

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 308: CAROL KAUFFMAN

Hello there, 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's you. This week I'll be talking to Carol Kauffman, founder of the Institute of Coaching at Harvard Medical School, and she's one of the world's most successful executive coaches. Carol is the co-author of *Real-Time Leadership Find Your Winning Moves When the Stakes Are High*, that's out this month. Carol has worked with everyone from royalty to startup visionaries. We'll talk with her about her new book, why she loves clients who hate coaching, and much more. Thanks for tuning in, and enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, Carol Kauffman, let's jump right in. There is a story that you have told me that's formative to this book and to you, one where you thought you were going to die. Can we start with that story?

**Carol Kauffman:** So I was 20, 21, and I was in college. And one day, I was lying in bed, and I opened my eyes; like suddenly, it was like boom. And my eyes opened, and there was a man standing about five, four feet away in my doorway, in my bedroom. And he had on like khaki colored pants, a black raincoat, a black bowler-like hat, kid you not? And I just looked at him and said, Excuse me, may I help you? Which was not the response that he was expecting. So, then he just starts talking to me, and I'm slowly coming to as I'm talking to him. And finally, he's asking about my landlord, whatever. And then finally I sort of looked at him, and I said, Well, who are you? And what do you want? And he just kind of got all flustered and said, I'm just a guy, I'm just a guy, and I'm just looking for a girl. To which I said, Would you mind looking somewhere else? And he left. And it was only later, when the police barged in, that I, in fact, realized how much danger I had been in.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, this story is formative to this book titled *Real-Time Leadership*. What does that mean exactly? So, take this story and draw a thread for us for the title of the book.

**Carol Kauffman:** Well, the subtitle, which seems a little superficial compared to this situation, is *Find Your Winning Moves When the Stakes Are High*. And I would say the stakes were very high. And what I was able to do, and this is what the book is about, was I was able to make space in that moment to make a better choice. And *Real-Time Leadership* is about that. There's a Viktor Frankl quote that says, "Between every stimulus and response, there's a space. And in that space is our freedom." And the book is about being able to make that space but then also knowing what to do when you're in that space. What are the smarter choices that you can make? How can you know what to do, how to do it, and how to connect to the people around you? That's mostly it. How do you really operate in the moment? And the book gives lots and lots and lots of examples and guidelines on how to do that.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, if you go back to that moment where there was that man standing in the door, are you astonished that you said, Can I help you?

**Carol Kauffman:** Yeah. I am. But, you know, we all have very different strengths, and my strength is sort of thinking on my feet and being fast on my feet. And so, in that situation, just sort of automatically being in the moment. But one of the things in the book, HBR, interviewed me about the *Options Generator* article that they did in the January issue, and they asked me about it. And along the way, I talked to them about my career as a fencer. And my career as a fencer goes something like this I was the worst fencer on my team by far. And so, they put me up against the best fencers in the opposing teams because, hey, if you're going to lose anyway, you might as well have me lose to those people and kind of get them out of the running. So, at that first fencing match, for some reason, I was the best fencer in that match. I won against the best competitor, and then I won against the second-best competitor. And I thought, Wow, I'm like, We didn't know. So, then I went back to practice, and I expected that I'd be really great again. Like the popular girls who are like putting their noses up about me. And I was just as terrible. And what I realized is that my superpower is being in that moment. And it took the jolt and the intensity of being on the fencing mat all wired up for me to get there. So, how does that connect to options generator? One of the things we believe is that for any set of choices, any interaction, any anything, you want to have four paths forward.

**Carol Kauffman:** David Noble, my co-author, talks about this four ways to win. And this comes from fight, flight, freeze, and befriend. But I turned that into lean-in, really engage. Go for conflict if you need to. Lean back is observe, notice. Lean with, which is nurture, and support. And don't lean, which is the capacity to not do anything to be responsive in the moment to the moment. And for me, what happened in the fencing, and I think somewhat with that person, was that I did a don't lean. I did nothing and just saw what came to me in the moment. And in that case, it was talking to that man. In coaching, it might be coming up with an idea. And in fencing, it was I needed to be in the moment, to work. But the issue is we all need to be flexible, and we all need to have those four ways to win. And so, that tends to be my default. So, my job is overcoming that default. So, I'm equally good at leaning in and engaging, leaning back and going with the data, and being nurturing. But under stress, I tend to go to that default.

**Whitney Johnson:** Of, don't lean at all.

**Carol Kauffman:** Yep. Yep. Just depend on my brain to suddenly save me.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, I'm wondering. So, back to the fencing example. I'm curious about that. So, what do you think happened? Is that you in that moment, you weren't anxious about it, and they were. And so that's why you won. Like what? What was. So, if you take that those four options, how do you apply that in that situation?

**Carol Kauffman:** I go into turbo. It's sort of like, you know, I mean, ideally, to be a good fencer, you should be able to lean in and choose how you're going to engage. You should have a strategy. Like lean back is here's my strategy, here's their strengths, here's their weaknesses, etc. So, be strategic. And my default is just respond in the moment. And in that case, one of it's a high-stakes moment. I was able to engage and might set me high, and others call that the zone. So, for me, that's my way into the zone.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. So, *Real-Time Leadership*. I mean, you're kind of dancing, fencing around it. If you had to say it in a really succinct way and someone said 10 seconds, *Real-Time Leadership*, what is it? What would you say?

**Carol Kauffman:** That *Real-Time Leadership* is being able to make the space between what's coming at you and what you do to make the most of every moment. Overcome your default reactions. Be aware of what is being required of me at this moment. What do I need to do? Who do I need to be? How do I need to relate? Can I find four ways forward? Can I really check out my view of reality? And can I then communicate? So, that is what it is. And that's the four, kind of the acronym of M.O.V.E. Those are kind of the four categories where we help people.

**Whitney Johnson:** What to you is coaching? How are you defining coaching?

**Carol Kauffman:** Coaching has got so many different variations on it. I'd say what I do is a combination of being a leader, advisor, and a coach. So, I can describe the nuances of that. As a coach, what you do is you really pull from the other person; you pull ideas. You ask questions that unlock their strengths. You listen as if listening was an Olympic sport, and in leadership advisory, you put things out. So, what I do as a leader, advisor, coach is I might sort of pull from you and pull from you. And then, if I feel like I have a piece of information for you, I will then offer it to you. But then I'll say, Does that seem right to you? Or how does that land for you and then go back to pulling from the other person. So, the other thing about coaching, so that's coaching versus consulting, and I, I do that combo. Then there's also coaching versus counseling and therapy. So, for that distinction, what I'd say is that in therapy, I was a therapist for 20 years. In therapy, you follow the trail of tears with the goal of finding the pain and helping the person heal. In coaching, you follow the trail of dreams, and what is it that energizes that person and optimizes? And for another metaphor, my apologies. It's like coaching. Actually, no, because for all three, for coaching, consulting, and counseling. Imagine there's three houses next to each other. And the thing is, there's some similar rooms, so you may be doing the exact same thing, but you really have to remember what house am I in? What is my mission? What is my purpose in this conversation?

**Whitney Johnson:** You said your co-author of *Real-Time Leadership* is David Noble, and you do a lot of coaching together. And I would love to hear, when you coach together, what does it look like when the two of you are at your best?

**Carol Kauffman:** So, the thing that makes our coaching when we coach together, which we typically only do in the most complex high stakes situation when we're working with a CEO, and there's a lot going on in the company. What's unique about us is our different backgrounds. So, David comes from a background as being a banker. He was managing partner of two strategy firms. He was the CEO of the world's first digital bank and was an operating executive who's lived around the world. Then there's me, and I have a background of being a clinical psychologist and a specialist in trauma and then positive psychology teaching at Harvard, I think, since I was 12. Like over, I won't even say how many decades. And we have very different takes on things. So, when we're working with someone together, it's like a duet. And I will perhaps pick up some things that David won't. Then David will pick up on things that I won't. And it's a little bit more hilly with the strategy, the business, etc. I'll lead with. So, who do you want to be to make this happen? What's going to get in your way of all the things you've just talked about? What's most important? And David will again just be, I think, more strategic. And he's got like the best memory of anyone I've ever met. So, he'll also be able to say, well, you know, on December 14th, 2020, you said blah, blah, blah. So, that's how we work together. And I'm very kind of much more bubbly and expressive. David is more sort of down-to-earth and calm. So, who we are as people is an interesting combination. And then our different backgrounds give us very different vantage points on someone.

**Whitney Johnson:** Let me give you a scenario. So, you're a CEO. You had to pass over a senior leader for a promotion. But you still want to retain that person. You understand their perspective, sure. But you have to act against that. What would you do in that situation when you think about this from a vantage point perspective?

**Carol Kauffman:** So, the core of what vantage point is and the so we know vantage point is that's how do I see a situation? What is my take? And is my take clear the right resolution, breadth, and depth? So what is my vantage point? But then, what is the other person's vantage point? How are they seeing the situation? So the first thing you want to do is, I think of it as, walk over the bridge. So, let's say person A got the job, person B didn't, and I want person B to stay. So, I would walk over the bridge to where person B is, and I would work to truly understand their view of the world and how they see it. That's option one of what I would do. Then, remembering the options generator. At that point, I would try to interact with them the way they needed me to interact with them. They might really need that leaning with and the pat on the back, etc. They might need me to sort of really put it in data context for the good of the company. We need to do X, Y, and Z. You are not able to be a match this time; just really information. I may need to sort of just really lean in and have a so this is why it didn't happen, and this is how we can work forward in the future. You're important to me. So, first, you want to see the world as they do. Then get a sense of what option pathway is better. And then to, I think the backdrop is leaders need coaching skills. So, the backdrop is the leader's capacity to listen to self-regulate and to be able to really step into a place of kindness, particularly if that person is angry at you or even caustic or attacking. How can you stay centered in that moment?

**Whitney Johnson:** So good. So, what I heard you say is, number one, as the CEO in that situation, is to walk across the bridge and really try to see and feel the experience that that person is having that just got passed over. But then use your options generator to think about how do I need to interact with them around this. And it might be being really giving them being really direct as to what happened, but it might also be just talking through with them and sort of sitting side by side and having a conversation. And maybe even feel what they're feeling. But instead of kind of armoring up and pretending like it didn't happen, walk over there and sit on the same side of the table with them. That's going to be your best shot at retaining them, is what you're saying.

**Carol Kauffman:** Yes. For them to, at the end of the day, feel seen and valued.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, I'm going to give you I'm going to throw another one in there. So, vantage point, what do you do? And maybe you'll do the generators. We're in a, we're in a situation right now in the economy where there are lots of economic headwinds and are lots of layoffs. And it is very bruising. And I and I know you coach a lot of CEOs. It's a very bruising experience to have to let people go. So, what model or framework would you use in that instance to coach the CEO through that situation?

**Carol Kauffman:** Okay. So, in this case, I'm coaching a CEO who has to manage a reduction in force. And the model that I would say here first is so with a M.O.V.E. Model, we haven't done the M.O.V.E., so I'm going to spring that on you now. So M is to be mindfully alert. We know what mindful is, in terms of being judgment-free, open mind, etc., but then alert like an athlete. Very much in tune of what's going on. So, being mindfully alert. And I'll double-click on that in a minute because that's where I would go first, the three dimensions of leadership to be mindfully alert. So then the O is options generator. V is vantage point. And E is engage, and effect change, which is basically how clear are your signals that you're sending out when you want to help move forward? And how well can you hear the the echo? And how well can you iterate? So, that's the M.O.V.E. Model.

**Whitney Johnson:** Which is the primary framework that people can read and learn about in your book, *Real-Time Leadership*.

**Carol Kauffman:** Yeah, it's the first half of the book is that. The second half is how you apply that to a first-time leader. Then how do you apply it to a 10X situation? So, here we have the leader who has to do the reduction in force. And then if we were going to look at being mindfully alert. First of all, it's like, okay, the three questions are. What is it that you really need to do? What is your outcome variable? So, is it the reducing 5%? Is that your actual outcome variable? Is it, how do I help everyone else feel safe in the context of these 5% going? How is it that I can make those 5% feel as safe as possible? So what? What are my outcome variables? What do I need to achieve? Then the second dimension of leadership is your internal leadership, self-leadership. And that would be, how centered can I be in this situation? What are my emotional resources, my values, my purpose, my strengths, and how can I use them to help me in this situation? And then there's the interpersonal. So, that gets back to how do these people need me to relate to them. So, I would at least go through those three to try to get a sense of how to do that. Now, for some people, laying people off is kind of not a big deal.

**Carol Kauffman:** Emotionally. It doesn't rile them up. They may be worried about the outcome, but they're kind of good with that. And that would not be me. But then it's like, okay, how would I help a leader or myself when I've got to do something tough and, you know, I'm dreading the situation? So, now there I am. I've got to fire someone. I know they're going to be upset, and I'm dreading the conversation. What can I do? So, I recently had something a bit similar to that. In fact, I dreaded it so much that I decided shock of shocks to use my own model to help myself out. So, I got up paper, and I thought, okay, what is my outcome variable, you know? Is it to keep this person, not keep this person? Is it how this person will experience themselves or me or whatever? The big one is about me. And so one of the things we talk about in our book are the five C's. And this is five aspects of who I'm being at my wisest best self. And the five C's are: am I calm, clear, curious, compassionate, and courageous. So, in this situation, the leader and, in this case, me as well, I'm like, okay, on a scale of 1 to 10, how calm am I? Then let's say I'm a three.

**Carol Kauffman:** It's like, okay, what am I doing? Right? Calm wise, I'm not a two. But then it's like, okay, what would calm look like? What's going to disrupt my calm? What's going to help my calm? Ok, clear. How clear am I? In that situation, I wasn't really that clear, so I sort of went. Ok, how can I become clearer about this, my inner state?

Then went to being curious. I thought that, okay, well gee, how can I walk over to the bridge to how this other person feels and ask them questions and connect and have the capacity to listen to them. To be compassionate, you know, to be curious so that I can be compassionate and be aware of their experience, even if it doesn't align with mine. And then how to step into being courageous, you know, really speak the truth and not be run by fear. So, that is typically my pathway in. And what I would suggest for a lot of leaders is if you're feeling disrupted, not in a good way. To take yourself through the five Cs and there's ways to help steady yourself and all of those and then figure out what is it that you're really supposed to do and what is it you're really not supposed to do?

**Whitney Johnson:** Interesting. So, before you go there, because I think that's that's a great point. Is so the the part of the M.O.V.E. Model is the first one is M mindfully alert. And as you go into a situation where you need to lay someone off, assuming that this is something that's difficult for you and as you pointed out, it isn't difficult for some people. But in that moment you want to look at what outcome you're looking for, but then you're also looking for how do you interact with this person. And that's where the five Cs come in. So, you say calm and clear. And what were the other three?

**Carol Kauffman:** Calm, clear, curious, compassionate, and courageous.

**Whitney Johnson:** And ask yourself where you are, because that will allow you to get into a mindset to treat the person in the way that treat them with dignity.

**Carol Kauffman:** And the big thing is and the five Cs really come from the work of the Internal Family Systems Model of Richard Schwartz. And it's the best way to make space for yourself. You know, there you are activated. And it's like when we say, okay, so how do I.

**Whitney Johnson:** Create that space.

**Carol Kauffman:** Create that space between? Exactly. That's the stimulus and response right there. You can make the space with the five Cs. Then what to do in that space, you can go to the three dimensions of leadership, my options generator or my vantage point.

**Whitney Johnson:** Carol, what do you do when you become unfocused? What do you do to refocus?

**Carol Kauffman:** I'm really terrible at that, actually. The one thing I think I would try to do is what I just said is the five Cs. That if I can sort of, first calm myself, you know, just help my physiology settle down. I think that that, for me, is what gets disrupted to be unfocused. So, if I can get calm, I then can get clear. The other one is to really ask myself in that moment, what's my purpose here? You know. So, there you are in a situation and maybe your focus scatters. It's like, wait, what is my purpose here? What is it that I'm meant to be doing? And how can that pull me in?

**Whitney Johnson:** You know, I was going to ask you this question. I think you may have started to answer it is. Is can you think of an experience when you've been in a coaching situation and you think, I've got nothing here? You're one of the world's foremost coaches and a lot of people who are coaching listen to this. And I'm sure there are moments when you're like, I got nothing. What do you do?

**Carol Kauffman:** Nah, never.

**Whitney Johnson:** You never have?

**Carol Kauffman:** Yes. No.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, are you serious?

**Carol Kauffman:** No, of course I'm not serious.

**Whitney Johnson:** I believed you. I'm so gullible. Like, sure. You got nothing? Never. Okay, so, one of the things you just said, I think you answered it, is that that question of I. I'm calm. I calm my physiology down. And then your question to yourself of what is my purpose actually here to help regroup you. But I'm wondering if you would add anything to that.

**Carol Kauffman:** When you're in a coaching situation. It's really helpful to have faith in the process. Not in you, not in you to be so confident you can ask that perfect question, but to have faith in the process of coaching and trying to create an environment where the other person can think and grow. So, there's times when I've got nothing. And some of the, my default question, when I have nothing is when the person stops is to use an intervention from Nancy Klein, who wrote a book, *Time to Think*. Then, she wrote *More Time to Think*, and I'm ready to make a joke at the next one, son of...

**Whitney Johnson:** *More Time to Think*.

**Carol Kauffman:** But but the question she has is when someone's done a wave and let's say they've done a wave and you've got nothing. She says. What else do you think or feel or want to say? So, that's one thing. Just bring the person into another cycle. The other one is if you feel that you've got nothing, what's going on for you? Are you actually in an ego full space here and you've got nothing because you're trying to be smart or brilliant and that's not what the person needs. That, then you go to, what's how can I be of service? How can I be of service to this person right now? And I'll share another question. So, I remember once this is like such bad practice, my life got like, totally disorganized one day. And so, I had a meeting with the CEO of a major company as I'm driving my car to an important appointment and I'm lost. So, I am talking to this guy while I'm I'm distracted and multi processing and I just didn't have a well, of course, I guess I had a choice. I made that rather dumb one. And then so then he stops and I'm like, Oh my God, First of all, like, where am I? Was it left or right? Where is I? So, this is going on this pause. And I'm like, so I, I didn't have time to pull over. I remember this intersection exactly. And I'm like, Oh, dear. So, I asked a funny question. You'll see why it's cognitively odd. So, I said, because a silence grew and I said. What else is it that wants to be talked about? And he then opened up about issues in his family and growing up and some very painful things he heard. And we had this incredible, incredible conversation, one of the deepest conversations we've ever had because of that question, what wants to be talked about?

**Whitney Johnson:** So, you have coached some very powerful people, and I know that it's one of your policies to not share who those powerful people are. But I'm wondering, is there anything that you have found to be in common about these people? Any common threads or themes of the people that you coach? That are willing to be coached. And when you get to the ones who are unwilling in just a minute. But let's start with the ones who are coachable.

**Carol Kauffman:** I'm going to answer a different question. I have coached many people who do not want to be coached in a big way, and they are coachable. They turn out to be very coachable. I personally really like skeptics. So, I'll tell about this one guy. He was told by a search firm, Egon Zehnder, about where I where I do half time search and leadership advisory. And he was told, imagine what this would be like. He was told, yes, you're the choice to be the CEO of this company, but you can't step into that role until you have had one year of coaching with Carol Kauffman. So, it's now six months later. He's managed to procrastinate and procrastinate and procrastinate. And so, then finally, we have that very first session which went like this. Hello, hello. Okay. He looks at his watch. How long is this going to take? That was the beginning of the coaching. So, what I said was something along the lines of, well, listen, I believe that coaching needs to fit into what you need. You don't fit into what I need and my structures. He said, Oh? And then remember when I'm like, uh-oh, uh-oh, uh-oh. I just think, how can I be of service right now? So, I just said, So, how can I be of service right now? What's going on? And so, you know, he just talked and talked.

**Carol Kauffman:** I did not stop talking for 15 minutes because market share in this and his people and blah, blah, blah, and we're centralizing and decentralizing. And then he starts talking about some issues with this team. And then. And so, he said something. And was like, No, he didn't really do that. So, I said, Well, what how did that? What happened? And he goes, well, my most valuable person quit. To which I said, Well, would you like that to not happen again? And that was the beginning of a wonderful relationship because a lot of people don't want coaching because they don't think they're really going to be heard. They think that they're going to be smacked in the face with holier than thou values. And they think that you are the representative of the power. Powers that be as

opposed to the reminder, this is confidential. I'm being paid by your organization, but you are my client. And in embodying that, I think I actually didn't even say it to the guy. It just sort of started, started out, but. So, a lot of these a lot of these people. And the other thing is, like, almost nobody cares about these people. You know, if you're.

**Whitney Johnson:** When you're really singular, you don't feel cared for.

**Carol Kauffman:** Well, particularly when they're assholes. You know, pardon me, but a lot of them, they they are. This guy was. It was just in the words of of Liz Wiseman, you know, her her book, *Impact Players and Multipliers*, she talks about the accidental diminisher. You know, these guys are, you know, cranky, threatening or whatever, but it's accidental. That's a side effect of of things. Most of them not they're not bad hearted, but they really you can think of them more as clueless rather than uncoachable.

**Whitney Johnson:** Do you think everyone needs a coach? Carol.

**Carol Kauffman:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Even small businesses? Everyone needs a coach?

**Carol Kauffman:** Everyone, I think every human on the planet needs a coach. If you were lucky enough to have someone who'll be in that role. You know, people. People say, you know, you were born alone, you die alone. It's like, Hi. Has anyone actually ever been born alone? Somebody was there.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly.

**Carol Kauffman:** Or you wouldn't be born. Yeah. So, that's, that's my own feeling. And it can be, you know, not everyone needs a professional coach. I think the coaching spirit is very important, and that's one thing we can bring to people in our work life and professional life. In terms of the spirit of, you know, being interested in who they are, you know, approaching people with a sense of kindness. So, I think someone in your life who is a embodies a coaching spirit is is really vital for all of us because we don't really make it alone.

**Whitney Johnson:** And coming back to what you said earlier is the ability to help people pull out of themselves the answers.

**Carol Kauffman:** Yeah. Yeah. I thought that was very annoying, by the way. So, there's this guy who's really sort of started coach in the UK. His name was John Whitmore, Sir John Whitmore, and he was one of these cool racecar drivers turned business coaches. And his famous question is, if you knew the answer, what would it be? Which I always thought was incredibly annoying. And then John decided to be my coach for a while. It was just odd. Once a month I would just get a call from him out of the blue and I was struggling with something and he asked me that stupid question. And darn it, it was like it.

**Whitney Johnson:** It was a good question.

**Carol Kauffman:** It was like some it it was remarkable. It was for some reason, the image I have is that someone took a washcloth and he just threw it at me. And and the question the answer was there. So, I think that there's really a lot that we don't know that we know, and coaching can help us know it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Carol, where can people find you if they want to connect, if they want to learn more about your book? Where? Where do you want them to go?

**Carol Kauffman:** Okay, you can start out by going to my website, which is [carolkauffman.com](http://carolkauffman.com). And when you get there, you'll see also the book *Real-Time Leadership*, and you can join my mailing list and you can click over and buy the book. You can also buy the book directly. Hardbacks are particularly appreciated given that they're the only thing that count for the Wall Street Journal. Hello. Why is that? And also, if you're listening and you actually do want to buy a book, hope you do, but I can't force you. Buy it before February 25th. I never understood why preorders mattered so much. And that's because if you order it that first week, that helps you get on the Wall Street

Journal bestseller list, which is my dream, because then I think the message that I have will just be able to spread a lot more. Buy it on February 27th, I'll be very happy, but not so much.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, what's the actual pub? What's the actual pub date for the book?

**Carol Kauffman:** 2-21-23. So, the week of Presidents Day.

**Whitney Johnson:** Talk about real-time leadership. All right. So, as you know, we will end this episode as I do all episodes with my takeaways. So, before we go, I want to ask you, what were some of your takeaways from this conversation today?

**Carol Kauffman:** Well, I liked your having me pull my thoughts through by the lay off example and also the example of what do you do about the person that didn't make it. So I, I like the focus. Because I'm, as you know, I'm super creative and I'll like jump from topic to topic because I'm a not leaner, which can be hard on people. That's why I love to partner with people like you who can take my chaos and turn it and bend it into light. But that's what I particularly like that. Is, being asked to think about the material in that way.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, it's something you do so brilliantly. So, I, as you know, I've had the benefit of having many coaching conversations just so that, you know. Just reminding myself, I remember many years ago talking to my therapist and my therapist saying, well, you know, therapists need to have therapists. And you've really taught me the power of coaches need coaches. And so, I think it was really fun for me to hear you real-time talk through some coaching situations. All right. So, as we wrap up, any final thoughts?

**Carol Kauffman:** Just that for for for you guys listening. What I'd love for you to do is keep pulling in everything that you know and using it for the good of other people. Because what we really want to do for our clients and for ourselves is, yes, we go from good to great. But we want to go from great to extraordinary. An extraordinary means that kind of living, a real-time leadership, being able to make space and be courageous or kind in any moment, but to be able to have that all the time, that's that's my goal.

**Whitney Johnson:** Carol Kauffman, thank you very much for joining us.

**Carol Kauffman:** Thank you. Whitney, you know, you're one of my favorite people.

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Thank you again to Carol Kauffmann. As I said, her book, *Real-Time Leadership*, is out this month. Let's now go through what I'm taking away from our talk today. First, Carol mentioned this idea of talking about what wants to be talked about when she was on the phone with the CEO. Remember, she was on the way to an appointment. She was lost. It might have been easier to rattle off an answer. Have her ego demand she have a solution. But she went with this weird question, what wants to be talked about? And he opened up. And that gets into how confident Carol is, that in a crisis situation, she will have the answer. It's her superpower.

She said she detested that question. If you had the answer, what would it be? But it changed things for her. She said that hearing that was a wet washcloth to the face, the realization, the unshakable confidence that it's not If you have the answer, what would it be? But the confidence that you always have the answer.

Last thing. When we were running through those simulations, we were talking about how difficult it is to have those conversations where you're going to disappoint someone and how easy it is to pull away and operate from inside our own cocoon. But Carrol says the most important thing you can do at that moment is to lean in. The worst thing we can do is to alienate our colleague, to not see them. So instead, we set our egos aside and reach across the emotional table with empathy.



For more on this, Carol mentioned Liz Weissman, whom I spoke to in [Episode 102](#). There's also my talk with Alexi Robichaux, the CEO and founder of Better Up in [Episode 259](#). And then if you're looking for a closer look at a coaching moment, there's [Episode 257](#), my live coaching conversation with Matthew Swaney. Thank you again to Carol Kauffman. Thank you to you for listening. If you enjoyed this episode, hit subscribe. Share the episode with anyone you think would find this conversation useful. And if you are so inclined, send me a note at [wj@whitneyjohnson.com](mailto:wj@whitneyjohnson.com) and tell me who you are, what you care about, and why you're listening. It may take me a while, but I personally answer every email. Thank you to our producer Justin LeVrier, audio engineer Whitney Jobe, production assistants Stephanie Brummel and Alexander Turk and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.