

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 389: JEANETTE BENNETT

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.

I always find it fascinating to pinpoint exactly when someone received the first inkling of what their eventual career would be. Our guest today, Jeanette Bennett, primarily known as the CEO and founding editor of *Utah Valley Magazine* in the state of Utah, knew from a very young age that she wanted to be a journalist. From pretending to interview her sister in elementary school to writing neighborhood newsletters and serving as the editor of her nationally recognized high school newspaper, Jeanette was a natural-born storyteller.

All through her formative years, Jeanette assumed that she would go into broadcast journalism. In high school, she dated that dream by working as a TV camera operator at a local station in Idaho Falls. A funny thing, however, happened on her way to becoming a TV anchor, she realized her path needed a reframe. It turned out to be the first of reframes that led her to where she is today: the executive managing director in Utah for real estate giant Colliers International.

I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So, Jeanette, tell us what your absolute perfect day in Utah looks like. Let's say you can teleport. You only have 24 hours. How would you structure the perfect day?

Jeanette Bennett: My perfect day in Utah would definitely begin early with time out on one of our beautiful trails. And I live near one, so right now I do more walking than running. But however, I'm out there, I'd love to be moving on the trail, watching the sun come up and its rays of light crawling across the valley before it hits me up on the trail. Definitely start there. Then I'd go back home. I'd be awake before the rest of my family come back home and spend a little bit of time with them, get them off to their jobs and school, and then I would just start cranking on the projects that I love. I mean, honestly, that's part of my perfect day is doing the things that I, that I love in my career and in my community. And that evening, I'd probably have dinner with my family and then show up to another community event to support some initiative of someone who's raising money for something or raising awareness for something and come back to sleep. Sit in my backyard. We have a little creek back there and I would just enjoy nature and the birds. Breathe in, breathe out and crash hard asleep at 11:00.

Whitney Johnson: This sounds like a perfect day. And you just reminded me. I remember a few years ago you did a *Dancing with the Stars* event in Utah for a fundraiser. How was that? Was it fun?

Jeanette Bennett: Oh, you know, my problem is I say yes to stuff that I really have no business saying yes to. And that was one of those. It was a fundraiser. They originally came to me and said, who would be some fun people in the community who could do this dance? So, I gave them ideas. They went and called them. Those people said no. So, then they came back to me and they're like, how about if you do it? I'm like, okay, I guess I'm not a dancer. I'm just someone willing to try and make a fool of myself. But anyway, I got paired up with a dancer who had been on the show, *Dancing with the Stars*, and we had practices totally out of my element or address from the show. But the thing is, the day of I was nervous. I'm like, I don't even know if I remember all the steps. The day of I'm like, I don't care, I'm just going to have fun. I'm going to be the smiliest person out there. I'm just going to have fun. I'm not going to worry about what I look like or whether I remember the dance, and it actually ended up being just a total blast. And I'm so happy that I did it that I said yes to something that I wasn't going to nail. I wasn't no, you know, no one's going to call me to be on the real show at this point. You know, this was just a fun community thing. And honestly, the crowd was great. They were cheering for me because I think they were thinking, wow, good for her, glad it's her and not me. And so, they were, they were fun and energetic and like, like most things in my life, I end up glad I did it.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. So, what dances did you do just out of curiosity, as a former love of ballroom dance person, what dances did you do?

Jeanette Bennett: So, it was just one dance because that was all I could handle, and it was to Taylor Swift's Shake It Off and it was a swing. So, anyway, we, it was just fun. But like, he flipped me over his shoulder, I spun on the ground. I did, you know, I did some things that an almost 50-year-old person probably wouldn't be expected to do. Someone who's not a dancer. But honestly, it was just fun. And it was to raise money for CharityVision. So, it was cool.

Whitney Johnson: So good. Okay, so, Jeanette, you started your career in media and publishing. Early in high school, you were the editor of the school newspaper, *The Buzz*. You even won some awards. Tell us more about that experience in high school.

Jeanette Bennett: So, it even started in elementary school. My older sister played teacher, and I would play journalist, so we'd have these little pretend things going on in the basement. And I did a little newsletter for her school, and I did a newsletter for the neighborhood, and I just was really drawn to that idea of storytelling and documenting, and I played weather forecaster. Then in junior high I was on the yearbook staff and then in high school we had a really good newspaper. So, I was on that and was the editor of my senior year, and my first airplane ride was my senior year. We won one of the top newspapers in the country and got to go to Columbia University in New York to pick up the award. So, that was huge for me. Never been on a plane, never been to New York and back there to pick up this award. And it was, it was just phenomenal and really kind of a predictor of my life in a lot of ways of just firsts doing things for the first time and having doors open because of journalism and because of my excitement and I think work ethic to plow forward. So, *The Buzz*, you know, I think naturally I'm kind of an introverted listener, observer. But I've had a lot of leadership opportunities where it's really stretched and grown me. And being the editor of *The Buzz* was maybe one of the first times where I'm like, all right, I'm in charge of these 30 people, and some of them have way bigger personalities than I do. And how am I

going to do this? How am I going to command their attention? How am I going to set out a vision? And that that prepared me for the next thing which prepared me for the next thing, you know. So those high school years were really formative for me. And then I went to college and stayed in journalism. It became my key to really everything, you know, my key to paying for school and my career. And it put me in starting in high school and college and on, in, in the offices and homes of really interesting people. And my, my pass to get in was that I was going to write about it, you know, so it built it built my network that way. But yeah, it did start in high school as a, as a teenager.

Whitney Johnson: What state did you grow up in?

Jeanette Bennett: Idaho.

Whitney Johnson: Idaho. Okay. Like southern?

Jeanette Bennett: In Idaho Falls.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. Got it.

Jeanette Bennett: Southeastern Idaho.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. Love it. Um, so when you were ten years old, say, and people asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up, did you say, did you know that you wanted to be a journalist?

Jeanette Bennett: I did, I, I thought I would be on TV more. I like, I thought that I would be, those were the journalists that I could see at that point. Right? And so, I thought that would be my path. I worked at the local TV station in Idaho Falls in high school as a camera operator. So, I would be there at the 6:00 and 10:00 news, running the camera and giving the signals, and it was exciting. I didn't meet any women in that, in that at that time that I really wanted to pattern my life after in broadcast. It's a hard, it can be done and there are many good examples. But in in my sphere, I didn't see women who were also having families and having good balance, and they were traveling around to small towns, building their career and not getting paid a lot. And I lost a little bit of my excitement for broadcast from working at the that tiny little TV station, but it was helpful because it reframed me to be like, okay, maybe, maybe print journalism is a better fit for the whole part of me that I wanted to create.

Whitney Johnson: Interesting. I like how you said you're working as a camera operator, and you reframed. I like how you did that. And it is interesting too. One of the first books that I wrote was called *Dare, Dream, Do*, and one of the things I talked a lot about is dating dreams. And so one of the things that you, you did when you were working as a camera operator, as you were dating that dream and you're like, oh, okay, maybe I don't want to, I want to be a journalist, but maybe I don't want to be on camera, maybe I, what's the other path that I can take?

Jeanette Bennett: That's exactly what it was. And I love the way you described that. I was definitely dating the dream. And I learned things, and I'm so glad for that. You know, I'm so grateful that I had that experience. I loved a lot of things about it and being a print journalist, actually, I have had a lot of chances to appear on TV shows. Just one offs, you know, enough to kind of scratch that itch, I guess. But I've never regretted the reframe that I, that I did at that time.

Whitney Johnson: So, who are some of your early mentors? Some people, 1 or 2 people that influenced you and how your life is today? Who comes to mind?

Jeanette Bennett: So, one of them was the two older people actually in my church congregation. One was the organist and just, you know, classic older woman organist. And I played the piano and she was like, you, you down there, I'm going to teach you to play the organ so that you can fill in for me. And I probably was a little resistant, but she taught me and in, in our lessons she also became a mentor for life. So, she would want to know, okay, what are you loving about school. And we'd talk about dating. We'd talk about all these things. Eventually, when I did start our magazine in 2000, she was our first subscriber and I'm getting emotional even thinking about that. The magazine was in Utah and she's in Idaho, but just her support of me in all ways really showed up in that

\$10 subscription check that she wrote before the first issue came out. She just wanted to be so supportive and that was so meaningful, way more meaningful to me than I think she even realized. Another person in that same time of life, an older gentleman one day in church handed me a *Women & Business* magazine. It's kind of out of the blue, you know, like I, you don't usually hand people magazines at church and stuff. But he handed me that and two messages that it gave me. One was that he had been paying a little bit of attention to who I was and who I was trying to be. And two, it gave me this, this feeling of like and he approves of that idea of a woman being in business, which wasn't a message I felt like I was getting from everyone in my life and every, every perspective. But I thought, huh? You know, he thinks that that would be a really cool and acceptable path for me to be a woman in business. And so those small moments actually made a big difference. Of course, there were other people, journalism advisors and people actually in the industry that were of course really, really shaping. But some of those key moments from those people who weren't naturally in my career path helped form my belief and confidence in myself that were really key. And so, I've tried and hope I've done that for a few, especially young women, along the way of just cheering them on in their in their pursuits.

Whitney Johnson: You know, it's interesting as you're talking, I'm having this, you know, you introduced this this image of the, of the camera and the framing. And it's interesting as you think about the, the woman who was the organist and then this, this other gentleman who handed you that magazine? In both instances, they were saying, I see you. I see who you are. I see who you can be. I think it's valuable. They were showing you a future version of yourself.

Jeanette Bennett: That's absolutely true.

Speaker3: That's beautiful.

Jeanette Bennett: It's absolutely true. And they in some ways, they were seeing it more than I was. I was still working through my limiting beliefs and my own confidence issues. And so, to see how they saw me helped me to build a little bit of confidence and belief in myself. Yeah. And that's happened other times in my life too, when I've, I've sensed how other people see me. It has helped me expand how I can see myself, even though I feel like I'm very I don't know, I feel like I have an internal compass of like, okay, I can figure out who I am and how to do it, but those moments of other people adding to that, it's significant. We really do need each other in this journey.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, it's a gift. It's a true gift when people do that. All right. So, you get a master's in mass communications and media studies in 1997. And three years later you start the *Utah Valley Magazine*. So, I think maybe I have a little bit of an idea where that vision came from, based on one of the mentors you just described. But give us some more, more detail of I mean, that was a pretty gutsy thing to do. I'm going to start a magazine. Tell us more.

Jeanette Bennett: Totally gutsy. And I was 25 when we started the magazine. So really young. I, you know, going through school and finishing my bachelor's and master's. I think what I envisioned was working for a magazine, working for Forbes, working for fortune, working for Inc. and being and writing about business. I did a business minor thinking I'd love to write about business and entrepreneurs. That's so cool. And then in 1997, the same time I was finishing my master's degree, I became a mom, and I was working at the *Deseret News* downtown Salt Lake. Simultaneously finishing my master's and working at the *Deseret News*. And I worked there until I went into labor. And, you know, I'm like, I'll be back in six weeks. And what happened was, you know, I went home with this brand-new baby. Work from home and hybrid. That wasn't a thing yet. So, it was like, if I go back in six weeks, it's traveling to downtown. The commute time being down there, you know, a ten-hour shift or whatever. And I couldn't get my head around it. I just I loved this baby so much. I didn't have family around. I didn't feel like I had this solution or desire to leave him. And so, that's when that's when the entrepreneurial light started turning on as I was like, how can I do it all? Which is also a theme for life.

Jeanette Bennett: How is there any way to play this Tetris game and fit this in? And creating my own publication became the solution that I had in my mind to be able to do that, and that if I was in charge, if it was my thing, then I could work from home and I could get up early and I could stay up late and I could be in charge of this rather than having, you know, my set shift as a copy editor at the *Deseret News*. And so, that's when the entrepreneurial bug kicked in. We did a few smaller projects in the '98 to 2000 frame, but working towards starting *Utah Valley*

Magazine, our first magazine, in 2000. By that point, I had a second baby. So, I now had two babies, two-and-a-half-year-old and a newborn, and launched the magazine as a 25-year-old in Utah. But really, it was the motherhood. It was that change that reframed. Going back to that word again, it reframed what success looked like to me, and that flexibility piece became really big for me. The control of my own schedule that some autonomy. So, that's when this new version of me came to be.

Whitney Johnson: So, Jeanette, I'm wondering, so this is now 27, 27 years ago, and I'm just wondering what was the ethos at that time was because I can't remember off the top of my head, was entrepreneurship a big thing? It seems like it was still a little bit early days for people. You know, everybody's saying, I want to become an entrepreneur. And I'm wondering, as you thought about doing this, do you remember 1 or 2 self-limiting beliefs that you had to wrestle with in order to do this?

Jeanette Bennett: Yes. So, the ethos was not entrepreneurial. At least that's not that's not what I was feeling in Utah and in Idaho. So, I kind of feel like those two states both shaped who I am. And the ethos was very much stay at home mom. And that was the ethos of my family, my mom and aunts. I'd never known any of them to have careers. My friend's friends' moms were all at home. Some of them had part time jobs at the fabric store or something, but nobody was all out, you know, building a career. And it was very much like, focus on getting a lifetime job, you know, so you go to college and then you work for a big company for 30, 40 years. Those were the stories that I was hearing. And as I finished my business minor and had speakers come in, all of whom were male, by the way, the lecture series was 100% male. It was working at big companies. It wasn't like I started this in my basement kind of thing. Those weren't the stories that were being celebrated. So, it felt very foreign to me and to everyone around me that we would try to do this. But there was, there was something in me that was like, but this is the way, this is the option. And I also felt like I could live on almost nothing. You know, having grown up in a big family in Idaho, having been a college student not too far in the recent past, I'm like, this doesn't have to, like, be huge.

Jeanette Bennett: This just has to, you know, put some groceries, you know, in my cart and on my table. And so, my, my goals and what success looked like to me didn't have to be, you know, multi-million dollar anything. It just had to be like a replacement for my *Deseret News* income, you know, to be able to do it, to do it at home. So, it definitely was different. And this is before social media. This is before, this is before texting. This is before it was common and before social media. So, all of these things, these platforms that have come have helped this gig economy and have helped women, have helped entrepreneurs, because you have so many ways to get the word out and to dabble with the business. You can start an Instagram account in 30 seconds and have a business, you know. But back then it just seemed so much harder to put a stake in the ground and be like, this is the name of what I'm doing. And this is, you know, this, you're my audience. And here's, you're going to hear from me. I'm going to put together a direct mail piece, and I'm going to send it to you, you know, at a, at a great expense.

Jeanette Bennett: So, there were a lot of barriers then. But I think my one of my biggest barriers was in my mind of just like, is this, is this okay? Is this, is this right? Is this, is this going against my beliefs and what I've been raised that my, my greatest purpose is to raise my children because I did believe that as well. So, it was that moment when I became a mom and I had I had finished my master's degree and I became a mom, and I was like, whoa, my worlds are colliding. Because my professors had been very, very supportive about my educational journey and, you know, always wanting me to be their assistant on different projects and things. I was succeeding there and then having the baby, which, you know, I'd grown up knowing that that was going to be my purpose. And when those worlds collided, I was like, I feel like nobody prepared me for this moment of having so much passion for this but having so much passion for this. And do I have to choose one or the other, or can they go together? And I feel like I don't even know who to talk to about this. I don't, has anyone, I'm sure other people obviously had faced that, but I hadn't talked to anyone who had. I hadn't had someone help mentor me through that clash of those big pieces of me. So I, I feel like I did that mostly on my own, if I'm going to be honest, at that time of life, my, on my own and with some help from, from above of just like what is okay to do, you know, and I didn't go back to the *Deseret News*, that did feel like the right decision. But then I also felt a little bit lost until we got on the ground with what we were doing. I felt like, man, like I felt like I didn't even have anything to contribute to conversations when my husband would come home from his work and school and, and when I'd see other people, I was like, I don't know, there's not a lot going on. I held a baby all day, you know, like I was reframing again. Well, that's our theme for the day. But reframing who I was and what I liked to talk about and

think about. And once I started the business and had that piece of me again, it was like I came back to life. It's like, okay, I and I still and I have five kids, and I feel like if you talk to them, for the most part, they feel like I was a present mom, and they also had a present dad. And I feel like for the most part, I did get to be the mom I wanted to be and build a business along the way.

Whitney Johnson: So interesting. So, the word that's coming to mind, and I'm sure you're not going to be surprised at all when I say this word is that you are a disruptor, because one of the first tenets of, of being a disruptor is that you play where no one else is playing. You take on market risk. And so, you have been a disruptor, both from a personal standpoint of like, how do I blend work and family and put these two together? And especially when the narrative was not to do that. So, there's a disruptor in that regard, but also disruptor in being an entrepreneur and in creating something that hadn't been created. And what did that business look like? And it's just really fun to hear you describe that, as well as the emotional aspect of doing something new where you're just like, I don't know how to do this. I don't know what this looks like. I don't know who to talk to. I don't know how I'm going to figure this out, and I want to make sure that I'm good with God in all of this. Like, how do I do? How do I put all this together? So, it's just very, very fun to hear you share that story.

Jeanette Bennett: Well, thank you. And you've given words. You've given a lexicon to the process that I was going through. And I recently disrupted myself again this year, which I'm sure we'll talk about. And so, I've, I've lived the concepts that you've described. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: I do want to come back to your most recent disruption. So, we will get to that. Okay. So, if we open up a copy of the *Utah Valley Magazine* today, what's in there? What are we going to see? What kind of stories are you interested in? Just talk to us about what are the contents.

Jeanette Bennett: All right. So, *Utah Valley Magazine* comes out six times a year, and it's all about people, and it celebrates Utah Valley. So, the area south of Salt Lake it's called Utah Valley. And we've wrapped our arms around that part of the world. And there's so many dynamic things going on there. Two big universities, Silicon Slopes, a lot of tech companies, network marketing companies. There's great, great outdoor activities and opportunities there, recreation... And so, the magazine celebrates the people behind all of those things I just listed. So, the cover story is almost always a person. And because we love to tell stories behind the scenes, stories of someone, get to know them, really get to know their childhood, get to know what makes them tick. We have some regular features people love. Once a year we do celebrity look-alikes, which is kind of a funny thing, but everyone looks forward to it every year. And we also go on one of the local TV stations with some of our look-alikes. One year we had a Jay Leno look-alike and Jay Leno invited that person on his show.

Jeanette Bennett: This was a while ago, right? But fun things have happened like that through the years. We feature doctors, so at times we've surveyed all the doctors. If you were to send your family member to a doctor, who would you choose? And then we list that. We have restaurants in there that, you know, the new restaurants, things to try, entree to try. We do high school students who will change the world. So, every year our graduation issue, we pick one high school student from each school and highlight them as someone who's going to change the world in one way or another. So, we have these regular features that are once a year, but then every issue it just, you'll see someone you know. That's one of the things I love that people say because Utah Valley has doubled in size since we've started our magazine. But still, it feels. It feels small enough that when you open the magazine, you're going to see someone you know and learn something about them that you didn't know before.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. And have you, have you tracked any of those high school seniors that are going to change the world? Do you go back?

Jeanette Bennett: So, we, we do a ten year. At ten years, we track them down again.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Jeanette Bennett: And so, I mean sometimes when we contact them, they're like, oh I don't know if I've done much. I'm still working on my PhD or, you know, whatever. But it's fun to do a check in and show an updated picture. And, and some of them have done what they predicted they would do. And of course, some have not. But

it's been, it's been meaningful. And what I, when we work on that section, I always think about the parents and also the junior high students reading that as they get ready for high school and as the parents get ready to raise high schoolers, like, what are the things, you know, what's the advice, what, what's the approach? And of course, a lot of it. You could guess. It's like, you know, be friendly to others, get involved, you know. But other things are more specific. And I see it as a parenting manual and as a high school survival manual. And so, I think it's been helpful for the community. And we've heard that. And that's brought me a lot of satisfaction.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. So, is there an edition of the magazine that you're super proud of, or a specific story that really sticks out in your mind?

Jeanette Bennett: Yeah. So, our sister publication is *BusinessQ* so we have this. So, *Utah Valley Magazine* is more community oriented and *BusinessQ* is, of course, business, and that's been the one, that's been my favorite project to work on, because I feel like it's been my continual MBA to interview and write about entrepreneurs. And in 2008, we started what we call the UV50, which was patterned after Inc. 500. So, UV50, name our 50 businesses, top 50 businesses in Utah County. And we do an issue about them with all their stats and info. And then we hold an event where they, they get their recognition in person as well. And that's my favorite one that we do every year, because I feel like it tells the story of our economy, which is also largely our cultural story as well, because you can see the types of companies that grow. And, you know, we were heavy tech. We're now more consumer products. You can see the evolution of the top companies. And that's my favorite project to work on. We're in the middle of it right now for this fall. My team is doing largely the large lifting now at this point. But that, I love that. As I look back on Utah Valley, more of the community based, people-based articles, one of the issues that comes to mind was actually our 20th anniversary issue, which was in 2020. So, we started *Utah Valley Magazine* in 2000. So, it's always easy to say how old it is. I had a kid that year too, so you always know how old she is. So, we did our 20th anniversary issue and that was, it was also simultaneous with Covid, obviously, and I had, I went through a cancer journey in 2020. So, I was very reflective at this point. On our magazine hitting the 20-year mark, the world in turmoil, my own health in the balance. I mean, I was, I was fine, but it was it was something to go through. So, for that issue, I went back to every cover we showed, every cover we had done in the 20 years, and I told a back story of the photo shoot, usually of that person. And, you know, something funny that happened or interesting or did you know, kind of thing from the photo shoot? That was really it was important for me. I think people enjoyed reading it as well to hear just all the hard work. And oh, this photo shoot took three different times, and they got rained out the first time, whatever it was. And that was, that was a moment where I'm like, even if we didn't publish another magazine, I feel like we did, we did it. We did 20 years. We documented it all. We wrapped it up with a bow and that issue came out about three weeks after I did my, my surgery to take out my thyroid and some lymph nodes here. And so, it was just this moment of like, I am going to take a take a minute. And like, instead of being so obsessed about the next thing, I'm going to talk about what has been and celebrate that and wrap it up and look at the lessons learned and things. So, that was really, really fun. I, my staff talked me into putting myself on the cover, which I had never done and never would have done. Oprah started her magazine in 2000 as well, and she was always on the cover as she should be. But anyway, that was my little Oprah moment.

Whitney Johnson: Your homage to Oprah.

Jeanette Bennett: Yes.

Whitney Johnson: So, let's talk just briefly about building a staff, especially a writing staff. Talk to us about, and what does your staff look like? Are they contractors? Just sort of the nuts and bolts of the people side of a magazine.

Jeanette Bennett: Yeah. So, we largely use full-time, full-time writers, and I've been lucky to have a lot of longevity on my staff. So, the editor in chief now, who works, works under me producing our publications. He's been there 22 years. And so basically from the start and then other writers as well, the only contract writers that we use at this point are former full-time employees. And because they were with us, they know. They know the cadence. They know the style. They know the tone. I'm really comfortable with them representing us as they go out in the community to do interviews and photo shoots. And for right now, that is what it looks like. In the past, we had a really robust news website at one point, that we don't do. At that point, we needed a lot more writers, and

so I had a different philosophy at that point. So, longevity is important to me. We all edit each other's things. Everybody reads everything that goes in the magazine. I think that's helpful for a few reasons. It makes the writing better, but it also makes future writing better as you notice the things that you love about each other's writing.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Jeanette Bennett: Through the years we've, at different meetings we've been like, everybody bring a good piece of writing, and we're going to just analyze a sentence or paragraph, and we're going to look at this one-word choice. And words are delicious, you know, just phrasing is so beautiful. And so, I love taking time to really look at that. And everybody bring an example. I think that's really helpful.

Whitney Johnson: Okay wait, before you go on. So, what's a piece of writing that you've read lately that was delicious.

Jeanette Bennett: Well, I just got back from New York, and I saw Hamilton. That's the first thing. It is so well written. The word plays, you know that. How he takes a word, and it means something else in the next sentence? I just, just can't even. Oh, that's so beautiful to me. I think that's awesome. So, that's I mean, that's the most recent piece of literature that I really, really loved. You know, even fiction writing, which is not journalistic writing. But one thing that I love is just the way they, they can just write a phrase that means so much, a description that means so much. *Humans of New York* is a, is an account I love. They can tell a story, and their words are just really efficient. You know, they don't take us a whole sentence to be like, this person has three kids. You know, they work that in somehow. Yeah, into another sentence about something else. And so, I just love efficient writing. We never have enough space to put in everything that we want in a printed publication. And so, efficiency, how can you tell the most information in the smallest amount of space is always cool to me.

Whitney Johnson: You know? And it's interesting too because I've noticed. So, Alex Tuerk, our producer, he has been doing a lot of fiction writing, and I've noticed that when he writes, his writing improved because he'd been doing and he was already a great writer, but it improved when he was in that discipline of writing fiction. Have you noticed that when people are focused on fiction, their nonfiction writing gets better?

Jeanette Bennett: Yes, because it's all, it's all words and its people, whether it's fictional people or real people. So, my daughter, who's a BYU grad, she's one of our writers at the magazine, and she has a real interest in fiction, and she's writing a fiction piece, reads a lot of fiction, which is not me. I, that's not me at all, but that she brings that taste to her journalistic writing, where she has a lot of just fun flair and really descriptive wording and things. And sometimes I, sometimes I trim that down. Okay, that's a little much, but like, she puts it on the page. And then between her creativity and my journalistic efficiency, I think we arrive at a pretty good place.

Whitney Johnson: Is that fun to work with your daughter?

Jeanette Bennett: It really is. So, she was the baby. She was the newborn. When the first issue of *Utah Valley Magazine* came out. And so, she grew up coming with me to events and delivering magazines and seeing me at the kitchen table. And then she pursued a degree in public relations and writing. And she's, you know, she's really fun. She's really creative. She's also a performer. So, she brings that flair to our events when she helps emcee and things. She's really good at the mic and I am really, really proud of her. You know, she we, we look a little bit alike. And so, it's fun for her to be my plus one at different events. And, and it's been fun for me. It's actually been freeing for me as I've pursued a few other things lately, to know that she is there. So, we held an event in March this year, a big launch event for the magazine, something I would never, ever miss. My first grandbaby was due around that time, and I told my kids who live in Seattle, I'm like, I will come when the baby is born any day except this day. So, don't have the baby this day because I have this magazine party that I just want to be to. And of course, the baby came that day and I, and I couldn't stand it. I had to, I wanted to be there with the grandbaby. And so, I did not attend that party. And Hailey, my daughter, stepped up and emceed and everybody said it was amazing. And she was so excited. And that day gave me more of a pass of like, I don't actually have to be there.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Jeanette Bennett: That is so amazing. And she got to step up. You know, if I'd been there, she would have been assisting me instead of me being gone. She got to rise. And so that ended up being great for both of us.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. Yeah. One of the things that we think about a lot in terms of succession, and when you've got a really senior person, one of the biggest gifts you can give them is, you know you're at the top of that's curve. What if you jump to a new S curve? And that gives that person who's on their own curve that headroom to move to move up the curve. And that's a beautiful illustration of that happening.

Jeanette Bennett: Right. That's a perfect example of an S curve.

Whitney Johnson: Let's talk a little bit about losing. So, you ran for state senator. You came in second place. How did you walk yourself mentally, emotionally through that experience of coming so, so, so, close?

Jeanette Bennett: So that also happened in 2020. That year was so formative.

Whitney Johnson: Wow. That's quite a year.

Jeanette Bennett: Yes. So, I got a call from the recently elected lieutenant governor. She started just calling me multiple times in a day when I was, like busy. And so, I was so interested in why she was calling. She was calling to say, hey, we are going to hire your state senator in your in your district. We're going to hire this person full-time. Leaves this opening and it's, there's going to be this special election. We're going to pick a new state senator in the next three weeks. And I think you should jump in. I'll support you. You know, and I had to decide in three days.

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Jeanette Bennett: And so, and I'm not the quickest decision maker. I'm kind of analytical. I like all the information, but I only had three days, so I was just like, oh, trying to analyze it. I wasn't feeling totally my best in any way. You know, I had gone through the cancer journey. Was doing pretty good, but still coming out of that and our business was still recovering from Covid and all that, it didn't seem like perfect timing, but in another way, it did feel like good timing because it was going to be a short election cycle. I'd always been interested in politics, but this running for a year and having to raise all the money, none of that seemed fun to me, and this was a small scale of that.

Jeanette Bennett: And so, the morning I had to decide, I had to decide to file by 8 a.m. I still hadn't fully decided. So, I got up and went on a walk like we were talking about the trail earlier. I walked about three miles in the dark, and the feeling that I came to on that walk was, you know, this isn't just about the outcome. There's no way to guarantee if I will win this or not. But what if this is not just about the outcome? What if it's also about the process? And that feeling made me feel like, oh, I can do this. I do a lot of things for the experience. So, if that's all this is, I'm down for that. And so, I decided to jump in, and I filed and there were six people who ran. And it was a short election cycle. We did one debate, but it was virtual. And, you know, I called as many of the delegates as I could. There were 300 delegates in our district, and so had a lot of phone conversations. Sent out mailers, did a lot in three weeks, raised enough money to do what I needed to do. And then through this process, I started to really want to win.

Whitney Johnson: Of course.

Jeanette Bennett: Because I'm a competitive person. Why would I put time in this if I didn't win? And I was getting some good feedback of like, wow, you know, I think you might win. There was a strong candidate in there who had, who was already in office in another office, and it was well, well known and, and anyway, so, we ran and then the night of the election was ranked choice voting. And so, it came down to me and this other guy, and then he won, and I came in second. And I did have what I was kind of like, gosh dang it. Like I really, really wanted to win. And so, then it was processing this again. And then I remembered that thought of like, this wasn't just about the outcome, right? This was also about the experience. And look at what I learned. Look at the people I met. Look at what I learned. I gained a lot of interest and respect and understanding for the political process.

Even that small experience of the process of needing to raise a little bit of money and people giving you money, and then me feeling a little bit beholden to them, that was it was just all of it was very interesting, interesting thoughts and emotions tied into it. And also, you know, calling all these people and wanting to give them the answers they want to hear, feeling that pressure of, okay, I know they want me to say this, but is it what I really think? You know, and just doing that dance. So, it was really instructive. And, you know, in the end, I'm so glad that I ran. My son sent me a text the next day and said, mom, it was so interesting watching you do this and watching you fail, essentially. And then you were, you were fine like you still held your head up high, and it showed me that I could do things that I might not succeed at, but that wow, that I could do that. And that was that was cool.

Whitney Johnson: That alone is worth it, right?

Jeanette Bennett: I know.

Whitney Johnson: That alone.

Jeanette Bennett: Yeah. And honestly, I think I thought maybe losing would hurt my confidence, but it actually, the whole process built my confidence because I did realize I did something super hard, and I gained experience. And I have every reason to hold my head up high. Shortly after that, the governor appointed me to the board of Trustees at Utah Valley University, which I think was part of that, people seeing me in a different light, seeing me in that he's appointed me. I'm also on the committee for our fourth district. Whenever we have judges that need to be hired in the fourth district of the state of Utah, I'm part of the committee that they go through to be selected. We interview them and then send some names to the governor. So, there's things that came from that experience that might not have happened otherwise. And so, it was net positive. Will I run for office again? Maybe.

Jeanette Bennett: I'm not saying 100% no, I'm not saying 100% no. It'd have to be the right timing and right opportunity. I have a lot going on and politics is difficult. You know, the minute you put an R or a D behind your name, you lose friends. And I wish it wasn't that way. So, it's a maybe. I get asked about it fairly regularly and I always encourage other people to run for office. So maybe. Maybe

Whitney Johnson: I love it. Big maybe. All right. So, let's talk about you alluded earlier to disrupting yourself again. So, you've got this magazine. You've now basically you've got an heir apparent. You are absolutely at the top of your S-curve from a magazine publishing standpoint. So, you ran for office. But from a professional standpoint, what are some ways that you're disrupting yourself right now?

Jeanette Bennett: Okay, so a couple years ago I started to feel again like this. Ooh, new horizons are coming. And a scripture jumped off the page at me from John 15:2, which basically said, if something isn't bearing fruit, get rid of it. If it bears fruit, prune it so you can bear more fruit. And it felt like it was for me. I felt like I am doing some things that don't bear fruit, and maybe I do need to prune my life so I can bear more fruit. It felt very applicable to my career, and so I started being open to change at that point, and other things just started enlightening me that direction as well. And so, an opportunity came up about a little, little less than a year ago to run a commercial real estate company here in Utah, which is, it's the name of it is Colliers. It's a, it's a global company. And then in Utah it has four offices and it's, it's the biggest by far commercial real estate firm here that works with the church on temple site selection. It works with the governor's office on bringing companies in. It's very involved in economic development. So, I got approached about coming to lead this company, and it was initially a no. That doesn't sound creative enough to me. That doesn't sound like a fit for me. But over the next several months, I started really looking at it and I was feeling a little, a little burned out as far as that S-curve.

Jeanette Bennett: I was at the top feeling a little, uh, Groundhog's Day. The challenge in my magazine company isn't quite there anymore. In fact, in some ways I, in some ways I was even getting worse because I was like, ah, I'll write this tomorrow right before it goes to the printer, instead of being passionate about it for weeks and months, you know. So, I started seeing this as a chance to really learn and grow. It's about 200 employees, a lot more scale financially that I'd be managing. And I started to see it as an opportunity to really challenge myself, but I still didn't make the decision lightly. I flew to LA a couple of times, met with different people there, met with others in this industry, and I was getting a mix of feedback. You should totally do it. Oh, you should not do

that. And you wouldn't like it. Oh, you would love it. And then I started to realize, I've got to stop talking to people. I just need to decide. It's not like I'm taking a vote from everyone I know, and then I'll go with the winning vote. Like, I just need, its helpful information, but then I get to decide. So, then I kind of closed out all the other voices and just really tried to dig deep.

Jeanette Bennett: And then about seven months into the process, over one weekend, I was like, I think I would be really dumb not to do this. This is such a chance for me as a, as a woman and as a business leader, to have this opportunity to sit in this seat at this level, in this state that I love and be part of economic development, which I feel like as a journalist, I have been by highlighting and growing and celebrating and supporting all of the entrepreneurs and businesses and people of our state. So, this is economic development, but in a, in a different, more direct way. And, and I decided I'm going to do this. So, at age 49, I took on this whole new industry and this whole new job. I found myself pulling books off the shelf, including yours, that had been kind of just sitting there for a while because I was in, you know, autopilot. But now I'm like, okay, I've got to create a culture here. Now, how do you do that again? You know, like all the things that I did in the past that now I'm doing in a new way, different way with different technological tools, and it's been really refreshing and exciting to take on something, something new.

Whitney Johnson: It's amazing.

Jeanette Bennett: Yeah, it really has been exciting. And I also have found it's more it's more similar than I expected. So, I have commission-based brokers, and I have a staff that produces the product, the marketing, which is exactly what my publishing company is as well. So, it's actually a lot of the same personalities, personality types, you know, that are here. And I'm bringing a lot of my same creativity. At first, I didn't know that this would be a creative job, and that was one of my concerns. But I just bring my own creativity to it in the way that I communicate and in the way that I approach things. And so, I am able to be myself and hopefully my best self. And it's only been four months, so I'm still doing a lot of things for the first time. In this role, you know, the first time I'm working through this particular issue or facing this challenge. And so, I feel really stretched. It's a, it's a period of growth that I'm grateful for. And I, will I be here the rest of my career? I don't know, maybe, maybe not. But I'm enjoying it and I'm; I feel like I'm making an impact. And the people here seem to appreciate my style, and I didn't feel like I had to really change to do this. I could just come and be me and bring my perspective and my background, even though it wasn't in this particular industry. It is applicable because it's people and its math, right? That's what it comes down to.

Whitney Johnson: People and math. It's a geographic region that, you know, so there's lots of really great transferable skill opportunities. Wow. Love it, love it okay. So, this is your big thing that you're doing right now. Are there any other, I'm just going to throw it out there. Any other big dreams that are kind of waiting in the wings that you want? This is a lot. So, you may say no Whitney this is plenty, but is there anything else that just kind of out there that you're, that's percolating?

Jeanette Bennett: I think I will be sad if I don't write a book at some point in this, in this life. So, I've sketched out a few outlines of things. It would be, it would be probably a business book.

Whitney Johnson: Yep.

Jeanette Bennett: And yeah. And so, I'd like that. It could marry my love of creativity and writing with what I've learned in business.

Whitney Johnson: Do it. You have to do it.

Jeanette Bennett: So, I'd love to do that at some point for sure. I think everything I do will be tied together with community and business in some, in some form or fashion.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, final couple of questions. What has been useful for you in this conversation? And just to give you a little bit of context, it may, it's probably not anything that you said or that I said. It may be an idea or just something that occurred to you. So, in the course of this conversation, what was useful?

Jeanette Bennett: I think the idea of the reframe was really helpful for me, and to see that I've reframed multiple times starting, starting young, you know, reframing my initial dream of maybe being a broadcast journalist and then reframing that, and then motherhood reframed again, and then reframing what a media company looks like once social media is a thing, and then reframing. Now, I think I've done that more than I've realized. I think that's been more of a pattern. You know, and that's been an interesting thing from the outside people, when I made this leap, it was confusing to some people because they're like wait what.

Whitney Johnson: Not at all.

Jeanette Bennett: Commercial real estate, you know? But when you look at it from my perspective and with this conversation in mind, it actually makes a lot of sense. And it's, and it's more similar and it's more sequitur than it maybe appears to the outside.

Whitney Johnson: So good. Okay. Any final thoughts? Any wrapping things up with the bow, as you said?

Jeanette Bennett: As I look back at my life, I feel like individuals and individual moments have made such an impact. And so, I want to be sure that I'm doing that for others. It's so easy to get caught up in my inbox, which is enormous. And my calendar, which is full, not to take those moments, because when I look back, it was very simple 30 second moments at times that made an impact. And so, I think sometimes I think, oh, I don't have time to like go to lunch for two hours with that person. But maybe a quick text or something would also make an impact. So, so I think just looking back and realizing that small things mattered to me and, and I want to be sure that I'm creating some small moments and love and lift for other people.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, Jeanette. Thank you. This was so fun.

Jeanette Bennett: Thank you. I always love chatting with you.

I love how Jeanette mentioned that she needed to “reframe” her career expectations after working at her local TV station. Not only is “reframe” a delicious word in that context, but it's also a nice way to think about the thought process of jumping to a new Curve. The pattern began for Jeanette when she shifted to print journalism, followed by creating her own publishing company when she became a new mother, and then expanding the company to adapt to the demands of social media. Jeanette continued to reframe with an unsuccessful but highly invigorating campaign for political office, followed by her current main gig at Colliers. I get the sense that Jeanette could accomplish pretty much anything she sets her mind to. There's something we can all learn from her.

For more on reframing your career arc, I'd recommend [Episode 383](#), if you haven't heard it already, with Paralympian Melissa Stockwell. If you're looking for more advice on women finding their voice in the workplace, there's [Episode 351](#) with Jennifer McCollum, former CEO of Linkage. And if you're looking to understand more about helping others achieve their dreams, check out [Episode 312](#) with Tim Harrison, founder of the Enjoyable Pain of Growth Academy.

Thank you again to Jeanette Bennett 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. Thank you to our

producers, Alexander Tuerk and Dave Mecham, our senior editor, Doug Fox, production assistant, Etta King, and production coordinator, Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.