

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 371: EDUARDO BRICEÑO

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Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you build high performing people and teams, because organizations don't disrupt, people do. Meaning the fundamental unit of disruption in any organization-- it's you.

So much of what we talk about on here is change - navigating change, embracing change, creating change. I think it's fair to say that if you're listening, change of some form is on your mind. We're no strangers when it comes to figuring out how to get from A to B.

But what happens when we have to change... how we're changing? What happens when we plateau with our progress, and the old models of learning just aren't sticking anymore? What does jumping to that new S Curve look like?

That's where our guest today comes in. Eduardo Briceño is the co-founder of Mindset Works, a firm dedicated to bringing Carol Dweck's growth mindset to workplaces world-wide. He's out now with *The Performance Paradox*, a book focused on that question of changing how you're changing.

From Caracas, Venezuela to the Stanford Business School, Eduardo has navigated all kinds of change, even a fear of public speaking. So, what do we have to learn from him?

I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So, Eduardo, I want to start off on a philosophical note. When did you start caring about purpose? And when did purpose become your purpose?

Eduardo Briceño: I did not, for most of my life, in early life and early adulthood, I did not care about purpose. So, I love your question and I started caring about purpose when I got physically sick. I got a repetitive strain injury called myofascial pain syndrome, which was very hard to diagnose at the beginning. And so, I didn't know what I had, and I thought it was a really horrible thing that was happening to me. So, I went on a journey to figure out what was going on with me, and eventually I learned that it was a repetitive strain injury, and I learned that that was a symptom. There were a lot of root causes of that symptom that I had to learn about, about how I was living like I was not eating nutritiously, I wasn't sleeping well or exercising. But I also learned that, and, for example, the way that I was holding my body, I was very tense. I was wanting to go through my whole day as a sprint to try to perform at my best all the time, which I could have done in a different way. But I was doing it by tensing my muscles all the time, and that was making them kind of shorter and permanently contracted, which was creating health problems because the blood couldn't come into the muscle to help it heal.

Eduardo Briceño: And so that was a lot of some of the example, things that I learned. But one of the things I learned is, wow, I can't take my hands for granted and my ability to do things for granted, and I don't feel like I'm doing something particularly useful with them. Like in my life, I'm not making an impact on anybody else. And you know, what a shame if I have lived and then, you know, I haven't done anything with my life. And so that's when I realized that in combination with observing my wife Allison, who had gone through a few job changes and she had been, you know, she had liked her job, but she hadn't loved them. And when she became a teacher, I saw a change in her where I realized, wow, she found her purpose. She found something that is really making her life richer. And I can very clearly see I don't have that for myself. I want to try to, you know, find that and develop that for myself. And so that took me on a journey to, to figure out what that was. You also have kind of what, when my current purpose became my purpose. You want me to go into that or...

Whitney Johnson: Not yet. I want to ask you a couple questions because I have some curiosities come up. So, how old were you when all of this was happening? When you had this injury?

Eduardo Briceño: 27 years old. I was living in Menlo Park, California. I'm originally from Caracas, Venezuela, and had lived in Oklahoma and Philadelphia and New York. And I thought I was, you know, the luckiest person alive, being, working in venture capital, being, you know, paid a lot of money and meeting with incredible entrepreneurs every day, had like my own office with a mahogany desk and beautiful trees outside and my body eventually had to say, hey, like, hold on. Like there's something missing here.

Whitney Johnson: So were you, when you're talking about this, I'm picturing that you were just sort of, like, tense all the time. Like every part of your, you were just tense. Is that what it was like?

Eduardo Briceño: It was. And I think part of that was proactive. I just thought, you know, when somebody is going to do a sprint in a, in a track run, I think you want to like, tense all your muscles and perform at your best. And so that's the image that I was having. And also, because I felt a bit that I was outside of what my knowledge was like. I was a venture capitalist, and I didn't have any operating experience. And I was supposed to be like making decisions about what were good and bad investment opportunities and what made a good management team or not, and what made a great sales leader and a marketing leader. And I don't know. And so like, yeah, it's like I was, I was working with people who were decades more experienced than me, and they were super nice to me, but I just felt like I all of a sudden was supposed to know all these things that I didn't feel I knew, and so I had to pretend. And that created a lot of stress for myself.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. Interesting. And then you at the same time that this was happening, then you were watching your wife, this sort of watching her sense of purpose unfold and, and you had that compare and contrast and you just said something is not working. Yeah. Like really not working.

Eduardo Briceño: I was very happy for her. And sometimes I would go and observe her classroom and see her interact with her students and her parents. And that was super, it made me very happy to see her that way, and it inspired me to try to figure out what that was going to be for me.

Whitney Johnson: What your purpose was going to be. Okay. So, we're going to we're going to build into purpose. So, I don't want you to tell me quite what it is yet. So, in your book, *The Performance Paradox*, Carol Dweck's work is all over the book. You met her shortly after this health crisis. For listeners who have not come across her writing, which are going to be very few, what should we know about her? And what does she mean to you?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, she has been my most influential mentor and supporter. I imagine there are parallels between you and Clayton Christensen in that way and others who have mentored you, but in particular him and for me is Carol and her work. She discovered and coined the terms growth mindset and fixed mindset, which often a lot of people have heard about. But if I ask listeners, what does growth mindset mean to you? People might answer and we hear lots of different answers, like it's working hard or persevering or having high expectations, believing anything is possible. And a growth mindset is none of those things. So, I want to be really clear. A growth mindset is a perspective about the nature of human beings, is specifically the belief that we can change the belief that our abilities or qualities are malleable, and we can develop them over time. And so, what all the growth, all the research has shown is that this belief that we can change is necessary, but not sufficient for us to change, for us to drive our own change. And when we believe that we can't change in certain ways, or that other people can't change in certain ways, that creates self-fulfilling prophecies. And so, yeah, I met her. I co-founded an organization called Mindset Works with her, and she's been my dear kind of mentor for the last 16 years.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. All right. So, you have written a book and um, let's get into it. Tell us. Well. What is the performance paradox?

Eduardo Briceño: The performance paradox is the counterintuitive reality that if we are constantly performing, our performance suffers. And that is what a lot of us are doing. And that's what I was doing, you know, before meeting Carol. Meaning, I was just working really hard, doing my best. And I thought that that was the way to improve and to succeed. Trying to minimize mistakes, trying to be as flawless as I could. And what I've realized is that in order to improve and to learn and to grow, we have to engage in a different type of effort, right? There's effort to perform and execute when we do things as best as we know how, trying to minimize mistakes, that's important. That's how we get things done. That's how we contribute. But we also need to be deliberate about engaging in a different form of effort, which is when we leap beyond the known, when we do things that we don't know if they're going to work well or not, when we experiment, when we ask more questions, if we make mistakes, we think about those mistakes, and we talk about those mistakes with others to figure out what can we learn from these things, what could we try differently? And all of those things are different from just getting things done. And so, most of us are going about our days just worried about going through our checklist, right, getting things done. And that keeps us stagnant, that actually it works to improve when we are novices, when we know nothing about something and we just try to do it, we'll get better. But once we become proficient, if we just keep trying to do, do, do we stay at the same level of efficacy?

Whitney Johnson: That's interesting. That's interesting. So, let's unpack this for a minute, because if I think about when I typically think about the S curve and moving along an S curve, I think that at the launch point of the curve, there's a lot of exploration that's taking place. And because there's a lot of exploration, we can get performative. And what I hear you saying is that there are some elements of when you're starting something new, that a checklist serves a purpose. And maybe it's the kind of checklist that you need to have in place. It's not to perform, but it's a checklist to learn. But once you move into the sweet spot and you start to get proficient, or even if you get into mastery, if you just stick with the checklist, then you're never going to get better because you're not challenging yourself anymore. You're not looking for opportunities to grow and develop. Am I tracking with what you're saying?

Eduardo Briceño: Yeah, and I would add that it connects a little bit to your interest in purpose from earlier in the conversation. Is that at the beginning when we are exploring and collecting in the launch point, all of what we're doing is we're trying to explore whether this activity is something that we might enjoy. And in order to do that, like deliberate practice is not something that's going to tell me, am I going to enjoy playing golf? Right. So, if I'm exploring, is golf something that I could enjoy? Probably like going out and playing a game, even if I don't know how to play, is going to give me some information. Is this an activity that I could enjoy? And so, playing a game of golf is a performative activity. I'm trying to hit the ball as best as I can, as close to the hole as I can. That's not a deliberate practice. That's not a strategy that's designed for improvement, is a strategy that's designed for performance. But it serves the purpose early on of giving me information. Is this something that I might enjoy? And because I'm so bad, like I'm going to learn along the way because I'm going to hit the ball or I'm just going to completely miss it, and then I'm going to adjust accordingly because I'm so bad. I don't need great strategies to improve. So that's part of what's happening early on.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. So, let's then talk about you in particular. So, you're the CEO of Mindset Works. You were for 13 years again; you were a co-founder. When did you fall into the performance paradox there?

Eduardo Briceño: Oh, like very early on. So, I was not clear on this difference between what I call the learning zone and the performance zone when we started it and what we wanted to do. And you know what? I was passionate about this idea of growth mindset because I, I read Carroll's book *Mindset*. It gave me so much insight about how I was stuck in a fixed mindset in different parts of my life, and that had created some big unlocks for me, like in social skills or athletics. And I wanted to, you know, we all wanted to bring this out into the world and help other people with it. And so, but my thinking was, okay, we're going to be the most growth minded organization in the world. And that means, you know, we're going to hire people wherever they are, and we're just going to hire the most passionate people about learning and growth and about making schools amazing places to be. Places where learning is so fun. And that's what people do every day. And so, because of that, I didn't hire, and we didn't hire the beginning for skills. We only hired for passion and purpose. And I just thought, like, if we're the most growth minded organization in the world, people are just going to develop their skills really quickly. And so, they don't need to come with skills. And that was naive because learning takes time. Developing skills takes time. It's like you say in your in your books, mark growth.

Eduardo Briceño: Like when you have experience and expert people in certain things in your organization, then other people can learn from those people and helps you perform. So, for example, we didn't have, people who knew how to, how school districts work and how the sales process works. And so, we had to kind of learn on the go and, and construct all of our knowledge. And that just took very, very long. And so that lesson was a painful one. Eventually, you know, we were able to bring expertise and get more mentors and bring more resources also to spend more learning, because the other thing we did is, being in venture capital, I saw a lot of pressure from board members to grow quickly. And I saw our journey in growth mindset as a marathon, not a sprint. And so, we bootstrapped, and we didn't raise money. And so, as a result of that, we were under-resourced. And as a result of that, and we tried to like we tried to serve too many customers too quickly, as opposed to focusing on a few customers more, more deliberately about learning from those customers. And as a result of that, we had to spend too much time performing rather than learning, because we had to serve, you know, customers and be doing fire drills and responding to customer service requests. So that was part of that. We got into the performance paradox ourselves in several ways.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. So, what's the learning zone and what's the performing zone? Just definitionally really simple.

Eduardo Briceño: The performance zone is when we are focused on performing, which means getting, doing things as best as we know how, trying to minimize mistakes. And the learning zone is when we are, when our goal is to improve. And so, we are going beyond the known. We're trying things that may or may not work. And both of these zones are really important. We can alternate between the two, and we can also integrate them and do both at the same time in what I call, learning while doing.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. All right. So going back to your example with your company, you, because you wanted to help people have, you know, hire people with a growth mindset, you from a business standpoint, needed to have people be in the learning zone too long to be profitable in the way that you need it to be. But then you also had this place of like, okay, now we've got these services that we need to deliver. People need us to perform. But we're performing so much we don't have the space to learn. And so, what you were saying is you had to figure out. So, your business became a laboratory for you to optimize the learning and the performing zones. Is that accurate?

Eduardo Briceño: Absolutely.

Whitney Johnson: What was the hardest part of writing this book?

Eduardo Briceño: This book was way outside of what's called the zone of proximal development. Like, you know, this was a big, big challenge for me. I wasn't planning to write a book. I didn't think I was ready to write a book. And at the beginning, the most challenging part for me was I didn't feel I had enough stories. And there are a ton of stories in the book, but I at the beginning focused on interviewing people to collect stories and to be able to show rather than tell a lot of the strategies. And so, I interviewed over 100 people. But there are a lot of other challenging aspects of writing the book. Finding my voice took about a year, just like, you know, the cadence and how deep to go into the stories versus fast moving from one thing to the other, and how much science and concepts to put in versus, you know, stories and analogies. And so, it's, it took a collaboration with very experienced writers and editors and tons of feedback. And eventually I'm very proud of what we created. But it was a huge, huge effort that took a lot of work.

Whitney Johnson: You know, Eduardo, it's interesting. So, it sounds like the interviews and the stories, you know, from a checklist perspective, you're like, oh, I can go out and get those. But the learning zone for you to put it into your language, was the finding your voice, which I think is just so interesting. So, I remember when I first started writing, this is like 2000. Well, let me back up. So, I'm on Wall Street as an equity analyst, so I know how to write. I mean, I'm writing research reports, but it's a very different thing to go from writing an investment memo, for example, like you did, to writing something in your voice. And, and for me, and it sounds like you had a similar experience, is like, well, what is my voice, I don't know what my voice is, and I had someone say to me very early on, her name was Vicki Sullivan. I'll give her a shout out. She said, you know, you started to find your voice when people who don't know you will read what you've written. I thought that was great. Really great because it takes a while to find out, like, what is my voice? How do I sound? How do I, am I serious? Am I, you know, am I light? Am I funny, you know? So anyway, it's an interesting question. So, what did you discover about your voice? What is your voice?

Eduardo Briceño: I love what you said, and I resonate with that. And I would say that, in our voice we have different registers. Like the way I speak with my wife is different than the way I speak with my friends, or the way that I present, or the way that I write in this type of book or an investment memo. Those are different registers. And so, in this voice, I learned that I need to be a lot more concise than what I used to be. I had to move a lot quicker from idea to idea, from story to story. And I had to go sometimes a little less deep and less intellectual and more, finding ways that people can relate to and connect to, and kind of a little bit, simplify a little bit. But still, I wanted to make it rigorous and valuable and the whole thing like useful. And so that that tension was also something that took some time to figure out.

Whitney Johnson: Mm. Well, and we're not even, we haven't even broached the fact that you are from Caracas, Venezuela. And probably English is not your first language.

Eduardo Briceño: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Right. So, here's the question for you because as you well know, I am a deep, deep lover of everything Spanish. How does the fact that you are a native Spanish speaker influence, where do you see that that ethos come through in your writing? In English?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, I would say what comes to my mind is that it creates challenges. One challenge is that I tend to at the beginning, like I tend to write very long sentences in Spanish. I don't know if you've noticed when you read in Spanish, they're very long sentences, and often they also use more complex language. Like when I read in Spanish, the words are a lot different, more literary than in English, the words tend to be simpler. So, I had to learn that there's a lot of challenges around grammar, like prepositions. ChatGPT, one of the ways that is really useful to me is just in checking my grammar. And so, I, what comes to my mind is challenges. But I am sure that there are also kind of strengths that I probably haven't even, like, become aware of.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Okay. That's your challenge for today is to think about what some of the strengths are. So, my guess is, I'll tell you what one of my guesses is. I've noticed that when I speak Spanish, I'm much more emotive. And there's more feeling to what I'm saying because Spanish has, it's less, it's less technical, it's less antiseptic. And so, I suspect that you're, the feeling and emotion of Spanish somehow infuses its way into your storytelling and your writing. That's my guess.

Eduardo Briceño: That's great. And I need to think about more about that. But that resonates. My intuition is that there's something there for sure for me as well. And the other thing that comes to mind is because of those challenges and because I've gone through a lot of changes, partly because of where I come from and the experiences I had, I have experienced a lot of change myself. And so, in the work that I do in what I write, that heritage and the journey that I've gone through definitely creates a lot of strength for my understanding and for my storytelling that I can rely on.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, you just opened that door, so I'm going to walk on through it. Eduardo, you just said where I came from. The experiences that I've had. Tell us about one of your childhood experiences that was formative for you and made you come to the United States, like, introduce us to childhood, Eduardo.

Eduardo Briceño: Well, you know, there's a lot to this, but one aspect is when I was in elementary school and middle school and high school in Caracas, Venezuela, I hated the school bell. Okay. And it wasn't the school bell that told me that class was starting or that the day was ending. It was the school bell that told me that it was time for recess. And the reason is that I was very anxious of speaking with anybody else, including other kids, and I didn't know how to do it. And I hated the pressure that I felt to talk about girls like they were objects and to make fun of other kids. So, I think that, and I think this has changed and the whole world has improved. But, you know, we're not 100% there. But it was a, I think, in retrospect, like a place of a lot of machismo and, and more kind of gender role differences and as you know, so. So, I tried to be invisible and not talk to people. And so, in college I studied chemical engineering and finance. And in grad school I went to get an MBA. And this is partly like my comfort being ideas and facts and reasoning and logic. And so, it was staying within that. But when I when I got to grad school, the class that was most popular and that was most highly rated was a class called Interpersonal Dynamics.

Eduardo Briceño: And people call it touchy feely. And so, I signed up for it. And I learned in that class something that I had never heard before, which is that emotions are useful and that they're one of the ways that they're useful is to communicate and to share our emotions. And that connects us with others. And it helps us talk about the things that are affecting us. And so, in one of, we had a practicum where once a week we formed a, a circle, 12 of us called a T group, and we just shared vulnerably, and we used emotions to communicate with each other. There was a lot of crying in this class. I really got into it and there was a time, there was a particular time when, because I was really into the conversations intellectually, because I didn't think of myself as an emotional person. And, and I wasn't an emotional person, but I was interested in learning about my classmates. And I also was fascinated by this idea, this very high achieving Stanford students who seemed all put together. They, we all had baggage. They all had baggage. I had baggage, and but I was all intellectual, while other people were a lot more emotional. And one day, a classmate that was sitting next to me, he turned to me and said, Eduardo, you know, there's something I don't understand about you.

Eduardo Briceño: You know, way back you told me that you and your wife, Allison, have decided not to have kids. And, I don't understand, like, doesn't that make you sad? And I was like, you know, we've thought about this, and we know that there are things that we are not going to be able to experience, but we think we can't have it all. And we've thought it through. And, you know, we're comfortable with this. This is the right decision for us.

And he said, yeah, but doesn't it make you feel sad? I was like, yeah, it makes me feel sad that I won't be a parent, but it makes me happy that I'll be able to do other things. And he said, no, no, no, you don't get it. Like you, you will never hold your newborn baby in your arms and feel her weight and look at her eyes and feel the warmth of her skin and her heartbeat against yours. Doesn't that make you feel sad? And I paused, and I could all of a sudden feel this moment that would never come. And I started feeling a tingling in the tip of my toes that shut up my body. And when it got to the top of my head, like it just took just one second. Like I just burst out into tears, and I was just, um, it was uncontrollable.

Eduardo Briceño: And it was the, it was complete, intense emotion, like I'd never felt before in that way. And, it wasn't like I was rethinking our decision to have kids. I thought, you know, I was confident in that decision, but it was that I really felt this moment that I would never come. That would be so special. And the amazing thing is that from then on, and it didn't have anything with having kids or not, but from then on, in every session of our two groups, no matter what anybody shared, I was bawling. I was like, all of a sudden something had changed in my body. A floodgate had opened and I all of a sudden had become super empathetic. And there was all this emotion and energy that needed to come out of me, of me. And it was happening in the class. It was also happening outside of class, like I never cried in movies, but for months, you know, when we were, when Allison and I were watching sitcoms, I was crying and a few months later, something really sad happened, which is that our beloved dog Jake died, and Jake was the first dog I ever had. He was my best friend. Like, he grew up with Allison. He was our child, right? And so, I was bawling. And one day I was talking to my parents on the phone, and I was telling them that Jake died, and they became very uncomfortable.

Eduardo Briceño: And they said, I understand this is sad, but you can't react like this. You have to control yourself. And then I got mad. I was like, no, you know, emotions are useful, and I have to be able to feel them and express them. And I realized, wow, you know, I realized that my whole life for so long, along with those messages of, you know, that pressure that I felt to talk about girls like they were objects and to make fun of other kids. I also had always heard that the message like boys don't cry and men are not supposed to feel, you know, sadness or sorrow. And so now my body had opened this floodgate, tsunami of emotions. And that was really healing. And I realized, like, this is something I had to go through in order to heal. So, I've become a lot more emotional. That's just one example. And also, it ties into a way that I have changed a lot too, which is I used to avoid people. I used to be very uncomfortable with people, and now I actually get energy by being in groups and being conversations and learning about people. So, I have, my personality has changed quite a lot. And that's something that is what my work is about, right? It's about helping us change.

Whitney Johnson: Right. And it's interesting to hear you say this. And I'm actually really happy to hear it because I remember having a conversation, you know, years ago with someone who was in the, you know, leadership development space. And they said, you know, one of the risks when people are in leadership development is that they talk about growth mindset, but they don't have a growth mindset. You know, they talk about the learning zone, but they're always in their performing, performance zone. And so, to hear you talk about how you said, okay, I am going to change, I am going to figure out how to change, you actually have changed. And I think that's really powerful because it makes it so that people, at least for me, then I'm willing to say, okay, I want to hear what he has to say because he is doing, he is living what he is teaching.

Eduardo Briceño: Thank you. That means a lot.

Whitney Johnson: So, all right, just a few more questions for you. When you think about the idea of, of the growth mindset and in your brain, do you think about, like, learning zone and performance zone, do you think of those as children of growth mindset? Do you think of them as on the shoulders of growth mindset? Do you think how do you how do you constellate those things together in your brain?

Eduardo Briceño: If we think about what are the conditions that need to be true in a person's brain in order for them to be motivated and effective learners, I think of three things. One is a growth mindset, which is the belief that I can change. Second is knowing I know how to change. And so, whether that's habits and systems and strategies and that's the difference between kind of growth mindset, a belief that I can change and the learning zone, performance zone, that's the foundation of I know how to change. Then third is I have a why. I have a reason why I want to put effort into learning and performing. And so those are three things that need to be true in

the brain. And then the fourth thing that's really important is the belief that I belong in a learning community, that the people around me are learners. They value learning. When you engage in learning behaviors, it increases your social status and that you feel you belong in that community. So, that's I think growth mindset and the learning zone are about, like I can learn and learning zone is I know how to learn.

Whitney Johnson: I know how to learn. And then that brings us to the third one, which is why. And so, let's go back to your purpose. So, what is your purpose now?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, um, I have every morning I remind myself of three missions that I call them. One is to generate and radiate love, joy, and kindness. That's just about how I live and how I create my own happiness and create those ripples. Second is inspire a world of learners. And that's what my work is about. That's about fostering growth mindset and learning zone. And number three is catalyze radical imagination. So those are the things that I pursue in my life. Or you know, there's other pursuits. But those are the three missions.

Whitney Johnson: Mm. And is your, is your thought or belief that by helping people know how to optimize the, the learning and the performance zones, that that will create the conditions where you can have a radical imagination, like how does that play out for you and your mind?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, you can apply a growth mindset and purpose and learning and performance zone to, you can think of present forward methods or future back methods. Present forward would be how do I make the present better? And so, there are things like soliciting feedback and continuous improvement and doing A, B, tests and an organization, how does that organization strengthen their culture, you know, next month and next week and next year. And then there's the radical imagination is about future back. So, it's about forget the present, forget what's true today, what would be an amazing future state without any constraints, radically imagining. And then that can come up with ideas and strategies and solutions that are different. It's a different problem-solving method than when you start with the present. So there.

Whitney Johnson: Which one do you prefer, well not prefer. Which one do you most easily default to present forward or future back for you personally?

Eduardo Briceño: Ah, it's a great question. I think it depends on like my mental state at the time and what I'm thinking about, what is being primed. Right. And so, I would say most of the time I spend in future in present forward because that's, that's my work. I want to serve people with their current needs. And that's where I spend most of my time. But I do love to radically imagine so when I have more space, when I have, maybe when I'm inspired by certain things. I do love to go into that place of, like, what could the future be?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Oh. So good. What's an S curve that you have jumped to recently that has nothing to do with your professional life?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, I can think of a couple. First, there's, I would guess that. Let me just give you an example of an opportunistic one and a proactive one. So opportunistic would be this past weekend, I participated in a workshop, facilitated by the moth. So, the moth is a storytelling organization. And four of their trainers came to my town, which is San Jose, which is where you grew up, after you were born in Madrid, Spain. And it was amazing. It was like Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon, and we had, we all told our stories on stage on Sunday evening, and it was really fun. And I learned some useful things. And I guess that was part of a longer S-curve where I, I do have a proactive interest in learning more about storytelling and developing my storytelling skills, but it's not something that I'm proactively doing because I'm just focusing on other escorts right now. But I just took the opportunity since they were going to be in town, and that was awesome. And it was fun. Also, there's small S-curves that are about eating more nutritiously. So, my wife and I, about 15 years ago, we started eating mostly whole food, plant-based foods at home. When we are outside home, we are more flexible. And so, there are s-curves that are about continuing to improve that. Like how can I create salads that are more delicious and faster and easier? And so, there are strategies that we're trying with regards to that.

Whitney Johnson: Oh wait. Well, give us, give us a hot tip on a salad, please.

Eduardo Briceño: The most amazing lesson I've learned, or one of them is that eating whole food, you know, plant based can be delicious. So that that lesson has been life changing to me because when I grew up, I don't know in Latin America what your experiences have been, but in mine, very few vegetables. And then when I ate vegetables, they just weren't prepared great. So, they didn't they didn't taste very well. So, from Doctor Joel Fuhrman and his books, including, *Eat for Health*. There are some recipes at the back. And I went to a weeklong workshop with him, and I learned how delicious this food can be, but it can also be very time consuming to, to create. So, one of the things that I discovered is, smoothies are super convenient, super delicious. So, once a week, I create a bunch of smoothies that I have every morning and but with a salad. And what I'm trying now is to, first, like with my wife collaboratively, just something that's fun that we can do together is just chop a bunch of things, and then you can learn. How do you chop faster, right, with some tools that make you help you do it? And then just have some, some things, like ingredients already chopped in the fridge. And then you can quickly kind of create your salads when you're going to eat. So, we're trying that strategy as a way to think about can we, because yeah, I think that would add a bit more variety.

Whitney Johnson: So, like what do you do like lettuce, strawberry? I mean like what ingredients? So, lettuce strawberries almonds.

Eduardo Briceño: Yeah. Those are great, blueberries, avocado, I love green onions. So, onions and mushrooms have particular nutrients that are not found elsewhere. So, I try to make sure that there's like green onions on top of another type of onion or, or mushrooms, which Alison doesn't love all mushrooms. So, trying to find which are the mushrooms that she likes, that's a part of like the journey. But walnuts are great. Kale or other kind of super greens.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, so good. All right, so, Eduardo, you've written this book. What's next for you? Like, what are you excited about professionally right now?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, something I'm excited about is really continuing to decompress from three intense years writing the book and creating the book. That was really exhausting, and I'm super proud of what we created. But I'm still kind of wrapping up that project and decompressing and finding a new cadence. Which involves also learning how to, like, say no when things that I'm excited about, but that I just can't fit in. Like, I just, I get so excited and want to help people. I want to try to do things, but I can't do everything that I want to do. So, I have to get better at what that filter is and how to manage that. And in terms of excitement, I, with my colleagues, we're building an app that is helping people that is going to help people. And I've used the prototype for two years, is super helpful to me. It helps consolidate information that you that you deem important is a digital flashcard app. So that what happens is that when we think of something that's important to us or we learn something new, we tend to forget more than we think we will, right? We think we're going to remember things, but then we forget most of what we think we'll remember. And so digital, like a space generation, like a digital flashcard example is, is a very effective way to put those things into our long-term memory so that we can think about them when they would be useful, right, so that we can generate them from within our mind.

Whitney Johnson: When you need them and want them.

Eduardo Briceño: Yeah. As opposed to like being able to do Google searches or asking artificial intelligence, which are super useful tools. But the information that we have in our mind is super useful, because then we can bring it up whenever it's useful.

Whitney Johnson: Like when we're having a conversation right now. So, you're building something that's going to allow people to say, oh, I want to remember that and then have a digital flash card. So, if you find a quote that you love, you can remind yourself of it. And it's a convenient way to sort of build that working memory like people had 200 years ago where they had to remember everything. Okay, I love it. What's the thing that you want people to remember about? So, if you had to have people remember one thing from your book, 1 or 2 things from your book, or 1 or 2 things that you would want them to do as a consequence of reading your book, what would what would it be?

Eduardo Briceño: So, one is that in order to improve, we have to be deliberate about improvement. Improvement doesn't happen just from working hard. And so, one thing that we can do is first identify what is it that we're trying to improve, right. And remind ourselves every morning of what that is. So as part of your morning routine, are you remembering ideally in a generation way? So ideally, instead of reading what you want to improve, you want to say, what do I want to improve right now? And then you remember that kind of like a digital flashcard technique. That's a lot more effective, because then throughout the day, you are more likely to bring that up to memory when there are opportunities to improve. And so that primes a growth mindset. It primes the learning zone, and it primes kind of proactive change and proactive growth rather than reactive growth. And the other thing that I would...

Whitney Johnson: Give me an example. So, I understand exactly what you mean. So, like what would be the passive way of doing this versus the, the active way of doing it.

Eduardo Briceño: Sometimes people think of growth mindset as if I make a mistake, then I can learn from it. Right? And so, I just go about my day in the way I go about my day every day. And if I make a mistake, then I respond in a learning way, a proactive way. And an example would be if I am looking to make decisions about what I say yes or no to on a daily basis, I can remind myself every morning, like, what am I trying to improve? And so, then I think about I'm trying to improve. Saying no more slowly and waiting until the next day to make a decision. Right? And so then, then every day I will be more likely when somebody asks me to do something, to remember that this is my intention. And then over time, that will become more automatic.

Whitney Johnson: Got it. Okay, so just remind yourself, my, I have an intention to say yes more slowly, perhaps no more quickly. I'm reminding myself of this. I'm reminding myself that this is important. I'm doing this to anchor my day. And so, the idea is that it's more likely to bubble up into your awareness in the moment when someone says, hey, Eduardo, we really want you to do X, Y, or Z. And you think, yes, I want to. And you think, okay, let me just take it in and I'll wait. But then you have the awareness because you're rewiring your neural pathways.

Eduardo Briceño: Exactly. And the other thing I would offer is that we are very affected by the people around us. So, thinking about how not do the how to engage in proactive learning, not just on our own, but also in our teams, in our families, how do we create cultures of growth where people are deliberate about what they're looking to improve and sharing, thinking with each other so that we can grow together?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. So good. That was the fourth thing that you said which I loved. Okay. So, Eduardo, what has been useful to you in this conversation?

Eduardo Briceño: Well, you know, I loved your question about how growing up in Latin America and speaking Spanish, how that informs my writing. And I need to think more about that from a strength's perspective, not only from like a challenge perspective. And I love that you offered well, I find the Spanish language to be, you know, very emotive, and that can be something that is a strength that, that I rely on. So, that was very useful. And I think, you know, thinking about my life story is something that I'm still trying to unpack. So, your questions about what was formative for you and your early life, that's something that I'm still trying to figure out. And so, thinking about that was helpful for me as well.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. Final thoughts to put a bow on the conversation. Any final word? Parting words.

Eduardo Briceño: I would say that engaging in the S curve. Right. Or in growth and learning zone, sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's uncomfortable. That's why it's disruptive. But at the end of the day, and overall, it enriches our lives and it improves not only the outcomes of us being able to be more skilled and being able to get more things done. But it also enriches the journey, right? And it makes life more interesting and fulfilling. So that's, it increases at the end of the day, kind of our happiness and how we feel. We're being stewards of our lives.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, beautiful Eduardo, thank you so much.

Eduardo Briceño: Thank you. Whitney.

“I want to change,” and “what do I want to change,” are two very different things. The first one is all emotion and motivation, putting your foot down, saying that something is wrong, and things must be different from now on.

The second is arguably harder. It’s actually charting a course once you’ve decided to set sail. There’s the ever-present analysis paralysis, of course, and then there’s all the questions that come up, of purpose, what you’re doing on this earth, the scarcity of time.

But what I’m taking away from my talk with Eduardo is that when we’re just aimed towards this vague notion of change, without narrowing down exactly how we’re going to improve, we’re not... challenging ourselves. We’re just staying within our bubble, where we can dream about change, but we never have to work to put it into practice. Yes, we need to step back to grow, but at some point, you need to step forward again.

Think about how spooked, how nervous Eduardo must have felt to walk into that interpersonal dynamics class, the quote unquote touchy-feely class, in grad school. That early exploration had to shift to deliberate practice, just like how we move from the learning zone to the performance zone. Dreaming of speaking with pride on a stage only takes you so far.

Here’s my action item from today’s conversation. The first step on this journey of the performance paradox is figuring out where you’re stuck in the learning zone. Where, professionally, do you feel comfortable? Is it because you’re in the sweet spot, watching your growth accelerate... or because you’ve stuck around too long at the launch point, or mastery? Where could you afford to feel a bit more uncomfortable?

For more on the enjoyable pain of growth, there’s [episode 312](#) with Tim Harrison. If you’re looking for more insight around this idea of spinning your wheels without getting anywhere, there’s [episode 299](#) with Jennifer Moss. And on this idea of looking busy without getting anything real done, I’d point you to my recent episode with Cal Newport, [episode 368](#).

Thank you again to Eduardo Briceño 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.

