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

Where did we get this idea that the youth will save us? I mean, what a burden for them and what a cop out for us. I mean, I understand the inclination, of course, I'm there as well. I mean, I remember marching about various causes when I was younger, and now I march less and I'm busy and I'm tired. I get easily distracted. It's just easier to give some money and cross my fingers and hope that these youngins will get this mess figured out.

MBS ([00:30](#)):

And of course, young people, they can be brilliant and ambitious and capable of extraordinary things. If we let them, if we support them. I just don't want us to forget that we, too, all of us need to be a force for change.



MBS ([00:48](#)):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that's moved them, a book that has shaped them. DeNora Getachew is the CEO of DoSomething.org. What a great name for an organization, DoSomething.org. It is an organization that helps youth engage for social impact to make today and tomorrow better places. But the foundation for DeNora's work doesn't begin really with youth, although it begins when she was young, it's more fundamental than that. It's about democracy.

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

Even though my mother would never actually tell me who she voted for. She'd take me to the booth in New York, we used to have these old school booths, and you'd pull the lever. She'd basically invite me in, but then be like, turn your back, because it's my private vote, but you need to know that you have to do this. So she was modeling the behavior, but respecting her own privacy, as opposed to the world we live in now where people have their ballot selfies, if you will.

MBS ([01:45](#)):

It went from theory to practice to reality when DeNora was a young pregnant teen during high school in Harlem.

DeNora ([01:53](#)):

I didn't know at the time that I was going to become a civic activist, let alone a democracy ninja. But when my school leaders tried to encourage me to transfer high schools, because they thought my pregnancy would be a distraction to the school community, that's when I found my voice. I like to say that I'm highly



coachable and I'm a rule follower. The juxtaposition of that and being a ninja is a little bit hard.

DeNora ([02:18](#)):

Since they provided the advice and recommendation, I considered this other school. I said, well, I should at least consider this school. I should say at the time I was a high achieving young person who was set up for academic success, had parents who were investing in me, was on track to be college-bound, but had made a personal choice to have a baby. And so I went to visit this school for pregnant girls.

DeNora ([02:40](#)):

What I learned very quickly is while they would afford me childcare, there was no academic rigor or opportunity that was going to be afforded to me there. The civic spark was lit in me finding my own voice to advocate, to stay at home, stay in my school I had already been in, and to be able to remain there with my peers and have access to more rigorous academic opportunities.

DeNora ([03:02](#)):

That's where the journey began. I think seeing it through from then, my career has built upon that, but it's that formative moment for me of realizing that someone didn't believe in my opportunity for success and that I had to learn how democracy works and how to leverage it for my own personal good.

MBS ([03:18](#)):

So you can see DeNora is facing off against authoritarian adults who thought they knew what was best for her, but she had an ally. She had her mom on her side.



DeNora ([03:28](#)):

Often when I tell this story, my mom says, "Oh, you turn yourself into this larger than life hero, DeNora," and I'm like, great mom, you get credit. My mom gets a lot of the credit for instilling the right values in me and supporting me throughout that journey.

DeNora ([03:41](#)):

When I said to her, "This isn't the fit for me, mom, what do we do?" She supported me in figuring out what we do. Is it appealing to the school? Is it appealing to the superintendent of the schools and actually understanding how to navigate the hierarchy and having the courage, but also the moral and financial support to, to do that.

MBS ([04:00](#)):

As DeNora and her mother were working their way through the bureaucracy, they were sparking what in many ways would be a guiding light for DeNora's future, for her sense of purpose.

DeNora ([04:11](#)):

We wrote the letter to the school, had the meeting with the principal, wrote the letter to the superintendent, and were able to navigate through bureaucracy, which can be daunting in and of itself. I think often people aren't courageous because when they see the hurdles they have to overcome, they'd rather just take the path of least resistance. And the good news for me is that I'm always going to take the path of the most resistance because I believe in getting to that systemic change. And I believe in knocking down those hurdles and obstacles that are holding us back.



MBS ([04:40](#)):

Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried." The fact that we seem to need a democracy ninja right now in 2021, that's worrying. I really wanted to ask DeNora, "What is it that people are afraid of about democracy?"

DeNora ([05:00](#)):

We'll get to this when I read the two pages, I think we're afraid of who has power, and how do they use that power? Throughout my career, I'm an attorney and a policy advocate, and I've spent my career actually dedicated to advocating, to eliminate structural barriers to participation. Think about things like early voting. Why do you only get to vote in certain states on election day? What's that about? And, what if something happens on election day, you get sick, you have to work late and then you don't get to go vote. Why do we have barriers like that in the way? Things like automatic voter registration, the government knows who eligible voters are. They know who citizens are because they've showed up and interacted with a government agency in some shape or fashion. Why aren't they automatically registered to vote?

DeNora ([05:42](#)):

If you don't want to vote, or you don't want to be registered, you can opt out. I think democracy is a complex political system that many people haven't been educated to understand. I've also spent time in my career working to bring civics education back into school so that young people learn about democracy, like that democracy is demystified for young people, before the barrier to entry exists.



DeNora ([06:04](#)):

Because if you haven't been taught, especially if you're a young person from a historically marginalized community, if you haven't been taught about democracy, you think that that's an expensive proposition that doesn't apply to you or that it's put upon you as opposed to existing completely in service of you as a citizen.

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

How do you think about power? It's coming down to the nubs of it, which is like, who's in power and who wants to remain in power? We don't want to have power, but power is one of those elusive, invisible, slightly intangible things. I'm wondering how you talk about power in a way that can make it feel graspable.

DeNora ([06:43](#)):

A lot of that work I did in my time at Generation Citizen, when we were working to get civics education back into schools, the interesting thing about civics education is, our education system in America was actually predicated at the public level on ensuring that we had a continuing and thriving democracy and we needed to educate people to grab that mantle and continue it. Because it is complex. The, "We, the people" can't exist if the "We" don't know they're a part of the people.

DeNora ([07:08](#)):

And power is both elusive and feels finite. And actually in this moment I was struggling. I want to be honest, Michael, with what book I was going to read from, because there's so many books that I'm drawing energy and life from in this disrupted moment. But America at its core and democracy, as it has been instituted in America, has always been about power and who can access it.



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

You think about the founding of America. It wasn't my ancestors. The democracy wasn't created with them in mind, though, the Constitution was written in a way that it could be adapted for me to have some of that power. And I think the moment we are living in right now, Michael, is genuinely about a fight for the soul of who has power in America and who is an American?

DeNora ([07:52](#)):

What we need to do is understand and teach every citizen how that democracy works, and that it is all of our responsibility to shepherd and steward it so that we can share power equitably. And I think that's what we're struggling with right now is, who has the power? Why do they have the power? And are they willing to redistribute power so that we can all coexist and thrive? I think that's what's at stake right now in this moment in America.

DeNora ([08:18](#)):

Part of the reason why we stopped teaching civics education in schools, I believe, is because we wanted to shift away from a society in which the focus had been about that democracy and that power, and have fewer people understand how to leverage democracy for good. We see young people protesting and marching in the streets. And they want equity. They want transformation. They want systemic change. Sometimes they don't know that the vehicle through which they're going to achieve that is democracy, because no one's told them that. They think the act, the tactic they're engaging in in that moment is the end all be all for their change they seek.

MBS ([08:57](#)):

There's so much there, DeNora.



DeNora ([08:59](#)):

I know, just the light subject, like power and democracy, Michael.

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

I've walked streets and protests and in some ways being on the street is an expression of powerlessness, because it means that you're not behind a door where other stuff happens. I grew up in Australia where voting is compulsory. You know, just to your point, government know who's eligible to vote. You're expected to vote. You're fined a minor fine, but you're fined if you don't vote.

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

So watching, particularly what happens in the States, which is this systematic exclusion of people from the ability to vote, it's not that Australia doesn't have power imbalances and hoards power in certain circles, but they do it in a different way, I guess.

MBS ([09:47](#)):

Anyway, this is such a rich conversation, but let's talk about the book that you've chosen for us. I love hearing that you struggle to pick the book because that's part of the joy for me is watching people who love to read, go, there are so many books, which one do I pick?

DeNora ([10:01](#)):

This is not a prop. This is my office I sit in every day and there are all the books. And yet there are more books that I was like, can't go up on the shelves.

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

I hear you.



DeNora ([10:09](#)):

I came on board, I didn't tell you much about DoSomething, so I want to take one minute to do that before I jump into the book. I came on board as the fourth CEO of DoSomething. You mentioned, we're almost 30 years old. We have been in the business of activating young people for social impact for almost three decades, which is powerful. DoSomething was founded in 1993 by Andrew Shue and Michael Sanchez, with the goal of just, as the name is so synonymous with, stop complaining, young people, just do something. About whatever cause it is you care about, there is something you can do to improve your community, whether it's in your park, whether it's in your school, whether it's in your home.

DeNora ([10:46](#)):

What has been so powerful about joining DoSomething as its fourth CEO just about six months ago, is that we have this ability to communicate directly with young people. To hear from them about the causes they care about, and then to build sustainable campaigns and programming that activate them to get engaged. My hope is that the work of DoSomething continues to evolve with young people. And that we continue to know them and meet them and activate them, but also catalyze their impact, short term and long term, towards that systemic change.

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

That's what I'm focused on as our fourth CEO is, we're living in a 21st century social justice movement, and young people are, I think in many respects you hit the nail on the head, they're marching in the streets because they feel powerless, but they do have power. And our work at DoSomething has to be to show them that there are other ways to harness that power. The book that I chose, great segue, is *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson.



Again, struggle, struggle. I've read much of the book, not all of the book, being candid, just because I started it as I was starting this new role and it's taken over my life, this new role.

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

Of course.

DeNora ([11:57](#)):

In the midst of a pandemic and having three children, two of whom are adolescents. But the reason I chose this book is because I think if we're going to talk about the future of America, the future of race and the intersectional reckoning that we're living through in this moment, we need to look at the root cause of how, of the systems on which our society was built. How do we disrupt that in order to get to the equity and the justice that young people, but all of us, are seeking.

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

Yeah. This has been a book that has been a bit of a beacon over the last few years in terms of this kind of reckoning is a good word around race and how it works. I'm delighted that you've chosen it. And we haven't heard from this book before, so that's exciting for us.

DeNora ([12:41](#)):

I'm surprised.

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

There's been a wide range of books that have been read from that have come at race in one way or another, but I've been waiting for this book to show up because it's like, it's time to hear from it. How did you choose the two pages?



DeNora ([12:59](#)):

It's interesting, I'm a lawyer, and so I get very wonky quickly. I highlight, I tab. So I was prepared, ostensibly, for this moment. Just needed you to invite me to the podcast, Michael, I need you to say, "Come read a book." When I was deciding which two pages, it really was for me about, one, looking through all of my highlights, and two, thinking about where we are in this moment and in society. But also even as I examine my role at DoSomething and realizing that we needed to get to the root cause.

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

There are two pages at the start of the book that where Ms. Wilkerson does a great job of framing the problem that we are facing society-wide, and then defining what this caste system is. To me, it's like a north star of what we have to dismantle, what we're up against. Those were the two pages of, where we needed to jump in and have a hard conversation.

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

It's a brilliant setup. Let me hand it over to you, DeNora, to read these two pages. I'll be listening carefully.

DeNora ([14:01](#)):

Okay. I'll tell you, again, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson, starting on page 16.

DeNora ([14:12](#)):

We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock. Heaving and contracting over generations. Cracks, patched, but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries, even. Many people may rightly say, "I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do



with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked Indigenous people, never owned slaves." And yes, not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it. But here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls, and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

DeNora ([15:11](#)):

And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands. Unaddressed, the ruptures and diagonal cracks will not fix themselves. The toxins will not go away, but rather will spread, leach, and mutate, as they already have. When people live in an old house, they come to adjust to the idiosyncrasies and outright dangers skulking in an old structure. They put buckets under a wet ceiling, prop up groaning floors, learn to step over that rotting wood tread in the staircase. The awkward becomes acceptable and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over the generations, we learn to believe that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be. The inspector was facing the mystery of the misshapen ceiling, and so he first held a sensor to the surface to detect if it was damp. The reading inconclusive, he then pulled out the infrared camera to take a kind of x-ray of whatever was going on.

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

The idea being that you cannot fix a problem until and unless you can see it. He could now see past the plaster, beyond what had been wallpapered or painted over. As we now are called upon to do in the house we all live in, to examine a structure built long ago. Like other old houses, America has an unseen skeleton, a caste system that is central to its operation, as are the studs and joists that we cannot see in the physical buildings we call home.



DeNora ([16:51](#)):

Caste is the infrastructure of our divisions. It is the architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining, in our case, a 400-year-old social order. Looking at caste is like holding the country's x-ray up to the light. A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value, that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry, and often immutable traits. Traits that would be neutral in the abstract, but are ascribed life and death meaning in a hierarchy, favoring the dominant caste, whose forebears designed it.

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

A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary, boundaries to keep the rank groupings apart, distinct from one another, and in their assigned places. Throughout human history, three caste systems have stood out: The tragically accelerated, chilling, and officially vanquished caste system of Nazi Germany, the lingering millennia-long caste system of India, and the shapeshifting, unspoken race space caste pyramid in the United States. Each version, relying on stigmatizing those deemed inferior to justify the dehumanization necessary to keep the lowest rank people at the bottom and to rationalize the protocols of enforcement.

DeNora ([18:16](#)):

A caste system endures because it is often justified as divine will, originating from sacred text or the presumed laws of nature, reinforced throughout culture and passed down through the generations. As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in the darkened theater, flashlight cast down on the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power, which groups have it and which do



not. It is about resources, which caste is seen and worthy of them and which are not, who gets to acquire and control them, and who does not. It is about respect, authority, and assumptions of competence, who is accorded these, and who is not.

MBS ([19:11](#)):

Wow, thank you for reading that. I haven't read this book yet, but just the title alone and the brilliance of transferring it from India, where you associate caste and this millennia-long experience, which has proved impossible to shake, and then to bring it to as a lens to current American society is such a brilliant framing. What's the burning truth at the heart of this for you, DeNora?

DeNora ([19:37](#)):

When I read this, I got chills, Michael, because it goes back to where we started our conversation. It's about power. I told you I was going to come back to that as the theme. It is about power.

DeNora ([19:49](#)):

What's interesting for me is, I'm a native New Yorker. I was born and raised here and, during peak one and peak two of the pandemic, I tried on living outside of the city for a little bit. I had never lived anywhere else, Michael. Raised in Yonkers in the Bronx, went to high school in Harlem. And I moved to the burbs. It was like fish out of water.

MBS ([20:12](#)):

Totally. It's a whole new world out there.

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

Whole new world out there. It involves your car. Fun fact. You have to drive everywhere. But jokes aside, what I learned is that I was in a new system. I was living in a majority white community where I didn't see myself. And, everybody



saw me. I couldn't even go to the store, Michael, without someone noticing, there's a new Black woman in our midst, where did she come from? She seems interesting. And that was so striking for me.

DeNora ([20:43](#)):

Fast forward, I'm back in New York City, thankfully, because this is my home and I love it so much. But I live in Harlem. A historic community in New York and worldwide, but also one that in many respects embodies the caste system in America. And I have two young daughters. One of whom is incredibly conscious and is, they're both thoughtful, but in very different ways. One of my daughters asked me a question, because we formally lived in a predominantly white community in Manhattan, and now we live in a predominantly Black community.

DeNora ([21:15](#)):

On the walk to the bus, let's just stipulate that this was at 6:45 AM, I am being asked questions about why this community is dirtier, why this community seems to have less resources, and why this community does not resemble either the white suburb we lived in, or the white neighborhood we used to live in Manhattan. And immediately, having read this book before, I was explaining to my daughter America's caste system. I was explaining to her how groupings of people are residing together in an underresourced community, because of the way in which historically we've made decisions as a society about how to allocate resources and who should benefit from them and who shouldn't.

DeNora ([21:59](#)):

She's a genius, Isabel Wilkerson, because conceptualizing this, and addressing the root cause of America's racial wrongdoing, the original sin as she calls it earlier in the book, I don't have those words. I didn't write the book, but it made it crystal clear to me what we're working against. Last year in America and



worldwide, we had what we called a racial reckoning, and it was this buzzword and everybody was protesting and marching in the streets. But was it just about race? I've been talking more intentionally about an intersectional reckoning, because it isn't just about race. Yes, race is one of the original sins and the root cause, but so is gender inequity.

DeNora ([22:42](#)):

In caste systems, it's also about power. It's about able-bodiedness, it's about gender orientation. There's a reckoning about all of what it means, but the root cause of that is about who has power, who should have access to power. And in this moment, the term reckoning being used as a way to say, it's time to examine and then redistribute that power. The reason that this book and these two pages in particular resonated with me was about that very concept of power, and who has it and who doesn't.

MBS ([23:14](#)):

DeNora, how do you navigate, I'm making a presumption here, which is, you're both inside and outside power. You're a CEO, you're an educated woman, you're a lawyer, and you are also a Black woman, and you're also working in the nonprofit sector. My guess is that you're both part of the establishment and not part of the establishment. A little bit like when you are talking about being a pregnant high schooler and you're like, I'm a rule follower and I'm also a high achiever at school. And I'm also a pregnant girl at school. And I'm just curious to know how you navigate that tension.

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

It's a daily tension. A book that is in my bookcase is *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. DuBois. And in the book he talks about this double consciousness of, what does it mean to live in two identities at once? And how do you reconcile that? Because yes, on its surface, being a CEO of a company and being a lawyer



means I have power. And yet, to Miss Wilkerson's point, this system wasn't built for me. The institutional barriers exist to keep the power with a certain class of individuals, be them educated, be them wealthy, be them honestly, majority white. How do we redistribute that power? Something I'm facing every day. I see it in my work to fundraise, to run a nonprofit. Is someone going to take the call from the Black woman CEO before they take the call from the white male CEO? Maybe in this moment.

DeNora ([24:50](#)):

I think, respectfully to Black women, we're hot. We're in right now, so you have to ride the wave. But, jokes aside, I also won't be tokenized as a Black woman. It's great that you want to let black women lead in this moment, but is that sustainable? Have we set up the infrastructure to ensure that I am successful and the Black women who come behind me will be successful going forward? I don't think so.

DeNora ([25:13](#)):

It's hard because I'm both metaphorically trying to crack some glass ceilings, while also realizing that institutionally the caste system hasn't been broken yet. For example, in America, we just received the results of our census. One of the lessons learned from that census is that other minorities, whether they are Asian or Hispanic, are growing in population share in comparison to African-Americans.

DeNora ([25:40](#)):

Well, what does that mean for that caste system? Does it mean that all people of color in America see themselves as aligned and have a desire to disrupt and eliminate the caste system in favor of all of us having more power? Or, does it mean, which Miss Wilkerson talks about in the book, that certain races will decide at all costs will not be Black people in America. They will step on our



back or try to surpass us in order to ensure that they don't fall to the same fate. It is hard, both as you navigate alignment, coalition building, living your daily life. It is this double consciousness of doing the right thing in service of, in my case, democracy and young people, and then, how do you coexist with that tension of the systems not being built to set me up for success to do that?

MBS ([26:29](#)):

I'm very struck by your comment you made: Black women are kind of of the moment, but I will not be tokenized. In your work at DoSomething, how do you navigate the tokenization of youth activism? Because that feels like something that you can like, go for it young people, you're doing such a good job at being angry and worried and Greta Thunberg, or some version of that. And if you create a little space where the noise can happen, then you can just get on with maintaining the status quo and the power. I know this is another impossible question, but I'm just wondering how you think about that.

DeNora ([27:18](#)):

That is exactly the burning question for me every day, Michael. I inherited an almost 30-year-old nonprofit that could exist in creating these activations and campaigns that gave young people something to hold onto, and that spark would be lit. In a 21st century movement for social justice that is happening out loud, publicly, viscerally, DoSomething cannot just be that. We are actually in the process of going through a strategic planning examination to figure out how we truly know young people, and are not activating them to contribute to the noise, but are actually activating them for systemic change. And that's what we see young people craving. In this moment, what we know to be true is young people are incredibly skeptical of structure systems, government, and yet, want systemic change to happen. And I won't even go down the rabbit hole of like, social media and slacktivism and how that contributes to the noise, because that's a whole fifth conversation.



DeNora ([28:17](#)):

DoSomething can't just exist to activate young people to scream into the wind. There's a meme that was not, I don't think built for DoSomething, but I've referenced it often. Because I've seen it before, where it's like a bunch of people screaming out their window saying, "Do something!" Then, what? If I am effective as the CEO of this company, we will not just be activating young people to scream into the wind. We will be activating young people to be the champions, the stewards, and the people who bring in a democracy that is more accessible, more equitable, more representative. That means we have to activate them to understand that democracy is for them. And they have to, in some respects, even if they distrust the system, learn how to leverage the system to get the change they seek.

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

And I think that's not what's happening now across the board. We are in a very noisy and disruptive moment, and a very uncertain moment. We have activists like the Greta Thunbergs or the Parkland students of the world who are pushing for transformative change. And the system is not designed to embrace them, to hear their voice, and let alone to redivide the pie and give them some power.

DeNora ([29:24](#)):

If I am effective, me and my colleagues are effective at DoSomething, we are helping young people understand how to get the pie redivided to give them some power, to push towards that systemic change. Do I want to raise awareness? Do I want to educate young people about all of the ails of society? Sure. I do, because that is the first step in that transformational journey, but it can't be the last step. DoSomething, and I think many nonprofits in this moment, are having this existential crisis of, what do we do to meet this



moment to ensure that we are being most effective and are catalyzing the spark that has already been lit by young people?

MBS ([30:03](#)):

You said you are going through strategic review at DoSomething to go, what needs to be different? So this will be an unfair question, but because I like asking these impossible questions, seeing you sweat, but, what do you need to stop doing?

DeNora ([30:26](#)):

Honestly, we need to stop doing things that create noise. We need to stop running campaigns that just get young people to click, and like, and heart something. We need to know young people better, hear what they want us to be doing, and then build that in service of young people. And that's hard. There are fiscal constraints that pull against that. There are operating in business norms that pull against that and create a tension there. And there's, we live in a noisy society. Even the notion of holding on to young people, or any person's attention for more than five seconds, it's harder. But what I see in this moment is, and I keep talking about this, and I was reflecting earlier. I need to, no pun intended, do something with this.

DeNora ([31:13](#)):

But I have gained my COVID clarity. As I've lived through this crazy disruptive time, which I hope is the last time like this in our lifetime, to know what I will and won't do, will and will prioritize short term and long term. I don't think society writ large has done that. I think by and large, we are so disrupted, confused, uncertain about the past and the present and the future, and trying to hold on what we know. Because it is a very untethered moment, where you're like, what am I doing, what day is today, where am I? On some level, we have to



be willing to let go of that, the former, and decide in this moment, what are we building towards with intentionality and with purpose?

DeNora ([31:55](#)):

I'm excited to do that in partnership with young people because they're raising their hands. They're unapologetic, as one of my good friends and mentors, Dr. Daniel Moseley would say, they're unapologetic about being the beneficiaries of the change they seek in their lifetime. They're not like you and I, Michael, who are like, if we could just keep working at this for the next decade, we're going to get that bill passed. They're like, we're going to get the bill passed tomorrow.

DeNora ([32:18](#)):

Maybe that on some level is naivete about understanding how the system works. But the urgency, the fierce urgency of now, if you will, is that they are willing to lean into that. We have to decide, are we leaning in with them to build what is the future, as opposed to just holding onto the past?

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

Who do you look at as a current role model for people who are managing to create disruptive, sustainable activism?

DeNora ([32:45](#)):

Of my peers or for young people?

MBS ([32:49](#)):

Anywhere. Anything, young people or our peers, who do you think could be a role model or a mentor for DoSomething?

DeNora ([33:00](#)):

That's a great question. I think there are all of the unseen role models and mentors for DoSomething. And that's what I'm keeping a pulse on, is the



people who are not only marching in the streets, but are in the capitals. And those are young people and adults, demanding change on systemic issues that are really getting to this power question. When you think about education, criminal justice, economic mobility, we are living in a moment that has created the greatest level of economic inequality that we will have experienced, at least in my lifetime. And it happened like this, it happened in the blink of an eye. What I think is so powerful about this moment, because we have access to, in a positive note, because I often get, DeNora, you just bashed social media, are you a Luddite? Do you not use the internet? And I'm like, no, I do. But I want us to understand how to leverage social media for good.

DeNora ([33:51](#)):

What it has done is given us an incredible amount of information technology at our disposal at all times. What we have to do better at as a society is distinguishing real news from fake news, avoiding misinformation. We're running a partnership right now with the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases around connecting the dots between medical misinformation and getting vaccinated against meningococcal disease. If we can take the best attributes of social media and our digital era and combine that with the activists who are pushing for the transformative, sustainable change, that's when we're going to find it.

DeNora ([34:32](#)):

I don't think I have to point to one person, Michael, because we are living in a moment where there are so many of those people. It's just so noisy, we can't hear it or see it all the time.

MBS ([34:40](#)):

I think there's some truth to that. There are so many people doing so many interesting things and they're just busy doing it rather than Instagramming it.



That's just look, this is me rolling up my sleeves and just making progress on a specific, small, important project that will make the world a bit better as a result of that.

DeNora ([35:01](#)):

That's right. But it's hard to see that. It's hard to see the forest for the trees in this moment, because it is such a disruptive and noisy time. So you don't know that Michael is off toiling away at the thing he cares about, because he didn't ask you yet to join him, but he should. Where do you give your time and your energy and how do you build more intentional coalitions towards that change?

MBS ([35:23](#)):

I love this conversation. I'd love to keep going, but for everybody's sake, I won't. But let me ask you this as a final question, DeNora. What needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation?

DeNora ([35:38](#)):

Such a hard question. My honest answer is, the fastest growing demographic in America at least is young people. And if we truly intend to create a more equitable and intentional society, we not only have to center our youth voice in that, we have to equip them. We have to arm them. We have to activate them to be stakeholders in this democracy. Let's not use age as a pretext for not giving over some of the power. Let's instead be clear about if we truly believe in, and I do because I'm a democracy ninja, if we truly believe in this democracy, what does it take to make sure that we, the people will continue to be the north star for how we're getting to that, we, the people.

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

I have various forms of power, and that means I'm asking myself in response to DeNora's question. Well, what would I need to do to center the youth voice? It's



not just about giving them more, more time, encouragement, resources, activation, I mean, of course, all of that helps. It's not just about shining a spotlight or following and giving thumbs up on social media, although that's good as well. We have to subtract as well as give. We, I mean I, have to examine how much of the center I hold, how much I'm willing to give up and make way for them. How do we decenter ourselves and step aside and invite them in? Sometimes doing something means just getting out of the way. If you enjoyed my conversation with DeNora, I hope you did. Let me recommend a couple of others that might spark your fancy as well.

MBS ([37:29](#)):

David Robinson, who's a Canadian children's and adult author. My conversation with him is called *To Read is To Change*. This is a man who is a brilliant writer and loves books. He has such an interesting pick for the two pages that he reads. And the second interview I'd recommend is with my good friend, Dolly Chugh. She is a force for good in the world. I love her to bits. That conversation is called *How and Why to Be Goodish*, which sounds a little prim and proper. But Dolly, she's just a beacon of joy and enthusiasm in life. You should listen to that conversation just so you can meet Dolly, if you haven't done that already. If you want to find out more about DeNora and her organization's work, [DoSomething.org](#) and you'll find them on all the socials, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, at [DoSomething](#).

MBS ([38:20](#)):

Please do support young people being activists, that is good for the world. Thank you for listening. We love all the support you can give us. Listening is support, don't get me wrong. But if you were then to forward an interview onto a friend, boy, I'd love that. If you were to give it a review or some ratings on your podcast app, that would be gratefully received. If you were to join some of us in



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