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

So I have a new book coming out in January. I know it's pretty exciting stuff. It's called, How to Begin. There should be a website up at howtobegin.com where you can sign up for pre-orders or at least find out a bit about the book and the book is about setting a worthy goal for yourself. I mean, not the usual ho-hum smart golf stuff and not the flimflam of letting me manifest the universe either, but a goal, a project, something worthy of your life, something thrilling, important and daunting.

MBS ([00:34](#)):

I know you know that and probably want that in theory but in practice... Well first, what does it take to find a worthy goal? And second, and this is probably the harder part of the mix, what does it take to commit to it?



MBS ([00:51](#)):

Welcome to two pages with MBS, 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. My guest today has lived in two seemingly different worlds, the Marines and the world of learning and development. Naphtali Bryant is director of learning and organizational development at Netflix, a company you may have heard of and he has a pretty simple passion in life. At least, it's simple to say.

Naphtali ([01:21](#)):

I'm one of those guys that is passionate about learning and development and really passionate about unlocking people's full potential.

MBS ([01:29](#)):

It's hard enough to unlock your own full potential, let alone someone else's. And while the language around Naphtali's passion might seem more warm and fuzzy, his foundation in it was built in a situation that was anything but.

Naphtali ([01:43](#)):

I actually spent four years in the United States Marine Corps and I was actually leading Marines and teaching Marines and coaching them on team stuff and coaching them on how to be better leaders. And it really dawned on me at that moment in time so I was like, "I want to do something with this."

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

But Naphtali's story starts even earlier than that. It seems his love of learning and development was the result of a challenging childhood.

Naphtali ([02:09](#)):



I'm one of six kids raised by a single mother. My father left when I was two years old. I never got to see him a day in my life. And so, I went to the military for this discipline and this determination, this drive, this level of leadership that wasn't present in my life. And I got all of those things and it taught me that when you bring those to the table, and those are like table stakes, where you're determined to get better every day, where you're disciplined enough to go out and make things happen and that if you can walk into a room and step up and be a leader, it can change everything for your life. And so, that was some of the anchors that allow me to think about a career in learning and development.

MBS ([02:48](#)):

Going from being a Marine to being a corporate guy, seems a pretty big stretch in and of itself. So I asked him, what he'd learned in the military that he brought with him to learning and development at Netflix.

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

One is around truth welfare. So we had this old idea of like, "Hey, let's take care of each other. Look out for one another," and the second one is mission accomplishment. So, really looking at how are we focused on accomplishing the things that are in front of us and how are we doing it together in a way where we're accountable for one another and we're also just focused on how do we make a difference in whatever we do. And what it has translated to me now... So, it goes from mission accomplishment in the military to something that I like to call, add value to people and then find ways to become more valuable to people. That's really been my anchors since that time.

MBS ([03:40](#)):

When you're in the corporate setting, learning and development, L&D has a bit of a mixed reputation. I mean, there are some people like you and me, we love it. We love this stuff.



Naphtali ([03:48](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([03:48](#)):

So, you and I just violently agree about how awesome all of this work actually is.

Naphtali ([03:54](#)):

Absolutely.

MBS ([03:54](#)):

But so often L&D is a kind of add on. It's seen by many as a bit of a waste of time. A distraction. A thing we have to get people through so they can then go back to their real job and do their real work. How do you influence the conversation to make L&D part of the mission? Part of, here's how we add value, here's how we keep adding value in an organization or a corporate setting.

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

Yeah. I try to focus on doing things a little more organically and through a relational lens. So, I try to focus on what are the relationships that are going to be most important to the success of the work that I'm trying to achieve? I work on those first and I really double down on understanding the people that I'm serving.

Naphtali ([04:41](#)):

The other piece that I really focus on is how do I keep things radically simple when it comes to the approach to the work? I have this concept called deliver easy, right? So, the overarching philosophy is make sure it's radically simple but then make sure you deliver easy. Make sure it's engaging. Make sure it's accessible. Make sure it's simple yet yielding to impact in what we do.



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

So, the combination of the two focusing on the relational piece and really honing in on delivering easy has really been a tool for me to help connect people. Not only to me and what I'm doing but also to the needs that they have within the business and how learning can help solve those needs.

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

I love that concept of deliver easy. Can you take me to a moment where that kind of became clear that this was an essential part of the plan?

Naphtali ([05:31](#)):

Yeah. It's interesting because when I was early in my career, I remember sitting in a workshop and the facilitator at the time, I'm not going to name any names. I don't remember the person's name but they were facilitating and it wasn't going that great. And they had their back to me the whole time, they weren't really focused and caring about my experience. And I say, "You know what? He's complicating things for himself here in this moment."

Naphtali ([05:57](#)):

How do he make it easier for people to engage and connect? And so, I started to hang my calling card on engaging people and connecting people and simplifying and making things easy. So throughout my career, if you talked to anybody that's worked with me, they always have a sense of when Naphtali shows up he simplifies everything. He makes it easier for people to engage and connect and to learn.

Naphtali ([06:19](#)):

And so, that's really when it started for me and I started to crystallize this concept of delivery easy over the past couple of years here. It may be a book



one day, folks, so you'll see there, but yeah, that's really what's happened for me in that way.

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

I really understand what you're saying about developing a training philosophy in the face of terrible training because that's where my stuff comes from too. I've just sat through so many training sessions where I'm like, "Oh my goodness, look, I don't even know this topic area but can I get up and run this and facilitate this for you because your process is killing me here." Naphtali, what role does curiosity play in your life? Why does that feel important to you?

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

Yeah. Curiosity is I feel like it's a superpower. If you're not asking the question, why or how does this work, or what can I learn, you're missing out on easy moments for growth and development. I've not gone to the top schools in the world. I've not even had some of the same opportunities as some of the people in my world or in my community but I've always been curious. I've always asked a question like, "Let me understand what website this is," or, "Let me understand like why they did this," and it creates this perpetual kind of learning vibe that I have that just doesn't stop because I will never lose my curiosity. And with that, if I don't lose my curiosity, I will continue to learn and grow forever and I feel like it's an advantage for me personally.

MBS ([08:00](#)):

So as soon as you say, "Curiosity is a superpower," I'm like, "Amen. Hallelujah. Exactly." There's so much of what I believe comes down to exactly that. Curiosity does open up so many interesting doors. Increases focus, increases connection, but I think you and I are probably in the minority in believing this. It's hard to find people who are anti curious but it's lots of people who've just put curiosity aside and get on with the daily grind. So, how do you help



champion curiosity with the people in your life and with your family and with your colleagues at Netflix? How do you wave a flag for that?

Naphtali ([08:38](#)):

Yeah, I think part of what I try to do is I try to challenge the status quo in every conversation that I'm in and I try to encourage us to ask the questions that aren't being asked. Like, "What are we not thinking about here?" That's that's one way. The other way is I try to help people in my life, people I work with, sit in the space of curiosity. Without trying to solve anything, just ask some questions, just take a step back and sit in the space of what could be, how could this look, and really sit with that because from that, it actually will help you create insight. And then, you actually can go in and solve the challenges, the problems, the things that you face with a little bit more ingenuity, a little bit more creativity, and a little bit more passion. So, those are just a couple of things that I try.

MBS ([09:29](#)):

So Naphtali, what book have you chosen for us today?

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

Yes. So I have chosen *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth* by my mentor and friend John C. Maxwell.

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

And when did this book come into your life?

Naphtali ([09:44](#)):

Yeah, this book came into my life about three years ago when I first became a part of the John Maxwell team as a speaker, trainer, and coach and getting mentored by him and his team. For years, I've always loved John Maxwell's work and I wasn't sure of what was next in my life. I was struggling with some of the growth that I needed to have personally and I found this book that really talks



all about how you can focus on growth as a key to transform your life. I ate that book up immediately. There are 15 laws throughout that book that help you do that.

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

So, what do you see in John Maxwell that's so impressive and inspiring for you?

Naphtali ([10:33](#)):

Yeah. I think one of the things that I see is that this authenticity. That John can get up there on stage, put a glass of water next to him, and just talk to a room full of 3,000 people like you were all sitting in his living room. That level of authenticity actually translates to his books. So, you feel connected to them. You feel also a way of that you're inspired by them, you're learning and growing from them as well. And so, that's one thing that stands out to me. The other thing too, is the simplicity and the practicality of how he writes to really help you understand how to translate this into your own life. I've read many books where you're like, "What do I do from here? That was great but like, where do I go?" He allows you to take it somewhere.

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

Yeah. Okay. The book is 15 Invaluable Laws but you've only got two pages. So, how did you come to choose these two pages? What are you going to go with?

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

Yeah, I've really tried to think about what has personified my life in terms of my ability to grow and develop, in terms of how I've helped others grow and develop through my 17 years doing learning and org development and I really landed on one of the laws specifically. It's actually the 10th law and it's called the Law of the Rubber Band and really, this law states that growth stops when you lose the tension between where you are and where you could be.



MBS ([12:00](#)):

Yeah, I like that.

Naphtali ([12:01](#)):

It just speaks to my soul because I'm always thinking about that tension.

MBS ([12:06](#)):

Right. That's really great. All right. Just because I'm really curious, what were the two other laws that were on the short list where you're like, "Maybe I'll read this. Maybe I'll read that," because it must've been hard to pick.

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

Yeah. The other one was the Law of Intentionality. Growth doesn't just happen, you have to be intentional about it.

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

Yeah. Right. Fantastic.

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

That's the first law. And I was like, "Ah, I don't want to do the first one." So that was one and another one that was on the list is the Law of the Mirror, which is really where it talks about you must see value in yourself to add value to yourself.

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

Oh, that's beautiful. Well, that would have been really interesting to hear as well. And I know people who are listening are thinking, "Okay, I need to find out what those other 12 laws are because they all sound really powerful." Well, why don't you take us to the two pages you're going to read? So, here we have Naphtali



Bryant reading from John Maxwell, his wonderful book, the 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth. Naphtali, over to you.

Naphtali ([13:13](#)):

Too many people are willing to settle for average in life. Is that bad? Read this description written by Edmund Gaudet and then you decide. Average is what the failures claim to be when their family and friends ask them why they are not more successful. Average is the top of the bottom, the best of the worst, the bottom of the top, the worst of the best, which of these are you? Average means being run of the mill, mediocre, insignificant, and also ran a non-entity. Being average is the lazy person's cop-out; it's lacking the guts to take a stand in life; it's living by default. Being average is to take up space for no purpose; to take the trip through life but never to pay the fare; to return no interest for God's investment in you. Being average is to pass one's life away with time rather than to pass one's time away with life. It's to kill time rather than to work it to death. To be average is to be forgotten.

Naphtali ([14:20](#)):

Once you pass from this life, the successful are remembered for their contributions. The failures are remembered because they tried but the average, the silent majority, is just forgotten. To be average is to commit the greatest crime one can against one's self humanity and one's God. The saddest epithet is this, "Here lies Mr. And Mrs. Average. Here lies the remains of what might have been except their belief that they were only average." I cannot stand the idea of settling for average. Can you? Nobody admires average. The best organizations don't pay for average. Mediocrity is not worth shooting for. As novelist Arnold Bennett said, "The real tragedy is the tragedy of the man who never in his life braces himself for his one supreme effort, who never stretches to his full capacity, never stands up to his full stature." We must be aware of the gap that stands between us and our potential and let the tension of that gap motivate us to keep striving to become better.



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

Settling for the status quo ultimately leads to dissatisfaction. I believe most people are naturally tempted to settle into a comfort zone where they choose comfort over potential. They fall into familiar patterns and habits. Doing the same things in the same ways with the same people at the same time and getting the same results. It's true that being in your comfort zone may feel good but it leads to mediocrity and therefore dissatisfaction. As psychologist Abraham Maslow asserted, if you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life. If you have ever settled for the status quo and then wondered why your life isn't going the way you'd hope, then you need to realize that you will only reach your potential if you have the courage to push yourself outside of your comfort zone and break out of the mindset of mediocrity.

Naphtali ([16:37](#)):

You must be willing to leave behind what feels familiar, safe, and secure. You must give up excuses and push forward. You must be willing to face the tension that comes from stretching toward your potential. That is the only way to avoid what poet John Greenleaf Whittier described when he wrote, "For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been." Stretching always starts from the inside out. When I was a teenager, my dad asked me to read *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen. It had a profound impact on my life. It made me realize that reaching your potential started on the inside.

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

Well, wow. He's not exactly pulling his punches there, is he? There's not a whole lot of ambiguity around this. It's like, "This is your life. Either you get this together and you stretch, you find tension, you strive to be the person you can be or you've wasted your life." I mean, this is a powerful call to action.



Naphtali ([17:45](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([17:48](#)):

What's at the heart of it here for you?

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

Yeah. The heart of it for me as I think about a rubber band and if you think about a rubber band, a rubber band is useless if it's not stretched.

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

Right.

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

And so, the thing I think about is I feel like we all need to be in this perpetual state of stretching. And what does that look like? What does that mean? Either you are stretching someone or something or you're being stretched yourself or you're about to be stretched. So, it's this perpetual stretching or tension that you feel, "Hey, I'm stressed by someone right now or something," or, "I'm stretching someone else," or, "I'm about to be stressed," stretched if you will. That's kind of the thinking that I have around it. If you have that tension in your life, growth is happening every which way possible.

MBS ([18:45](#)):

How do you look after yourself when you're being stretched? Because I mean, it sounds good in theory but actually it means you're perpetually out of your comfort zone and it's tiring. It's stressful. It's ambiguous. It's uncertain. I'm curious to know how you balance that with the need for self care.



Naphtali ([19:03](#)):

Yeah. I think part of the balance is choosing where you want to be stretched and really owning that stretching. So it's not, "Hey, I'm being pulled in 15 different directions and this is uncomfortable." It's, "You know what, I choose to be stretched in this direction and this direction. I choose to stretch other people in this direction because I know it'll be good for them." So, it's an intentional stretching. It's not a haphazard stretching which allows you to have self care because you're not in this state of where you're being consumed by the stretching, you're managing the stretching. And so, you can stretch and then let go, you can engage and come back to it. That's kind of the thinking there.

MBS ([19:50](#)):

And how do you figure out where to stretch? I think I've had times in my life where I'm like, "Oh, okay I've chosen this," and there's other times where I'm like, "Okay, it's chosen me. Oh, apparently I'm stretching now. I'm the rubber band here. Okay. Well, thank you universe." And in fact, the book that I've been writing at the moment is about helping people figure out a worthy goal, something that's thrilling and important daunting. So, because this is on my mind, I'm curious to know how you figure out what to put your time and attention on.

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

Yeah. I connect it to what my purpose is. If it's not connected to the greater purpose of why I'm here on this earth, then I'm not going to allow myself to be stretched in that area because it's a waste of time. And that's why you got to know what your purpose is so that you know where you need to stretch to get you closer to actually realizing that purpose as much as you can before you leave this earth.



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

And how do you articulate your purpose?

Naphtali ([20:51](#)):

Yeah. So for me, it's really, my purpose in this world is really to motivate and inspire people to be the absolute best version of themselves and to unlock that in any way, shape or form. Anything that is pushing me toward doing more of that for people, whether it's speaking, whether it's teaching, whether it's just showing up to offer encouraging words, that's where I want to push and stretch myself toward being better at, toward growing in, because that's what's going to give me the greatest return on my investment.

MBS ([21:27](#)):

Yeah. I love that. Can you tell me how you found that moment you found and articulated your purpose because you've thought about this, so where did it come from?

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

Yeah, so it actually was almost eight years ago to the date. I grew up in church and my pastor at the time was like, "Hey, I think you need to be a preacher and a minister in the church," and I almost passed out because I was like, "Oh, I don't know if I can do that." I know the work that goes into that and the life that you need to live and embody and I was like, "Oh, I don't know if I'm ready for that." And so, then we had some further conversations and I'll never forget, I was going through with this minister in training where I was making steps closer to being that minister that I thought maybe it was for me but also maybe it wasn't.

Naphtali ([22:21](#)):



And I stepped on stage and it was actually going to preach a sermon, if you will, and the pastor at the time looked at me and he said, "You know what? You're not a preacher or a pastor for the church. You are a corporate preacher."

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

That's interesting.

Naphtali ([22:35](#)):

That's what he told me. You are a corporate preacher. And I was like, "Wow, what does that mean?" and so, I went on this search and this journey to figure out what that means and it really basically means what I articulated a moment ago around helping people unlock all that. So now when I show up, I show up with a good word. I show up with the tools and the ways that you can unlock the greatness that's inside of you and I'm operating out of that corporate preacher that I was told I was many, many years ago. It's pretty crazy to me to think about and actually share that story. I've never shared that openly but I figured I'd share it with you, Michael.

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

Well, thank you. I appreciate that. That's quite the moment having somebody see you and call you forth like that. It must've been incredibly powerful. So, even with the purpose that you have in the direction of that purpose which is to unlock people's potential and be a corporate preacher, there's still so many opportunities you could go to stretch. It could be, I'm going to start my own company and go in there and reinvent learning and development from the outside in. It could be, I'm going to make Netflix a legend in the world of L&D by just rethinking everything around the way L&D happened in a way that's true to Netflix's famous culture and speaks to the technology we have. It could be, I'm going to write a book. It could be, I'm going to launch a podcast. All of these are possible projects that you could speak to your purpose and also stretch you and grow you. So, how do you figure out which of these to choose?



Naphtali ([24:03](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, it's challenging to be honest. It's one of those things where it's constant energy management. It's not time management, it's energy management because all of those things... The stretching takes energy, especially when you're stretching in the direction of your purpose. So, I really try to take a step back and I try to simplify how much stretching I'm going to do for a given year, right? And so, that may mean, "Hey, you know what, I'm only going to take a couple of speaking engagements this year. I'm only going to focus on writing a book this year or I'm only going to double down on a one area of significant growth for me where I want to, Hey, maybe be a better facilitator or a better coach." So, I don't try to boil the ocean but I do try to make one significant investment every year that's pushing me toward and stretching me toward my purpose.

MBS ([25:02](#)):

Yeah, that's nice. And I mean, "asking for a friend" because I spend a lot of time trying to make a choice between a whole bunch of interesting ideas I have, how do I choose which ones to push the money into and the time into, and the resource and the commitment into? Naphtali, when you talk about stretch and when you talk about growth and when you talk about focus, I think what's also required here is something unspoken and less acknowledged, is sacrifice. You have to say no to things. You have to let some things go. I'm wondering if you can talk about a moment where you've had to make a clear sacrifice in order to commit to your purpose and the stretch goal that you've set yourself.

Naphtali ([25:43](#)):

Yeah. I think it happens pretty often in terms of sacrifice because I feel like anybody that's really clear about who they are, the value they add, and where they want to go, it is a road filled with sacrifice. And I think there are many times that come up for me but I think it really comes down to sacrificing my own



desires over the desires and needs of my family and it really comes down to... Most recently, I've had my second child and part of what my wife and I have always been talking about is like, "Hey, you got to really figure out where you spend your energy because the moments that you spend energy stretching in these other directions can sometimes take away from us. So, very be very clear about what those moments are," and so it's a constant conversation to figure that out. Sometimes I get it right. Sometimes I don't which I think we all can kind of share that.

MBS ([26:44](#)):

Yeah. Me too.

Naphtali ([26:46](#)):

So, it's difficult. I'm not going to sit here and say, I have any clear answers to that but I think it's constant communication about the why and really understanding why you're doing something because sometimes we can do things in vain for our own selfish needs. Oh, I want to write a book because I want people to see that I wrote a book or I want to do a podcast because everybody else is doing a podcast. So, you have to watch those moments so I'm really challenging myself on my why so that the sacrifices are not as deep as they could be. I'm not sure if that completely answered your question but-

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

No, that's great. Because now I'm wondering why I'm writing a book and doing a podcast. I mean, are my motives pure? This has been actually a wonderful conversation so thank you. And I've got a final question for you, it's a big question, all encompassing but I love it as a kind of the final wrap up question in this conversation. Naphtali, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between us?



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

Yeah. Stretching comes with the price but it's a price that you got to be willing to pay for. Because the other thing about the stretching is, when you allow yourself to be stretched you end up being a role model for others to see that, "Hey, you were stretched and it was okay. You didn't break," and it reminds me of this old toy, Stretch Armstrong. Stretch Armstrong was this like fit guy toy from I think like the 80's and you could stretch him in four different directions. And you see the commercials, the kids are like stretching him and everything and it's like, "Yay!" Wrap him around a pole. But at the end of the day, he always returns to his original shape. So, the thing to remember is that even though you're being stretched you will always be able to return back to who you are and the core of why you do what you do and it's not going to be break you.

MBS ([28:50](#)):

Do you remember Naphtali talking about the rubber band? Useless if not stretched, that's really the daunting part of the worthy goal which I talked about it at the top. That sense that you're up against your own edges, feeling your way into the unknown, and there's that paradox: We want to be stretched, we don't want to be stretched. They're both true. But what I also love about this metaphor is that a rubber band can't stretch itself, it needs an outside agent to help it find its potential. A friend, a colleague, a coach, a mastermind group, a podcast, perhaps. So my question for you is who's the person who provoke, permit, allow you to expand yourself?

MBS ([29:42](#)):

So, if you enjoyed this conversation, I've got a couple of other learning and development rooted episodes to recommend. First, my conversation with Dan Pontefract, who's a good friend of mine and he was the chief learning officer of Telus, big telco company in Canada. His episode is called Lead, Care, Win also the name of his new book. Second, Jennifer Paylor, also a friend of mine,



formerly of IBM and now at Capgemini. Her episode is entitled, Trust is the Key. So, take a moment to listen to those for sure.

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

For more of Naphtali, you can find him on LinkedIn, N-A-P-H-T-A-L-I Bryant, B-R-Y-A-N-T, and you'll also find him registered on the johnmaxwellgroup.com website as well. He is one of their coaches and trainers as well.

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

Thanks for listening. No, it's a pleasure to have you here with the podcast with me. I appreciate your time. I appreciate you enjoying this conversation. If I haven't mentioned it before, which I think I probably have, you can always show some love by giving the podcast a review or some stars on your podcast platform, whatever that might be. I'm really appreciative if you share the podcast with other people. We grow by word of mouth. I'm trying to grow my audience base. I'd love it if you help me out with that. And if you'd like a little more, there's a free membership site called Duke Humphreys. It's where you can get downloads, unreleased episodes, transcripts, and the like. You can find that on the website, mbs.works and go to the podcast page there. You're awesome and you're doing great.