



Join our free membership site, **The Duke Humfrey's**, and get access to full transcripts, past episodes, exclusive downloads and more. You'll find it all at www.MBS.works/podcast

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

Let me be blunt. Most of our learning experiences are terrible. And it's not that they're bad, it's that they're thoroughly blandly mediocre. I can't really speak to what school's like now. I mean, I'm happily child-free and it's been, I don't know, 40 years I think, since I started high school, but in organizations, this is a place I do know, so much learning seems to suck the very life out of us. There's half a day of my life I'm never getting back again. And it's killing me because if we don't keep learning, we stagnate. And if we do keep learning, we have a chance of unlocking the very best of who we might be.

MBS ([00:47](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, and apropos of that quick rant, where smart



people like you come to learn. My guest today is someone I've come to know through my work with Microsoft. Magdy Karam is the chief learning officer at Microsoft Canada. He loves learning and growing as much as I do, perhaps even more. Magdy rose up the ranks as a tech professional. And as he worked with large teams in a leadership role, his natural instinct was to work with them on their learning and their development. And Magdy got results.

Magdy ([01:27](#)):

Person after person after person come to me and says, "Magdy, do you know what? I've been with Microsoft for this long, or I've been in this IT career for this long, but you are the very first manager who took a very personal care about me and my development." And when it happened once and twice and three times, all of a sudden it starts ringing a bell in my mind and I'm going, "Yeah, this is something that I'm passionate about. I love doing it." So I decided, you know what, I should do this for a living, not as a side job.

MBS ([02:00](#)):

One of the things that's truly delightful about Magdy is he didn't really realize that what he did was so special, because I think it's just such an intrinsic part of who he is both personally and professionally.

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

It was an eye-opener for me. And I took it for granted that everybody does that. And when somebody pointed that out, that it's not the case, I felt like honored. And I felt like, okay, this is something that I'm definitely very passionate about. And this job came available and I applied for it. And I was, again, very blessed to be picked for the job in Canada.



MBS ([02:36](#)):

Being the CLO at a company as large as Microsoft Canada presents its own challenges. It goes way beyond just leading a team. Specifically, how do you teach at scale? So not only for the employees who are part of their ecosystem, but also the customers and the partners, the scope is massive. And Magdy with his small and mighty team achieved great things through their programs. So I asked him how he made the choices, how he decides what to teach at scale and what to focus on and bring into their lives.

Magdy ([03:10](#)):

Well, that's a great discussion, and we're continuously visiting that and trying to figure out what is the best way, right? Because you're absolutely right, the number one challenge for people to learn is time. And so we are always competing with every single priority. And when they have other priorities and objectives, learning sometimes feels like a burden and it's something that they need to do just because we're asking them to do it. So the way it works with Microsoft is that some of these programs are defined at a global level in corporate Microsoft globally. And then what happens is myself and my team, we're responsible for what I call landing it. So the idea is how can you make it, you motivate people to learn? How do you get them excited about learning? And so what we focus on more is the culture of learning and trying to build that into their DNA, as opposed to focusing on you need to go and learn this by this date, right?

Magdy ([04:24](#)):

When you push the actual program or the course that they need to learn, or the different certification that they need to accomplish and achieve, it becomes something that you're kind of as if you're holding it, you're pushing something, you're forcing them to do it. So it sounds like something that is done to them, as



opposed to when you are focusing a lot on the culture, and this is where growth mindset and the whole culture shift at Microsoft becomes so crucial. So now we're adopting this learning organization mindset. And so everybody's growing there. And my focus is really to focus on that angle and get people to love learning for the sake of learning. A even when we motivate them, we don't motivate them anymore with kind of like rewards and so on, but it's actually a masterclass subscription.

Magdy ([05:21](#)):

So in other words, we motivate them to finish their own training by giving them more training. And I'm telling you that people are loving it because they are now starting to recognize that when they are learning and they are continuously learning, it is their competitive advantage. And they become much more efficient in what they're doing. They become much more valuable, valuable in terms of a resource. And of course they become much more marketable and sought after. So we always train people because we want them to stay at Microsoft. But even if they decide to leave, then they become our advocates outside and they are being asked for from all different companies, even our competitors.

MBS ([06:05](#)):

I love that. I love that you're rewarding learning with more learning. So often there's that kind of gap between what you get at the end or the other carrot that's being used, it doesn't kind of make sense, but this is a perfect way that it just amplifies this commitment to a culture of learning. That's really smart. What else? I mean, as much as you're willing to share, because I'm so nosy about this stuff, but is there anything else that you've found has really helped with shifting to a culture of learning? Because I think actually that what you said



before is quite profound, which is stop selling the course and build the environment that just makes the courses sell themselves, if you like.

Magdy ([06:53](#)):

Yes. So let me give you just a little bit of context, although you're very familiar with Microsoft, for your listeners as well. At Microsoft, we based our culture on the work done by Dr. Carol Dweck, and we introduced the concept of growth mindset. At its core, growth mindset is based on the belief that potential is nurtured, not predetermined. And that means that knowledge and ability could be acquired by anyone really. And so that in of itself is a very powerful concept because if you didn't believe that knowledge can be acquired, then you either had it or you didn't. Right? And now that myth has been busted. So now we don't give up anybody because anybody can acquire the knowledge. And so with that, that is the culture, that is the premise behind everything that I'm going to say next, right? When you introduce a culture into a new organization, for it to take roots and really take hold and stick, if you will, you have to do much more than just announce it.

Magdy ([07:59](#)):

And so we have developed programs for our leadership and we can talk about that a lot, but our leadership at every single level has to live it and breathe it and practice it day in, day out. Because when you introduce such a massive change, it could... people can think that it's a fad that goes here today, gone tomorrow. In fact, even growth mindset when it was introduced by Satya seven years ago, people were kind of using it and snickering about it and talking to each other and say, "Oh, you don't have growth mindset," and so on. The only time it started to sink in is when they are starting to witness true change. They're seeing that their leaders, starting with the immediate manager all the way to



Satya Nadella himself, people are living it day in, day out. The way talk, their habits have changed, right?

Magdy ([08:57](#)):

There is no more fear of failure. Instead, we actually encourage experimentation and we want you to go and try things out. And if you fail, that's okay. Fail fast and share that learning with others. When they start hearing that again and again, in storytelling and repetition, every single day, they start figuring this is real and they started adopting it, but that's only one aspect, right? So the systems, even your operational rhythms, your processes also need to be accommodating. Meaning, if we start taking a look at a process that is not helping us, but instead is hindering us, we get rid of it.

Magdy ([09:35](#)):

When we start seeing that people are spending too much time in meetings, we actually save them time. We take this so seriously, so it is embedded in everything, our symbols, like everything that we want to focus on and care about. Like for instance, our rewards system, our performance, takes that into consideration. And we reward people who are collaborating with others and building on others work and sharing freely, all these types of things that contribute to the culture taking hold, and really changing our empathy as a company inside out.

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

Beautiful. And in fact, I think you've, I know in fact, you've selected an author who is also a champion for curiosity and growth and empathy. So tell us about the book that you've chosen to read from today, Magdy.



Magdy ([10:28](#)):

Yes, absolutely. So the book is called Dare to Lead and it's by Brené Brown. And I've been a fan of Brené and I've watched lots of her TED talks and I've read all her books, but this one resonated with me in several sections. The piece that I want to read to you today is also resonating with me personally. And after I read it, I'll tell you why.

MBS ([10:56](#)):

Yeah, please do. So, Magdy Karam, CLO of Microsoft Canada, reading from Dr. Brené Brown's book, Dare to Lead. Magdy, over to you.

Magdy ([11:13](#)):

Having to be the knower or always being right is heavy armor. It's defensiveness, it's posturing. And worst of all, it's a huge driver of BS. It's also very common. Most of us have some degree of a knower in us. Too often, we stereotype type of the knower as the irritating, but lovable Cliff Clavin from the TV show Cheers. Unfortunately though, needing to know everything is pretty miserable for the knowers and everyone around them. It leads to distrust, bad decisions, unnecessary rumbles, and unproductive conflict. It sounds pretty easy to replace the armor of knowing with becoming a curious learner, but for many people the need to be a knower is driven by shame, and for some even trauma. Being a knower can save people in hard situations, but it's easy to buy into the belief that being a knower is the only value we bring to relationships and work.

Magdy ([12:19](#)):

Knower can also become a cultural problem when only some people are valued as knowers. Others don't speak up because they're not senior enough, or they're not in their place. One leader shared that he had been with this new company for six months and had never contributed in a meeting. He was brought in



because of his 20 plus years of experience, yet he was expected to be quiet in the meetings because of the cultural norms that valued only the contributions of tenured leaders. And then she proceeds to contrast that with daring leadership, being a learner and getting it right.

Magdy ([13:07](#)):

There are three strategies that I've seen work to transform always knowing into always learning. First, name the issue. It's a tough conversation, but clear is kind. As an example, quote, "I'd like for you to work on your curiosity and critical thinking skills. You're often quick with answers, which can be helpful, but not as helpful as having the right questions, which is how you'll grow as a leader. We can work together on this," end quote. Second, make learning curiosity skills are priority. Third, acknowledge and reward great questions and instances of quote, "I don't know, but I'd like to find out," end quote, as a daring leadership behavior. The big shift here is from wanting to be right to wanting to get it right.

Magdy ([14:11](#)):

I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm ready to listen, ask questions and accept that I may not fully understand the issue. Often in the midst of feedback session, we forget that we're supposed to be facilitating and fact finding from a place of curiosity and not lecturing. When we lecture, we're typically focused on getting it over with and shoveling one lesson into one session. We want to get this difficult feedback or hard conversation over with. And we certainly don't want to string it along over multiple sessions. Instead, we must lean into our grounded confidence. As an example, quote, "Here's what I'm seeing. Here's what I'm making up about what I see. I have a lot of questions. Can you help me understand?" end quote, then dig in, take notes and ask questions followed by, again quote, "I need some time to think about this. Can we circle back



tomorrow? I'll come to you if more questions come up. And if you have questions, please come to me," end quote.

MBS ([15:30](#)):

Well, Magdy, I love this stuff. So I'm violently nodding my head as I've been listening to this. I've been going, "Exactly." But tell me what about this passage in particular that strikes a chord for you?

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

Yeah. So I've been with Microsoft for 21 years, and I love Microsoft and my passion for this company, even after this long time has grown, not diminished from the time I have joined. But 21 years ago when I joined, Microsoft was very, very similar to what Brené is describing in her book. Those know-it-all people, those heroes, the only the most senior people's opinion is heard and others are ignored, as I said, it was a different company then. And our company, the one that I work for today has managed to transform itself by transforming its culture. It's a great story to tell.

MBS ([16:33](#)):

For you, did you have to undergo the shift? I mean, how did you work, what's the change been like for you personally?

Magdy ([16:40](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([16:40](#)):

Were you the odd duck out 21 years ago? Like under Balmer and the like where you had to be know it all and loud and senior?



Magdy ([16:48](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

MBS ([16:49](#)):

Or you've found your place now, or have you, too, gone through a change that reflects Microsoft's change.

Magdy ([16:57](#)):

I have to admit, I have gone through the change, because when I joined Microsoft, I joined as a consultant. I was in the consulting organization, so this hero mentality took over completely, right? You come in, you want to come into a situation or a customer's scenario and save the day. And because of that, you had to appear that you know it all. Not only that, you also used to hoard information. You didn't share it freely because you want to stay the hero. You want to be the one that people come to you and you are always the kind of the savior. So yes, I had to go through the transformation myself, but I'm telling you, this idea that you had to be a knowing it all was extremely, extremely stressful. And especially when I moved into leadership, right? When somebody asks a question, you're expect it to know the answer.

Magdy ([17:51](#)):

I remember sitting in meetings in a room, when we could sit in still in rooms, somebody would ask a question and every face would look at me as if, okay, tell us wise one, what is the answer. Right? The amount of stress and burden that puts on me was unbelievable. So now with this stress formation and growth mindset, it is such a relief and freeing because I finally can say, "I really don't know, but let's figure it out together." Right? I don't know, and let me think about it, and I'll do some research and get back to you. I can be honest about these things. So honestly, the weight that it takes off your shoulder of being a



know-it-all is unbelievable. So yeah, no, I did have to go through the transformation myself and I admit it fully a hundred percent.

MBS ([18:46](#)):

What was the moment when you realized you had to make that change, when you suddenly went, it's just not working as a know-it-all, and this is broken and I need an alternative? Was there a moment of sudden realization?

Magdy ([19:00](#)):

Yeah. So, you know what, when Satya brought Dr. Dweck's work to Microsoft, I actually bought the book. So I wasn't content with the one email that talks about becoming more empathetic and growth mindset. I went and bought the book and I read through it. And every, like yourself now, when you were nodding your head and kind of approving everything that Brené was saying in her book, I was doing the same thing. I go, this makes perfect sense. This is great. This is what we should be doing. And you know what? I embraced it fully.

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

And of course, when you talk about growth mindset versus fixed mindset, nobody is there. Nobody is fully growth mindset in every aspect of life, right? So I catch myself in lots of times being fixed mindset, but reality is I love the work. I love the theory behind it. And actually I try to embrace it every day. And the idea, again, that it is freeing, so it does... there is no shame in not knowing or failing, right? So I can admit my failure, even in being about growth mindset. And I can share that with vulnerability, with my team and ask them to hold me accountable and ask for feedback. And as I said, it's very freeing.

MBS ([20:24](#)):

It's one of the great ironies which is like, look at me failing at growth mindset is an embracing of growth mindset. It's like a paradox.



Magdy ([20:32](#)):

Exactly. Yeah.

MBS ([20:34](#)):

What was the hardest thing for you to unlearn, the hardest thing to let go? Because I get your enthusiasm about growth mindset in theory, but in practice, where was the struggle in this for you?

Magdy ([20:48](#)):

So I'll tell you my one, right? So as part of growth mindset and the cultural change, diversity and inclusion is a core tenet of that, right? And it is very, very easy to embrace diversity, but it's not as easy to embrace inclusion. And let me give you an example, right? So for me, it is when I'm addressing my team, and there were times when I had a team of like 30 people. And so again, while hiring and while thinking about hiring practices and making sure that the team has the right diversity and all of that was, as I said, that was the easy part. So I look around and I've got a team of 30 people around me coming from all different walks of life. Great. But then you have a meeting and then you start discussing something. And all of a sudden this other component, which is that inclusion piece, that is hard, right?

Magdy ([21:52](#)):

So I find myself talking to the ones that are the most extrovert and loud and have a voice. And sometimes I forget about the ones that are shy and quiet, although I am actually shy and quiet myself sometimes. And I'm an introvert by nature. And so for me to make sure that I look around the room and make sure that every person has a voice and they are included in the discussion and we're not making unilateral decisions without listening to their feedback and taking it in, I think that was the most difficult. And this is still a journey that I have to



admit I still fall into that from time to time, and I'm still learning and growing through the process.

MBS ([22:40](#)):

How do you help to make inclusion a reality? Because I totally get the distinction you made between diversity, which is like, you can see the variety in front of you and inclusion, which is, and that variety, there're different ways of thinking, there're different backgrounds, by contributing in a way that's appropriate. Are there tactics or strategies you've used just on your own self-management or in general, in terms of how you kind of run the business or run your part of the business to try and increase inclusion?

Magdy ([23:15](#)):

Yeah. I read this quote that says, "If you don't intentionally, deliberately, proactively include, you will unintentionally exclude." Right? And that's exactly what was happening. So I have that, like my motto and I always use that to kind of check with myself to make sure that did I follow that? Did I deliberately sure that every voice is heard? And so, again, I'm not sure if you're aware, but Microsoft had a conference, a two day conference that it was called Microsoft Include that was run last week. That was Tuesday. I'm so, when I hear about this and when I get involved in things like that, it is so humbling and I'm so proud of Microsoft as a company that takes this so seriously, that they put their money where their mouth is, they create such great content, and ask everybody to dedicate two days of their time. This is a worldwide event and they're asking the whole company to dedicate two days to this type of initiative.

Magdy ([24:31](#)):

So I know I'm not answering this question directly. I don't think there is a silver bullet. I don't think there is an easy way other than to make sure that



deliberately day in, day out, you are making sure that everybody has a voice and you're going to even the most quiet person on your team or the virtual team that you're working within and ask for feedback, ask for their opinion, make sure that they are telling you what they're thinking.

MBS ([25:00](#)):

Magdy, what's most surprising to you about the leader you've become today?

Magdy ([25:07](#)):

Surprising? Okay. I never thought about that, actually. I don't have an answer prepared for you, Michael, but you know what, I'll give you another story that I just happened to be about a couple of days ago. So I mentioned that I'm an introvert, right?

MBS ([25:31](#)):

Yeah.

Magdy ([25:33](#)):

And I'm originally from Egypt as well, right? So I came to Canada 25, 26 years ago, even more actually, 27 years ago now, 27 years ago.

MBS ([25:45](#)):

The number just keeps creeping up, doesn't it?

Magdy ([25:47](#)):

Exactly. And because of that, I come here and I look around me and I see the successful people. And in my mind, extrovert is the way to go, right? And so for years I tried to cover and hide the fact that I am an introvert, and I try to adapt to the culture around me. And then just two days ago, I was reading a book, and the book is called the Power of the Introvert. And going through that book, the



first thing that struck me is number one, the myth that introverts is the minority. In fact, introverts are either 50% or even more, and so we're not a minority. So I've got a lot of people like me.

Magdy ([26:36](#)):

And then the second thing that was eye opening, and I love that about the author who wrote the book is that she said, "We should embrace the fact that we are introverts. We don't have to be extroverts." And all of a sudden, and this is literally 48 hours ago, Michael, I was thinking about this and I go, that's true. Why have I been trying to become someone who I am not. Instead, if I embrace the fact that I am an introvert, and that does mean different things, it doesn't mean anything bad or good, but all I'm trying to say is that it means that I need to rejuvenate or reenergize myself in different ways than an extrovert does. And I do need to engage in activities that may be not necessarily a lot of people care about, which is for instance sit alone with my book. And I'll be very happy with that for a long time.

MBS ([27:35](#)):

Right.

Magdy ([27:37](#)):

So this is a long way and a long story to tell you that that was an eye opener after how many years of being in IT and in leadership and all that. And all of a sudden, a new book opens my eye to something and I embraced it fully. And yes, I'm just in the beginning of the journey, but I love the fact that I can share that and be who I am, and I don't have to become somebody who I'm not.

MBS ([28:09](#)):

Beautiful. What are the powers of an introvert, Magdy? What do you see as the super strengths there?



Magdy ([28:16](#)):

I'll tell you one thing that personally for me, right? You can ask me a question, and I am a very thoughtful person, meaning if it's important to me, I will not be able to answer you immediately. I would take that, think about it, spend some time kind of deliberating me and myself and I, and then come back with a much better thoughtful answer. And I found that that is something that is... sometimes I felt that that is hindering my ability to be on the spot quick, witty, and trying, again, to compete with others. And so I felt bad about it, but now I feel actually good about. So that is the power. The power is that if I have the time and if it's something that is important to me, I usually spend a good amount of time and I give you out of myself to deliberate and think about it in extreme detail and thoughtfulness so that I offer you my best type of answer, as opposed to something that I'm quick because I have it at the tip of my tongue.

MBS ([29:34](#)):

I love that. And I'm probably be more wired to be an extrovert. When somebody asks me a question, I just started talking and I didn't even know what I'm to say. I'll often go, "Magdy, there are three points I want to make here." And I'm like, "And I don't know what any of those three points are yet. We're about to discover." And that's so diff... Typically, with an introvert, they're like, well, I'm going to figure out what my answer is in my head before I start talking.

Magdy ([29:58](#)):

Correct.

MBS ([29:59](#)):

And that can make for just a little deeper, a little more shaped, little more powerful answer. So I love that you're speaking to that. Hey, Magdy, it's been



wonderful talking to you. I do have a question I like to ask right at the end of these conversations, and I'll ask you it as well. We've covered quite a lot, from Brené Brown to the power of an introvert. I love the reflections you've had on Microsoft and how it's changed. That's going to be really interesting for people to listen to. The question I've got is a broad run, and it's this; what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this interview?

Magdy ([30:40](#)):

Wow. So again, I'll take an extra beat to think through that a little bit. Okay. So the one thing that I, again, learned recently that I love to share with my team and others and anybody who would love to hear actually, another quote that I heard, and it says, "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek," and it's by Joseph Campbell. And that to me was, again, one of those defining moments. And I've always learnt that if you start getting comfortable in what you're doing, that means that it's time for you to change, whether that is a change of role, that is a change of... taking on more responsibility, going over and doing something else. But this one, again, when I read it, it also sounds like it is the things that you sometimes shy away from, these are the ones that you don't want to tackle, and that's the one that you absolutely have to go and tackle.

Magdy ([31:59](#)):

So I share that because, again, when I see sometimes some of our they're called HiPo, high-potential employees, when I asked them to go and do something, whether they know how to do it or not, they answered, "Absolutely. Sign me up." Versus if you had to come to me and that was just before I learned about this and you asked me, "Magdy, can you do this for me?" I would say, again, this is an introvert thing, you know what, Michael? I am not a hundred percent sure. Let me go and think about it. And the reason I'm telling you that is that I'm



worried that I will not be able to perform on what you're asking me to do. Although I have the history behind me that says, you know what, you've tried the new things before, you've learned how to deal with them, you've learned how to grow and you manage to perform. So what is the big deal? But it is my fear of certain things that I would not even try.

Magdy ([33:05](#)):

So again, looking at this, I said, you know what, this is something that I need to learn, and this is something that I encourage everybody to do. The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek, meaning the things that you don't want to, or you're shying away from, or you're thinking, yeah, you know what, that's too much of a mountain to climb, that's where your success could be lying. And you will miss out if you don't try.

MBS ([33:40](#)):

The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek. I love that. And if that quote from Joseph Campbell wasn't just a throwaway line in a podcast that you're listening to, but was the universe in some way laying down a challenge at your feet, how does it strike you? The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek. Do you start thinking about the cave or the treasure? I mean, I don't think there's a wrong answer. In fact, in my experience, it's a little bit about how you're wired. I know if I was going to ask my wife that she would say the cave, and if she's going to ask me, I would say the treasure, that's what I start thinking about.

MBS ([34:23](#)):

So let me do the unexpected. Let me flip it a bit. And I want you to examine the other element, the thing that you didn't first go to. So, for me, I go to treasure. So let me examine, let me sit with this idea of the cave, the cave that I fear.



Hmm. Okay. This is me now lying down on my therapist's couch. I don't actually have a therapist, but I do have a couch. If I'm thinking about that, for me, there's a deep fear I have, it shows up often enough around being trapped or pending or losing my autonomy in some way. So how was that insight? My fear of losing my autonomy of the treasure that I'm seeking? Well, I need to sit with that. I need to figure that out. It's a big question. I hope it's landed for you as well. I hope that the interview's landed for you. I hope that last quote has shaken you up a bit, got you thinking about treasure and got you thinking about caves.

MBS ([35:27](#)):

Meantime, thank you so much for listening to the podcast 2 Pages with MBS. If you're a regular listener, you know that this is the time I invite you to join our fantastic community the Duke Humfrey's, named after the coolest library at Oxford University, the place where the oldest, rarest, most beautiful books were kept. And our free membership site you get access to unreleased episodes, downloads and special resources, some video clips, it's all free, but I just love you to come and join our community there and get even more bang for your non-existent buck. It's totally free. And because this podcast grows by word of mouth, if you know somebody else who's interested in learning and in development and shifting organizations, perhaps you'll pass this podcast episode onto them and say, "Hey, take a listen." And if you're willing to give me a quick review on your podcast app, whatever that might be, that would be wonderful. We always appreciate the stars. You're awesome. And you're doing great.