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MBS (00:00):

I'm guessing that most of us get diversity and inclusion and why it matters in theory. I mean, personally, I've never been quite as aware of my shortcomings and of my place in the world relative to others as I am right now. But again, in theory. How do you go from theory to practice? How do you understand and then champion different perspectives and experiences, and lives? How do you truly learn that? Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from books that have moved them, books that have shaped them. Favorite books, important books. Today, my guest is Pamay Bassey, a friend of mine. She is the Chief Learning and Diversity Officer for an organization I'm betting you've probably heard of.



Pamay ([00:56](#)):

Currently, I am the Chief Learning and Diversity Officer for the Kraft Heinz Company. A global food company, about four 40,000 employees in 40 countries. And more than likely, some of our products are in your pantry or your refrigerator. And you love our snacks.

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

40,000 people, 40 countries. That has to be a pretty full-time gig, but Pamay has a side hustle. She's the Chief Experience Officer of My 52 Weeks of Worship, a project that focuses on interfaith, diversity, communication, and understanding. And that project came out of a really difficult time in Pamay's life. I mean, in the span of a year, her grandmother and then her father died, and she suffered a deep betrayal. So Pamay was questioning a lot of things in life. Where do I find happiness? How do I manage sadness?

Pamay ([01:49](#)):

I just made a personal commitment to visit a different place of worship every week for a year, just to be in sacred spaces where people were just grappling with the big questions of life and celebrating their joys and kind of navigating their pain. And then I did it. And then I did it again a couple of years later in Brooklyn, and I wrote a book about it, and I did a TED talk about it and has become kind of a ministry, no pun intended of mine that has really... I mean, at the time, it helped me heal from a very difficult time.

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

Then, I realized it was also really a foundation of my inclusion practice because I was walking into spaces. I knew nothing about, I was respectfully engaging with people who were different than me, and I was just learning about them, and whether I understood what I was learning or not, I was respectfully listening and then figuring out how that would or wouldn't change the person who I am.



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

What a profound way to really understand diversity. Traveling in others sacred spaces, but why faith instead of something much easier, like going on a boat cruise to different countries.

Pamay ([03:01](#)):

I said, "You know what? I want to see goodness everywhere. I want some sort of proof that there is goodness, anywhere I look, not just in familiar places, but literally anywhere and in the eyes of strangers and in places I might not expect it." So it was really just a really deep need to see divinity in many different forms. And I wasn't shopping for a new faith. I never was. I never was thinking, "I don't like my faith. I want another one." I just thought I need to just be in lots of different places and see how people are looking towards the divine and the way that they do.

MBS ([03:39](#)):

Looking towards the divine. Even as an atheist, that strikes me as a really powerful phrase. So Pamay decided to repeat the 52 Week Project a few years later. And she really noticed things has changed.

Pamay ([03:53](#)):

The world had changed considerably. The first time I never felt unsafe. I just felt like I was the random lady walking into people's sacred spaces. But over that time, there were so many incidents. I mean, I sit in the US at this moment of people walking into sacred spaces and inflicting violence on those people for no apparent reason. And so the second time I did it, I realized it's really revolutionary to reach a hand out to a stranger because I could have been walking in. Nobody knew if I was coming for good or for evil. And sometimes, I was coming into very small congregations where it was clear I was the only one who was new, and it felt very revolutionary A to trust that I was walking into a safe situation and to respect that the people who were receiving me were like,



"Well, she could be a terrible person, but maybe she's just a good person who wants to worship with us today."

Pamay ([04:49](#)):

So when to answer your question, I was always amazed that there was somebody when they say all are welcome, there was always somebody who would catch my eye, noticed that I was new. One of these things is not like the other and invite me into the space, not just kind of me sitting in the back pew or in the corner, someone saying, "Hey, I see that you're new. This is my community. This is my space. Come join us." Every single time. Amazing.

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

What have you learned about welcoming strangers into new places?

Pamay ([05:26](#)):

Well, the kindness of strangers is an amazing force. And often, when you are going through something difficult, you want to depend on the people that you love or the people that love you, because isn't that what people you love or for. Right?

MBS ([05:47](#)):

Right.

Pamay ([05:48](#)):

But if you're going through a significant amount of grief, sometimes the people who love you just want you to be better and quickly, like, "Are you feeling better? Are you feeling better? Are you feeling better?"

MBS ([05:59](#)):

Are we not done yet? If you could wrap this grieving thing up so we could all move on, that would be very convenient, please.



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

Absolutely. It's uncomfortable for me. I feel really bad because I care about you, and you're still feeling, but strangers don't know. And when someone is kind to a stranger, it's such a pure act. So me walking to a space where nobody knew me, even on the days where I was feeling terrible, they were like, "Well, she's here. We should be kind to her." And that was amazing every single time. And then, of course, I feel very strongly about giving to that bank of kindness because I drew from it.

Pamay ([06:36](#)):

So I think that whole interaction about just being kind to people, even if you don't really know them, is so pure, and it relieves the people you love from having to take the whole burden of walking down... I mean, of course, you want to walk down the path with people who care about you, but wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have to make them do all the work and you could just wander in the world and give and receive kindness from.

MBS ([07:01](#)):

Oh, I love that. Pamay, what have you learned about what it takes to cross a threshold into a new and different space because you've done that more than most have. And I'm wondering if there's some insight or practice or wisdom you've gleaned from what it takes to step into the unknown like that.

Pamay ([07:21](#)):

I have. And it's a practice. I use that word a lot because I think it's an amazing word. And it's word that people who commit positions they practice so that when you walk into their space, they can help you appropriately. A lawyer may practice so that if you get in a bind, they can help you. Humility is so important because if you walk into a space and you're like, "I don't actually know anything. I don't know what's going on here. I don't know what is important to you. I don't know." And even sometimes I walk into spaces that have, I like to see a lot of



commentary around them where the general population may speak about that particular community a lot. And walking into that space and really trying to shed that and saying, "I'm actually just going to try to experience this for myself and quiet the noise."

Pamay ([08:15](#)):

So I think you asked about kind of learning and diversity. It's the same sort of thing where people say, just learn about other people if I'm a black woman. If you don't know about black people, read, there's so much information. And if you should be lucky enough to have a really close friend who's up for the task to educate, engage. It's a similar thing. I walked into a space. I thought, "I don't really know what's going on here. I'm going to sit here quietly and see what's the same to my experience. What's different? What's wildly different? How do I feel when this is happening? Am I uncomfortable? Am I like, I don't really believe that, but I can see how somebody would." I'd like to say, it's like, you're putting a mirror up to your face. And you're saying, how is this changing how I feel or believe or not.

Pamay ([09:04](#)):

So I think that when you walk into a space, just to be humble with an open heart and good intentions and say, "I'm here to learn because this is a space that is not the same space that I walk in the world," is so huge because men, you can learn and then you can let what you learn change the way that you lead the way that you live, the human that you are.

MBS ([09:26](#)):

That's beautifully said, really. You mentioned humility and that willingness to share a narrative that's potentially coming with the new place you're walking into and just show up and go, "What is actually happening here? And what impact does that have on me? What am I learning?" And it's making me think about the need for unlearning. And when we talk about learning a lot, but in



some ways, it feels like we have to clear some stuff out to create space for new learning, new connections to happen. In your work as a learning professional. How do you think about unlearning, and how do you go about helping people do that?

Pamay ([10:08](#)):

I definitely think unlearning is a thing. And I don't know that I speak about unlearning as a learning professional, although as a diversity professional, I feel like I do. The unlearning, I would say when I talk about it as learning professionals, more about every idea or every piece of information you take in, you ask yourself, is this for me? Or is this not for me? Because I'm not expecting you to believe everything or use everything, or apply everything. And if it's not for you, you can put it to the side. And I think in some ways that's related to unlearning, which is, "Hey, I took that in and I put it away. Not for me, not relevant, not actually what I believe, not useful for me."

Pamay ([10:51](#)):

I was talking to a friend the other day, and she said to me she was talking to another friend who was a chief diversity officer. And they said, "If you're doing this right, it changes you tremendously. Because even if you've been spending a lifetime mitigating bias and making sure you are being inclusive, there's certainly some underrepresented group that you know nothing about, you've not engaged with, you haven't really included in your practice." And as you're really trying to be inclusive of all different kinds of people, you have to look in the mirror and say, "Oh boy, I do have some biases left." You have to equally advocate for everybody. You have to address some of the issues that you have. And so that requires unlearning because, okay, that's a thing that I probably should just get away. It's not working. It's not aligned with this inclusive leader that I want to be.



MBS ([11:49](#)):

I kind of see that now. I can't answer you.

Pamay ([11:52](#)):

There it is. I have to address it.

MBS ([11:54](#)):

Pamay, I think the book you've chosen for us speaks a little bit to the conversation we've been having so far, not least the power of a practice. So what book have you chosen?

Pamay ([12:04](#)):

I have chosen, I am a big fan of Steven Pressfield. I read his first book, *Through the Work* when I was working on my first book, and it helped me get through. I have chosen, however, today to read from *The War of Art*. And the subtitle is *Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles*, and this book is so delicious that when I opened it, I didn't want to finish it because every page just spoke to me so deeply. So that is what I chose.

MBS ([12:33](#)):

I love that you've chosen Steven Pressfield, the very first podcast I did, and this was 10, maybe 15 years ago. Steven Pressfield was my very first guest, the great work interviews. So I feel like we've come full circle. What were you up to when you discovered this book?

Pamay ([12:50](#)):

Well, I did a project. I like projects, and I've learned the power of doing big things in small repeats. It's like the *Power of Habit*, those sorts of books. And so, when I started at Kraft-Heinz, I did a project called *365 Days of Learning*, where I said I learned something new every day and share it with the organization. And it was things that were within our corporate university, but it also, I love to read as



we've discussed. And so books were kind of one of the things. And so this was one of the things, the books that I read during that 365 days of learning. And I knew that I'd love Steven's last book. And so I knew I loved this one.

MBS ([13:30](#)):

That's fantastic. I mean, I've read this book, so I know it's hard to pick the two pages. Which two pages did you choose?

Pamay ([13:37](#)):

So odd. It's interesting. I was going to read about fear, but I chose just to read from a section called the Unlived Life, which is at the beginning, the very beginning when you're just familiarizing yourself with the impactful experience you're about to have with Mr. Pressfield and his books.

MBS ([13:57](#)):

I love that. So he's laying out the stage for us. So here we have Pamay Bassey reading from Steven Pressfield's War of Art, which of course, some people will have made this connection already is a play on the phrase, the Art of War by a famous military book.

Pamay ([14:14](#)):

Sun Tzu.

MBS ([14:15](#)):

Sun Tzu. Thank you. Perfect for me. Over to you.

Pamay ([14:19](#)):

Fantastic. So this section, as I mentioned, is called the Unlived Life. Most of us have two lives. The life we live and the unlived life within us, between the two stands resistance. Have you ever brought home a treadmill and let it gather dust in the attic? Ever quit a diet, a course of yoga, a meditation practice? Have you



ever bailed out on a call to embark upon a spiritual practice, dedicate yourself to a humanitarian calling, commit your life to the service of others? Have you ever wanted to be a mother, a doctor, an advocate for the weak and helpless, to run for office, crusade for the planet, campaign for world peace, or to preserve the environment? Late at night have you experienced a vision of the person you might become, the work you could accomplish, the realized being you were meant to be? Are you a writer who doesn't write, a painter who doesn't paint, an entrepreneur who never starts a venture? Then you know what resistance is.

Pamay ([15:35](#)):

One night I was lying down. I heard papa talking to mama. I heard papa say to let that boy Boogie Woogie because it's in him, and it's got to come out. John Lee Hooker Boogie Chillen. Resistance is the most toxic force on the planet. It is the root of more unhappiness than poverty, disease, and erectile dysfunction. To yield to resistance deforms our spirit. It stunts us and makes us less than we are and were born to be. If you believe in God, and I do, you must declare resistance evil, for it prevents us from achieving the life God intended when He endowed each of us with our own unique genius. Genius is a Latin word; the Romans used it to denote an inner spirit, holy and inviolable, which watches over us, guiding us to our calling. A writer writes with his genius; an artist paints with hers; everyone who creates operates from this sacramental center. It is our soul's seat, the vessel that holds our being-in-potential, our star's beacon, and Polaris.

Pamay ([16:46](#)):

Every sun casts a shadow, and genius's shadow is resistance. As powerful as is our soul's call to realization, so potent are the forces of resistance arrayed against it. Resistance is faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, harder to kick than crack cocaine. We're not alone if we've been mowed down by resistance; millions of good men and women have bitten the dust before us. And here's the biggest bitch: We don't even know what hit us. I



never did. From age 24 to 32, resistance kicked my ass from East Coast to West and back again 13 times, and I never even knew it existed. I looked everywhere for the enemy and failed to see it right in front of my face.

MBS (17:41):

Pal is so good. I haven't read this for a while. And man, I love that. One of my favorite quotes all time comes from an Australian movie called *Strictly Ballroom*. It's about ballroom dancing, and it's about gold lame. And it's about the Australian suburbs. It's also good versus evil. I mean, it's fantastic. And a heroine who's called Fran. Her saying is, "A life lived in fear is a life half lived." And you're speaking just to that right there. It's wonderful. I mean, what is it about this that grabbed you, Pamay?

Pamay (18:15):

I mean just the beginning where it says most of us have two lives. The life we live and the unlive live within us between the two stands resistance. And I spend a lot of time in sacred spaces, and I think we all want to be the best version of ourselves. And that can be if I'm sitting in a role that I want to be the best accountant ever, and boy do, I need to learn all these things in order to be able to do my job so I can create a life for myself and my family, or it can be a lofty creative goal where I want to write a book or the great American novel or a screenplay or something that's creative and hard. I love the idea that I can. This is frankly why I do the work that I do of seeing where I am and where I want to be in trying to navigate between those two and resistance is between those two, no matter what you're doing and the idea that we have to declare war on resistance.

Pamay (19:11):

Well, I mean, if you're a creative of any sort, you understand that. And how many people have bought a treadmill and said, "Oh, look that's a clothes hanger." Or like, I really want to be, I mean, right. I raised my hand, and all the



kind of projects that didn't come to fruition because I gave in to resistance, and I'm a writer as well. And I think I was starting to write. I have so many books in my head. And so really the idea of waging war on resistance. So you could find the creativity and the genius that you have. It's just so good.

MBS ([19:48](#)):

So clearly, you're a woman who's managed to overcome resistance in some settings because of all you've achieved and the work you've done and the work you put out into the world, but we all have resistance that we're wrestling with. I'm curious to know what's the resistance you're wrestling with in the moment that's hard for you?

Pamay ([20:06](#)):

I was just talking to a friend of mine today that says, "I'm so aware of my shortcomings and it's crystal clear." And to your point, many people will say, "But you've done this and you've done this." And I'm like, "Uh, but I haven't done that or that," It's like, Hamilton's there's so many things I haven't done. For me, health and wellness has always been a challenge. And so, in some ways, living your best life requires you to commit to whether it's eating right or exercising or all the things you know you should do, and I'll do them for a few days, and then I'll take a nap for those people. So that's like a very tactical thing.

Pamay ([20:49](#)):

I love the conversations around grit and how some people can just push through, and they have that. It's something that when I took my first assessment of my grit, I was like, "Wow, you got some work to do." I somehow have been able to push through in some areas, but I'm not that person who could just chop wood and carry water and in silence and in kind of strength and not make commentary along the way about how hard this is.



Pamay ([21:14](#)):

So and even my spiritual practice, I have to trick myself. "I'm going to go do something every week for it." I mean, some people just do that. I had to make a declaration, and I had to create a project around it. That was the way that I kind of had to make myself sit in that practice. And I've learned that projects are fine. It's how I work, and I'll just start a new one. I've got a couple going on at the same time, but those are some examples.

MBS ([21:39](#)):

I totally hear you, Pamay. I'm going to have such a track record of setting up elaborate structures to try and get me to do things and then hacking my own elaborate structures. And the older I get, the more elaborate and clever they are, and the clever I get at undoing the very thing that I want to do. So it's interesting that I have a similar sense of when people look at me and go, "Hey, you've done a bunch of stuff," and that is true. I have done a bunch of stuff, but part of me is going, "You have no idea of my graveyard of littered half projects and false starts and dabblings and all of that stuff." I mean, it's legion. Part of my learning around this is just to be kind to yourself because it's insult to injury to beat yourself up for not doing the thing that you want to be doing. It just kind of compounds the struggle.

Pamay ([22:34](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I would say one thing that I have been thinking about quite a bit is that learning anything is actually difficult and not knowing, and being in a space where people are talking about a thing and you're like, "I don't know," is really hard and most people avoid it at all costs. They are just, "I will learn this thing and I will stay in the space where I could be an expert in this thing." And because I'm not that kind of person, I'm constantly putting myself in situations where I need to learn and stretch and grow and climb this learning curve that compassion with self is so important because it's not that no, you're not like,



"Oh boy, I just too stupid to get this." That's not it. You are learning all the time. And that is hard. You are creating. And that is difficult.

Pamay ([23:22](#)):

So I love that this whole book is about managing resistance because that's that feeling like, "Oh, I haven't mastered this yet. Why am I not great in that?" Well, it's because the process is actually challenging, and kudos to you for starting that process. Even if you've tossed that research project, half-baked, you started it, and then you started something else, and you've created things that you have dragged across the finish line. So that whole compassion, empathy for self, I totally agree. So necessary.

MBS ([23:54](#)):

Pamay, you're the CLO of Kraft Heinz 40,000 people, 40 countries around the world. What's the challenge for bringing this to scale because you've read the book, I've read the book, and we go, "Oh my goodness, that's fantastic." But if you're calling forth the very best of the 40,000 people who work for Kraft Heinz help them overcome resistance. How do you do that at scale?

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

So the idea of having a practice or a habit, I think, is the antidote and talk to any writer, you know what? I write every day for two hours. I don't care if I feel like writing. I don't feel like writing up here. I feel like I'm creating something great. Or if it's just dribble, two hours, I'm doing it. And so the whole idea, we have a whole campaign around learning called learn like an owner, make a commitment to learn something new every day, but it's just for five minutes. And it's that habit that first of all, after you start with the habit, you realize, "Wow, this is really enriching my life." And then, you can direct that habit towards a specific capability. "Hey, I'm a marketing person. I need to learn about X," but I have this learning habit, so instead of reading about leadership for the next 90 days, I'm going to focus on this capability, et cetera.



Pamay ([25:06](#)):

That's how I think at scale. You model how to deal with the resistance. As you encourage people to start reading a habit, think of yourself as a learner, think of yourself as somebody who can learn your way through anything. And then you have that in your tool belt, just like any creator is going to say, "I'm going to write every day. I'm going to run every day. I'm going to," whatever you need to do every day to become that person that you want to become. And you're not going to allow resistance to get in the way of that practice is kind of the way it's shown up, I think, in my corporate space.

MBS ([25:39](#)):

Yeah, I'm kind of nosy about this because I play in this world of corporate learning and change, and it's hard. It's a struggle to get people to learn for some of the reasons that we've talked about, and then to get them to change their behavior is harder still. And it's in changing your behavior that you actually shift a culture. People are always really comfortable with what they know in the moment and how they act in the moment because you're relatively new in the role of CLO at Kraft Heinz. What surprised you in terms of the challenge of moving to a new organization and playing at a bigger scale than you played at before?

Pamay ([26:14](#)):

What surprised me? I don't know if it's a matter of surprise. But I will say that when I joined, and it is just over two years now, I was really focused on how can I make an impact? How can I add value to the situation? And in a real way, because at the end of the day, I want to make sure I'm supporting my CEO and his strategy for the company and moving things forward. I want to make sure that I'm helping people learn what they need to learn so that they can execute with excellence and contribute to the bottom line.



Pamay ([26:53](#)):

So it was kind of really some sleepless nights trying to determine how will I do that? And to your point, the culture is everything. So creating that culture of learning and curiosity, and creativity was the first step. And maybe what surprised me was wow, before I start creating curricula and programs and those sorts of things, the foundation is culture, is making sure that people are talking about learning. They're excited about learning. They have some passion around it. And then when I tell them, "I need you to learn X. Okay, great." Because learning is awesome verses, I come knock on your door and say, "If you don't learn X, then here's the consequences." People think of learning as a punishment, which is so sad because learning is delicious. Learning is great. Learning is a privilege.

Pamay ([27:46](#)):

So I think that coming to the realization that culture first, and then curricula culture first and then capabilities, culture first, and then everything else may have been a realization that I came to very early and then figured, "Okay, let's get to business, building a learning culture, transforming the learning culture," so that the development of capabilities and skills and those sorts of things could be built upon that.

MBS ([28:13](#)):

This really reminds me of that earlier story about walking into a new sacred space and crossing a threshold and approaching it with that humility around, "I don't know everything that's going on. And I don't know what the answer is. I don't even know what some of the questions are," and how tempting it is to walk into a place going, look, "I know stuff, I know how to make stuff happen. That's comfortable for me," but you just missed the bigger game if you're doing that.



Pamay ([28:38](#)):

Yeah. Some of the executives that I really respect, you listen first, just listen to as many people as you can, especially if you're walking into a new place where everybody else kind of knows how things work around here, and you're just starting to know, and again, crossing the threshold, the same thing as you make the eye contact with the person who's like, "I see you're new here. Let me help you. Let me show you how things get done around here," and having the openness and the humility to say, "Great because I want to learn all the things and I'm just going to listen and learn and see how I react. And then I will make some sort of movement."

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

So, believe it or not, you might not think that a project about sacred spaces would be relevant to a corporate space. But I see parallels in my life, the lessons I've learned, and how I can apply them in various contexts so clearly.

MBS ([29:33](#)):

Yeah, for me, just listening to this conversation, I'm really thinking about how I arrive into new spaces and also how I want to welcome people into new spaces as well. It's really beautiful, really quite profound. For me, as a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Pamay ([29:55](#)):

What needs to be said that has not yet been said? Well, I will say this, when I was looking at another book I was going to choose, I first settled on two pages about fear and how fear and resistance are related, and how so many people are. We talk about the fear of success, fear of failure. But so many people are so terrified of being their full, most amazing, most creative, Most insert adjective self that they will do anything not to be that. And I would have read it, except it was like two pages in a sentence. And I was like, "There's not going to end right."



So I chose the other section. So I think the other thing that needs to be said is courage is everything, no matter what role you're playing in a company or in your life, to be able to be courageous. So many people told me, I'm like, "Gosh, it took a lot of courage for you to walk into all those spaces that you didn't know," possibly.

Pamay ([30:57](#)):

But when we're talking about being our full actualized self, dealing with that fear, man, and having as much courage as you can to say, "If I'm going to be in the room, let me be in the room. And I'm going to talk to someone who I don't know anything about their lives. If I'm going to advocate for somebody, if I'm going to learn something so challenging to me," just walking through that fear is one of the largest... And talk about practice, just practice facing the fear and doing it anyway, I'd say that's the last kind of unlock to all of the goodness is yeah, you can fight resistance, but you're going to also have to be courageous because courage is necessary to do big things.

MBS ([31:45](#)):

When did you last welcome a stranger? When did you last cross a threshold for the first time? Our lives are grooved with the patterns and the people that we revisit, the patterns and people we return to. And there's often joy in that. The comfort of the familiar unselfconscious play, but if that's all there is, I wonder, are you truly looking towards the divine? So, of course, it's not hard to find Kraft Heinz's corporate website, but if you're looking for more about Pamay and particularly about her 52 Weeks of Worship, you can find the TED talk by Googling Pamay and TED. And the talk is called Navigating Sacred Spaces. And the website is my52wow, so M-Y-52 the numbers W-O-W.com. And of course, if you're on LinkedIn, so many of us are, you'll find her there as well.



MBS ([32:47](#)):

Look, you're awesome. You're doing great. I so appreciate you listen to the podcast, a few things to do if you're so moved, give the podcast reviewing your favorite podcast app. It really does make a difference. I check occasionally, and I'm always hoping to see more nice things said and more ratings and reviews. Think about joining the Duke Humphrey's, our free membership site. You'll find that at the website, [mbs.works](#), and you find your way easily enough downloads, transcripts, interviews that haven't been released. It's all there. And it's all totally free. And I think that's it just celebrating you listening and grateful for you being a listener and part of this community.