

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 373: NATHAN TANNER

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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 that disruption - it's you.

Self-fulfilling prophecies – and falling into their trap – are part and parcel of being human. From ancient Greek tragedies to television like *Breaking Bad*, they've popped up time and time again. We just can't escape our flaw of telling ourselves stories about the future, and then making them reality.

Our guest today knows quite well the power these prophecies can have. Nathan Tanner will tell you himself he's been battling his victim mindset his entire life. Before he knew he was colorblind, kids were laughing at him for getting the colors wrong on his drawings. He thought he finally had it all with a cushy investment gig at Lehman Brothers. The problem was, he joined up in 2008, right before Lehman went through the biggest bank collapse in history.

Since then, Nathan's worked through top positions at LinkedIn and DoorDash before settling into his own coaching practice. Today, he's out with a new book, suitably titled *The Unconquerable Leader – Mastering the Internal and External Game*. It's all about learning to show up for yourself so that you can properly show up for others.

So, how did Nathan's internal game respond when all of DoorDash's anonymous performance reviews went public?

I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** Way back when, stories were all we had to keep us going. So, your new book, *The Unconquerable Leader*, is cover to back, chock full of stories. But let's start with your story. When you were a kid, what story did you dream about writing for yourself?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yes. I mean, going back to when I was a boy, uh, I wanted to be a professional baseball player and that was all I cared about. I lived for baseball, I loved baseball, unfortunately, around age 12 or 13, reality set in, and I wasn't good enough. And so, I had to, I had to find a new path. And that took many more years to, to figure out.

**Whitney Johnson:** Do you remember that moment when you realized, oh, yeah, I'm not going to be a pro baseball player? What happened?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah, I think it hit me. There was another boy on my team who was just worlds better than me. And seeing the amount I thought I had, the commitment and the drive and seeing both his talent level, but even more so, just the level of commitment he had to practicing and training and preparing. It was like, I, I don't know if this is for me anymore.

**Whitney Johnson:** You're like, he's got ten times the talent, he's got ten times the commitment, which actually goes a little bit to the title of your book, *The Unconquerable Leader*, which we're going to come back in just a minute. Before we get there, though, I want to ask you, you were at DoorDash. Tell us what you did at DoorDash. And how did you know it was time to jump from the S curve of DoorDash to doing something new?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yes, so I joined DoorDash in late 2016. There were about 250 employees when I joined, and I was hired to lead and build out the HR team. It was it was an incredible experience. I mean, I made a very big jump from LinkedIn, which was 10,000 plus employees and an HR team of 4 or 500 to me and a handful of others on the HR team. And it was a, it was a rude awakening there, just jumping into the startup world. And so, I was tasked with a lot of different things right away. One of them was leading performance reviews, and just having to figure out how to do more with less. So, it was a very, very steep learning curve for me. I loved the experience. I loved so many things about being at DoorDash, about leading HR and then wearing a lot of different hats in HR. But for me, ultimately, I found when I reflected on the work, I enjoyed the most and the work I thought I was best at, it was the one-on-one coaching work that I was doing with senior leaders at the company. And so, I went through a coaching training and certification program. I started building a coaching business on the side and ultimately felt like, you know, that was where I wanted to spend the majority of my time. And it was probably five years from when I decided this is exactly what I want to do next before I actually made that jump, because for me, like there were a lot of steps to, to get there. I mean, there was it's a completely new identity and a whole you know, personal disruption process to, to get there.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, from the time that you decided, oh, I really want to run my own business, I want to be a coach. The moment you had that realization, there was a five-year process of preparing to jump to that new S-curve.

**Nathan Tanner:** Yep.

**Whitney Johnson:** I think that's really important because sometimes, Nathan, people will say, you know, I know I want to do something different. It's time for me to disrupt myself. And there's this sense of, and then I'm going to do this, and then tomorrow I will be doing this new thing. And I the other day I was having a conversation with

someone and they said, so. So, tell me about your process of when you became a coach. And I was thinking and reflecting. I was like, well, we first had this epiphany in 2002 when I was working on Wall Street as an equity analyst and thought, I'm more interested in momentum of people than I am of stocks. But when I look at when I wrote the article *Disrupt Yourself* in *HBR*, that was 2012.

**Nathan Tanner:** Oh, wow.

**Whitney Johnson:** It was ten years. I mean, a lot happened during that time. So, it's not, I think it's not dissimilar to what you're describing when you even when you decide, okay, this S-curve is not going to be my long-term curve. And this S curve is where I think I want to go. It can require, see, you're smarter than I am - so, it only took you five years. It took me ten.

**Nathan Tanner:** Well, if I may Whitney. I mean, it was five years from when I made the firm decision. This is what I'm doing. There were probably, you know, 4 or 5 years before that of I think there might be something there. Let's talk to this person who's a coach. I remember reaching out to, to you and getting your perspective on things. And so, I think, you know, for many, at least for me, I can only speak for myself. There's a time period of, oh, there's something I'm curious about something here. Let's scratch that itch and see where it goes. And there were many years of that as well.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. There's that exploratory phase. Yeah. I just, when you said that I thought let's call that out because I think it will be comforting for people who are thinking about doing something new and realize that gestation period may take five, ten years. All right. So, you've written a book. It's about balancing your focus on the external game. The bottom line, the shareholders, all of that with the internal game. When you and I were talking prior to the podcast, and also when I read your book, you told me about a time where all the performance reviews were made well, not anonymous. Tell us about that and how did your internal game react?

**Nathan Tanner:** Oh. Good question. Yeah. So, I had led performance reviews several years, at DoorDash and I remember the first year I had a very short period to do it in like three weeks, where at LinkedIn I, we had months to prepare for it. And I was like, I don't think I can do this. And my boss was like, well, if you can't do it, we'll find someone else who can do it for you. And I was like, okay, uh, yes, I can. I can figure it out. And then as the company got larger each year, we had to change our approach and how we were going to run the review process, because now you have several thousands of people. And so I went through with my team, and we found a software vendor that was going to manage all of this feedback, and we had promised the employees that this feedback was going to be anonymous. So, I'm getting a performance review for myself. My manager is going to gather feedback from my direct reports from my peers. All of this feedback, it's going to be anonymous, and then it's going to be shared with me. Well, I had assigned the responsibility of making sure this tool worked to one of my direct reports, and I had had such a busy day.

**Nathan Tanner:** I wasn't there to check in on this process to make sure that it worked. I had just assumed that this person was going to take, to handle it. And I remember going to bed at night thinking like, okay, we're in excellent shape. Like this process is buttoned up. Everything is going to be awesome. And I woke up in the morning to like 20 emails from angry employees. I'm on the West Coast. We have a lot of employees on the East Coast. Angry employees saying, Nathan, you promised this was going to be anonymous. I see everyone's name attached to this feedback, and the feedback just kept pouring in. And people had entrusted the process, entrusted me and the team that I had built to creating, creating a process that was going to be anonymous. And I had totally messed that up. And getting to the internal game, I mean, my initial thought is, okay, I'm angry with my direct report because this person, this person is messed up. My boss is going to be mad at me. How do I save face? And it's just kind of fear and panic that's going on inside of me. And yeah, it was a rough moment.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let's just pause there for just a minute. Like your stress level. Well, I'm projecting onto you. My stress level would have been, like, through the roof. I'm going to get fired. Were you worried that you were going to get fired?

**Nathan Tanner:** You know, the thought went through my mind. I had a good relationship with my manager, but there'd been enough. It was, DoorDash at the time was such a high growth environment. There was so much at

stake. We had raised hundreds of millions of dollars and the valuation was skyrocketing. And so like, everything was just moving really, really quickly. And I was so stressed out at the time. And so, yeah, the thought went through my mind like, well, this this could be the end, this could be it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. So that's your internal game. So, what's the rest of the story? What did you do?

**Nathan Tanner:** So thankfully I did not act on uh that initial you know fight or flight response. And you know as the feedback was coming in, I'm like we need to get in front of this. Like, let me pause for a second. Let's get in front of this. And I reached out to my manager, and I told her. I really, really screwed up. I really messed this up and I wanted to throw my team member under the bus. But I'm like, even if I do, it's my team. I hired this person, so it's only going to reflect on me and it's not really this person's fault. Like so, I stood up, I said this was on me. I made a mistake. We need to get in front of this. My recommendation is I draft an email to the company. You don't need to get involved. This is me. I draft an email to the company, you can review it, and we get in front of this. And I just kind of sat back and waited to hear what her response might be.

**Whitney Johnson:** And what happened?

**Nathan Tanner:** She was frustrated, as you can imagine. We ended up, I drafted the email. I met with her again about a half an hour later, and she said, Nathan, after thinking about this, I'm actually really glad that this happened. I'm not glad that you made this mistake like you messed up. But I'm glad this happened because as a company, we need to be more transparent in the feedback that we give. Like, we need to stop hiding behind anonymous feedback and like, yeah, you messed up, buddy. But like I, I'm okay with the outcome because this will push the company forward. And so, you know, in some ways I'm grateful there's a happy ending. I guess there's another scenario where maybe it's not so, not so happy of an ending, but yeah, that's where, that's where things ended up.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Well, what's fortunate is that she reinforced your positive behavior. I mean, to me, I think about the outcome was positive in the sense that you took responsibility and you didn't, you know, throw the person who worked for you under the bus to me, like, you handled this as well as you possibly could have. And I think it's such a great example of someone taking responsibility.

**Nathan Tanner:** Oh, thank you. Yeah. It's one of the things I try to talk about, uh, with the coaches of, like, owning our mistakes. No one expects perfection. And actually, when we make big mistakes, often it's a great opportunity to learn and to share those learnings with other people, even when they're painful.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh. Especially when they're people. All right. So, your, the title of your book, which I've alluded to, is *The Unconquerable Leader*. What are we frequently being conquered by?

**Nathan Tanner:** So, the book actually starts back in 2018, and it was probably a few months after I after this experience I shared with you. And I had this moment where I was feeling stretched in so many ways, stretched at work. I had a long commute. I had a young family and responsibilities there. I had church responsibilities and I kept telling myself in the moment of like, just keep going, just put your head down. And the signs of burnout were there. But I just completely ignored them of, like, I'm just strong enough. I can just keep going. I can handle all of this. And I remember I had this moment. It was a Sunday morning, and it was my daughter's second birthday, and my wife got our kids ready, and we were there getting ready to church. And I just couldn't, I couldn't go. And I remember staying home, and I just felt so overwhelmed by everything going on. And I went into my room to meditate and pray. And I had this overwhelming experience, this, this just like panic attack where I was, like on the ground crying.

**Nathan Tanner:** And I've never had any I've never had anything like it. And I, eventually I got in my car. I drove off like I missed my daughter's entire second birthday that day because, like, I couldn't handle my stuff. And that moment was a wakeup call for me of like, okay, I, I don't have all of my stuff together. Like I was showing up at work and I went back on Monday, you know, and showed up like any other Monday. But my family took the brunt of that, and my health took the brunt of that. And so, when I talk about being an unconquerable leader, it's not about being unbreakable. Like we're going to break we're going to have moments where we get knocked

down. It's about getting back up. And it's about winning, not just at work, but in all of the aspects of our lives that are most important to us. And so anyway, that moment was really a defining moment in a wakeup call for me.

**Whitney Johnson:** Is that when you started to think about this idea. Well, you felt that you were being conquered so you wanted to conquer yourself. And is that when you started to write and construct this personal operating manual or is that a different expression?

**Nathan Tanner:** So, the personal operating manual for me came up, came a bit later. You know, for me in that, in that moment, it's funny, I was actually planning on becoming a coach in that moment, and I was doing several coaching engagements. And I remember thinking of like, how, how can I how can I be a great coach myself? Like, how can I help others, you know, and kind of fill up someone else's bucket if, if my bucket is, is empty? And so, that's where I had to do a lot of the work. I was fortunate shortly after that our fourth child ended up being born, and I took two months off of work entirely. And, and it wasn't a vacation, but it was an excellent opportunity to regain perspective of like what was most important and really put work in, in light. And so that experience does shape the operating manual, you know, which we can which we can get into if you'd like.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Before you go to the operating manual. So, I just want to recap for a second. So basically that moment where you missed your daughter's second birthday and you're having this sort of emotional breakdown, for lack of a better term, which it probably felt like, but you were also having this epiphany at the same time of like, I want to be a coach, I want to coach people, and here I am. And we all know that every therapist needs a therapist, and every coach needs a coach. You realized; I've got to do some internal work if I'm going to be effective in what I want to do. So, it was really your own call to adventure in a way.

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And one of the things I found and this, this gets into why I wrote the book when I got into coaching and I thought, okay, I am an executive coach. Now I am going to work with leaders and help them delegate and communicate and set expectations and all of these things like that was really the angle that I was coming into it. And that's what I talk about is the external game kind of how we show up with others. And then I started working with leaders, and I found that like, yes, they need to improve in those areas. We all do. But the biggest challenge is the internal game. It's what's going on inside of us. It's the thoughts and motives that impact how we lead but others don't see. And so, I had that experience myself. Like I didn't go into work on Monday and say, hey, guess what happened yesterday? Like I didn't share that with anybody. And I found in the work I do with leaders, like almost everyone has a story like that or moments like that where they're really struggling internally and having gone through that process and strengthening myself, that's really, I think what makes me and I think what makes anyone an effective coach of like being able to help with the external and the internal side of things.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. All right. So maybe let's just like touch on the operating manual before I go to the next question. So, if you can like touch on that. And I think I might have another question but talk to us about that briefly.

**Nathan Tanner:** So, one of the things I do with all of my clients, or almost all my clients, is help them create a personal operating manual. And this is a document that is very personal. It's up to them. But often this manual will outline values and principles that this person holds expectations that they have of their team, when to contact them, how to communicate with them. You know, the things that are important to this individual because especially, I think, in any organization, but especially in, in fast-moving organizations where you're hiring people, we learn by making mistakes. And so, I didn't come up with this idea. It actually, I saw this from several leaders at DoorDash. One of them in particular, Ryan Sokol, he was the head of engineering. He joined DoorDash and just this, like, crazy time period. And he had this three-page document, and it was like, here's what's important to me. Here's how to best communicate with me. Here's how I can support you. And it very quickly allowed him to build trust and just integrate into the organization. And I'm like, that's really, really profound because, I mean, how many times are we wondering, like, what does my boss think? They said this to me, what did they mean? And so, the goal of the operating manual for me is to help others understand who you are, what you value, what's important to you. So, it's just easier to align and there are fewer assumptions made.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Okay. So, let me ask you a question. So, thinking about your own personal operating manual, what's something that someone can do to build trust with you really quickly?

**Nathan Tanner:** For me, I really, really value connection. It's probably why I became a coach, and so I, I want to know you individually. Like what drives you? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What are you excited about? I really enjoy having intimate one on one conversations. And so, let's try to cut through the what's the weather like where you're living and just get right into the, into the meat of things like that's something that I really, really love.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, what you're saying is if when you, when you meet a person and you're working with a person, if they'll tell you their story, if they'll tell you who they are, if they will tell you what they care about, then you trust them because they're revealing a piece of themselves to you.

**Nathan Tanner:** I understand them a little bit more. I know, I know more about their background and how they operate.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. Okay. All right. So, let's talk about Steph Curry. In the book you talk about him and the idea of putting in the repetitions to improve your external game. But probably also it's going to be the case with your internal game. What's a story about his, him putting in the repetitions. And why is that story meaningful to you?

**Nathan Tanner:** The thing that is most impressive to me about Steph Curry and if you don't know Steph Curry, he's a basketball player for the Golden State Warriors. He has won four championships now multiple MVP's. But coming out of high school he was not heavily scouted even though his dad played in the NBA. Even though he was on the radar of a lot of people, he was not scouted at all, did not go to a major university. And the story is told of a young Steph Curry at this basketball camp and this coach is named Allen Stein Jr. And he calls out the story of how he knew immediately Steph Curry was going to be a star, even though his skill level wasn't quite what others were doing, or skill level wasn't quite where others were at. And he, the story is told like 30 minutes before every single workout. Most players are in their flip flops. They got headphones on. Stephan Curry has already been shooting. He's made 150 shots and is in a full sweat before the practice is even starting, and he's making sure he has perfect footwork.

**Nathan Tanner:** If he gets anything wrong, he's redoing that. And the most impressive thing of all is at the end of every single practice, Steph Curry ends by swishing five free throws in a row, not making five free throws, but like shooting the ball, making it in the hoop without hitting the backboard or the rim at all, and just observing this person's commitment to the game. Steph Curry's consistency really, really stood out. And like, those are the habits that ultimately turn into success and the question I think about as I tell this Steph Curry story is, are the habits that we have today on par with the dreams that we have for tomorrow. And that's what Steph Curry brought. And so, it's just incredible to see that level of consistency, you know, lead to results. I mean this story was, this was 15 years ago, and he's put in the work day after day, year after year.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. All right. So, I want to I want to talk a little bit about this story, because one of the things I thought was really interesting about your book, and I think your readers will enjoy it as well, is that you had a lot of sports stories in your book that I hadn't heard before. People like talking about sports. They like writing about sports. And maybe that's because I just haven't read. But I read a lot of books, so probably they haven't been written about. And so, I'd be curious. You wrote for the *Bleacher Report* for a while, so maybe after you realized you weren't going to play baseball professionally, you decided you were going to go into sports another way. But talk to us about that experience of, what is the *Bleacher Report*, the writing that you did for them, and what by doing something that you didn't get paid for you loved it and there have been dividends. So, there's a lot of questions in there. Let's see where you go with that.

**Nathan Tanner:** Let's do it. So, I started my career in investment banking. I joined Lehman Brothers in 2008 right as Lehman Brothers was imploding. Largest bankruptcy in history. I think that's still the still the case. Eventually, I, you know, made a pivot, came back to investment banking a little bit later. And the first year was

grueling. I mean, you know, investment banking, really, really long weeks. But then we had this moment where several senior bankers on the team left, and the workload slowed quite a bit. And around that time, I joined one of.

**Nathan Tanner:** Where were you? Sorry, where were you?

**Nathan Tanner:** So, I'm at Piper Jaffray in San Francisco at this time.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Okay.

**Nathan Tanner:** And so, around that time, I joined one of the senior bankers to go visit a venture capital firm there talking about investments they've made. And one of them is in *Bleacher Report*. And *Bleacher Report* is a publication where they have fans do all of the writing. This is back in 2010. So, I think *Bleacher Report* has evolved quite a bit since then. And I'm like, that's really cool. I'm a big Angels fan and a big Lakers fan. Like, let's see if I can write something. I had a little bit of time. I'm like, let's try this out as an experiment. And so, I apply. A couple days later, I get accepted, and I write this piece and Whitney it's, I went back and read this, a year ago. It's very, very bad. It's not, it's not quality writing. And it was like why the angels were going to win the World Series or something like that. And but it was really fun. It was so much fun. And so, I, you know, then decided to write another article and another article, and eventually they invited me to be a featured columnist, and I had a dedicated editor. I'm not getting paid for any of this. I have a dedicated editor, I have deadlines, a lot of these articles are getting major traction and picked up in larger publications like the *LA Times*. And funny, during this we hire back all of these senior bankers and like work is really, really busy. I'm back to 80-hour weeks again and I still have these like *Bleacher Report* deadlines. And my wife is like, what are you doing? Like you don't get paid doing that. Like focus on your real job. And I'm like, okay, you're right, I probably should. And so anyway, during I wrote for about a year and during that period I probably wrote 50 different articles for them all, all sports. And it was, it was just the most fun thing ever.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. So, you've written for a year, you've loved it. You start out there not great, you know, great writing, but it ends up, you end up becoming a really good writer. Did you think of yourself as a writer, like what was your identity piece around writing and now you've written a book, but what's your identity around that?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah. So, I, it was, it was a muscle that I'm really glad that I built because if I go back to middle, you know, middle school, I was I remember being in an honors English class, and I, like, dropped out of the class because I couldn't keep up. And I remember at the time being like, I hate writing. I'm not a good, I'm not a good writer. It took me a really long time to write these essays, and it was a story I told myself, and it was a story that eventually went really, really deep to the point where any time I'm in college or even afterwards, like there's writing that needs to be done, and I have like an allergic reaction of like, oh no, I like, I don't want to do this. And so, I think what was most valuable was in the process of writing these 50 articles, and I didn't even think of myself as a writer. I'm like, I'm just doing this for like, fun. In the process of writing those, a muscle was built, and I was able to tell a new story where, like, eventually, you know, 30, 40 pieces in, I'm like, these aren't so bad. And I'm starting to get comments from people like, oh, that story you told really resonated. And so, I think there was a new story that emerged, but a lot of that was like having to create evidence for that new story, being open to the story, but then creating evidence for it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm I love that. So, the *Bleacher Report*, even though you did that for free, you actually had a lot of, that was a high ROI, high return on investment.

**Nathan Tanner:** Absolutely.

**Whitney Johnson:** In terms of the stories, what you've learned, you probably had a lot of street cred internally because all your colleagues are like, these are great stories. It taught you to write. So, you could do this book, you changed your identity. And it is an interesting thing, this idea of self-limiting beliefs. I had this happen to me just yesterday. So, my daughter is in college or our daughter's in college, and she wanted us to take a personality test, and she had this interesting idea of like, she took the personality test and she said, okay, I know that part of my personality is going to be genetic. So, mom, dad, will you take this test as well? I take the test and I finish it up and there were some questions on like, are you, you know, are you wildly imaginative? Do you have flights of

fancy? And I wrote no, no, no, no, no, I don't like, like mildly, you know. No. Sort of considerably inaccurate I think the answer was. And I went back, and I said, wait a second, I'm saying that. But is that really true. Like, is it really true that I don't have an imagination? I mean I've written four books. Yes. I have plans and dreams for the future of things that I'm going to do. I all the time believe, and I'm sure you agree. As a coach, I imagine a better future for the people that I coach. Is it true that I don't have an imagination, or have I created a self-limiting belief that I'm not the person who writes these fantastical fiction stories? No, I don't do that. But is it too limiting of a definition around imagination that just came into my head as you were talking about this around writing is. Is that accurate? Clearly, it's not accurate. Clearly you are a good writer.

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** So how do you...

**Speaker3:** It's really fascinating to me. So, I'm colorblind and I have this experience in first grade of like I get up and I draw this frog and I hold this frog up, and I'm like, here's my green frog. And my teacher starts, like, cackling and laughing, and she's like, that frog is brown. And I don't know if she actually cackled. That may have been a stretch, but I remember in first grade, like it went really deep and just being like embarrassed. And that led to a I can't draw therefore I'm not creative. And these like little things can become very, very self-limiting. And I think it's fascinating for you because as I think about imagination, like, yeah, think of all the creative endeavors you have embarked on and the curiosity that comes with that and the courage to put yourself out there. It's yeah, it's really fascinating what we could what we can do.

**Whitney Johnson:** It's a reminder, yeah, that every coach needs coaching, and every therapist needs therapy, and every person needs therapy for the record. All right. Yes. So, speaking of putting yourself out there, you have an Ironman triathlon under your belt. So, for our listeners who don't know what that is, can you tell us what you have to do to participate in the, the Ironman? And yeah, tell us what you had to do and what did the internal game look and feel like to you?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yes. So, the story about the Ironman starts years earlier. I had done a couple of sprint triathlons with my brother. The first one, actually, when I was an investment banker and I, I didn't have a bike, I just borrowed one from my dad, and we did it and it was fun. And then fast forward many years down the road, I had this experience. I'm sitting in the airport. I had just ran from, you know, to the terminal, and I'm sweaty and it's hot and I'm excited to see my family. I've been traveling for a while, and the flight gets delayed by, like 45 minutes. And I have this moment and I'm just like, this is the worst experience ever. And like, this is the absolute worst thing that could happen to me. And then a few seconds later, it hits me of like, okay, you're like sitting in an airport. You're about to get on an airplane to fly like 35,000ft in the air, to go see your family. Like, it's not that bad. And I had this moment. I'm like, wow, when did I get so soft? And I read this book that was a really, really profound book called *The Comfort Crisis*.

**Nathan Tanner:** The author's, Michael Easter, and he shares that, you know, fewer problems in our life. They don't lead to more satisfaction. They lead us to lower our threshold for what's considered a problem. And we introduce these new comforts, and that becomes our new baseline and these old, you know, discomforts or these old things we used to find comfortable. Now we view them as uncomfortable. And so, and they talked about this idea of a misogi, this, this Japanese ritual of doing one hard thing every year that puts the rest of the year in context. And so, I've done a couple of these small triathlons and I'm like, let's do a full Ironman triathlon. Like, I don't know if I can do it. And the rules of misogi are like, number one, you have to have a 50% chance of completing it. And rule number two is don't die. And I'm like, okay, I think this fits both of those rules. Ironman triathlon let's do it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, so what do you do in an Ironman triathlon?

**Nathan Tanner:** So, it is a 2.4-mile swim. It's a 112-mile bike ride. And then it is a marathon. So, 26.2 mile run at the end.

**Whitney Johnson:** And which of those three parts was the easiest for you and which was the hardest?



**Nathan Tanner:** I swam in high school. And so, swimming was, swimming wasn't too bad. So much of it is technique. Running, I had always like, really, really struggled with. So I was, you know, I was a little bit overweight when I was younger, and I just, I just couldn't ever run. We had this mile run we used to do in middle school. And I could get like halfway through. And then I had to walk. And so, running, running for sure was the was the hardest.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. All right. So, the question, so when you okay...Two questions on this. So, what, what was your biggest internal game challenge of doing this triathlon?

**Nathan Tanner:** So, I'm out here doing.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, sorry, Iron Man. Yeah.

**Nathan Tanner:** So, I'm out here doing the doing the triathlon and the swim goes well. It's really, really cold in the morning. So, this is in Bear Lake, Utah. It's at 6000ft. And most Iron Man's, have like thousands of people. And this one, it was technically not an Ironman branded event. There were like 20 of us that had signed up for. So, it's a very, very small number of people, lots of other people doing other distances. So, I finished the swim. The swim goes, well, cold, but it goes well. I get on the bike, I'm about halfway through the bike and it starts raining and it's raining hard and it's cold and I'm tired and I'm. And then like, you know, ten miles go by and I'm like, okay, I made it. I made it through this like hard moment and I'm patting myself on the back. And then eventually I finished the bike, and the run starts, and I start having these major stomach cramps. And then the really challenging moment happens where it's dark outside. No one else is on the course at this point. There might be a couple of other people, but they are nowhere in sight. And so, it's very, very lonely because it's just me out there, like running by myself. It gets dark and so they pass out like a headlamp. So, I'm running with the headlamp. No one's around. And then it starts raining and then it starts pouring.

**Nathan Tanner:** And so now I'm like. I'm on. You know, I have to, like, crawl over to the side of the ground. It's raining. My stomach is in pain. I'm all by myself. Like a lot of the support staff had gone home, and I just had this moment of like, what am I doing? Like, I don't want to be here anymore. Why am I doing this? And finally, around that time, the race director drives by in a pickup truck and he's like, is everything okay? And I just kind of stare back at him. I don't even remember what's going on at this point. I've been I've been exercising for 13 hours at this point. And I look back at him and he looks back and he says, I can give you a ride back. Do you want to? And in this moment, I'm like, yes, I do, like I desperately do. And then I'm like, but if I do that, like, I'm still gonna have to finish this Iron Man. I'm gonna have to get back out here. And I just muttered back like I'm okay. And eventually just kind of pulled myself back together and, and finished the event and, it was the hardest day of my life. And I think I was physically prepared to an extent, but mentally there was a level of loneliness, extreme loneliness that I was completely unprepared for while I was out there.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow. Okay, so what was your misogi in 2023 and what's it going to be in 2024?

**Nathan Tanner:** Oh, the misogi in 2023? Writing this book? I don't know if I can get credit for the book in 2023 and 2024. I know you like to push people, so I'm not. I'm not gonna. I'm not gonna claim both. 2023 has been the book um, I wrote, you know, the first book was written nine years ago. You know how much work it takes to write something and to pull it all together. 2024.

**Whitney Johnson:** Although I would push you on 2023, I don't think there was only a 50% chance that you would finish.

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah, it's a good point and it's one that I'm still trying to find. So, I've done two Half Iron Mans this year. I may, I don't know if I want to do another full Iron Man, I think, I think I need to find a...

**Whitney Johnson:** You don't need to.

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah, once you've done it, I think I need to find something else. So, yeah. This is something I need to. I need to work on.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Well, and I think that's a nice, so, now you'll think about what? And the year is young. It's only April 29th. So, I think this is a nice lead in to, your book starts with those first lines from William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*, where he says, unless you want to quote it, do you have it memorized, or do you want me to read it?

**Nathan Tanner:** Please do, you take the lead? Okay.

**Whitney Johnson:** "I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul". The poem then ends with another powerful image which says, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul". So, beyond being unconquerable, what does being a captain of your soul mean to you?

**Nathan Tanner:** When I hear a captain of my soul. I think of the word that comes to mind is ownership.

**Nathan Tanner:** I think for many in our society. And for me individually. At times I have had a victim mindset. At DoorDash and other companies. I planned on things going a certain way, going, let's go back to Lehman Brothers 2008. Lehman goes bankrupt. I'm out of work. There's lots of people I can point fingers at. Lots of excuses I can make. And ownership, which was a value at DoorDash, which is a value at LinkedIn. It's a value at many companies, is about taking responsibility for ourselves and acknowledging the challenges, acknowledging that things are things are hard, but taking ownership and moving forward despite those challenges.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. So good. All right. So, Nathan in this conversation what is something that has been useful for you. It may not be anything you said, or I said, but just you thought you observed. What did you hear that wasn't being said.

**Nathan Tanner:** I mean the immediate thing is you pushed me on it, and this is why you're so good Whitney of like okay what's, what's the message for 2024. And so, so that's, that's one thing that I'm, that I'm thinking of and like I, you know, I have a, I have a tendency to stay in the comfort zone. The comfort zone is very, very comfortable. And as I grow as a coach, it's, it's easy for me to continue to do what works. I've been able to help many different clients, but by keeping that approach, stagnation can come, entitlement can come. And so that's what I'm taking away is, okay, what's the next phase of growth for me. How do I continue to push myself?

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. Mhm. Right. Because you have you've had a, you've had many experiences actually that have really kind of put you on the edge and you've had to figure out what to do to deal with them. And so, then the question is, is in a, in a year where there may not be any external circumstances that put you on the edge, how are you going to create that?

**Nathan Tanner:** Yeah. Yep. Exactly.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. All right. Any final thoughts.

**Nathan Tanner:** No. Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. I have been a, a longtime fan of the show and your work. And so, it is a, it is an absolute honor to spend time with you here. Thank you so much, Whitney. I have a lot of respect for you.

**Whitney Johnson:** So fun. Loved it.

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Sometimes it's not about the success story we tell ourselves, but rather the story we spin around our own failures. Steph Curry, looking out at the bleachers in high school and wondering where the talent scouts are. Nathan, telling

himself he's next to allergic when it comes to writing, or working through a panic attack on his daughter's second birthday. These are the moments where we have to be careful about the prophecies we're writing.

It's just being human, fitting what's happening into a narrative, but mastering the internal game is being conscious of what you're saying to yourself. When Steph Curry makes those 150 shots before a game, he's saying to himself, sure, I may not have been scouted, but I can outwork and outthink anyone on this court. I'm saying that I care about this sport more than these other players around me, who got scouted into Division 1 colleges.

When Nathan wrote his book, not only is he telling himself yes – I can write – but that the moments of failure were useful, that they're a part of him. Brushing a panic attack under the rug is an easy way to delete a paragraph from that narrative you're telling yourself. But the infinitely more powerful action is to bring that moment into the light and figure out where in your story it belongs, and how you're going to talk to yourself about it. Facing your own story might be the misogi you're looking for.

If you're looking for some more motivation on conquering your fears, there's my recent episode with Eduardo Bricenño. That's [episode 371](#). On learning to be the protagonist of your own story, there's [episode 307](#) with Andre Menezes. And if you're having some trouble finding the words to your own story, finding a running theme, I'd point you to [episode 298](#) with Steve Arntz.

Thank you again to Nathan Tanner 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.