

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 310: ANGELA AHRENDTS

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 building block of that growth. It's you. Today's guest is known for her work in everything from high fashion to Apple Stores. I've known of her for years, but it was only recently that I was able to hear her speak. It was at the Masters of Scale Summit late last year, and I thought, you absolutely must hear from her. Angela Ahrendts, currently chair of the board at Save the Children, is formally the head of retail at Apple, and she was formerly the CEO of Burberry. Angela builds communities out of companies. And when you hear her speak in a moment, you'll think, now here's a leader. She's not only disrupted the companies she collaborates with, but herself too. Angela has turned the good into the great over and over again. And I'm thrilled for you to hear about how she's made disruption serve her in her stellar career. Enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: So, we usually start the podcast with a formative story. I just love this story. I would love for you to tell it, which is you just started at Apple as the head of retail. A lot of employees, it should be noted, did not want you to have a conversation with the entire team, and you start doing this call, and then your daughter calls while you're filming. What's going through your mind when this happens?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, especially after I had just given them strict orders that we were going to do one take, no edits. I wanted it to be so authentic and from the heart, and we were doing three thoughts in 3 minutes or less. So, I said, Regardless, no matter what happens, do not stop the camera or the video. And so, then, obviously, my daughter calls. And so, I'm just, you know, in a split second, right? Kind of saying don't stop. And then how do I just very calmly and quickly, you know, because I would never, ever, ever have my kid. I would always take my kid's calls. Like, that was kind of a pack we always had. So, I took her call, and I just said, Angelina, I'm on shooting a video. I'll call you back in 5 minutes and hung up. I think I said, You know, anything urgent, you know, I'll call you back. And then I and then I just picked right up and finished the video. So, of course, the team wanted to edit, and I'm like, No, no, no, no, no. That was for a reason. Everything in life happens for a reason. And so, I made them leave it in against their, you know, Apple likes everything absolutely perfect. And but I made them leave it in because I didn't know then, but my instinct said, just go with it. I mean, it happened for a reason, and just leave it in.

Whitney Johnson: What did your employees say the next day?

Angela Ahrendts: I think that was the greatest lesson for the entire communications team. I think we woke up to probably 1,500 emails from around the world, and there were about 55,000 employees at that point across 36 countries. And we had translated it. So, it was actually probably in the next day, probably a couple of days later, because we had translated into all the languages, sent it out, and the feedback that came back was basically, Thank you, thank you for the video. We felt you. Thank you for taking your daughter's call. For being a good parent. For, I mean, it was just, it was so that I don't know if they heard everything else in the video, but the fact that I did that said, I'm like you, I have a family. You know, I'm working. I'm trying to communicate with you in a new way. I'm new coming in, I mean, it didn't put me way up here. It made me just one of the team. I mean, that was the feedback was heartwarming. It was an incredible welcome.

Whitney Johnson: I just get chills when you tell that story.

Angela Ahrendts: And not planned. I think that's the difference. I think following your instincts. Right, so many times, and women have such incredible instincts. I mean, men do as well, but men, I think, are taught early to turn it off. But, you know, if you just and again, I don't think anything in life is an accident or a coincidence, I think that they're all incredible signs. And if you kind of go with them and don't second guess and use them to optimize the moment, then you're surprised on what the results are.

Whitney Johnson: So, out of curiosity, why was your daughter calling?

Angela Ahrendts: More than likely to see what time I was going to pick her up from school.

Whitney Johnson: So, do you think that this kind of this quick thinking, this ability to be confident and be decisive, mixed with vulnerability, is something that can be taught?

Angela Ahrendts: I think 90% of the things in leadership can be taught. It's kind of like it's kind of that old adage, Right, ready, fire, aim. No, no, no, no, no. Ready, aim. Right. And it's, and I think that you know, I think of that adage a lot, and it forces me to then just pause. You know, as humans, as some of these asking a question, I find that so many times, so many people are so focused on the answer they're going to give, that they're not hearing and picking up all of the different emotive signs that you might be giving in that question. And so, how do we teach people to just to pause, to be so present and to listen, to take in not just what you're hearing, but what you're seeing and what you're feeling and pause. Let it sink in. And then give a response. So, I think those things can absolutely be taught. I don't think we're as cognizant about them. We take narrative and language, I think so, for granted and might have second thoughts later about why we did that or how we did that. But maybe we could avoid that if we would just learn to. Pause. Breathe. Think and take it all in. And then I think our responses would be just so much more impactful.

Whitney Johnson: I love how you modeled in the moment what you were saying with your body. So, I saw you say, okay, as a leader, you want to listen. And I think so often we see in our coaching, and I'm sure you saw this with your leaders, one of their biggest challenges is to listen. And so, I like how when you said, You just pause, take a breath and listen and focus on what people are saying. And your point is, is that it can be taught, but oftentimes we're not aware that we need to do it. So, there's a lot of coaching that has to sometimes take place by a leader to the people that work for them. I think it's very interesting in looking at your career trajectory, you've moved from Apple to Save the Children, and I'm wondering if you can talk about what has your experience been like moving from the for-profit to the nonprofit sector. It's kind of an open-ended question, but what's your experience like? What are some lessons learned?

Angela Ahrendts: It's funny. It's from the profit to the nonprofit, and then it's going from a CEO of Burberry to an SVP of Retail at Apple to the chairman of the Board of Save the Children. So, it's a very, very different position because you're not the CEO running the day-to-day of the business at all. So, how do you use your commercial expertise and experience? How do you bring that in? How do you fly just a little bit higher and build global relationships? There's 30 chairs around the world. There's 30 CEOs around the world. There's 30 Save the Children boards around the world. Right? It's a real federation. And it goes back to all those basic skills that you learned as you were a leader going up the. I often say that I truly believe that that everything I experienced in

Burberry, the global complexity, all of the government relations conversations that we had as we were investing, I mean, just 45 nationalities in our headquarters, that Burberry truly prepared me for Apple. I mean, it was just amazing. Apple was tenfold the number of employees, etc., etc... But. As you do Apple at an entirely nother level. Everything I did at Apple then prepared me for this position at Save the Children. And there's so many things that are similar.

Angela Ahrendts: In a commercial business, you have a CEO. You have five lieutenants. You have a COO that heads up supply chain, etc... You have a chief marketing officer, a chief technology officer, a CFO. It's no different in a nonprofit, right? The leadership teams are not dissimilar. And at Burberry, you're selling fashion, at Apple, you're selling phones, and it's really no different in a nonprofit. You're just working with donors as well as direct to consumer. But you're saving lives. Right? It's, you know, and I often say it's the same. I say, you know, if this were the final quarter at Apple and we had to make that quarter, what we would do, how creative and innovative we would become to sell more phones or more technology. So, as the hunger crisis worsens, what does that sense of urgency and that innovativeness again to make sure that we are saving three times, four times the number of lives than we historically would? I don't tend to fixate on the differences. I tend to focus on the similarities so that I can use all that I've learned throughout my career to make the biggest impact I can make when I think not only NGOs, but I think society. And I hope, I hope that more leaders, more commercial leaders, as they reach their next phase of life. You know, I hope they all lean into this sector.

Whitney Johnson: I hear a sense of mission. I hear a sense of calling around the work that you're doing now. And I also hear, I mean, I hear you saying that there are similarities, but one of the things that's registering for me is that there's an inclination for someone to say, oh, they retired from Apple to Save the Children. And what I hear you saying is that, at some level, this is more complex. There's a greater sense of mission. The stakes are higher. And in terms of the remit of managing people, in some respects is more challenging as well. And I also hear you saying, and I love this call to arms of people, saying when you decide to leave the for-profit sector, why don't you go do some real work and go to the nonprofit sector? That's what I hear you saying.

Angela Ahrendts: Yes. Yeah, because it's daunting. I mean, it's absolutely daunting, and everything's gone backwards ten years since COVID. We already had a climate issue; just layer COVID on top of it and a little bit of conflict with Ukraine and all the people they fed, etc... So, you have 11% of the global population on the brink of starvation, over nearly 800 million people, 100 million kids. And I just it's not our legacy. We're putting people you know, we're sending things to Mars where, you know, look how fast we put the COVID vaccine together. Hunger is an absolutely solvable problem. And it's just, you know, and without hunger, you know, you don't have education. You don't have, I mean, it just. Anyway. Yeah, I think it's a. But it's daunting, and it's challenging, and it is 100 times more challenging than a commercial job. Absolutely. It doesn't haunt you. A commercial job doesn't break your heart.

Whitney Johnson: So, is that why it's daunting? So, you're saying it's daunting? What is it daunting because the emotion that you feel? Is it because of how you're trying to get other leaders to rally around the cause? It's not just employees. What about it is daunting if you had to put your finger on it?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah. The quantum.

Whitney Johnson: Just how big it is.

Angela Ahrendts: The quantum? Absolutely. And of course, it's in the most remote countries in the world. Right. With different regimes and different. Everyone's heard what's happened in Afghanistan this last week that no women are allowed to work in NGOs. And I mean, so it's just it's a constant. But in organizations like Save, UNICEF, World Vision, I mean, there are incredible organizations, hundreds of thousands of people on the ground working it every day. And but I would not tell you that we're growing at the rate that the problem is growing. Right? The sector is not. And so, that's why I think at Davos this week, it is so vital the conversations that are taking place. And it is not just climate. You can't talk about environment without talking about hunger. It has to be in the same sentence. It has to be in the same breath. And I love some of the stuff coming out. Again, not concrete solutions, but raising the level of awareness because it just keeps getting worse. And what a horrible legacy for our generation to leave that we left the largest global hunger crisis that, I mean, it's just.

Whitney Johnson: So, the daunting piece is that sense of I'm going to work as hard as I possibly can, and will it make a difference?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah. And raise awareness because it's not hard. There's nearly 8 billion people on the planet. And if everyone, if those that have just leaned in a little, if companies focused as much on the S as they do on the E and, you know, and we're forced to report what they're doing, I don't care if it's in their community, in a city in another country, how are they partnering with NGOs? And I think Paul Polman at IMAGINE is really re-imagining this entire thing and how big business can work with government and work with NGO and then collectively change a food system or, you know, so.

Whitney Johnson: All right, just to clarify S-sustainability E- earnings. Just want to make sure that that's what you were saying.

Angela Ahrendts: No ESG. So, all the pressure to report ESG. E is the environment. We've been working on getting formal reporting for 15 years. S, We've so far defined gender and diversity, and inclusion. But I argue that it's also social responsibility. What percentage of your profits in the communities where you live, and work are you giving back to make sure that society keeps pace with as fast as your business is growing so governments alone can't do it? It's going to take government with big business, with NGOs, and collectively we can make an impact.

Whitney Johnson: Let's talk about Burberry. You had to refocus the company's image, but I think you're also doing this at Save the Children. Is when you're doing something so big and so daunting as you just described, what do you do to make sure that you feel a sense of confidence in yourself? How do you make sure that you sustain yourself of, I'm going to persist. I'm going to figure this out.

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, it's funny. Confidence is not usually a word that I would even use to describe myself.

Whitney Johnson: Wait, wait, wait, wait. What would you say? Say the more. Now, I'm curious.

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, I would. I would tell you. And I'm. And I, and I'm confident in saying about this myself because I'm, you know, I've gone through so much in my career. But I would actually say that a deep insecurity is what has driven me my whole career, that fear of failure that. And so, and so I don't think I ever have peace and confidence. I think that when you're leading an organization like Burberry, what I've learned is it's all about collaboration, and it's about consistent, clear communication inside of the company outside of the company. It's about building consensus. So, so I've always said as a leader, I'm a connector; I'm an enabler. You know, it's like a chess game. My job is to put the right people in the right place at the right time and then put all the mechanisms in place to enable that constant communication. And then and then it's an iterative process, right between the weekly meetings and the monthly meetings, and the strategy sessions. And so, in Burberry, you know, when we started, we got 150 of the top executives together in the company. And we spent a week coming up with the strategy. Do I have instincts, did Christopher and I kind of know going in what we wanted to do? Absolutely. But if they're not a part of helping shape it and create it, then then it's going to take you a year to implement it versus we were able to flip the business in three months because they were all a part of creating it. They owned it, and it's not dissimilar to Apple. We went in, I went in and you know, there were 55,000 people.

Angela Ahrendts: They know 100 times more about what's right and wrong than I do. And I don't have time to learn. I'm in a new sector. I'm in a new. And so, we did what I like to call the largest internal crowdsourcing exercise. And we brought in a small company so that we could dual track, and we had them go out to every single employee every week, took a couple of months, and they asked very simple questions. What do you think Apple should be doing more of in your community?

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Angela Ahrendts: Teams would get together. They would feed everything back. And at the end of the couple of months, then we had the key eight things. And so, we knew whatever experience we knew, whatever store design, we knew, whatever we were doing. And again, we kept working on it. But then we made sure that everything we did would be in service of those things that the team said they wanted and needed. And education was a huge part of

that, partnering with entrepreneurs and educators and, you know, and senior citizens. And it was just it was powerful. So, so to me, it's less about confidence. I think I need to be a brilliant collaborator and just, again, consistently communicate, build consensus, and then everyone owns it. I'm not a really good top-down leader. I'm a much better bottom up and then I'm a much better team. I believe teams win. It's these businesses are too big to be an individual sport.

Whitney Johnson: All right. So, a number of things I want to pick up on there. First of all, I think it's interesting that you had people ask the question of what does Apple need to do more of in the community? So, it wasn't what do they need to do more of, but in the community that that connection, that collaboration that you just described, I think that's a very interesting word choice. I want to call that out. I'm also picking up on the fact that you have been and continue to be willing to say, I don't always feel confident. I think that's back to the thing that you said at the very beginning, that video of I'm going to be real. I'm sure I know that when you just said that that was very inspiring for me. And I suspect it is for many people to say she's very successful, and yet sometimes she doesn't feel confident. And yet it's so powerful to hear you talk about you connect, you collaborate. And as you connect and collaborate, you not only get a good answer, but then you empower people, and they own it, and then you can move things forward. And that is how you conquer daunting tasks. You make them doable, right?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, I say we say we break it down and bite-sized chunks. And again, it's a team. You know, I don't care if it's sports. I don't care if it's a band. You know, it's a collective group of people. And I believe as humans; we were created, we were wired to work as a collective, to work as a team. And that's how you change things. That's how you move mountains.

Whitney Johnson: Is that something that you knew when you were in college, when you were in high school? Like when did that whole notion of we're going to collaborate, we're going to connect, and we're going to work together? Were you organizing the kids on your playground when you were ten? Or like, where did that start?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, honestly, no. I think it was really when I took the position of CEO of Burberry, and all of a sudden, you are now 100% accountable. And to me, we would win or lose under my watch. And so, so what did I, how did I have to behave differently? How did I. And so, so that's really and I was doing so many things for the first time that I had. I've never been a CEO before. I had never been over a business so global and so complex with it wasn't all owned, it was franchised and licensed and so many different business models. And so, it was the first time that I realized, okay, this thing is incredibly complex. We've got to simplify; we've got to streamline. The Internet's coming. This was a few years ago. This was before Facebook and Twitter and before the iPhone even came out. But you had this whole new thing that was taken was it was all coming. And to me, it was one of the greatest catalysts that we had. I mean, I said, we've got this technology tsunami coming, and we can either get crushed, or we can be the first to ride this incredible wave. And that was really as a team, that was kind of the kind of how we thought about it.

Angela Ahrendts: And that was that sense of urgency. You know, you were going to do or die. And so, we just started cleaning up and pulling in and streamlining. But we had a very clear, simple vision. Five hard strategies, five soft strategies. The hard strategy was a very quantitative measures for investors, etc. The soft we really knew would enable the hard right that was the creation of the Burberry foundation that was building an incredible culture. Right. All of those soft qualitative strategies. But we had both, and they and these were so important. They enabled this because they united the team. Right? They made us feel collectively that we were invincible and that we could because we were the underdog. You know, we were there were five big French brands and five big Italian brands. And we were the poor little British brand at that point, only making £30 million a year.

Whitney Johnson: Wow!

Angela Ahrendts: And so, we had to be scrappy. We had to innovate. And but we could look and see what was coming, and we could just turn faster than all of them could to get ahead of the curve.

Whitney Johnson: So, you were in a position where it was it was very much, you know, I think a lot about disruption and disruptive innovation. You because you were small, you were in this position where you could be the David versus the Goliath. You could be nimble. And you were very you saw the Internet. How are we going to leverage the

Internet to move ourselves forward? We've got our hard strategies. Can you talk briefly about your soft strategies? So, you said the Burberry foundation, you said culture. What were the other three that you had to place?

Angela Ahrendts: We also put brand way up there, and this is a few years ago, so I should have said that remember what the five were. But we also put brand up there and we said that it's not what's best for you, it's what's best for the brand. And the reason we did that was because Burberry had been around 150 years. And so, to remove self, and to focus on team, Christopher and I used to stand on stage as we were talking to 1,500 people at our all hands, etc... And we would say because, and some people have been there 30, 40 years. And so, we said very early on, we're not revamping everything. Burberry's been, it's got a lot of incredible attributes. It's been around 150 years. You know that Burberry Check had a 98% record of unaided recognition. I mean, some of the stats were incredible, but we had just, you know, we had gotten a little old and a little dusty, and we weren't as profitable, etc... So, so what we used to say was we're just going to write another exciting chapter. So, let's say we're all going to be here for ten years. This is our chapter. What do we want? And then we're going to pass the baton to the next generation. And our job as a brand, as a company, is to make sure that we do everything we can to clean up, to refine, to sharpen the product, the processes, the technology, to make sure that the company will still be relevant another 150 years from now. So, we just said, this is our ten years, let's do everything we can, and then we're going to pass the baton on to another team of people.

Whitney Johnson: I love that sense of stewardship and also honoring the past. But then also there's a wonderful Leo Tolstoy quote, which I'm going to completely butcher. But basically, he says, you know, we need to honor, honor the shoulders of yesterday because they're what make tomorrow possible. And I think that's beautiful, but also the sense of stewardship for who comes next.

Whitney Johnson: I think you've alluded to this, but I would love if you could just riff for a moment around what are the traits and qualities of people that you don't like to work with and also the traits and qualities of people that you do like to work with. I mean, you've said collaborative, but just something come to mind off the top of your head?

Angela Ahrendts: If you're going to be authentic and you're going to, and you're really going to put your whole self out there, then trust is such a big deal to me. And trust at the most, the deepest level. Right? No games. No. No head games, no ego. No. And so to me, I always say that anybody that I work with, their values have to be aligned to not just mine, but to the culture that we're creating. And values go deep. Values are high integrity, trust, authenticity, you know, open communication, passion. I mean, there's so many things that go under your values. And so, to me, I have a hard time working with someone whose values aren't aligned with mine and not just mine. It's you're creating it's a culture. And so, what are the values of the collective? And what you don't want is someone coming in where it's about them. It's not about the brand of the company, right? It's about them moving fast and, you know, and them climbing the ladder and then making more money. And it's like, no, no, no, no, no. That's, selfless is a very important attribute again, because, you know, when you're doing these things, you use the word steward. I've often said its servant leadership. You know, these are huge, gigantic institutions that are going to outlive all of us if they have the right leadership. And it's so much bigger than any individual. So, for me, it's values and it's just high integrity. No ego, someone who wants to be a part of the collective. And Tim Cook used to say, leave it better than they found it.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: You know, and so someone who wants to be a part of an incredible team, but it's not about them.

Whitney Johnson: I have lots of favorite quotes, so let me preface this, but one of my quotes that I like very much I will say it's a favorite is from Tom Rath, who wrote *Strength Finders*. And he says: "Contribution is the sum of what grows when you are gone." Isn't that beautiful?

Angela Ahrendts: And I think, like you said, when you use the word confidence, that's why I'm actually glad that I'm not confident. Because with that can come a multitude of other. So, I hope that I never lose my objectivity. I hope that I'm always a bit insecure. I hope that it's always a bit daunting because it unlocks my creative thinking. It helps me problem-solve and innovate and look further out. And if I'm too confident, I think I've got it. And I don't ever.

Whitney Johnson: When you need to let someone go, no longer work with you. Are there one or two practices or rules that you live by? It's such a challenging thing to let someone go, and so difficult, and so difficult not only for the person who is losing their job but also for the person who's letting them know that they're losing their job. One or two things that you do that have served you well in this.

Angela Ahrendts: The number one thing I always say is, do unto others. How would I want someone to, if I were on the list? If I was a potential person to be laid off, how would I want them to handle me? And I would want them to take me on a journey so that I could digest it. I'd want them. Maybe. Maybe it's something like, Hey, we're going to have to cut. There's a recession. We don't want to, you know, but we're going to have to make some changes. And we had to do this at Burberry. But again, we had a lot of people involved in it. And I wasn't the one who made the decision in 2008 when we needed to get £50,000 out of the business from September through December. And it's about \$75 million on a business that wasn't that big at that point. And we pulled everybody together and said, Look, we don't want to cut anything consumer-facing because we're in the middle of a turnaround, and it's going really well. But we do have this huge challenge now. The financial markets are collapsing. Business is going to be very rough for the next year. What do we do? And we said, you know, some people might want early retirement, some people might want to consult, some people might want to go from full-time to part-time.

Angela Ahrendts: Let's do everything we can so we don't hurt anybody who's been a part of this incredible team and these incredible efforts. And we and so, so collectively. And I said and you know, you also know where we're doing things we shouldn't be doing. We've been around a long time, you know, where there's dead weight, not even in people, but in processes. So, what can we stop doing that can save us money? So, we, the team went through the entire thing, and they came back to us, and here's what we're going to do. And they cut that out of the business a month faster than they even needed to. Because, again, no different than being a part of the strategy. They were part of the solution. They were a part of leaving us strong, it wasn't something that was being done to them. They were a part of helping solve the problem. So, I think it's the same collaboration, consensus, but mostly do unto others. What if you? What if that was you? How would you? I'd want to be on the journey. I want to be a part of the solution. I'd want to know why; I'd want to understand. And then, intellectually, and emotionally, I can deal with it. But I would also want to know that you're going to help me throughout that journey.

Angela Ahrendts: You know, one of the greatest examples is what Airbnb did, you know, as we were going through COVID, etc... so, and no one's allowed to travel. You know, they were on the brink of going public and then had to lay off a huge part of their workforce. But Brian Chesky is the next generation leader. And he said, Oh, these are incredible people. So, he created a website he put out there, he got a full-page ad and sent a letter and put it out on Twitter and across social media saying, these are the most amazing people in the world. We will give them a reference. But then he also told the board, I'm extending their health benefits a year. I'm going to extend their stock vesting. We're going to do all of these things. So, I mean, he just, he used his instincts and he said, I want to make sure that they continue to be amazing brand ambassadors because it's not their fault. They're incredible people.

Whitney Johnson: Wow!

Angela Ahrendts: So, I think that what we did, what we've done, I think what he's done, I think there's a lot of great examples out there that but just treat people with the same integrity and respect that you would want to be treated.

Whitney Johnson: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You mentioned when we met briefly at Masters of Scale that you are discovering some wonderful things about your partner slash husband after having been with him for several decades. What have you discovered?

Angela Ahrendts: Yeah, it is several decades. We just hit 45 years, January one. So, and you know, it's funny, there's all the different life phases, right? We met in high school, so you have that incredible I call it the pre-kid phase, pre-married phase, you know, and you travel, and you have fun, and you get to know each other on one level, and maybe it's more of a, I don't know, maybe it's more physical, maybe it's more just fun. And then you have kids and you're working full-time running companies, etc. And he's busy and I'm busy and you're raising kids and the focus becomes about them, you know, and that's 20 years of your life. And then all of a sudden, the kids are gone. And luckily, we worked really hard. But now we're back together now and we have a bit more freedom because I'm kind of off the day-to-day treadmill. So, we have so much more time. And it's funny because again, when you're moving

fast, you know, especially with your partner and you don't pause and you don't watch and you don't feel and think and I'm actually I mean, I love him more today than I did 45 years ago. And I say that I mean. And I'm sure it's always been there, but so many of his attributes are so much better than what I knew. Thoughtful and kind and smart and how much he knows about so many things that I'm like, wow!

Whitney Johnson: I chose well!

Angela Ahrendts: Things you've known all along. But. But you don't have the time to see or to feel it. Like I said, you're juggling work and kids and families and parents and siblings and friends. And there's just so much. And you're having fun, a very blessed life. But it's been wonderful to be able to learn and just reconnect with him.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, it's the Marcel Proust. The quote which I'm again going to paraphrase, which is your, you're seeing him with new eyes. So, you grew up in New Palestine, Indiana, which is a very small town outside Indianapolis. Is there something from your childhood as you go into all of these far-flung places, town halls, boardrooms, etc., across the globe that you carry with you a lesson that you learned really early on?

Angela Ahrendts: I think that they're the most formidable years of your life. And I would say that I carry my father was very philosophical and my mother was very spiritual. And my dad gave me *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran when I was 13.

Whitney Johnson: Wow.

Angela Ahrendts: And I loved it. And I underlined and I. I mean, to this day, I can quote and, you know, he had the *Desiderata* on his wall. And he gave me James Allen *As a Man Thinketh* at, I don't know, 13 or 14. And he was a great British philosopher. And I still have those original copies that he gave me. And he knew I was a sponge, and I was the third. So, I was the listener and I just hung on every word. Well, my mother also understood that. So, she's where I got to do unto others. And she's where I got to ask and it shall be given. And, you know, and meditating and so. It's funny. My mother had one sister. My dad was an only child. They found each other, and they created the family that they both always dreamed of having. And so, so they really leaned into us. And so, I will tell you that I take the deep spiritual part of my mother, and I take the deep philosophical part of my father and all of the quotes. I quote my father constantly. I mean, just constantly. He was all about being selfless. He was all about. And it's funny because we didn't have phones or videos or anything back then. Right. But we took a lot of pictures and had our photo albums. And he used to frequently he'd say, I'll know. I did a really great job. If when you look at that photo, you look for yourself last.

Whitney Johnson: Wow. Mic drop.

Angela Ahrendts: Right. Yeah. So, I think I carry so many things. He also used to say that now we're five girls and one boy, six of us in seven years. So, really close, very humble beginnings. And he used to say that he could teach us anything, but he couldn't teach us to care. Anything that I've done or will do is because of how I was raised.

Whitney Johnson: So, speaking of caring for people who have been inspired and want to do something to help eradicate hunger globally, what would you suggest?

Angela Ahrendts: I think there's multiple ways and, you know, and there's so many organizations and what I love you to lean in to Save, and help us because we have incredible people on the ground. Absolutely. But so does UNICEF. So does World, so do so. So, pick one that you trust, and you believe in. And I think as an individual, ask yourself, what can you do? And you can go to any of those websites. You can go to Save the Children in any country in the world, and you can make a one-time donation. You can do a monthly, you know, you can do \$20 a month. I'm also on the board of Charity Water, and they do a ton of stuff on social media. I've been affiliated with Charity Water for ten years and Scott Harrison does a brilliant job. And a huge part of his income comes from individuals the next generation on Instagram and, you know, \$20 a month. And because the hunger crisis starts with water, which is why. So, if they have water, they can grow food, they can have livestock, they can. So, they're all related. It starts here.

Angela Ahrendts: And then Save the Children is obviously much bigger, many more boots on the ground. So, I think as an individual, what you can do, but you're also employed by someone, and the big bucks come from companies. So, does your company have a matching program? Is Save the Children or your favorite charity on that matching program? You know, encourage your company to do and give more and, you know, and then the same thing with your local governments. I mean, really challenge them to do and give more, challenge your local church too. I just think that it's going to take a village. It's going to take every single one of us leaning in however we can. And, you know, and I was reading online last night again over 800 million. Imagine, I mean, I can't stand it if I'm hungry meal to meal. Imagine you're just 800 million people living hungry. On the planet. I mean, it's and again, it's very solvable. And there's incredible organizations. There's incredible people talking about it. But my challenge would be, what are you doing? What are you doing? Because everybody has a role to play. It's all of our responsibility.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. And I want to think about having heard you share this. I'm going to talk to my business partner and think about what we can do to donate. I'll talk about it in the outro of just I'm feeling very inspired by this, and I'm also thinking about another favorite quote is Charles Dickens, who said, "If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, then we have not given enough."

Angela Ahrendts: Hmm.

Whitney Johnson: Isn't that good?

Angela Ahrendts: Brilliant.

Whitney Johnson: It helps us just be like, Oh, is a little bit uncomfortable. If it's not at all uncomfortable, then probably I need to up it just a little bit. In the course of this conversation that we've had. What's been useful for you? It could be something that you said, maybe something I said, or it could be just a thought that you had. So, what's been useful for you today?

Angela Ahrendts: You made me pause and the questions made me look internally a bit more than I typically tend to do. But again, I'm moving forward. I rarely pause and look backwards in that. I always say we turn the page of that chapter. There's nothing I can do about it. I need to move on. And I do believe you have to look back before you look forward when you're coming into a new position, etc. But personally, I don't. I rarely look back personally. There's so much to read and keep up on and things changing. And so, I'm constantly a curious student learning and trying to just stay on. So, so you actually made me pause. You made me think about mom and dad. You made me reflect on. And it is funny. You. You made me realize that. I am who I am. And regardless of what I've done. I like me. I'm not trying to be somebody else. And I'm not the smartest tool in the shed. But I can bring in incredible people. I can build great teams and hopefully inspire those teams too, to make an incredible impact in whatever we've chosen to do. So, yeah, thank you. I mean, you made me as I was preparing for this, just really pause and reflect. And that's a really great thing to do at the start of a new year.

Whitney Johnson: And I have to say, you are a beautiful you. So, thank you for sharing your heart and your spirit with us today. Any final thoughts that you'd like to share? Closing remarks to put a bow on the conversation.

Angela Ahrendts: You know, I think as we start a new year and of course, we all think physical, we've got to lose weight, we've got to get into shape. And we all think about our work and what we're going to do to do it better etc... And I would just urge us also not to forget about that third leg of the stool, which is. People outside of our family, people outside of our work. There's another whole cohort that need us. And I think as we start a new year, I would just. You know? Yes. Make yourself better as best you can. And yes, do a great job at work. But maybe the New Year's resolution this year is what can I do for others? How can I serve others outside of my own small world? And again, if it breaks your heart, because, and I challenge you to ask yourself what breaks my heart? And if it breaks your heart, then I think you'll. You won't sleep at night, and that's your call to action to give you peace.

Whitney Johnson: What breaks your heart? Angela, thank you so much for joining us. This has been wonderful.

Angela Ahrendts: Well, thank you for having me. It's great to see you again.

Thank you again to Angela for joining us this week. We spoke about a lot and I'm sure you're still processing, but here's what I'll remember. First, I'll remember that Angela wouldn't call herself confident, that she feels a fear of failure more often than she feels confident. But she also said she doesn't really think about how confident she feels, certainly in a crisis moment. She thinks about her team's unity. She thinks about their confidence.

And that gets to the second point. I want to mention how focused she was on this idea of her company, of her organization as a collective. It's not about where she is on the S Curve or where one of her Apple store managers are, or where anybody at Save the Children is. It's about where they all are as a group. She then reinforces this through open communication.

Last thing. What makes your heart break? If something keeps you up at night, then it's probably worth doing. In honor of Angela joining us and asking this question, Disruption Advisors will make a donation to Save the Children. Now, if you're thinking, Well, nothing really makes me feel like that, my question to you is, why not?

For further listening, check out Hubert Joly, [Episode 165](#). Another great leader [Episode 62](#) with Sloane Davidson, the founder of Hello Neighbor. She focuses on immigrants and that definitely makes my heart break. There's also John Clifton, CEO of Gallup. I talked to him in [Episode 305](#) about world hunger and global trends.

Thank you again to Angela Ahrendts for joining us. Thank you to Hubert Joly for making this introduction. If you enjoy this episode, hit subscribe, and don't forget to share it with anyone you think would find it 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.