

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 392: ORIT GADIESH

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.

Confidence and curiosity make a powerful tandem. Individually, either could be a positive catalyst or a distraction to meaningful progress. But as a combination, they often create a mindset where everything, including failures, become steppingstones along the S Curve.

Bain & Company Chairman Orit Gadiesh has these two traits in spades. From her early school days and now her entire career at Bain, Orit's curiosity has never waned. Trained to always ask that extra question, she's a student of the world around her. And, when Bain faced severe financial hardship in the late 1980s, it was Orit Gadiesh and Mitt Romney who reversed the company's course and steadied the ship – through extreme confidence. When asked by competitors how Bain turned the company's fortunes around so quickly, she said, "It's because we're better than you." It didn't matter who they were or what company they worked for—her answer came automatically and without reservation. Bain today is one of the most revered management consulting firms in the world.

I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So, I wanted to start with one of your accolades. *Forbes* named you multiple times one of the world's most powerful women. What does this mean, powerful woman, to you?

Orit Gadiesh: Well, I think it's always very nice when somebody says something like that to you or puts you on some list. But the truth, that doesn't reflect the way I think about myself, and it doesn't impact particularly what I do. I think lists come and go. I've seen many lists, including myself putting many other people. I always think it's a great compliment of the moment when somebody thinks about you and then you just move on. And in fact, most people aren't remembered for the list that they've been put on. So, I think what's important is how, how it affects, and how I interact with people around me, whether they're clients or my partners or anybody else. I frankly can't remember what year those lists were. And it really, really doesn't matter because it's the people that are close to you and the people that matter to you and their reaction to you, as opposed to you being on the list that matters. So, it's really come and gone. Very nice compliment. And we have to move on.

Whitney Johnson: You know what's interesting, when I hear you say that one of my favorite quotes or aphorisms - and I heard Bob Proctor say it though I don't know that it was his - he said amateurs compete and professionals create. And when I hear you say that, that's what it evokes for me, is that when we track lists too closely, there's a sense of competition, of how am I doing vis a vis my peers or the world, as opposed to just what am I creating and what does that look like? And how do I stand to the people that matter most, starting with myself. So, it's interesting to hear you say that.

Orit Gadiesh: Thanks.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. Alright, so for our listeners who are not familiar with what Bain and Company does, if I run a private or a public business, let's talk through how can you, how can Bain help me grow my company?

Orit Gadiesh: That's a bit of a generic question, because you could be any company of any size and any place in the world, and you could come to us, and we would sit down and begin to think how to answer your question. Growth, by the way, may not be the first question you might ask. You might want to grow your profitability as opposed to your revenue. Depends where you are in the world. And frankly, over time, there are all kinds of things that come into it, but there are certain playbooks that you need to make sure that you understand about a company. You want to understand where the company thinks it's competing, and what is truly the business definition of where they compete, and sometimes those are very different. So, where are the boundaries of the business? You want to understand what the competitors are doing? Are you a leader in this business? Are you a follower? Because obviously you're going to have to do very different things. And whether or not you're a leader actually has a lot to do with how you define the business. The very famous, very old example of lawnmowers, where people who were building them and selling them really believed that that's where they were competing with other lawn mowers. But it turns out that the most important and most profitable part of their business in the business and the value chain was motors. And those were shared across small motorcycles and small boats. And actually, the people who made the motors, which they sourced, were the ones who were making the most profit.

Orit Gadiesh: And unless you understand that the business definition of where you're most profitable was really the motors, you were not going to be successful there. So, you have to redefine the industry and therefore who is a leader in the industry and therefore what parts of the profit pool you can or want to participate in. And by the way, whatever you think is today, the profit pool, even if it's correctly defined, may change very much because the value chain changes. Kodak is probably the best example. They were, they made a lot of money because they were making actually the film. The world moved to digital, and they fought it for a while because film was really where they made all the money. They did not make money in any other part of the profit pool. And eventually we know what happened and other people came in who did redefine the business and then went on to make, at the beginning, digital cameras today, of course, has changed as well. By the way, I believe that Kodak actually made one of the first digital cameras, but did not want to sell them. And that's something that Christensen, of course, spoke a lot about. So, you need to understand where, whether and where you can have superior economics, you need to understand what your customers really want. Who they really are. What they really want, what they want from your competitors.

Orit Gadiesh: How different customers fall into different buckets. It's not just segmentation, but also that, who are your most profitable customers and how can you get or maintain the loyalty, which is sometimes more difficult than getting the initial loyalty. But execution is the most important part of any strategy. And here is where I would say, when Bill Bain founded the company, he drew a distinct line between McKinsey and BCG.

Our firm is about getting results for clients, not reports. That was actually what Bill Bain said came out of a competitor where he was actually slated to become number one. But it was about reports, and he wanted to be about results. And it's a fundamentally different approach to almost anything you do, because it means that from the moment you start any kind of work with a client, you are also thinking about implementation. You don't come up with the strategy and then say, okay, how do we implement it? You start from the beginning. So, you work with the clients at all levels, and you have to take into account not only what business they're in, but what, who their executives are, how they're structured, what their organization does, what the culture is. And you might come up with something that I call the 80/100 rule, which is not going to be the perfect strategy that you could devise for a company at any point of time. But it's going to be 80% of the perfect strategy, because the perfect strategy is unimplementable at this point, with these times and so forth.

Orit Gadiesh: And so, you're going to go as far as you can, and then you're probably going to have another step. But it's not only a quick cute pick up on 80 over 20, but it's 100 times zero is zero and 80 times one is 80. And obviously you're winning. So, it's a very, very different mindset. And then, you know years ago when Bain was founded, businesses that we were working with, that Bain was working with were really mostly American businesses. And then there were English businesses or German businesses and, and the idea that it was really competing in a global business started probably several years after Bain was founded. I still remember when I worked in the automotive industry at the beginning, they really thought about the United States alone. And frankly, most of the competition had been the United States. But that was when Japanese, especially Koreans, later companies were really coming in and they did not see them as competitors. You can imagine what it meant to how you thought about your cost. Have you thought about your competitors? Have you thought about complexity? This is a critical part of all of that, because you always want to reduce complexity in anything you do, whether it's how many manufacturing, where you source things, where you, how you market it. And car companies, for example, had huge complexities. In fact, you could design a car any way, anywhere you wanted as a customer, and you had about 10 billion permutations for a car that sold several thousands.

Orit Gadiesh: And you can imagine what that did to the suppliers, to your own manufacturing, and to the dealer who didn't really want to have that much. And so, reducing complexity is always a very important part of it. And it's not just in manufacturing, it's in purchasing, it's in supply chain. It's in how you structure your company and your organization. Today, more and more, you really need to think about things that historically you didn't have to think about. I'll give you one example, geopolitics. But it's more than geopolitics. It also has to translate to something that is meaningful for you. So, China is clearly a very important market for just about every business. And for a long time it was a very important place for supply chain. It's where a lot of companies sourced things from. Let me leave aside for a moment the supply chain, because a lot has been talked about, especially since the pandemic. But I've been going to China now for over 20 years. First, because it was just, it was emerging and it was fascinating. And then because I joined something called the International Business Council for the mayor of Shanghai, which got me really involved with the work. In fact, I'm going there next month. Really involved with China, but also because China was fascinating in so many different levels, huge market, companies that were coming very quickly up to speed to competitors.

Orit Gadiesh: But for years I've been saying that in China, which is a for many clients, for many companies, either the first or the second most important market, especially in consumer products. You don't want to be number one or number two. You want to be number three and number four, for the simple reason that you're going to have to buy your way to leadership, buy market share, which in many other businesses is the right thing to do in many situations. But China is not going to let you remain number one or number two. They will make sure one way or another that Chinese companies are. So, you want to be a profitable number 3 or 4, because that will actually allow you to be profitable for much longer and continue to do things in China much longer. That was counterintuitive. But if you understand geopolitics and you start thinking about that as part of what you need to do, strategy to grow, as you suggested, then you see new things that come into what used to be considered important. Today, you have a whole array of things like that. You have technologies. How and where to use technologies. Not every technology, not all the time, is the right one for you everywhere. But sometimes you're going to miss on something very important if you don't actually introduce technologies that are available or about to happen.

Whitney Johnson: An example that you have around that, the technology piece.

Orit Gadiesh: Well, we've gone through quite a number of technology revolutions, but I'll give you an example that most people don't think too much about. I don't think media, newspapers, a lot of them have disappeared completely because people don't need to get a paper newspaper, for sure, but not even an organized newspaper in a digital form. There are those people who have remained successful and actually become more successful, like the *Financial Times*, for example, is a great newspaper that I do prefer to read online digitally, but it's actually organizes things not only on the economy, on business and geopolitics, technology. It's very interesting to see how successfully they've made their newspaper. And then many newspapers are gone. Many newspapers are not particularly good anymore. And that's a simple example. But people who have not adopted technology. Amazon arrived and a lot of companies had to decide whether or not they want to participate in something that was new to them. Not particularly difficult to understand, but with new and different to how they did it. Amazon had no other way. They were doing it, so it didn't have to. They didn't have to get rid of old-fashioned ways of thinking about their market and so on and so forth. And that is actually a business where Walmart has been more successful than many people have predicted they would be. It is a huge competitor. Obviously, Walmart is the largest retailer worldwide. And yet they managed to do it where a lot of people have not.

Orit Gadiesh: You can see it in, well, I mentioned cars before. Even all those years ago, Japan had introduced new technologies into their assembly so that they would minimize the amount of labor and minimize the amount of complexity, and that you didn't have to guess anymore where a piece was going to go on in the car. It was years before competitors who were already very established had started to do that. But, you know, you have to be careful sometimes with technology. When the .com came, it was a huge hype. But in fact, the companies that adopted some of the things that .com was all about were the established companies who actually were competitive, already realized that they could adopt some of those things and make themselves even more powerful and more competitive. And hardly any .com from that period has survived, with the exception of 1 or 2 companies that actually have done something that was not possible to do before. When I spoke about it many years ago, people were upset at me. It turned out to be the reality. So, technologies sort of come and go. It's a good thing that technologies come. It pushes people. They will prevail for a while, but some of them will be ones that, if the existing companies that already have quite a bit of power and are good at what they're doing adopt, then they're going to be a newcomer.

Whitney Johnson: So, could you give an example? So, let's talk about AI because that's the latest tech cycle. I guess two questions there. One would be an example of an incumbent company that has, that's powerful, that has resources that could adopt it very successfully. And then also curious about the role that Bain plays in helping a company think through that kind of decision.

Orit Gadiesh: So, AI is relatively new. Still, this is an early stage of AI. We went through quite a bit of hype at the beginning. It's actually exciting what you can do personally. But right now, where we are on, I think is, in its current form, does some things very well and some things it doesn't do as well. And if you think about what a LMN, what a foundation model is, it's not surprising that it's not doing forecasting and prediction as well, because it's not about learning from what the next word was, but it's doing great when it's generated text or image or even video, by the way, which is content as opposed to something very precise. You can see how that would be a very different thing. And it's actually pretty good in segmentation and classification of different things, because there's a he** of a lot that what it's not yet all that great, although it's beginning to show some promise in R&D and things that are happening in the physical world. So, it has already been used, for example, to try and identify new antibiotics, and it's been more successful in getting as close to that. But one of the reasons is that it can actually read every material about any attempt to do R&D on antibiotics and cast aside immediately everything that hasn't worked before. Whereas if I was sitting in the lab and starting from scratch, I would know a lot of things, but I'd still do the trial and error, which is effort. So, it can help me identify what's not right.

Orit Gadiesh: It's not quite where it can predict what will happen. It can just move so much faster. And so, it's gotten people closer to where they can be in that. But it's, I don't, we're not yet where it can simulate things that are happening in nature. You know, what happens in climate, what happens in our brain, what happens in medicine overall? It can identify more things than we've had before. It had taught us about more proteins, for example, than we'd done before, but again using a very similar way of doing it. Extremely helpful. But beginning. Yeah. Beginning. So, you need to in everything, you need to experiment some by definition. And there's some use

cases you could experiment with but really try to understand at this point mostly how you can become more efficient because you're using AI. And there you have, uh, a wealth of bill to do. It can summarize things, can retrieve things in a speed that, you know, none of us can do. People say, well, that's just making things faster. Well, that's great for efficiencies. And we should start with that. But, you know, we should keep making sure that we understand what a foundation model can or cannot do. There is a whole issue of open source which is more cost effective. And then there's the question of how much synthetic material you can, you can add to it in a particular domain so it can become actually pretty strong in a certain domain as opposed to a very big foundation, like OpenAI.

Orit Gadiesh: But all those things we need to understand working with our clients and what's relevant to them and what is relevant for us inside our company. So, it's affecting our industry and affecting our business. And what we're trying to do is optimize. And I use this word, advisedly, because there's also a huge cost that's associated with new technology. And in general, when you think about where we're going, the cost right now that it is predicted to be at when you think about building the infrastructure, not just the chips and the huge call centers, if you will. But the energy and what about energy versus decarbonization, which is also important, which is now coming back to our discussion before an important part of how you think about strategy. Right? So, its technology and its cost are things that you have to take into account when you think about how and its cost, obviously not just now, but very in the future. I mean, the best example, of course, of the technology, it's that came down very, very fast is solar panels, for example, which today China can produce at a lower cost than anybody can anywhere in the world. They could still, with 100% tariffs, be lower cost if they wanted, probably lower price as well. It's caused all kinds of strange dynamics in China because there are too many of them, and the competition is but people buy them as opposed to try and replicate what they do. It's a great opportunity to get down there and that's almost every technology.

Whitney Johnson: So, you just said AI is great personally. What did you use it for recently?

Orit Gadiesh: I was on my computer the day it came out in November 2022. I just found it fascinating, the things that I could do with it. But it was, for me, frankly, more fun. Yes, I've asked it to summarize 100-page documents for me. I've asked him actually to take something that somebody had written and bring it down to two pages without any repetitions. And so, but these are simple things. I mean, it's great and it's taken a lot of time for me. I probably wouldn't have done it myself anyways. I would have asked somebody else to do it. So now we're looking at how it can replace some lower cost and lower-level labor in some places. But I was fooling around with the with the ability to create pictures and art and so on and so forth from, I believe that I've taught, OpenAI or Dall-E what an Old English Sheepdog looks like, because I have one, and I wanted to have an Old English Sheepdog, you know, play the guitar. And it took about a whole hour to teach it what it looks like. But once it got it, now I, you know, after that, I could do anything I wanted, and it created in two nanoseconds. So, for me, it has been fun. And then some efficiencies and work for me, it's been, it's been experimenting with a lot of different things, but also a lot with retrieval and with ability to summarize things and to streamline things. I'm yet to see AI helping us come up with a real strategy. And when we talked about strategy before, with all the constraints on it, I think you can see why at this point.

Whitney Johnson: So, one more question on that before I go to my next sort of bigger block of questions, which is so when you sit down, when a client reaches out to you and they may reach out to you, as you said, for a variety of reasons, from a variety of disciplines, is there a first question that you that you find yourself almost always asking that person.

Orit Gadiesh: Independent of where they're from and what they're, and what it is that they think they want our help on?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

I think there is a first half question. I, for me, I usually react to what's in front of me. So, I think the first thing I do, actually, when I'm in an executive's office is, I look at the books and what's around and learn pretty quickly what they're interested in. And my first question might be actually directed at something that caught my attention from that, but that's because I'm trying to understand the person sitting in front of me and learn about them. And

remember when we started this conversation about strategy, I said, strategy and implementation go together. If I don't understand the people who are going to have to implement this strategy, even if they ask for a help implementation, they are going to own it or have to own it. They are going to implement it. Then anything else that I ask is going to be going to be not very relevant. So, understanding the person or the people and why they are asking what they're asking is very important. And sometimes you while you do that, you realize that really what they wanted to ask or what the way they would have phrased what they're feeling, as opposed to the words that came out, is, is something a little different than what they actually ask. But that's why dialog and conversation are such an important part of the beginning and the ongoing way of doing of doing business.

Whitney Johnson: In doing my research before our conversation, I found an interview with you, with *HBR* about curiosity, and I just thought it was so interesting because I'll tell you an experience that I had, and then I'll tell the experience that you had. So, I in my high school yearbook, people would tease me because I asked a lot of questions and I remember saying, well, asking questions is a sign of intelligence. I don't know that I got quite the response that you did, so I would, I found it absolutely delightful to hear about your experience with asking questions. And instead of putting words into your mouth, will you share what happened when you were 13 years old and about to change schools and something that your homeroom teacher said to you?

Orit Gadiesh: My teacher, who was an amazing lady. She actually encouraged me, and she said, continue to ask the two questions always. That's because there were times where I felt because I raised my hand, and then I'd ask a question, and then I have two more questions and to some people would drive crazy. This particular teacher thought that it was a fantastic way to learn, and to be curious was one of the most important things that she wanted her students to have. So that was a great encouragement, actually. Yeah, I think I never stopped.

Whitney Johnson: Well, and what you just said to do the work that you do, it's being in dialog and being curious and asking questions. And so, I think it's so powerful that that teacher encouraged you, that positive reinforcement for that behavior that made it possible, more possible for you to do this work. All right. So, you joined Bain in 1977. You graduated from Harvard Business School. '93. Bain is in turmoil. Two years prior, it pulled back from the brink of bankruptcy. You now step in as chairman. So, what are some of the questions that you asked? How did you approach the role at this point?

Orit Gadiesh: Well, I didn't start really doing anything at that point. What happened was the founders took too much money out of the company, basically by selling it to ESOP and getting some loans from, from banks. And frankly, by the time that this sort of woke up to this, and asked me to come and help, we were close to bankruptcy. And so, Mitt did an amazing job of really getting some of the founders to return some money negotiating with banks. And then there was a group of partners, and there really was a group. We actually got together and discussed it, decided that we wanted to continue with Bain and Company because we believe that what set it as a company that was unique was, was still unique. And if we could keep it and keep working that way that we could turn around this company and here I'm coming really to something that has to do with our focus on, not the strategy, but implementation. Part of the thing that made us unique then, and I think in many times still does, is we call we have a name for it now. It's sort of it's our true north, which is independent of what the image means. It means that we really, really need to make sure that we understand things and that we look the client in the eye and that we have a discussion about what really is happening, about the truth.

Orit Gadiesh: And I know it sounds kind of hot, but if you don't have a discussion about what's really happening and if you gloss over things then you can't actually get them changed. So. You know, so you do it with a lot of respect. But you do it which, you know, promotes a very often, very honest and collaborative and productive kind of discussion in there, not in a listening mode. They're part of the discussion. It also allows you to put in some things that might be provocative, which otherwise they wouldn't be willing to listen to. But you've got to come to a shared understanding. And that true North sort of, you have got to really, really say what really is it and what should I be communicating and how should I communicate with the client. And it was a very powerful way to work. And we decided I'm just showing one element, and it also causes collaboration in your teams. Being part of a team is such a powerful thing because you really are dealing with the issues. And everybody has permission to participate and to contribute. Independent of what level they are. So, we decided that it was important to keep, and we figured out that we really had three kinds of turnarounds that we had to do. One was the financial turnaround, which obviously did a lot for the negotiations I just mentioned.

Whitney Johnson: So, when you say Mitt, Mitt Romney, just for clarification?

Orit Gadiesh: Yes, who used to be a partner at Bain and Company and then, of course, started Bain Capital. The financial turnaround was accomplished, actually in about a year and a half. We had a business turnaround. You couldn't go anywhere without people talking about what they've heard. And the press was full of that. And we needed not so much our clients to stick with us because they knew us and how we work, but new clients, I remember going to meetings where we would walk would be beauty contests, and we would walk in after our competitors had been there. And on the, in front of every person was copies of, I don't know, *The Wall Street Journal* article that was written a while ago. And I remember saying, I can see what everybody has been talking about. Shall we start with the gossip, or shall we start with the issue? And all the times I can think of we started with the issue and we never got back to the gossip. And actually, we got a lot of those clients because I said, I believe that after we go through a conversation, you will not want to talk about the gossip, but of course we can. So, we actually, we were able to get more business. What we needed also was a pride turnaround, which is not which is this thing that is projected by a group about what they do, and which is hard to do, even if you're proud of what you're doing individually. We needed this projection as a group. And that was, it wasn't so much a talking about it. It was reminding people why they felt proud about being in the company and why they should still feel proud.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so I'm going to jump in here because something that you, there's been a Harvard Business School case study on this. And I think it's interesting because it's actually, the year before you became chairman, you were still the vice chairman. So here here's what you said. I'm going to quote it back to you. You said, "we've turned around financially. We've turned around the business. And even our competitors are beginning to acknowledge that. Now it's time to turn them on. What they really fear, what they have envied us for, what made them the most uneasy. As crazy as this sounds, it's time to turn around our collective pride in what we do."

Orit Gadiesh: Uh, well, I haven't heard that in a long time.

Whitney Johnson: It's good, isn't it?

Orit Gadiesh: Thank you. That was what I felt very strongly, and I wasn't I wasn't sure how to convey it to people other than to remind them of what people say about them and about how they feel about each other, and about how we all feel about the company having come out of it. It's just that we kind of needed permission because the world didn't quite know how we were doing. And the world was still saying, you know, this company just came out of bankruptcy, almost bankruptcy two years ago. No professional firm really. Hardly ever do people actually turn around. And so, we had to project how we feel about the company so that other people will get that this is real. We do feel it. And also, when you feel proud, when you feel this collective pride, you are better at what you do. This is why I think our competitors fear it. And I actually got questions from our competitors. You know, how come you can turn around so quickly? And I remember saying to one of them, it's because we're better. And my competitor rightfully said, how? How can you say that to me? And my answer was, it doesn't matter who they were, but it just came automatic. I said what Bane does and what he does at its worst. Neither one of us are proud at its best. We're both extremely proud and should be. But day in and day out, what we do, I believe, yes, that we are better and that is why we've done that. I really believe that. I still believe that, but I really believe that at that time I don't think we could have come out of it otherwise. So, I, I wanted other people to feel that because that is something to feel proud about.

Whitney Johnson: You know, it's interesting. I'm going back to the question that I asked you at the very beginning about the Fortune's most powerful women, and then I'm thinking about Katie Ledecky in the Olympics, and you know, those competitors who are, like, literally not competing against other people. They're just like, this is what we do. It is exceptional work. And I am proud of this, and I believe it. You don't have to agree with me, but this is what I believe. And that sense of conviction is incredibly, I think it's contagious and it's inspiring. And it's also, you can't really argue with it because it's what you believe. And so, I think that gives you a lot of ground to stand on.

Orit Gadiesh: Well, the nice thing was that our clients believed that too, or we obviously have done that.

Whitney Johnson: Of course, of course.

Orit Gadiesh: Important part of it.

Whitney Johnson: Right. Well, the financial business. But then it was, it was it was the head game piece. All right. So, let's back up a bit. You're 17 years old, you're in the military. You actually had the privilege of spending time in the Israeli war room, which according to my research, was military intelligence. You were an aide to the deputy chief in charge of operations. What are some of the lessons that you have pulled from that experience at such a formative age?

Orit Gadiesh: Yes, I worked for the deputy chief of staff, actually, but I was an aide. I was 17, but I was there to provide whatever is needed. And the war room. I have no idea what it looks like now, but it was a relatively small space. It really was a war bunker, and everybody was in that room. And so, I was privileged to be able to listen and to observe what was going on. I did not participate, but I think I learned three things from that experience. It wasn't just in the war room. It was my military experience in general there. One is I really do think I learned not to be afraid of hierarchy. Respect. Yes, but there really was a small room and they were drinking coffee next to me. Drinking coffee, if you will, because everybody had to be there. And I just got to see them as people who I knew when they were not in the bunker, when they were above, and they actually looked a lot more formidable. They were pretty formidable down there, but they were people. So huge respect. But I think it took away my fear of or intimidation. I learned from them. I learned from my military experience, sort of the follow me attitude that I can't speak for Israeli army today, but it really was for ages.

Orit Gadiesh: It's why so many Israeli officers have died during wars is because the officer actually is in the front and it's follow me. Huge important lesson for anything you do later in life if you are interacting with people and with people with teams and the third one really is. And that's really the privilege of being there. You could hear what was going on in the battlefield and what the officers in the battlefield were talking about and doing, and they were in touch with the bunker, had everybody, the chief of staff and sometimes the defense minister and the person that I worked for, and deciding what to do or how to go about something. The final say was of the person on the front because they knew what they are dealing with better than anybody sitting in this room. That was such a lesson and such an important. And we do that at Bain and Company, too. The partner dealing in the front is always the partner who knows more about it than anybody else. And which is why hierarchy is not that important in places like that. It is important for certain things, for responsibility and so on and so on. But that was a lesson that was rare to see at that age, and that has never left me.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Wow. The person out in front has the final decision. That's really powerful. You've been at Bain your entire career. What is it that's made you say? What is it about Bain that you've stayed there? I mean, you've had lots and lots and lots and lots of options. Undoubtedly. So why do you stay?

Orit Gadiesh: I am a curious person. I think intellectual curiosity is a gift to people who then use it. And I can see how in, in many things in my life, I just bring experiences from many different things into whatever I'm doing. So, I read a lot of fiction as well. By the way, very good friction, especially if I go to a country I haven't been to before. I will make sure that I read the fiction translated from the language that the country that I'm going to. But if you're.

Whitney Johnson: Wait, wait, what? So, what's a book? Okay, I have to tell you, just so you know, when we spoke briefly before you talked about *Anna Karenina*, I started listening to it. It is. I read it years ago, but I'm relistening to it. Wow. Just wow. The character study, it's just unbelievable. I mean, I understand now why this book has been around 200 years. It's unbelievable. Okay, so I just had to digress there. So, what's a country that you're going to and what book are you reading that's fiction in that vein?

Orit Gadiesh: So, by now I really have traveled a lot around the world, which is a blessing in many ways. But I'll give you an example. There was a time where I went to Germany a lot. Germany was an important market. There were certain clients that were important, so for a while I read German literature all in translation or in English or in Hebrew. I actually decide in what language I will read a translation first based on the language, but also then

based on the translation. And one day there were five of us in a car going to a client and some, and there was a list of the best German written books that have come out in the last 100 years that was done in Germany. I don't remember now how. And so, we started talking about it. So, the people in the car were talking about it, and I read all five of the five. I was the only one in the car that read all five. Now, one of them is not an easy book to read, and it's called *The Man Without Qualities*. It's written, it's Musil. And it's 2000 pages. And he quits before he finished.

Orit Gadiesh: But it's not a, it's a book about. Well, first, it's a book about bureaucracy. When people say, what book should I read about bureaucracy? It's never a business book. I suggest that because it's it takes place in the waning years of the Austrian Empire, and the man without qualities is actually himself, who has meddled in a lot of things and gone from being one thing to another. But it's also a sort of philosophical book about many things. But it is tough. I started it twice in Hebrew and once in English. And then there was a new translation that I read about in the New York Times Book Review, and I went out and bought it, and then I couldn't put it down, except that you need to breathe and to think about it. So that was a book that was not popular in the first part, but, you know, so I read all, all, all five and I read many more. And it gives you an idea of. So, when I was going to Germany, then that was what I was doing. Although some of the books I had read before. A small country, you get a lot of books in translation and in Israel a lot of people read. So, you get an opportunity to read a lot of them then.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. I totally derailed you. Alright. Okay. So, we got off on books, which was really fun. And that is fascinating, that idea of reading a book about, you know, written by someone about the country that you're working in. Amazing. Let's go back to why. Why, Bane? You said you're curious. You've been here your whole career, but what's allowed it so that it's perpetually interesting for you?

Orit Gadiesh: It's if you are curious. I think consulting and definitely Bane is just the best place you can be because constantly what you need to focus on and learn changes. You go from, sometimes from one industry to another, definitely from one type of client to another, from one client to another, from one business issue to another. The technologies keep changing as you go. The context within which same kind of questions are now taking place is changing completely. I gave you an example before, from thinking nationally to thinking globally, but thinking globally 20 years ago or 15 years ago was very different from thinking today. Geopolitics was great. Geopolitics today you need to really pause and think about what and where are you going to have a supply chain? What are you going to be able to get in the market? Where do you want to be number one, two, 3 or 4, and why and how? Where do you have to locate your own manufacturing, where do you want to source your technology, etc... So even if you are doing similar things, you're actually doing different things. You know, if you look back five years ago, you have to address things that then you didn't think about. And I realized some people are more comfortable doing a similar thing all the time, really becoming an expertise, something I think that's great. And we have some people in our company who are very good at that. For me, it was incorporating these new technologies. I just, you know, I was fascinated in November 22nd when OpenAI came out with ChatGPT 3.5. I made myself learn it because there's nothing, we didn't do that. And, every technological, major technology change fascinated me enough that I wanted to learn about it and think about how to incorporate that into everything that I'm doing.

Orit Gadiesh: If you work with a steel company in the United States, it's very different from working with a steel company in Korea, even though some of the issues are the same. So, it's like endless opportunities to keep changing and evolving and integrating more things into what you're doing. And then when you do that over time, it allows you to become a better strategist or a better strategist because it helps you recognize patterns that maybe otherwise you wouldn't have paid attention to. And by the way, all the things that I get interested in that are not part of work, I also bring into work because I think that also helps you recognize patterns, including what I read. So, I have had offers to go into those places, and they made me some of them made me pause and think, but I've never actually looked because I was bored. I was never bored. Maybe I was luckier than some people. I just found that it's constantly changing and constantly forces you to change and learn new things and interact with new things. By the way, you're also interacting with different people all the time, whether it's your own team you're addressing some client or whether it's a client team you're working with people from across the globe, you want to talk about diversity. That's one of the best things about a company like Bain and Company. I'm not talking about DEI. I'm talking about real diversity, different places. People have done different things. They grew up in different

places. They are men, women. Whatever. Diversity makes a product, an outcome so much better. And what a fantastic place to do that.

Whitney Johnson: So, one of my, something I say frequently is that learning is the oxygen of human growth. And you're always learning. You always have oxygen. Why would you leave?

Orit Gadiesh: That's correct.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, when you look back on your tenure and your impact, how do you want that story to read?

Orit Gadiesh: Well, Bill Bain started a great company all those years ago. And a group of us, with the help of Mitt Romney, as I mentioned before, were fortunate enough to pick this up and create momentum and turn it around. And we were, we were partners. We stuck together as partners. And we did manage to bring Bain and company back to where it was. And then, since then, we've had many more partners. I don't even know what the number. We probably had 30 partners. We have hundreds. Thousands. And I'm really proud to have been part of that team of partners that started with a small group, first with Bill Bain, then with a small group trying to turn it around and then with a growing number of partners and a team that have kept these values that, that I said before we call true north. And had stuck by those, I mean, when you stick by the truth and you have a culture that allows you to do that inside, because you're also doing that with your clients and to have maybe contributed some to this culture. Definitely with those partners to maintaining and enforcing and maybe enhancing it. I think that's a great privilege.

Whitney Johnson: Mhm. Mhm. Alright. In the spirit of something that you said about Bill Bain a few minutes ago of like you would say something that was never even asked. Here's my question for you. What's been useful for you in this conversation? Probably nothing anybody said but what was useful for you?

Orit Gadiesh: I think when you are asked, which you have been doing with asking very good questions, to articulate things that you don't think about all the time, I don't think I have thought for a very long time about why it is that I've always stayed at Bain and Company and didn't think about going somewhere else? But it's definitely encouraging that that's what I feel. And the way I answered it without really thinking about it. But I think that's very helpful. And thank you.

Whitney Johnson: Any final thoughts?

Orit Gadiesh: I've enjoyed listening to somebody who understands the importance of questions and knows how to ask questions. You have the ability to bring out a lot of important things in people and that's quite a good trait.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Orit Gadiesh: Thank you. Likewise.

One standout revelation from my discussion with Orit was her dedication to reading. Not just any books but ones specifically from countries to which she is traveling or has previously visited. What better way as a global executive to gain a more complete worldview than studying literature from so many places? Plus, the first thing she does when she enters an executive's office is visually absorb what books and other items, they surround themselves with.

Another main takeaway was her observation about the importance of taking pride in the company. Those who were proud of Bain's financial turnaround inevitably performed better.

To learn more about how Bain approaches business, check out [Episode 176](#) with Darrell Rigby, the colleague who introduced me to Orit. For more on great leadership, I'd recommend [Episode 235](#) with now Chanel CEO Leena Nair. To understand the power of questions, there's [Episode 124](#) with Hal Gregersen.

Thank you again to Orit Gadiesh--and thank you for listening.

At this time, I'd like to announce that Disrupt Yourself will be taking a hiatus while I finish writing my next book. Long-time listeners of the podcast know that I end most episodes by asking my guests what was useful in the conversation. Today, I'm turning the table on myself, and will share a few things, 10 to be specific, that have been useful for me over the span of nearly 400 episodes.

#1. I've shared before but will do so again. I discovered that an overly large percentage of my guests have been 1st or 2nd generation immigrants to another country. Of course, when you start completely over in a foreign country, that is a huge disruption. It's a muscle that gets strong, and you can use it over and over again.

#2. It's been useful to me to have conversations with so many profoundly interesting people -- and yes, I have almost always read their books -- but to be able to have that moment in time, just 1-on-1 to hear their story. There is so much magic in a 1-on-1 conversation. It's been useful to confirm again, and again that this is one of my favorite things to do.

#3. For those of you who have read my books, *Build an A Team*, and *Smart Growth*, in particular, know that it has been useful to use these podcast episodes as a way of doing primary research. Like after interviewing Astrid Tuminez and Harry Kraemer, that's it, these are the opening stories in my next book.

#4. It's been useful to do vocal coaching. A couple of years in -- I had someone say to me -- you could improve your diction, pronunciation, breathing, etc. so I hired a coach. I would have never thought to do something like this. I have learned a lot from the process.

#5. I learned the importance of great producers and writers -- and I have had some wonderful ones!

#6. It was useful to grow up as an interviewer. I talked about this in the outro for my interview with Simon Sinek, one I haven't shared was the interview with John Mackey. I remember he was initially reluctant to come out and play, if you will. I think about it kind of like a tennis match. He started with "this isn't going to be that interesting". So, I started hitting the ball at him really hard, back at him. I ran into him in the airport a few years later. His comment was -- that was a good interview. It was important to show up, not only as a guest, but also as an interviewer.

#7. I learned about the contagion effect real-time. When I interviewed Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas who had written *Humor, Seriously*. I found myself laughing, joking. I was funnier than I usually am in an unexpected way. And I am confident that it was their style, their approach -- that was indeed contagious.

#8. I had the opportunity to overcome some self-limiting beliefs in reaching out to people. When I said, “Oh, Ed Catmull, founder of Pixar, he will never agree to an interview”. Several of my friends and family said, “how do you know, have you asked him?”. And no, I hadn’t. So, I asked him, and he said yes, twice.

#9. It was useful to be reminded that even with something you absolutely love to do – like I do – with interviewing people that you can reach the top of an S Curve, and need to pause, so you can figure out how to move back into the sweet spot, or move to another launch point entirely.

#10. It was tremendously useful to hear from you, you who are listening, like Joe Mardini, who made the observation that a common theme running through all of the interviews is agency -- I am drawn to -- and I would say by extension, you as a listener, as well, are drawn to people who are agentic, who are willing to disrupt themselves.

And with that, I want to thank again our producer, Dave Mecham, our senior editor, Doug Fox, our production assistant, Etta King, our production coordinator, Nicole Pellegrino – and I especially want to thank you!

I’m Whitney Johnson.

And until our next season, this has been Disrupt Yourself.