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MBS (<u>00:00</u>):

If you can imagine a painter or a musician or a dancer, then you can probably bring to mind where they're doing that work, it's a dedicated space. A studio or IntelliJ or something like that, a place to explore and to create, to make. But how could that be relevant to those of us who are in the world of organizations and corporations? I'm Michael Bungay Stanier, and welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. And my guest today is Jennifer Paylor. Now officially, she's a head of learning & development, talent & culture for Capgemini in North America. But in her own words-



Jennifer (<u>00:51</u>):

So, I'm an artist, Michael and I create art with my work.

MBS (<u>00:55</u>):

She's a singer, a writer, and she's also a hardcore electrical engineer, which worked in a scientific laboratory. But now Jennifer spends her days leading talent and learning and culture. This is art and science intertwined.

Jennifer (<u>01:11</u>):

I call it being an artist because I take some of the skills that I have like engineering, coaching, leadership development, and try to create a space where it's almost like harmony. That's how I see it. Systems thinking, sometimes people call it, but I call it harmony.

MBS (<u>01:31</u>):

But how did Jennifer get to this point?

Jennifer (<u>01:33</u>):

I was just fascinated about people. And I said, "Wait a minute. I really want to work with people." And they said, "Well, engineers are not people, people." And I said, "Well, maybe I'm not an engineer anymore. What am I, who am I?"

MBS (01:49):

So, I am imagining that the people in her life were pretty taken aback at Jennifer abandoning a 10 year career, "What are you doing?" But there was one experience in particular that fed Jennifer's drive to make the workplace a better place.



Jennifer (<u>02:05</u>):

I remember one time I was in Indonesia, I was in Bhutan and I think I may have been there a week, but I was going from Singapore to Bhutan. So, when I would go to Bhutan, I would take a little ferry and you would go out to this long journey out in the wilderness, they had cutout a technology part in the middle of nowhere. And I would see the culture, I would see how people would just love to go to work, strive to go to work. And then I would come back to Singapore or America and it was almost like we were taking things for granted. So, at that moment, I started realizing, wait a minute, if these people can value the idea of work and just be so passionate about it and just be there for each other, even they didn't have a lot, some of them were literally during that time, they would come out of their place of living.

Jennifer (03:07):

They were living, it looked like a jungle, but that's what it literally looked like. They would come out and they would get on a bus and they would go to this park, technology park and they would stay there a week and then they would go back. Someone will stay there two weeks and it just clicked for me like, it's a lot of things that needs to be done to help people. Help human flourishing. And that's when it kind of clicked like technology and human beings can co-exist with the right agenda.

MBS (<u>03:37</u>):

Jennifer's current role is a relatively new one. It's one that she came to after 23 years at IBM, that's actually where I met her. She was in charge of the coaching program there. So, how'd you go about trying to make change when you're in a new position and a new culture where you have no history and you have no clout.



Jennifer (03:55):

I literally told myself I'm not a hero because I think sometimes if you put on that mindset of, I'm coming to say the day, and there's this red carpet, there's this thing that I have that you don't have. And there's this idea or experience that I have that's better than yours. I told myself I'm not a hero. The way I set up my thinking was no body knows me in this space. I'm going to have to really test the mettle because now this is where the rubber meets the road. It's one thing to say, because I'm known for really transforming cultures. So, it's one thing to say, "You can transform a culture if everybody knows you. You've been there 23 years, you've been across the entire company." It's another thing to say, "But I have a method. I have some capability and I really know culture is something tangible.

Jennifer (<u>04:55</u>):

You can put your finger on it and you can tweak it and you can actually transform and scale." And then do that without knowing anybody, without a network. So, it was almost like testing my mettle myself. So, it's like when you are an artist, right? One thing about an artist, an artist knows for a singer, I'm a singer, but a recording artist who's a singer, we know that everybody's not going to like your song. Everybody's not going to like your music and it's okay. But for those who like your music, you're going to give it your all, you're going to connect to them, and the thing about it is they don't have to like it. They don't have to like you, everybody doesn't have to like you, right?

Jennifer (<u>05:42</u>):

It's just, the music has to resonate. So, as an artist, you don't try to get everybody to like your music. You try to find that audience that sings the same tune and likes the style and you work together and you build another record, another song. That's how I kind of approached my thinking like, who's the audience? What do people need? What are they thinking? What words are on



their minds and on their hearts, do I need to figure that out? How can I actually be of service? How can I become part of this new family? So, it was really a humbling moment for me.

MBS (<u>06:17</u>):

It is a grounding moment. I want to talk to you about humbling and humility in a moment. But here's a question that comes to mind. You talk about being an artist and I think that's true. Who do you have as a role model, as an artist? Are there people you look to and going, "I like not just what they do, but how they do it?"

Jennifer (<u>06:42</u>):

Let me see. I can say a lot of people. Yeah. Michael, you came to my mind first. I know this is your show, but you did. You really did because it's a way of creating, putting context and art together. When I was at IBM, I really did, like we had a president, Jim Whitehurst, he came from Red Hat. He was a CEO of Red Hat and he literally sleeps, eats, breeds culture.

MBS (<u>07:12</u>):

Right.

Jennifer (07:13):

And I really do resonate a lot with the way he thinks about culture. So, Jim Whitehurst to me is somebody that is a force in this world today. He's one of those modern cultural leaders. I do look up to him and I find myself thinking the same way when he says that, I'm like, "Yeah, that's right. I agree." So, in my last moment at IBM, I got some time to really connect with his mission and play a little bit there. So, when it comes to culture, Jim Whitehurst is a one. I also like the thinking of Gary Hamel.



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MBS (07:52):
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Oh, yeah.

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Jennifer (<u>07:53</u>):
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I like Simon Sinek. Like Simon Sinek, I mean, everybody knows. So, it didn't get upset right there. But yeah.

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MBS (<u>08:01</u>):
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Oh, that's interesting. I was thinking you might share actual songwriters or singers or people who in that sphere who've influenced you, but I love that you took us to the business thinkers and leaders as well. Tell us about the book that you've chosen to read for us.

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Jennifer (<u>08:19</u>):
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Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box by the Arbinger Institute.

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MBS (08:25):
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That's great. When did you come across it? How did it come into your life?

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Jennifer (<u>08:30</u>):
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When I was making that transition between engineer and people's stuff.

MBS (08:35):

Right.

Jennifer (<u>08:36</u>):

And I couldn't put my finger on what was happening in the state of leadership at the time. And so, I discovered this book. My mentor told me about this book. So yes, I really love my mentor for that. And she says, "Have you read this



book?" I said, "No." And she said, "What are you talking about? You're talking about this idea called self deception that leaders have." And so, she said, "Read the book." I read the book and I haven't stopped reading it. I have recommended it in all of my coaching clients, in my programs and things. And what I love about this book is it really will transform you in one sitting.

MBS (<u>09:27</u>):

Jennifer Paylor, who is head of learning & development, talent & culture for Capgemini in North America, reading Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box by the Arbinger Institute.

Jennifer (09:41):

Chapter six, The Deep Choice That Determines Influence. "So what's this something deeper?" I asked curiously. "What I've already introduced you to, self-deception." Bud replied. "Whether I'm in or out of the box." "Okay," I said slowly, wanting to know more. "As we've been talking about, no matter what we're doing on the outside, people respond primarily to how we're feeling about them on the inside. And how we're feeling about them depends on whether we're in or out of the box concerning them. Let me illustrate that point further with a couple of examples. About a year ago, I flew from Dallas to Phoenix on a flight that had open seating. While boarding, I overheard the boarding agent say that the plane was not sold out, but there would be very few unused seats. I felt lucky and relieved to find a window seat open with a vacant seat beside it about a third of the way back on the plane. Passengers still in need of seats, continued streaming down the aisle.

Jennifer (10:47):

Their eyes scanning and evaluating the desirability of their dwindling seat options. I sat my briefcase on the vacant middle seat, took out that day's paper and started to read. I remember peering over the top corner of the paper at the



people who were coming down the aisle. At the sight of body language that said my briefcase's seat was being considered, I spread the paper wider, making the seat, look as undesirable as possible. Can you get the picture." "Oh yeah."

Jennifer (11:22):

"Good. Now let me ask you a question, while on the surface, what behaviors was I engaged in on the plane? What were some of the things I was doing?" "Well, you were being kind of a jerk for one thing." I answered. "Now, that's certainly true." Bud agreed, breaking into a broad smile, "But that's not quite what I mean. Not yet anyway. I mean, what specific actions was I taking on the plane? What were my actions or behaviors?" "I picture the situation you were taking two seats. Is that the kind of thing you mean?" "Sure. What else?" "You were reading the paper. You were watching for people who might want to sit in the seat next to you. To be very basic, you were sitting." "Okay. Good enough." Said Bud. "Here's another question, while I was doing these behaviors, how was I seeing the people who were looking for seats?

Jennifer (12:13):

What were they to me?" "I'd say that you saw them as threats, maybe nuisances or problems, something like that." Bud nodded. "Would you say that I considered the needs of those still looking for seats to be as legitimate as my own." "Not at all. Your needs counted and everyone else's were secondary if that." I answered. Surprised by my bluntness, "You were kind of seeing yourself as a Kingpin." Bud laughed, obviously enjoying the comment. "Well said." And he continued more seriously. "You're right. On that plane, if others counted at all their needs and desires counted far less than mine."

MBS (13:00):

So, I mean, first of all, I feel like I've been Bud on the plane with my bag casually on the seat next to me and not meeting anybody's eyes so that they kind of get



scared away. And yeah, I've been that jerk. But what is it about those pages that struck a chord of truth for you Jennifer?

Jennifer (<u>13:20</u>):

All of us get in a box at any point in our life, in our day, in our week. Being in the box means we see others as objects and at that moment. Bud just really illustrated how our day to day behaviors, how our intentions, how the way we feel about someone in the inside shows up in how we present ourselves as leaders. So, at any given moment, any one of us can be in the box, including me. I'm not exempt from it. So, it was important for me, leaders, you, every one of us to really think about, "Am I in the box? Am I seeing this person as a threat, as an object or something I can put up with? Or am I seeing this person as a person, human beings, someone who has a desire, a need, someone who has dreams goals?"

Jennifer (<u>14:21</u>):

So, that really resonated with me because like you said, Michael, I can remember times when I felt like I was putting up with somebody or people came to me and I said, "Oh, not this person again." So, it's just happens that fast. We can self deceive ourselves. So, it really resonated for me to really check in on a day-to-day basis to see whether I'm in the box or out of the box and being honest with myself.

MBS (14:49):

The thing is Jennifer, sometimes people are annoying, frustrating and irritating and I can try my best to be out of the box and kind of be present and be human with people who things are going well, and we're getting on fine. But isn't, I know it's just asking myself to kind of set myself up to be a doormat or kind of a pushover if I'm trying to be nice to everybody all the time, regardless of however they're showing up?



Jennifer (<u>15:19</u>):

Very good question. I get that all the time. We should be nice, right? But there's some times we're not nice. It's about how we see others from the inside. Sometimes leaders can say the right things, can put on the right heirs, can use the right body language, but the impact, the connection is not there, right? People actually respond to how we feel about them on the inside. So, sometimes you can have a very difficult tense conversation. But if you see that person as a person, the conversation will go over better. And it could be where the person is like, "Oh, they're not being nice at the moment." But you see the person, not the object. And if we can see the person, then we actually, the person is whole, the person feels like I exist.

Jennifer (16:17):

I'm being heard my story. What I'm saying is valued. It doesn't mean that the person is nice, or I like the conversation even if it's rough, it just feels like I'm human, I'm whole. It's one thing to be with someone, whether it's virtual or in person, and the person walks away feeling like they don't exist. So, that's why it's important especially as a leader to think about the is about influence. There are many ways we can influence. And the first one is being able to see a person as a human, not as an object.

MBS (<u>16:54</u>):

Yeah.

Jennifer (16:55):

That's why I don't like the word human resources. Well, that's another subject.

MBS (<u>16:59</u>):

Yeah. That is another subject. But I'm already agreeing with you because I know how you feel about it and I feel the same way. But Jennifer, can you tell me a



story of a time when you were able to be out of the box to kind of present to that other person's humanity during a difficult conversation and kind of what was going on in your heart and brain and body and soul that allowed you to stay present to that? Because that's such a hard, I mean, I agree with this in theory, it's so hard in practice. Tell us a story of a time where you somehow managed to navigate that and how you managed to navigate it?

Jennifer (17:38):

So, I can think of many situations, but I'll just share this one, like you asked. But I was trying to give feedback to one of my team members. And I felt like I had this story, this conversation over and over, I felt like it was like the 10th time. I've said the same thing. You can hear it in my voice, right? I was so over the conversation. I was irritable. I was like, "Why is this person not getting it? What's going on?" And I used to see myself when the person would put time on my calendar, I was like, "No, I need to reschedule. She's not going to get it. Blah, blah, blah." So, what happened? I said, "She's a person, right? And however long it takes for me to show up and be there and see her as a person, that's how long it's going to take for me to have that conversation.

Jennifer (18:28):

Even though I'm on number 10, if it takes 20, I'm there." Because at the end of the day, I wanted her to get it for herself. For her future, for her, for herself. Yes, I was frustrated, but I realized that she's a person. And you know what happened, she saw herself and she said, "The way you keep..." I think I forgot the word, "But you keep being there for me. I know this has been going on for a long time." She started saying stuff and I was like, "Great, she's silly. She's listening." So, it was more important for me, even if she didn't ever get the feedback and change and do what she was supposed to do, it was more important for me, for her to walk away and to be able to say, "I'm whole, and I'm not broken." I didn't break her.



MBS (19:22):

Yeah.

Jennifer (19:23):

And that was all in my control, that I really was. Because I could have, because I was frustrated, I was... Deadline was approaching. It was all types of things on the line.

MBS (19:33):

Right. So, setting that intention around showing up and doing your best to be human is one way of helping to manage this, for sure. And so, often we go into these conversations with good intentions and after about seven nanoseconds, you're off the rails. That's going to hell you stop seeing them as a human being. How do you stay present to that humanity in a conversation when there are all sorts of opportunities for you to opt out?

Jennifer (20:05):

Very good question, because there are a lot of highways and roads that light up where you can just hit it and run. I keep myself focused on what does he or she need? What does this person need right now? What does this person believe? I hear what the person is saying, but what underlying beliefs does this person have? What does he or she need? And I just keep staying right there until I can find out what the person needs. And many times I realized that the person, they might not be able to articulate their needs.

Jennifer (20:37):

It's like a doctor. When you go to the doctor and you say, "My nose is running, my eye is itching." and they say, "Oh, maybe you have COVID." "No, I don't. I have something else. I have cold." They practice medicine. But what happens with people is they talk in symptoms. And so, I have to practice humanity and



listen to the symptoms and say, "Okay, here's what you need." So, I just keep focused on the need. There is a need somewhere even if they don't articulate it.

MBS (21:07):

It's had to do this Jennifer, just you and one other person. But in your role at Capgemini, you're head of learning & development, talent & culture. So, knowing how important this book is to you, I imagine that you hold is a bigger goal going, "I want the culture at Capgemini to be like this. To have an ability for us to be out of the box longer, more of the time to increase the humanity of this organization." How do you think about scaling work like this?

Jennifer (21:39):

It all starts with me and our team and the belief that everybody owns the culture. So, sometimes people think culture change or transformation is this huge, or this big overhaul, like you do this page, change management program, but it's not. It's really about getting really good at pinpointing the day to day interactions. How do people get on day to day? How do they show up? What do they do throughout the day? How do they hold meetings? How do they create spaces or not? What things do they say? How do they hold meetings? And so, you start to get really good at noticing what it looks like and seeing those patterns. And you find a weak point in the system. You find a point where you can exploit and you start culture hacking. You start hacking it. So, I'll give you an example.

Jennifer (22:36):

When I first got there, I saw how some of the meetings with managers, the manager would have a team meeting and the manager would come on the meeting once a week and they would have a list and an agenda and able to, "We're going to go through these things, go down the list." And the whole team would just sit there and take notes and scribble and listen. It was almost like he



was lecturing birds how to fly, right? So, I'm like, "Dang, that's not going to work for me because I'm not hearing, I'm not lit, I don't see here debates. I don't hear ideas. I don't hear collaboration. I don't see people moving." So, that was something that happened all the time. So, I said, "Okay, we'll just tweak the meeting format." So, we tweaked it and every week somebody else leads a meeting and we have different rounds and do we do different things. So, it's like six rounds and each round everybody's in on it. You can decide to jump in or not. It literally overnight changed the behavior.

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MBS (23:32):
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That's great.

Jennifer (23:33):

So, I don't even have to be there. That's the goal.

MBS (23:37):

Well, I think that's really powerful, which is you have to think about what are the structural changes to shift a culture, to influence behavior, because it relies on you being there, it's not sustainable.

Jennifer (23:48):

Right.

MBS (23:50):

Jennifer, how do you think about building influence? Because IBM, you've been there 20 years. You just know a bunch of stuff and you know a bunch of people and you have the weight of your tenure and the power of your tenure there. So, at IBM, I'm just sure that you had influence by amongst other things, longevity. But when you move to a new organization and you're trying to influence



culture, but you don't yet have relationships, I'm wondering how you think about influence in that context.

Jennifer (24:31):

In IBM, it was a huge enterprise. So, there were places where I was foreign. People didn't know me even after 23 years. And the thing about it is people change. It's new people that come in. It's different structures and different business units. So, I took that same approach that I use if I were to go in a new business unit IBM and go in here. So, I really try to get a sense of what are the people saying on the ground? What are they experiencing? And also from a leadership perspective, when I sit in the leadership meetings, I think about what is not being said, right?

Jennifer (25:09):

I start really thinking about what is not being said and what do people really want to say, but they just don't have the courage. So, from day one, it's almost like, I feel like, well, I have a little pass, because I can say I'm new. So, I can ask some of those hard questions because I know they'll give you a pass. So, very quickly they realized that Jennifer is very courageous and she'll take some risk. I won't harm anybody, but I will ask provocative things that people want to ask, but they're just conditioned not to ask. So, I started building influence that way.

MBS (<u>25:47</u>):

Right. One of the things that you've touched on, and I know you have an opinion on is humility. And I think at the heart of getting out of the box, this Arbinger Institute concept around is how you regain that connection to the humanity of other people is through humility is through being connected to your own humanity. But I'm curious to know how you think about humility and how you think about making it a attribute that people can bring into their lives more.



Jennifer (26:21):

That's my favorite topic, intellectual humility. I think when you think about bias, sometimes we don't realize how much overconfident confidence bias plays a part. So, yeah. And so, humility is really about setting up the mental, your mindset to say, I have an imperfect view or knowledge about the world. So, I need to be more curious. I need to figure out what else can I learn? I don't know it all. What questions should I ask? What questions haven't I asked? So, it's really about a mindset of questioning and learning and just coming to terms like we don't know it all, really. If I rely on my past success, even like at IBM, I people know me for building a coaching culture, they call it, I don't call it a coaching culture. I call it coaching movement. I call it this applying, coaching the capability in a culture that's already there.

Jennifer (27:24):

So, people might know me for that. And they'll say, "Come do it again. Build it again." But if I rely on that overconfidence bias then I'm really being arrogant. I'm relying on something that may not work this time. It might be more complex. So, I have to ask more questions and I have to be more conscious about this might be different and most of the time it is. The context is different. The people are different. The goal is different. The time is different. What questions should I be asking instead of what direction should I be given?

MBS (<u>28:02</u>):

Now, at first to me that once you get on this path, it gets easier because you become more aware of your biases and you also become more aware of the things that you'd thought you knew, but you don't know. And the things that you didn't even know, you didn't know. So, there's a way that once you step through this door, it unlocks an ability to be humble because you're constantly humbled by, well, just how bad your advice is most of the time and that I can go on about this forever. But how do you help people who are a little blind to their



own brain-based limitations? How do you get them to take the first step towards intellectual humility?

Jennifer (28:46):

You give them what they ask for.

MBS (28:48):

Yeah.

Jennifer (28:49):

What I mean by that is sometimes people will say, "I want to do this. I want to take on this challenge. I can do this. I can do that." They'll just talk theirselves up. I'm saying, "Okay, do it. Have at it." So, literally it's like, you give them exactly what they want, but then you don't let them fall. You just coach them along the way. And so, what they come to realize is, "Wow. Maybe I wasn't ready. Maybe I need to..." So, they started to realize it for themselves. Instead of trying to protect them from it, is really just helping coaching them, given the situation where they can navigate. And then they will just come to terms with, "It's a lot of stuff. I miscalculated." That's one of the techniques I use.

MBS (29:32):

I love that. Jennifer it's been so wonderful talking to you. I've learned from and valued your experience, changing cultures, IBM Capgemini, and also the work you're doing. I know you're thinking of writing a book on, well, you're actually writing a book on cracking the code for humility, which I am excited to see when it makes its way out into the world. I actually, the question I ask at the end of this interview, you actually hinted at it just a few moments ago. So, I'm going to ask it to you explicitly, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me, Jennifer?



Jennifer (30:09):

Trust is how we grow. Trust is the key to human growth, human flourishing. Trust is everything when it comes to competitive advantage. Trust is a key to unlocking the culture you want. Nothing can happen without trust. So, I think if something was missing, it would be the power of trust in any culture, in any relationship in any company.

MBS (30:39):

Right. Trust is so fragile and easy to break and hard to regain. How do you nurture a sense of trust?

Jennifer (30:52):

I think about trust as where decisions get made. If I trust you, there are certain decisions that I acquiesce and you make. So, if I don't trust you then take all those decisions myself. So, I think about it as what kind of decisions am I creating a space for you to make?

MBS (31:20):

That's good. And when you create that trust and you give people the capacity and the responsibility to make those decisions, and they kind of screw it up either through inexperience or they on the other end of the spectrum, betray you miserably and horribly, how do you maintain an attitude of trust rather than shrink from it?

Jennifer (31:47):

I think about it as most of the things that people break it doesn't destroy the world. And I always think about is the world stopped? Did the world stop? I mean, I literally would tell my team, they'll be, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I messed up." And they'll just feel so bad, right?" And I said, "Did the world stopped?" They said, "No." I said, "Did the world break?" And they said, "No." I said, "Did you



break?" And they said, "No." I said, "That's the key. As long as you didn't break, we can make this work together. And then we overcome it." That's how I kind of approach it. If the world breaks or the world stops, then we got a problem. He used to, we got a problem. But most of the time I just err on, did it break the person? If it broke the person, it's going too far. But as long as it does not break that person, then we can overcome.

MBS (32:48):

I remember when I first read the Arbinger book that Jennifer read to us, honestly, I was a little conflicted. I mostly don't like fable stories where the teaching happens through some sort of elaborate story. I mean, I have a master's degree in literature. So, my standard for a good story and character and plot is pretty high and most fable stories fall way, way, way short. But honestly, this book grabbed me. I really remember reading. It wasn't even grabbing. It was more like jujitsu. I kept getting flipped up and over by it and its message at its heart, I think is really clear. And this is the point I'm taking from the conversation with Jennifer. It is so easy to lose sight of the humanity of that other person with whom you're interacting. Just doesn't take much to trigger you to put you back in your box.

MBS (<u>33:41</u>):

But when you do that, you lose sight of your own humanity. The way we nourish our own greatness therefore, is to stay open and present to the messy and frustrating and fabulous humanity of those all around us. You want to connect with Jennifer? You'll find her on LinkedIn. So, Jennifer Paylor, P-A-Y-L-O-R. And she has a website in the building of it. It's not quite there yet, but it's under construction at peopleengineer.com. And thank you as ever for listening to this podcast, 2 Pages with MBS, please join our free community. It's awesome. There's some great resources there, unreleased interviews, transcripts, downloads, some bonus material is named Duke Humphrey's, after



my favorite library at Oxford is Duke Humphrey's is the library where they kept all the really old, cool, ancient, amazing books. And I think you'll find some, maybe not quite as brilliant as the real Duke Humphrey's, but some helpful stuff.

MBS (34:41):

And of course the membership is absolutely free. And the podcast grows by word of mouth. If you're interested in culture, if you're interested in that blend between art and science that we heard from Jennifer, maybe there's somebody else in your life who could do with that insight around what it takes to shift a culture, what it takes to commit to coaching. If you can think of somebody, please let them know about the episode. I'd be grateful, they might be grateful too. And if you're so moved review and a piece of encouragement on your favorite podcast app, a star or five would be amazing. Thank you. You are awesome. And you're doing great.