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

The oil company, Shell, has been practicing scenario planning for 50 years, imagining different ways the future will roll out and building an organization with the resilience and adaptability to be ready, or at least ready ish for these new worlds. Shell ran their very first scenario planning session in 1971. And they've been sharing some of their insights since then. In a new Lens report from 2013, they talk about three different central paradoxes to our world, the prosperity paradox, the leadership paradox, and the connectivity paradox.

MBS ([00:38](#)):

Let me just focus on one, for now, the connectivity paradox. And the connectivity paradox is this, on the one hand, we've never been more connected, and that has unleashed in an extraordinary way the ability to connect, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn articles, self-published books, yep, even



podcasts. They are everywhere. And that's just the tip of the surface. But that same connectivity has destroyed the value of IP. It's easy to be a creative. It's hard to fund a life as a creative. The long tail is very, very, very long indeed these days. So how do you find a way to live a life as someone who creates?

MBS ([01:25](#)):

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. I first came across Jessica Abel's work when I discovered her book, *Out on the Wire*. It's really a must-read for anyone interested in the art of storytelling, particularly in the world of podcasting. It's also a graphic novel.

MBS ([01:50](#)):

Now I dabbled in graphic novels, or sometimes they're called comics. I've just finished *Y: The Last Man*. And if you're looking for a recommendation that's about to become a TV series, that's a pretty good read. And so, of course, I have some idea of what it takes to write a book because I've written some of those myself. And if you haven't heard me complain about it, it is endless working and reworking of the text. I don't really know what it takes to create a full-length graphic novel, but Jessica does.

Jessica ([02:19](#)):

We're not talking like, "Oh yeah, I had a couple of weeks of crazy hours." It was literally 10 months with me working flat out every day. Matt helping me with backgrounds, interns helping me put stuff together. Because the thing about comics is that I spent a year researching the book, creating the structure, redoing the... Learning from the material to create the book and writing it for another year. So pulling this structure apart, doing it over, whatever. So two years of development, and then I have essentially a complete book, except I still have to draw it.



MBS ([03:00](#)):

So, in other words, it's just like writing a book, but then also drawing a book. Twice the work, at least, for something that gets consumed maybe five times as quick. Wow, that is a lot. And you know what? Creating the book is, in some ways, the easy part because at least that's a known unknown. It's a mess, but it's your mess. You've set the parameters. You're accountable for its progress and success, but there's so much more to life than that.

Jessica ([03:32](#)):

If I'm going to be able to pay for my family's life, I have to be pitching a new book now, while I am working 10 hours a day at the drawing table. I should be coming up with a new concept, putting together a book proposal, getting it to my agent, getting it out, trying to figure out what's next. And I just was, I just thought, "I can't." This feeling of, "I can't ever get off this hamster wheel of creation." You're just churning out stuff.

MBS ([04:05](#)):

The hamster wheel, chasing hard, just to try and catch up to being slightly less behind. And that's the perfect segue for Jessica's book.

Jessica ([04:14](#)):

I chose *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* by Alexander Chi. It's a memoir. It's a series of essays, many of which have been published elsewhere and then reworked to fit together and so on. But basically cover his life, becoming an author.

MBS ([04:38](#)):

Right.



Jessica ([04:38](#)):

It covers his high school years and thinking about his awakening as a writer at that point, and it's not always just focusing on writing. It's also focusing on other parts of his life. I mean, he's Asian-American, he's gay, and all... He was very involved in Act Up and AIDS activism.

MBS ([05:03](#)):

Activism. Yeah.

Jessica ([05:03](#)):

Yeah. And so, all that's in there as well.

MBS ([05:07](#)):

So knowing all that, how did you come to pick two pages? I mean, it sounds like there's a lot to choose from.

Jessica ([05:12](#)):

It took a while. It was hard, but I mean, we're going to talk about why I picked this after I read it.

MBS ([05:18](#)):

Yeah. Let's do that.

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

Well, I'll tell you why I picked this book because you know.

MBS ([05:22](#)):

Right. Well, let's hear these two pages, Jessica. I'm excited to listen to them.



Jessica ([05:32](#)):

"When I was a student of writing in college, I was guilty of believing that I would have the sort of life of an author that proceeded along lines that kept me well within the limits of the middle-class. It is the American art trap, make art, but be a good member of your social class. A friend of mine even has a belief that I think is worth testing that the primary deciding factor of whether a writer becomes a writer is their relationship to being middle-class. If they are working-class or upper-class, or even an aristocrat, they're at least comfortable betraying that class in order to write. Put another way, will you be able to write and also eat? Or even eat well? Will you have to work another job? Will you be able to pay for healthcare, a house, dental work, retirement? These fantasies frayed and fell apart fast enough as the two places I chose to focus my career, writing and teaching, have both met with extraordinary income destruction in the last two decades.

Jessica ([06:27](#)):

I learned quickly that if you stop writing, nothing happens. But I also learned that I had nowhere else to go. I mastered my diligence in the face of that, but I'm still not free of the demon that can stop me in my tracks and make me doubt my sense of my own worth and power. And there isn't just a single demon, nor are they only personal ones at that. You're up against what people will always call the ways of the world and the ways of this country, which does not kill artists so much as it kills the rationale for art. In part, by insisting that the artist must be a successful member of the middle-class, if not a celebrity, to be a successful artist. And to do otherwise is to fail art, the country, and yourself. Should you decide that writing is your way to serve your country or to defend it, you're almost always writing about the country it could become."



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

There's a lot there about what it means to commit to a life of being a creative. What rings true for you in all of this, Jessica?

Jessica ([07:33](#)):

Well, I mean, this relates directly to what we were just talking about. I recognized throughout this book in various points this resonance of this battle between art and wanting to make art, wanting to make creative work for its own sake, and feeling like it's got to pay its way. I have to be able to make this be the primary way I make my money, partly just for time reasons, because money gives you time to do the thing.

Jessica ([08:08](#)):

And I mean, I could have picked all kinds of parts in different places in this book, but a lot of times, the entire essay is about the thing that I want to talk about. And there was no two-page section that I could boil down. This was a nice little short section. This is actually in the middle of the very... I think it's the last, maybe the last essay in the book, which is about the last, the 2016 election. The election-

MBS ([08:37](#)):

Yes.

Jessica ([08:37](#)):

... and how that affected his thinking about his life and writing and his relationship with the students and all kinds of other things, so that's-

MBS ([08:46](#)):

Have you-



Jessica ([08:47](#)):

... the context of this particular piece.

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

Have you had to sacrifice the joy of creating by turning it into a career?

Jessica ([09:00](#)):

I think there's an element of that. I mean, it's not a total sacrifice of all joy in it. I mean, they're definitely things that I really enjoyed and were stimulated by throughout my career when I was working actively as a cartoonist. But the economic imperatives around being an author are just so difficult to handle. And they're so destructive really of your ability to create work for its own sake.

MBS ([09:34](#)):

Yes.

Jessica ([09:34](#)):

Or pursue an idea that may be a really great idea, but doesn't necessarily fit the mold of what you can sell and what people are going to be interested in and those kinds of things. And sometimes it's fine to work on those things, to balance those things with something else that's going to support your life. And I think that's actually a really honorable way to do this, is to find a way to balance those things. For cartoonists, it's a little extra difficult because of the amount of time, non-fungible time that needs to go into creating the actual thing. But for authors too, for prose authors as well, it can be really difficult to find enough space for making the thing.

Jessica ([10:19](#)):

But yeah, I do think it takes, I mean, people in my course and in the Creative Focus Workshop in the Autonomous Creative Collective and especially in



Authentic Visibility, which is the marketing visibility course that I teach. All of them, it's very frequent to have people say something like, "This is an idea that I have. So what's next? Should I put her on Etsy? Should I create a store? Should I make a website for this?" And by the time they're in Authentic Visibility, the answer is "Yes, because that's what you're there for." Right. But when you're in the Creative Focus Workshop, the answer is, "I don't know, maybe?" Like, "Do you need to? How much visibility do you need around this? How much community do you need to build? What kind of relationships do you want to build around this work? How much money do you need to make from it?" And being really, really clear about your goals for the work-

MBS ([11:20](#)):

Right. What does success look like for you?

Jessica ([11:21](#)):

... in the world. "What does success look like for you and why?" It's really, really essential. Because if you don't, and I think that's the biggest thing that happened with me, is there was a misalignment between what my goals were, what success looked like. Because it included both great reviews and people loving the book and having a cultural influence. And also supporting my family. A worked, B did not work as well as I expected. And I couldn't ever figure out why. I had to figure out what was that free fall area space between those two things and why did they not connect to each other. And that took a really long time.

MBS ([12:08](#)):

How do you find that line between wanting the external validation, awards and reviews, and invitations to conferences and the like, and the internal motivation? I'm wondering how you've navigated that because I feel that pull this way and that way myself.



Jessica ([12:35](#)):

I think that probably the external validation, not money, but having people see the work and respond to it was why I became a cartoonist, basically. Because I got really good feedback very early on, and it kept me going, it kept me doing the thing. Even though when I started, I was doing mini-comics, which is just self-published photocopied. I just, I could pay for postage with what I... Because it send them through the mail. And there was no financial benefit to doing this, but there was a really large social benefit to it. So I got reviews, I got people talking about it.

Jessica ([13:17](#)):

I also had people from across the country and around the world writing me letters, saying, "Send me this book. I've heard about it. It's great." Or it's saying like, "Send me the next one. I love the way you did it," and fan mail and all this stuff. So that kind of validation kept me doing it at a time when I was really bad at self-regulation and productivity, getting anything done. I was really, really bad at it. Honestly, people look at me now, and they're like, "That's not possible." And I'm like, "You don't understand."

MBS ([13:44](#)):

Trust me. I've come a long way, baby.

Jessica ([13:47](#)):

I know. I took a year to finish a 20-page mini-comic of which only whatever, 12 pages were comics. I mean, I was not a model of production.

MBS ([14:03](#)):

Ruthless efficiency. Yeah.



Jessica ([14:05](#)):

Exactly, not at all. But those kinds of things kept me on track. And I could see that I was heading towards something. I had this kind of crisis moment after I'd done four mini-comics. And I realized that the comic I had just done, or done three of them, I guess, it wasn't up to my standard even though I just kind of crapped it out, even though it took me a year. And I felt like, "Am I going to really do this or not? What's happening here?"

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

And then I really put focus into the next thing that I did. And I submitted it for a grant, the Xeric Grant, which is at the time was a very important grant for self-publishing that a lot of my colleagues of my age cohort and afterwards, this was the pivotal moment when they got the Xeric Grant, that's when they started doing whatever. And in fact, that's what happened with me. And it's again, there's this next little piece that kept me in the game a little bit longer.

MBS ([15:07](#)):

That's an interesting phrase you used, "I really put focus into it." What have you learned about what focus is?

Jessica ([15:16](#)):

Well, in that case, and this is we're talking mid-90s now, I didn't necessarily have a philosophy around what comics were or should be or anything like... I didn't know how to construct stories. That's one of the reasons I eventually ended up doing *Out on the Wire* is feeling like I need to figure out what are the principles that go into this?

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

Right, what are the deeper rhythms behind stories?



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

Exactly. So that was always a struggle to figure out how to put the story together, how to make it have any kind of forward momentum at all. I'm, by the way, English major, University of Chicago. And I still didn't know. Nobody ever taught me this. What I was thinking is, "I can't do a kind of okay job on..." At that point drawing, was what I was really focusing on. I can't just be okay at this. I have to actually give it my all. The stuff that's really hard, like backgrounds and doing complex sort of like establishing shots or stuff like that, I have to actually do that. I have to spend the time necessary to do it right. Or I'm not going to get up a level. I'm just going to stay in this good for a beginner.

MBS ([16:36](#)):

This is the next step towards mastery.

Jessica ([16:38](#)):

Yeah. And pursuing mastery in that way. And I've had a number of different times that I've done that in different areas, and I can also see where I've stopped doing it in some areas and kind of stagnated. With drawing, and like stop and start. And then, with writing and stop. And I can see different ways in which I went through that. But I would identify a place where I'm like, "I have to solve this problem." And put a ton of effort into figuring out what was in it and what I cared about in it. And what did I want to learn? And those kinds of things.

MBS ([17:14](#)):

So when you are teaching your students about focus, about committing to a singular goal and the important work, what surprises them in what you teach about what's required for this degree of focus?



Jessica ([17:30](#)):

Well, I think the thing that surprises them and me, frankly, over and over again about learning creative focus and really Creative Focus Workshop is a program that is about executive function. It's about decision-making and being in control of your trajectory, being able to direct yourself, which can turn into productivity, but that's not the focus of it. So the number one thing that I think is surprising everybody is how much no is required in order to have a yes.

MBS ([18:04](#)):

Oh, I love that you said that. It's so true.

Jessica ([18:06](#)):

It's so True. Right?

MBS ([18:07](#)):

Yeah.

Jessica ([18:07](#)):

And people come to me saying, "I don't know what to focus on. I have all these different ideas. How do I say yes to something?" I'm like, "No, no, You said yes to everything. That's not the problem. The problem is no." And it's really hard to say no to other people. And that's the first layer where people resist and have a hard time because they've always done all the kitchen cleanup and need to ask their spouse to do it or whatever. There's those kinds of nos that are emotional and difficult for people. But the hardest one is no to yourself.

MBS ([18:47](#)):

Right.



Jessica ([18:49](#)):

You have to say no to your own ideas. And you have to learn that saying no is saying yes. It's the same thing. Just in a coaching call last week with a group, and a woman was there, and she has two ideas that she is super committed to. And they sound like great ideas, frankly. They sound amazing.

MBS ([19:16](#)):

That's not the point.

Jessica ([19:17](#)):

Right. And she said that she's been toggling between the two. Which one does she want to do? And they're related thematically, but not in their execution. They're both offers, as it turns out. That's not always the case. But one is an offer for clients. And one is an offer for individuals, like a course. And in related areas, but consulting versus whatever. And she said, "I've been talking to people in my life, friends, whatever. And they all think, 'Yes, you should do both of these things.' So what do you think? Any red flags?" And I'm like, "Yes. One red flag."

MBS ([19:56](#)):

One big one.

Jessica ([19:57](#)):

One big one. That you just can't develop both of those audiences at the same time, you can't put effort into those things. And you're going to hobble both of them.

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

Okay, but how do you get the courage to kill off or at least to shelve these ideas? Because this woman is not atypical in that she's down to just two ideas,



but they're both really good ideas. What have you learned, Jessica, about how to make that call? How to plunge in and go, "I'm making a strong yes." And that means I have to have a couple of strong nos to really give my yes outline and shape and commitment.

Jessica ([20:37](#)):

I mean, you have to have hundreds of nos. Let's not underplay this. One yes means all the nos. How do I do that? Well, I am still learning, still trying to figure this out. But the main thing is pulling back to 10,000 feet and figuring out what do you really want? So defining success for yourself. Defining where and thinking about where you want to be in the future? What work do you want to be doing in the future? But who do you want to be working with? Who do you want to be looking at your work and paying attention to your work?

Jessica ([21:10](#)):

So we do a thing called Vision Quest in Creative Focus Workshop. We do visioning also in Authentic Visibility. So there's this kind of, that's the initial piece. And people get really like, [inaudible 00:21:21] about that because it feels too big and too scary. And honestly, I don't have a five-year plan. I don't have a five-year vision. And I just said something that was going to be confusing. So I make a clear distinction between a vision and a plan. So a vision is a north star, a thing to head towards that can help you make these kinds of decisions and figure out whether they are aligned with this future thing or not. And it changes all the time. It should change because as soon as you take action, you have more information about whether that is actually something you want or not. So if you feel tied to this future vision, and you're not changing it, you're probably ignoring-

MBS ([22:06](#)):

[crosstalk 00:22:06].



Jessica ([22:06](#)):

... the information that you have right now.

MBS ([22:08](#)):

Hey, can you give me an example of what a vision sounds like?

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

Well, I think what I do is I have people write a bio for themselves, a one-line tagline in five years. So something like, Tanya Jones is an award-winning children's book author who is currently on tour for her latest, this book, whatever.

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

Jessica Abel is the catalyst of 100,000 artists and creatives in the world.

Jessica ([22:43](#)):

Right. Exactly. That kind of thing.

MBS ([22:45](#)):

Yeah, nice.

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

And the more granular it is, the more helpful it is. So just the catalyst of a bunch of authors and artists is like, "[inaudible 00:22:56]." What am I catalyzing?

MBS ([22:56](#)):

Right, right.



Jessica ([22:57](#)):

If I can be more specific about it, then I can actually make decisions about like, "Okay, is the project I'm working on right now then to catalyze people? Is it the first step on going towards this end result?"

MBS ([23:06](#)):

Right, right.

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

Our mission at Autonomous Creative, which is my company, is lead the conversation about creative autonomy. So that means I want people to be thinking about this and talking about this. I want people to be thinking about this decision-making that needs to happen, the sense that creative people there's so much learned helplessness.

MBS ([23:31](#)):

Right.

Jessica ([23:31](#)):

There's so much disempowerment handed to us as creative people as we grow up, like the starving artist myth and the writer in the [inaudible 00:23:41] and all that other stuff. But also, what goes along with that is if you're not committed to your work, to the exclusion of basically any other thinking about how this fits into your life or whatever, you're not really the real thing. You're not really an artist if that's the case.

Jessica ([23:57](#)):

Same thing with entrepreneurs. If you're not grinding every day, it's not real. And those are just really destructive myths. And so getting people to question those kinds of things and think about what does it mean to be autonomous?



What does it mean to be making your own decisions for yourself and self-directing in your life? That's what we want to be doing.

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

And so everything I'm doing now is how do I get people to talk about that more, how to get people to be thinking about that more, how can I get them to activate that in their lives? And so that is a filter for all the projects that I do and all the things that I spend time on in my company.

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

That's a powerful word, autonomous, the autonomous creative. Can you tell me a bit more about what you think a strong autonomy looks like and feels like?

Jessica ([24:43](#)):

I think the most important thing to start with is that autonomy doesn't mean alone. So we are the Autonomous Creative Collective. That is our membership. And it's a collective of people who are able to make autonomous decisions for themselves. But also know sometimes that means leaning on people. Sometimes that means working together on things.

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

So autonomy is, as somebody who grew up very much following my own path, super DIY everything, DIY comics, I was in a rock band, just, we didn't know how to play anything. And I was inviting people over to jam with us. Just do it, just do the thing. That's my attitude about stuff. And as a professional, I realized in the last few years, I'm a little bit kind of raised by wolves.

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

I didn't come up through the corporate world. I don't understand any of that stuff. And it's actually been a major work of translation to understand those



business-building concepts and how do I need and how do I interpret them for me and for my kind of people.

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

Right.

Jessica ([25:58](#)):

So but you don't have to come to autonomy from that. But that's where my brain comes from. That's where I come from is this idea of first principles. The more I can learn to go back to first principles on storytelling, for example. What are the basic underpinnings of creating a compelling story? And listen, I mean, obviously, there's many different ways to do it. And I talk about a range of the spectrum, not everything. But in that range of spectrum, what are the things you can do to make this work better?

Jessica ([26:32](#)):

So, a book like *Out on the Wire* is really just this investigative work of finding out what are those secrets? What are those things that are going to make this function? I, with my husband, Matt, Matt, and I, we wrote two textbooks about making comics. So also there, it's like, what are the elements you need in order to be able to build comics from the ground up? And then there's these, the Creative Focus Workshop principles, whole new set of things that some of them I'd learned to be effectively productive over the years. And that's what I started out teaching, but really learned from my students over time to expand the definition of what we were trying to do into this much more building sustainable, resilient, effective creative life.

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

And that takes going back to these first principles. This idea of, I teach this idea of the one goal. It's not really one goal. It's kind of one project at a time. That's what we were talking about in terms of saying yes and saying no. There's a



whole process around that. That's a principle that applies all over the place. And so, again, so to be autonomous, you have to be willing to give up received wisdom and make these decisions for yourself.

MBS ([27:53](#)):

Is there any risk that autonomy becomes a burden of, "I need to know all the first principles of everything myself?" I mean, this is, I asked for me because there's this tension between look, "I want to be the author of my life and shape it and frame it in the way that I want to do it." And, but the intention to that is I want to hire other people to do a whole bunch of stuff and have expertise. But am I then engaging in magical thinking? Going, "Hey, I hate this stuff. Just you do it for me, and I'll pretend it doesn't have to happen." How do you navigate that trickiness, Jessica?

Jessica ([28:39](#)):

Well, you're right. It's a very real tension. So one thing I would say is beyond a certain level of... The basic things we teach in the Creative Focus Workshop of figuring out what your vision is and the direction. And then also the building, figuring out your one project, your one goal, and a little bit of project planning. Outside of that, I feel like when you come to something that you need to make a decision about, it's really important to treat this opportunistically and not try to figure out everything in your life before you start. I'm a huge advocate of imperfect action.

MBS ([29:18](#)):

Yes.

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

One of the things I say all the time is that you can act your way into a new way of thinking, but you can't think your way into a new way of acting. You just have to do stuff. This is what I was saying about vision too. Like you say, "Here's my



vision." And then you start working on it, and you're like, "Oh, no, that's not my vision at all. No, no, no, no, no, no." So if you try to get it all right, then it's just, you're falling into perfectionism again. And I talk about this kind of scientific thinking or semi-scientific thinking-

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

Yes.

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

... where basically you're taking data, that's coming into you, and you're making decisions based on what happens. And so that looking at things somewhat opportunistically in the sense that when it comes to you, that's when you make the decision. Or when you see this issue, that's when you figure it out. Instead of trying to retrofit everything in your life, all at once.

MBS ([30:08](#)):

Right. Right.

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

That's what I would say about it. In terms of hiring people again, being autonomous doesn't mean not-

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

Alone.

Jessica ([30:16](#)):

... working with people. It doesn't mean alone. In my company, the people who work with me, I want them to be autonomous within the company.

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

Yes.



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

I want them to be empowered to make decisions based on our collective goals-

MBS ([30:31](#)):

Their sphere of responsibility.

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

... and their individual goals. Yeah. And so you can have autonomy and still... And I think we have a really wonderful company culture. It's just a few of us, but we really care about each other and work together really well because we're all respecting each other's autonomy. We're not kind of trying to maintain some kind of hierarchical... Obviously, there's some kind of hierarchy because I know more about what's going on than anybody else does. But other than that, as much as I can, I just want to give people areas of responsibility and trust them.

MBS ([31:07](#)):

Jessica, I've really enjoyed this conversation. It's been really wide-ranging. A question I love to finish with is this, what needs to be said between you and I that hasn't yet been said in this conversation?

Jessica ([31:19](#)):

I don't know. That's a rough one.

MBS ([31:20](#)):

Yeah, it's-

Jessica ([31:23](#)):

I think we covered a lot of stuff there.



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

You did. You did. If there's anything that's on your mind that you're like, "Oh, I wish he'd asked me about this." Or "Dammit, I was hoping we'd go down this path." You can put that on the table. You could just go, "Look, my work here is done. I've got other things to do. I'm out of here, Michael."

Jessica ([31:36](#)):

I don't know if there's anything that we need to say beyond what we said. I feel like I wish I could talk more about Alexander Chi because he's amazing, and everybody should read his stuff. I also struggled to pick a book. I'm sure a lot of people do. And there are all kinds of other books that I could have read from that would be... They'd just be a completely different conversation. One of the ones that came to mind immediately was *Under the Volcano*.

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

Oh, right.

Jessica ([32:05](#)):

By Malcolm Lowry-

MBS ([32:06](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Jessica ([32:06](#)):

... which is one of my favorite books. And I thought, "Oh, it'll be an opportunity for me to reread it." And I'm like, "What am I going to talk about in relation to *Under the Volcano*, which is about a drunken consul in Mexico?"

MBS ([32:15](#)):

That's right.



Jessica ([32:16](#)):

I lived in Mexico, but that would be a whole other, I don't know. So is there anything we need to talk about? No. Is there anything we could talk about? Oh-

MBS ([32:25](#)):

Endlessly.

Jessica ([32:25](#)):

... yes.

MBS ([32:31](#)):

There might be some people out there who've managed to transcend the petty metrics the rest of humanity use to measure progress and success. I'm not one of those people. I mean, I know I both got internal motivations and external motivations. I mean, for instance, with this podcast, I worked some goals around the number of people who listened to it. It's not enough for me just to have fantastic people for my own sake. I really want an audience. I want reach. I want to make a difference, but I don't want a big audience at any costs. I also want to create something that's special, something that's distinctively, Micheal, external goals, internal goals. What I'm taking from this conversation with Jessica is how these goals change, how they emerge, how they're fluid. And I think the trick is to notice.

MBS ([33:21](#)):

I mean, I've got two questions I try to ask myself regularly to reset where I am and what I care about. What is success? And relatedly, how much is enough? Some days, these questions I can answer, some days I can't, or at least I struggle. They're hard questions. They're big questions. What's gone from feeling like enough sometimes changes and dissolves. And now I ask myself, "What am I doing here?"



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

But until you get clear on the answers to these questions, you'll struggle to know what to say yes to and what to say no to. Jessica talks about this. Saying no to other people. Well, that's hard for sure, but harder still is saying no to yourself. No, to the obligations that you still carry, even though they may no longer be yours. No, to a limited sense of who you are and what's possible when your potential and your capacity has expanded. No to the belief that you're not allowed to be ambitious for yourself or for the world.

MBS ([34:24](#)):

If you're looking for other conversations in the same vein as this one, I'd recommend two. First, the episode called, How to Get to Grips with Reality with Oliver Burkeman. I can also recommend his new book, 4,000 Weeks: Time Management for Mortals. And another episode that's got a different vibe to it, a different energy, but touches on similar issues is the one with David Norris entitled the Lords of Strategy.

MBS ([34:47](#)):

For more information about Jessica and her books and her courses, jessicaabel.com. She's also on Instagram at [visiblewoman](https://www.instagram.com/visiblewoman). And of course, if you're buying her books and they're available everywhere you'd buy books, I'd encourage you to buy local rather than an Amazon if you can.

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

Thanks for your support of this podcast. The three key ways to support it. One, word of mouth. If you can pass on a recommendation of an episode to somebody in your life. That's great for them. Great for me and possibly great for you as well. Secondly, giving a review or a thumbs up or some stars on your podcast app, that's always exciting for me to see. And finally, joining us and being a member of The Duke Comfrees, the free membership site that's



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