

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 305: JON CLIFTON

Hello, and welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you grow your people to grow your organization because organizations don't disrupt; people do. And the fundamental unit of that disruption of that growth is the individual. It is you. Work and happiness. How long have we been grappling with this? Well, since there's always been work to be done, a long time. If you strip away the noise. How different are we really from our hunting and gathering ancestors? We were meant to live in tribes, to survive, to feel safe. And apparently, right now, we don't feel so very safe. Our overall community mental state appears to be at an all-time low. What's scary is that when we have a wave of negative emotions consuming us, as and we don't feel safe, it causes us to do things that we wouldn't otherwise do. But, says my guest, Jon Clifton, CEO of Gallup and author of *Blind Spot The Global Rise of Unhappiness*. There is an antidote. He reminds us that the little things that we do, that you do, that I do make a massive difference. Think about compounding interest. A penny, doubled daily, lands at \$10 Million after a month. Imagine that same model applied to human pain or happiness on a global scale. Jon Clifton is especially focused on happiness at work. It's easier to grow to move up an S Curve when we feel good, not bad. So, how do we help people feel more positive emotions at work? That's just one question that we ask and answer in this fascinating conversation.

Whitney Johnson: So, Jon, will you share with us a formative story, something that helps us understand why you are who you are today?

Jon Clifton: Sure. So, I guess when I was really young, my grandmother, my grandmother told me that I went to her countertop one time and sat down. I think this was in the early nineties. And I looked at her, and I said to her, Ma, what's going on in Somalia? And she always said, It really surprised her that someone so young would ask something about a country that's so far away. And I think for everyone in my family, they knew at that time that international issues were something that was going to what got me up in the morning. And so, they kind of worked and did everything they could to get me to focus on that. I also was really passionate about math, so anything that I could do with countries and numbers is what they focused on. It ended up being what I applied when I went to Michigan. I applied to be a math major, and I ended up focusing on international politics and history as well. When I studied abroad, did international law and law school, studied abroad again. So, everything kind of led up to figuring out countries and numbers.

Whitney Johnson: So, speaking of countries and numbers, you've written a book titled *Blind Spot*. What's the big idea of this book?

Jon Clifton: The idea is that right now, world leaders still focus solely on traditional economic indicators like GDP and unemployment. What they don't have are indicators on how people feel, like whether or not people are feeling a lot of anger, a lot of stress, a lot of sadness. And for the past 15 to 16 years, we've been quantifying that in over 140 countries, which represents ultimately 98% of the world's population. Because we feel that even though those traditional economic indicators are important, that how people feel at a macro level is equally as important. So, that's why we've been doing this.

Whitney Johnson: One of the big things you measure is well-being. How are you defining well-being?

Jon Clifton: We define well-being in two constructs. The first is how do you see life. The second is how do you live life. And the reason that you measure both is because they capture very different things. So, in a country like the United States, if you ask a middle-aged adult, one that has a child in the middle-aged adult that does not have a child, to rate their lives on a scale of 0 to 10, one of them rates their lives higher. And it's the person that ultimately has a child. But if you look at how they live life, the amount of stress they have, the amount of sadness or how much joy, there's one that separates from the other one, which is the person with children experiences more negative emotions and more positive emotions than the person that does not have children. So, this is why measuring those distinct constructs are so critical. The other thing is, is that they have different drivers. So, for example, in terms of how people see life, the single biggest driver is money. But when it comes to how people live life, like stress, sadness, and anger. Money only makes, only hits at a certain level. And for the rest of it, it's other things that buy less or that gets you less sadness or less stress or more joy.

Whitney Johnson: So, it's almost like money allows you to get to a certain point. Let's say on a scale of 1 to 10, it allows you to get to three, but then how you live life. So, explain that.

Jon Clifton: Here's where it gets really complicated. So, when it comes to rate your life on a scale of 0 to 10, that's a measure of how people see life. There's a study done by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, and they found that the more money you make, the higher you rate your life. In fact, there is no satiation point. That's why when you see countries like Denmark and Norway, who rate their lives the highest, and places like Haiti right their lives the worst, it highly correlates with GDP per capita. But on the other side of the ledger, anger, stress, sadness, and pain, or whether or not people laugh and smile a lot or experience a lot of enjoyment, money, there's a tipping point. And in the United States, it's 75,000 after 75 k. Money doesn't buy you less stress, money doesn't buy you more joy. It's other things in life that impact those various indicators.

Whitney Johnson: So interesting. All right. So, you just said this, but just want to make sure. So, which countries? Actually, you talked about the money piece. So, from a well-being standpoint, which countries rank the highest?

Jon Clifton: So, this is, again, where it gets complicated because it depends on how you define well-being or happiness. Because if it depends on how people see their life or rate their lives on a scale of 0 to 10, then the countries who do the best in the world are Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. And the countries that do the worst are places like Haiti or Afghanistan. If it's on the other side of the ledger, which is whether or not they experience a lot of joy, have a lot of enjoyment, feel treated with respect. The countries that are the highest in the world are Latin

America. In fact, if there's anything that we can learn in Latin America is that Latin Americans possibly know how to have fun more than anyone else in the world. So, we have a lot to learn from them. Now, if there's anything culturally that we all have in common, it's anger, stress, sadness, and physical pain. Because it looks like many of the drivers are very similar. And the country in the past 12 months that ranked the highest in terms of all of those negative indicators was Afghanistan. We did the interviews face to face while the American forces were leaving, and we found not only a record in our tracking of Afghanistan, we found a record of stress, sadness, all those negative emotions in the history of our database. We have never seen more daily pain than we've seen in Afghanistan than we ever have in any other country in the world.

Whitney Johnson: So, it's very interesting to me hearing you say that because I lived in Latin America for a year and a half, and I learned to speak Spanish. I was a missionary there for my church. And I will say that I love Latin America. And I love when I speak Spanish. I'm a different person when I speak Spanish. And what you just described, I just had this. Aha. Is that they, you said, it's not about how they see life, but it's how they live life. And there's something I'm sure embedded or encoded within the language that allows them to experience life in a different way. And so, that experience for me, of how they experience life transmitted to me because I lived there, but also because I learned that language. Thoughts?

Jon Clifton: Well, it could be culture. And one of the things that when people are analyzing this information, and they hang it on culture. One of the things that they do is they say, look at East Asia, because when we talk about negative emotions or positive emotions, any of the things that we track on the emotional side. They say, well, East Asians typically don't, are not very expressive on these particular indicators, and that's why they're low. And all this has to do with culture. There is probably some aspect to that where they're right. But then explain this because in China, over the past 15 years of our tracking, negative emotions has been steadily increasing dramatically. So, if it was culture, that they are less likely to express those particular indicators, then why are they steadily expressing them far much more now? The other thing is that in Latin America is that, yes, it is the region that expresses the highest positive emotions, but it is the region that expresses the second highest negative emotions. So, it is a part of the world where emotions are expressed a great deal, no matter what emotion it is.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, one of the major theses of your one of the major thesis or themes is that negative emotions are on the rise globally, and we need to pay attention to that. And when I saw that thesis, my initial thought was, oh, but whatever we pay attention to, we get more of because our brains have this magnificent filtering mechanism or are a magnificent filtering mechanism. And so, if we focus on these negative emotions, are we going to get more of that? And yet I'm pretty sure you know that, and you're still telling us we need to pay attention to this. So, why is this important?

Jon Clifton: Well, let's address the first part of it, which is, is this something that because we talk more about it, we, therefore, start to see more about it? And I think really the dialog started, at least in the United States, potentially in Western Europe, where after the pandemic, people are saying these are some mental health issues that we need to be talking about more frequently. I certainly hope the pandemic wasn't the impetus for us to be talking about these various issues. Because even with some metrics by the United States government, these things have been getting worse for a very long time. Things that people have been more open to talk about than ever. So again, is it something that they're just more open to talk about? And if so, what was causing it for well over a decade? And now, the same is true globally. And there are a lot of people that are actually disconnected from the Internet. As we know, it's anywhere around 60 to 70% of people that are online. So, if they are truly following this conversation and those that are not online don't necessarily take part in that conversation, why are their negative emotions rising as well? And I think it's because it's not necessarily the world is saying, hey, it's okay to talk about it. I think it's because people's negative emotions are truly increasing, and that's what's got us so concerned.

Whitney Johnson: So, what do we do about it?

Jon Clifton: Well, first, is look at what's causing it. And arguably, we find that there are kind of five drivers. But three, I think, should be something that alert people right away. The first one is global hunger. So, for 40 years, the world has been celebrating that we've been winning the war against hunger. But since 2014, we started to lose the war against hunger. Gallup actually works with the Food and Agriculture Organization out of Rome, the agency of the United Nations, to help actually capture these data. We found in 2014 that 20% of people were either moderately or

severely food insecure. Today, that number is 30%. And if people think that the war in Ukraine or COVID caused this, then they haven't been paying attention because that rise has been coming since 2014. And again, there's a white paper in the *Journal of Nutrition* that actually connects these data on hunger to Gallup's data on anger, stress, sadness, and physical pain and worry. And they kind of come up with what I think we already probably knew. And sometimes we do this in research, which is prove the obvious, which is if you're hungry, you're negative, emotions skyrocket. And that is one of the things that's taking place. The two others are loneliness. And so, we see a massive increase that's taking place with loneliness. And the other one is the misery within the global workplace. So, those are the three things that leaders could focus on now. And again, it's not just when we're talking about the workplace pay and benefits, it's also about how people feel when they're at work. And these are massive issues facing the planet today.

Whitney Johnson: So, we'll come back to work in just a minute. So, basically, there is hunger, loneliness, and work. Before we go to the work thing, and I started to ask this, and I think I derailed you. What bad thing is going to happen if we don't pay attention to the negative emotions?

Jon Clifton: Well, there are serious consequences. One of them, I think, is that an academic, I believe, is now at MIT. His name is George Ward, took Gallup's data on negative emotions and said, can you actually connect this to voting behavior? And what he determined is that he can actually show statistically that when negative emotions rise, so do interest in populist parties. And so, if there are leaders, at least from a public sector perspective, that don't necessarily want to see the rise of various populist parties, and he picks out places like Viktor Orban, I'm sure if you asked him today, he would be talking about what's taking place in Italy. Potentially Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or even Donald Trump in the United States. He would say that the reason is, is because that there is a real pain, a real frustration that you could have seen in people's sentiment and that they actually took it to the polling booth. Now, I don't know if that's necessarily true. Of course, we can look at correlations. It may very well be that intense political environments also make us miserable. There are data to suggest that, but in terms of how people feel ultimately determines how they act. And this is why leaders need to pay much more close attention to these indicators.

Whitney Johnson: So, what I hear you saying is that when you're hungry, you're you can't function like mentally and emotionally. Your emotional regulation goes way down. And if you carry that one step further, if you're feeling a lot of emotional pain, whether it's sadness or loneliness, then your emotional regulation goes down, and you just want the pain to go away. And so, if someone comes in and says, I will fix this for you, you're more likely to be thinking not rationally, but sort of almost just want someone to take care of you and make the pain go away. Which isn't necessarily what we need to function well and to build a productive society.

Jon Clifton: I don't think that that's an unreasonable conclusion at all. But I do think that when we have a bunch of negative emotions that are starting to build up, it causes emotional flooding, and it causes human beings to do things that are totally unrecognizable to themselves. And sometimes, it can be bad things. Sometimes, it can be things that need to take place in a society. If people feel that there are things that are happening in an unjust way, maybe they take to the streets. You know, you take one example, which is Tunisia. When Mohamed Bouazizi, during the Arab uprising, self-immolated in the city of Bouzid. He didn't say, I'm doing this for a god. He didn't say that he's doing this for any other reason other than the fact that he just wanted to work. And at that time in Tunisia, people were frustrated. They couldn't get good jobs, they were hungry, and they thought that corruption was serious within the government. And that sort of cocktail becomes perfect for people to take to the streets. And when we fast forward ten years later, the protesters who were still in the streets not long ago, I think it was January 2021, they were saying the same thing, that they wanted bread, that they wanted freedom, and that they wanted some kind of jobs. And so, these are fundamental human needs that I think oftentimes are overlooked for some kind of macro-level issues that leaders are talking about.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, you started to talk about work. You said we don't have a work crisis. We have a good jobs crisis. Say more about that.

Jon Clifton: Yeah. So, you know, it's interesting because if you would have looked at unemployment, right, during the global COVID crisis, it was 6.5%. In 2019, global unemployment was 5.5%. And so, if you looked at those data, you would have said, do we have a jobs crisis at all? In fact, most economists say that 5% unemployment is sort of the set unemployment if you will. And that's a challenge because the jobs picture globally is way worse than those

numbers suggest. And so, why is that? There are two reasons for it. The first is that the traditional economic indicators hide a very source of misery in their indicators, which is self-employment. In the West, when we hear self-employment, we think pride. We think people are doing it because they want to be the next Steve Jobs, or they want to be a small business owner out of freedom. And that's an amazing thing. And from a well-being standpoint, that can be good, at least from a freedom perspective. But when we talk about it internationally, self-employment means something very different because, in a lot of poor countries, there isn't sort of the benefit, if you will, of unemployment. People don't have necessarily the opportunity to do that, so they're forced to beg and sometimes that means selling anything, doing any kind of work possible just to get by.

Jon Clifton: And so, when an interviewer from the government comes up to him and says, Did you work an hour in the past week, it's almost a joke because, of course, they did, but they didn't have a meaningful paycheck, and they weren't employed by an employer. They were self-employed out of necessity, not out of opportunity. And that's a problem. And so, if you look at those data and crunch about who makes under less than \$2 a day, you could triple, if not quadruple, the true unemployment rate globally. But the problem gets worse because if you isolate within workforces, people who are truly miserable at work, they don't have the opportunity to do what they do best. They don't like their colleagues, and they don't have opportunities for development, and they usually can't stand their manager. The misery that they experience on a day-to-day basis. Anger, stress, sadness, physical pain, and worry looks more like the unemployed than it does their other peers in the workplace who actually like their jobs or just have a slight emotional detachment to their jobs. This is why it's so critical for leaders to be looking a lot more closely at the subjective aspect about how people feel about their job, their personal relationships, or anything else that makes a great life.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, one of the statistics that you cited was of the roughly 3.3 billion people who want a great job; only 300 million have one. So only 10%.

Jon Clifton: That's right. And again, if anyone is so kind as to read this book and they'll see that the way that I define them. I'm going to say I because in case some of my colleagues at Gallup necessarily don't agree, which is it is defined as someone who has full-time work, a paycheck, and they are engaged in that work or what I would also call as they are thriving in that job, meaning they know what's expected of them. They have the things they need to do their job effectively. They have the opportunity to do what they do best. They have the development opportunities and ultimately get recognized for the great work that they do. If you're threading that needle at work, it makes a huge impact on your overall life, your daily emotions, and how you see your life. And if the world could create more jobs like that, I believe that it could, honest to God, double the amount of people that are thriving globally.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. You said 70% of what determines a worker's emotional attachment to a job is the manager. So, seven zero percent. So, if you hate your job, it's probably because of your boss.

Jon Clifton: That's right. That's right.

Whitney Johnson: So, our listeners have heard me quote Clayton Christensen before, who's one of my main mentors, and he said, management is the noblest of professions if done well.

Jon Clifton: I agree with that. But the challenge is, is that people are. Just because management is a noble profession doesn't mean it's built for everyone. And I think the challenge is that everybody thinks that the pinnacle of work is to be the boss, and it's not true. Being a great manager means that sometimes you need to have the underlying talents to be a great manager. You also need to have the right kind of training. It's not just the technical expertise of what you do as an organization. You also have to have expertise about what do you do in terms of performance management, What do you do in terms of if you have to let someone go? These are really important aspects of being a great manager. And fundamentally, some people are not just they're not built to do that. They are supposed to be the greatest player. I think the greatest distinction and I think it's a good thing. But in sports, for example, who is it that gets paid the most? Steph Curry or Steve Kerr? And we know it's Steph Curry because he's the top player, and organizations ultimately need to look back at that and reflect to say, how do we sort of idolize, hold up the stars and not always the managers because we need people that aspire to be the top player just as much as we need people who are going to aspire to be a great manager.

Whitney Johnson: Can you talk about how women rate their lives at a 5.3, and this is on the scale of 0 to 10. That's how they see their life, Yes. Mm hmm. But then only 28% of the women are thriving globally, which means 72% or nearly 2 billion women are either struggling or suffering. And then you mentioned three factors that would improve their well-being. What are those three factors for women?

Jon Clifton: Yeah. So, the first one has to do with better integration into the workforce. We know right now that I think it's 75% of adult men are in the workplace, yet only 50% of women are. Now, from a cultural standpoint, there are some countries that are not as progressive in terms of integrating women. India is a great example. 75% of adult men are in the global or excuse me, in India's workforce, and it's only 25% of women. But it's not about just ensuring to help women get jobs. It's also to make sure that they get great jobs. And that's where we have managers who help them with get into positions that use their strengths, etc.. The second one has to do with childcare. We know that during the pandemic, if there was one of the particular groups that was disproportionately affected during the pandemic was because a lot of women, when they went home, they also took on the large role of care. It was overwhelming and understandably so. As we look forward as companies all over the world, how do we help women with children? Because if you look at some of the pay gaps that exist today, we know that in the OECD, there's a pay gap of about 14% between men and women.

Jon Clifton: But the pay gap grows disproportionately more when you isolate women with children. And there are there are other pieces of literature that oftentimes say that this is because women with children sometimes aren't able to travel as much because of the children that they have at home. And this prevents them from accelerating like their other peers without children. So, there are a number of issues that we have to do in order to advance that. I think the other big issue that needs addressed when it comes to women's well-being is safety. And the reason I say that is when we ask men and women all over the world, do you feel in the city or area where you live, do you feel safe walking alone at night? Outside of economic opportunities, safety is the second largest gender gap between men and women, and women just deserve better. So, not only do we need to make sure that communities are safe for women, but we also need to make sure women feel safe. And there's are two very different elements in terms of leadership.

Whitney Johnson: Have you run any studies or analyzes to look at the correlation between negative emotions and quit rates at work?

Jon Clifton: We have. But if I could just say one other thing about what was written in the book about women, because I think this is one of the single most incredible findings that we've had, and quite frankly, we can't fully explain it. And I would be interested in your thoughts as well. Which is, we know that women face challenges unique to them as a gender. For example, these sort of economic opportunities that are afforded to men and not necessarily to women all over. Same is true, as I mentioned, with personal safety. Women just don't feel as safe as men do. And you have countries where women are subjected to honor killings, which just seem like incredible horror that an individual could experience. So, when we ask women, rate your lives on a scale of 0 to 10, and we ask men lives on a scale of 0 to 10, my hypothesis was potentially maybe that men would rate their lives better, especially considering so many aspects of a great life that face an individual that women unfortunately don't have some of these same things, like the opportunity to feel safe in many of their communities. So why? The answer was, is that women rated their lives the same as men.

Jon Clifton: If anything, they rated their life slightly better. Why? This is such a fascinating thing that became economist Carol Graham. She's at Brookings in the University of Maryland. She's one of the top experts on wellbeing. She got so interested, she wrote a white paper on it that said women are happier than men in most countries around the world. Why? And she said to me, interestingly enough, she goes, Jon, I didn't mean for this to happen, but I think it's the most cited white paper that I've ever written in my career. Which and this is someone who is one of the top 400 most cited female economists in the world. And so, we're still not entirely sure she has hypotheses. I interviewed a handful of experts on women's well-being globally to say, why do we think this is taking place? And while we can't prove it, I think all four of them offered hypotheses that will take us a lot further, because whatever is happening here is something I think that all of us globally could learn a lot from.

Whitney Johnson: So, what did they say? What are the hypotheses?

Jon Clifton: So, one had to do. Carol Graham talked about expectations. She looked at a study that was done in the cantons in Switzerland in voting, and there was a vote that took place almost 50 years ago now. And they voted on giving women more rights, I think it was in the workplace. And what they found is that in the more liberal cantons, interestingly enough, there was no improvement in terms of how women saw their lives. There were in the conservative cantons. Her hypothesis as to why is because the women in the liberal cantons had expected to have those rights. And so, once they received them, they didn't necessarily see a balance because they said, well, this is something I expected. And her hypothesis was that the women in the conservative cantons did not expect to have them get them and actually did see a meaningful increase in their lives. Another one has to do with Shauna Olney, who's the former chief of gender at the International Labor Organization. And she ties this back to the family. She says that women's role with respect to family, with respect to raising children, does meaningfully impact the lives of women everywhere. And it's something that we need to study in far greater detail. And it's just an incredible insight on her behalf. The other one is that Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders, who was America's ambassador to the Congo and to Nigeria for a long time under both the Republican and Democrat administration.

Jon Clifton: And her hypothesis was that this is the wrong analysis, that women don't compare themselves to men and that we need to look at them completely independent from each other. And I think this, too, is a really interesting point that she advances and she's done a number of studies within Africa. In fact, one of her books is on the Uli women in Africa. So, those were kind of three of the hypotheses. And then my colleague, Julie Rae, she has written some of the most stories on Gallup about humanity's well being. And she said what you see here is if you look at the statistical relationship between how women rate their lives and between the Human Development Index, what you will find is that what is good for women is good for all people. And so, she says that basic human development issues like education, like economic opportunities and safety are things that we should advance, not just behalf on behalf of women, but because it's good for everyone within the country. And that's why you see that people in Finland, Switzerland, etc., when they're rating their lives so high, it's because they are advancing the well-being of everyone.

Whitney Johnson: So, first of all, the Julie Rea, who, her hypothesis that what's good for women is good for all people. When you said that, I felt I felt something like I felt it, and it just it resonated with me and the power of that. So, that's number one. Number two is. To not compare men and women. I'm thinking about to reading Carol Gilligan's, *In a Different Voice*. And that was the first time up until that point. This is, this book is probably, I don't know, 40 years old, maybe, at least. Up until that time, I remember reading career books, and how do you, how do you navigate a career? And in my brain, I was like, well, women navigate a career the same way men did. But then I read that book, and I read Sally Helgesen's book called, *The Female Advantage*. And just this understanding of men and women are different. Now, I understand that some people listening to this may not agree with me, but I think that men and women are different, and so we can't necessarily compare. The next thing that I thought of is this idea of expectations management. It goes back to the first hypothesis, and it's interesting, isn't it? So, if you're in a situation where you've just expected less, and this talks a lot about the S Curve that we use to think about development and growth is, I basically describe it as an expectations management exercise.

Whitney Johnson: And what you're saying is if you expect less, then you're going to be surprised on the upside. And if you expect more, you're going to be surprised on the downside. And I wonder if you would see that across underrepresented groups generally is that the expectations are lower, so they're more likely to be surprised on the upside. So, that's a question that I'm having. And then the last thought or observation I'm having as I'm listening to you is talking about how women tend to be more closely part of home and hearth than men have historically. It actually made me think that, if you go back to union psychology and how we have men and women have masculine and feminine characteristics, we both do. And in order to develop, we need to develop both. We need to be a ship and a harbor. It made me think that maybe the key here is for men to have more meaningful experiences with their families and with their children. Because you said they are both about the same happiness. But if men could have more meaningful experiences, then they would be significantly happier.

Jon Clifton: That very well could be that. Very well could be. Or imagine where women might be if we had a world where women were able to feel safer and where women had more economic opportunities. So, I agree with you there. Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Absolutely. Definitely the economic opportunities. Did you mean this to be a policy book? I mean, it's not written as a policy book, but clearly, you are talking to one of your constituents or government leaders. Was that part of the intention of this?

Jon Clifton: Definitely. Definitely. It is also private sector leaders. And the reason for that is because private sector leaders can impact people's lives right in the workplace. And it's not just employees, but take customers, for example. And so, one of my favorite stories has to do with customer interactions from a behavioral standpoint at a bakery. Because there was a bakery where they had one of their top customers. She came in at least once a month, and she spent at least \$100 with them every single transaction. And anyway, it was one particular month she just stopped going. She never went again. And the reason was not because they changed their ingredients. The reason is not because they charged more. The reason is not because there was a line. The reason was because they treated her with disrespect. And she said, because of that, I'm never spending a dollar here again. Now, if you think about what took place, there is that sort of line of thinking was emotional. It was not rational because from a rational standpoint, they spent it was the same amount of money, it was the same ingredients, it was the same length of time of wait. Everything there was rational. But what caused the breakup was emotions because if we were automatons, whether or not someone treated you respectfully or not would make no difference in terms of your behavior.

Jon Clifton: And so, this is what behavioral economics became so popular for. Because it's really our way of understanding why is it people make decisions that they make. And we make, I think there's a low estimate at 10,000 high estimate of 40,000 decisions every single day. And if it's true that 70% are guided by our emotions, and 30% are guided by rational thought, then how much are leaders at both the private sector and the public sector using indicators that understand our emotions? Because even from a discussion I had with somebody in the press today, they had called me and said, well, you know, why is it we're not using this? And I said back to them, If people are so interested in what's happening in Iran right now, then why aren't they calling Gallup and asking, well, how are people feeling before the actual protest took place? Because if they were interested in that, if leaders were interested in that, then that would be the accompanying headlines rather than just kind of the narrative, an appropriate narrative of what's taking place right now.

Whitney Johnson: So, 70% are feelings, 30% is the rational brain. And yet most of the indicators, nearly all, are focused on that 30%. So, you've got this whole 70% that no one is paying attention to, and that is governing how we behave.

Jon Clifton: Exactly.

Whitney Johnson: So, if you're a manager listening to this conversation and you're thinking, Wow, this is really interesting, what's one thing you would encourage them to do?

Jon Clifton: If you're a manager. The one thing that I would encourage is for people to follow the engagement or the thriving levels of their colleagues. Because even if you're listening right now and you say, Jon, that's for stakeholder capitalists, I'm not a stakeholder capitalist. I'm a shareholder capitalist. So, all I care about is making more money. Then I would say back to you then, Perfect. And this is for you too. Because if.

Whitney Johnson: Find a math major.

Jon Clifton: Yeah, exactly. Because people who are thriving at work ultimately are more productive. And not only are they more productive, but they give better customer service, and customers who have more of an emotional attachment to a brand and organization, they spend more money. And so, all of these things ultimately benefit the bottom line. So, it doesn't matter if you're a stakeholder capitalist, a shareholder capitalist, a customer capitalist, or a purpose capitalist, no matter what business philosophy that you prescribe to. Having engaged or thriving employees helps advance every philosophy in a meaningful way. And the last thing I would say is for those that are saying, Jon, it's too much. Happy employees is not what I'm looking for, because happy employees are the ones that want volleyball courts or something like that. It's not true. A thriving employer, an engaged employee is someone who wants to know what's expected of them. And if we were accomplishing that through every single workplace, then why is it that only 50% strongly agree to the fact that they know what's expected of them at work? I mean, we have massive opportunities to just get the basics down as managers. So, I think I think managers need to pay a lot closer

attention to this because if they were, we wouldn't have an America 70% who are totally emotionally disconnected from work. And it's even worse globally.

Whitney Johnson: That's such a great takeaway for me personally, is just making sure that the people on our team know what's expected of them. It's a great question to go back and ask your team. Do you feel like you know what's expected of you and see what they say?

Whitney Johnson: If you're an individual contributor listening to this or just a person who's not necessarily in the formal workplace, a mother, a father, a teenager, what would you encourage them to do after listening to you speak?

Jon Clifton: Individual contributors have a massive role to play in the well-being and engagement of their colleagues. Why? Because there was a study that was done about ten years ago in the UK where they started giving recognition from each other's colleagues and what they found that it boosted both somebody's emotional well-being at work and it boosted their productivity. Because sometimes when you tell somebody that they're doing an awesome job and it comes from your manager, it feels sometimes contrived. It feels like, Well, you were supposed to do that. You're my boss. But when it comes from somebody that you're not necessarily expecting it to come from, you can make tremendous gains in terms of how they feel and in terms of their productivity. So, individual role players have a massive role to play in an organization from an engagement and a well-being perspective.

Whitney Johnson: So, how have you changed because of this work? How has it changed you? What have you done differently as a consequence?

Jon Clifton: Well, I would say that I have focused far more on the behavioral side from a customer interaction. I, from one perspective in my life, I kind of saw everything either through shareholder or stakeholder capitalism and didn't realize that there was this discipline that focuses more on customer capitalism. And it's kind of old school, if you will, because it's more of Peter Drucker's philosophy. But listening to the voice of your customers and again, to do that is a science. And I personally call many of our clients and talk to them and say, How are things going? Actually, spoke to one. I called him back a year later, and he said back to me, I know you're gone, and things are a lot better. Thanks for doing that. So, it inspired me to think, How is it that I actually get a lot closer rather than looking at just kind of massive surveys, which I believe are incredibly important, but also getting the qualitative side. The last thing I'll say is that I think there are a lot in the industry that confuse customer complaint cards with listening to the overall voice of all your clients and customers. And that's a problem. And now we've advanced many of these technologies that allow us to listen to as many complaints as possible, but we forget the fact that we're not listening to the ones that don't necessarily have a complaint, but that want to do far more with us because they're the ones that are already engaged. So, again, I think one of the things that helped me think about this more is the emotional side is far deeper, deeper than just kind of the quantitative. It's also the qualitative. So, I personally got involved with that.

Whitney Johnson: We've been talking about negative emotions, and the complaints reveal to you negative emotions. And yet, at the same time, you're saying, but that's not all of your customers. That's not the voice of all of your customers. So, you need to be aware of that and mitigate that. But then really focus on what all of your customers are saying.

Jon Clifton: Well, and also remember that just because somebody submits a complaint doesn't mean that somebody else doesn't have a complaint or isn't in a terrible state of mind. They actually just didn't think you'd do anything about it. So, they actually might be even worse about it. So, again, this reaction to people who are voicing their concerns are not always your entire group. And I think that may be true at a macro level as well. I mean, as I mentioned, we see that there's a massive group of individuals who remain offline. They are not connected to the Internet, and their negative emotions are growing intensely and they need listen to just as much as people who are online and have voices that they express on Twitter or any other social media platform.

Whitney Johnson: Jon, what was most useful for you in this conversation?

Jon Clifton: Probably how we opened. You'd ask me about something personal, and I think a lot of times, and you actually said this to me before we went live, which is, you know, executives, it sometimes makes them more easier to

connect to when somebody hears a personal story. And I think, quite frankly, I can come off as a robot sometimes. So, maybe telling personal stories can help me come off less as a robot myself.

Whitney Johnson: Any final thoughts?

Jon Clifton: No, I think, thank you. Because there are a lot of people that are just not quite taking an interest in these particular subjects. But you have, and I think you are doing that, at least from my research on what you've covered in the past, have been trying to elevate people's voice, whether it's employees, customers, or just the masses. And I think we need more leaders to do that. So, thank you.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you for joining us.

Jon Clifton: Thank you for having me.

Thank you again to Jon Clifton, CEO of Gallup. Here are three things I'm going to remember from our talk. First, it's important to understand just how much the rise in negative emotions can affect us in every aspect of our lives. As Jon said, only 30% of our decision making is based on rational thought. That leaves the other 70% for emotional choices where feelings you haven't explored or really just ignored can explode. The shadow self. It might not be easy to admit the hold our deeper feelings have on us, but without acknowledging them, Jon shows us how it leads to unrest on a societal scale.

Second, despite what you may be hearing on the news, Jon says there isn't a crisis in who wants to work. It's a crisis in what work is out there. It's so easy to forget, probably because of all of the negative emotions that the people who work for us want to be engaged, to be recognized, to grow. And that starts with knowing what's expected of you. It's hard to feel safe if anything and everything is your job to do. And listening to him, I realize I could do a better job of this even at Disruption Advisors.

The last thing, the part that Jon said about me being a people scientist. It was a really nice thing to hear that it's not just a podcast, but a platform for empathy that was meaningful. And it gets to what he was saying about recognition for your work. It's a mirror that helps us see what our strengths are through the eyes of other folks. If you enjoy this conversation, you might also like my talks with Mbali Maseko, Head of Employee Wellbeing at Sasol, South Africa, [Episode 304](#). Marcus Buckingham, [Episode 279](#) or [112](#), who, talks about loving our work and strengths. And Chester Elton, on Cheering for Others, [Episode 61](#). Thank you again to Jon Clifton for being our guest. Thank you for listening. If you enjoy this episode, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode, and share this episode if you know of someone who would find this useful. Thank you to our producer, Justin LeVrier, audio engineer Whitney Jobe, production assistants Stephanie Brummel and Alexandre Turk, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.