

[music]

**0:00:01.4 Nicole Antoinette:** I'm Nicole Antoinette and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. Today, you're in for a treat because you will get to meet Holly Whitaker.

**0:00:13.4 Holly Whitaker:** I know I want to write a book, and many books, I know I want to build this organization and I want to do this thing at this organization, I want this organization to do... And I had all these fixed things, and then I think that probably the hardest part of it was having... If you have gotten these things, if you've checked all these boxes, part of the problem is that we think that the happiness is in the achieving when it never is. But what was so confusing about it and so hard about it, and still is so hard about it is, there is no other definite thing. So there's just that liminal space of absolutely not knowing anything and feeling extremely directionless.

[music]

**0:01:03.4 NA:** Holly is the founder and CCO of Tempest, a modern digital recovery program. She's also the author of the New York Times best-selling book, *Quit Like A Woman*, achievements that she worked really hard for. But what happens when you work really hard for something and then you actually get it and find out that you hate it? That's what this conversation is all about. I ask Holly, how does that feel to get what you've thought you wanted and find that you just don't? How do we reckon with the difference between the fantasy of the thing and the actual reality of the thing? When do we leave? When do we quit? When do we stay? Holly talks us through her own experience in a real messy and wonderful way, and I hope that you enjoy it and find it as thought-provoking as I did. And a huge shout out to the folks who support, made this conversation possible, the 400-plus people in our Sliding Scale patreon community, you are the best. It's your monthly funding that allows me to get a full transcript made for each episode, cover all admin and hosting costs and pay fair hourly compensation to every single guest, to our sound engineer, Adam Day and to myself as the host researcher and producer of the show. It takes a village, as they say, and I am just so grateful to the virtual village that has gathered around this mission of filling the world with honest conversations.

**0:02:26.1 NA:** Our patreon community, which I have nicknamed Adventures in Honesty, It's not just a funding source for this podcast though, it's actually so much more than that. I host a live end of month reflection and journaling circle for the whole community each month, you get a bonus monthly podcast episode called Real Talk Reflections, where my friend Julia Hanlon and I share deeply and honestly, maybe sometimes too honestly, about our own real lives in real time. You get my monthly business and money report where I share all the behind the scenes information and I do an in-depth monthly Q&A about the financial administrative and decision-making side of my own small business and lots more. If you love this show, if you love these kind of conversations, I bet you'd feel really welcome and have lots of fun in our community. And as I said, we do operate on a sliding scale with all tiers getting access to absolutely everything regardless of where on that scale, you fall. And you can find us at [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). That's [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette), and I will see you there. Alright, now, are you ready? We will get into the show.

[music]

**0:03:35.1 NA:** Alright, here we go. Holly, welcome back to the show.

**0:03:38.4 HW:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm very excited to be here.

**0:03:42.1 NA:** I can't believe it's been five years since we last... That feels like an amount of time, first of all, that's too long, that I can't believe the podcast is this old, what happened, and also just, Wow, a lot has happened in the last five years for both of us.

**0:03:55.8 HW:** A lot has happened, and I remember exactly where I was when we recorded. I was in Italy when we recorded that episode.

**0:04:03.1 NA:** Yeah, you were in Italy and I was living in Oregon, in my former house with my former spouse. So things has changed also that was right around my five-year soberversary, and now this is right around my 10-year, so yeah, it just... It's funny, that I feel like even just these couple of conversations you have been a really integral part of a couple other important periods of my life.

**0:04:27.3 HW:** Isn't that funny how that works? I feel the same too, because for me as well, they're milestone moments, so I am about to celebrate my eight-year sobriety anniversary in a month.

**0:04:40.4 NA:** Our sobriety is all grown up.

**0:04:41.8 HW:** Not even a month, oh my gosh, it's like in two weeks. [chuckle] Wow.

**0:04:47.1 NA:** That's wild. So this might be kind of a strange place to start, but I have been thinking lately about little ways to make my life feel more luxurious, and I would like to ask you to tell me about your favorite every day luxuries. What are some things that feel luxurious to you, but in a totally accessible way?

**0:05:07.4 HW:** This is gonna sound so basic, but water. I actually, last night, went to a store and bought two gallons of water. I love water, and I find that one of the things in pandemic time, especially, that has been really helpful to me is being very grateful about very simple things, and so I actually, when I'm drinking water, pay attention to how much I love it. So I know that that's probably not luxurious, but I find... It is, water is a luxury and then what else do I do? I'm just really good at pampering my little body. I really am, I'm very good, I really push myself hard, but I also at the same time, I'm really... I take my body and I put it in warm baths, it loves warm water, it loves the sun, it loves to sweat, it loves comfortable clothes. And so really making sure that I'm comfortable and... What's that word? What's that Swedish... Is it a Swedish word for cozy.

**0:06:10.9 NA:** Oh, hygge? I don't think I'm pronouncing it correctly, but...

**0:06:13.2 HW:** Yeah, super into that, cozy. Hygge, hygge?

**0:06:17.4 NA:** I like the idea, when you were talking about, the body likes warm water, the body likes this, thinking about it almost as a separate entity that needs to be cared for. Did you ever have one of those Tamagotchi toys?

**0:06:31.6 HW:** No. I miss that.

**0:06:33.8 NA:** Do you know what they are?

**0:06:34.3 HW:** I know exactly what they are, but that was like right after my childhood.

**0:06:39.1 NA:** Okay, okay, maybe that's our little bit of age difference, is that I had and was obsessed with the Tamagotchi. For anyone who doesn't know, you can look it up, but they were basically like little digital pets in the '90s that their needs were very simple. It needs to be fed, it needs to be played with. It needs... I don't know, needs to poop. I don't actually remember all the things about how the toy worked, but one of the coping tactics for me when I'm finding it hard to care for myself is to think of myself as Tamagotchi me, like What does Tamagotchi Nicole need? Oh, Tamagotchi Nicole needs a nap, needs a cookie, needs... For some reason it really helps...

**0:07:13.1 HW:** Yeah, that is so true. Because we don't really think of it that way, that we're... I think of it very much like I am given this body and it's my responsibility. And so I've gotta take care of it, and I think that that's been extremely helpful to me because I didn't take care of my body for so long.

**0:07:29.8 NA:** Yeah, can you identify a point where you started to actually really believe that? 'Cause I feel like that what you just said that, I've been given this body, it's my responsibility to care for it, I feel like that's a thing that at different periods in my life, I would have heard that and been like, Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. But to actually believing it.

**0:07:45.9 HW:** Because it sounds really...

**0:07:48.4 NA:** It actually sounds quite profound to me now, I'm like, Yes, we've been given these bodies, we have to take care of them but was there a point where you actually started to believe that?

**0:07:57.3 HW:** Well, I think that it's so complex because the wellness industry has sold us this idea of almost self-care as a productivity goal. So it's almost like an additional burden that we've been given that we have to measure up to, and so I think it's fraught with that piece of it. It's also fraught with this foreseen idea of being in a place. It's really hard, I think, to care about our bodies when we've really been conditioned from birth to hate our bodies and to not care for them. And so it can often be what you just said is exactly right, which is, I think it is very hard to make that leap from hearing it, knowing it and the platitudes around it, and also just really believing it. But it was very specifically in early sobriety, and that was really it. I just started to develop this sense of respect for

the vessel, and it doesn't mean that I am precious about it or that I don't harm myself constantly, but it is just this developing relationship with loving the thing that I have to live in every day.

**0:09:14.0 NA:** And thinking about it really in those practical terms, your body is your home, it's your only forever home and... Yeah, I think that I can sometimes take it too far like, Okay, then I can only do the absolute best things for it, when like... No, I do and eat and whatever, trash things all the time, but it's not an all-or-nothing. It's very much the both end of, that can be true, and feeling like it's my responsibility to care for it can feel really sweet and tender also. I love that. So one of the things... Perhaps the thing that I'm the most dying to ask you about and kind of formed the basis for us deciding to have this conversation, not that I need an excuse to wanna have a long conversation with you, believe me I don't, but is a story that I know that you wanted to share of working really hard for something and getting it and hating it, which we're gonna get into the details of, but I think a lot about the difference between the fantasy of the thing and the reality of the thing. I think about that. I thought about it with sobriety, what I thought it was gonna be like, and then what it was actually like.

**0:10:19.5 NA:** I've thought about it with van life, I've thought about it with long distance hiking, I've thought about it with self-employment, and the reality is almost always different than the fantasy, sometimes in really great ways and sometimes in really challenging ways. And it's not talked about that much, like how disappointing it can be when the fantasy isn't the reality. So yeah, take us to the start of this story for you. Where do we begin?

**0:10:45.5 HW:** Well I think there's three things that happened kind of all... And all happened at the same time. And I think one was, I got the relationship that I had been writing about on paper forever, and I absolutely hated it, the one that was literally taken from the vision... I don't know, like the map that I made just a couple of years ago when I was really trying to be specific about what I was looking for in a partner. I think and then at the same time, I published my book, and at the same time, I grew what started as a very small business that was just me into an organization that now has around 70 people working there. And so I don't know which one of those threads 'cause they're all really different, but they're all really similar, but I think what's so interesting... Before we dive into it, what's so interesting is that there is the piece of it that's not even necessarily... Even not necessarily about hating it so much, but about... But really the way that we say, When I have this thing, then, when this thing happens, then I will be okay. And then what happens when you have made that tragic assumption, and then you have it, and also because you have it and because you wanted it for so long then you're really torn.

**0:12:10.9 HW:** And that's when... I think for me, that was when a lot of my disconnection started to happen, which was forcing myself, because on paper, it looked like what I had really staked to my claim around, and then not being able to objectively look at my own happiness, from that thing, without believing, but I'm supposed... This is supposed to make me happy. So I'm going to try and make this work and I'm going to deny how I feel.

**0:12:39.8 NA:** And for me in those times, it can be filled with a lot of... I was gonna say self-doubt, but I think actually being quite mean to myself with dialogue, like What's wrong with you that you

finally have this thing and you can't be happy? Well, if you can't be happy now, you are never gonna be happy. That it's very easy to weaponize the difference between the fantasy and reality of the thing, when it does wind up being in a way that's challenging. I find it very easy to weaponize that against myself and make it all about, Something's wrong with me that I'm not grateful enough, I'm not appreciative enough, and... Sure, maybe sometimes a perspective switch can be helpful, but also sometimes it's just you thought you wanted the thing and you don't, and cannot just be neutral information, which is very easier said than done for me.

**0:13:28.7 HW:** And I think it's also... Here's another track of it, so let's take... There's three tracks of it 'cause I think the relationship one is so interesting, and I also think that the CEO one is also very interesting, but what I found... So I was desperate to be... Not desperate, but I really absolutely wanted to be a CEO, and I wanted to be a CEO in my... I knew at the last job I was at, I dated a CEO and I watched his movements and I was obsessed with what he did and how he did it, and while I was building Hip Sobriety and then Tempest, I read so many books on different... On leaders, on people that had... And visionaries, that had really been able to combine both their creative vision and also their executive discipline, and I remember so vividly saying to my therapist about four years ago... It was probably the summer of 2016 or the summer of 2017... It was the summer 2017, and I said, I wanna be a CEO, I wanna go for it. And I want... And I remember having this somewhat, it felt a little... To want that specific thing.

**0:14:52.3 HW:** It wasn't all I wanted, I wanna be really clear. I really wanted to build... I wanted to build something and I had something really driving me, that I wanted to bring forth. But at the same time, I also had this fixed idea of wanting to run an organization, and I thought that was absolutely what my skill set was, and that I had this merging skill set that was going to really be valuable in this new world, but also I just had this desire and I remember telling her and her saying that tracks. That makes sense. And her validating it. And then I think the other piece of it, winding back to the thought that I was on as I was starting to talk, I don't... I now know I've been there, done that, and I absolutely don't wanna be a CEO. [chuckle]

**0:15:43.1 HW:** And also, I have to think I wasn't wrong for wanting it, and I think that that desire that I had way back when was meant to serve me to do what I did over the past many years. But also that desire, it wasn't like it was wrong and I made a mistake. I think it was also the thing that was whispering to me or driving... Basically, the part of the motivational force that helped me to build the thing I built, and then when it stopped serving me and it was no longer what I'm meant to do or spend my time and energy, the desire changed. So I think it was really... It's easy to kind of say Oh, I was wrong, but I also think I wasn't wrong in the timing of it, I think I just... I think maybe something ran its natural course. Does any of that track?

**0:16:37.4 NA:** Completely, yeah, completely. My friend Alex, this was years ago, this conversation, but I remember she said to me that... Along the lines of changing your mind about something like this, that it's not that you were necessarily wrong before or that the previous version of you was lying or anything like that, it's just that the truth has changed. And also sometimes we were wrong before. Absolutely, I have made mistakes and have been very, very wrong, and I'm sure will be again and continually, but that you only know what it is that you know. And as you experience new

things... And this is why one of my guiding principles for myself is to try as much as possible to shorten the time span between when I'm interested in something and when I try even the babyest version of it, not to say you can necessarily try being a CEO, but I find that the longer I wait... It's sort of like what writing a book has become for me, it's something that I've wanted for such a long time that I have turned it into this mythical, wild... The fantasy of the thing, as opposed to if you just try it sooner, it sort of breaks that power or that spell that something can have, which isn't always relevant.

**0:17:49.4 NA:** So a couple of questions. So yeah, let's talk about the business CEO track first, and then we can absolutely come back to the relationship stuff, 'cause I agree. I think that's really interesting. When you said that you really wanted to be a CEO, that you were looking at this person you were dating and wanting to emulate that, reading the leadership books, can you speak a little bit to why? What did you think that was gonna give you or what did you think that it was gonna make you feel that you didn't already feel?

**0:18:16.2 HW:** That's such a good question. I think it was really wrapped up... It's important to understand that I... I had... In 2013, while I was just barely getting sober, I had a very, very strong pull to create what I ended up creating. The early ideas of it were very clear before I even really understood it. It really was something that... I left my job seven years ago this month, well by the time this airs, seven years and some change, but I'm in that seven-year period of when I really left to go start it, and so there was a...

**0:19:00.0 HW:** There was... What I was trying to say in that it wasn't just, I wanna be a CEO of anything. It was really like I very, very much wanted to build something that was going to be large. And I remember sitting with my friend Julie Santiago in, oh God, like probably 2014. We were both... Maybe like 2015. We were both talking about what we were building, and I remember I was just so clear on... I wanted to create something that was going to be massively large and also really create a different way of recovery. And so I think that there is... For me, it was wrapped up in a number of things, but it was mostly about the idea of what it was that I want... The vision in my mind of what it was that I wanted to build. And I did have... I started my career in Silicon Valley. I'd worked in start-ups as a consultant for Aries, and then I've worked in a start-up that went from 50 to 750 people over a five-year period. And I just... That was I think for me, it was the only way I could really understand how to grow, if that makes sense. So it was part of the package.

**0:20:18.6 HW:** It was, I'm going to raise venture capital, I'm going to build an organization from the ground up. And the way that I want to build an organization, we're gonna have this type of benefit plan and this type of work environment and these shared values and this specific type of culture, and it was far more about, I think, for me, following a well-worn path that I... That was the world I lived in, and also a path I had seen others.

**0:20:52.9 NA:** Yeah. Well, that's what success looked like around you.

**0:20:56.4 HW:** That's what success looked like around me. And also that's what really the... To me, I think it was also... When I was building this, this was not when... There was no sober curiosity.

There was really... It was a very different climate, and I think starting out and trying to explain what I was trying to do, people really didn't buy into the idea that culture around alcohol would change or that people would look at quitting drinking like they do quitting cigarettes, and I did not get a ton of validation in the circles I ran in. It was kind of like this cute thing I was doing. I remember talking to a lawyer from one of the big firms in the Bay Area trying to pick up some legal representation as I started to have conversations with investors. And he was just like, "That's a cute idea but you should definitely just like... Have you heard of Tony Robbins?" So people were consistently telling me... Save for a small, a handful, people were consistently telling me that I didn't have the right idea and that I should just play small.

**0:22:11.8 HW:** And so for me, I think that when I went out and raised our first few million dollars, we closed that round in late 2017. We did it in San Francisco and all of a sudden I had two-and-a-half million dollars. And not only that, I got money from... Really from a good investor set. And so for me, it was this... If I'm sitting here and I'm being honest, it was about the power that I could gain. For me, it was like, How do I take this idea that most people think is silly and how do I validate it? And how do I start to gain traction, get people to care about it? And so... 'Cause I was convicted in it. It was my religion. I believed fully and believed fully in the model, but not many people did. And so it was more like... How do I get people to care about what I'm doing? Well, you do it. What you know, which is, you become a Steve Jobs, or you become a Mark Zuckerberg. That was my model.

**0:23:16.4 NA:** And forgive me if I'm projecting. I certainly don't mean to. The allure sometimes of not proving people wrong almost, of people don't take this seriously, but I know what this is, and I'll show you not in a vindictive way, but when you know, when you feel that something is true, and especially for you with this method of recovery and everything that you had gone through and the people you had already helped and just like what you knew to be true, and then to be told, "No, no, no. Okay, little girl, cute idea," or whatever.

**0:23:45.2 HW:** Which is basically what most said. Yeah.

**0:23:47.6 NA:** Exactly. And that, I would imagine feels enraging and that it's very satisfying to be like, Okay, I'm gonna raise millions of dollars and build this 70-person company and it's gonna be incredibly effective and middle finger to all of you who did not believe in me.

**0:24:03.4 HW:** Yeah. And I think that what's so funny about that is I remember the first investor I ever talked to, and I talked to him in June 2014. And he was actually extremely positive, but told me, "Go out, build a brand, get speaking engagements, then come back," which is not typically what you tell... I'm sure that when Mark Zuckerberg was pissed from people for not telling him to go out, give some talks and build a following. Mark Zuckerberg is probably not the best choice because he built the following that I built my following on, but... Or he built the platform I built my following on. But the idea of men don't typically get that cute idea. But maybe you should go out and build a website and try and sell it to bored housewives and just stay in your lane. And so I think it was extremely... It was fuel for the fire though. That was more... The more "no" that I got, the more that people wrote me off, the more convicted I became. It was... It had the opposite effect.

And the funny thing about it is that that same investor, that first one, I saw him, I was at an investor conference... God, when was that? January 2020, right before pandemic, I was in San Francisco. I was at a house party that was a meet-and-greet of all these different investors and CEOs and whatever. And I just remember him running across the room and saying, I knew you would do it.

**0:25:34.8 HW:** And being... 'Cause I had just published my book and my... I had written an article and it was the Wall Street Journal, and he was just like, I've been following you... Oh no, it was the New York Times and he was like, I've been following you and I am so, whatever. But the funny thing is, it's just like when you... By the time you get to a certain point of being able to say, I was right. I do believe if you're doing it right and you're learning what you should be learning, you don't really care anymore what the naysayers said or didn't say. I have forgotten... Just like I've forgotten the exes that rejected me, that I assumed at some point I would be like, Eat your heart out. We have these when we're first really close to those rejection periods, we do think and fantasize about that moment, but then by the time any of those moments have come where I do have, that look at me now kind of thing, I really don't care about the look at me now. And so, yes, and also funnily enough, no. It feels good just because it feels in itself good to have done something that I personally was... Was a personal challenge. Does that make sense?

**0:26:47.7 NA:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. That makes so much sense. And so, obviously I know that we're glossing over a bunch, but the TLDR is you did it, you built this company, you did this thing, and so I'm interested in, was there a particular moment or series of moments or conversations or something where you knew that it wasn't what you wanted to be the CEO and to do this thing?

**0:27:13.8 HW:** Yeah, I think... It's just funny because they never really... I think that there is a subset, there's a culture, there is a track, and that is the CEO founder, and that wasn't always the case. Founders didn't typically run their organizations in the sense that we expect people who raise money to build and then run their organizations today, but there is now an entrenched belief in this myth of the founder CEO, again, because of people like Jeff Bezos... From the exceptions from Jeff Bezos to Mark Benioff, all men, Mark Benioff, to Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, we already talked about, there is this... Even Howard Schultz, and I can keep going, but the CEO founder is this mythical thing that you're supposed to be. And so I think that the first... It's the hardest... It's not the hardest job anybody could have, but it was such a ridiculous job, and I created what I did because I absolutely believed in the model I was creating and the vision I was creating, and really the creative aspect of it, and the art of it. But then you... And that's what you raise money off of, and then you get into it, and it really is this, That's not what you're doing.

**0:28:36.5 HW:** You are... You're the head of an organization and your first job is to be the head of that organization, and organization being the keyword here, and so I just was... It's like the frog boiling... Sitting in a pot of water that slowly boils around you, I think that there was just... I got very used to... As soon as I raised that first round, I stopped sleeping. And that was it. As soon as the money hit the bank, all of a sudden the clock started ticking, and I moved to New York really shortly thereafter, and I just stopped sleeping. And I just remember consistently, I have an incredible support network of advisors and friends that are following the same track as I am, and I just remember just kind of believing I was supposed to get used to it and that it was just all part of it,

and so I think that that's... There was no one moment, there was just the getting used to a really incredibly difficult job and I... Last Thanksgiving of 2019, the founder and CEO of Wild Thing? You know that company?

**0:29:48.6 NA:** Yeah.

**0:29:49.5 HW:** I heard her on a podcast, on a Harvard Business review podcast, and I heard her talking about how impossible it was to be a woman, to be a founder and to be a CEO, and the level of anxiety she had and the quality of life that she had. And I listened to it while I was on a plane to go see my family, super... I just was... I looked like death, I really did. And I remember listening to it and feeling so validated because no one was talking about how hard and lonely it is to be responsible for an organization, especially as the founder of it. And then I think I posted something on Instagram about it, and what happened was I got a bunch of messages from people saying that I needed to check into rehab or that I wasn't taking care of myself or taking my recovery seriously, and so it even felt like... It felt in this way what I was feeling, I wasn't even allowed to feel and I wasn't even allowed to talk about because number one, I don't think that there's not a large understanding, and I didn't feel like there was a large understanding of what my actual job was from the population in general. But then I also felt like there was really nowhere to go to have this weird honest conversation about how much you absolutely feel ruined by what you do every day. So I would say that that was a real revelation point.

**0:31:30.4 NA:** Yeah, and when you said, The money hit the bank and I just stopped sleeping, it's... The red flag of any situation where the assumption is that you just need to get used to or suck it up with really inhumane conditions, whether you're doing it to yourself, or the situations doing it to you, that's not sustainable.

**0:31:55.0 HW:** But the funny thing is, I knew it wasn't sustainable, but I also knew on the other hand of it, I was convicted and I felt like this is the path I've chosen. And also... It's so hard to really boil it down and pull it apart, and I think there was also just this piece of me that was... I really was just like, "Well, this is what I signed up for, and I'm in it." And I had, I think that I had no problem putting this before myself and doing that for... And that wasn't just post raising the money, that was in almost every step of building it. And then there was an almost relief in the priority of, "I just, I'm gonna worry about this one thing and I'm gonna let everything else." And I'm not like somebody in recovery, I didn't let my recovery go, so I need to be really clear, it wasn't like, "Oh, this is the only thing." But it was just, yes, that should be a red flag. And also the organization is successful, and I don't think sitting from this space, there's really no other way it could have gone. You know what I mean?

**0:33:09.3 NA:** Right. And that's why the nuance of this conversation is important because it's really... There's no way that we can pick apart an entire thing in any one single conversation or probably even over a series of conversations, but that's why I think that it's really worth talking about because there's an overly simplified narrative of like, "Well, I wasn't sleeping, and I was too anxious, so I just walked away."

**0:33:31.7 HW:** I know. I couldn't and I didn't want to. That's the other part of it too.

**0:33:35.1 NA:** Exactly.

**0:33:36.5 HW:** And I also think it's really important, and we talk about this, really... I talk about this in the sense of recovery, which is, yeah, maybe we're drinking too much for years and maybe we're really sick from it, but also maybe that thing that's also killing you is somehow saving you. And so I also have to go back to that. I wouldn't have gotten sober a day earlier, and I don't think it was wasted time that... I don't think the time it took me to move through what I moved through, even though it was horrible, and it was killing me, I needed every minute that I had in my path, and I feel the same way about this, which is just like it wasn't just, "Oh, I had this... It was really complex and there was no way, cold dead hands, try and get me to leave this thing and I think that there was a really natural arc and path to come into a conclusion that I was gonna replace myself as the CEO and move into something that was less painful.

**0:34:42.4 NA:** Yeah. Well, the sacrifices are worth it until they're not with a lot of these things, and I think that it almost like does a disservice to our former selves to say, "Oh, well, I never should've done that, or I never should have gone through those sleepless things or whatever," that it seems really clear that it was worth it to you until maybe it wasn't. And that's okay too. I think that it's really cute to memefy personal growth on Instagram or whatever, and it doesn't fit into this tiny box that this is, I don't know, it's messier, it's more complicated than that and that's... I'm grateful that you're willing to talk about it. How does it feel having made that transition now out of being CEO?

**0:35:33.2 HW:** I think... Oh God, I mean... Wow. So I started the conversation, and so just to be clear, I still work at the organization, I just changed my role to something that's way more conducive to what I do, which is creation. But I started the conversation, I did my research on it starting last July and August of 2020, and it was just like, again, so similar to any big scary decision I've ever made. I did my research on it, I looked at other examples of people that had gone before me, and did similar things like Reid Hoffman at LinkedIn, founded LinkedIn and then replaced himself as CEO right around the same time and at the same size as Tempest was, so I had really good examples of individuals that had done this. I know plenty of people that had done it themselves, at different stages. And so it wasn't like it was a long, hard, thoughtful decision that I got a ton of... That I ran by a lot of people that I trust. And it's also, as one of my advisors said, "It's a bell you can't un-ring." So if I went to the board of directors of my organization and said, "Hey, I'm thinking about... I think we should hire a professional CEO to take us through this next phase of growth."

**0:36:57.0 HW:** By the time I had that conversation, I was 100% in it. And having that conversation was like, Oh, it was just one of... It was a terrifying thing, and it was a six-month process to find and hire a replacement, create the conditions, but the second that I think like anything, voicing a thing... Glennon Doyle in Untamed wrote this one specific line which said, What truth are you not speaking that when spoken out loud will change your relationship, the institutions you're affiliated with, friendship, what is it that you're not saying that if you did speak it out loud would actually force a change? And I thought about that and thought about that, because when I read it probably... I

guess I read that in January of last year, I was like, Oh, that I...

**0:37:51.0 HW:** That I can barely get out of bed, and that I don't think I can do the job that I'm tasked with. And I couldn't... It took me six or seven months to be able to say that, and I think the second that I said that, it was just such sweet relief and then the transition, the hiring process and the path to get there while still running the organization and preparing the organization to have a new boss, that wasn't me.

**0:38:17.6 HW:** And for me to have a new boss that wasn't me, was just like running a marathon, but on your hands and knees and I think the new CEO started on... Ruth Sun, this amazing woman that we spend a lot of time with before she came on, she started on February 1st, and it took me about a month to work out, getting her set up on her transition before I could take a vacation, and I don't... I think it was almost like the first relief came seeing that, but then it was holding my breath for the next seven months. And then how it feels now on the other side of it is how it feels when you make a decision that is extremely hard and stands to cost you so much, but also is the right decision. So it's empty and it's terrifying, and it's also full and it's potential, and it's... And I'm happy and I don't feel... I was on a call with my therapist this morning and she was just like, Wow, you look like a different person, and I was on a call with one of our board members yesterday, and he's like, You sound like a different person, and so it is... I think it feels like what it feels like when you make a decision that's in integrity with who you are, even though it might cost you a whole hell of a lot.

**0:39:44.5 NA:** Well, that's really beautifully said. I'm interested, 'cause you mentioned these couple of different tracks of things that you got the thing you thought you wanted and it wasn't what you thought you wanted, and you mentioned that one of them was the manifested relationship. I don't know in which ways that maybe that story is parallel to the story that you just told, but anything that you wanna share about that I would be very interested in how... Everything that you just said, how does that apply to a non-work context?

**0:40:17.5 HW:** Well I mean, it's kind of everything. I think that... At the height of all of this, January 2020, I am in this slog, we just raised \$11 million, and I was about seven months into this relationship, and then my book came out, and I have never been so lost in my entire life. It was like, ring ring ring. And I bought my first home. It was like all of this, it was on my vision board shit, it was literally all of it, and I was like, Yes! And then I was like, Oh my God. I think it was on some level embarrassing because I wrote about in my book about being on this hamster wheel, you don't think you can get off of and then all of a sudden, I'm promoting a book that has that line in it, and I was like, I'm on another hamster wheel and I don't know how to get off this hamster wheel.

**0:41:16.2 HW:** And this is not the relationship I wanna be in. This is not the job I wanna do. I absolutely wanted to disappear from... I wanted to disappear. I really wanted to disappear. And so I think all of these things kind of really threaded themselves together, and I think it's... To take a step back from it, the importance of being in the relationship stuff, I think that one of the things that I had really deluded myself about in early recovery was that this is me now, this is who I am. And so I built up this whole... And I think we just keep doing this. I built up this who I am-ness, based on external things, and then you get attached to them and then you realize you're never the external

things, and so meaning that, I just... I think that there is a... I think that the hardest part of this was that I, in my mind was on this track and this is just gonna be my forever track, and then all of a sudden I realized, Jesus, this is not my forever track, and there is no forever track. And so... Anyway, the relationship piece of it, it was exactly that. It was being... Finding... I think... Getting the thing I wanted that I had been looking for, and then also being... Having that fight between, I'm supposed to be happy with this and this is what I wanted, and if I don't want this, then what do I want?

**0:43:00.1 NA:** Yeah, and then what to do in that space. Because I think it's not necessarily easy, but it's relatively easy to walk away from a thing if you're very certain about what it is that you're walking to.

**0:43:12.1 HW:** That's right.

**0:43:12.4 NA:** The replacement, like, Okay, not this, but this, but how do we sit with ourselves in the place where what you know for sure is not this but you don't know what's next?

**0:43:24.1 HW:** That's right. And I think that that... That's so money. That's exactly it, because I have... I have had... That's it, because I was like, I know I want to write a book, and many books, I know I want to build this organization and I want to do this thing at this organization, I want this organization to do... I want to be married for certain and have a partner. You know what I mean? I had all these fixed things, and then I think that probably the hardest part of it was having... If you have gotten these things, if you've checked all these boxes, these boxes are not it, and there's so much to pull apart here too, because having this goal-oriented... Part of the problem is that we think that the happiness is in the achieving when it never is, but there is that piece that you just said, which is so right, which is, what was so confusing about it and so hard about it and still is so hard about it is, Okay, not these things, but also, I don't know, there is no other definite thing. So there's just that liminal space of absolutely not knowing anything and feeling extremely direction-less.

**0:44:41.7 NA:** Do you feel like you're still in that space?

**0:44:45.1 HW:** Yeah, but not in a desperate... Sadly. [chuckle]

**0:44:49.6 NA:** Interesting. So even that space can have its own phases, right? [chuckle]

**0:44:54.5 HW:** I mean, it can because that's... So when I left my job, I had been at this company for five years. It was my life. It was my identity. I didn't have to prove anything there. My work was well established, and my value was well established, I should say that. And most of my friendships, if not 90% of my friendships were through this organization. It was where I went every day. It was my schedule. I had been in a relationship with the founder of that company, and was... It was my everything. Everything that I knew about myself was wrapped up in that, and I quit that job really in a rash way. Not really rash, but it just stopped working, and I acted on it. And then I hung around for eight weeks after that, meaning, I put in my notice, and I was like, "I quit," and then I didn't formally put in my resignation for eight weeks, even though we were all talking about it, but I was

just trying to... I don't even know what I was trying to do, but I remember sitting down with the head of HR, and I remember her saying... Oh, God, I mean, it was just like of all the things, she said that quote about leaving the shore to swim for new horizons, losing sight of the shore to swim for new horizons. You have to actually lose total sight of what you know to hope to even begin to swim to something with greater potential.

**0:46:25.2 NA:** Yeah.

**0:46:26.3 HW:** You don't get to just move from one rock to the next rock.

**0:46:30.5 NA:** But I don't like that, right? I don't... I don't [chuckle]

**0:46:33.9 HW:** No one likes that, but that's why the spoils go to people that can... My firm belief, firm, is that you have to trash it completely with absolutely no hope of anything else. And hope, not faith. I have... But hope, that this other thing is gonna save you. You have to actually go on pure faith alone and believe in possibility, and believe in yourself to... And believe in a kind universe, and all of that bullshit. You do, in order... Because otherwise we just cling. We just cling, and we cling, and we cling, and life is continuously expanding. And I know I sound like an Abraham-Hicks person right now, more like a Secret person of stuff that I do appreciate, but I mean this just in the most literal sense of, we cling as humans to small shitty stuff. We cling to scraps, because we're sold into a scarcity model. We're sold into this belief that there's only so much that can go along, that that's a zero sum game, that there's... And so when we get a piece of something that looks good, we will just stay there, because we can't imagine anything better can come along. And that is what... This is what... Everything that we're talking about, the okay relationship that checks all the boxes.

**0:48:03.5 HW:** But that maybe makes you [chuckle] feel completely disconnected from your body, or the job and the role that pays enough money that you would be an idiot to walk away from, or gives you enough status, or whatever, because we are constantly gonna run back to the safe corners without realizing... For me, I have now a proof, a history of proof that when I leave the comfort of something that I feel is the most I'll ever do behind, I am constantly surprised by what that makes room for. Mentally, it's better than what I could have imagined.

**0:48:41.1 NA:** Well, that's encouraging. I feel that I will be relistening to the last four minutes of everything that you just said over and over again a couple of times. Thank you for the pep talk.

**0:48:49.1 HW:** That's the pep talk I give myself every day, but that's it. It is it, because to be able to separate myself from that role was one of the hardest things that I've ever done.

**0:49:00.4 NA:** Yeah. Yeah, I think a lot about... Maybe this is a weird example, but when I'm brainstorming something, let's say it's something to do with my business, or a change, or a pivot I wanna make, or a new offering or something, one of the things that I often have to remind myself is our range of what we think is possible is really narrow and related to things that we already have proof that we can do, and that can be really limiting. That if I'm thinking of, "Okay, what are all the possibilities that this can be?" All the possibilities are still usually relatively related to what I'm

already doing, because I had a basis in this and It's not necessarily a bad thing, but I do really need the reminder, of what you said about losing sight of the shore. Sometimes the next thing, or the bigger thing, or whatever, you can't see it from your current vantage point, because your current vantage point has kind of like the blinders and the biases of everything that you've already done, but if it's gonna be something that's really new, it has to be new, and that means you're floating in that liminal space for a while, which I don't like, but it's true.

**0:50:09.3 HW:** It's so cliché, and it's so true. It is. It's so cliché, but it is absolutely so true. Everything we do is based on the history that we know, on our known knowns. And so to...

**0:50:18.0 NA:** And can change comes from... I think about this... Sobriety for me was the real turning point for this. It was really the first thing that I had no frame of reference for. I didn't know a single person in real life that had done it. And this was in 2011. There was no online community for it, or unless there wasn't that I knew about.

**0:50:37.5 HW:** Nope. [laughter]

**0:50:37.6 NA:** There was barely even an Instagram.

**0:50:39.2 HW:** No.

**0:50:39.6 NA:** And sometimes I think back to... It was a month before my 26th birthday, and I'm like, "Who was that version of me who was like, "You know what, we're done with this?"" Sometimes I think about her and I'm like, "She is so cool. She is so centered in her..." I don't know, rightness, and integrity, because that was a choice that I had absolutely no modeling, and no reinforcement for, and it worked, so yeah.

**0:51:04.1 HW:** Isn't that... It's exactly right, which is why I think that recovery is so... I just, I think that it always goes back to the... The first time, the first proof point I have that impossible things are possible and that you can do anything, you can do anything, and that we're so limited in our belief system, and we're so limited in really understanding what we're capable of doing, and that was completely from exactly the same situation. Didn't know anybody that had done it, didn't have any role models in it, did not understand how I was going to be able to create anything beyond what I had created in terms of my life.

**0:51:55.7 NA:** Yeah, and I will get questions about that sometimes, and I'm sure you do too, of like, "How did you know it was the right thing?" When I try to think back and put myself, not just in a place of sobriety, but I have walked away from a lot of things in my life, things that were awful or... And more difficult, things that were good but not great, and that... I hesitate to ever try to give anybody advice around that, because it's not necessarily like, "Well, here's the four-step plan. If this, this and this are true, then it's time to leave," but I keep coming back to for myself, if I'm really, really honest, I do know when what I want is not that, when you do have that feeling of "not this." I might not know how it's gonna happen, or I might not know what comes next, but I do know when leaving is the choice.

**0:52:45.4 HW:** That's right. You know, it's so interesting... Oh my God, I'm so happy that you just said that because it just makes me think of something that felt really profound. So I was on vacation a couple of weeks ago, and I was listening to... I watched the Joan Didion documentary. Have you watched it?

**0:53:03.9 NA:** No, not yet.

**0:53:04.5 HW:** It's pretty good. And I always love stories of people that are just totally committed to their craft. She's not one of my favorite writers, but I think definitely her body of work is impressive and so anyways, that's beside the point. It's a documentary about her, but they weave in excerpts from her writing, and one of the things that she said about leaving New York City when she was 28 was that Endings are always really hard to see coming, but beginnings are always very obvious to her. And I was like, "No." Like I never... And I actually wrote a piece for myself, just a writing exercise of writing about how I feel pathologically aware of endings and I know them so well and I see them before anyone else typically sees them, but I cannot see beginnings. I never... Beginnings... I can... Whenever people say, "When did that start?" Like when you asked me, "When did that start?" I can't tell you when something started. I can tell you when it ended, and so...

**0:54:16.3 NA:** Or when it ended for you, right, like we're at the beginning of the ending. Yeah.

**0:54:19.3 HW:** When it ended for you, that's right. And I know them and I see them, and I was writing about this because I felt like... I think when I made the announcement about moving from CEO, immediately it was met with, "That seems premature," and to me it already felt late. And then I think I wrote this specifically about a relationship that I was just in, a different relationship, and I knew it was over well before it was over, and I just... I'm very attuned to the end of things, and I'm also really... My comfort zone is actually... And I'm just so curious to hear how you feel about this... But for me, I am most comfortable when something is falling apart.

**0:55:07.6 NA:** That's fascinating. Okay.

[laughter]

**0:55:10.2 HW:** Or when I get the memo, that's my territory, that's where I come alive. Because I also look at endings as always the clearing, and then the beginnings are very scary for me and... But I'm actually so comfortable in that space when I call it. That's like where I feel the absolute most alive.

**0:55:38.9 NA:** Okay, so then follow-up question: If the coming apart is the thing you can see the most clearly and potentially represents a comfort zone of sorts, like you just said, do you think that there's ever a tendency to keep recreating endings, or how does that, if it does, get in the way of staying, when staying is maybe the right but less comfortable choice?

**0:56:06.7 HW:** I have two answers to that because I've obviously thought about it. I wrote a

whole... [chuckle] and this is like my... This is like half of my journal, and actually the person I broke up with said something about me being self-destructive and ruining everything good, but that's not true. Let me just put it really clearly. I think, first of all, my first answer to this is, what if I told you I was pathologically addicted to the beginnings of things, or more attuned to it, or my comfort zone was in the starting scratch? Those two things aren't disconnected. Starting and ending are connected, so if you end something, you must then start something, that is a new beginning, and if you begin something, something else ended. And so I do think that, one, they're just the same thing, and that we're always kind of ending and beginning, and so I think the first answer is no. I feel that I am fluid. I actually feel not that I'm always looking to run from something when it's hard, because I would have chosen a really different life. I wouldn't be sober and I wouldn't...

**0:57:17.0 NA:** Totally.

**0:57:20.3 HW:** I wouldn't have built a company, that took seven years of commitment and will probably require my involvement for the rest of my life, and on and on. And I think that sometimes we can get into the stories we tell ourselves and say, "I'm just this way." For instance, I told a therapist a couple of months ago, "Oh, I just don't like being around people that much. I just like to be by myself," and she challenged me on that, and I went out and proved that I actually really love being around people. And so I think we have to get really careful about when we say, "I'm just this way," because we kind of are all the ways, we're kind of everything. The other piece of, this is, absolutely yes, I think that... Yeah, if I'm really comfortable in blowing things up, does that mean that I have a tendency to blow things up? And the answer is absolutely yes, it's really easy for me to walk away, but I also...

**0:58:11.0 HW:** That's part of my process is knowing, sometimes I stayed too long in things, and sometimes well beyond their expiration, and sometimes I left things prematurely, but what I actually wrote down about this relationship, was, I wrote down, "It feels like I'm running out of a burning building. And why do I always run out of burning buildings?" And then I read the piece to my friend whose house I was staying at, and she was like, "Why would someone stay inside a burning building?" And so... Anyway, I think it's... There's no yes and no, but I think that the answer is, if you're... What I try and bring to it is self-awareness and accountability, to not leave something prematurely, or to leave something a mess, but also to not stay when it's something that is no longer serving you.

**0:59:04.6 NA:** I feel a lot of resonance in your story, which is probably what prompted me to ask that clarifying question, but I think what I am personally getting from what you're saying, and obviously anyone listening can get whatever they get from it, but what I'm getting from it is the reminder that is actually very comforting to me that there's not a formula for whether to stay or whether to go, that if I only can figure out what the right formula is, then I'm never gonna have to be in pain again.

**0:59:33.2 HW:** Yeah.

**0:59:33.9 NA:** I think that there's this... And again, when you were saying earlier the, "If I get X,

then I'll be happier. When I reach this place, then I'll feel fulfilled." I think I can have a similar grasping desire around the myth of the right processing techniques, or having the right internal sensor alarms go off at the right time so that I can walk away at the exact perfect moment when nobody's in pain. It's not real. And yes, our discernment gets better with experience over time, growing compassion, growing empathy, all of these things, our communication, but it's a mess actually. And what if that were okay?

**1:00:13.9 HW:** That is a mess, and I love... Thank you, I feel very validated by what you just said...

**1:00:18.7 NA:** The mutual validation session, just back and forth, back and forth.

**1:00:20.9 HW:** Well, because I'm thinking about you too, I'm like, "Oh yeah. I get why you're asking it because of what's happened." Just in the five years I have known you, I'm always just like, "Look at her go," and I am in awe, like, "Oh my god, van life." I think our mutual friend, Adam and I talked about you when you hiked the PCT or before you did, or maybe it was when you were just starting to really go out in the world, and I think that... I think first of all, each of us are gonna have our own unique life path, I don't think everybody needs to maybe move at the speed that you do or that I do, but I also think, when I see you in your nature, I'm just like, "That is exactly what I admire and would expect." And so, I also think... I'm reading this really good book right now that our other mutual friend, Laura McKowen, recommended to me, and it's called "Let Your Life Speak". Have you heard of it?

**1:01:22.5 NA:** I have seen her post about it and write about it, but I haven't read it yet.

**1:01:26.7 HW:** So she recommended it to me, and the thing about it is, the whole point of it is just in one sentence, what is being whispered to you? What is being given to you? What you're being called to do is yours. And that's it. Not what we're supposed to be doing, not what the... It is like listening to your pieces, isness or whatever. But it's just listening to... Listening, listening. And I find it so fascinating because when I actually listen to myself I make extremely good decisions, even if they don't make sense to other people. It's when I don't listen to myself.

**1:02:06.7 NA:** That's the pull-quote from this conversation, "When I actually listen to myself, I make really good decisions." Yeah.

**1:02:13.0 HW:** It's true.

**1:02:13.9 NA:** So, keeping in mind that I will not hold you to any of these things, using that question you just posed of what's whispering to you, what is?

**1:02:24.5 HW:** Oh, wow. What is? I think what is, is I have spent many years listing goals of what I wanted to achieve, and none of them included the word "happiness" in them, or contentment, or balance, or health. It's so weird. It was like, "Become a New York Times bestseller."

**1:02:50.0 NA:** Check.

**1:02:51.1 HW:** Check. And also, one of my yoga teachers always says... I've never been able to do splits, Hanuman... And she can, and she always says, "Do you know what happens when you can fully go into Hanuman?" And she always says, "Nothing. Nothing happens." And I do think that it's so important to have things, goals, things to work toward, and at the same time, I think that one of the biggest learnings that I am taking with me right now is that if you're not actually enjoying the journey to get there, you're missing the point. Right now, what is calling to me is to stop, and to pay attention, and to figure out how, as I build... I'm working on a second book, but how do I build stuff? How do I have goals and move towards aspirations? But also, how do I make sure that I'm happy along the way? How do I just make it less painful for myself? What's calling to me is writing, what's calling to me is really nesting and taking care of myself, and what's calling to me is being in joy as much as I can, and to not worry so much.

**1:04:30.7 NA:** I remember a couple of years ago, I interviewed my friend Lauren, and she talked about something, a goal of hers at that time was to practice satisfaction, practice contentment, to think about being content, being satisfied, as not really a state that you arrive at but as a thing that you practice, and as a thing that you practice side by side with whatever your wild ambition is, and I think about that all the time, and I hear that a lot in what you're saying too, because it doesn't mean don't have strong drive for big things if those are the right fit things for you, or if that's actually what you really want. It's not like, "Okay, well, I have to tamp down these desires in order to make myself be satisfied with this smaller thing," if that doesn't feel true, but it's looking at how can I practice contentment or satisfaction or whatever word resonates, or happiness along the way? I don't have necessarily a capital A answer to that, but it's something that I think about a lot.

**1:05:36.5 HW:** It's so well-said because I think life is delicious because of ambition and possibility, I love potential. And life is also really delicious just by... I was at lunch yesterday with my mom and she was being, just frustrating me terribly, and then I was trying to have a serious conversation with her and she was being silly and I wanted to stay on track and move the conversation forward, and I couldn't help myself and was just laughing so hard at her. And it was just that moment of... Right, just stop being so serious, just enjoy this, why does it... Nothing has to be that hard. There's actually an even better bigger lesson in this, especially when it goes back to addiction, which I think addiction not just as someone that's in recovery from substance misuse, but also as somebody that's just a human, I think all of us are really addicted, but there is a book called "The Molecule of More", and it's a book on dopamine. Have you read it?

**1:06:35.7 NA:** No, but that's a great title.

**1:06:37.5 HW:** Right. It talks about how we most likely are dopamine-forward or dopaminergic-forward as a species, because dopamine is motivating, and dopamine is probably what drove us out to explore and to colonize the world, moved early tribes of homo sapiens out of Africa, and propelled us to every corner of the earth; and that the further away something is, the populations tend to be more dopamine-heavy. And that this... It's really important... As a survival mechanism, dopamine is an extremely important... I almost said molecule... Molecule, but an extremely important neurotransmitter. But dopamine is also what's connected to never being happy, to

always... It's not the neurotransmitter of satisfaction, it's the neurotransmitter of dissatisfaction, it's wanting and never having enough, and it's what drives all addiction, as well as productivity and... Anyway, so the book talks about, it's not a bad thing, but also it's balanced by...

**1:07:43.1 HW:** And it doesn't... It's not active, and I don't know how true their science is, this is... Is a book, I think it was written by a neuroscientist, but... And I don't know how great I am at relaying it, but what I picked up from it was that dopaminergic pathways don't fire up when serotonin... I don't know, the here and now neurotransmitters are firing, so oxytocin or serotonin; that basically, you can't really be fully present and experiencing those intimate, "I'm witnessing the present moment," and also have your, "I need to go and snort a lot of coke or run a marathon, pumping." And so, to me, what I got from that book is this balance between being very aware of when I'm motivated and really harnessing that, but also working on producing those here and now moments, and moving between those two networks rather than being fully in this... What I have an end, which is productive, accomplish, and conquer.

**1:08:47.3 NA:** Yeah, and potentially experimenting with a different way of doing things and seeing how that feels.

**1:08:52.8 HW:** Yeah.

**1:08:53.6 NA:** Yeah. I also... I try, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to hold things with a little bit of a looser grasp in terms of, it really works well for me to treat my life as an experiment, 'cause I can just get way too serious about things and take things way too seriously and feel like I have to know what step 20 is gonna look like before I'm willing to take step one, and that's not how it goes. And so the more I can be, "I'm just gonna try this other thing and see what happens," that's usually the entrance point or the doorway into something good for me.

**1:09:29.9 HW:** Yeah. Hear, hear.

**1:09:31.6 NA:** And to just... Yeah, to just see... See what's next. But I love that question that you shared of, "What is whispering to you?" It's also... There's something really gentle, there's a really gentle invitation in that question, it's not, "What do you want? What are you gonna do?" It doesn't have that hard, gritty energy to it, but it opens up space for... You don't have to actually have it fully formed or know the answers, but...

**1:09:55.9 HW:** No.

**1:09:56.5 NA:** What's the whisper and paying attention to that a little bit more?

**1:10:00.1 HW:** What's the thing calling to you? And I think the other piece is, what's calling to you sometimes is not gonna be the most convenient thing, what's calling to you is sometimes an extremely impossible ask.

**1:10:12.9 NA:** Do you feel like there... Are there any of your whispers that feel really

inconvenient?

**1:10:17.7 HW:** I think that I've been through a number of the inconvenient ones, recently. Nothing at the moment, but I think I have... I think I have been there and done that in the last year a lot.

**1:10:30.2 NA:** Yeah, you certainly have, you have had a year.

[chuckle]

**1:10:33.4 HW:** Yeah, yeah. No, right now it feels really open, it feels really wide, it feels really exciting. And I think, I was thinking back, on a seven-year cycle, again, seven years ago, I left everything I know, and I was miserable because I was so desperate to create the next thing, and I was never doing enough, ever. I was never, ever... I never gave myself a break. I couldn't enjoy it, I was upset at myself for being lazy and unmotivated, and not productive enough, and not being further along and this, that, or that, and I am trying really hard right now to not try really hard, and just to actually be chill and to trust, to actually trust that even though I can't really see things like I once saw them, and I don't have this fully formed picture of what is in front of me. I have more evidence that it's okay to trust that things are kind of divinely, not kind of, things are divinely guided, at least in my belief system.

**1:11:43.9 NA:** Yeah. So I wanna be respectful of your time, and I have one, potentially a wrap-up question, one more question I would love to ask you.

**1:11:52.9 HW:** Sure.

**1:11:54.4 NA:** So you mentioned, as we were talking about the different threads, right, publishing the book and starting the company, and then stepping down as CEO, being in what you thought was the perfectly manifested relationship and realizing that wasn't it, and untangling yourself in different ways from all of those things, I'm interested in anything that you can share that you have learned about... This might be a really weird question, Holly, but how to disappoint people. 'Cause I can imagine that in all of those situations, there were people who wanted you to make a different choice or who would have been happy or more convenience... It would have been more convenient for them if you made a different choice, is there anything you can share about learning to disappoint people? Asking for Amy.

**1:12:41.8 HW:** Yeah, I think that it really does come back down to, you're just gonna have to be okay with any response, you can't really control for disappointing people, that's just it, you're going to disappoint people. And it is about not internalizing what someone else's experience or what you should or shouldn't be doing, letting them have that, or really letting them have that, and not taking on... It doesn't mean... I love Rene Brown's suggestion, that you... The people whose feedback and advice you want should fit on a tiny little piece of paper, 1 inch by 1 inch, five names or so, of people whose opinion you really care about, because they've earned their place on that piece of paper, to be honest and not self-directed in informing you about your decisions. And I think that everyone that's not on that piece of paper, you just need to let go of what their reactions are. And so

I have had... Oh. If you can just imagine, between all of those things, so many different reactions and most of them extremely supportive, but plenty of them not. And I think I had one recently, the ending of the last relationship. And it was a pretty brutal conversation, and that was their experience of it, my experience... I had to not take on their experience of it.

**1:14:12.0 HW:** And I think relationships are really an interesting one, 'cause oftentimes when you end a relationship, you are not on the same page, it's not typically like, "Let's peacefully and mutually agree to stop being in a relationship." It's usually hard, to say the least, and very personal, and everyone's stuff is triggered. And so I think there is just... For me, my main job is to just stay in my own experience of something, I'm such a sponge, and I think that there is... When you're disappointing people, especially if you are a person that has a hard time letting people down, if you're a pleaser or you're a co-dependent, whatever the hell it is, whatever you wanna call it, I have found great value in exposing myself to other people's terrible reactions, to my boundaries or decisions, and letting them keep their terrible reactions for themselves, and then remaining in my own truth, in my own decisions, and letting those be entirely separate things that are happening to two separate people.

**1:15:13.0 NA:** Oh, yeah, that's very well-said, and the reminder that, it's not that you're only allowed to have boundaries if everyone else is okay with them, that defeats the purpose, right?

**1:15:24.3 HW:** Yeah.

[chuckle]

**1:15:25.3 NA:** Yeah, okay, okay. So if you could leave folks with one call to action based on our conversation, what would it be? Maybe a question to ask themselves, a small action to take, of everything we've talked about, what would you love to offer for folks?

**1:15:39.9 HW:** Oh my God, I'm really... This whole time I've been thinking about this, and I'm actually gonna do it when we get off this call, this exercise I did seven years ago with a coach, that was called the "circle exercise", and I've used it on Hip Sobriety, I think you can find it if you Google Hip Sobriety circle exercise, and I think Tempest uses it now too, in a lot of its materials. But the circle exercise is where you take a piece of paper and you draw a stick figure of yourself, and you draw a circle around the stick figure, and then you draw another circle around that, and then you draw... And then you have the rest of the paper. So, stick figure in a circle, circle around that. In the first circle, you write out everything that you have going on in your life, good and bad right now, your existing situation, and maybe it's unfulfilling relationship, maybe it's paycheck, health insurance, I don't know, good and bad, what are the things?

**1:16:28.8 HW:** And then the next circle is, what are you afraid of? And you might write, maybe you are thinking about sharing your opinion, that's an unpopular opinion. And when I did this, I was talking about alcohol, and recovery, and AA, and I was like, people hating me, I was afraid of losing money, I was afraid of losing friends. And then I... In the larger circle, in the outer circle, you write, what are the things you absolutely dream of, and it's like starting a company, writing a book. And

then you take an arrow from the self and you draw... Or you take a pencil and you put in the center of the page on the self, and you draw an arrow from the center out to the outer corner of the page, and it just is a reminder that here's where you are, here's what you have to go through in order to get that. And so it's just, what is what I'm afraid of, what I want, and what you're afraid of is typically how you get to what you want.

**1:17:30.8 NA:** Right, you can't get from where you are to... Yeah, that's incredible, I shall be taking that. Thank you. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, that is great for everyone.

**1:17:37.9 HW:** It's so good because you're like, "Oh yeah, if I wanna do this, I'm gonna lose friends, I'm going to have financial insecurity, I'm going to potentially be disliked by trolls on the internet," but that's how you get to where you're going.

**1:17:54.8 NA:** Yeah, and I just... I do so much mental gymnastics or try to figure out which levers to pull that are gonna let me leap over and side-step those fears. Like it's cute, I really, like, "Let me figure out how I can do this in a way that's gonna not have to go through any of those fears," and spoiler alert, that's not how it works.

**1:18:13.6 HW:** That's not how it works.

**1:18:14.6 NA:** What is the best place for people to find you and say hi, if that is a thing you are open to? Do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks?

**1:18:22.4 HW:** Yeah. My website is hollywhitaker.com, and that's just where links and writing and stuff goes, and then you can also find me on @holly, just my handle is Holly on Instagram, I don't use any other social media. And then there's also Tempest, our organization that helps people to find individualized paths of recovery.

**1:18:46.5 NA:** I will put links to all of those things right in our show notes. Holly, thank you so much.

**1:18:52.0 HW:** Thank you so much, Nicole, I appreciate you so much. This is exactly what I needed. [chuckle]

**1:18:56.7 NA:** Yay!

**1:18:57.8 HW:** Yay!

[chuckle]

[music]

**1:19:03.5 NA:** And that's our show for today. Our music is by Adam Day, who also handles our sound editing. Thanks, Adam, you're the best. And huge thanks again, I can't say this enough, to our

Patreon community for making this honest conversation, this whole entire podcast, and so much of my other work possible, like my weekly personal essay and discussion thread series on Substack, which is called Good Question. Yep, that is funded by the Patreon community as well. Your monthly funding allows me to keep creating resources and gatherings for folks who crave honest conversations, both with themselves and others, and I fully believe that these conversations can change our lives, our relationships and our world. Maybe that sounds like a lofty goal, but it is one that I believe in with my whole heart. To join us, just come on over to [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). Our community operates on a shame-free sliding scale, so you can feel good about supporting this work from within your own means. So I'll see you over in the Patreon community, yes? Hopefully? And until next time, know that you are doing great, you are exactly enough, you are not alone, and I am totally rooting for you.

**Thank you for choosing Scribie.com**

Cross-check this transcript against the audio quickly and efficiently using our online Integrated Editor. Please visit the following link and click the Check & Download button to start.

<https://scribie.com/files/02b47840badd4a4cbeba19c4b05b7ff71dfe73fa>