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

One of the influences on my life is a guy called Simon Biley. I don't think I've ever mentioned him in public before, but I met him in my first job when I worked in the world of innovation and new product development. He was a visualizer. He'd show up with his box of colored pens and paper, and as I tried to describe the ideas and solutions that were bubbling through my brain, he'd try and draw them. And then as he'd draw them, that would spark new ideas for me and I'd try and build on them, and he would hear what I'm saying and try and draw to that. We would do this dance of imagination and creativity together, it was quite liberating. It was a way of somebody helping me make ideas real.

MBS ([00:44](#)):

Now he still shows up in my life as an influence certainly, because when I write on flip charts or with a Sharpie, I write like he does, kind of like a designer does.



The way I draw an E, for instance, is I draw a C, capital C, and then I put a little dash in the middle. It's like a super fast, clear way of writing a capital E. You didn't know you needed to know that, but now you do. But more deeply with Simon, and I think I'm only just realizing this now, he's one of the ways I came to understand that one of the most powerful ways to show up in the world is to stay curious just a little bit longer.

MBS ([01:24](#)):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book. Sarah Stein Greenberg is the Executive Director of d.school in Stanford. In my world, d.school's kind of iconic. It is a cool place to go. And she's also the author of a wonderful new book, *Creative Acts for Curious People*, a guide of facilitation, of a way of opening up your mind and your heart and your spirit by doing some creative stuff. It's terrific. Her job, though, really is a paradox. It's to unleash and yet also to contain creativity. But maybe that's the nature of design, because in some ways, design is how creativity learns how to dance. Sarah started navigating this world some years ago.

Sarah ([02:16](#)):

I was very lucky about 15 years ago to stumble upon this incredible ecosystem, the world of design and human-centered design in particular. I arrived at that moment kind of partially formed, I think, as somebody who thought of herself as creative, but didn't necessarily have a formal language around it, or all of the ways in which I really wanted to practice those skills.

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

She had a moment of early success, which put wind in her sails.



Sarah ([02:47](#)):

In my case, one of the earliest projects I worked on was around education, and we were designing ways to help kids express their need to fidget, but without distracting everybody else in the class. And I remember when we presented that work, even though it was very rough and it was student work, we got feedback on it that there were some viable concepts. And in fact, one guy on the review panel said, "Hey, I'm dabbling in some venture capital, I'd love to fund this if you're interested in taking it forward."

MBS ([03:20](#)):

Now that doesn't happen often. Normally you're chasing money, not having people offer it to you. But as it happens, Sarah and her colleagues didn't pursue that idea because she'd realized something more essential.

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

Like, "Oh, this is a moment where I'm recognizing that this set of skills could lead me to this kind of moment, hopefully a number of times, where I've created something that is worth implementing in somebody's eyes." And that, to me, was the big takeaway, was that design is not something that you do once and have one moment of success or impact, but actually it's this set of skills that you can use over and over to approach problems that you're new to that have a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity, and you can produce something meaningful as a result.

MBS ([04:08](#)):

Listening to Sarah speak, one thing was intriguing me. She uses the word design and create sometimes as if they're the same, and then other times as if they're slightly different.



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

That's interesting, because I do think of them as very intertwined. I guess I would say creativity and creation is probably the super category, and design is a particular set of strategies for creating and making within that broader context. And I firmly believe that all human beings are creative, but I do think that the particular tactics used in design, while they should be widely accessible to everyone, and some of these strategies, I think, are things we should be teaching all throughout education and that everyone can use, there is still some mystique about them. There is still some training that is really useful to acquire, to be able to practice these tools.

Sarah ([05:13](#)):

And I say that with a little hesitation, because part of the core of my work is trying to broaden the use of these methods, right? So I don't want it to sound like, oh, only a certain number of people can use design or can be good at design. But I do think that there is a real discipline. There is a real set of methods around it that pays off if you practice, if you commit to that work to acquire those skills.

MBS ([05:44](#)):

I was reading the introduction to your book, and a quote struck me when you're talking about how do you think about design? It's a Hungarian painter, so I'll almost certainly mispronounce this name in a horrible way, so apologies. But László Moholy-Nagy, perhaps? In the '40s, says, "Design is not a profession, but an attitude transformed from a notion of a specialist into a generally valid attitude of resourcefulness and inventiveness." And why it struck me, apart from its wisdom, was part of what I'm trying to do in the world is make coaching and curiosity be more accessible to more people.



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

And my hero, a guy called Peter Block, who thinks about... Well, he once said his job was to give people responsibility for their own freedom, which is such a wonderful phrase. He wrote a blurb for my first book, which was like, "Coaching isn't a profession, but it's a way of being with each other," and it just felt like there was a similar resonance in that statement and Peter Block's statement in terms of how do we bring these black box, slightly woo-woo skills into a way that feels more accessible and more universal and more democratic for people?

Sarah ([06:52](#)):

Yeah, that is very resonant, I think, with my core philosophy. There are parts of design work, in particular the moment where you synthesize and you connect the dots and you come up with, "Here's the direction we're going to head in," and that is a very, very powerful moment. I would say, for most of the history of design, that has been that sort of black box moment, and many designers and design educators have written about how challenging it is to communicate what is actually going on in your brain when you have those moments of synthesis, right? But that's exactly... It is such a powerful experience and it does give one agency, right? It helps you take control because it allows you to recognize I am somebody who can look at the world around me, who can notice opportunities for change and improvement, and I can actually do something about it. I can come up with ideas that could potentially make a difference and assist someone, or improve an experience or create a new product or service that is meaningful.

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

We often talk about that at the Stanford d.school as creative self-efficacy. It's that idea of being able to do the things that you set out to do and having the confidence that you can get there. And then the reality is, in a moment where so much is changing in the world so quickly and we're faced with what feels like



an unprecedented amount of uncertainty and ambiguity, we need particular strategies and skills to confront that. So I see the tools of design, that resourcefulness and inventiveness that Moholy-Nagy was talking about, that is at the core. It's like, "Can I figure out, no matter what I have access to, no matter what materials, no matter what my technical skills, can I spot the opportunity for the problem, and then can I be inventive and resourceful about how I might solve it?"

MBS ([09:05](#)):

You talk about that core philosophy, which sounds like it's not just about design, but it's about making design an accessible way of seeing the world and an accessible tool to help shape the world and shape yourself within the world. Where does that come from? Because you could have just become a kind of, "I'm going to champion design within my own little walls in these schools full of random, cool, Silicon valley people. We're not going to put books out about creative acts for creative people." Where do you get that fire for taking this more broadly?

Sarah ([09:38](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I will say it was really part of the core DNA of the d.school from the start, particularly in that one of the things that we do is we have students and faculty from all over campus who are contributing and who are participating in these very interdisciplinary teams. There's quite a bit of talk these days about interdisciplinarity, and I think that is in part because there are so many challenges that are really sitting right at the intersection of various disciplines. At least in the academic world, but also in the business world, we've sort of artificially separated all of these different ways of seeing and knowing and doing. So having a medical student on the same team as somebody studying biology and somebody studying business and somebody studying engineering is going to produce an unusual array of ideas for tackling a certain challenge.



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

And so I think from the very beginning, there was this sense of how do we tap into that creative ability of somebody who's not in a profession that necessarily is bringing that out of them, but who still nonetheless has those skills and has something to contribute, and actually then maybe has some technical capacity to solve for that challenge once it's been identified? So that idea of inclusiveness across disciplines was present from the beginning at the d.school, and that was very appealing to me. And I think in particular, I am somebody who, throughout my career, I have consistently found myself at intersections of different overlapping cultures and communities. I love the vibrancy that comes from those kinds of misunderstandings and collisions, and the serendipity that happens when you're forced to explain yourself a bunch.

MBS ([11:38](#)):

Right, kind of de-centered.

Sarah ([11:39](#)):

When you're trying to you articulate, "No, no, here's how I see it. How do you see it," right? And that kind of articulation of worldview and perspective and ideas, I think, is often what results in these kinds of rich collaborations.

MBS ([11:59](#)):

I want to get on to your book in a second, but before I do, I've got one other question because this stuff is so fascinating for me. How do you maintain your sense of being on the boundaries? Kind of the, if you like, slightly otherness, or the de-centeredness when there's so much that could be pulling you towards the center? Because you have status and you have authority and you lead a d.school and there's all sorts of things that are now saying, "Yeah, good job out there on the boundaries, but come on back in now." How do you maintain that otherness, if you like?



Sarah ([12:40](#)):

I think this is something to constantly pay attention to. I think about this quite a bit, because I've seen the arc for the past 15 years of where we started and where we are now as an organization and as an emerging field. We literally started on the outskirts of campus in a trailer, and it was the only space on campus that we could get into. It was a 300 square foot trailer, the floors were sticky because the faculty went in over winter break and pulled up the carpet, and only one window opened. Everything in that space signaled we are an experiment. You can't mess up in this environment because it's already dirty, it's already a mess.

MBS ([13:29](#)):

There's a pirate flag flying above the thing.

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

Exactly, there was a metaphorical pirate flag. And we're now an organization that has an amazing facility in the middle of campus, and people walk in and they're thinking... Particularly for folks who are thinking, "I want to build this kind of a creative environment in my campus or my company," they walk in thinking, "Oh, you have to start at this scale," right? So I think there's a part of it which is when we try experiments ourselves, we do that at a small scale, and we try to have a lot of exploration happening at the same time that we're regularly delivering courses and trainings. One of the most successful ways that we've done that in the past has been to have fellows who we invite to come in and shake up the curriculum and shake up how we're teaching.

Sarah ([14:24](#)):

But I have to say, I wrestle with this. Can an organization, as it matures, as it becomes more well known, as people have expectations of it for reliability, for things that they want to count on, how do we maintain that sense of being on



the edges? I think about that both at an organizational level, how do we bake that in, and on a personal level. How am I making sure that I am still personally in touch-

MBS ([14:56](#)):

Off balance a bit, yeah.

Sarah ([14:57](#)):

Yeah, a little bit off balance. And for me, one of the main things that I do, personally, to continue to experience that is travel, and in a time when travel has been limited, I've found that harder, and I think that's something...

MBS ([15:12](#)):

It's interesting.

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

I personally think it's just so important to pay attention to.

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

I've noticed that myself, that not being able to travel for two years, has made me more comfortable with the status quo.

Sarah ([15:27](#)):

Yeah, that's an interesting way to put it.

MBS ([15:31](#)):

Sarah, will you tell us about the book you've chosen to read from?

Sarah ([15:34](#)):

Yes. I chose *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, which is by Elizabeth Kolbert, and it is primarily a chronicle of this terrible moment that we're in, in which the rate of species extinction on this planet is at an incredible height and



also accelerating. And she sort of gives you the historical context that this is not unprecedented in Earth's history, but it's happening right now in a way that is quite frightening, quite alarming, and feels very out of control. That's the main thrust of the book, but the section that I found myself reading and rereading may be a little bit surprising, because it comes in the early stages of the book and it's really about the invention of the idea of extinction. And so just to set the stage before I start the reading, there was a moment, or actually for most of human history, the idea of animals and species was fixed in time. It was like all the animals that we have, that we have today, are all of the ones that have ever existed and they have always existed, and that was kind of the popular conception.

MBS ([16:56](#)):

Like Noah's Ark.

Sarah ([16:58](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([16:58](#)):

They went onto the ark, they came off the ark.

Sarah ([16:59](#)):

Yes, exactly, and that that was kind of a fixed state. And I think, we'll talk about this after the section I'm going to read, what I was so struck by was what it looked like to arrive at a completely new paradigm of understanding something that must have seemed so fundamental and so true and unquestionable to most people, and what it looked like to start to acquire the wisdom and the data to challenge that.



MBS ([17:34](#)):

That's fantastic. So I'm very excited to hear this, I haven't read this book. I remember it coming out in 2014, I remember it won a Pulitzer Prize for it, and almost the title scared me away. I was like, "Oh boy, that sounds hard." I'm reading a book at the moment called the End of the Earth, which actually chronicles the different extinctions that have happened over the millions and millions of years of the Earth's existence. And it's brilliantly written, but also a little bleak at times. But I'm excited for these two pages, you've set it up brilliantly, Sarah. So over to you, reading from The Sixth Extinction, by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Sarah ([18:11](#)):

All right, well I also want to say to anyone listening that my pronunciation of French is roughly in the same ballpark as your pronunciation of Hungarian. So I want to apologize to all French speakers everywhere for what will surely be an imperfect rendition of certain names.

MBS ([18:31](#)):

That's great.

Sarah ([18:38](#)):

"When exactly Europeans first stumbled upon the bones of an American mastodon is unclear. An isolated molar unearthed in a field in upstate New York was sent off to London in 1705. It was labeled the tooth of a giant. The first mastodon bone subjected to what might anachronistically be called scientific study were discovered in 1739. That year, Charles le Moyne, the second Baron de Longueuil, was traveling down the Ohio River with 400 troops. Some, like him, Frenchmen, most of the others, Algonquins and Iroquois. The journey was arduous and supplies were short. On one leg, a French soldier would later recall, the troops were reduced to living off acorns. Sometime, probably in the fall,



Longueuil and his troops set up camp in the east bank of the Ohio, not far from what is now the city of Cincinnati. Several of the Native Americans set off to go hunting.

Sarah ([19:42](#)):

A few miles away, they came to a patch of marsh that gave off a sulfurous smell. Buffalo tracks led to the marsh from all directions, and hundreds, perhaps thousands of huge bones poked out of the muck like spars of a ruined ship. The men returned to camp carrying a thigh bone three and a half feet long, an immense tusk, and several huge teeth. The teeth had roots the length of a human hand, and each one weighed nearly 10 pounds. Longueuil was so intrigued by the bones that he instructed his troops to take them along when they broke camp. Lugging the enormous tusk, femur, and molars, the men pushed on through the wilderness. Eventually they reached the Mississippi River, where they met up with a second contingent of French troops. Over the next several months, many of Longueuil's men died of disease and the campaign they had come to wage against the Chickasaw ended in humiliation and defeat.

Sarah ([20:44](#)):

Nevertheless, Longueuil kept the strange bones safe. He made his way to New Orleans, and from there shipped the tusk, the teeth, and the giant femur to France. They were presented to Louis the 15th, who installed them in his museum, the Cabinet du Roi. Decades later, maps of the Ohio River Valley were still largely blank except for the place where the elephant bones were found. Today, the place where the elephant bones were found is a state park in Kentucky known as Big Bone Lick. Longueuil's bones confounded everyone who examined them. The femur and the tusk looked as if they could have belonged to an elephant, or much the same thing, according to the taxonomy at the time, a mammoth, but the animal's teeth were a conundrum. They resisted categorization. Elephant's teeth, and also mammoths, are flat on top with thin



ridges that run from side to side so that the chewing surface resembles the sole of a running shoe.

Sarah ([21:49](#)):

Mastodon teeth, by contrast, are cusped. They do, indeed, look as though they might belong to a jumbo-sized human. The first naturalist to study one of them, Jean-Étienne Guettard, declined even to guess at its provenance. "What animal does it come from," he asked plaintively in a paper delivered to France's Royal Academy of Sciences in 1752. In 1762, the keeper of the King's cabinet, Jean-Louis Marie Daubenton, tried to resolve the puzzle of the curious teeth by declaring that the unknown animal of the Ohio was not an animal at all, rather it was two animals. The tusks and leg bones belonged to elephants, the molars came from another creature entirely. Probably, he decided, this other creature was a hippopotamus. Right around this time, a second shipment of mastodon bones was sent to Europe, this time to London. These remains, also from Big Bone Lick, exhibited the same befuddling pattern. The bones and tusks were elephant-like, while the molars were covered in knobby points.

Sarah ([23:02](#)):

William Hunter, attending physician to the queen, found Daubenton's explanation for the discrepancy wanting. He offered a different explanation, the first halfway accurate one. The supposed American elephant, he submitted, was a totally new animal with which anatomists were unacquainted. It was, he decided, carnivorous, hence its scary looking teeth. He dubbed the beast the American Incognitum. France's leading naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc, added yet another twist to the debate. He argued that the remains in question represented not one or two, but three separate animals, an elephant, a hippopotamus, and a third as yet unknown species. With great trepidation, he allowed that this last species, the largest of them all, seemed to have disappeared. It was, he proposed, the only land animal ever to have done so.



MBS ([24:10](#)):

Fantastic. That's beautifully read. Thank you, Sarah. I love the guy going, "I'm just going to clear up the uncertainty by calling it the American Incognitum," like The American WTF. "I don't even know what to call it, but I'll pretend I do."

Sarah ([24:23](#)):

Yes, in today's parlance, definitely it's the American WTF. I mean, I have to say, that was the moment that this book just totally stopped me in my tracks. And there were a couple of things about it, one is just the name, the American Incognitum, or anything incognitum. This is now a name that I have adopted to use for any time that I have a hunch that there's a there there, that there's something brewing in my brain of a potential idea, a potential answer, but I don't even know what to call it yet. And that idea of the long hunch, that's one of the things that spoke to me about this.

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

To understand the time scale, right? The tooth was found in like 1705, it made its way to Europe. In the middle of that century, people were like, "What is this? Is it one animal? Is it two animal?" 10 or 20 years later it was called the American Incognitum, and it wasn't until the end of that century that the beginnings of the glimmer of the idea that there were some animals that used to walk around on the planet that no longer walk around the planet. In other words, the idea of extinction.

Sarah ([25:36](#)):

It took 100 years to get there from when this particular tooth was found, and that wasn't the first fossil that was found, but just the idea of how long it took to shift this paradigm, the earliest glimmers of shifting that paradigm. For me, this was, I don't know, there was something about the way in which... We function in such a fast paced cycle of innovation and thinking about new product



development or thinking about creativity. This is the opposite. This is that slow burn that is truly revolutionary.

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

The long hunch is a fantastic phrase. I mean, if you haven't already claimed it as the title of your next book and bought the URL, you should, because it's fantastic. And it is so hard to sustain curiosity. We've got all those cognitive biases. A confirmation information bias, which we're like, "We're going to try and make this work to how I see the world." How do you help yourself, how do you help others resist closure so that a long hunch can stay long rather than short?

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

Well, resisting closure is a very apt description. There is research on people's tolerance for ambiguity, or intolerance for ambiguity. We have a preference for closure. We have a preference for getting out of that space of ambiguity and uncertainty and open-endedness as quickly as possible. And I think that the ability to resist that prematurely is one of those core skills that you acquire with a strong creative practice. So what I see happening for our students is we give them these challenging design projects in which they are not only asked to come up with a solution, but almost always also asked to come up with what is the framing of the problem that you wish to solve?

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

So in the case of that education project I described, we were sent into a classroom and said observe what you observe, see what opportunities are worth solving for here, and really had the responsibility as a group of students to name that and frame that problem. And once you've done that a few times, you recognize, wow, the ideas that I had after I steeped in the problem space, I stewed in the ambiguity for a while, were so much more interesting and so much more unexpected, and that's what actually opened up this much bigger opportunity space. So I think it's one of those things where you have to get a



few cycles under your belt to have the personal conviction that the amount of emotional resilience that it takes to resist that closure is going to pay off, right?

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

That in that struggle, the next thing that's going to happen is a breakthrough. But you have to have the sensitivity and the conviction that that is actually possible, that that's going to happen. I mean, really, that is why we teach the way that we teach, which is we'll do multiple cycles. We get people to go through a project experience several times because you need that sensitivity in retrospect, to be able to fully have that conviction, I think.

MBS ([29:05](#)):

Do you find there's a moment in particular that helps people move to, one, either resisting closure, or two, in a kind of related way, being able to say, "I don't know." Because one of the breakthroughs in the piece that you read was somebody going, "Look, honestly, that might be a hippopotamus, that might be an elephant, but the third one, I just don't even know." And that is hard if you're an expert to go, "But this thing, I'm befuddled by it," because I should know all the animals, because I know what the animals were when they marched off the ark. Do you notice something that tips a balance to allowing people just to expand that capacity a little bit?

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

You asked two very good questions in there. I mean, one is I think that the thing that I've seen help the most is naming that that ambiguity is productive, right?

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

That's great.



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

And actually, the phrase that I like for that the most is actually called productive struggle. It comes from mathematics education, where researchers have looked at if you struggle in the early stages of learning a new concept and applying a new concept, you are actually much more likely to retain it and to be able to apply it more broadly. So we've started saying to students, "Hey, there's going to be a period of time in your project where you might experience this feeling. You're learning a lot about what the problem is, what the solution might be, about your team, about your own creative abilities, but it's going to feel rough."

Sarah ([30:35](#)):

And just being able to have some language to diagnose when you're in those moments is surprisingly powerful. And also, just the knowledge that that is a normal part of creative work, and in fact, if you're not having those moments of struggle where you're feeling like I want closure, but maybe it's too early, then you're probably not working on something that is likely to result in something new or innovative or meaningful. So learning to reframe what your own experience of those moments is, I think, is very, very powerful.

MBS ([31:10](#)):

Right. It's meant to feel like this.

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

It's meant to feel like this, right?

MBS ([31:15](#)):

Yeah, yeah.



Sarah ([31:16](#)):

And the other part of your question is about our bias towards expertise and towards presenting ourselves as being knowledgeable about all things, and never uncertain. Having just helped lead an organization through time of extraordinary uncertainty, the desire to be able to say, "I know what this is going to look like for the next six months, here are all the ways that we're going to navigate that," and the lack of our ability to do so honestly, that gap just becomes so clear. And so I actually think, in a way, this past moment, as we have been and continue to be navigating the global pandemic, has been an important moment for people in all kinds of roles, but particularly in leadership roles to say, "Here's what I know, here's what I don't know. Nobody knows." And to sit with that discomfort of being able to just acknowledge what is true, which is we don't know how the future is going to unfold.

Sarah ([32:19](#)):

And interesting to think about this example from the Six Extinction in a scientific practice of being able to say, "That thing is undescribed," right? It's undefined. And that's actually true in a lot of... In the naming of species you'll often see, "Oh, we've got pictures of this new thing, but there haven't been enough to know that that's a species that we're going to give a name to and we're going to define it in a certain way and in a certain part of taxonomy," and so the term for that is undescribed. And I think there's something powerful about being able to, again, have a name for that thing that you know is important. It's the incognitum, it's emerging, it's a hunch, but we don't yet know everything about it. That language, that disposition, I think would be really helpful in more contexts. To be able to point to something that is a phenomenon that you can start to appreciate and think is a real thing, but you don't yet know the name for.



MBS ([33:23](#)):

Part of when you're in that place of ambiguity and uncertainty and exploration is not just the intellectual dissonance, which is like, "This is hard for my brain to be with," but it's also connected to that. It's like, "How do you feel about this?" What are the feelings of... I think five core feelings of my taxonomy, mad, sad, glad, ashamed, and afraid. And in uncertainty, basically everything but gladness is there. I'm angry, I'm upset, I'm afraid, I'm embarrassed, all of that's going on. And I was struck when I was reading the introduction that you wrote to the new book, that d.school is a place where feelings are acknowledged and just treated like this is part of the work, not this is an unwelcome intruder into the work, and that is counter cultural to lots of places. I'm wondering how you help people sit with how they're feeling.

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

Well, one way that we do that is literally by giving people a greater familiarity with all the different names of feelings. So there's a wonderful tool that I've seen, some of our teaching teams use, it's a wheel of feelings.

MBS ([34:39](#)):

I've seen that, it's great. Yeah.

Sarah ([34:41](#)):

It's trying to help those of us who might have that more limited vocabulary, which I will say, I also... I feel like I had a relatively small vocabulary, particularly about naming my own feelings, not to get too personal here, and actually really being able to appreciate the difference between mad and frustrated, or frustrated and disappointed, and actually sit with some of those nuances is really helpful. And it's partly helpful because, in doing what we call design research, you're going to be interacting with people that might be expressing the needs that you're designing for. So one of our classes, taught by an amazing



designer named Jules Sherman, focused on designing for parents of infants who were having pediatric feeding difficulties. So sometimes very severe medical conditions that were making it difficult for them to get the nutrition that they needed.

Sarah ([35:37](#)):

That's a really sensitive set of topics, so our students are in people's homes, they're connecting with these parents, they're observing these tiny babies hooked up to lots of... There's feelings everywhere in that, even though it is a medical context. So the students really need the ability to relate to what might be going on and ask a bunch of questions, and then also show up and hold space if people's real feelings are emerging and are on the surface. Now oftentimes, in that case, the parents, they were holding space as well, because they were the experts in that situation. And then the other part, feelings also come up in teams. So one of the things that-

MBS ([36:22](#)):

You're a nightmare! I'm right, you're wrong!

Sarah ([36:25](#)):

That's right, and one of the ideas that I was really taken with in the research for this book was one of our instructors, Dan Klein, said to me, "What I've seen on teams is that so much conflict comes from just that simple misunderstanding where one person is in an exploration mindset, which feels exciting and new and like everything is possible, and another person is in the decision making or closure mindset." And so much misunderstanding intention can just come from not expressing, "Hey, which mode are we in right now?"

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

And it gets personal, right? Because then it's like, "You're blocking my new, amazing idea. I want to explore this hunch," right? Or someone else is feeling



like, "You're preventing me from getting this thing done and I have to move on to the next thing in my day," right? And so being able to register what's the creative and intellectual process that we're in at this moment, and do we want to be in at this moment, so that we can hear the contributions we're each making to this without judging, without actually personalizing, right? Those are some of those fundamental skills we want our students to be able to acquire.

MBS ([37:35](#)):

So it's been such a rich conversation and I feel like I barely got started, but in the interest of time, I'm going to ask you one final question, which is the question I love to ask at the end of all of these conversations, which is what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between you and me?

Sarah ([37:54](#)):

I guess I just want to thank you for the prompt to bring in the piece of external content that I got to share. I've actually been thinking about that incognitum idea for a long time, and I haven't quite found the right way to express it. I think there's something there that I personally want to explore more deeply. This feels like potentially my next project, my next writing. I'm not quite sure. So I guess I want to just express some appreciation for the opportunity to explore that with you today.

MBS ([38:34](#)):

Oh, I loved the story of the incognitum, Americana Incognitum. It's fabulous. We're so desperate to know, to remove the mystery that we name it, even if we're calling it by the Latin words for I have no idea what this actually is. I think this is what I want for myself, perhaps for you, too. It's a willingness, actually, just to sit with the mystery of it all. I mean, I often talk about staying curious a little bit longer, it's one of the phrases I've become known for at Box of Crayons. It's one of the things that we teach, which is, "Hey, look, to be a better manager, a better leader, a better human being in this interaction, stay curious a little bit



longer." But the subtext to that, often the actual text will say, "Because it will help you figure out the real challenge. It will help you figure out what's going on."

MBS ([39:19](#)):

And in some contexts, that's exactly the right thing that matters. But I'm thinking about this now, maybe even sweeter or maybe even just a little more metaphysical, back to the long hunch, if you like, what would it be to stay curious just so you could stay with the mystery of it all? A couple of other people who I thought throw a light on staying with the mystery of it all, conversations we've had on this podcast, Sarah Hendren is a designer just like Sarah Stein Greenberg is, maybe it's a Sarah thing. My conversation with her is called How to See the World and You, and it comes through the lens of designing for people with disabilities. Really fascinating.

MBS ([40:00](#)):

Katy Milkman, behavioral scientist, her new book is How to Change, and the episode is called, You Are Perfectly Imperfect, which I think is staying with the mystery, just in the title alone. And then Jessica Hagy is a cartoonist and a designer and thinker who I long admired. She was actually a contributor to the End Malaria book that I put out many years ago, and her title is called How to keep Creating. The d.school in Stanford are getting into publishing books. Sarah's book is the first of a series. I've checked them out, they look pretty terrific, actually. You can find out more about those books at dschoolbooks.com.

MBS ([40:45](#)):

Thank you for listening, it is always a pleasure to have you here. I mean, honestly, my guests are awesome. I'm not surprised you're listening to them because I think these people are just so fascinating and so thoughtful about the lives they lead and the lives they're helping me, and perhaps you as well, to lead. If this interview in particular struck a chord with you, send it to somebody.



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