

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 360: SAMANTHA COOPRIDER

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you grow your people to grow your organization—because organizations don't disrupt, people do. The building block of that growth? It's you.

*"I said, empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend."*

Famous words by Bruce Lee, sure, but when we've felt like a stone our whole lives, what does becoming water actually look like? How do we learn to be more malleable in difficult situations? And how can we be confident we're flowing in the right direction? Our guest today has spent her career learning how to flow while remembering her form, and mission. Samantha Cooprider is the senior director of global leadership development at Meta – formerly Facebook. Today, Sam's shaping leaders at a corporate level, but her path to the top has been anything but straightforward. She's had to learn how to flow from a Midwestern childhood, through the non-profit world, and into the C-suites of Tesla and Meta. It's been a path full of what Sam calls "perception-busters." So how does Sam keep her mission top of mind when she's moving from one cup to another? I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Sam, tell us where you're from.

**Sam Cooprider:** Well, that's an interesting question. I was born and raised in Indianapolis, in the Midwest, not Minneapolis, Indianapolis, where the Indianapolis 500 takes place, and I've never been to it, so that's interesting as

well. But I moved a lot between Indianapolis and Southern California, South Orange County, to be specific, from about 11 to 17, which those are two very, very different places. And I moved back and forth several times.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. Why did you move back and forth several times?

**Sam Coopriders:** All right. Well, the short answer is my parents separated. My mother actually moved to Hawaii first. I spent some time in Hawaii but didn't live there. And then she moved to Southern California. And I have a brother who's seven years younger, so I'm the only girl and the oldest. So, I moved, I took my brother, he stayed in Southern California, and then I, I went back and forth, and I ended up graduating early. I think it was a semester early from high school, ultimately in Indianapolis. But I went to middle school and high school several different places in both states.

**Whitney Johnson:** What was that like? Ping ponging back and forth in terms of making friends?

**Sam Coopriders:** It was on one hand, way harder than I thought it was going to be when I first. When I first agreed to move to Southern California, I thought it was going to be really fun and easy. And I was also in middle school. I think because of just my, I knew I already had a skill in connecting with people, but it was harder than I thought. And there was some real mean girl stuff that started happening that surprised me. And there was some bigger culture shocks than I expected. But it was also a real blessing because it really, really, really helped me learn some deeper skills around connection and boundaries and being able to go into new places and new work environments even. I mean, I see it in my career today, how I can kind of read rooms or read organizations and see where folks are. So as hard as it was, I'm really grateful for including the separation with my parents. That was another hard thing and hard on the family, but I learned a lot through that process. I was kind of the go between, with both of my parents. And though that was hard, I think I learned a lot around negotiation at a very young age.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, it's interesting hearing you say that. So, you're saying that you can walk into a new situation, and because you got so much practice going into new situations, it didn't cause you to retreat because you knew you had a natural talent to connect with people. You just honed that skill of being able to read a room.

**Sam Coopriders:** I think so I. I think that's accurate, that's a great summary. I think I also learned more about conflict and having different opinions than others and how to... I mean, full transparency, I had someone who threatened to beat me up because she thought I was dating somebody, and I wasn't. But even that, I mean, I was so shocked by how she even thought I was dating someone and what that meant, and why she was so angry with me and, like, worked through it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Sam Coopriders:** I mean, this is an eighth grade, but yeah, I mean, it was, you know, I had one moment where I'm like, I guess I could probably take her, a little bit, my street smarts, but I'm like, all right, I really love school. I don't want to get into this. This is not something, I do not want to be in a fight over this. This is ridiculous. And there was also a lot more, a lot of different diversity in Southern California compared to Indianapolis. But I also remember who would kind of stand up for each other or take a stand on things. And I think this is, that was another important, like a lot of people would just walk away or just want to watch what was going on. And I remember the few people who stayed and were part of the conversation, were like, whoa, whoa, whoa. And I think that really stayed with me. But it matters to have an opinion. It matters to say your truth, because it was some other people who I really didn't know that said, how is this what you think has happened? That's not actually what's happened.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm. So, I find myself listening to you and thinking everything you know to do, to be successful at work-you learned in eighth grade.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah, I don't know if I realized that, but I think it's true. I don't know if I would just put it in eighth grade, but boy, did it certainly come to a head at that point. I was activating all of the skills and tools that I had and then some I didn't know I had and then learning some. Yeah, that's right.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, when you and I first met, it was last summer, we were both at David Peterson's memorial service, who was a wonderful coach to me, and I think mentor to you. And I'm very grateful for him, so I just want to acknowledge him again. And as we started to chat, you shared some of your personal story, not this part that you just shared, but some of your personal story around when you graduated from school and how you didn't go to college immediately out of high school. And I found myself absolutely gob smacked, intrigued...and I would love for you to share some of that story.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah, I'm happy to. And certainly, if there are any parts of it you want me to dig into, I'm happy to share. I think what I'll start with is, the gist of it is, let me kind of highlight a couple things. I'm very, very close with my mother's mother. So, my maternal grandmother. She passed not too long ago. She was illiterate. I was always told by her and others in the family that she wasn't allowed to go to school. She was considered, quote unquote, a half breed. I never really understood what that meant. But I knew that was the case. And I think probably just assumed that was true of everyone, everyone's grandmas. I didn't know there was a real difference. It was much later in life that I started to understand what was going on. She grew up in the South picking tobacco and cotton. And actually, when my parents separated, I had already spent a lot of time with her. But when they separated, there were also several years and moments in that whole process, I lived with her. So, she was a very influential, important person in my life. I actually remember going to the grocery store with her, and she would pretend that she didn't have her glasses so that I could write the checks for her. So, it was a whole thing that we actually never spoke about.

**Sam Coopriders:** But I knew what was going on because she was illiterate. So, I would write the check and she'd say, 'oh, thank you, since I don't have my glasses, I'll just sign the check'. And I think it was also a place where I got to feel adult and special, like I was young, writing a check, which felt really great. She, by the way, later in life, which is been hugely influential for me, in her 70s, learn to read. She claims that it was because of me that I took her to a library and said there was an adult literacy program. I don't actually remember being the one to do that, but that gives you a sense of our relationship. Neither one of my parents nor my grandmother obviously had gone to college, though education and reading was very important and seen as an honor. I think I say all of that because school was always really important to me. And I think in particular, I don't know if it was like on a cellular level, but I really had this sense to not take it for granted and not everybody gets to. And I think I'm very average intelligent, but boy, do I know I work hard and I think it was a lot of, just like a legacy and, wanting to stand on the shoulders of my family that I knew had worked hard and hadn't had a lot, but were really contributing to society in a lot of, I think, really great ways. My grandmother was one of the wisest people I knew and would say some of the funniest things as well. So, between all of that and then my parents separating, we had a very humble life, so there was no college money. So, there was always, the beauty in this is there was always a sense of, you can do whatever you want. Like there was zero pressure of like, go be a doctor or go be a lawyer. But if you want to be, go do that, but you're going to have to be the one to do it. And sometimes that felt so deeply unfair to me and boy, am I so glad that was the life that I had, because everything I did was a very conscious choice. So, when I graduated from high school, I was very clear that I wasn't totally certain what I wanted to do. I was also very clear that college was very expensive, and that I needed some time to figure out what I wanted to do, and I wanted some time to also be on my own. I graduated early. I right away started working in a nonprofit, that worked with American Indians. And I thought, well, no better way to learn and decide what you want to do, start doing something and see what you like and what you don't like.

**Sam Coopriders:** And I loved it, and I slowly, I did some classes at community college because I thought, oh, I'll just get some of the basics done. I was very financially savvy about that. Never paid a dime. The state of California at the time would pay for, so I got some of that done. And then I got really clear what I wanted to do, and I applied to Berkeley. It was the only school, UC Berkeley was the only school I applied to. Everybody said I was crazy. Nobody gets into Berkeley. It was, they said, you know what if you don't get in? I said, well, look, I'm doing all the things I love to do. If I don't get into Berkeley, I'll look at other options. But I'm clear that's what I want. And I got in. And I think there's a clarity, there's a thread for me in all of this of, of being thoughtful and having clarity that has often worked that way in my life. And I also had a very different experience in college than most folks. My younger brother, who was a teenager, needed to live with me. So, I had a teenage son/brother. I was like an auntie/mom and I was working full time at this point with Learning as Leadership. They basically do coaching, leadership development and OD work.

**Sam Coopriders:** I got to meet all kinds of amazing people, that now it's shocking when I look back. Maxie Maultsby as an example, who's the co-creator of Rational Behavioral Therapy. I could go on and on, but I got to meet and be

trained with directly. And so, in retrospect, I personally hope and wish more young people had kind of the experience that I had. It is pretty shocking to me how we expect kids to go straight from high school to college and make some decisions at that level of what they want to do. How would you know? So, it seems like there is more openness to gap years, but I'm like, I don't even know if it's a gap year. It may need to be just a gap or some time. I hope that we are moving towards more thoughtfulness and space for that. I felt like I really had to advocate for myself. I had a lot of, I remember some teachers that I really liked in high school saying to me, we're really worried that you're not going to college right away. And I said, I'm not worried about it. I know that when I make a decision, I'll go. There was really a narrative or a story of if you don't go, you'll never go back.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, for sure!

**Sam Coopriders:** And I felt a lot of pressure, and I was like, I really think I will go.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, I completely agree. I mean, I've thought a lot about this because when I graduated from high school, you know, if you did not go to college immediately, it was as if you had fallen off the apple cart, like you just you weren't going to go to college. And most people didn't. And I do think it's also changing. So, our daughter, she graduated from high school. She'd gotten into some really good colleges, but she decided, she wanted to take a gap year. And then she decided she wanted to take another gap year. And then she decided to enroll in college. And now she's a junior and figuring it out. And she's twenty-three. And it's fantastic because she has a different perspective. And so, to your point, I think it has shifted significantly, where we are saying, okay, so you don't go right now and maybe you never go, and that's okay.

**Sam Coopriders:** I think there's more acceptance even of that as well for a lot of different reasons. And I think that's okay too.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Okay. So, jumping to the present moment, talk to us about what does your day to day look like at Meta. So, you oversee, my understanding is that you oversee a team of coaches, but what does that look like practically? And do you have to coach the coaches a bit?

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah. So... let me back up for just a second. My role, which is such an honor, is coaching is one part of it. So, I also, we also have a team of leadership development business partners, so essentially internal consultants, and the programmatic piece as well. So coaching is a piece of all of that. So, it's kind of an end to end, to support leaders and the org leaders in the company, which is great. Do you want me to start with what my day looks like with all of that?

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Just give us a little bit of the flavor just to get a feel.

**Sam Coopriders:** I would say exciting, full on, lots of context switching. So, and the reason being, with all the different teams and functions that I support, it's everything from meetings to, I coach leaders as well, so that I can sometimes switch. And then I'm in the coaching mode. Then I'm sometimes talking to our coaches about where we are with our strategy and how it's going with coaching to certainly one on ones and supporting my team with like our strategy and looking to the future. And because I'm in tech, there are pings coming all the time with emails. And then my husband, we have our own private, he's also in tech, by the way. Different tech company. He's a video game producer. We have a whole 'nother platform where then he tries to ping me when he has questions. And sometimes at the end of the day, he'll be like, why didn't you respond? And I'll just say, I can't keep track of all the pings coming in all the time. So, exciting and full on and sometimes maybe a little too much.

**Whitney Johnson:** And what do you do, Sam, when things get to be too much? What's your, how do you manage that?

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah. Okay, maybe I'm overly honest about stuff. There's two go to things I do. If I don't have a lot of time. I'm known to literally lie down on the floor for, like, five minutes, two minutes, thirty seconds, and just take a deep breath. I work at hybrid, so I have done it at work. I don't do typically when I'm in the office. That's not what I do. I have done it, though I will be honest. And it's for me just a grounding and literally and figuratively take some deep breaths and just try to reset. It helps. I think it's just calms the nervous system down and try to like, parse

through, 'what do I need to do right now'? My other favorite though is going for a walk. They're kind of similar, but I will and get out and if I can and usually, I can get outside.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's interesting. So, walking is my go-to. In fact, before you and I got on this call, I was like sort of pacing back and forth just to get that, you know, get that cortisol out of the system. But it had never occurred to me to just lay down, flat, prone.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** And allow your body to just...

**Sam Coopriders:** Be still, thoughtful. Sometimes it's a meditation, sometimes it is just: ground myself, take a deep breath. And I've done it with like a ten second in between. You know, where I think I don't have time to go for a walk or that's gonna add more stress. And, yeah, it sends a signal pretty quickly to the body. You have to let me know if you try it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. I'm curious. I, you know, and of course there's always the go to of, I go grab a Diet Coke or I go grab, you know a potato chip. I'm sure you know we do those as well.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** But on our days that we're managing it well, it's the walk or the lay down. So, does a nonprofit require a different style of leader as opposed to a place like Tesla?

**Sam Coopriders:** You know. It's a really great question. Yes and no, is what I would say. I know maybe that sounds like a cop out, but there are a lot of similarities. I think the places, you know, it also depends on what type of company, what type of nonprofit. There are huge nonprofits. I think what I personally have experienced is the biggest difference is around pace and scale.

**Sam Coopriders:** And I want to be very clear. Nonprofits can go very fast. They often have to. And certainly, the ones that I was involved in, where it was humanitarian aid work on top of policy change. I mean, in many ways, I think that's where I could translate like, oh, I know how to be scrappy. I know how to like, just grab what you can and go and just start making something happen. But I will say, certainly the difference between nonprofits and just tech in general-so whether it's Tesla, Google, Meta, etc. is the scale. So, you add speed and scale like that, with like very innovative ideas. Yeah, it can feel like a rocket ship or an electric car taking off from, you know, a model S going from 0 to 60.

**Whitney Johnson:** I appreciate that distinction of thinking about, speed can happen at a nonprofit or in a tech company like a Tesla. But the scale piece is, that's interesting to hear you say, that it can, the scale, at least in the companies that you work in, is very different.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yeah, exactly. And I think the other pieces for me, all of the places I've ever worked, there is a common thread of being mission driven. Now, we could all debate if everybody agrees with the mission. But for me personally, very consciously mission driven and missions that I believe in, But I do believe nonprofits generally, and certainly the nonprofits I was working in that had a longer, impact, like the impact took longer to see sometimes probably because of scale. I think that's how I got there is, I could work just as hard or as fast and have this sense sometimes of, wow, I really wish we were seeing a bigger difference. But we're also talking, you know, much smaller team, smaller amounts of money that you're trying to move around or impact. And I think that's the reason why. I mean, that was that was off the cuff what came up for me.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, you mentioned something about being mission driven. And right now, you work at Meta, and I think it's, I would love to hear your thoughts because, you know, when people think about this idea of mission driven, they typically, their brains, our brains go to, I work at a nonprofit. And yet I think that, in my experience, anyway, you can have, you can be very mission driven. You can be very motivated by the work that you're doing in a for profit company and feel like you're really doing good in the world. And so, I would love to hear

for you this perspective of, you know, what mission are you on inside of Meta, for you personally? What does that look like and feel like?

**Sam Coopriders:** Well, first of all, I've been very clear from a very young age, I want to say around eighth grade—so that is funny that that was probably a pivotal year for me that I want to make a difference in the world. And I think for a while I, in my youth and immaturity and naivety, thought I knew what that meant and how it had to be done. And that was very much in the nonprofit sector, and it was pretty self-righteous about it, quite honestly, in retrospect. For instance, the big aha I had when I went to Learning as Leadership was they had been a nonprofit. The background of the founder, you know, pretty compelling, had been through a lot, had her own lessons about all of that, and was not righteous and really could have been quite righteous and really wasn't. And they decided to become a corporation. And they felt like they could have a bigger impact and do more being a corporation than a nonprofit. And that I remember that being the first perception buster for me of, oh that's really interesting. And I think over time what I started to see is. I don't have a definitive, you have to be a nonprofit or for profit to make a difference. It really is, though, about what is the mission, what are you trying to do? And quite honestly, a lot of companies have a lot more impact on society in the world than non-profits.

**Sam Coopriders:** I still have a love for non-profits. I'm still involved with them. I wouldn't be surprised if I returned to one someday. It's not an either/or for me, but I started to get really clear as I worked with Learning as Leadership. And then I got, I had access to even bigger companies, and quite honestly, companies I had a lot of judgment about, industries that I never thought I would be involved in. And as I was confronted with that, as I worked in those organizations, I started, of course, to see they're really amazing people who are doing the right thing and want to do the right thing. I also started to see, for instance, you know, if I'm going to be mad about gasoline, but I drive a car with gasoline, I'm being really hypocritical. So better that you're working in industry and you're working with leaders who want to make a difference. And these corporations have a ton of power. And so I think that was a big shift for me of, okay, then, if you want to make a difference in the world, you're probably going to have to go into some places that you've had some judgment about, and be part of it being for good.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm.

**Sam Coopriders:** So, I... I never thought I would be in tech. I don't really know why, although I guess with my background, you could imagine that is a big jump from, like, Midwestern background that I had helping to, you know, get my brother into adulthood, etc. to being in some of these amazingly large and innovative companies. But it's been a real gift and honor, and I really do... I still say we with all of those companies, because I still feel like there's a contribution that I've made in all of them and still believe in. And it's all part of the world and technology we use. So I, at least I get to be part of it. I'm not passive in it, and I don't think we all get it all right all the time. That's not what I'm saying either. But I want to be co-responsible for that.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Interesting. You know I was just doing a live stream yesterday with Magda Mook who runs the ICF, and we were, someone posed the question of like how can you create, you know a better culture within the community of coaching. And she actually flipped it and said, how can we create a culture where we coach? And I just thought that was beautiful.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good, we're all the time thinking about how do I create a situation and circumstances where I'm coaching other people.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yes. And also, in all areas and also how do I ensure that I'm coachable?

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, okay. So here's one of the questions that I sometimes like to ask people when I'll say to them, so tell me about the last time you got feedback, and I say to them, if you hear someone say to you, I don't know the last time I got feedback, I haven't gotten any feedback recently. Be very, very concerned because it's likely that you haven't gotten feedback, not because you didn't need feedback, but because people feel like you won't hear it.

**Sam Coopriders:** That's right.

**Whitney Johnson:** And so, when we start getting feedback from people of, hey, have you thought about this? Hey, have you thought about that? That is a really good sign because it means that you are, in fact, coachable.

**Sam Coopriders:** I couldn't agree more, couldn't agree more.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, in that spirit, what's some feedback that you've gotten recently? What's some coaching that you've gotten?

**Sam Coopriders:** Do you want as a mother, as a wife, as a leader? I mean, which one do you want?

**Whitney Johnson:** How about as a mother? Because those are always real gems. And then something at work too.

**Sam Coopriders:** Okay, so as a mother, Olivia is 14 1/2, so keep that in mind with that age. And I mean keep that in mind for all of us, have empathy for all of us. Olivia thinks that, and rightfully so, has given me feedback that I can be tense with work and like, quick to frustrate. And she's absolutely right. And she also, the family can feel it and I even can feel it, you know. And so I think that's also where this, something I'm committed to practicing and I don't always do it perfectly is even what we were talking about in terms of going for a walk or lying down on the floor, I'm realizing how much I need to do that in the context switching of my personal and professional life, and all the more with this hybrid work environment where in some ways the beauty of working from home more is that we get more time together. The problem is, sometimes we're all together in the same house, switching gears, like I'm going down to get some sparkling water and Olivia has a quick question for me. She's come home from school and I'm in some other mode and just trying to get the water and go back upstairs. But this is the new world we live in. My husband also works from home, so we're all around more, but we're context switching as a family together. I don't say that as an excuse. It's just a new learning curve of like how to switch these modes and which mode to be in. And I do think I was better at it when it was at work five days a week, but I would still say I'm not. It's still an area for development. It's still a way that I can be a little tense and have something on my mind and then she's asking me a pretty minor question and my response isn't matching.

**Whitney Johnson:** You're not there. Yeah, kids give the best feedback.

**Sam Coopriders:** They really do - And she's really good at it and direct which I love.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. What's something at work?

**Sam Coopriders:** So at work, the most recent feedback uh that I've been given, that I'm in deep reflection about and it's really accurate and it feels really hard to make big change on is that at times when I feel challenged, especially what I will call politically, I can tend to shrink. And I think what it is, is that my default is I start to go quiet.

**Whitney Johnson:** Um.

**Sam Coopriders:** Partially because of pace being so fast. I think part of what I'm trying to do is observe, get my thoughts together. But I do think I'm overly safe sometimes, like, I think I'm staying there maybe a bit longer than I need to, should could in these moments. And I think it is because I'm, I always tell people this, I'm a not shy introvert. So, my meaning, I say that because I think sometimes people they'll be like, oh, but you have no problem speaking up. I'm like, no, I don't have a problem, that's not the issue. I recharge, I need time to think. I introvert my thoughts. It can take me a moment, even several times with you, I've noticed I want to, like, pause for a moment, just that's just how I'm wired. There's pros and cons to that, but I do think sometimes I take a little bit of a safer route. I go a little quiet, a little too long. There's probably a whole bunch of reasons for that. And I think the more complex and the bigger the org is that I'm leading, I think there's some places where I need to lean in faster and quicker with a point of view. I have one, I just think I got, and maybe be okay not having it fully baked or being totally clear myself. But it's noticeable, and I think it's absolutely accurate. And I think where I am in this company and the team that I have, it's highlighted it in a beautiful and hard way sometimes. But you know, there's some places and environments where I could totally hide that, to be honest, because I'm like, oh, great, you know, it's kind of like

parenting. Or you get into these contexts where it's like, I can't hide from this. It's gonna push on this development area faster and harder, right?

**Whitney Johnson:** And because you are in coaching and you are in leadership development, when you get that feedback, it's incumbent upon you to model the behavior of,

**Sam Coopriders:** 100%

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, I need to receive this. I need to consider it. I need to act on it.

**Sam Coopriders:** 100%. And I think most people would say, I hear it. I agree with it. I think where I'm feeling the most challenge because that's not where I'm sensitive. I agree with it. It's been one of the harder ones for me to fast action on. I think, in the past, and it's ironic with the point being that I need to go faster. I get that there's a whole irony in all of it. I hear it, I've even had, I've said like in the moment, coach me, help me. And I've even in the moment had a leader. She knows who she is, and I really appreciate it, say, you know, okay, tell us what you think. And I, I stuttered, I did what I just, I had a moment of like uh, uh... And I, but I just think I'm gonna have to keep practicing it.

**Whitney Johnson:** And you have an opinion.

**Sam Coopriders:** Yes, I do, I do. I think I wrap myself, I think I'm overthinking. What I think is happening is I think I'm overthinking. I have an opinion, but I'm like, second guessing myself, and I'm, I think I'm too worried that I'm gonna say something that's gonna piss somebody off. And what's funny is I generally in life don't have an issue about pissing someone off. That's not, I think as I get closer and more connected to people and systems, I get a little more careful about it.

**Whitney Johnson:** You're aware of the consequences.

**Sam Coopriders:** Exactly. And I think all going back to eighth grade and all that, I'm doing the dance of like, is this worth going in kind of spicy or do I... And I, my husband...

**Whitney Johnson:** Do I really want to fight that person over the boyfriend?

**Sam Coopriders:** Exactly.

**Whitney Johnson:** It all comes back to eighth grade.

**Sam Coopriders:** That's 100% right. And I think I just overthink. And so, I think what they're trying to do, and rightfully so, is see, like just go a little, just like one two clicks faster and don't let yourself churn so much.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, so good. So, Sam, every website, or every biography of yours, on every website where we looked and researched it, mentions the California coast. Why is that?

**Sam Coopriders:** Well, first of all, I love the edges of everything, and I love the ocean, specifically the Pacific Ocean, so the edges of the Pacific Ocean. And I think that's symbolic. And it's also, the Pacific Ocean is powerful and deep, and it is a place that I often go to center. When I go on a walk or when I need a vacation or a break-it is often to be near water. And I love kind of everything related to water, everything from swimming to surfing to just watching it, quite honestly.

**Whitney Johnson:** I took surf lessons for the first time over the Christmas break. It was so fun.

**Sam Coopriders:** What'd you think? Isn't it fun?

**Whitney Johnson:** I loved it, and I had the most helpful, encouraging surf instructor. And it was a great experience, I loved it.



**Sam Coopriders:** Do we have time for me to tell you a quick little surfing story?

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh yes. Please do.

**Sam Coopriders:** Okay, I love that you did that. I think everybody should try surfing at some point. There's and there's a whole bunch of research about the value of it and impact on the body, etc., and being deeply present and connected to nature. But the first time I really surfed and I took a lesson, I was in Hawaii. What a what a beautiful place to do that. And I, it was a young, probably 17 or 18 year old local guy who was like, yeah, let's go. It's just what I wanted to do. Like he knew where the waves were. I was like, teach me. Also like, how are you choosing where you go, etc.. We go to the beach. He has me stand on the surfboard. He lifts up the nose of it. He's like, all right, we're good to go. And I'm going, wait, wait, wait. I don't know what I'm doing. Like, I need a little more. He's like, no, we're good. Come on, let's go. And I said, okay, all right, let's go. So, we go out there, um, he turns me around. He said, when I say stand up, stand up. I was like, all right. You know, I'm thinking, I don't really know what I'm doing. So, all this and I mean, you paddle and stand up. But yeah, about twenty seconds later, he yells paddle and then jump up. So, I do. And I stand up and I surf the wave. And I turn around while I'm surfing the wave and I say to him, I don't think I'm on the right foot. And he screams back at me, who cares -you're surfing. And I turn back around and like, literally, I mean, the waves weren't that big obviously for me, but I got up and other people were falling and I was like, wow, I actually stood up. But I was so focused on that I did it wrong. I paddle back to him and I'm like, okay, which foot? And he's like, young guy, he's like, this is really interesting. Okay, you're right-handed. Okay. Well, but you don't really need to like, care about that that much. But yeah, if you're right-handed, I would probably switch the way you did it. But you also got up, so who cares. Long story short, I keep paddling and keep trying it. I tried both feet like switching feet. Which one do I like better? And then at some point he just paddles over to me, and he very calmly says, you know, you don't have to surf every wave, right? And I just said to him, I don't know how to explain this, but this whole experience has been deeply spiritual and very related to what I'm working on developmentally. And so, I sat there for about five minutes letting waves pass, just thinking about how the whole day had been about am I doing it right? And instead of enjoying the wave, I'm yelling back at him, wait, which foot am I supposed to be on? It was a really, really beautiful experience.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, so speaking of surfing, is there a new S curve that you have jumped to recently? And how does it feel?

**Sam Coopriders:** Well, I mean, I will say, I mean, this is all about time. But I mean parenting, parenting right now, I'm in a new phase of parenting. There's some pretty challenging mental health things we're navigating. It's taking parenting to a new level for me. Parenting and leadership always have this interesting symbiotic relationship, though, of, I think what's familiar for me is there is a common thread of sometimes like just when I think I got it, I don't. I'm like, all right, all right, I got this. Like, okay, I know this kid or I know this org. And then they'll be like a new complexity or a new way that it shows up, whatever the "it" is that really pushes me to go, all right-I'm going to have to really rethink how I do this, how I lead through this. And that kind of is similar both personally and professionally, because, you know, I've gone through layoffs before. I've led through them. I've led through really difficult other times throughout. But even what we've all gone through and what is very publicly known about Meta last year, there were some components that really kind of sucker punched me that just felt hard.

**Sam Coopriders:** And I feel similarly as a parent. I think as hard as that is the beauty for me, and the learning is that it just makes me really humble and it kind of reawakens the learning. I do feel like I'm someone who loves to learn, maybe too much. though. My husband's like, I've never met anybody who needs to read as much or be in school as much as you are. Feedback taken as well there, but it's like a breaking wide open of learning. It's like a new, oh, maybe I wasn't paying as much attention as I should have been or could have been. And so, yeah, I think I'm on just a new learning curve as a parent about what she really needs, how that may be different than what I needed at that age, or what I need now. And how do I learn to show up in the way that she needs it? And I think that's really true as a leader as well. I think it's rooted in compassion. I consider myself a compassionate person, but it's taking it to another level.

**Whitney Johnson:** It's interesting what you said, where it's not necessarily that you're doing something new, it's that the situation or the nature of the relationship or the person that you're working with shifts, and so it pushes you into a new place or onto a new S curve in terms of how you engage with them and support them.

**Sam Coopriders:** That's absolutely right. I mean, I am a bit of a junkie of like learning new things. Whether it's surfing or riding a motorcycle or horseback riding, all of that I love and there is a lot of learning in it. But I'm really, really struck at this moment of my life how things that, you know where you thought you know, there's still so much to learn and the nuance of that. And it's something that I'm very struck by and paying a lot of attention to.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. I think that it's been interesting for me because, you know, when I was in my 20s and 30s, I went to therapy and I'm like, okay, good, learned a lot, this is great, etc.. And thinking that, you know, you sort of solved through a lot of things. Now let's just focus on, you know, emotional regulation and self-awareness and mindfulness and all that good stuff. But not too long ago, some things came up and I was like, oh, I need to go back to therapy. Huh. Didn't see that one coming. I guess there's more that's unresolved, that wasn't expected to be resolved. And now I'm in a different place and it's time to go back and revisit that again. And so that's what came to mind when you just said this of like, you might, you know, you may go to therapy once or twice or five or 10 or 20 times because there's this there's this cyclical nature to it and a spiral of improving and progressing. But you might have to go back and revisit some things. So that's what came to my mind, what you described.

**Sam Coopriders:** That's precisely it Whitney, so, and I think that's true of coaching or parenting or leadership. I mean, why you can be in one role or it's the same person, but we're all changing. Everything's changing all the time. I mean, I'm a big believer in complexity theory. You can't replicate a lot of this because we're all growing and learning. So, what I learned and worked, you know, with my daughter several years ago, she's a different person right now. She's evolved and I have too. So, I can't just keep doing the same things and expecting the same results. But I'm just finding that to be so true everywhere.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Sam Coopriders:** And I'm dumbfounded by it. There's just moments where I'm like, wow, okay, I thought, to your point, it was like I kind of thought I tied this in a bow and I like, had learned this. There's a new component of this. And similarly coaching therapy, I think I'm gonna have to go open this case back up.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. All right. Last two questions. What's been useful for you in this conversation? And it's, it's a bit of a meta question.

**Sam Coopriders:** Pun intended...

**Whitney Johnson:** Uh huh. Absolutely. Which is something that you observed that occurred to you that, happened because we were having a conversation.

**Sam Coopriders:** Keeping it big picture. Just the importance of time to reflect, and really synthesize career and life experiences. I'm a big believer we are holistic human beings, and they are woven together tightly. But it has been a while since I've thought about it. Maybe because I'm further away from eighth grade and all the other things that I've talked about. It's been a while since I, I've made that connection, and it was something that really struck me when we met. And it felt serendipitous with the connection we both had with David Peterson as well. Um, I remember feeling that. So being reconnected with that, and just connection with you, connection with humans and kind of how small the world is in many ways. I'm always kind of in awe of that, actually. I don't know if I'm allowed to ask, but it's the nature of who I am. I'm curious for you how you'd answer the same question.

**Whitney Johnson:** I think what's been useful for me is your resilience, and observing how you move and have moved throughout your life and found yourself in a number of situations that were not easy. And yet there is something I think, innate to who you are, but then you've worked very hard to develop it, to be open and optimistic and embracing and cheerful about what comes your way. I think that's what's been most useful for me, is to listen to you and observe that.

**Sam Coopriders:** Wow. Well, the a, thank you.

**Whitney Johnson:** You're Welcome.

**Sam Coopriders:** B- your ability to ask really insightful, interesting, thought-provoking questions. It's a real skill. And not to be presumptuous, but it feels there's a friendship or a connection that I feel, and I think a lot of it, I remember not knowing your background, etc.. I remember feeling that when we met. So, I really appreciate that.

**Whitney Johnson:** So there needs to be a third time.

**Sam Coopriders:** I agree.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Sam, any final thoughts to put a bow on the conversation?

**Sam Coopriders:** Just a lot of gratitude. Thank you. Thank you for this conversation and making this happen.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So fun. Thank you.

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I'm walking away from my conversation with Sam keenly aware of the difference between what we consider intelligence, and what we consider wisdom. Book smarts and street smarts are usually how we define and separate the two, but I think we nailed down something more essential. Intelligence is all you, you, you – all the facts and dates and equations you've spent time learning, objective and concrete things. Sam, like her grandmother, has plenty of that. But what they also have is wisdom, a willingness to instead set yourself aside and consider other perspectives. If intelligence is being comfortable operating in an objective environment, wisdom is when a person thrives in a subjective environment, where everything is shifting and nothing is concrete. Maintaining that inner drive when nothing's consistent. Some might call that street smarts, this... instinct, for changing circumstances, but I see it more like putting in the reps to quiet your ego. Wisdom is accepting that you are fallible. For Sam, wisdom is that scrappiness she described, the ability to recognize and put her own biases aside for the moment, in favor of the mission. In the intro to this episode, it's what Bruce Lee called formlessness, shapelessness. The circumstances may not always be ideal. You might have conflicting thoughts, reservations, wild dreams, all at the same time. But wisdom is like Sam said – "grab what you can and go." It's pushing past yourself when you're standing in your own way, to finish what you started. For more on women finding their unique voice in a male-dominated industry, there's my recent talk with Jennifer McCollum, [episode 351](#). I'd recommend my episode with James E. Dixon, too – his grandmother was central to his message, and another dose of grandmotherly advice can't hurt. That's [episode 343](#). Lastly, check out [episode 259](#) with Alexi Robichaux, on the power of asking for help. Thank you again to Sam Coopriders, 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