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MBS ([00:01](#)):

What is it about going on a cruise, being in the lap of luxury and ease, having our every need attended to that is so enchanting? And what about the advent of next day shipping from Amazon and others, that has made us so very impatient. I can't wait 48 hours for that thing. What does that mean for us as a culture? What does this mean for us and our happiness? Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book. And today's guest is one of the five people who've most influenced my life. So no pressure here. Dr. Shannon Minifie, is the CEO of Box of Crayons, which is the learning and development company that I founded some 20 years ago. She is a brilliant leader, a strategic thinker, someone I trust deeply and really admire without reservation.



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

I mean, she's leading this company that I started. It's like handing over a child to somebody. And Shannon is the best person for exactly that. We actually met talking books. She was working behind the bar of my favorite local pizzeria. I sat at the bar with my wife and were eating pizza, we got to talking and pretty quickly we just started geeking out on books. So of course, having her come as a guest on this podcast, I was keen to see who she would choose. She reads really broadly. I was like, "Okay, who's it going to be?" And in some ways it was predictable, Shannon chose not lightly. She chose the author she wrote her PhD dissertation on, David Foster Wallace. Now *Infinite Jest* is Wallace's best known book. It's a 1096 pages long with the final 100 or so of those pages being just footnotes. So this is literally and metaphorically, a weighty book. It's not really a book you carry around with you, unless you're Shannon Minifie.

Shannon ([02:04](#)):

You don't leave the house if you're reading *Infinite Jest*. I actually, I solved that problem. I don't have the book next to me, but I solved that problem by tearing it into thirds and then separating. I know the people who don't like tearing books are going to hate me for that, but I tore it into thirds and then also tore off the footnotes. And I carried around the relevant sections.

MBS ([02:24](#)):

Getting through those 1000 plus pages, turned out to be something of a portal for Shannon. Shannon was about to begin a graduate degree when she learned that the person who would have been her supervisor, passed away. And of course that's crushing emotionally, but Shannon also had to change her own plans about her topic for her master's degree. And actually it was about this time that David Foster Wallace committed suicide.



Shannon ([02:46](#)):

I went into one of their offices and I was like, "I have this idea about how Alcoholics Anonymous works in Infinite Jest." And immediately, they were like, "You need to write about this, because you've already read the book and that's half the battle, because everyone's going to go and read Wallace now because he's died. And the book's 1100 pages, so start writing." And that's how I ended up making a huge change in direction. And then, I went on to do a doctorate. So I ended up writing about Wallace for over a decade.

MBS ([03:13](#)):

Now, Infinite Jest, isn't the Wallace book that Shannon chose for today's episode. Instead she chose an essay collection. And she's reading from the first, the centerpiece essay. Wallace was sent to write a review of a seven day cruise experience. And that might sound like a jaunt, but it was never going to be that for Wallace.

Shannon ([03:35](#)):

He takes the seemingly simple assignment and he turns it into a very long, the essay is over 100 pages long, and takes hours to read. But often humorous and also dark reflection on what he ends up seeing as an insatiable and infantile need for gratification in American culture. And in an attempt to deny the reality of our own mortality.

MBS ([04:00](#)):

So from what is supposed to be a fun, relaxing assignment on a cruise ship to reflecting on mortality, that's the journey Shannon took with Wallace. So let's get to it. Here's Dr. Shannon Minifie reading two pages from, and I love the title of this essay, A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again, by David Foster Wallace



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

Celebrity cruise line, seven night cruise brochure, uses the second person pronoun throughout. This is extremely appropriate, because in the brochures scenarios, the seven night cruise experience is being not described, but evoked. The brochures real seduction is not an invitation to fantasize, but rather a construction of the fantasy itself. This is advertising, but with a queerly authoritarian twist. In regular adult market ads, attractive people are shown having a near illegally good time in some scenario surrounding a product. And you're meant to fantasize that you can project yourself into the ads perfect world via purchase of that product.

Shannon ([05:05](#)):

In regular advertising, where your adult agency and freedom of choice have to be flattered, the purchase is prerequisite to the fantasy. It's the fantasy that's being sold, not any literal projection into the ads world. There's no sense of any real kind of actual promise being made. This is what makes conventional adult advertisements, fundamentally coy. Contrast this coyness with the force of the seven night cruise brochures ads, the near imperative use of the second person, the specificity of detail that extends to what you will say.

Shannon ([05:37](#)):

You will say, "I couldn't agree more." And, "Let's do it all." In the cruise brochures ads you're excused from doing the work of constructing the fantasy. The ads do it for you. The ads therefore, don't flatter your adult agency, or even ignore it, they supplant it. And this authoritarian, near parental type of advertising, makes a very special sort of promise. A diabolically seductive promise that's actually kind of honest because it's a promise that the luxury cruise itself is all about honoring. The promise is not that you can experience great pleasure, but that you will. That they'll make certain of it. That they'll micromanage every iota of every pleasure option so that not even the dreadful, corrosive action of your adult consciousness, and agency, and dread can fuck up your fun. Your troubles





and capacities for choice, error, regret, dissatisfaction, and despair will be removed from the equation.

Shannon ([06:31](#)):

The ad's promise that you will be able, finally for once, truly to relax and have a good time because you will have no choice, but to have a good time. And there's a footnote. Your pleasure, several mega lines slogans go, is our business. What in a regular ad would be a double entendre is here a triple entendre, and the tertiary connotation is, mind your own bloody business and let us professionals worry about your pleasure for Christ's sake. And it's far from incidental. Return to the main tact. I'm now 33 years old, and it feels like much time has passed and is passing faster and faster every day. Day to day, I have to make all sorts of choices about what is good, and important, and fun. And then I have to live with the forfeiture of all the other options, those choices foreclose.

Shannon ([07:17](#)):

And I'm starting to see how as time gains moment, my choices will narrow and their foreclosures multiply exponentially until I arrive at some point on some branch of all life sumptuous, branching complexity at which I'm finally locked in and stuck on one path, and time speeds me through stages of stasis, and atrophy, and decay until I go down for the third time, all struggle for not, drowned by time. It's dreadful, but since it's my own choices that will lock me in, it seems unavoidable.

Shannon ([07:45](#)):

If I want to be any kind of grown-up, I have to make choices, and regret foreclosures, and try to live with them. Not so on the lush and spotless MV Nader. On a seven night cruise luxury cruise, I pay for the privilege of handing over to trained professionals, responsibility not just for my experience, but for my interpretation of that experience, i.e. my pleasure. My pleasure is for seven nights and 6.5 days wisely and efficiently managed just as promised in the cruise lines advertising, Nate, just to somehow already accomplished in the ads



with their second person imperatives, which make them not promises, but predictions. Aboard the Nader just as ringingly foretold in the brochures climactic page 23, I get to do, in gold writing something you haven't done in a long, long time.

Shannon ([08:34](#)):

Absolutely nothing. How long has it been since you did absolutely nothing? I know exactly how long it's been for me. I know how long it's been since I had every need met choicelessly from someplace outside me, without my having to ask or even acknowledge that I needed. And that time I was floating too. And the fluid was salty and warm, but not too. And if I was conscious at all, I'm sure I felt dreadless, and was having a really good time, and would have sent postcards to everyone, wishing they were here.

MBS ([09:10](#)):

That's fantastic Shannon, beautifully read. Thank you. And such a powerful piece.

Shannon ([09:15](#)):

He's fun.

MBS ([09:17](#)):

I'm guessing that the thing that brought you to that piece was not because you love carnival cruisers and big boats, it was something else. So what's the idea that kind of blew your head off and changed your life that was contained in that passage for you?

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

Yeah. I'll talk about the idea of one second. The choosing of the piece. I was like, I want to choose a piece that ticks some Wallace boxes.



MBS ([09:37](#)):

Yeah.

Shannon ([09:38](#)):

So it's got to have some footnotes because it's like lots of critics, including my friend, Steven Guy have written about the way in which Wallace's footnoting changed the blogosphere, has changed a lot of online writing. He's responsible for this voice he left in our heads, has changed a lot of that kind of writing. So I wanted something that caught that, and the sort of maximalism. He also has a tendency to sort of get into minute detail of the subculture, which wasn't totally in that passage. But you see it a little bit in his, the carnival seven night cruise luxury cruise. The repetition, which he usually says sic, if it's a repetition that he's doing, and he's like calling out the grammatical error.

MBS ([10:23](#)):

Sick as in S-I-C not S-I-C-K?

Shannon ([10:27](#)):

You got it. Yeah exactly.

MBS ([10:29](#)):

[crosstalk 00:10:29]. This is how they wrote it, not how I wrote it.

Shannon ([10:31](#)):

You got it. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So that kind of redundancy. So I wanted to choose something that sort of captured that kind of... That just captured those sort of aspects of his writing, from top to bottom. So the ideas.

MBS ([10:46](#)):

Right.



Shannon ([10:47](#)):

So the idea in here that I was interested in when I wrote it and that I remained interested in for years and I remain interested in now is, it's basically the idea of temporal finitude. If we know we're going to die and we do, how does that affect how we choose to live? And if we're denying death and everything we do is about denying facing that reality, how does that shape the way we spend our time and the way that we live? And the how those questions, or that topic leads to this idea, which he gets at in this passage a bit, and even more so by the end of the very long essay. This idea of this paradox of liberating constraint. So what it means to be an adult is to have constraints, and restraint, and not just to infantilly want and satisfy our needs as though that is the only reality.

MBS ([11:53](#)):

Yeah. Kind of think about where I want to press into there, because it's like-

Shannon ([11:56](#)):

Yeah. The big ideas.

MBS ([12:02](#)):

Exactly, it's like the, what is existence? What is a life well lived? Actually, I can ask you this because I wasn't expecting your answer where you started off by going, this talks about our time on this planet is short. What are you going to do with that? And I didn't read that so much. I didn't hear that so much in the passage. Where do you find that in the passage? Or is it just more generally in his writing?

Shannon ([12:28](#)):

No. Well, it's more pervasive in the entire essay, but the idea is... The idea that's highlighted in this particular passage is that the cruise ship is selling a lie. And the lie that it's selling you is that you, by having every desire and need met, in a way that's described, your troublesome capacities for choice, error, regret, dissatisfaction will somehow allow us to reach that level of not Nirvana, but it



will allow us to overcome dread of death. So that all of this activity on the cruise ship, all of this frenetic activity, is about not paying attention to the bad part of being alive, which is that, without any doubt at all, I'm going to die. And so that the part of what the lie is of the cruise ship is that taking away that choice and taking away that confrontation makes us feel better instead of worse. Because what Wallace feels is worse for denying that reality, instead of embracing it.

MBS ([13:46](#)):

And of course the cruise ship isn't just the cruise ship. It feels like-

Shannon ([13:51](#)):

No it's life.

MBS ([13:51](#)):

... The cruise ship is, this is life. This is the world that's being constructed around us, which is to remove agency, and to flatter us, and to infantilize us, to make us feel better. But in fact, to give up our agency, which will make us feel worse.

Shannon ([14:08](#)):

Exactly. Yeah.

MBS ([14:09](#)):

How do you bring that idea into the way you live your life Shannon? Because there are forces against us that are keen for us not to actually kind of grasp our agency. I'm curious to know how it shows up in actually a lived life.

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

I'm not a disciple of Wallace's, so not taking this and putting it into immediate action in that way. But I think that there is, at the time that I was reading this, I was unmarried, I was headed to live stateside. I didn't know what I might do, or where I might go? I had a lot of friends were just traveling around the world, getting pass out drunk in Thailand, just doing their big travel thing.



MBS ([15:00](#)):

Yeah.

Shannon ([15:01](#)):

And a lot of friends who were like, for whom there was an allure about just chasing the next fun thing and not having a lot of commitments. As though, being committed to things starts to put this box around you and becomes constitutive of our identity in ways that people don't like. They want that kind of, they want that freedom. And I think that the older I get-

MBS ([15:31](#)):

So when you start saying that, isn't it, now that I'm an old person. Yeah.

Shannon ([15:33](#)):

Yeah. It's the commitments we have and the ways in which we are beholden to people that gives me name, rather than the absence of that stuff. And I know he's not quite, he's not going there, now we're over here on how does Shannon jump off and think about this.

MBS ([15:51](#)):

Exactly.

Shannon ([15:51](#)):

But I do think that there are... Like he says, like he does say in that passage, that part of being an adult is making decisions, which foreclose other options. It's also, he's also brilliantly describing what a good strategy is, which is I can't do all the things. I'm going to commit to these things, and they're going to lead me down these paths, and those will be good paths or there'll be paths, but I can't be everywhere at once. So I think actually in my work, I think about that as well, that there is something about being strategic and being adult in the way that he describes that resonates.



MBS ([16:39](#)):

I mean, you're the CEO of Box of Crayons. And I know that part of the commitment at Box of Crayons is we try and live internally in our own culture, what we try and teach to our corporate clients, which is around curiosity at the heart of the work that we do. But that's in part to drive an ability to make better choices. I'm wondering how you help bring this commitment to... And I think the language you use at Box of Crayons is adult to adult relationships, like clarity and ownership of the choices that you make, how do you help bring that into a culture? I mean, you role model it in part, but how do you hold a culture to that standard? Because it's a high standard.

Shannon ([17:26](#)):

Yeah. Internally at Box of Crayons, it's intention with another one of our values around generosity. So the be generous value is all about assuming positive intent. And the cultivate adult to adult relationships value that you just talked about, is about for us radical candor. So we use Kim Scott's work about, "It's not mean, it's clear," in order to have those kinds of tough conversations, and help each other own and be accountable for decisions you make and actions that we take.

MBS ([18:08](#)):

And how do you, I guess I'm going to say maybe calm people down around the tension, meaning the conflict that arises in those moments, because it's one thing to go look, retro. Kendra is great. And you read Kim Scott's book on that. And you're like, "Yeah, I'd love to do that." But what that means is having to be present with anger, and sadness, and frustration, and confusion, and lost ness. And that's just on your side of the table, who knows what's happening over on the other side of the table. I'm wondering how you create a place that feels safe enough for that to work. Because one of the criticisms I've heard of Kim's Scott's work is, it works really well in some cultures, but it doesn't actually work in a culture where it's overly hierarchical or fear-based or whatever it might be.





Shannon ([19:05](#)):

Yeah. So it's a work in progress, but I think that the thing that's needed is pretty strong psychological safety and trust among the team. So yeah, if you trust that the people are interrogating the question, and so being curious about the question, and being curious about what happened, not looking to place blame, then I think that being radically candid, and being direct with each other and precise in our speech when we're being direct, is that that works. It works well, but you need to build up that kind of trust.

Shannon ([19:44](#)):

So if someone's brand new to the organization, you need some time to build relationship in order to be that way. But what you said about... Oh, I thought of something else Michael, about, oh yeah, about tension, about things being in tension with one another and being hard, the hardness is the thing that matters. Going back to Wallace's text, right?

MBS ([20:04](#)):

Right.

Shannon ([20:04](#)):

If it's easy, like lying, getting burnt on the 15th deck of the Nader-

MBS ([20:12](#)):

Ordering a 15th margarita on the 15th deck of the boat. Yeah.

Shannon ([20:16](#)):

Exactly, exactly. I mean, go and read the whole 100 page essay, what ends up happening, but yeah. Yeah. I was more so speaking to your listeners.

MBS ([20:25](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.



Shannon ([20:27](#)):

So yeah. So you might remember that what ends up happening is that he boards this ship being like, "Oh me, I've never even been on the ocean." Because he hasn't. And then by the end, he sees how the expectation of getting spoiled and of things being easy, only primes him to expect and want easier things. And so that, like you can think about a lot of smaller examples, even just how convenient things have become, right?

MBS ([20:56](#)):

Right.

Shannon ([20:56](#)):

So it's like now that Amazon can get me something here tomorrow, it's like nothing is fast enough for me. We just get more, and more, and more impatient. And he has this really funny interlude near the end where they park at one of their various destinations next to a way fancier luxury cruise ship. And he says that he imagines doing a William T. vole Minish move of jumping over the deck in like a amazing journalistic feet to that other boat. But what he's doing is he's like, well, it seems way better over there. I bet their mints are bigger. I bet that the food is better. I bet everything's better over there.

Shannon ([21:31](#)):

And so what it starts to do is make you resent where you are. And so part of being adult and part of not always chasing some maybe better thing that's been sold to me is like, I'm content right here.

MBS ([21:46](#)):

Right.

Shannon ([21:47](#)):

And I know that's what being sold to me over there is somehow better, is a lie. And back to the tensions thing, like things that are easy like aren't real and



they're not worth it. The reason that the values are hard and have tension is because they require deliberation and intention to perform.

MBS ([22:12](#)):

Yeah. It's interesting. Isn't it? I mean, it comes back to so many classical philosophies from stoicism onwards, which is around stay present to what truly makes you happy. What truly satisfies you. Stay present to the hard choices and live a better life. And it feels paradoxical to say it like that. But as you talk about this, Shannon, I think about some of the psychological literature. And there's one term, this idea of a satisfiser. [inaudible 00:22:37] what the other term is called, but a satisfiser, there is a person who is content, makes a choice and sits in contentment with that choice.

Shannon ([22:48](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MBS ([22:48](#)):

And the way I think about it and the way it's changed my life, it's a really small way, but it helps, is when you go to a restaurant and you open a menu, as soon as you see a dish that you go, that sounds good enough, you close the menu and go, that's what I'm going to have. Rather than keeping caught in agonies around, "I don't know, should it be the fish, or should it be the vegetarian curry, or should it be something else?" And there's just great literature that says, you are happier with that contentment in your choices rather than that, "Yeah. But I could have a even more expensive bottle of wine." Or "I could have a cigar with the expensive bottle of wine watching the sunset on the even bigger cruise ship." And chasing that pleasure principle is a finite game that you can only lose.

Shannon ([23:36](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah. And, yeah, I learned that from you. We've dined together enough times that remember you doing that and I've stolen that. I think you talked about, and this is apropos of the Wallace piece too, in terms of choice. It's



possible to be just being overwhelmed but, we both don't want overwhelmed choice and we don't want choice taken away from us so that we're just like in Euro, how he describes at the end. I think you also mentioned like Obama, only wore, just wears white shirts. I'm not going to think about it. I'm just going to wear a white shirt every day.

MBS ([24:13](#)):

Yeah. It's like, I've got grey suits, white shirts and blue ties and that his-

Shannon ([24:18](#)):

That's it.

MBS ([24:19](#)):

So he never has to think about his clothing choice. I'm not prepared to go down that path. I like my clothing choice, so that brings me pleasure.

Shannon ([24:26](#)):

Yeah. That's okay. But also on the pleasure, like happy life thing, there's a... And because you brought up a curiosity, there's a Todd Kashdan who I think was at George Mason and writes about curiosity. His argument basically is that the key to a good life is not happiness, but curiosity.

MBS ([24:46](#)):

Yeah. I love that. And Todd's going to be one of the guests on this podcast, so he'll be coming on soon I hope.

Shannon ([24:51](#)):

Very cool.

MBS ([24:54](#)):

I hope. So I'm excited about that. Shannon, how about part of what Wallace says really explicitly in the passage you read out, which is like, and I'm



paraphrasing, you'll probably have the right words, but it's like when you make a choice, you're being an adult and it comes with attendant grief, and loss, and sadness, and guilt, and anxiety about making the choice because you are committing to something. And in doing that, in committing to something, you are eliminating other options, you're not able to keep your options open when you make a choice.

Shannon ([25:24](#)):

That's right.

MBS ([25:25](#)):

And people are probably listening to that and going, yeah, that's true. And also in the corporate world where you and I spend a lot of time, most organizations are paralyzed by an inability to make choices because there it's like, "Let's keep saying, yes, let's not say no." I'm wondering how, where you find the discipline to make brave choices, because that's one of the things that you do as a CEO at Box of Crayons is you are courageous enough to go, we're committing to this.

Shannon ([25:56](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MBS ([25:57](#)):

How do you build that muscle within you? And how do you help others around you become better at that as well?

Shannon ([26:03](#)):

Yeah. We're exercising that muscle. But yeah, that's exactly the passage I was saying. He's basically describing good strategy, right?

MBS ([26:11](#)):

Right.



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

That it would be a good strategy is if you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to? For us, I mean, I just had earlier today a phone call with one of my colleagues about, what are still going to be our guidelines for the next few years for us? What are our guardrails we're thinking about? And basically what we mean by that is what are the things we're putting on the table and what are the things that we're taking off today? And things change. But right now, how are we going to, where are we going to put resource and energy? It's just in the practice of doing it. I think we have the conversation, but we need to have... You've got to have the rigor to just keep asking the question of like, is that still strategic? And coming back to those principles of what the strategy is. We practice integrated decision-making, which is an idea that I took from Aaron Dignan's book, *Brave New Work*.

MBS ([27:08](#)):

Which is a wonderful book. And I love Aaron's work as well. I know you and I actually, for listeners, Shannon and I are going to be on Aaron's podcast sometime in the future, talking about how we managed the transition from me being CEO to Shannon being CEO. So that's going to be a nice juicy conversation.

Shannon ([27:25](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([27:26](#)):

But can you explain that idea from Dignan's work?

Shannon ([27:29](#)):

Yeah. The idea from Dignan's work is based in advice and consent. So for an integrated decision to be made you identify roles, so not your job description or your contract, but like what is the expertise you bring? What's the thing, the call that you own in your role. And we identified that. So we all did our work on that.



And then what we did was create this pithy little chart that's laminatable, and refertuable. And it says, which kinds of decisions require advice, which can be followed or taken or not? And which require consent and from which parties? And it means that when we have our... The people who lead our company at these critical junctures of decision-making, where a question like, oh, I might chase this thing, which is going to take me out on this branch or not comes to pass.

Shannon ([28:23](#)):

They are like, okay, it's this kind of decision. So this kind of expertise advice is required, and this consent is required. And so it creates the moment for the conversation, which brings us back to the strategy. I mean, I speak aspirationally, but this is what we're trying to do.

MBS ([28:40](#)):

Yeah.

Shannon ([28:42](#)):

Your question also makes me think of just about, the beauty of things that can be done by making decisions. And so here I go to not corporate examples, but I think of like Robert Frost, who hated open forum and his famous thing he said about open forum is that writing poetry in open forum was like playing tennis with the net down

MBS ([29:04](#)):

And by open form, you mean without kind of any formal structure to a problem, like a song that has a formal structure, or a 16 line, a 14 lines and a rhyme scheme that you're supposed to follow. And a haiku has a formal structure.

Shannon ([29:16](#)):

Exactly.





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

But open forum, it's just like, just write down whatever word you want, in whatever order you want, and if there's many lines as you want.

Shannon ([29:23](#)):

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And but this idea that, you can create a more beautiful thing for giving yourself boundaries within which that thing has to be created as opposed to anything at all goes. I mean, I love Walt Whitman. And so there's all kinds of open forum that breaks that rule, but it's an interesting idea of, for me, that's the liberating constraint. That's a beautiful way of thinking about that argument of, how much beauty can you create by giving yourself parameters you need to play within. And in some ways the tighter the stanzaic requirement, the harder that work gets. And so when you pull it off, it's really beautiful. Anyway, he wrote this on it, mostly.

MBS ([30:11](#)):

Fantastic. I love that. I mean, I'm such a believer in building in limitations to where you can play and how you can play. But it is difficult to have that. I mean, sometimes they're imposed on you. So when people, it's the classic scene that I used to use way back in the distant past, when I kind of taught creativity and innovation, is the scene from the Apollo 16 movie, or 13, or 18. One of the famous Apollo movie where they're trying to fix the spaceship. And they come in and they dump a bunch of stuff on the table and they go, "We've got a round air filter and we need to build a square air filter." And this is all you've got to do it with, because this is all that's happened in this little spaceship and this race against time, it's all tension and they kind of make it happen.

MBS ([31:00](#)):

But that is the perfect contained example of be creative. And here are the parameters. Part of the structure, I think of discipline, of choice-making that you're pointing to is first of all, the discipline of setting up structures in the first



place, guard rails, as you put it, but also there's what happens on the other side of the decision-making, which is once you've made the commitment, you have then imposed the limitations in which you now need to be creative, and flourish, and do your best to kind of achieve the goal that you set yourself. And that's powerful, and exciting, and beautiful as well. I love that you use the word beautiful, which is like getting stuff done, important stuff done that you've been brave enough and courageous enough to commit to, is a thrilling experience.

Shannon ([31:48](#)):

Yeah. And we, I think in those terms, because another one of our values is to pursue elegance. And there is something just kind of, there's a beauty to that kind of elegance. There's an aesthetic quality to things sort of coming into, falling into place.

MBS ([32:12](#)):

This is a kind of more personal question. And it's a tricky one. It's one that I wrestle with as well, which is, we see Wallace's cruise ship and we know that that speaks for a worldwide where capitalism in the capital sea, is kind of doing many of those things that a cruise ship is trying to do, which is like remove choice, make us feel good about ourselves. If you want to a popular version this, it's Wall-E from Pixar, same sort of thing that humans have blasted off from earth there. At Box of Crayons, we work with these corporations, who are doing this. I'm wondering how you square your insight around this, which and this is often what it takes to live a good life. And in some ways it's around rebelling against the comfort and the ease that the world is trying to sell to us. With the fact that we, in some ways are working with those corporations that are doing just that.

Shannon ([33:14](#)):

Well, first while we're name dropping other authors, Kelly Smart, their book the Conscious Creative is a lot more eloquent on this topic because they write at length about it.



MBS ([33:26](#)):

They do.

Shannon ([33:26](#)):

I think that the-

MBS ([33:27](#)):

And it's a wonderful practical book as well. I can really recommend their book. Yeah.

Shannon ([33:31](#)):

And it's awesome. I think that there is the commitment comes back to the individual. So for me, part of what we're doing at Box of Crayons is helping in the people feel less alienated from their labor. And so if we can help organizations create cultures in which people feel like they have agency, and they have choice, and they can affect change, and they are more engaged in their work, and less alienated from that, then that's the beautiful outcome?

MBS ([34:05](#)):

Yeah.

Shannon ([34:06](#)):

And Smart describes this as sort of like you're transforming from the inside out. And Michael, you and I have talked about a sort of Trojan horse of like, we go in and we bring in these programs, and we help transform the culture that is committed to individuals flourishing. And that has the amazing effect as well of helping those businesses succeed.

Shannon ([34:28](#)):

So that's how I think about it. I mean, I had a lot of years of being like, "Oh, I'm not going to... I'm going to be an academic and I won't have to do anything to do with the corporate world." And that was probably mostly immature, but



there's all kinds of things that private industry can do to make a difference and has done. Stacey Abrams, I recently saw her on a webinar. It was talking about how she's like, "Poverty is a moral problem."

MBS ([34:57](#)):

Yeah.

Shannon ([34:57](#)):

And I think that it's something that private industry can help solve, capitalism can help solve problems with the right leadership.

MBS ([35:04](#)):

That's right.

Shannon ([35:04](#)):

So it's not all big companies are not bad.

MBS ([35:08](#)):

Absolutely. Shannon, we're almost done. One of the questions that you and I have introduced in the way that we work together, because one of the things that we're really conscious of in terms of our relationship is power. Because I'm the founder of Box of Crayons and I cast a long shadow, you're the CEO. And founders are notorious for making life for their CEOs difficult because they're fiddly and they're kind of controlling, and they're... Founders are just a weird anyway. And one of the questions that we introduced in terms of us maintaining the clarity and rigor of our relationship, which we both value, and we both want to protect is the question, what needs to be said that hasn't been said?

Shannon ([35:59](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think the, what needs to be said that hasn't been said, or the thing that maybe all I'll say is that, I paused for a moment, speaking of power



about choosing, whose voice do I want to amplify on a podcast? Not millions of people are going listen to you on this podcast.

MBS ([36:17](#)):

They might.

Shannon ([36:17](#)):

But here's what I want to amplify. [crosstalk 00:36:23]. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that. And I've read a lot of books, but the question was which book in some way changed my life? And because of David Foster Wallace sent me on this path that it mattered, but it also matters, that Wallace to say, and to know that Wallace is a problematic writer to say the least, and that even his biography, D.T. Max's biography barely touches on a lot of the abuse that he's responsible for. And that Mary Karr and others have since brought to light. And so there's, I don't want to cancel Wallace for the greatness of his words in a lot of other places and the ideas, and I wanted... But when it's worth mentioning that he is somebody who's abuse of power needs to be considered as well. Claire Hayes-Brady is a David Foster Wallace scholar, who writes really well about some of Wallace's misuse of power and... Yeah, just like poor characterization of women, and black people, and people of color.

MBS ([37:41](#)):

Shannon said, "If we know we're going to die, and we do know that, how does that affect how we choose to live?" Well, that is the big question, isn't it? It's the heart of the life journey, the spiritual journey. What's a good life? Part of what I strive for myself and a big part of what I admire in Shannon, is a willingness to step out to the edge of your comfort, your competence, your experience, to walk the boundaries between what you know and who you are now and who you might yet become. I mean, I'm not saying I wouldn't mind going on a cruise ship. I mean, maybe post pandemic, but a little luxury, in a little TLC is delightful, its nourishing. But the grand adventure of life, well, that's going to



require getting off sun lounger and seeking opportunities that are thrilling, and important, and daunting.

MBS ([38:41](#)):

You can hear Shannon on other podcasts, my favorite is Dave Stachowiak's Coaching for Leaders, that's a wonderful episode. And you can find out more about Box of Crayons and how we move organizations from advice driven to curiosity led at [boxofcrayons.com](http://boxofcrayons.com). And thanks for listening to 2 Pages with MBS. I'm hoping you're enjoying these conversations, I certainly am loving them. So honestly, you're secondary to my delight in this podcast, but if you're geeking out as well, and you're liking this diverse range of different authors, and speakers, and thinkers, and activists, I hope you'll consider joining our free community. It's called the Duke Humphreys. It's named after the coolest library at Oxford University, the library where they kept the rarest and most extraordinary books. You can find transcripts, and unreleased episodes, and more at the Duke Humphreys, my Duke Humphreys. And you'll find that at [mbs.works/podcast](http://mbs.works/podcast).

MBS ([39:38](#)):

And podcast grows best by word of mouth. So if it could be your word of mouth, that would be amazing. If you've enjoyed this conversation with Shannon, her reflections on mortality, her reflections on what it takes to live a good life, well then perhaps you can think of somebody in your world who might like to hear that episode as well. More subscribers means I have more chances of landing pretty amazing guests, and that's what I'm hungry for. And when I have amazing guests, you get to benefit from that as well. And of course, if you're willing to leave a rating and a review on your favorite podcast app, well that's just marvelous. Thank you. You're awesome. And you're doing great.