

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 388: YAMINI RANGAN

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you build teams of high performing people -- because organizations don't disrupt, people do.

There's a reason we call it a mental RUT - this deep groove in the mud, cut by wagon wheels rolling back and forth, back and forth. It's a pattern of behavior that we've dug into our brains, and when we go down this road, it's where our mental wheels get stuck. When have you been stuck in a rut? Maybe it's coming back day after day to a job you hate. Maybe it's something small, like knowing you should eat lunch at home but finding yourself in line at the Sweetgreen every morning. Getting stuck is human. But so is shoving the wagon out of the rut and cutting a new path.

On today's episode, we're here to talk about what that really looks like. Our guest is Yamini Rangan, CEO of HubSpot. If you're a small or medium sized business, you're probably already familiar with HubSpot's value - helping entrepreneurs track customers, make sales and follow up on those relationships. But the real focus here is Yamini's journey to the top, from studying engineering in India, to taking her first step into the world of sales, and eventually - the C Suite. It's been a journey of rewiring herself, learning how to build new mental roads while staying true to her authentic self. There's a lot to take away from our talk, because I know I did.

I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Yamini, let's actually start with your stepping off the plane in Atlanta. You left your hometown in India at the prime age of 21. Did you ever think in those first years here in the United States, I think I made a mistake.

**Yamini Rangan:** No, I never did I ever think that I made a mistake. It was exceptionally difficult. I had to completely change the mental model of who I was going to be, but it was all an incredible adventure for me. And Whitney, maybe just to step back. Our family actually applied for immigration and a green card when I was ten. And I remember this excitement when I was sitting in this dinner table and my parents said, kids, we have something important to tell you. We're going to immigrate to the US now. It actually took like another 12 years for me to actually get, you know, the green card and part of it take a one-way ticket and land in Atlanta. But for most of my childhood, I carried this dream of going into a different country, learning something completely new, and making a new life out of it. So, it was always this adventure that I looked forward to. It was just living that moment of something that you'd been waiting for more than a decade in your life, and everything was just this adventure, and there was never this moment of, oh my God, did I make a mistake? It was like, wow, this is the dream that I've always had. What can I do? To get the most out of this moment was the mindset that I had.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mm. So good. So, it's interesting though. You just said you had to completely shift your mental model. So, you, you'd been dreaming since you were ten years old? I'm going to go to. I'm going to go abroad, and you land. But then you had to adjust. What were some of the adjustments that you had to make, mentally and emotionally?

**Yamini Rangan:** Yeah. Look, I did my undergrad in engineering back in India, and I was one of the very few women in our class, and we had a graduating class of about 300 plus engineers and no more than 20 or 22, you know, women engineers. And throughout that whole, you know, engineering undergrad program, there were questions of, is it actually a good thing for women to be engineers, or are you actually going to use anything that you learned within the engineering program? Are you sure that this is the right path? And the way I got through it is through a ton of resolve. I actually made a bet. This sounds pretty, you know, frivolous. But I made a bet with someone in my first year of engineering that I would be top of the class, and I was like, I'm going to go for it. I'm going to be top of the class just to prove that women can be a top engineer. And, but the way I did it was by flying under the radar, by not asking questions, by not putting myself completely out there and by working harder than anybody else. And that method of kind of getting to the top by flying under the radar actually worked when I was in India. Now, one of the first big shifts, you know, coming to Atlanta and then going into my master's in engineering program was 50% of my classes had 50% in participation. Now, this is just mind boggling to someone who comes in with this, you know, I will remain under the radar. I will not speak. I will try and be quiet as I accomplish what I want to accomplish, to be like, okay, you're now going to have to talk, you know, in order to, you know, be good at your craft. And that blew my mind. And I had to, like, completely rewire myself to think about how do I participate in class, how do I ask questions when I've been kind of on mute for a while now in my life? And how do I do it in the right manner? And, you know, I kind of went back and forth. I probably like, overcorrected. And then I under corrected and then I found an equilibrium. But that was like a more fundamental shift in who I was, you know, as, as a human being and as a person. Now then there's all the, you're in a new country, you know, you are in a university town. You're trying to figure out the social norms. You're trying to figure out, you know, there's no more cricket, there's only football. And football was loud, right outside, you know, in the stadium, you know, that I was living at. And so there's all those societal things that you got to, like, get used to. But there's a fundamental shift in how you show up as a person and how you rewire yourself in a new country. And again, I found it exciting.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Okay, so this is fascinating. Would you describe yourself as an introvert or an extrovert, or are you somewhere in between?

**Yamini Rangan:** 100% introvert? 100% completely introverted. I do not, I gotta sit with myself. I have to be grounded with myself. I've now, after being, you know, in sales and technology for multiple decades, I now have an, you know, extroverted cover, but it is totally a cover. And when I am, you know, in front of people, when I'm engaged in conversations, I'm very present. But then it takes a lot of my energy, and I have to go back into my shell and recover from, you know, all of that energy expenditure and then regain, you know, a lot of the energy before I can reengage. So yes, it takes a lot of time for me to, to get there.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's fascinating. So, I'm just imagining, you know, it's funny hearing you talk about what your, your modus operandi was in India. It's very much a disruptor, right? I'm going to be completely under the radar. No one's going to know what I'm going to do, and then I'm going to come out on top. But your way of being, of not asking questions, you now have these pretty strong neural pathways. So, to come to the United States and say, if I want to be at the top of my class here, I need to ask questions. That muscle was not developed. And so that must have taken a lot of work to start to speak up. And how do I frame the question, and how do I articulate my opinion? I can imagine, as I'm listening to you, that was a big lift.

**Yamini Rangan:** That is a huge lift, and I think it carried through in my career. You know, both as an engineer as well as in sales. I had to learn and relearn how to balance that skill. And if today you ask me what is your top skill, I'd tell you asking questions is my top skill, and remaining curious is my, you know, top skill. And that's the only reason I'm here where I am, because I think you overcorrect, you under correct. And then you don't know exactly if you're hitting the right balance till you actually hit the balance. And so, it's been a big part of changing and disrupting who I am for actually multiple decades now.

**Whitney Johnson:** We're going to come back to this. I want to ask you a couple more questions for background for, for our listeners. Electrical engineering. Computer engineering. What about those disciplines was appealing to you from a young age.

**Yamini Rangan:** I'm going to give you a very frivolous and trivial answer.

**Whitney Johnson:** I always have a frivolous story or two as well.

**Yamini Rangan:** So, I'm just going to say it. And, you know, I'm going to own it as well. So, I grew up, two daughters, and my parents always talked about education. They were like, the only thing that we're going to give you is this foundational education. And my mom wanted both of us sisters to be doctors. My sister, elder one by two years, just listened to her and became a doctor. And I was like, you know what? I will not follow her. I'm going to find my own path, and I do not want to just follow the same path. And I'm going to take this other option. And frankly, the time that I was growing up in India in the 80s and early 90s, there were maybe a couple of professional, you know, options. You become a doctor, you become a lawyer. You become an engineer. So, I said, oh, I'm going to become an engineer. Little did I know that electrical engineering or computer engineering, or actually getting this more foundational engineering degree would, you know, rewire my brain. And it did rewire my brain. It rewired it in terms of first principles thinking. You know, I wouldn't call myself, you know, when I was growing up as a teen that I was some kind of first principles thinker, but years of, you know, going through engineering degrees and working as an engineer for a few years taught me how to think about the foundational principles before you get started solving any problem.

**Yamini Rangan:** Then it taught me how to break down problems in a very methodical way. Then it taught me how to think backwards from what the future state that we are envisioning is. And those skills, you know, of breaking down problems, thinking from the output backwards to where you need it to be. It actually served me really well in throughout my journey and along the way. I have to say, I just enjoyed being in a field that is constantly disrupting itself. The joy of being in technology. Is that what you know, you know, from last year is no longer what is relevant or true this year. And so, you have to be a lifelong learner to be good in this field of technology. And I think I've really appreciated that about, you know, being in the world that I am.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. Okay. So, I do think it's funny and about how your sister was a doctor, you're like okay I'm going to individuate, I'm sister number two, I need to carve my own path. I'm going to become an engineer. I think it's fascinating how, I'll give you a frivolous story just so that you share one with me. So, when I was growing up, I lived in in the Bay area in California, and so we went to a lot of Stanford football games. And I remember I loved going to these football games, but I loved watching the cheerleaders. And so, when I was applying to college...now, I didn't end up going here. But I will tell you, I ended up going to BYU, but when I was applying to college, I wanted to go to UCLA. The only reason I applied to UCLA was because I liked their cheerleaders.

**Yamini Rangan:** I love that. I love that. Did you say that in your college application?

**Whitney Johnson:** Probably not. Because you don't say those kinds of cheeky things. And the irony is, of course, as an admissions committee, you probably love those cheeky things, but no one ever admits it anyway. So, individuation. We like the cheerleaders. Et cetera. So, I'm curious about you, first consultants, you get out of grad school here in the US, and then you move into the C-suite workday, Dropbox. Talk to us a little bit about this journey from being an engineer. And then you said you moved into sales. I am really curious about that journey. What are some of those milestones and maybe a story that helps us capture that experience that you were having?

**Yamini Rangan:** Yeah. Multiple transitions, because, you know, I was in engineering for a while, and then I really found that I liked talking to people about technology versus just doing, you know, things with technology. And that's why I went to business school. And I wrote something like that in my college application to business school. And I went to Berkeley when I, when I graduated from, you know, business school in Berkeley, which the two years that I had there were fabulous. It was just like I loved it, learning, growing, exploring, I loved it, but when I graduated, I wanted to be in product marketing and I, did get a job in product marketing, but it was literally after 9/11, you know, and it was 2002. And when I started, you know, in my day, one of the jobs, they said, well, you actually don't have a job in marketing, you're going to be in sales. Now imagine the horror for an Indian parent who wanted their daughter to be a doctor that I now am telling them, no, no, no, I'm going to sell and I'm going to actually be a salesperson in technology. And they're like, what? This is what I made out of you. So, you know, first off, there's this like trying to explain to the Indian parents and relatives that my job was actually selling. And then I was like, oh my God, I've never thought that I would be in the sales part of my career. And there's commissions involved, and I don't know how this is all going to work. And my initial approach for sales was I looked around the room and I said, oh, who is the best salesperson out here? And there were a few.

**Yamini Rangan:** You know, I would say at that time, men, mostly men in the room, and they were great at their craft, but their craft was quite different. Their craft was relationship building. It was, you know, having just this amazing, easy conversation that they could have, you know, and this nice banter and then getting into the whole, you know, selling aspect of things. And I said, oh, this is what I should do. Let me try and like learn golf. Let me try and like, watch football. Let me try and do these things. That seemingly makes the first, you know, five minutes of the conversation easier and build that relationship before I can actually start. And I was so bad at it. I was so bad at it. I was, I was like, so bad at golf. I didn't know how to play the game, and I didn't have the patience I was so bad at, like, trying to get my head around these, you know, this conversation, I was pretty awkward. And I was like, okay, you know what? I'm not going to do this. So I shifted back to the playbook that I knew, which was first principles, thinking deep curiosity about a business and the playbook I followed was I would read every 10-K, I would read every 10-q, I would listen to everything that the person that I was going to meet had ever said. And I said, I will not be good at the first five minutes, but the next 25 minutes I'm going to be really good at. And I asked probably the most detailed questions.

**Yamini Rangan:** I would go deep into their business, and I gain credibility by being curious and learning about, you know, the person that I was talking to. And, through years of doing that, I learned one insight Whitney, which is sales, is about getting your buyer promoted. Nothing else. And if you personally care about how they're making the decision, how to make them successful in that decision, and how you can actually genuinely feel good about getting someone to move up in their career. And if that's all you care about, you're actually going to make your number. And you know what it did? It took me a few years, and I, I will say, I don't think it was, it came naturally to me. But I think, you know, leaning back on my strengths and really understanding the buyer's journey more than my quota and my sales and the people that I was supporting. I was in a, you know, overlay sales role at that time. None of that mattered. But the fact that I actually cared about the buyer and their personal success mattered. And that's kind of what I have taken. And that's what I obsess, you know, today about is when I talk to our customers. I asked them about their personal goals, and I asked them about what would make them successful a year from now, five years from now, and how can we be part of that journey. And that completely changes the conversation. And I think, you know, you got to you got to embrace who you are and what your strengths are, rather than, in my case, trying to learn golf pretty poorly.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Oh, wow. There's just so much here to unpack. Yamini, this is amazing. So, I loved what you said. You know I'm going to be bad at the first five minutes. But I'm going to be great at the 20. The,

you know the last 25 minutes and that recognition. You know, while we're, we're swapping stories. I remember in my career on Wall Street, I had an experience where I had said, oh, this is how a man asks for a raise, and I'm going to, I said, I'm going to follow that playbook. And it was it was a total bomb, complete bomb. And I had that moment of, oh, I've got to, I've got to do this differently and I've got to look at how would Whitney do it? How would a woman do it? What does that look like? So, hearing you say and have that realization of I have to do this differently, go to the first principles, play to my strengths. And I want to come back now to something that I think is fascinating and a question and a curiosity I have. If you had been able to come to the United States and follow the same playbook that you had when you were in school in India of just being under the radar, never talking, never listening, and not having to come here and be very deliberate about developing and mastering and creating a superpower of asking questions. Would you have been able to walk into those situations and be so successful in sales?

**Yamini Rangan:** Absolutely not. Absolutely not. There is no way. I think you know the asking questions and getting to the bottom of things is so foundational. And to me, it's been my learning journey. And I don't think that if I had hadn't passed at some points in my journey, coming here to this country, being an engineer, moving into sales, if I hadn't passed along certain points to rewire myself, then no, I would not be who I am at all.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, today you're the CEO of HubSpot. Talk to us. Let's get really granular for a moment of what does a day look like for you. How do you spend it if you're thinking about allocating your time? How do you allocate your time on a, on an average day?

**Yamini Rangan:** Allocating time on an average day actually starts with imagining what you want to be five years from now. And that's how I approach it. And there's this wonderful book called *Working Backwards*. It's about Amazon and the first principles that Amazon and Jeff Bezos had. It's a really great recommendation for listeners. But, you know, the principle of the book is like you work backwards from what you want to create. And, you know, when I stepped into the role now, I had like no ambitions for becoming a CEO. And I got there, and we can talk about that. But when I started, I actually said, five years from now or ten years from now, what would I want to say? And it is I would want to say that I gave it my all, you know, to take HubSpot from where we are to multiple times the heights of where we can be. And that is from, you know, really focusing on the customer and really focusing on the business foundations and being the best CEO that the company deserves. Right. And trying to do that, that's like number one. The second thing, I committed to myself, and I created is that I want to speak up for women in technology as well as, you know, all kinds of minority leaders within technology, because I do think we have very different playbooks.

**Yamini Rangan:** We don't have to assume that one playbook that works for a certain population needs to work for us. So, I want to be able to speak up for that. That's kind of my second thing. And third, I want to be really present with my sons, my husband, my family, and I do not want to ever regret that. You know, I didn't spend time, and I didn't prioritize my time, you know, in a way that keeps me very grounded with my family and my friends. And those are literally the three things that I care about. And, you know, five years from now, ten years from now, that's what I imagine. I always have this question of, if you're sitting on December 31st of a given year and you said, hey, what? What are you happy about accomplishing? These three would be the top of my list. And so that governs what my day looks like my day looks very much like, you know, priority number one, two and three are actually HubSpot. And what can I do for customers? What can I do for our leaders who are making decisions every day in and out to help them with those decisions? And what can I do for our employees, and how can I show up being exceptionally present and ask questions? So, a lot of, you know, the day-to-day stuff is around that. I never say no to a great opportunity where I can represent what women and minorities can do within this field.

**Yamini Rangan:** So, it always raises to the top of my calendar of, okay, I've committed to myself that this is the impact that I'm going to have. So, it needs to show up in the calendar. And then I always have, you know, very specific times of the week and of the day where I'm spending time on myself and the family to keep, you know, very grounded. And so, what you measure is what will show up in your calendar. And I actually measure it. I look at the time that I'm spending on priorities, I look at the time I'm spending on the community, and I look at the time that I'm spending on family, and that keeps me accountable to myself in terms of how I'm using my time.

**Whitney Johnson:** You know something you said that I thought was interesting. Well, everything you said was interesting. I'm going to pull out one piece which is this idea of working backwards. What do I want to be saying in five years from now? And I think there's a nuance in what you just said that I think is important is that sometimes we think, well, what do I, you know, what do I want to have accomplished? And sometimes that's difficult for people to know. Exactly. But the way you described it is, how do I want to feel about how I showed up as a CEO? How do I want to feel about my relationships with my family? How do I want to feel about how I represented women and minorities and technology. And so, it's, and you're allowing that feeling to be your guiding principle.

**Yamini Rangan:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** And so, that makes it a little bit easier to think about allocating your time as opposed to having to say, well, I need to know with certainty what I'm going to be doing. You don't know, but you're allowing the values to guide how you're allocating your time. That's the nuance I picked up.

**Yamini Rangan:** Well, very important. I think you did a brilliant job of picking it up, but it also fundamentally gets to one of the other challenges, you know, in growth as a human being and growth as a professional. You know, for many years, I was one of those folks saying, no, I can't take the next job, you know, because I'm, I haven't checked off 100% of all the things that I need to do in my current job. And every time I got picked for something more, I was like, no, I don't think I can do it. And, you know, there's a word for it called imposter syndrome. But really, it's like there's something in yourself saying you are not ready for the next thing. And what that puts you in Whitney is in a place where you look at your past in order to create, you know, your present and where I had to disrupt that thinking for myself is to say, if I look at the past patterns and then create my present, I'm always lacking. But if I look at my future and create my present, I'm always winning. So, I want to take that path which sets myself up to win, rather than a path where I'm constantly looking backwards and saying, you know what? I have not done that before, so I don't think I can do it right now.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, it's so fun listening to you talk about these like underlying, you're continually building new neural pathways. It's really fun to hear you. You talk through that. Okay. You alluded to something a minute ago. So, let's go here. You said, you started to say I didn't really plan on becoming the CEO of HubSpot. Can you just talk about that journey and how you ended up in this role?

**Yamini Rangan:** Yeah. I mean, when I was growing up, I was in a super small town which didn't have a full high school. So no, it was not my ambition to be a CEO. I, I think learning and curiosity got me to becoming a CEO. And the path is, you know, I'll keep it super short. First decade being an engineer, working in engineering, second decade of my professional life working in sales and falling in love with customers, and then third decade was really scaling and pattern recognizing, you know, in terms of what was happening. And along the way, in the, in maybe the third decade of my career, I recognized one thing, which was it's all about connecting the dots across, you know, the company. And it's all about putting customers and company first and connecting the dots rather than thinking about your career, your team, your function. It's much more about having a very thoughtful ways to connect the dots across teams. And when I started doing that in my career, I just got picked for more and more, you know? You know, senior roles and the reason I still remember getting my first C-suite, you know, role many years ago. And I said, so why did you, why did you do this? Because I haven't done, you know, this particular team before. I haven't led this other team before.

**Yamini Rangan:** And they said, well, you know, at the time the answer was like, you just connected the dots better. You helped, you know, connect the dots across all of these teams better. So, you have more credibility across all of these teams. So, I found at some point you didn't have to do every single job. You just had to like connect everything across. And so, I joined HubSpot, you know, two months before the start of the pandemic in January 2020. And you know, Brian Halligan, who is the who's the co-founder and CEO at the time. He said, well, take your time. Don't do anything for the next three months. And then March hit and he was like, do everything in the next week. And it was just obviously a really, really critical time for the company and for us to completely disrupt all the things that we were doing. And I think there's one decision I made in the first year that actually opened up the opportunity for me to step into the CEO role. The first week of the, after the pandemic, we had significant churn in terms of our customers. Our customers were leaving. They didn't have cash. There's a lot

of uncertainty. And one of the biggest plays that we did, and it was not just me, but I certainly supported this is to cut the prices for all of our customers and to move a lot of features into our free product, and we did that because we put customers first.

**Yamini Rangan:** And that single decision, you know, I still remember going to the board in March 2020 and saying, yeah, we're going to cut the price by, you know, 100 plus percent. And they were like, how are you going to recover it? And my answer was, I don't know. And I was like, this is, this is kind of bold. You're three months into a new job and the board asks you a question and your answer is, I don't know. But, you know, I think we knew in our gut that doing the right thing for the customer was actually going to play out. And what happened was that we literally didn't know. We just did the right thing for the customers. Two months later, everybody moved into hybrid remote, and they all needed digital ways of connecting to customers, you know, talking to customers, being able to sell to customers. And they all came back to us in so much more rigor that we grew in 2020 and 2021, the kind of growth that we have never seen as an organization. And so, I think sometimes you have to disrupt yourself in more than one way, and you have to disrupt your business in more than one way is to deal with, you know, big, like tectonic, you know, moments in the business and when you know. Brian unfortunately had an accident when he looked around, he said, well, I think you got to take it and run with this. And again, at that moment, and when he came back and said, we're going to recommend that you become the CEO. Part of it was I respect what Dharmesh and Brian have created in this company, not just the, the beautiful, you know, product that we've built, but the culture and how we care about customers and employees. And I was like, I want to do them really good in this process. And I, again, did not start with all the areas that I did not know, I didn't know how to deal with investors. I didn't know how to manage boards. I didn't know how to talk to shareholders. I didn't know how to, you know, really get deep into product and engineering. But that was not what I was thinking about. I was thinking about five years from now, what would I be proud to say, and how can I make the company proud for all the things that we can accomplish? And so that has been the journey.

**Whitney Johnson:** You said something really important is this idea. So, one of the things that our firm is very focused on is change management. So how do you go into an organization who has a massive organizational shift or a technology implementation like HubSpot, and how do you prime people psychologically and emotionally, to be able to do that change and make it so that it feels daunting, not daunting, but in fact doable? And one of the things that you just said, I think is so powerful is there is so often this tendency to walk into a new environment and, and whether consciously, but more often subconsciously, to be like everything in the past was bad, bad, bad, and everything in the future is going to be good, good, good. And one of the things I heard you just say is, I respect and admire Brian and Dharmesh. What they've built, the culture, who they are, all of that.

**Yamini Rangan:** Absolutely.

**Whitney Johnson:** And we're going to go do some really amazing things because I went five years in the future and I'm working backwards. But this is the foundation, this is the heritage, this is our legacy. And I want to build on that. And so, honoring that in a way that felt really good to everybody who had gotten you to where you were.

**Yamini Rangan:** Absolutely. I mean, you know, I agree that sometimes, you know, you tend to look at like everything as, oh, this is all broken. But for me, it has been, you know, if I didn't have deep respect for what Brian and Dharmesh, you know, have done with HubSpot and the decisions they made and the kind of company that they built, I wouldn't be there in the first place. That was a decision that happened before I joined. And so, every part of what I've done is really, you know, honoring the past, but still painting a compelling need for change in the future. I think you can do both. And I think you can take an even higher road by really making people feel like you did something great. Now is the time to do something even better. And it's hard now. I wouldn't tell you, Whitney, that it has been easy because the last you know, I would say four years have been just maybe a period of exceptional change. Now, we've all dealt with change throughout our careers, but, you know, going through pandemic, then going through a period of zero interest rates, followed by sky high inflation, followed by high interest rates while going through a major technology shift to AI. I mean, this is this feels a little much. And I don't think that I have, you know, navigated every turn beautifully. I don't think like I would claim that at all, but I think every time you do something, you just pause and say, what did I learn from it? What could I have done better, and where could I have asked different questions or, you know, made the change a little bit smoother? It has been pretty bumpy ride, I think, for most of us in the industry and most of us as leaders have been left with,

you know, not a playbook, right? Like, you know, when I first took the job as a CEO, I did something I actually, you know, went out and I, you know, connected with a lot of CEOs in the tech industry.

**Yamini Rangan:** And I will say that we have super supportive people in the industry. They'll, they'll reach out to you, they'll take time. They'll talk about what has worked. And I was like, okay, this is the playbook. Great. Now I'll put my own flavor to the playbook, but there is a playbook. And then, you know, a lot of the things that we've seen in the last three years happen. And nobody has a playbook. Nobody has a playbook for taking a company from in-office great culture. You know where you know you'd walk in and you'd see everybody to completely never seeing anybody, right? Nobody has a playbook for suddenly managing a global company across, you know, just home in office and coffee shops, like, you know, people are working in all these different places. Nobody has the playbook to do that. And nobody has the playbook to go through a high and a low, followed by a big technology shift. And so, I think part of it is to say, what am I learning, what is working, what's not working, and being very transparent with the teams about, hey, we made a mistake here. We're going to course correct and we're going to continuously evolve how we get things done and being curious about where you're making mistakes along the way.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. Yeah. So, I think it would be useful for you just very briefly to talk about. So, everybody who's listening says, okay, what does HubSpot do. So, if you can give us a prototypical ideal customer, what do you do for that person? For that company?

**Yamini Rangan:** Yeah, we help a small or a medium company market and attract their end customers, sell to those customers and service and support those customers. And we do it with a passion. What we care about the most is helping those small medium businesses grow. What we have found is that the way they can grow has gotten difficult over the last decade, but certainly in the last three years, you got to have a really great way of engaging with your customers. And again, Brian and Dharmesh came up with this insight of you provide content, you provide something valuable before you take their email. And you earn the right to communicate with your customer. That is how inbound marketing was born. It was born from this insight that you have to earn the right to talk to your customers, and you earn it by giving something valuable. So, we help with content marketing, you know? And if you want to write a blog and you want to put it in social media, we help with all of that. And then once that comes into your website or to a landing page of some sort, then we help you prospect it and convert them into customers. And once they become customers, we help you manage those customers, deliver exceptional support and delight your customers. That's what we do. All of this ends up in helping small medium businesses grow, and we're passionate about small medium businesses. Whitney the number of times I've heard someone say, hey, you should go upmarket, become like, you know, support a very large company. And I'm like, then who takes care of small and medium businesses? I think we are passionate about it and that's what we do.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, we're HubSpot customers. Yay.

**Yamini Rangan:** Yay!

**Whitney Johnson:** And we, you know, I actually I don't know if you know this, but I had the opportunity to meet Brian and Dharmesh years ago, probably well over ten years ago. Because I was living in the Boston area. I had worked with Clay Christensen for the better part of a decade. Clay. You know, he was an inspiration for the founding of HubSpot in terms of being disruptive and focusing on small and medium sized businesses. And so just to give you that background, also, it's very fun because one of our head of ops said, and I quote this week, as we're, you know, trying to build out the systems and the structures for our business to scale it, she said, if it's not in HubSpot, it doesn't exist.

**Yamini Rangan:** Oh my God, that is, isn't that it's a T-shirt line. It's a...

**Whitney Johnson:** T-shirt line.

**Yamini Rangan:** It's a tee shirt. We're printing it. I love it when, when customers say it, you know, and it just shows the you know, if you can be in it every day and you can engage. It's for your growth. And so, I love it. I'm you know I'm going to take it. You got to remember that.



**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, let's talk about AI very briefly. And I'm wondering I think, you know, another technological shift. Is there one way that you're using AI in terms of, as you think about your customers, us as your customers and serving us better, doing it productively? You know, what's one way that you're using AI that you're finding it's being really, really useful in better servicing your customers?

**Yamini Rangan:** Yeah, I think I'll start with this. Who is our customer? What do they care about? Yes, there is a big technology shift that's going on, but if you're a small medium business, every day you wake up in the morning and the question is not what's the state of AI or this large language model? It is how do I grow? And so, we're very, very focused on how we can help customers grow leveraging technology. The other thing is given, you know, where we really are passionate about small medium businesses, we know that it cannot be very complex. And you're not thinking, oh, I want to be a prompt engineer today, and I want to develop APIs that can talk to five different large language models today. Nobody in your company should have to think about that. So, we're doing it for you. So, the approach that we have taken is that we're just going to make it easy, and we're going to do the hard work to make it easy for our customers to leverage AI and just build it into current products. All of the hubs, if you're using it in Marketing Hub, is just going to show up in marketing. If it's going to if you're using it in Service Hub, it's going to show up in service. And where we are finding what we're really, really focused on at this point is repeat usage and value for customers. There's just a lot of hype in the industry of, you know, AI is going to transform.

**Yamini Rangan:** It's going to disrupt. It's going to, you know, take away humanity, all of these things. And, you know, it's, I don't I don't even care about those questions and conversations. What we are focused on is how can we get repeat usage for something that can improve the productivity for someone within marketing? And how can that add value so that our small medium businesses can grow? So, the places that we are seeing a lot of value, I would say is, you know, content marketing and service and content marketing, you know, AI is fantastic at giving you drafts, at iterating with content. And it's not good with this connection. Right? You know, just before, as I was preparing for this conversation, I asked, hey, tell me everything about Whitney, what has she done? And it actually gave me like a beautiful, you know, like recall of all the things that you've done. And I asked a bunch of questions, so I prepared for it. But this connection, the conversation that we are having that is very human. And so, we're looking at every possible place within HubSpot that we can drive insights, make draft creation easier, make summarization of conversations easier, make a prediction of next steps easier. So, we're trying to do all of that while getting, you know, the customers to be connected, right. This conversation, this connection cannot be replaced. And so, I think we're finding ways to leverage AI to drive everything that can make the conversation much more meaningful and impactful.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, I love what you just said. This idea of in service of connection and then back to the raison d'etre of a business, which is to help the business grow.

**Yamini Rangan:** Exactly.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yamini, is there a moment where you didn't feel like you were your authentic self? So, you talked earlier about, you want to be all in as a CEO? Fully present. Just give it all. Is there a moment where you felt like, oh, I'm not. I'm not being present. I'm not showing up in the way that I feel I can, and I want to. And when you did that, what did you learn?

**Yamini Rangan:** I think many times in my career when I have, you know, veered away from being authentic and who I am, you know, I've certainly felt that, you know, early on in my career, I said the playbook I was trying to follow did not work for me as a salesperson. I reinvented the playbook. Many years after that. I became, you know, a manager. And I was, you know, beginning to lead teams. And part of being a manager is honestly trying to get your entire team to perform, you know, in a in, in a way that works for that team. And I still remember probably one of my harshest 360 feedbacks that I got, you know, a decade into my career and you know, it was from my team and then from some of the peers. And as I read it, you know, it was not pleasant to read like, hey, she's moving too fast, and she has a playbook, and she wants me to follow her playbook. You know, a few of those things hurt. But what hurt me the most is that I read that, and I was like, this is not me. You know, when you when you read something about you and you're like, this is really not who I am, deeply. And why am I not

showing up? Why am you know who I am as a person? Why is that not showing up in the feedback of, you know who I am as a person and where is there a disconnect? And you know, I asked that question and at that time, you know, I had a phenomenal coach and I've been lucky throughout my career to have coaches, mentors, sponsors and this executive coach at that time said, is this feedback hurting you? And I was like, yeah, it's hurting me.

**Yamini Rangan:** It's hurting me pretty deeply because this is not who I am. And, you know, she asked me, what do you think you need to change? And I said, I think I'm going really fast. I'm going fast. I'm not enrolling the people on my team. I'm giving them answers. I probably need to get better at asking questions, and I need to like, slow down and, you know, and she asked me the question, so if you know all of this, why haven't you changed? And that question really made me think because I had heard those feedback before. But in my in just not being present, what I always did was to say, oh, it was my team, or it was my manager, or it was my company and it was never me, you know, And at that moment I said, well, the best thing I can do is to completely change who I am and how I show up at work.

**Yamini Rangan:** And, you know, the hardest thing for us to change is ourselves. The easiest thing for us to change is our manager or, you know, the company that we work with, you know, especially in tech. I mean, you just lift your head, you'll get calls, and then you're like, oh, I can avoid this problem, and I can actually go somewhere else and restart the same problem all over again. And so, I think, you know, in my early part of my managerial journey, I recognized that I got to change how I show up. And that's when I started to slow down. Enrollment of the team in the vision became really important. Asking questions rather than giving answers becomes important. And I still recognize in my in my current journey, there are times I fall back because there's so much happening, and the first thing that I notice is like, I go faster than everybody else and I'm like, okay, I can. I see myself following the same pattern that I had, and then you just slow down and then you start asking questions. But I will tell you that it has had a huge impact in terms of my own career and my own growth is recognizing and being even more authentic to who I am.

**Whitney Johnson:** It's interesting how you had gotten that feedback a few times, and then you finally you had a coach be able to sort of really hold up that mirror and say, okay, you can be different, but you, you yourself are going to have to disrupt yourself. So back to those new neural pathways. You will need to do something differently. And at that point you now had the conviction or the desire to want to be different.

**Yamini Rangan:** Yes. And you know, this is the thing that I tell people that we all think that the hardest thing is for us to change, and the easiest thing is to go to a new company and a new boss or new manager or a new team. But the minute we get really comfortable being uncomfortable, the minute we start questioning what can we be doing differently? What can we take on for ourselves, then everything else becomes easier. You know, you may still decide to change your team or your manager or your company, but the minute you sit in that discomfort and say, you know what, I'm going to change myself. And I just embrace it now I'm like, bring me the discomfort I want to be in, you know, uncomfortable positions which feel like I have to, you know, break through from who I was yesterday in order to get to where I need to go tomorrow. I just have to, like, break through something. I want to sit in that, you know, discomfort. And I want to find a way to kind of like, break through because then the amount of transformation, and the journey itself is great. Like, you know, I think about the most fulfilling times in my career was not associated with getting a promotion or a pay raise. It was, you know, associated with this breakthrough learning moments and then making that a practice of who you become. And when you continuously do that, the journey itself is like, wow, okay, I learned this this time. Okay. What is this year going to bring in terms of new learning? What is this year going to bring through in terms of breakthrough learnings? Right. And so, it just requires you to sit in discomfort and learn from that discomfort.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And you know, it's interesting something you talked about imposter syndrome earlier because I think sometimes in that place we do feel like an imposter. And I remember hearing Seth Godin, who obviously is a master marketer, said, you know, if you in that moment when you feel like an imposter, Good, because that means you're changing. And I think about it from the launch point of the S-curve perspective. You can then once you know that. So, we're talking, you know, intellectually we can see those markers of like, I am feeling really uncomfortable right now. I'm feeling really awkward right now. I feel like an imposter. And it allows you instead of saying, oh, I've got to change something just to say, oh, yeah, I need to change myself. But it means I'm actually in this place of growth and so it.

**Yamini Rangan:** Makes me.

**Whitney Johnson:** Feel less awful.

**Yamini Rangan:** I, I love this, I, this is why I think, like your S-curve, you know, it resonated deeply with me because, you know, s-curves are fundamentally breakthroughs, right? These are breakthroughs. And there are moments within that breakthrough where you recognize the need for growth and change. And if you can just say, I love what you said about Seth, if you can say, great, you know, you feel like you're not good enough, great, become good enough, you know, and you feel like you should not be there. Great. Earn your spot at being there and prove you know what you need to do to get there and work backwards. And the other thing that I add to myself is that great, you feel uncomfortable? Then think about what you want to say about that discomfort in the future, and then work backwards and align everything that you do today to be able to get there, right? Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. All right. Just a couple final questions to wrap up. Um, what do you do to relax? So, what are some indulgences that you do for yourself that just sort of feed and nurture you?

**Yamini Rangan:** Uh oh. Very, very basic. You know, I have to say that I do, um, you know, yoga and meditation, and it literally grounds me. It's a practice that brings me down to earth. I think that's how I think about it when I, you know, do a 30-minute yoga session. I feel like I'm down in a place which feels like stable and comfortable. And interestingly, my favorite pose in yoga is actually Shoulder stand or headstand. Because if you can remain stable when you are upside down, then you can remain stable when you are actually standing on the ground. And I think that's, you know, I've and I'm not good at it, but I practice because what when I'm in that moment, I'm like, well, the world is upside down. If I can stay grounded when the world is upside down, I can do that in practice. And so, it really grounds me. And then I have like super simple things that I, I actually have, like this vegetable patch where, you know, this is summer and I have, you know, tomatoes and basil and, you know, herbs and like, you know, cucumbers and I'm like, it just gives me so much pleasure to just go out, you know, on a weekend and look at like, oh, I need to like, clean this up and do this. And then when it starts, you know, like, right now my house is full of tomatoes. I don't know what to do with them, but I'm like just the act of looking at how something grows and, you know, harvesting it, making a beautiful, simple salad with olive oil. I love basic cooking. Not fancy cooking, just like, you know, basic cooking. Those are things. And then, you know, spending time with my family. Um, nothing like two teens who will keep you grounded. We're like, we don't care what you do, mom. You're just, like, super normal. You didn't help me with my homework. You're not good enough. And they keep you grounded.

**Whitney Johnson:** And it's very humbling, isn't it? Having two teenagers, one of my one of my most memorable moments. So, our children are in their 20s, but I remember my daughter, um, and we still tease her about it. She said to my husband and I one day, you know, mom and Dad, you're solidly above average as parents.

**Yamini Rangan:** So. Well, you should consider that a huge compliment, because I think my teen boys might not even say that.

**Whitney Johnson:** Um, okay. So, um, what's been useful for you in this conversation?

**Yamini Rangan:** Reflections. I think you've made me reflect a little bit on, you know, the journey in probably different ways than ever before. I don't think that I spend as much time reflecting, especially all the way, you know, uh, when I was ten years old. So, I think reflection, because then it brings you a little bit more clarity in terms of what the journey, you're on and what you're trying to accomplish. Um, I think the other thing I've really enjoyed is your art of asking questions. I'm such a fan of anybody who is phenomenal at, you know, asking questions. And I think you are wonderful at asking questions. And, um, I'll say maybe the third is being present. You know, there's such beauty, you know, in being present and connecting with someone else. And I think you are exceptionally present in this conversation. So, all of those are just beautiful. Thank you.

**Speaker3:** Mhm.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, right back at you. This is, this has been really fun. All right final two questions. So, if you could, go back and talk to your ten-year-old self. Um what would you like to say to her in terms of because your ten-year-old self is the parent of who you are today? Um, how what would you like to thank her for?

**Yamini Rangan:** Oh, a lot. I would think my ten-year-old self, you know, being resilient, never taking no for an answer, uh, you know, paving my own path and finding, you know, that authentic core of who I was. There was, like, this spunk. And there was like this, like, energy about my ten-year-old self. I had no business, you know, uh, coming to a new country and, you know, becoming a CEO. I like no business, but I think there was some spark in that, you know, ten-year-old about never giving up, of always being resilient and always coming back to something authentic and, um, just grateful for that. Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Um, okay. Any final thoughts to put a bow on the conversation that you want people to hear or take away in your final words?

**Yamini Rangan:** Almost everything that I have seen in my life has been proportional to how much I was willing to learn. And I think, you know, if we, uh, really embrace learning, then we'll embrace the journey that we are on. And I just want people to enjoy that learning process and embrace that learning process, because that can lead to just absolute tremendous growth.

**Whitney Johnson:** So beautiful. Yamini, thank you so much.

**Yamini Rangan:** Thank you. Thank you for having me and the wonderful questions. I really enjoyed the conversation.

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You gain credibility by being curious. What a powerful statement. And fairly universal, too. Obviously in sales, the more Yamini asked about her customers' journey, the more they trusted her and bought into the idea that – like she said – she's there to get them promoted.

And it's that curiosity that got her to the C-Suite. Remember, when she asked why she got that first C level role, her bosses said that she just connected the dots better. You can't connect those dots if you're not willing to learn about each point, each team, what makes them tick and how they fit into the larger picture.

But one kind of credibility we often overlook is our personal credibility – knowing who we are and what we are capable of. And you can't discover that unless you're willing to ask hard questions of yourself. It's often much easier to probe into a customer's motivation than it is to sit down and figure out where your own motivations come from. It goes back to the first principles thinking that Yamini's used her whole life, from learning to speak up in an American business school, to asking herself where she wants to be in five years and working backwards.

First principles thinking challenges us to question those mental ruts we all get used to, to go beyond the knee jerk reactions we're comfortable with and interrogate what we really stand for. I'll wrap with a quote from Yamini – “Do you feel like you're not good enough? Great! Now figure out how to become good enough.”

For more on embracing the anxiety of feeling like an imposter, we mentioned Seth Godin – you can listen to my talk with Seth in [episode 303](#). On this idea of servant leadership and putting your customers first, I'd love for you to check out [episode 310](#) with Angela Ahrendts. And if you're looking for another healthy dose of that curious spirit, there's my conversation with Diana Kander, [episode 340](#).

Thank you again to Yamini Rangan and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. If you want to know more about how DA can support you and your organization through upheaval and change, you can reach us at [workwithus@thedisruptionadvisors.com](mailto:workwithus@thedisruptionadvisors.com). 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.