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MBS (00:00):

Hello, dear listeners. So this is still 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book. But now it's going to twist because it's me reading two pages from my new book, and me inviting brilliant people just to reflect on what they're hearing. So this is all part of the lead up to how to begin being published on January the 11th. I'm hoping you've already picked up your pre-order copy, or your post order copy, post-launch copy, whatever it is. Mark Bowden, we've known each other for, I'm thinking, at least 15 years.

Mark (00:38):

It's got [crosstalk 00:00:39] Yeah.



MBS ([00:39](#)):

I met you where you had a very young. Son and if I'm not wrong, it's Lex's 16th birthday today.

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

It's the 16th birthday today. Exactly. Exactly.

MBS ([00:50](#)):

So that is sweet 16. It's hard to believe, because I saw him as a incoherent youngster, toddler screaming.

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

Right.

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

Mark and I had both arrived in Toronto, we were both strangers in a strange land. We met at a networking thing. One of us asks the other one out for a coffee afterwards and we connected. And since then, we have traveled together, we have worked together. I have dined so many times with Mark and Tracey, and Lex and Stella at his wonderful house. He's a bon vivant brilliant cook and a wonderful host, plus he's written a number of different books. I think probably the one that I'm looking at on this screen right now is Truth and Lies, which is a wonderful title, which I actually helped him come up with.

Mark ([01:36](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([01:36](#)):

Thank you, because you've helped me come up with titles for my books as well, Mark. And also you've got a new YouTube thing. I think of you as the body



language mafia, but I don't think that's what you're calling yourselves. [crosstalk 00:01:50]

Mark ([01:51](#)):

The Behavior Panel.

MBS ([01:52](#)):

There we go.

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

And we've had quite a success on YouTube, but through no fault of our own, I think.

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

Well, Mark is an expert in influence and persuasion. His background is as an actor and as a director, and truly immersed in a deep knowledge of those arts, and has brought those into the world. TEDx Talk has been seen by what? 5 million people, some [crosstalk 00:02:21] Anyway, Mark's successes are impressive. His family is lovely. His friendship is really important to me. And when I was thinking of the five or six people I wanted to share this book with, Mark was right up on the top of that list. So welcome, Mark.

Mark ([02:38](#)):

It's a pleasure to be here. It's great. I mean, for you and me, this is like an evening in.

MBS ([02:43](#)):

It is, exactly. Exactly. It is a little too early to drink wine and make cocktails, but we can imagine that.



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

We'll make up for it.

MBS ([02:52](#)):

And part of why I love the chapter that I'm going to read to Mark, and Mark had a scan of the book and picked this one, is actually I'm sharing a model that Mark taught me. So it is perfect. And as I've given him credit in all the books where I talk about this, but to give him credit on the podcast as well, for introducing me to this idea of prizes and punishments. So without further ado, I'm just going to plunge in. I'm going to read these two pages and then you and I can have a chat about it.

Mark ([03:21](#)):

Fantastic.

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

For those of you who listened to my Great Work Podcast, which ran for many years, you may recognize Mark's voice because he did the intros and the outros, the voiceover for the podcast. So you can see the pressure I'm under, trying to read to Mark Bowden. It's something, but here we go. This is chapter five of nine. It's the middle section of the book. The first section of the book is, "How do you find a worthy goal? How do you define it? How do you draft it so you've got something that feels real, and valid, and vivid, and thrilling, and important, and dangerous, and daunting?" The second section is about, "How do you fully commit to it?" And this is what this chapter comes from. And chapter five is entitled, Way Up the Status Quo. And the subheading that kicks us off is, We Love the Status Quo.



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

"One of my favorite Gary Larson cartoons shows a moose slumped in a ratty armchair, watching the television, can of beer in hand, porch on display. The very acme of stuck in a rutness. His moose wife, hair in curlers, stands with her hand over the phone's handset. 'It's the call of the wild,' she's saying. Now what if, like our moose friend, you chose not to answer the call? Imagine not taking on this worthy goal. Imagine that the mosquitoes..." which is a reference to a previous chapter. "Imagine that the mosquitoes keep biting. Imagine if you let this opportunity slide past. It can feel like a sign of weakness, or a betrayal somehow, to bring that possibility to the surface, but answering it is absolutely essential for progress.

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

There are very tangible reasons, prizes, for not taking on the worthy goal. We are far more committed to the status quo than we realize. Until you fully understand this commitment, promises that run deep and are often unspoken and unrecognized, it's hard to shift that allegiance. Equally, there are very tangible consequences, punishments, for stepping away from the opportunity. And until you understand the cost to you and others for not taking on your worthy goal, you may never be pulled forward to commit. In weighing up the status quo, you'll balance out the prizes and punishments of not taking on your worthy goal. It's in this weighing up that your choice to follow through or not will become clear."

MBS ([06:07](#)):

Next up, heading is called Prizes, The Comfort. "Broadly speaking, the prize for not taking on the worthy goal is the maintenance of what you've gathered that in your life so far. What that looks like is different for each of us, but the underlying themes are the same. You'll maintain comfort, status authority, privilege, familiarity, and control. You'll protect and keep hitting vulnerabilities



and insecurities. Prizes for not taking on your worthy goal might include not disrupting the way others see you, or disappointing the expectations they have of you, not having to challenge your own limiting stories about yourself, not stepping out to the edge of your own experience, competence and confidence, and finding ways to let yourself off the hook, or place more, or keep being a victim, or stay disengaged, or be cynical. I've taken to calling these prizes #WinsNotWins, because while they generally do offer something in the immediate moment, they're mostly [inaudible 00:07:16] victories, protecting our egos and others, playing by others' rules, staying hidden. They're certainly not about unlocking greatness by taking on the hard things."

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

And that's it. That's a couple of pages from the book, setting it up. After that, there's a little conversation about the punishments of saying no to your worthy goal. But what did you hear in that, Mark? What struck a chord?

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

Yeah. I mean, there's lots there. Some of those lists you make of some of the complexity within this, I think you've kind of summed up quite nicely. The horror of the complexity that happened within punishment and prizes.

MBS ([08:01](#)):

Yeah.

Mark ([08:02](#)):

But because potentially, there are a lot of prizes and there's a lot of punishments, and so there's a lot of calculation to be done around that, like a lot of sums to be done.



MBS ([08:16](#)):

Yeah. Well, I mean, you gave me the language for prizes and punishments. Was that your invention? Did you come up with that? Or did you stumble across it somewhere? How did you come across that as a way of thinking about the world?

Mark ([08:28](#)):

Yeah. If I remember right, I came up with... I didn't come up with it. I first heard it from some relationship therapists.

MBS ([08:39](#)):

Ah.

Mark ([08:40](#)):

Yeah. Who were basically saying, "Look, in any relationship you have," and I guess here, you're talking about the relationship that you might have with a goal [crosstalk 00:08:50]

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

Own ambition. Yeah.

Mark ([08:51](#)):

Right. An ambition. Yeah. Your relationship to ambition. And I think what they were saying is, you can't just think it's all upside. That's ridiculous. Life doesn't work like that.

MBS ([09:03](#)):

Yeah.



Mark ([09:03](#)):

And so you've got to understand, if you're getting into any relationship of any worth, you have to expect... Yes. It's great to expect, "Look, life should be like this. There should be some super upside to this," because otherwise, why would you bother? [crosstalk 00:09:19] We get that.

MBS ([09:20](#)):

Yeah.

Mark ([09:20](#)):

But I think their experience was is, that what most people missed out on was understanding the punishment of it, and living in a fantasy around how good the world should be. I really like the simplicity of that binary-

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

Me too.

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

... element in a very complex world.

MBS ([09:46](#)):

What I'm already learning from you, Mark, is, I've always talked about this as, "Every choice you make is prizes and punishments," but what your language has given me is this idea of, "A choice is a choice to step into a relationship or not." And actually, it's the relationship that has prizes and punishment. So it's not just the moment itself of making the choice, but it's the ongoing dating game that you're about to enter into, and going... I once gave Marcella an anniversary card that said something like, "Look, thanks for 15 amazing years, three so-so years, and two pretty crappy years," which is a kind of nice summary of what 20 years



of living with somebody is, which is... It's definitely mostly upside, but it's not all upside. Some years were much harder than other years.

Mark ([10:35](#)):

Yeah. And I think when you're talking about this goal, this worthy goal, my guess is it would be so easy to read the book and have idealized that thing as a prize on the horizon, rather than a relationship with that over, potentially, successive years if it's a decent goal. I assume a decent goal takes a long time. I mean [crosstalk 00:11:01]

MBS ([11:01](#)):

It takes months, not weeks, and it can take years, not two months. It's more likely to take closer to a year than closer to a month, I would say. It depends on the goal and the nature of it. How do you use the prizes and punish model in your life? I mean, I'm wondering how you weigh up stuff. Is it still something that you use? Or do you think about it in a different way?

Mark ([11:24](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So I think when I am idealizing a situation-

MBS ([11:34](#)):

That's good.

Mark ([11:36](#)):

... I've got to work out, "Okay. What is the cost to this?"

MBS ([11:40](#)):

Yeah.



Mark ([11:41](#)):

If I'm idealizing it and it's feeling really, really good, I've got to check out what I think the costs might be to continue with this relationship with a thing.

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

That's really [crosstalk 00:11:54] because what you're bringing up for me is just thinking about, effectively, this is a counteraction to a cognitive bias we have, which is this kind of honeymoon stage of, "If you're wired a certain way, you're just seeing the upside of it."

Mark ([12:07](#)):

Right.

MBS ([12:07](#)):

I spoke to a guy yesterday, just thinking about a move to set up an office and in new country. And he was super excited, and his company's super excited. I'm like, "You should do some scenario planning about what happens if it takes twice as long and costs twice as much as everybody's thinking, because that will be the reality of it." How will you manage it then? And it's looking at the dark side to get a more holistic understanding of what's going on, a more nuanced way of thinking through it.

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

Well, I know in relationships, there are different stages, and people have their different categorizations. But one of the categories I use is the infatuation stage, where you idealize, and you mirror, and you get infatuated, and it's super perfect.

MBS ([12:53](#)):

Yeah.



Mark ([12:53](#)):

And then the stage after that is the horror that you're in a relationship with a complete alien and you're not mirroring anymore. You do things which are totally different from each other.

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

Right.

Mark ([13:06](#)):

And so now you've got to get into that prizes and punishment situation of going, "Hang on. Why was I in in the first place? And does that outweigh the punishment at the moment? Because I was idealizing at the start that there was zero punishment ever for this prize." So it is a little bit kind of that, just weighing up those positives and negatives all the time.

MBS ([13:33](#)):

That's wonderful. Mark, I love talking to you about the book. Thank you. Your friendship matters a great deal to me, and I appreciate this conversation as well. For all of those who want to find out more about your work, where can they find you in the world?

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

Yeah. Just Google me, Mark Bowden or TruthPlane. You'll find me all over the internet.

MBS ([13:50](#)):

Perfect. And that's TruthPlane, P-L-A-N-E.

Mark ([13:53](#)):

Yes. That's right.



MBS ([13:54](#)):

Perfect. Mark Bowden, thank you so much.

Mark ([13:57](#)):

Thanks, Michael. Great speaking with you.

MBS ([13:58](#)):

Hey, it's Michael here. Thank you for listening to one of the, How to Begin episodes, part of the 2 Pages with MBS podcast series. So you're either listening to it before or after January the 11th, which is the launch of How to Begin book. How to Begin: Start Doing Something That Matters. If it's before January 11th, if you're happy and willing to make a pre-order of the book, I would certainly be grateful. The pre-ordering kind of really matters to authors. It's our chance to get some notice of the book, to get a bit of buzz going around it. It's one of those great gifts that a reader can do, is to pre-order a book for an author.

MBS ([14:42](#)):

I wrote the book because a line came to me, which is, "We unlock our greatness by working on the hard things." When I think of my own personal growth, and the difference I've made in the world, and the impact I've had, it's when I've taken on something that feels thrilling, and important, and daunting. And I wanted to share and write about a process to help others do that. So if you're looking to be more ambitious for yourself and for the world, to connect to that ambition, and if you're really wanting to rethink goals as a liberating force, and if you just want to be the best version of yourself and do work that makes a difference, whether that's work at work, or work just in life, outside your career, then I think this book might be for you. You can find out more about the book at howtobegin.com. That will give you bonuses. That'll give you pre-launch extras, if you're listening before January the 11th. And it'll just give you additional



resources if you're coming to it after January 11th. Thanks for your support.
You're awesome, and you're doing great.