

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 361: PAUL ALLEN

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Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you grow your people to grow your organization -- because organizations don't disrupt, people do. The building block of that growth? It's you. When we talk about robots, machines, artificial intelligence, it's usually within the context of something theorists call the singularity. That's the moment when AI figures out how to upgrade itself and leaves us in the dust. After all, it can learn a library in an instant - the AI doesn't need to stop for a snack and a nap. In the world of the Terminator, it took Skynet a single day to become self-aware, destroy most of human life, and then send Arnold back in time to make sure no one could stop it.

*"It can't be bargained with, it can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, remorse, or fear. It absolutely won't stop, ever, until you're dead."* (Kyle Reese)

But in the end, The Terminator is one person's vision of the future - a vision that's also designed to sell well at the box office. Isn't it just as possible to write a different version? Our guest today is spending his time doing just that. Paul Allen, the co-founder and former CEO of [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), is asking instead - what if we saw AI as an ally, not an arms race? What if it could supplement our strengths instead of exploiting them? With his new venture, Soar, Paul is writing a different story, one where the robots aren't sent back in time to strip away our humanity, but rather - they exemplify everything that's unique about being human. So, a lot to grasp, but what does this all mean for you? I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Paul, I want to start with your strengths and the process of discovering them. What should listeners know about Don Clifton? Who is he and who is he to you?

**Paul Allen:** That is a great question to start with. I adore Don Clifton. I had never met him because he passed away in 2003, but I think personally he was the greatest psychologist of the 20th century. And the reason I say that is that psychology is filled with very bright people analyzing all kinds of things about humans and how we think and feel. And but much of the field of psychology up until the 1950s was focused on what's wrong with us, what are our neuroses or psychoses or problems, flaws and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the DSM handbook (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) is so packed with a taxonomy of a bazillion things that are wrong with us. And Don Clifton, who was from the Midwest and had fought in the war and came home from the war, he thought he wanted to do something positive for the world. And so, in 1952, he asked the question, well, I believe he was a graduate student at University of Nebraska in Lincoln. And he said, what if we focused on what's right with people instead of what's wrong with people? What would happen? So, for the next 50 years, he literally interviewed hundreds of thousands of people in usually 90-minute structured interviews. To find out what made them tick, and he would ask these questions to find out their natural, innate talents. His definition of a strength was a naturally recurring pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving that could be productively applied.

**Paul Allen:** So, it does depend a little bit on the context, but it mostly depends on your patterns, your recurring patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. Who you are when you wake up and you can't turn that off. And so, I love that he taps into that natural, innate talent, what I would call a God given talent. And then he studied it for 50 years, and he created a taxonomy of over 400 talents that he had observed from successful people who were doing great work. And he would interview the top life insurance salesperson at a company and find out what made them tick and why were they such a high performer. And then he would catalog that talent. Well, before he died, he worked with a Harvard business professor, Harvard, maybe computer scientist, and they created an online version of an assessment. It's 177 questions. And if you answer those questions quickly, I think you have 20s to answer each one. So, you can't overthink it. But if it asks you these questions and then they tell you what your top five natural, God given talents or strengths are. And the beautiful thing about what's now called CliftonStrengths. It used to be called StrengthsFinder, but it's now been taken by over 31 million people, and it's changed many people's lives because it helps you focus on what's right with you and what is unique about you.

**Paul Allen:** And I absolutely love Don Clifton's work. His mission. His grandson, John Clifton, is now the CEO of Gallup, and John's goal while he's CEO of Gallup is to help a billion people on Earth discover their Clifton strengths. So, there's thirty-four themes out of the four hundred strengths. He boiled it down to thirty-four strengths themes. And when you take the assessment for just \$20, you'll get your top five Clifton strengths in order. And to answer your question, that was a long answer to a very short question, but a very important one to me. My number one strength, according to Don Clifton, is learner. My number two strength is input. My number three, and my personal favorite is ideation. Four is intellection. Five is strategic. Those are all what's called what are called, strategic thinking themes. In fact, my number six strength is analytical, so my top six strengths are all in the strategic thinking domain. And the other domains include executing strengths. How do you get stuff done? Influencing strengths? How do you influence other people, and then relationship strengths, which is how you interact with other people. But those are my top six and I think they're very, very accurate. And I'm really grateful that Don Clifton's work has helped me understand myself better.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, he's really, he's a very influential figure for you. I'm wondering, what was the experience like when you first discovered this and discovered these strengths about yourself? What did that feel like?

**Paul Allen:** First of all, it felt like it was long overdue. I took the assessment in February of 2012. I'd been a CEO for 22 years. I'd started seven companies. I had been married, I had eight children. I have seven siblings. I just I've had lots of good friends in my life and I had no clue what, you know, what words described me. I think I had not very much self-awareness at that point. And as I read the report, there's a insights report that comes that's totally personalized to you based on your top five strengths and the intensity of those strengths. So, when you get this top five report, it's unlikely to say the same thing to you that it says to any other human being, you are so uniquely you. Your blend of top five and the intensity of those top five is personalized to you. So, the Gallup algorithm personalizes these descriptors. And so, my learner sounds different than someone else's learner. And it's so it's

extremely hyper personalized. As I read this report about me, I thought this explains everything I've ever done and how I've done it. And I felt like it understood me better than my mom did, or my wife, or my best friends. I just felt totally understood for the first time. It was really incredible.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ah. So now that we've got that as a backdrop and you understand yourself and we understand you, you better. I want to ask you what might sound like a silly question, which is how do you take an idea? Like, I want to connect people to their past and execute on that idea. How do you write that business plan?

**Paul Allen:** Well, that's an interesting question. And it actually really did happen. So, my ideation kicks in every morning. Every night, like every time I'm on a road trip, traveling in a car or on an airplane, my ideation is going nonstop, and I say I love it because I just love the thinking about what's possible. And Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft, before he passed away, I started reading. I read his biography, it's called or his autobiography. It's called Paul Allen, *Idea Man*. And people that are in the world of ideas, Nikola Tesla, Elon Musk, it's just so inspiring. There's just so many incredible ideas. Paul Allen, the other Paul Allen, lived his life to answer this question, what should exist? And then he would fund it or found it and make all kinds of amazing things exist. But to answer your question, the idea to put all the world's genealogy records on the internet and to make it possible for anybody to discover their ancestors really hit me. I think for the first time in late 1995, and I was at the time CEO of a company called Infobases. It was a five-year-old company. Our mission was to put all the world's best books on CD-ROM. We wanted to identify the best books ever written in every field of human knowledge, and to index them using this search engine that my brother founded a company called Folio, built in Utah, uh, around, uh, just a few years after WordPerfect.

**Paul Allen:** And it was the world's best search engine for, for desktop retrieval of, of large libraries of content. So, I worked there for two and a half years, and then I started Infobases. And the mission for Infobases was inspired by the president of Brigham Young University, Jeffrey Holland, who in 1988 gave a speech that talked about gathering up all the greatest truth and knowledge in the world and making it available. And he said, that's what universities and libraries do. But I realized that in the tech world, we could do that digitally. So, for five years, we were focused on digitizing all the world's most important books in many fields of knowledge. And we had one major problem. Copyright. It was really hard as a young 20 something year old founder of a tech company, to go to publishers or authors and to license the electronic rights to their material. That was not an easy task. We had some successes early on, but then as the value of digital content started to become more obvious, it was really hard to get publishers or authors to pay attention to us.

**Paul Allen:** And so, we started turning our attention to public domain content. I, started a master's degree in library science in 1990, and I dropped out because the company started taking off. But I spent a lot of time at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and I started, spent a lot of time studying copyright law. And when something becomes public domain, and I was at an internet conference in San Francisco in 1995, it was called Internet Developers II. It was the second conference I, apparently, they had one in '94. And as a CD-ROMs publisher, I realized that the internet was going to replace it was going to disrupt to put it into your words and Clayton's words. It was going to totally disrupt the CD-ROM industry. And so, I clearly saw that that would happen. And I also knew that copyright was really challenging. And I also knew that, especially in my faith community, a knowledge of your ancestors, finding the writings, letters, journals, history of all your ancestors is extremely important to a lot of people. So, when you think about the most important or most valuable content in the world, in one sense your own family writings may be the most important content that you could preserve and pass down.

**Paul Allen:** So, it was September '95 that the idea struck that we could put all the world's genealogy records on the internet, and they were all in the public domain. All of the birth, death, marriage records are in the public domain, and we wouldn't need permission from anybody to do this. And so, within a few months, we had put over 50 million records on the internet. June of 1996, we launched the original version of Ancestry.com. And a year later we incorporated it in Delaware as a C Corp. And, you know, I used my learner, I think, and my input for the next couple years to find out where are all the most important data sets in the genealogical world. I went to dozens of genealogy conferences. I read reference books. I love buying reference books on used bookstores or on Amazon. All the librarian tools and reference books that tell you where all the data is. And so, we used a book called *Red Book* and a book called *The Source* that were the two most encyclopedic versions of where are all the genealogy

records in the world, how do you find them? And this was for people that were doing genealogy the old-fashioned way.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, so what I think is interesting, as I hear you tell this story, is that you'd already started a company that you were trying to digitize content, and you had started out with books. And so, there was a level of expertise, a level of knowledge that made it possible for you to be aware of how to technically do the work that you needed to do. You realize then that that was going to be disrupted, but then you had this skill of, I can apply this somewhere else. The most important books or records that people care about is family records. And so that when you had that idea and there was some element of inspiration because you'd heard someone that you admired, which was Jeffrey Holland, then it could all come together. But there was some foundational work that had been done that prepared you, that when you had that idea, you could act on it.

**Paul Allen:** That is exactly right. And what was really important and helpful was that in 1996, when we were shifting from the CD-ROM business model to the online genealogy business, we sold the CD-ROM business to a large religious publishing company, but we kept 30 employees. So, all the developers and data prep, all the search engine folks, everyone on the company who had been working on publishing electronic books and libraries on CD-ROM, they just shifted their attention slightly towards genealogical content and doing it online instead of doing it on CD-ROM. We had the perfect scenario where we just hit the ground running, and literally by July of 98, we were cash flow positive, doing millions of dollars of ARR. And it was just such an exciting time. Uh, and I was in the right place at the right time with the right team and the right skills, like you said, to execute on that idea.

**Whitney Johnson:** You're reminding me, this is such a great example of Amar Bhide. Who, uh, an academic who said that 70% of all successful new businesses end up with in a different place from where they started. And Ancestry was a perfect example of that, of like it ended up being successful, but that is not where you started. You started in a very different place, but you kept pivoting, kept pivoting, but you had but everything that you did, you know from an S Curve perspective, you jumped to a new curve, but you had the foundation that allowed you to jump to that next curve so that you were continually building on what you had built before.

**Paul Allen:** That's right. Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. All right. So, you had, learner was affecting this, ideation was affecting this, strategic was affecting this, analytical was affecting this because you're going to all these source books. Where was the, where does the intellection piece come in?

**Paul Allen:** But I think you skipped the most important one. You skipped input.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, say more.

**Paul Allen:** It's a weird word to describe a person's talent. Like nobody told me in ninth grade or 12th grade, Paul, you really are strong in input, you know? But Don identified input. It is an insatiable desire to collect and gather knowledge or anything to gather and then to dispense it to people that need it. So, archivists and librarians, people that are collectors, everyone who has input has some personal interest that they just collect. It might be taking notes and having all of your life's notes in a file that you can retrieve. But the thing that drives a person with input crazy, and I've experienced this so many hundreds of times is if I know there's a resource and I can't find it for the person that needs it right now. So, input for me in the world of internet allows someone with input who has this insatiable desire to collect and gather and organize and then to dispense what people need when they need it. It's like this perfect power tool for a person with input. I could do notebooks and paper and things like that, but that doesn't scale. And so, I feel like input was probably the strength that I have. That led me to do the gathering and publishing at scale for both religious and educational content on CD-ROM, and then the world's genealogy collection on the internet. And everything I'm doing today in my in my current companies is using input to find and organize, collect. Index. And now we're putting AI power on top of all these data collection. So, I'm having the time of my life because input has so much modern technology that that supercharges it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. It's interesting. So input is in a way it's a why, it's what animates the work that you're doing. You're doing this because you want to be able to collect the data that will allow other people to learn and grow and

develop and to archive it. So okay, which brings us to your current project, Soar. You want to soar you want to help other people soar. Of all the things you could have started, why this? Tell us about what it is you're doing.

**Paul Allen:** Don Clifton's first book, published in 1992, was called *Soar with Your Strengths*. When he, uh, built the online StrengthsFinder assessment, it obviously made it possible for that assessment to scale beyond him and his trained psychologists. There was no longer a 90 minute in-person needed. And so, *Soar with Your Strengths*, to me is the finest book anyone could ever read to discover how to live the best possible life, given your natural talents. Now, Don hadn't defined the thirty-four strengths themes yet. That was later 1998 or 99, and the assessment came out online. But in his 40 years prior to the book, in 1992, he had observed how people could discover their talents and grow them. He has in that book five clues to your natural talent, and literally every person could take a look at those five clues, and even without taking his assessment, you could start to get a sense of what your strengths are, what your natural talents are. For example, one of the clues to talent that Don put in his book is called rapid learning. Let's say you sign up for a class in physics and lots of people are struggling with it, but it's like, oh my gosh, it's like, I already know this. It's so easy. This just all makes sense to me. When you experience rapid learning, that's a clue that you have a strength in that area. And these other four clues to talent are also really powerful. They're little questions you can ask yourself. And so, Don's book, *Soar with Your Strengths*, to me is a roadmap for human excellence that literally every person born on the planet. If you discover what your natural talents are and play to your strengths in your education journey, in your work journey, and in your relationships and hobbies, if you play to your strengths, there's a very good chance you'll become excellent. And if you focus on the top strengths, you could become best of breed, best in class, and then you get rewarded and recognized for good work. And that's very validating. And humans flourish when you're able to accomplish good things using your natural talents.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's so good. All right. So, I, I love the name Soar and, and the provenance of that. And you want to be an evangelist of all good things. So, talk to us about how, what does Soar do, tell us, get granular and specific for us.

**Paul Allen:** Soar is currently in our latest incarnation, which is about a year old, has morphed itself into what we call an AI studio. There are venture studios or venture building organizations that are kind of like incubators for lots of projects or lots of companies. As a matter of fact, we decided to call ourselves an AI studio, and we are incorporating 15 corporations, Delaware C corporations. We've already done five. We've gotten more on the roadmap, and we have a multi-million-dollar tech stack that is really powerful AI that can be used in many contexts. And so, as I told you about my original start into tech, it was built on the Folio search engine. So electronic texts, powerful search engine, Boolean search, hypertext linking. That's how I learned about computers and business was building a company using the Folio search engine. Well, Google is the search engine that everyone uses today, but it doesn't have any of the features that Folio had. It's just a web crawler and a web search engine. But if you have one thousand important books in one field, Google doesn't really help you very much. So, what Soar AI studio has is a transcription engine for video and audio and a search engine for electronic texts.

**Paul Allen:** And so, we're getting closer to rebuilding Folio in the web world that can be applied in career, workplace, faith, citizenship, health, legal, all these different contexts. You need a great search engine that's not Google. So, every one of our subsidiary companies gets the transcription tool and the data pipeline and the search engine that could power their search ability. But then in the last three years, as we got more and more into machine learning and AI, you know, two years before GPT-3, ChatGPT came out, our team was learning how to build custom machine learning models that would take great training, such as sales training, leadership training, management training. There's a \$400 billion global industry around workplace training. And according to Marshall Goldsmith, almost none of it sticks. You go through these classes, you learn all this stuff, and then you go back and revert back to all your natural habits, which are obviously not as good as what the trainers want you to do. And so, leaders get training, managers get training, employees of all kinds get training. But we forget really quickly, and then we have bad habits, and we don't apply it. So, Marshall Goldsmith's big paper on this subject was called, *Leadership is a Contact Sport*.

**Paul Allen:** And what it means is after training, you have to have repeated contact with the people that went through the training to remind them to hold them accountable, to help them and mentor them to implement the training properly. And it turns out that when leaders go through training and there's no follow up, there's no behavior change. Right. When leaders go through training or managers go through training and there's a little bit of follow up,

there's a little bit of behavior change. But when there's periodic, regular consistent follow up, there's massive positive behavior change that's in line with the training that you invested in. So Soar is partnering with SHRM, the Society for Human Resources Management, and we're very excited that all of the best training and teaching in the world, in all these, uh, fields that relate to our careers and our work and our occupations, AI can be quickly customized to pair with that training and to analyze after your calls, your meetings, whatever you're doing in the workplace, that's digital. I can sit on top of that and help you live up to the training that you just invested in. So that's a that's a big part of Soar's AI platform.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. So, one of your, one of your verticals is sales. So, talk me through talk me through how it would use we would use it. So, I've got a sales team. We need to train them. They come to you just talk me through the business model of how someone would engage with you around sales.

**Paul Allen:** So first of all, in the disruptive innovation world, there is an Israeli company called Gong that's eight years old that is worth \$8 billion. Gong is an AI technology platform that records all your calls and gives you feedback on your sales. It's not a sales training company, it's an AI SAS platform that is used by tons of people. Well, it turns out Gong is worth more than the top twenty sales training companies in the world combined. Times eight.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Paul Allen:** That's how disruptive an AI sales platform is versus a training company. Take all the best training companies combined. They're not even worth a fraction of what Gong is worth. So, we partnered three years ago with a former Stephen Covey protege named Joe Thomas. He was the top seven habits trainer at Franklin for many years, and then he went off and started his own sales training company. And I love Joe Thomas. He's such a deep thinker. He's an avid learner. He's got intellection, super smart guy, and he's studied sales for so many years that he created an entire new category of sales training called High Focus Communication. Now, let me just give you a little backdrop, because this will answer your question about how sales AI works. He teaches people to focus on the customer. Well, everybody in sales says, oh, I focus on the customer. And then they proceed to talk about themselves, their company, their products, its features and its benefits. Almost all sales, communication and almost all marketing material says, buy our product because we have this and we do this and we'll solve this problem. We're award winning and we've done all these great things. It's 100% rah, rah rah about me. Is that customer focused? No. So Joe has reversed the pattern of communication so that instead of I and we and us and here's all the things we'll do for you, it changes it so that all your communication is, hey, you, Whitney, your sales team, when you learn high focus, your team will be able to talk to customers about their problems and your salespeople will not be talking about themselves and you, but they will be investing in conversations around how it will. How if they choose to use your product, that they will have this outcome and this outcome, and how will that affect their life. So, it's a complete different perspective and it works incredibly well. Joe has so many clients who have doubled or tripled their sales close rates because they flipped all of their we we we I, I, I, me, me, me to you and yours. And today things look like this. But if you choose this path, your future will look like this. And so, he knows the psychological motivations behind selling. And he's just a brilliant trainer. He's trained 20 or 25,000 people on this. But here's the problem. Joe started training me and my co-founder, Clint and our sales team, and we kept listening and learning and never doing what he taught. This was three years ago or four years ago. I told Joe, Joe, this is the hardest thing I've ever tried to implement. I wrote in a journal for 35 years. What perspective do I use? First person I did this, I did that.

**Paul Allen:** When people ask me about my company, I tell them about my company, about my products, about what it what it's doing. It's like I am so neurologically, you know, my pathways are all I, I, I, me me, me, we we we. And I said, Joe, this is really hard. So, we hired some data scientists and we built AI that would detect high focus or low focus. And we started an email grading tool for Joe. And you can go to high focus AI and sign up for his service. But it's all built by Soar, and it's what led us to do machine learning and AI three years ago or four years ago, and now we're able to take whatever patterns he recognized and give feedback on every call and every zoom meeting and every, uh, email. And within a few weeks of getting that feedback, I totally mastered high focus communication in writing. And when I'm intentional about it, I can fall into high focus communication on a sales call. And it's a complete game changer. So, training can be really difficult if it's not natural, if it doesn't suit your current habits, it doesn't fit your current habits. But with AI feedback, you get, you know, game film after every call and within a few weeks or months like you could achieve mastery. I think of almost any training technique.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, before I hop off this and go to something else, I'm just curious on the companies. So, you talked about sales, what are 1 or 2 of your other companies that you're incubating that's further along right now or that you're just excited about?

**Paul Allen:** Well, the first company we incorporated was Citizen Portal AI, that was last January. And since we incorporated it. There have been maybe 600,000 hours of city council meetings, school board meetings all across the country. Every single jurisdiction has been mapped, and every government recorded video that we can find is being transcribed and indexed. And if you're a citizen living in some small town or some city, in some county in some state, the goal of Citizen Portal would be that you can log in and find out what was said at all the meetings that your government officials, your elected representatives in this republic, constitutional republic, all of us have elected officials who are supposed to represent us. And Citizen Portal hopes that every citizen of the United States will be able to, at a glance, find out what your elected officials are doing and saying on any topic that matters to you. And not only the keyword search engine is there, but you can also use what's called a retrieval augmented generation query. It's a powerful AI query engine where you could ask a question like a GPT and find out what's going on in your school board. What decisions have they made over the past 12 months? What are they planning to discuss in the next meeting? In fact, Citizen Portal is going to be launching thousands of GPTs in the OpenAI GPT store so that you could go and find Virginia GPT and you ask it a question. It will know what's going on in Virginia government. So the goal of Citizen Portal is a platform to help every citizen in the world become informed and engaged so that we can be stronger together as a country, and that the democratic foundations of our country, that every person matters, every voice matters, but every citizen needs to become informed and aware of what's going on. And we think Citizen Portal has a chance to do that. There's a crowdfunding right now on [startengine.com/citizen-portal](https://startengine.com/citizen-portal), and there's a lot of funding that's coming into this from a lot of people.

**Whitney Johnson:** It's interesting because we just had local elections here and I, I found myself frustrated because I wanted to figure out, you know, who am I going to vote for. And fortunately, the local newspaper did a write-up on each of the candidates. But what if I didn't have the local newspaper? And so, I think it's that ability, because right now it ends up really favoring the incumbents as opposed to people who are not, you know, people who are new. And so, I, I find what you're doing around that very intriguing in that regard.

**Paul Allen:** I spoke to about three hundred people on Saturday about Citizen Portal, and I believe less than 5% have a local newspaper that's covering government. You know, there's just the demise of the newspaper industry with all the ad dollars going to the internet companies has led to a loss of good journalism around local, county and state government. And so, there's a huge void. In fact, if you think about the Fourth Estate or the fourth branch of government, which has always been historically playing a big role in checks and balances on government authority, that whole Fourth Estate has largely disappeared. And I think the reason citizen distrust in government is at an all-time high is we don't know what's going on, because those wonderful journalists who for centuries went and recorded and reported on what was going on and even investigated and told us what was happening, that's gone mostly. And so, Citizen Portal could play a role in helping everyone get firsthand access to what's going on in government and after Citizen Portal, we're launching Faith Portal, which hopes to take all the sermons taught in all the churches, mosques and synagogues across the country and around the world. And everyone in the faith community, which is the majority of humankind, could then have a search engine of your favorite religious teacher and an AI that you could chat with so that you could remember, what did my pastor say about divorce, and what did my pastor say about anger or forgiveness, or the suffering of Jesus? And all these faith communities haven't got these powerful digital tools or AI that reinforces the teaching.

**Paul Allen:** Now, AI can hallucinate. And what we're doing with retrieval augmented generation is that we don't hallucinate like a creative writer, but the AI's that Soar is building are more like a perfectly knowledgeable librarian retrieving what the humans said, wrote, or preached instead of making stuff up. So, while I love generative AI, I think it's kind of scary. You wouldn't want to, you know, trust every answer that GPT-4, GPT gives you. So, Faith Portal, Founder Portal. Founder Portal is AI for entrepreneurs, and it will be trained by tens of thousands of videos and podcasts and books by the world's greatest entrepreneurs and entrepreneur teachers. And so, the AI will coach you every step of the way from idea to exit. And that's an exciting product. And then a family portal is coming out. I won't go into detail there, but a friend portal will come out.

**Paul Allen:** I, I think that Facebook ruined the word friend, and that loneliness is at an all-time high around the world. And even though Facebook connected us to all of our friends, you don't have a thousand friends Whitney you don't have 5000 friends. You're lucky if you've got 3 or 4 close friends that you can call at 3 a.m. if there's an emergency. If you don't have any close friends that you can rely on or count on, it's more dangerous to your longevity than smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. So, I think the word friend has been ruined. But Gallup once again published the world's best research on friendship in a book called *Vital Friends*, and we're hoping to collaborate with them somehow. And if everyone could take these assessments to find out who your friends really are, and what role do they play in your life, and how do you preserve that friendship forever? Gallup has discovered the reason why friendships break down, so Friend Portal will use AI to help you become a good friend, but also find out who your real friends are and align your expectations of friendship with what that person can naturally provide for you in that friendship.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's exciting.

**Paul Allen:** Yeah. Tom Rath, who wrote the book, basically found that every relationship, whether it's marriage or friendship, breaks down when the expectation of one party doesn't match what the person other party can provide. And it's really an issue of talent and strength and match, and expectations can be modified so that it's the right expectation of the right person, and then you're never disappointed.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, this is a this is a more tactical question. And I'm just wondering if you have an answer. So, you've got your strengths on StrengthsFinder which you outlined learner, input, ideation, intellection, strategic, analytical and there's many more. How would you use AI right now to help ensure that you are leaning into and doubling down on those strengths on a daily basis? What would you do?

**Paul Allen:** So, our team is currently working on what we call a copilot. For every occupation type, there's like 1200 occupations at the department of the O\*net database from the DOL. And there are a couple of things that the copilots that are being designed will do. One is it will ask the person what your strengths are or, you know, either your top five or the ones that matter to you. It turns out my seventh, eighth and ninth matter a great deal to me. Competition activator. Achiever. I'm driven to win. I hate to lose. I like to get lots done. And I like to start now. So, take all my thinking themes. I probably should have been an academician if it wasn't for. Competition activator achiever. I don't think those would work really well in an academic situation, professor. You know, so competition activator achiever really flavor my thinking themes. So, the AI copilot that my team is building and designing that AI will be one of the first users of. Will look at my day, my schedule, my plans, my goals, and evaluate it through the lens of my top themes and give me suggestions on how I can get more time doing those things and delegate the things that other people on the team have, where they have strengths that I don't have, and they actually would love to do the task that I'm currently grinding out because I don't like this task. So, one of the fun things to me to imagine about the future of AI and workplace and strengths and occupational roles, is that I could not just be aware of one person and the tasks they have to accomplish, but the entire organization and the variety of strengths I have.

**Paul Allen:** I had a podcast interview with a really fantastic podcast. I think it was called Adventures in Machine Learning. It was about a 90-minute interview, and as we were discussing Jira tickets, a lot of engineers will use Jira to assign tasks. And this engineer on the other side of the call said, I wonder how many engineers have to suffer through doing JIRA tasks because they just got assigned to it, because they hate that task and other tasks on the JIRA board that they would love to do got assigned to someone else who hates the task they got assigned. So, imagine an AI that's not only aware of strengths, but also past work and what you loved and what you didn't love. And it's also aware of the team and the and the whole project goals and all that has to be done. The manager, with the help of AI, could make sure that the majority of tasks are assigned to the person, that it will energize and light up, and they'll do great work, and they'll and they'll feel invigorated rather than, oh, I have to do this again. So, so, you know, we're just getting started with the copilot feature, but we're going to weave together a number of elements from other organizations and thought leaders into something that we hope will work great for individuals, but also incredibly well across an organization are so good.

**Whitney Johnson:** When you think about the S Curve, and you think about Soar and what you're building - you're definitely not, you're not going to tell me you're in mastery. Would you say you're on the launch point or are you in the sweet spot?



**Paul Allen:** Definitely on the launch point. And the reason is, while I've started many companies in the past, I've often stepped down as CEO because I didn't like the responsibility of being in charge of everything. I really like creating products, marketing products, doing the things I love to do. So, I've often stepped down as CEO well, in this Soar AI studio model. I'm the CEO of the parent company, and we'll need to bring in 15 CEOs in the next 2 or 3 years. And that is definitely launch point for me. On the learning curve. I'm not great at delegating. I'm not great at hiring. I've been very lucky to hire brilliant people. But it wasn't. It wasn't because I had a system. I just was blessed or lucky to find the right people at the right time. But I've also hired a lot of people that didn't turn out to be the right fit. And so, I think that's a huge challenge to recruit values-based people that aren't trying to get super rich, and they're trying to find a way to use AI to uplift humanity in our legal AI portal, our medical, our health portal, our finance portal. AI could really help all of us go through all of our S Curves in life much more quickly, because it can personalize the advice and speed up the game film, give us more moments to reflect. I really am bullish about how AI could affect the quality of life and the overall journey of every human being in all contexts of life. I'm really excited about that. But certainly, I'm at the launch point on understanding how to build a portfolio of companies led by great values-based leaders.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, you're, so you would say your mastery of knowing how to incubate and start a company, but you feel like you're on the launch point of knowing how to build out a portfolio and, and scale the companies within that portfolio.

**Paul Allen:** That's exactly right.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, Paul, what was useful for you today?

**Paul Allen:** Whitney talking to you and listening to your thoughtful questions. I've been an admirer of the kinds of questions you ask and how personally, personally you customize the questions to your guests. So, thank you for that. I'm on a journey myself to try to be more curious about people and learn more about people. And I know, as John Maxwell says, great leaders ask great questions. So, one thing that your book has been getting me excited about for the first time in my life is to create a vision board for the next five years, but you call it an action board.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's Tara Swart, Tara Swart.

**Paul Allen:** I've started working on this and I'm very excited that I will soon have a visualization of, you know, the next several years of my life with family, faith and work goals all visually there last night in the college football championship, the quarterback from Michigan, the commentators were talking about his visualization of his goals for the past few years, including a rose in his teeth from the Rose Bowl like he just has been visualizing for years. And it reminded me of, of what you've been talking about and advising us all to do so I think the takeaway from today is, Paul, keep following Whitney's work and her S Curve and learn as much as you can from her and her guests, because that will really help you get through your next S Curve.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ah, and that reminds me back to the high focus AI. Right, like, how do you just focus on the question, you know, focus on the person you're talking to. But I love that visualization of the rose. Okay. So, any final thoughts, closing thoughts that you would like to share with our guests, not our guests. You're the guest with our listeners.

**Paul Allen:** You know, just that the world does seem to be hurtling towards really, really difficult generational problems. Both the Israeli, uh, Hamas conflict, the Ukraine, Russia conflict, the trillion-dollar interest payment on the debt, the \$34 trillion, the kind of out-of-control government. I actually think we're facing really, really challenging times. And my advice to everyone in the world is to start by looking at what talents did God give you, and how can you find out what those are? StrengthsFinder, CliftonStrengths is one instrument talking to other people. There's lots of clues to talent, but I really think that for humanity to deal with the massive challenges geopolitical, financial, environmental, educational, cultural, all these different headwinds that we're facing, and I think the fear is, is tangible. People are so afraid and young people aren't dating and marrying and having kids. That's the, a most important, joyful part of life is to get married and to have children and to and to grow and raise your children, invest in them, and have this instant love for them. That is that is divine. It's just not human. And so people are short, you

know, or they're just cutting, selling them themselves short because of fear. And yet I believe that we have all been equipped collectively with the right tools and resources to overcome the challenges of our day. And if we collaboratively, collectively do that and more good people are harnessing their talents and strengths to overcome, we can create a really, really bright future, I think. Jordan Peterson held a conference in London called the Alliance for Responsible Citizens, where they're trying to say, here are the six big issues facing the world. And here's the current fearful narrative on each of these six areas. Let's create a new narrative, and then let's aim towards having that new narrative be the one that plays out in real life.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. All right, Paul, thank you so much for joining us. It's been a pleasure.

**Paul Allen:** Thank you. Whitney.

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It's easy to think about what's unique to AI. What we as flesh and bone can't do. Picture server farms the size of villages, able to compute asteroid trajectories and compose new sonnets in an instant. A program that can take one look at a student's wrong answers and invent a personalized lesson plan. Millions of stock trades made in the blink of an eye. I get this sense from Paul, though, that the future is centered around what **only** we as humans can do. Think about it this way – would an AI have come up with democracy, out of an ideal that participation in politics is a noble endeavor? Probably not. There's an abstractness, a *je ne sais quoi* that only the human touch can give. Like the feeling you get when you see a Picasso painting. However, can AI supplement our democracies today? Yes – and Paul showed us how it's already doing just that. Where local newspapers are struggling to survive, AI steps in to give us the information we need to make an educated decision when it comes time to vote. Can AI dream, like we dream? Can it dream like Alexander the Great did, the young Macedonian king finding the courage to invade the biggest empire in the world at the time, the Persians – and win? No, but it could have helped him follow through on those dreams. It could have told him there was a high likelihood that malaria would kill him in Babylon and warned him against one of our most human faults – hubris. When we start seeing AI as tools to magnify and exemplify our own God-given talents, as Paul said, and guardrails against our God-given pitfalls, we don't lose our humanity. Instead, we draw closer to that abstract spark that only we can contribute. For more on artificial intelligence as a co-pilot on our S Curves, there's my recent talk with Chris Duffey at Adobe, [episode 336](#). On learning to play closer to your unique strengths, there's [episode 220](#) with Sarah Feingold. And for a deeper dive into one of those human sparks that machines will never replicate – love – there's [episode 334](#) with Alan Mulally. Thank you again to Paul Allen 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.