, that was it's a small example, but totally, I was like, okay, I can solve this. How am I going to get all this up around me so that I'm not cutting myself? Everything I touch, and as I even needed to collect my belongings in the car. And so, I just quickly used the duct tape to kind of clean everything off. And I don't know, that was a moment. And that's why the word duct tape came earlier. Because I just used it yesterday to solve.

Whitney Johnson: So, you're using the duct tape to get the shards of glass off?

Ashley Smith: Yeah. So, I just kind of got a big piece and like, went along everything sticking to it, trying to make because you can't see all those tiny pieces. And that's what I felt kind of come off of the windshield as it happened. So anyway.

Whitney Johnson: That's a great example. So, I'm thinking of it of like the, the presence of mind in this situation where you're like, I could have just died, right? I'm sure you, you had that thought of like, we might die, and yet you're like, stop the car. And you figure out a great example of resourcefulness. Okay, so, the first dance studio you opened in your basement. Talk about the early days of being an entrepreneur. What was that like?

Ashley Smith: Oh, it was exciting and fun. I mean, first of all, my husband is incredible because he encouraged it. And I quit my job to start that opportunity. And it was, talk about a risk. And also, kind of funny because he was also in his dad's basement at the time starting Qualtrics. And so, it was just this funny moment of us in these basements trying to do something. And I was really blessed because we could take the risk. You're, you know, we're not always able to take the risk. And financially, we were, I was able to do that. So, very like, I understand how lucky that is. And I've never, I will never for, you know, I'll never let that not be a part of this story. But it was exciting. It was exciting to know what I wanted in the end and to try. I mean, I'm still, just constantly pivoting, trying to figure out how we're going to get there. And I, at the time, was doing it with a friend that I danced with growing up who I adore, and, and it was just fun to kind of dive into that together. She sadly had to move after a few years, so she wasn't around for that long, but was definitely a big part of the beginning of this story. And it was just kind of like, I don't know, I sometimes I want to call it playing dance because it just felt like we got to play house. We got to play

dance. And I think back on those times and I, I immediately smile because it was just kind of my energetic excitement and hope and dreams, which maybe as you get older, gets destroyed sometimes. So, I am thankful for those days and that, again, that I had a husband who was supportive and that I had a life situation that worked for me to just kind of go play dance in my basement.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so paint a picture for us. So, you're you've got a basement. You're living in Provo at the time.

Ashley Smith: Orem.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so you're living in Orem, and you go downstairs. Are there any windows in the basement or, like, small little windows?

Ashley Smith: Yes, we had some windows on either side. Natural light. And the door that you entered to the studio was all glass. So, we had we had some natural light coming in. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: And so, what were one of the first classes that you taught?

Ashley Smith: The very first class I taught was a jazz class, on a Saturday morning. And I basically just invited all the neighborhood little girls. I was very newly married. And when we purchased the house, the basement wasn't finished. And that's when Ryan said we could turn this into a studio, and you could have your dream. And then I truly just went out to who was proximate, and it turned out to be. I definitely get emotional about that group of girls, because those girls are just very important to me and their families and their moms and the people who trusted in me right in the beginning. And I can't even believe when I think about that jazz class I taught and how far I've come now. And I'm so thankful they trusted me. And yeah, it was fun though, because was exciting.

Whitney Johnson: You didn't know how to teach at that point.

Ashley Smith: Well, no, I did, no, I mean, that's where my passion is kind of always been. I got that opportunity through my studio growing up. I did train in the Royal Academy of Dance RAD, that's through London, and I was able to get that teaching credential, and that was when I was really inspired to. I wanted to teach, for sure. So no, while I was at BYU, I had teaching opportunities around the Valley, and so I always knew I wanted to teach. But in terms of writing a full curriculum for full groups of youth, I mean, I have definitely put in the hours now, but I did not know what I was fully doing at that time.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, and it's interesting hearing you talk about it. Um, it sounds like I mean, you had taught before, so it wasn't it, it wasn't so much that you were teaching. It feels more like you were starting an academy. You were going to build. You weren't going to; I'm going to go teach this class. I'm going to build something. I'm going to build these girls. I'm going to build this business. And so there was maybe a greater vulnerability and also thrill to it. Is that?

Ashley Smith: Yeah. I mean, I don't think I ever imagined ever, ever that it would turn into what it is today. What is it today? I mean, it's close to 500 students and 40 teachers, and it's amazing. I mean, it's everything to me. But I definitely, I never went there, and that, that that wasn't ever a goal, and it still isn't. The only goal for me is the environment. It is what else we can teach while we teach dance, which I love and have so much passion about. But what else can we be instilling? And maybe the things that I've had to learn as an adult that I would have given anything to have figured out earlier in my life. I just want to impart those, right? I want to share them. And so, we spend a lot of time talking about our core values and talking about our brains and talking about how we.

Whitney Johnson: Really?

Ashley Smith: Yes, we spend a lot of time in my staff. I'm really intentional about who I hire, because you've got to be on board for that. And it's an added weight, so you don't get to just come teach technique. You actually have to come be exceptional at teaching technique, and then you have to be able to connect with these youth, and you have to be able to be an example. And in the right moment, know what to say to help them mentally and in a healthy way

and to avoid kind of a toxic culture that, sadly, in the performing arts, it's very easy to end up in. So, yeah, it's a big, it's a heavy lift as a teacher. It's not this is not just a studio that you can come in and teach class unintentionally.

Whitney Johnson: When you talked about some of the very first girls that you taught in your basement, are you in touch with any of them still?

Ashley Smith: Oh, gosh. Yes. Many of them teach for me now. Or, you know, one of them runs our social media, and one of them comes and does pictures for us. And so, I know. These are very important humans to me. I mean, I can't, I literally can't even think about them, talk about them without tears. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, so it's, it's a, it's a sisterhood.

Ashley Smith: Yes. Yeah. And I learned for sure more from them than they did from me. So.

Whitney Johnson: So, it's interesting and fun to me that your very first class you taught was a jazz class, and now you bought the Jazz?

Ashley Smith: Yes. Somebody recently gave me a necklace that says jazz, and it was intended for the Utah Jazz, but I actually didn't take it off for almost a year because it has such a double meaning for me. So, I appreciate that you noticed that.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, the double entendre is just absolutely magical. So. So, where did the idea of buying the Jazz come from?

Ashley Smith: Um, yeah, man, talk about paths of life that we do not anticipate. But my husband, well, actually, both my husband and I have been passionate basketball lovers, and it was really cool. Because we're very passionate people about whatever it is we are doing in life. And that's one thing that I think really brought us together. It's that recognition in each other. And somehow, basketball just became something we did together in early in our marriage. We were very into BYU basketball, and we were traveling with the team, and we were I mean, basketball games were our guaranteed date nights, and it was such a fun time. And then it became so important as we were having children. And basketball was big for us. And I don't know why. And I'm just thankful because it really united us. And that is one thing that I love about athletics and basketball and also dance. Right? So, these kinds of entertaining hobbies that unite us in this divided, messy world, all that goes away when we get to love something together. And that was basketball for us. When the NBA became a client of Qualtrics, we went to a few all-star games. We went to LA, and we went to Vegas. Just Ryan and I, and those were fun adventures where we got a babysitter for our kids and left together, and it was just really cool how that evolved. And again, something I never would have as we were dating. Or if you would have said, what are you and your future husband going to love together? I, that is not something I would have put on my list.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Ashley Smith: Although it was a part of my life growing up, my dad was a super epic Utah Jazz fan, so it's in my blood. Um, but yeah, we just fell in love with it together. And then, Qualtrics and Ryan had an opportunity to do something philanthropic, and they started the Five for the Fight Foundation, which is just putting money toward cancer research. And that was kind of Ryan, and his dad always knew that if they hit a point where they were able to do philanthropic things, they wanted it all to be in that sector. But Ryan's dad had gone through thyroid cancer, and that's part of how Qualtrics started, was Ryan got a phone call when he was doing an internship in California that his dad had been diagnosed with a pretty severe stage of cancer, and Ryan quit the internship, came home and spent the rest of the summer with his dad. And his dad kind of showed him this thing he was building, this engine he was building to do research, had no intention of doing anything else with it. And Ryan said, dad, we got to we got to sell this. So anyway, that's how Qualtrics started. And so, they made that decision early on. Like, if we can, it'll all go towards cancer research. Well, then the opportunity came to have a sponsor of the jersey patch with the Utah Jazz, and Qualtrics decided to become the sponsor and donate that patch to Five for the Fight. So, that is when it really the Utah Jazz started to kind of take over that whole basketball sector of our lives, and those games started to

become so important to us. And we started meeting those players and learning their names and understanding their lives and, seeing this whole new world of in a little similar way to dance of it's way bigger than basketball.

Ashley Smith: So, when it came time to have an opportunity to become stewards of the Utah Jazz. That was a big part of it. So, along the way, there was an opportunity with, in another market, which was a very hard time for Ryan and I. Because, I didn't know at the time, but it just didn't feel right, and I didn't know why at the time. It was very sad to me. I remember a moment of saying, okay, but we can still keep our Jazz tickets, right? And I can still take the kids to all the games, because that had truly become such a big part of who we were. We had united around this like my family. We had a string with us all connected through the Utah Jazz, and the thought of having to go somewhere else to games and not being able to go to very many games and having Ryan on the road a lot. I mean, because also the time in the car was such an important part of our life then of, I know I get you for an hour, and we can connect. And so, all of these things feeling in jeopardy was really terrifying. And also, I don't think I saw any vision of it being bigger than basketball. It just it felt like it was only about basketball. But I couldn't have articulated that in that moment.

Whitney Johnson: Can you, can you just clarify. So, you had an opportunity to buy another basketball team in another market.

Ashley Smith: Correct.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. And you and you as.

Ashley Smith: As we got more involved with the NBA because of the patch, that opportunity then.

Whitney Johnson: And what's the patch? Just to clarify for some people. Like, I don't know what that is.

Ashley Smith: So, the jersey patch is, it's something that the NBA opened up, just a few years back where sponsors can purchase this patch on the jerseys.

Whitney Johnson: Got it.

Ashley Smith: And yeah, so they're actually represented on the jersey, and Nike had never allowed it before then. That was the first time they were letting sponsors come in on NBA jerseys.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. Alright, I digress because I wanted to just clarify a few things. Alright. So, you make this decision. We're not, we're we could buy this team, but it's not quite feeling right. And you're doing a lot of introspection. And so, how did you make the decision not to do it? And then, let's come back to what led up to the Jazz. So, how did you like, say no?

Ashley Smith: I mean, it was very hard because I'm not a no person by nature. But I, I just kept coming back to with Ryan. It does not feel right. Something is just not right for me, and I. I could not articulate at the time. Now it's a little more clear, but it was hard. And he listened because I am not a no person. I don't say no that much. I'm pretty easygoing. So, thankfully we have that relationship where we trust each other. And he listened, and he made a very hard phone call to Adam Silver, saying, I'm not going to do this; we aren't going to do this. And he also reached out to Gail Miller and said, just so you know, I have this opportunity. Just making sure there's no opportunity here with the Jazz. And we adore her. She is. She is everything I want to be. She emits the values that I want to be in life one day. And, she was so kind with Ryan and always has been with both of us. And she said, yeah, that that opportunity is not here. So, both doors kind of shut in that moment.

Whitney Johnson: And you were sad.

Ashley Smith: And it was hard. Yeah. Yeah, it was sad. But also, then we said we're going to be the best jersey patch sponsor of all time. We're fine. We're good. We got this figured out. So, that's the direction we were headed. And then six months later we got a call back from the Millers, and yeah, we started talking opportunities. So yeah, it was. And at that moment, things started to seem a little more clear for us. Because definitely, the difference. A - Utah, of

course, we absolutely love this state. But B-because it's Utah and because it's here and our home and because of the energy and the opportunity and the entrepreneurial spirit in Utah, it all of a sudden was way bigger than basketball. And so, that's what led to a final decision of, are we going to do this? Because also, it provides amazing opportunities for us and our family. But there's a lot of sacrifice and a lot of time and a lot of energy. And it was, you know, going to be a different path. But at the end of the day, it was way bigger than basketball. And that's what made it feel exciting and right for us and for our family. And that was missing with our earlier opportunity.

Whitney Johnson: The other opportunity was more of a business decision, and this was a purpose-filled, family-uniting stewardship decision.

Ashley Smith: Right. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: So, what does that, now that you have that, that stewardship, what is what does that mean for you? What does that look like?

Ashley Smith: That's a moving target. But I will say,

Whitney Johnson: What does it look like today, then?

Ashley Smith: I will say that it is exciting and inspiring. And if we thought we loved this state three years ago, it's quadrupled.

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Ashley Smith: And right. Who could have even known that was possible? But it's just our community is so rad in so many ways. But the thing that I mostly am noticing probably lately, is just this social trust that we all have and the championing of each other. It's just, it doesn't matter where I go if I'm at a Jazz game, if I'm at Qualtrics, if I'm here at the studio, if I'm at church, if I'm at the grocery store, if I'm in my neighborhood. I feel surrounded by champions of each other, and everyone's inspired and exciting and opportunity seems to be around every corner. And it's just this really exciting, empowering, invigorating vibe. And it kind of coincides with kindness. We're really service oriented, I would say, in this state, and that speaks to me. And now, we have this opportunity to be stewards of a platform that has a really loud voice with that kind of people. I mean, it's just everybody brings each other to their best place, right? And who doesn't want to hang out with people who bring us to be our best selves? So, that's what I feel like Utah is.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. You mentioned Gail Miller earlier. Is there a piece of advice that she, as she handed the stewardship, the baton of the stewardship over to you and your family? Is there a piece of advice that she gave to you that's stuck?

Ashley Smith: You keep bringing me to tears.

Whitney Johnson: Tears are good.

Ashley Smith: Yes. You're correct in that. Yet somehow I still avoid them. Like, why can I not accept?

Whitney Johnson: Do you need to dance?

Ashley Smith: Why can I not accept?

Whitney Johnson: Dancing should feel really good.

Ashley Smith: Yes, actually I feel good crying while dancing. That's actually very well-articulated for me. But yes, every single moment that I get with Gail Miller is a treasure. And I do not leave without writing every word down, she said. Even if it's funny or not useful, or which, everything she says is useful. But I mean, this is this will make you

chuckle. But, like, the first time we went to meet with her after the decision was made, we had met with her prior to that, but this was kind of sitting down.

Whitney Johnson: We're going to do this.

Ashley Smith: Right, and it's just funny because she said, don't read the comments. As we left her house that day, she said, the one thing I want to say to you is, don't read the comments. And it's funny because you can laugh, right? But also, I think it's bigger. It's bigger than that in that it's a little bit some of this first thought second thought of.

Whitney Johnson: Don't pay attention.

Ashley Smith: Don't pay attention. Don't let, don't let anybody change who you are. Don't let anybody change what this is about. That, and so, it's actually become a little catchphrase for Ryan and I. Don't read the comments. And it doesn't. We're not even at this point referring to Twitter, right? We're referring to don't let that moment change our bigger goal. So, I think she has been very, very influential in this being about a bigger picture for us personally. First of all, she just exemplifies that, like who she is to her core, you feel when you're in a room with her, better yet, speaking to her like her values she wears in bold all over her sleeve. And I, I love that about her, and I admire that. And I will aspire to that forever. But this idea that our bigger goal has to be what's driving everything. And we can't let the comments, we can't let the hard days, we can't let the hard moments, the tricky scenarios, emotions. We can't let any of that derail this bigger goal.

Whitney Johnson: Or even the praise. Right?

Ashley Smith: Yeah, right. Even the good moments.

Whitney Johnson: The hard days, but also the good days of like, what is our purpose? Why are we doing this?

Ashley Smith: Yeah, I mean, you know, how quickly wins can make this be only about a championship? Which, don't get me wrong, like you want to parade?

Whitney Johnson: Yes, of course you do.

Ashley Smith: But, like, wins or loses cannot matter in, like the grand schemes of the scheme of things. But we still want a championship, and that is still the goal. But, Gail was very important in us having that bigger goal and continually reminding us that that's what's the most important part.

Whitney Johnson: Of your stewardship.

Ashley Smith: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: What is working in tandem with your husband look like? How do you both pedal the bike together?

Ashley Smith: Yeah, well, it's been fun. We were doing Qualtrics and Smash Dance in our separate basements for a long time. And what was awesome about that part of our marriage is just learning how to be a support system for each other, and that's a learning process that's not easy. And there were both. There were moments for both of us where it was hard what the other was doing, and so figuring out how to navigate that together. I'm thankful for that experience. Because truly, that's why now we can support each other together and kind of in our different ways and our different strengths. But yeah, now it's really fun. I mean, fun just comes to mind. It's kind of such a simple, easy word, but it's so fun to be doing things together. And it's exciting to rely on each other. But also, we kind of have the different things we have our hands in.

Whitney Johnson: There's interdependence. So, you're not for sure you're not independent, you're not dependent, but you're interdependent. And so, you're both bringing something to each other and enjoying each other.

Ashley Smith: Yeah. And I think that's hard to do without figuring out, maybe independence, not quite right. But with our separate businesses, we were pretty independent but had to figure out how to support each other. Yeah, when it was hard. And being able, having the opportunity to navigate that early in our marriage, really was helpful in us being able to now be interdependent.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. I mean, you bring up something so important because, you know, we will often hear where you've got, you know, a person who's the primary breadwinner and then a person who's the lead parent. And they say to the lead parent, you go do something. Go, go, have a dream, go, you know, open a dance studio. But it can't conflict with anything else that I'm doing. So, we want to support, but then we're not actually supporting. And so, to hear you saying that as you wrestled through. No, when we say we're supporting each other, we really are. And that may mean sacrifice on my part.

Ashley Smith: And everything has to be about us as a unit. So, I think, I think a little bit, perhaps even that first basketball opportunity in the NBA outside of Utah maybe wasn't about us as much as it was Ryan's dream. It was, Ryan would have run with that, and he would have nailed it for the record. But it wasn't an us thing.

Whitney Johnson: And Utah Jazz is?

Ashley Smith: Yeah. But I even think we figured out how to make Qualtrics us. We figured out how to make Smash Dance us. We figured out how to make basketball us. So, it's kind of trying to figure that out. And I think that will continually be a moving target. But I, I'm just thankful for our early opportunities to figure out how to be independent, but how to still be interdependent so that now we can really be interdependent. Because I think if you can't figure out how to function separately, but super truly supportive, kind of as you're saying, it's not, it would be very hard to make this work.

Whitney Johnson: Oh yeah. Yeah. Oh, I love the power of that. It's about us. What's, and maybe you've answered this already, but what's a new S Curve that you've jumped to recently? Something that you're doing new.

Ashley Smith: I've become. I've become more aware of not just my time, but my mental and my emotional energy that go into things. I think I spent the first 41 years of my life just depleting myself of all of those energies, not realizing that there were different buckets. And I just thought time was all. If I had time, I can get it all in, and I can stay up all night and get it all in, and I can and just all of these unhealthy practices. That I arguably even thought were superpowers. That I, it's kind of crazy to me that it took me a very long time to realize it was not. None of that was good for me or helpful. And I will spend a lot of time probably repairing, um, right repairing that. But just I'm I've really raised my awareness of the emotional and mental energy that things can take on me and that I need to take that into account as I plan a day. Because, at the end of the day, what is most important for me is that I am present for Ryan and my kids. When I, when we're home and in the mornings before school and at night when we're together, that I'm present. And I think I reached this point where I was just so drained every day by 4:00. That my kids were getting the worst of me. And I, we still have those days, but at least I'm aware. And I'm, right now I'm just trying to stay aware. And I think, eventually, I will get to where I'm implementing change. I'm not quite there, but I'm somewhere on that path.

Whitney Johnson: Well, you're right, as I would describe. It is like you're collecting data right now. You're just saying, I don't know. I know that I want to do something differently, but I don't know what it is right now. I just need to collect the data. And then once I get the data, then I'll know what to do.

Ashley Smith: Yeah. Which, by the way, has also been hard because that problem-solving part of my brain, the duct tape. I want I wanted to do it in January when I kind of my, my brain was saying danger, danger a little bit like you're in a spot you don't want to be. I wanted the duct tape, and I wanted to clean up the shards of glass very quickly.

Whitney Johnson: Now.

Ashley Smith: Yes. And I actually, if you would have told me at the time that I couldn't solve it quickly, I would have been very overwhelmed. So, I'm glad I didn't know then that it was, I would just be collecting data for a whole year. But anyway, so it was hard to accept that that's what I'm doing right now. But now, I'm definitely in a spot where I'm

okay just measuring. And then, I have plans for January and how I'm going to start implementing change in a good way.

Whitney Johnson: So, so, you're still in the data collection phase, but is there anything that you've discovered that when you do it, it just gives you a lot of energy. You're like, okay, this felt great to me.

Ashley Smith: Yes. They're not they're not things I, I get to keep in my life often. But I for sure there's, there's a handful of events with my children and with Ryan that like, those things really fill my bucket. And this is, I can't even believe I'm saying this live on a mic. But my daughters, Ryan, and I went to Taylor Swift in Seattle with some friends. And Taylor Swift, funny enough, is just something my daughters and I have really bonded around since they were very small. I took them.

Whitney Johnson: I love that!

Ashley Smith: I took them to the 1989 concert many years ago, and since then.

Whitney Johnson: '89?

Whitney Johnson: Well, oh, not '89. I'm like, wait, not in 1989. Wait, were they even alive in 1989?

Ashley Smith: Okay, for sure, they were not. But, um.

Ashley Smith: It's just been a thing that we do together. In fact, last night, 1989 was released, the Taylor's version. And, of course, we stayed up until ten to lay on the bed and listen to the new songs, because this is part of who we are together. So, we went with Ryan and there was a moment where I turned to him, and music is everything for me. Like, I am very musically driven in every day of my life, what we play guides, what we're doing, and our moods and everything. But being in that arena and my girls and I screaming, and we're dressed up and having Ryan there excited and screaming as well. And I just I looked to him and I said, like, this is top moments for me. Because those things that connect us really give me energy. The things when I'm very present for my children, that gives me energy. And I feel the same way on a boat. If I'm on a boat with my kids, I just feel like everything's okay.

Whitney Johnson: A sailboat?

Ashley Smith: We're all together, not necessarily sail, but any boat. Yes. Yeah, we spent we spent time in Coeur d'Alene every summer. So, when we're up there, and we're just on the water, and devices are nowhere, and friends aren't around, it is just us together. And music is always involved in those energizing moments. So yeah, those things bring me a lot of energy.

Whitney Johnson: Have you brought your dad to a Jazz game?

Ashley Smith: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: How did he feel?

Ashley Smith: Amazing! I mean it was it, it was very fun. He's come to a few. One was during COVID, so not quite the same. But then he came last season. We actually, I think he went to a few last season because we also went to Houston, where he lives now, and we went to a Rockets - Jazz game. And it is so fun for so many reasons. I could go on and on. But the Jazz is a definite connector of those memories with my dad, and he and his brothers were just such epic fans. I mean, he talks about the day that they announced the team was coming here from New Orleans and it wasn't even the NBA back then. I don't think it was. Anyway, he talks about having to pull over on the side of the road to cry because he was so full of joy. And so, I mean, those, I mean, Stockton & Malone were heroes, like, these are deep memories. So yeah, even this week, our opening night, it's our 50th year. And so, they were wearing a retro throwback jersey, and I walked in and saw the court and saw the jerseys. And I got teary-eyed because it was an immediate, I thought of my dad. I mean, I wanted to FaceTime him that minute. I didn't, I couldn't, but I wanted

him to see like these old retro colors back in and we're back to the Delta Center. And it was a moment where I felt my dad. Right. So yeah, it's been cool.

Whitney Johnson: Alright, Ashley. So, as we wrap up, um, what was useful for you in this conversation? And to give you some context around that, it might be something you said, but it might be something that you thought or something that occurred to you in the course of talking together.

Ashley Smith: I mean, I adore Michelle Obama, and one thing I love that I've learned from her is the importance of preparation. And I'm always thankful for the prep. And even if I feel like we talked about all sorts of things that I was not prepared for, but because I did spend time preparing. That, then I'm able to be articulate, and I'm always thankful for that opportunity. Also, to quote Taylor Swift, because I do, she has this line that I say to my girls a lot, or my students, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." And we just say that a lot. Um, so anyway, I'm always thankful for the opportunity to prepare myself, even if we go other ways, because the best version of me is who I always want to bring. And that's something I've learned in the last few years. So, I'm thankful for that opportunity always. But yeah, it's just invigorating, always to kind of talk about what's really deep in our heart and our soul and our brains. And I just didn't do that a lot in my youth. So, I'm always thankful for those opportunities to vulnerably just share what I think and feel. So, thank you.

Whitney Johnson: Ashley, this was absolutely wonderful. Thank you!

Ashley Smith: Thank you. It's such a pleasure being with you and yeah, doing this.

For those of you still curious, the lyric, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" comes from Taylor Swift's song, *Mastermind*. I was thinking about how easy it is to fail to see your own energy flows, moving from dreams to reality. The hidden courses of our life can seem like whitewater rapids, and no doubt, they often are. But when we don't know where the river lets out, we've really planned to fail. All this to say, Ashley's ability to translate potential into kinetic energy is the real takeaway here. When you see how the electronics behind the screen work. When you see where you get your potential from and how you best turn it into kinetic, you can lead more effectively.

The launch point of a new curve can often feel like what Ashley called playing dance, playing house. We have a dream practically bursting at the seams with potential energy. But if you've never really taken the time to connect with how one flows into another in your own body, they'll just stay dreams. Potential dreams. You'll be stuck playing at what you don't want. And what could be worse?

For more on women taking the lead in the world of Utah philanthropy, we talked at length with Gail Miller, the previous owner of the Jazz. I spoke with her in [episode 337](#). And if all this basketball talk has got you fired up for the Jazz days of Malone and Stockton, I spoke with Danny Ainge, an executive with the team, in [episode 276](#). There's also my chat with Zaza Pachulia, [episode 183](#), the former center for the Golden State Warriors.

Thank you again to Ashley Smith. 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.