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MBS ([00:00](#)):

It's one of the crazy making things for me about social change, that the people and the organizations who are doing the work of making the world better should live on scraps. That if you're doing this work, you should not only do good, but you should give your all. And yet this is a mindset that's endemic, both inside and outside the nonprofit and social change sectors. Look, I'm really not saying that being part of an NGO should be a route to being a millionaire, but surely the question is, what will fuel sustainable impact? And I don't think a scarcity mindset is going to enable that sustainable impact.

MBS ([00:44](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read two pages from a favorite book. I'm that MBS, Michael Bungay Stanier. And my guest today is Nell Edgington. She is an author and a speaker who has spent her



25 year career innovating in the social change sector. She's a champion for reinventing social change with abundance at its heart. But that doesn't mean it's thinking it's all Enya music and unicorn burbs. You have to start by seeing what's really going on.

Nell ([01:17](#)):

All of our systems are broken. The way money flows to people is broken. The way we take care of each other is broken, our healthcare systems, education systems. All of these systems are broken, and they're broken because we don't see each other as equal and we don't see a need to take care of each other as equals.

MBS ([01:37](#)):

I don't know if you've ever been part of the social change sector, but it really can wear on a person. You work tirelessly, only to see lackluster results and always this resistance, this real resistance to change. But it was in the election of 2016 when Nell had her own dark moment.

Nell ([01:55](#)):

I went to a really a dark place. I took a break from writing and speaking, and just kind of tried to find my way back to social change and the feeling like there was a positive momentum in the world. And I found Tara's book along with lots of other books, but hers was particularly resonant for me, because I felt like it was a call for all of us. She speaks particularly to women, but it's really, I think a call for all of us who feel compelled to create a better world to step into that leadership role.

MBS ([02:31](#)):

The author she references is Tara Mohr, and the book is *Playing Big*. And during her sabbatical Nell uncovered a startling truth about what was really standing in the way of getting herself back to the work she loved.



Nell ([02:45](#)):

No one else was in the way of the social change I wanted to create, only I was in my way. And so I started to, and I didn't have the answers when I came back from my sabbatical. Honestly, it took me many more years after that to really figure it all out and writing the book was part of that process. But I figured out nothing's standing in my way. Trump's not standing in my way, you know? Nothing's standing in my way, it's really my mindset. And so there was a shift that I needed to take. And honestly, it's from scarcity to abundance.

MBS ([03:19](#)):

From a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance, to tell us all about why that matters in the social change sector. But first, here's Nell Edgington reading from Tara Mohr's book, *Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create, and Lead*.

Nell ([03:40](#)):

"The past was a world defined, designed, and led by men. The future we hope will be a world defined, designed, and led by women and men. The present is the transition. Those of us born into this time, were born into a unique and remarkable historical moment. A moment of in-between. That means you and I and all the women we know, have in a sense been hired for a very important global transition team. When I give a talk, I often ask each woman to turn to the woman next to her, look her in the eye and say, 'You've been hired for the transition team.' And then I ask the women listening to really let that sink in. The historical moment we live in can feel so confusing. We are told things are mostly equal now, but the equality isn't translating into the results it should.

Nell ([04:32](#)):

Like a critical mass of women in leadership, girls feeling confident about themselves in their bodies, women being physically safe, walking down the street. When we understand our moment as one of a major transition that will



take decades to enact. And when we see ourselves as forgers of that transition things shift. We can focus on how we want to help move the transition forward, and we can feel less wounded and frustrated, but the myriad ways the transition is not yet complete. We can also feel honored and grateful to be alive at this transitional moment and to be stewards of it. Today women have access to participate in a public life, a professional life, and a political life that is not yet reflective of women's voices or women's ways of thinking, doing, and working. That means that as we participate in those realms, we'll often feel like outsiders, like strangers in a strange land. It's our job to not run away from that, but instead take up our small piece of the transition team's work, sharing our ideas, our voices, our callings, in a way that is authentic to us.

Nell ([05:43](#)):

By so doing we'll create a more balanced, sane culture, one reflective of both men's and women's voices. That means that whether you signed up for it or not, you will be a revolutionary. You will be a revolutionary because any woman who's being authentic in her work will bring forth ideas and ways of working that run counter to the status quo of her company, industry, community. A status quo defined by masculine values and masculine ways of working. You don't have to intend to be a change agent. When a woman truly begins playing big, according to what that means to her, she becomes one naturally. The tools you've learned on this journey can certainly help you succeed better in traditional ways within traditional systems. But they are most potent as tools to assist you in doing your transition teamwork. Let them strengthen your ability to be an agent of change.

Nell ([06:39](#)):

In the minds of women around the globe lie the seeds of the solutions to climate change, poverty, violence, corporate corruption. For me in the end, the bottom line is this, in millions of communities, organizations, companies, and families, women know what needs to be done. Playing big is doing it."



MBS ([07:00](#)):

That was a great call to action. And for me, what really spoke is this idea of actually not only are you on the transition team, but you are a revolutionary, that's what it means. I'm curious to know how that landed with you when you heard that which is like, actually now you're a revolutionary. Is that a label you're comfortable with, or does it kind of take a while to adjust to it? Or is it actually not one that you've taken on?

Nell ([07:30](#)):

Oh, I'm totally comfortable with it. I feel like I've always been a revolutionary. I mean, in high school I created a feminist group that was very controversial, but I've, at points in my life I have sort of stepped back from that sort of revolutionary change agent mode, because I got scared. And so when I found this book, I think I was in one of those moments where I was scared and I was stepping back and I didn't know, deer in the headlights. So to me it was very much a call to action, very much sort of a wake-up call to return to those revolutionary roots.

MBS ([08:11](#)):

This call to be a change agent, it's so important. It's so hard. I've tried to do change in various ways for 30 years myself. Like you I've had a career about that same thing. And I would say most of the stuff that I've tried to change hasn't changed that much. I've probably got more scars than I have trophies as part of this journey. What do you feel you know now about change and being a change agent, then that you might not have known before? What's wisdom that's become kind of apparent to you?

Nell ([08:50](#)):

Well, I think, first and most importantly what I kind of said, alluded to earlier, is that it starts with you. It starts internally. I think so often I see this with leaders I work with and I saw it in myself, I probably still do at times, is that change



happens out there. It's everyone else is messing up, that's why we've got all these problems in the world. But really, truly change starts with you. And so if you can take time to go inside and get your own stuff figured out, and then exude that kind of change out into the world, that for me has been transformational. You can just witness, even in a room, you can see the energy shift. If you can get your own energy figured out, you can really start to shift the energy in the room. And I do this with my clients in board meetings and other things. So I really think it starts internally and we need to stop sort of looking outside to see the change we want.

MBS ([09:59](#)):

So, how would you say that you're internally realigned or better or differently aligned to make that change? I mean, what shifted in you? I get that move into the darkness and then out of the darkness again, but how else have you shifted in terms of who you are as a person and as a woman doing this work so that you're better able to embody, as Gandhi says, "Be the change you want to see in the world." How have you shifted to be that change?

Nell ([10:30](#)):

Well, first of all, I would say it is an ongoing process. I'm absolutely a work in progress.

MBS ([10:36](#)):

Yes, indeed. I [inaudible 00:10:38] to that.

Nell ([10:41](#)):

And I would also say that it's taken me years to kind of come to this realization. And then it's a realization that I try to remember and put in practice every single day. But for starters, I just do great practical and tactical things, which is I give myself space every day. So I take an hour long walk every day. I meditate for 20 minutes every day, write in my journal every day. I read by myself before I go to sleep. I do things that create space and time for me to kind of reconnect with



that inner knowing or intuition or whatever you want to call it. And that's practice. And the days when I don't do those things, I completely see a shift back to kind of my old ways of stress and feeling the burdens of the world and all of those things.

MBS ([11:35](#)):

How do you balance that commitment to self-reflection, self-management, self-growth, self-care, all of that, with something that you said earlier, which is, "Our systems are broken." And I always struggle with this, trying to figure out, look, I get the power of self-development and self-growth and self-nurture, but I sometimes worry if what that means is we have a lot of individuals doing meditation and sleeping well and taking walks, and in doing so they're not actually putting their attention on how do we actually reinvent some of these fundamentally flawed systems that have structured our world in a way that doesn't promote abundance and equity?

Nell ([12:25](#)):

Yeah, so I agree with you. I think it's a balance. So, in my own case I do the self-reflection and the self-care and all of those things so that I can step into the arena by writing this book, by blogging and speaking. And I view my role as a change agent for the social change sector. I think my role is to call BS on things that I see going on in that particular sector. My role isn't to solve democracy or solve education or for any of those things. But I think-

MBS ([13:01](#)):

Well, both of those, you can knock both of those off in the next couple of years, that would be awesome, yeah.

Nell ([13:06](#)):

Yeah, no problem. But really, I see my role as sort of peeking at a particular system. In my case it's the social change sector, so how we fund and support efforts to fix these other broken systems. My role is to demonstrate where



that's gone wrong to places we are focusing on scarcity instead of abundance. Places where we're not doing equitable, treating things equitably. So it's that, I think it's really the combination of the two, the self-care, the self-reflection, that allows you to then step into the arena. And then when it gets really rough, you go back to the self-care and then you go back in again.

MBS ([13:50](#)):

So what is it that drives you nuts about the social change sector at the moment? I'm sure after 25 years you saw some things that make you go, "Okay, we've got to sort this out."

Nell ([14:01](#)):

So much, but honestly, fundamentally the people that are working in the social change sector for the most part are amazing people. They have these tremendous visions for a better world. They believe in equity. They believe in a healthy planet, all of these very admirable things, yet they are held back both by themselves and by the inequitable structures, the way, for example, the way we fund social change is so broken. The idea of treating it as a charity where you just kind of throw pennies at these massive social problems. That in and of itself is just so, so broken. So that's a big thing that I focus on is, let's get money flowing to social change the way it flows to Amazon and Facebook and all these other places.

MBS ([14:54](#)):

So I know that part of your book is resetting relationship with money. Is that something you had to do yourself in terms of coming to grips with how money works in your life before you then took it into that social change sector?

Nell ([15:10](#)):

Absolutely. And again, still a work in progress. I mean, I think we all suffer from the scarcity mindset, particularly in our own finances. It's money is a scary thing. And so, yes, I often say, "I wrote this book to myself first, and then it's a gift to



the sector as well." But all of the things that I talk about, how you need to shift that mindset, I have to repeat them to myself all the time I go back and read sections. Oh yeah, that's what I'm supposed to be doing.

MBS ([15:42](#)):

Exactly. You write the book that we need to read.

Nell ([15:45](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([15:46](#)):

So what have you learned about abundance?

Nell ([15:49](#)):

First of all, that it's possible. So I grew up, like I think a lot of people did, having no idea, the concept of abundance. Like what is this thing? So I grew up very much steeped in the idea of scarcity. So first of all, that it's possible. And then second of all, that it's there for you if you just start to shift your belief that it's possible. And if you start to shift that belief and start to move your actions towards that, abundance will come to you. And it's actually quite easy once you start to move in that direction. I had a client few years ago that came to me. They were really struggling, national membership organization. They had only three staff. They had almost gone out of business a couple of years prior to that. They knew they wanted to be doing more in their space, but they just struggle to kind of move forward. They were very much stuck.

Nell ([16:53](#)):

So I worked with them. I did an overall assessment and kind of laid it out for them essentially how they were completely stuck in scarcity. They refused to invest in the organization. They refused to do things differently in terms of fundraising and to think about their work in a much bigger way. They refused to even invest in a strategic plan. And a strategic plan, at least in my world, is a big



key to abundance. Because if you can chart a future course that you're really excited about it, get other people excited about it, abundance flows to that.

Nell ([17:29](#)):

So they were hesitant to kind of do any of those things. So I worked with them over a couple of years. Finally got them to create a strategic plan. They got very excited about it, did some coaching after that. And now they are in a place, they're about to move to close to 12 staff members, they've tripled their budget. And most importantly, they just have a much bigger impact on the space that they're in. And it's just really exciting to watch. And it's all because they were willing to make that shift from scarcity to abundance, to really start to invest in themselves, to think bigger, to believe that it was possible.

MBS ([18:10](#)):

I mean, that insight around investing in yourself. I mean, I'm not part of the sector, but I kind of watch it a little bit. And one of the more pernicious measurements I feel is like, how much of my donation goes to the cause and how much is used to run the organization? There's always that, let's find the organization that costs the least to run. Is that actually the best metric? Because investing in your organization then increases capacity and courage and ambition. So an investment there plays off in the longer run, how do you support people to make the investment in themselves?

Nell ([18:57](#)):

I will say it's challenging. There has to be some sort of opening there. There has to be a willingness, and often I think it's that people and organizations have to get to such a point that they finally surrender and say, "You know what? The status quo, the way we've been doing this, is just not going to work anymore. There's got to be a better way." And just that slight shift of thinking, "Maybe there's something else," that can start to open the door to abundance. But when you are so stuck, when you are so resistant to doing things differently, then I think you're going to stay there.



MBS ([19:35](#)):

Yeah. One of the things that, from the two pages that you read is Tara Mohr is talking about, "Welcome to a transition team." This is exciting. We're in this moment of change. In the past is institutions that aren't influenced by women's actions and women's thinking, and women's kind of moral compass. And in the future lies a system where it's a shared stage, shared power, shared influence in terms of structures that reflect both men and women's thinking, that's what I heard in the two pages you read, but it's in the future. And it's like, it's not, we're not talking 2024 when this gets sorted out. So part of what I heard when I heard you read those two pages is, this transition team is a bit of a long-term commitment. It's not got a short-term payoff. How do you build resilience to keep doing this work now? I mean, I'm curious what nourishes you and keeps you going, knowing that there's not an easy win in the near term around some of this bigger stuff?

Nell ([20:51](#)):

Probably the biggest thing is my clients, the people I work with, and just the other social change leaders I see out there. I mean, these are some of the most passionate, committed, selfless people. And so to me, they're honestly, they're the model. I mean, I have worked with people that have been doing the work they've been doing for 20, 30, 40 years. And in times where we weren't even close to even the transition part of the work. Where they were just slogging through, just because they simply knew this had to get done, right? And so that to me is incredibly inspiring. And so when I get frustrated, "What is going, when is this stuff going to change?" I looked at people like that, and historical figures as well, who are dead. So they're not going to see the transition for sure. But they laid the groundwork for where we are now and for the progress that we've already made. So that's, I guess that's what inspires me.



MBS ([22:03](#)):

Do you have any kind of role models from the past who you look to and go, "This person and the way that they did their thing or lived their lives," that you're kind of drawn upon or you look to?

Nell ([22:18](#)):

Yeah. So, I mean, I have very public inspirational figures like Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King and things like that. But then I have also very quiet sort of behind the scenes inspirational folks. One of my favorite people in the world is Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who was the wife-

MBS ([22:36](#)):

I don't know who this person is.

Nell ([22:38](#)):

She's the wife of Charles Lindbergh, the first in flight. No one really knows much about her, but she was a phenomenal writer, she wrote many books, was also a pilot. She was copilot with him on a lot of his flights, kind of charting the airline flights now, the modern airline patterns. But she also kept voluminous diaries and letters. And so she's got five volumes of these. But she's just a really very thoughtful woman that sort of struggled with this public private role, struggled with, she also had five children while she was a writer and did all these other things. And so she just is just an amazing person who just was able to do so many things and just, I find her incredibly inspiring and no one really knows much better.

MBS ([23:33](#)):

I love that. I've never heard of her before. Obviously Charles Lindbergh I've heard of, but not Anne Morrow Lindbergh, is that her name?

Nell ([23:40](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.



MBS ([23:41](#)):

Yeah. So what do you draw from her that you could have taken to the way that you think about, or manage your own life?

Nell ([23:50](#)):

Well she, mostly I love her diaries and letters, because you get such a personal understanding of her struggles. And I feel like her struggles mirror mine so much, because she went back and forth between her private family life and then her kind of her public roles and the things that she was trying to create in the world, all the books and things that she was trying to do. And the struggle between them and always wondering, "Am I doing enough? Is this good enough? Am I a good enough mother? Am I a good enough writer? Am I a good enough public figure, kind of things I'm trying to accomplish?" And just this constant struggle, constant sort of self-effacing, challenging herself and her role, I just find it very comforting, because I have all of those same kind of internal conversations and to see someone else have it there, but at the same time to be so inspired by that woman, it's kind of comforting.

MBS ([24:49](#)):

So now, how do you, what are you ambitious for now? I mean, it's wonderful to have a book out in the world. I've actually got it with me here in Australia, because I looked at it on the plane on the flight here. And in a sense it's a milestone in itself where you kind of pop a bottle of champagne and go, "This is amazing. I've got a book out in the world." I know that journey because I've walked it myself a few times. So I know just what an accomplishment it is to have a book out in the world, it's a big thing. But I'm curious to know now how you, what ambition you claim for yourself?

Nell ([25:29](#)):

Well, so I wrote the book to start a conversation in the sector. As I said, I feel that I'm a change agent for the social change sector. One of many, I think there



are many kindred spirits of mine, but so I think my role going forward is to get the message of the book to be absorbed by the sector. And so I totally understand, everybody's not going to read my book. Probably not even a ton of people are going to read my book. So it's up to me through speaking and trainings and all the other things to take that content, take that message and help people access it in whatever way works for them. So that's kind of my next journey.

MBS ([26:12](#)):

Yeah, and if you were to point to two or three things that you're like, "Okay, the overall message," I mean, the title is Reinventing Social Change, and the subtitle, which is kind of the core message, I guess, Embrace Abundance to Create a Healthier and More Equitable World. If you were to give me then like, okay, what are the three key ways that I might think about doing that for people who are like, "Okay, I haven't read the book yet, but maybe I should." What are the three key messages that come through from the book?

Nell ([26:42](#)):

So, the first is to recognize that you are far more powerful than you think you are, and to really start to step into that power, embrace it. And that goes back to what I was talking about earlier is like, find the power within, kind of center within, that's where change starts. The second thing is to make money your friend. I think so often in social change sector we despise money. We fear it. We just have this weird-

MBS ([27:11](#)):

We kind of bad mouth it.

Nell ([27:14](#)):

Yeah, very dysfunctional relationship with money, but money is an incredible tool for social change. So you really want to embrace that and get super cozy with money. And then the third thing is to mobilize your networks. I think so



often social change leaders isolate themselves and just put the whole burden on their own backs. But there are so many people out there, both inside your organizations, but then outside in the world that want to help, that believe in your mission and want to see it move forward, but you need to access them, direct them, embrace them, all of those things. And so it's how you mobilize those networks for the change you want to see.

MBS ([27:55](#)):

So can you tell me a time when you mobilized your network for greater effect, or maybe you helped a client do the same?

Nell ([28:04](#)):

Oops, sorry. Yeah, so I worked with a client in the democracy space. It's a space I work in a lot here in the U.S., how we create a stronger democracy and all the things that go into that. So I worked with an organization that was a single organization that had a mission related to a stronger democracy, but like so many organizations really kind of isolated themselves, felt the burden, the competition for funding, all of those things that kind of isolate nonprofit organizations. And worked with them to map the external networks out there, who they could tap into, who had similar missions, who the funders were, who partners were, influencers, policymakers, all of those sorts of things, and created a strategy to start to tap into those.

Nell ([28:58](#)):

And really it's as simple as picking up the phone, getting in front of people, reaching out, saying, "Here's what we're trying to accomplish. Where do you see some overlaps with your work? How can we be helpful to you? How can you be helpful to us?" And just kind of doing the work of creating that network. And it's amazing to see how that transforms this organization. Now they have this partners in all kinds of different arenas, different sectors, greater funding, all of these things happen when you start to see the world out there as potential



partners and collaborators, as opposed to competitors and fearful of them, et cetera.

MBS ([29:41](#)):

It's very interesting, this idea of activating your network. I think this happens at scale for so many of us individually and for our organizations as well, which is, we just don't tap into the people that we know. And you get to a certain age, like I'm now, I'm not old, but I'm not young anymore either. And I'm like, "I think that I know a bunch of people, and I know if I don't know them directly, I know how to get to them."

MBS ([30:09](#)):

And I was talking to a friend of mine just over the weekend. And he's in a career change, he's quite senior in a newspaper. And he's like, "I don't know how to do this, what to think about it." I'm like, "So correct me if I'm wrong, but don't we both mutually know a brilliant executive coach, a brilliant CEO who's in that role, so you can understand what that role looks like? This person, that person." And he's like, "Oh yeah, I think I do know this people." "Yeah, you do. We went to school together with them."

MBS ([30:42](#)):

And I'm thinking, if he as a person who holds lots of privileged cards around being white and male and straight and cis and successful and financed finds it hard to tap into his network, how hard it must be for others to actually go, "I have permission to reach out and ask for help and make connections."

Nell ([31:08](#)):

Absolutely. And that's really the key hurdle, I think, is the asking for help, because we all feel, I think there's such an ethos in Western culture to, we can do it alone. We're independent, we don't need to ask for help. And it's really, the opposite is true. As soon as you open yourself up to help, as soon as you say, "Hey, can we meet? Can we sort of share or find opportunities for partnership or



that sort of thing?" As soon as you do that, magic happens. That abundance really can flow.

MBS ([31:46](#)):

Tell me a story about that. Was there a moment when you or somebody, your were kind of, made that bold recap for help and it made a real difference?

Nell ([31:55](#)):

Well, I'll tell you, I am being forced to do that right now with my book. Because, and it's hard. Again, I'm a work in progress. It's hard to, so I'm sending individual emails to people in my network, "Hey, I just wanted to let you know, I just wrote a book. Here's what it's about. Would love to find opportunities to partner. Here's some ideas, let's talk." And it's so scary to send each one of those emails or calls or whatever it is. But it's amazing what I get back from that. I've been invited on all kinds of different podcasts and webinars and invited to do [inaudible 00:32:38] and all kinds of things. And it's phenomenal, but every single time it's scary to put yourself out there and to ask for help.

MBS ([32:52](#)):

At mbs.works, that's the home of this podcast and things like our membership site, The Conspiracy. Our goal is to help people be a force for change. So know why I really enjoyed this conversation. I mean, I'm just certain that if we have more people doing more in big ways and small to help make this world be more fair, more equal, more inclusive, and more human, then that's the arc of history bending towards justice. But justice can feel a long way off at times. And that's why in this conversation the idea of a transition team really struck a chord for me. You might not identify as a revolutionary, or an activist, or a change agent, but I hope you could sign up to be part of a transition team. I hope in the words of Jacqueline Novogratz, "You can find your way to give more to the world than you take."



MBS ([33:48](#)):

You can find out more about Nell and the work she does at socialvelocity.net. It's .net, not.com, socialvelocity.net. And she is on Twitter [@nedgington](#). It's [@N-E-D-G-I-N-G-T-O-N](#). And thank you for listening to 2 Pages with MBS. Look, I'm hoping you're enjoying these podcasts episodes. I love producing them. There's a ton of work that's being put into them, but here's the thing. If you're not part of our free membership community, you're missing out on some of it. You're missing out on transcripts. You're missing out on free episodes or unreleased episodes. Why is it called the Duke Humfrey's you might ask? Well, it's named after my favorite Oxford library. I went to Oxford University and people spoke of Duke Humfrey's with a whispered breath, because that's where the really important, the really ancient, the really beautiful books were. You'll find our Duke Humfrey's at mbs.works/podcast.

MBS ([34:48](#)):

And a podcast grow best by word of mouth. So if my conversation with Nell has struck a chord with you, if you can think of one other person who might be thinking, "Yeah, I need abundance. Yeah, I'm interested in being on a transition team. Yes, I'd like to be nourished by my work in social change. Yes, I'd like to be a force for change." Then let them know about the episode. Pass the word along if you wouldn't mind. More subscribers means I get more leverage to try and invite cool people to the show. And if I get cool guests, well, we all win. And of course, if you get a chance to rate and review our podcast, is what all of us podcasts hosts desperately want, affirmation. We have fragile egos. So if you go to your favorite podcast app and give us some stars, write something nice, that would be marvelous.