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

Part of the genius of humankind, the very bedrock of civilization, is our ability to have ideas and to share them. Hey, have you noticed? Hey, what if, which is one of the reasons why it is so irritating on how hard it is to actually do this? You say, "Hey, what if?" And they go, "Hey, whatever." You don't get why they don't get it.

MBS ([00:32](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Now, Tamsen Webster is all about idea transmission. She's honed the skill by helping hundreds of TEDx speakers take their loosey-goosey abstract and confusing idea and making it a compelling, irresistible 17 minutes.



MBS ([00:59](#)):

And she's done similar things for marketing teams and brands around the world. She got a new book, Find Your Red Thread. And in that, by reading that you come to understand that she is what you could call her an idea whisperer. Oh, what do I even mean by that? What is an idea whisperer?

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

Yeah, I think the best description of what I am and what I do is that I am an English-to-English translator. I have found myself throughout my life sitting between worlds. And as a result, I seem to have picked up the ability to understand one group is saying, so I can translate it for another

MBS ([01:39](#)):

Translating English-to-English, well, that sounds nonsensical until you remember that wonderful quote from George Bernard Shaw. The problem with communication is the illusion it's taking place. Now, I'm intrigued by this idea that Tamsen brought up about being between loads. Tamsen go to her first taste for that early on in life in high school. She was very much part of the art crowd. But her school required her to take sports. So, Tamsen found a way to do just that, that didn't involve sweating a lot.

Tamsen ([02:15](#)):

So, I ended up being the manager of the varsity boy's baseball team. And it was a blast. I mean, I learned how to score a baseball game, which I'm still very proud of my skill ability to do old paper scoring of a game. But it really helped me, I think, see for the first time that these two groups, which on the surface seem radically different, really just had a lot in common. And there were just things that I could understand from one group that helped me fit better into this other group and vice versa.



MBS ([02:51](#)):

Bridging arts and sports, well, those are two very different pursuits with very different languages. But in these divided times, it's clear that a bridge building campaign is required between just as normal humans as never before. So, I asked Tamsen, why is it so hard for the rest of us to hear and understand other people?

Tamsen ([03:16](#)):

Well, because we spend so much time talking to ourselves. And I mean, that seriously. And then, of course, there is that fun fact that not everybody has that inner voice, which for those of us with an inner voice.

MBS ([03:27](#)):

Really?

Tamsen ([03:27](#)):

This is mind blowing thing. I know. But whether or not you actively talk to yourself something there out loud, yeah.

MBS ([03:36](#)):

We tried to do, definitely, yeah.

Tamsen ([03:38](#)):

I mean, your brain has shortcuts for making the world make sense. And they are so innate at this point. They're so second nature. There's so much part of our operating system that it's nearly impossible for us, just like a computer can't read it... or can't see its own code, really, for us to really understand that we're doing it.



Tamsen ([04:03](#)):

And so what happens is, we end up talking like a local to a visitor from a foreign country. We may be talking about the same thing, but the way that we're talking about it is a way that suits us, but doesn't suit the people that we're talking to. And so, that's really the big flip that is required is that ability to... and it goes beyond empathy. It's not just to feel what somebody else is feeling. But to the extent possible, think like someone else is thinking and to take that perspective when you're trying to explain things.

MBS ([04:43](#)):

One of the ways you introduce yourself, I've seen this in your bio, is part strategist, part storyteller. What is the relationship of story to strategy or maybe vice versa, strategy to story?

Tamsen ([04:59](#)):

So, I would have had a very different answer to this just even a couple of weeks ago, but recently, I saw an article in the MIT Sloan Management Review that was talking about how strategy is an argument. And that how any good business strategy actually is an argument. It's a case for something that has-

MBS ([05:15](#)):

Oh, that's nice.

Tamsen ([05:16](#)):

Oh, it's just like oh, my gosh. I was like these are my people. Thankfully, I'm very near MIT. I do have some context there. I'm like, "I just want to talk to you about this."

MBS ([05:30](#)):

As an aside, I write for that periodical. So, I can make introductions if you need to.



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

Oh, my gosh. Please, that article, I was this is the missing link, because when we make sense of the world, whether that's in business or elsewhere, we do it as a story. And a lot of times when people hear story, they think once upon a time story, rising action, falling action, hero's journey, whatever. I mean, that's true. But the kinds of stories our brain builds are really just cause and effect stories.

Tamsen ([06:01](#)):

They're instant explanations for why things work the way that they do. And in essence, to quote a different area of the world, it's a story is an argument. And so, when a strategy is an argument and a story is an argument, and so, to me, a strategy is a story if you can actually understand what was the story that you told yourself about why this idea, this particular action is the right one?

Tamsen ([06:33](#)):

Well, then, you have the strategy, you have the argument for that strategy, and you have a way of explaining that strategy to other people that will intuitively make sense to them, because everyone has this story operating system. So, the degree to which you can put your ideas into that code is the degree to which you can quickly upload your ideas essentially into other people's story process. Great.

MBS ([07:02](#)):

So, do you have to succeed, Tamsen? Okay. I'm thinking about the argument. And I love this bridge all the stories of version of an argument and strategies a version of an argument, you get to see how these bedmates. And then, if you're somebody like me, like, yeah, I'm conflict averse. I don't like arguments.

Tamsen ([07:23](#)):

Yes, I get that. But I mean, think of an argument like a case. That's how I think of it. It's not that you're arguing like, err, let's have a conflict about it. It is the



argument in the logical definition of it. This is your case for why this particular idea is important, or this idea of particular idea or strategy, or whatever it might be, is the right one.

Tamsen ([07:46](#)):

And that's the thing. I mean, I think when you are explaining your idea, I think so often, we end up offering explanations for people, when what we really need to be offering our arguments. Again, not conflict, I'm going to fight you on this. That's actually counter to my whole approach. But it's, in order to really convince somebody of something, in fact, they have to convince themselves. You will not convince them.

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

And so, they have to hear a case that makes sense to them. And that case, the cases that make the most sense, are the stories we tell ourselves. Those are the most powerful arguments of all. And so, that's really what this is all about. I really just got fascinated by that from really started back in my days as a weight watchers leader, like how is it that people make these decisions, what stories do they tell, how can you rewrite those stories.

Tamsen ([08:45](#)):

Yeah, and not from a once upon a time, it was a dark and stormy night kind of thing. It's the case. It's that explanation that we give ourselves. That the justification for why it is that we do what we do the way that we do it.

MBS ([09:06](#)):

There's a fear that I have around this Tamsen, because if I'm busy trying to put my case, my argument into the language that they understand so becomes a story that that made sense to them, and they can tell themselves, how much of myself do I lose in that? And you're entangled in that as well, how much of my authenticity am I trading for that? How much of my uniqueness am I losing in



this need to build a bridge over the understanding bridge over to the other person? How do you balance that tension?

Tamsen ([09:42](#)):

So, I hear that and my initial reaction is that it isn't just the language that we're putting into the frame of the audience, the people that you're talking to is the concepts. And so, there's a couple things. One is that where I believe that argument starts, which is in something that your audience wants, but doesn't yet have. To me, that's a shared goal. If you don't also believe that your product service idea, whatever it might be, satisfies that wants that somebody else has well, then why are we doing it for?

MBS ([10:20](#)):

Why are you in this conversation anyway? Yeah.

Tamsen ([10:22](#)):

Yeah, exactly. There's no conversation to have. So, that's the first piece where that very first place where it starts as a shared goal. I mean I talked about it in the language of it's the audience's goal, because that's the way that I found over time, just puts the thumb slightly more on the scale in favor of somebody actually putting in the audience's language.

Tamsen ([10:43](#)):

But it is a shared goal. I mean, you have to believe that your idea actually is an answer to that question. The second piece is that, as you know, from having read the book, that you're in the way of that goal, then we present a problem that standing in the way. It's there, in fact, a real problem that has to be solved before we can solve the problem of how to get the goal.



Tamsen ([11:06](#)):

And that's, again, a place where it is, while it is first anchored in the way that your audience sees the world, you are immediately contrasting it with your way of seeing the world. And again, it has to be a contrast that you agree with. It's basically you're trying to find a shared perspective, a shared set of lenses, through which you can talk about your idea.

MBS ([11:31](#)):

Can you give us just to ground this for people who are catching up on this whole light structure, can you give us some examples of just the demonstrations of what those are or what they could look like or sound like?

Tamsen ([11:44](#)):

Sure, I'll use an example from one of my TEDx Cambridge speakers. And those are fresh and eventually in the public domain. So, I know I can use those safely. So, one of the folks that I'm working with right now, actually, when I was working with just this morning, Becca Schwarzlose is her name. She talks about brain mapping, and there's goal question, this question that she her research answers is, in lay language, why is it so hard for us as humans to think about certain kinds of things like budgeting and long-term planning, and compound interest are some of the examples that she gave.

Tamsen ([12:29](#)):

She's like, "Why is that so hard?" And the esoteric, more intellectual question that that is, is whether or not is our brains built to serve the adults that they will become? Or it is the brain that we have an adult.

MBS ([12:45](#)):

Well, give me the damn marshmallow now?



Tamsen ([12:47](#)):

Exactly, what's going on there? So, that's the question. And this is your question, right? So, she is legitimately curious. Her work started with this question of like, why is it so hard.

Tamsen ([12:58](#)):

Another speaker that I'm working with, again, a similar just lays question, which is what makes people say yes to a request, right? That's been so bums. And these are questions that are shared. Now, in the way of these questions are another problem that has to be solved. And so, when you're talking about whether it's a researcher or whether it's you and your own idea, there really is this phase that your brain went through that says, everybody looks at it this way. But what if I looked at it this way?

Tamsen ([13:32](#)):

And so, in the case of Becca's work with the brain mapping, she said, well, most people think about these questions about the brain development, and why is it so hard from an evolutionary perspective? And that's not wrong. I mean, our brains developed in certain ways for certain reasons. Just about we focus on that more than on. So, that's the current perspective and that's the one that validates the audience's current perspective.

Tamsen ([13:55](#)):

But the perspective that she's introducing is one of experience. How are our brains shaped by not only the experiences that we have, but the experiences that we must have in order to become the humans that we're becoming? And so, you see? Just by doing that, she validates how most people look at it, but she's offering this other thing, which most people would agree is also true, right?



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

Most of us would say, of course, our brains and who we are as adults are shaped by our experiences. But that's usually not what we're thinking about when we're thinking about the mechanics of how our brains work. So, that's how she's starting to introduce that second perspective but still be true to her own research, her own perspective. And you see, we're using the audience's language to get to her work, but we're not losing her work. We're really just opening doors to her work that are attractive doors to the audience.

MBS ([14:51](#)):

It's reminding me of really my first job which was in the world of innovation and creativity, and I spend a lot of time doing market research. And I learned a way of writing concepts to test them out. Is there an idea here? And you're starting, isn't it annoying that this happens? But wouldn't it be great if something like this could happen instead? Blah, blah. It's the new way you get this to happen not that to happen.

MBS ([15:17](#)):

And then, you go to people, "Oh, no. Are you interested in that?" They're like, "No," because the problem statement didn't really connect, or the solution statement didn't really connect. And you're going to work in both of those to try and figure out a way to go, oh, here's maybe some crappy product that I might be able to sell you. This is why I left that career. But yeah, it's a little bit story.

Tamsen ([15:37](#)):

Yeah, this is why same friend, the same. Yeah, notice that I'm not so in marketing or advertising. I love the big ideas and I was conscious choice to go to things bigger than widgets.



MBS ([15:50](#)):

So, speaking of big ideas, tell us about the book that you've chosen to read for us.

Tamsen ([15:54](#)):

So, the book that I've chosen to read is, *Mistakes Were Made But Not by Me*.

MBS ([16:01](#)):

I think you wish you came up with that cover title that is such a good title.

Tamsen ([16:04](#)):

It's such a good title. And I came to this book, as it was a recommendation from a psychologist not when I was seeing, but actually a psychologist that I was referred to because I was exploring an idea that I wanted to cover in one of my keynotes.

Tamsen ([16:22](#)):

I wanted to check my thinking on something. And it was an idea behind the keynote that eventually became the one that I call getting the green light, because it was about this idea that pain is the enemy of long-term change. And I wanted to make sure that I was accurately representing some basic concepts, frankly, a cognitive behavioral therapy, but in a business context.

Tamsen ([16:52](#)):

And so, I talked with this woman, and she was like, well, and I knew that she's essentially, what you're talking about creating cognitive dissonance in people. And I'm like, "Well, I know that, but I can't exactly say that from chemo stage, because people like, err, err. I mean, I get there, but you can't leave with that, because people were like, "What are you talking about?"



MBS ([17:10](#)):

Exactly.

Tamsen ([17:10](#)):

And but she said, if you really, really want to understand this really, really well, you should read this book, *Mistakes Were Made, But Not by Me*, because it was written... I mean, I had read. So, Leon Festinger is the psychologist that initially came up with cognitive dissonance theory and he's got this amazing and it's just for people not familiar with his work. It really started with his study of doomsday cults, and why is it that when a doomsday cult would predict the end of the world, and then the end of the world didn't happen, what happened to those people? What happened?

MBS ([17:46](#)):

Half of them double down on there going, "See this proves it even more."

Tamsen ([17:49](#)):

I know.

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

How does that work?

Tamsen ([17:52](#)):

Exactly. And I'm sure none of us see any familiarities or through lines to what's happened recently at all.

MBS ([18:00](#)):

Exactly.



Tamsen ([18:01](#)):

But she was suggesting that this book was a great... okay, it was lay persons read of cognitive dissonance theory. And it was written by one of Festinger's protégé. So, it was very tight to Festinger. So, this wasn't somebody interpreting somebody else's interpretation. This was somebody who studied under Festinger was saying, okay, here's what we've done with cognitive dissonance theory since.

MBS ([18:21](#)):

There's a spiritual lineage to from the original work, yeah, in this.

Tamsen ([18:25](#)):

Yeah, I am so fascinated by cognitive dissonance, because the seeking of cognitive consonants, in other words, making sure that there's congruency and alignment between who you see yourself to be, how you act, what you say what you do, that drive is one of the most powerful drives that we are as humans. And it is running afoul of that drive that in my experience, is what gets in the way of creating change.

Tamsen ([18:58](#)):

And so, I just really wanted to understand it more. So, I read this book, and this book was just wonderful explanation and exploration of this, just the deep cognitive biases that come in with dissonance that it was, yeah. It has become one of my favorites and one of my favorites to recommend to other people.

MBS ([19:18](#)):

That's fantastic. And why do you pick your two pages and read from Mistakes Were Made, But Not by Me?



Tamsen ([19:29](#)):

The brain is designed with blind spots, optical and psychological and one of its cleverest tricks is to confer on its owner, the comforting delusion that he or she does not have any. In a sense, dissonance theory is a theory of blind spots of how and why people unintentionally blind themselves so that they fail to notice vital events and information that might make them question their behavior or their convictions.

Tamsen ([19:59](#)):

Along with the confirmation bias, the brain comes packaged with other self-serving habits that allow us to justify our own perceptions as beliefs as being accurate, realistic, and unbiased. Social psychologist, Lee Ross, calls this phenomenon naive realism, the inescapable conviction that we perceive objects and events clearly, "as they really are."

Tamsen ([20:28](#)):

We assume that other reasonable people see things the same way we do. If they disagree with us, well, they obviously aren't seeing things clearly. Naive realism creates a logical Labyrinth, because it presupposes two things. One, people who are open-minded and fair ought to agree with reasonable opinion. And two, any opinion I hold must be reasonable. If it weren't, I wouldn't hold it.

Tamsen ([20:58](#)):

Therefore, if I can just get my opponents to sit down here and listen to me explain how things really are, they will agree with me. And if they don't, it must be because they are biased. Ross knows wherever he speaks, both of his laboratory experiments and from his efforts to reduce the bitter conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Even when each side recognizes that the other side perceives the issues differently, each thinks that the other side is biased while they themselves are objective, and that their own perceptions of reality should provide the basis for settlement.



Tamsen ([21:38](#)):

In one experiment, Ross took piece proposals created by Israeli negotiators labeled them as Palestinian proposals, and asked Israeli citizens to judge them. The Israelis like the Palestinian proposal attributed to Israel more than they like the Israeli proposal attributed to the Palestinians. He says, "If your own proposal isn't going to be attractive to you, when it comes from the other side, what chance is there that the other side's proposal is going to be attractive when it actually comes from the other side?"

MBS ([22:15](#)):

That's great. And as blunter laying out of you're not nearly as smart or as rational or as kind or as gentle, as you think you are.

Tamsen ([22:24](#)):

Oh, never.

MBS ([22:26](#)):

What struck a chord for you in this testimony? Why did you pick this passage, in particular?

Tamsen ([22:32](#)):

This passage in particular, because I thought it was such a great explanation of the blindness that we have to our own bias. This was the first time I'd ever come across that phrase, naive realism. And it explains a lot, right? I mean, we think that we see the world clearly because the world makes clear sense to us, thanks to all those stories that we've constructed about it in our head.

Tamsen ([23:00](#)):

But we completely forget that other people have that same perspective from their own worldview. I thought that combination of concept, which just a beautiful, I think, potentially unfamiliar concept to some folks, combined with



such a dramatic example from the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and how you just put a different label on it. And people like, "Oh, well, that's clearly not better" when actually they preferred their "opponents version" simply because it was labeled as if it was from their own. It just says to me, just as you said, immediately after the reading.

MBS ([23:38](#)):

We're not. We're not basically not.

Tamsen ([23:45](#)):

It's a great reminder that, A, humility is a trait to be fostered and nurtured within ourselves, as is the ability to extend grace to other people, because, as I like to say it, everybody wants to be perceived as smart, capable and good. And if we could just remember that more than anything else, then I think all of us would be to forget influencing, getting big ideas out there. I think each of us would be more successful as humans, if we were just to remember that that everything that we do and everything that other people do, by and large, is just simply driven by that need to be seen as smart, capable and good.

MBS ([24:35](#)):

I'm wondering what delusions you've managed to let go of now that you're becoming aware of this and what delusions you're holding on to.

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

All right. Delusions to let go of. I think the biggest one for me is the delusion of memory and the delusion of the accuracy of memory. That was a different book, actually, frankly. I think Invisible Gorilla was the name of the book that really made me go? Oh, my gosh.

MBS ([25:03](#)):

Stumbling into Happiness is a bit like that as well.



Tamsen ([25:05](#)):

Oh, that's a good one too. Yeah, absolutely.

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

And Daniel Gilbert worked where I'm just, oh, I remember nothing accurately. Yes.

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

No. So, that's definitely been one of those. And I think the other one which has been very important is the delusion that I am free of bias. There is another research study that I found fascinating once upon a time that it's the people who think that they are not biased that in fact, have the most bias of actions, that people who are completely, at least, aware of the fact that their prejudice that they're bigoted, or misogynistic or racist, or whatever that actually account for that in their behaviors.

Tamsen ([25:42](#)):

Sometimes it's justification of bad behaviors, but in a situation where they know they have to give "unbiased" review of something, it's the people who acknowledge their bias that are actually able to give a more unbiased review, because they take into account. They've acknowledged that. And I won't let myself get away with the just okay, well, you're going to be biased Tamsen, so just live with it.

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

I do try to eradicate that when I find them. I see it oftentimes actually in conversations with my kids, because one of my older son is, and I love this about him, he is very focused on fairness and justice and what's equal. And he is at the tender age of 13, very convinced that he is right, and how he's remembered something is [crosstalk 00:26:39]. Correct. Yes, absolutely. And I find that this comes into play even in my interactions with him because he'll be



like, "do you remember that this is what happened and I think to myself." That is not what I remember.

Tamsen ([26:52](#)):

And I'll say that. I was like, "I don't remember it that way." I said, but and I'll say to him. I'm like, but memory is fallible? I think it's like if you remember it that way, I think that's probably true. And I think those are kind of the delusions that I have try to let go as a part of this. And it's just made me aware of the delusions or the delusions I still have.

MBS ([27:19](#)):

I know, we're all finding our way out of the maze of ourselves now as best we can.

Tamsen ([27:24](#)):

Yes, yes, I have a lot of therapists, too, business therapists, financial therapists.

MBS ([27:31](#)):

There we go.

Tamsen ([27:32](#)):

Yeah, lots of therapists.

MBS ([27:34](#)):

Your book is called Find Your Red Thread.

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

Yes.



MBS ([27:38](#)):

When did you come across the metaphor of the red thread? And why is it so powerful for you?

Tamsen ([27:44](#)):

I first came across that metaphor when I was in Sweden, outside of Stockholm, actually, in the offices of Ericsson. They were a client. I was working for a different company at the time. We did a boutique presentation skills and message development training. And we were working with them on something.

Tamsen ([28:06](#)):

And one of the clients said, he basically said, so those two the red thread of this is and then supplied, whatever. And at the time, I was like, "Oh, what a beautifully visceral phrase." And I understood contextually what it meant. But I presumed it was an internal to Ericsson thing. Maybe it was just like one of those company things that somebody said something and they're like, "Oh, we talked about the red thread here at Ericsson."

Tamsen ([28:35](#)):

Until several years later, I was working with a different client here in the States, and they had a Swedish team member. Again, this is different clients. So, this is the State Street bank. This was an Ericsson and she was like, "All right, I'm missing the red thread here." And I'm like, "Oh."

MBS ([28:54](#)):

Is it a Swedish thing?

Tamsen ([28:56](#)):

Is it a Swedish thing? What is this? And she was like, "Oh, don't you don't you use that phrase in English." And I was like, not here in the US. I mean, I understand, it's like, "Do I have it correct what you mean by this?" And she said,



"Yes." And I was like, "Where does it come from?" Because now it's clearly like, is it Swedish? She's like, "I don't know."

Tamsen ([29:20](#)):

So, that set me on to an exploration because I had that in my head. And I had recently finished Chris Anderson's official guide to TED Talks book or whatever type it is, where he talks about how every great TED Talk has a through line proceeds to give you examples of them and then does not tell you how to create one, which I found infinitely frustrating because at the time, and I still do actually.

MBS ([29:48](#)):

Well, market opportunity, yeah.

Tamsen ([29:50](#)):

Exactly. Or market, ding, exactly. That was where the book was born. I have to tell you because, at the time, I was an executive producer of TEDx Cambridge, so the idea strategist for them. And I was like, "Okay, here's this thru line. It's really important. The Swedish have this awesome name for it. Tell me more." And yeah. Then I dove in and discovered his origins in Greek myth. And that was a fabulous discovery.

MBS ([30:24](#)):

Right, that minute told this is so powerful.

Tamsen ([30:27](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([30:28](#)):

One of the things that you say in the book is that ideas need to be built. That really struck me. I was like throwing ideas just happen. I mean, they just basically



show up in your head. And sure, you might polish them a little bit. But the idea of building blocks to shape and create an idea felt like a lot of work and less spontaneously genius. I just wait for the idea to show up.

Tamsen ([30:55](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([30:56](#)):

What are the building blocks?

Tamsen ([30:58](#)):

Yeah, well, the building blocks are the building blocks of story. So, it's what you quoted, you had a great quote earlier, where something inspiration was when-

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

Yeah, it's when your past suddenly makes sense, yeah.

Tamsen ([31:09](#)):

Correct. In other words, where all the pieces of the story fell into place. So, in my mind when I started really diving into this, and trying to figure out, again I was trying to figure out, how do I take this expert language at the time as this expert language of the scholars and academics that I was working with, with TEDx Cambridge and how do we translate that into lay language, admittedly intellectual, highly educated lay language of a TEDx audience. But it was still a translation.

Tamsen ([31:37](#)):

And I was trying to figure out what is the language that everyone speaks? And everybody's brain speaks story. And again, not just once upon a time stories, but the reason why once upon a time stories are so effective is because they contain the building blocks of these make sense of the world stories. So, what's



happening is that inspiration striking so happens, those eureka moments are real. They absolutely happen.

Tamsen ([32:07](#)):

But what I have come to believe is that the moment that happens is the moment that that last piece of that building block of story clicks into place. So that all of a sudden that connective tissue between question and answer between issue and idea between problem and solution just suddenly makes sense. So, it's good news for the creative folks who just want that piece to... that magic strike, because it means that it will, but be it means that you can go back and find the building blocks that created it so that you can actually explain it to somebody else.

Tamsen ([32:44](#)):

You can explain to somebody else, why that bolt of inspiration is the right one, because in that moment, you're like, this is the right idea. And I'm completely convinced of it. And most people have had the experience that you can't just say that to other people and have them become convinced it to.

Tamsen ([33:02](#)):

So, being able to go back and understand that every idea has that story behind it means that if you do have that flash of inspiration, you can go back and put what's the phrase, you've built your classes in the air now put the foundations under them, that's essentially what you can do. But it also works on the other side, if you're like, if you don't have an idea and you're trying to find one, you could really start at the beginning of the story and see where the story takes you.

MBS ([33:30](#)):

Tell me more about that, because I'm an ideas person. I have ideas bubbling through my head on a regular basis. And least 98.5% of them are rubbish. And



the other one and a half aren't that good either, but there's some subset that is an okay idea every now and then. But having ideas is not the problem for me. I've got lots of ideas. And I know in conversation of other people that like I have no ideas.

Tamsen ([33:55](#)):

False.

MBS ([33:57](#)):

Well, I think I agree that's false. But how do you help people move into the darkness and start feeling their way towards and feeling the shape of the ideas that are there, but maybe not yet fully recognized?

Tamsen ([34:12](#)):

You take them along the stepping stones of the structure of the story that current leads to an idea. You just take them up the steps. You lead them up the steps. Eventually, you'll get to the top. And that starts with a question that they want to answer for themselves. So, back to what we're talking about before like what's and you were saying like it starts with something that's annoying, or why don't we have or what's a better way or why can't we or how could I or when will I, all of those things.

Tamsen ([34:45](#)):

Every idea starts with an inquiry like that. It just does whether it's conscious or not, there is a moment where you're like why not, how can, when will, who will, how will. It just starts there. So, yeah.

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

Actually, can you repeat those five or six little question stubs that you threw out, because they're fantastic. It's just like, I've got this image of you seeding a field with these different types of curiosity questions?



Tamsen ([35:17](#)):

Sure. I don't know that I can repeat them. I just there was a lot in the moment. But there are things why not, how can, where will, when will, who will, how will, why not, why is it so hard to, why is it easy for me to.

MBS ([35:32](#)):

That's good.

Tamsen ([35:36](#)):

Everything starts with that kind of inquiry, again, whether conscious or not. So, really, the whole process that I walk people through is a process, I believe of making the unconscious conscious and making the covert overt and discreet, because it really, when you're trying to find an idea, and I do have folks that come to me with this, either because they've established... they're already established around an idea and they're like, I need my next big thing. Or they feel that pole of having a thing that they can hang their hat on.

Tamsen ([36:12](#)):

They feel the call as any human would I think of being able to really crisply define the distinction and the differentiation of their own worldview. It helps to just back at the beginning, more questions you love to answer? And that, frankly, is a question like that realization came to me from reading a fantastic book, a collection of essays by Alain de Botton, which I'm sure I massacre called the Art of Travel. And there's this wonderful essay in that book, where it was so resonant for me. He was basically complaining about tourist guides, tour books, visitor books, and other ones. They're like those are X, Y and Z.

MBS ([36:58](#)):

Lonely planet or something.



Tamsen ([36:59](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

MBS ([37:00](#)):

You and every other lonely planet person shows up the same game temple, right?

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

Exactly. And he was basically it was basically a beautifully elegant rant against that, because or rather it was a rant about making sure that you're clear on the fact that whoever wrote those books was writing them from a point of view of a question they were intrigued to answer. And so, I took the thrust of the call, to action of essay to be what question like when you travel, what question do you seek to answer?

Tamsen ([37:37](#)):

And I know for me personally that helps put into perspective, like why I just love to walk around a city. I just love to walk. I like to window shop. I love to just see what's in the stores. Some of that might be because my mother was an anthropologist. It's just got through me-

MBS ([37:52](#)):

What's the question you seek to answer when you travel?

Tamsen ([37:57](#)):

What gives this place its unique pole and power?

MBS ([38:01](#)):

Yes, yeah.



Tamsen ([38:01](#)):

Yeah, which is actually a consistent question for me around everything. So, there was these tumblers of a lock like really reading that essay and answering that question for myself. And I was like, "Well, wait a minute. That's kind of what I do with everything." If I were to come back as an animal, I'm pretty or if I wasn't one before, I'm pretty sure it was a magpie because I'm just endlessly fascinated by beautiful shiny things and ideas, and just picking things up from wherever to see what I can build from them.

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

Again, that that was part of what was woven into the thinking behind the book. And my approach, which was what if other people are like this? What if other people have questions that they are repeatedly drawn to answer? And I found that people are. They may not have it cross bread on the top of their head, but if you ask them enough times like what are you curious about, what are you solving.

Tamsen ([39:05](#)):

It doesn't take much, because now I've seen it over and over again with my clients over a number of years now, where you start to put those answers that they give you next to each other. And you can say, do you see, do you see how this is all the same question. And sometimes they're like, "Oh my gosh." And it's just a beautiful moment.

MBS ([39:22](#)):

When do you think we have an essential question that drives us that creates the through line to our life?

Tamsen ([39:31](#)):

Well, that is the perpetual fox versus hedgehog, isn't it? I am a self-avowed hedgehog. So, for me personally, absolutely. There is a question that I think that



I see the world through, and that is, how do you close the gap between aspiration, the aspiration and actual between potential and reality? I'm really fascinated by that.

Tamsen ([39:58](#)):

And so, it's part of why I've spent so much time between the worlds of passionate people, because sciences where spent a lot of time, academics where I spent a lot of time, artists where I spent a huge amount of time as well. These are people who are exists on the edge of potential consciously. Most of the world just doesn't get it. They don't get why they do that. They don't get the power of their things.

Tamsen ([40:27](#)):

So, I see that my world is definitely driven by that single question and all of the different clothes that it wears to different situations. But I fully understand that not everybody is that way that Isaiah Berlin foxes are out there where there are multiple frameworks and multiple schema through which people look at the world. So, I know that there are people who are interested either in a group of questions, or in the process of questioning even. And those folks are just as fun for me to talk to and work with, because it is a worldview and a perspective that so different from my own.

MBS ([41:17](#)):

Yes, Tamsen, it's been a wonderful conversation. What needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between us?

Tamsen ([41:27](#)):

Well, I think it's building a little bit more when you said that, some people feel like they don't have any ideas. And I said, "False." And you're like, "I agree." I want to take that one step further. And that is that I believe that everybody, in fact, does have at least one very big idea in them. My experience shows that not



everybody's willing to do the work to bring out or to serve that idea, which is fine, like everybody can do what they want.

Tamsen ([42:02](#)):

That's one of the delusions that I have tried let go. But I do believe that because if this work has taught me anything, is that even though this structure of story that we use to explain the world to ourselves is universal, and I believe that it is and if I ever decide to go back and actually get the doctorate, I tell myself that's what I want to prove out that it is in fact universal.

Tamsen ([42:33](#)):

How we fill in those blanks is this beautiful, motley Madlib, right, of life and of perspective, and that how each of us fills in those blanks. What question we answer? What those contrasting lenses of perspective are? What the core assumptions, values and beliefs are? What sets of skills and approaches that we have developed either through intuition or experience or education? That combination is if it's not actually unique, it's mathematically close enough.

Tamsen ([43:12](#)):

So, that if you can find that and you can find your own, truly, you're close enough to a unique way to articulate how you see the world and that operating system that drives you, you have enormous power, both for yourself and for the world that we live in.

MBS ([43:41](#)):

So, one of the bridges my wife and I have had to build over our route years together is on the pronunciation of macramé or macramé, depending on what continent you're from. I say macramé, she says macramé. And I have no idea why we were talking about macramé or macramé. But here's the point, when I hear Tamsen's final words macramé slash macramé is what comes to mind.



MBS ([44:07](#)):

Weaving together who you are, your history, your strengths, your vulnerabilities, your opportunity, your source code with that one idea that's bubbling up. I mean, this idea stemmed from frustration? This matters, and the way Donald currently sucks, it needs to be better. Or perhaps it stems from a vision. This is what's missing. And this word needs to be known by others. Honestly, it doesn't really matter what the source is, only that you consider it and consider bringing it and sharing it and communicating it with the rest of the world.

MBS ([44:46](#)):

You can find out about Tamsen and her book and her work at her website, tamsenwebster.com, her socials are all her unique name as well Tamsen, T-A-M-S-E-N, Webster, W-E-B-S-T-E-R. Whenever you're social is and you want to follow her on that, that's where you'll find her.

MBS ([45:05](#)):

Thank you for listening, I always appreciate it. The three things that you can choose to do now go check out the Duke Humphreys membership site, totally free. But you'll find some bonuses, transcripts, downloads other episodes. Get the podcast a review. Honestly, it's annoying but this is true. It's annoying that I have to ask at the end of every episode, but people look at reviews as a way of going this is worth listening to. So, it makes this podcast easier to find for others.

MBS ([45:35](#)):

And thirdly, honestly, the best way this grows is by word of mouth. So, this conversation about communication and finding your big idea with Tamsen struck a chord for you. I'd asked you to go who asked my destroying a chord for in your life. And if you're willing to pass on a recommendation, I'd be grateful. You're awesome and you're doing great.