Reading a Selection from
Beyond Happiness
By Ezra Bayda

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MBS (00:00):

When you start working, it can be pretty exciting to be sent away on a business trip. You pack your suitcase and you head for a new exotic destination. I mean, sure, there's work to be done, but a new city, a cool hotel, some sort of limited expense account. This is living, baby.

MBS (00:18):

Maybe one of my first trips was to the hinterlands of Scotland. The hotel was, it was rough. I mean, imagine rural and then imagine much more rural than you're actually imagining. The kitchen was closed. It'd been closed up for the winter and there was nowhere nearby to eat. In the wardrobe of my room was somebody's lunchbox, with sandwiches, crawling with mold. And in the bathroom, and I kid you not, there were over 200 dead flies on the floor. I mean, I'm not sure, maybe it was some sort of fly cult come to a sticky ending.

MBS ([00:54](#)):

Anyway, I was there to talk to people about soup. The Scots love their soup. And a big soup company, it starts with H and ends in -inds, but I'm giving you no other clues. Well, they wanted the company I was working with, an innovation company, to come up with their next soup sub-sub-sub-brand. And the way good stuff happens is you find a way to sit down and talk to people.

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

So welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast, where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Susan Weinschenk is somebody who I could have done the help with when I was in that business, because she is an expert in human behavior and what makes us tick. She's got a PhD in psychology and has a number of books under her belt, including 100 Things Every Designer Needs to Know About People. And she's the Chief Behavioral Scientist and CEO at The Team W, a company that studies human behavior. She calls herself a science nerd. And that definitely started way back when.

Susan ([02:06](#)):

I've been fascinated with human behavior since my earliest memories. I mean, I can remember being fascinated with human behavior and running my own little life experiments at the age of seven. So this really goes back a long time. And I think it's because when I was growing up, we moved a lot. We moved at least once a year and sometimes more. And I think because of that, I was just confronted with relationships. You're young and you want friends, right? And so just watching people and how do you get friends and what happens when you have to leave your friends? And why is there an in group? And how do I think about myself and how does that influence how people are reacting to me? I think I was kind of forced to look at these things when I was growing up. And it just became my way of operating in the world.

MBS (03:04):

As a young girl, navigating an ever-changing world, Susan was hit with something of, let's call it a moral dilemma. Maybe you've experienced something similar.

Susan (03:13):

One of my problems is that I want to control everything, which as we know is not possible, but I want to because of the unpredictability. But I do remember, there's one thing that comes to mind when you said that. When I was about 13 years old and we had moved, of course, to a new community, and now I was facing, going to a new school. And all of a sudden, you'd think I would've thought about this before, it dawned on me, hey, wait a minute. Nobody knows me. They don't know my story. I could make up a story. I could present a self-story. They'd have no idea whether it was true. That was actually a really dangerous thought. And I think when you're in your teen years, you're struggling with identity anyway.

MBS (04:03):

I've had this happen a few times for sure, a new country or a new job. So if I could be anyone, who would I be? What would I keep? What would I change? What would I give up and walk away from?

Susan (04:16):

So I actually made up a story and everyone believed it. It was like, well, of course they believe it. How would they know otherwise? And of course, this was pre-internet, so they couldn't have even looked me up or anything. But then that led me to a whole interesting, I mean, in some ways, some crises about who am I really, and what is the way I present myself to the world? But I think that also led me to a deeper thought about us and about the relationship of stories to how we perceive the world, how we interpret the world, how we

navigate through the world. And that's also something I've been very interested in. And there's some great research about self-stories and how that really drives your behavior.

MBS (05:08):

Of course, this is one of the questions at the very heart of being human. And we've all been there at some point, hurling the question into the existential void, who am I really? I asked Susan how we might answer that question.

Susan (05:25):

I think it's really hard to determine that. And I think, just thinking of my own personal experience, if you want to be able to go through your life with a feeling of comfort and security or confidence that you have to be willing to be fluid in that self-story. And to understand that you may never really have a clear vision of the real you, the authentic self. It's going to change, but that's okay. So one of the things I like to do periodically is write out the current self-story. Like, wait a minute, wait a minute. What is the self-story I'm operating in right now? Because it changes so often. And sometimes you actually have a self-story that isn't serving you, you have a self-story that's making your life more difficult, but you don't realize it. So periodically, I mean, I will literal write out my current self-story and then think about how I might want that story to be a little bit different. And then I'll write out a revised self-story.

MBS (06:48):

I haven't heard this phrase before, but I love it, the self-story. Can you give an example of what a self-story might sound like, just some aspect of it? I mean, do you write it in the first person or the third person? I'm just curious how you articulate a self-story.

Susan (07:04):

Yeah. I tend to write them in the first person, but not always. I don't know that that's critical. I think you could write it in the first person or the third person. I think either one would be okay. There's a wonderful book called Redirect by Dr. Timothy Wilson. And if you're interested in the research on self-stories, it's a great book. I mean, it's research, but it's very easy to read. And he was the one... I had thought about self-stories before, but I don't think I sat down and wrote one out and then rewrote it until I read that book because that was a technique that he has researched in his work.

MBS ([07:49](#)):
Right. Right.

Susan ([07:50](#)):
Here's an example of a self-story recently. Recently, I've gone through breast cancer treatment and that just, wow, did that throw me for a loop. I had been pretty much my whole life, a very healthy person. Then it's like, uh-oh, not a healthy person. And what does this mean? Right back to that, what you were saying before, who are you really? Right? And I realized going through the treatments, which are very difficult, that I really needed to stop and think about self-story. And what was the story now? What was my self-story? When you're going through something like that in your life or even just everyday life, there's so many different ways you can perceive yourself. So like, who am I? Did I lose myself? Am I now a different person because now I'm someone with breast cancer or now I'm a breast cancer survivor? Is that how I define who I am now?

MBS ([09:00](#)):
Right.

Susan ([09:01](#)):
I remember my son, who was along with many other wonderful people helping me through this, he said to me, at one point, "You've got to own this story. This

is part of your story now." And instead of denying it, I don't want this to be my story. I don't want to be going through this.

MBS (09:28):
Right.

Susan (09:28):
Right? Which is what I was doing. He said, "You've got to own it." So then I wrote a different story. I had sat down and said, and in this case, I think I said, and I could look it up, I have the journal, but something like I'm a strong, resilient person who now is going through breast cancer. And then I just wrote about what that meant to me and what the future would be now because it was now going to be different.

MBS (10:02):
And I love the idea, Susan, that in writing stories, you can also write different versions of stories because, as a writer, the first draft of anything I write is not that great. So it's not like necessarily the first story I write of myself is the truth. It's like maybe this is a step towards a story that I'm looking for. And I haven't quite yet found the words around it.

Susan (10:27):
Yes.

MBS (10:29):
Because with breast cancer, I can imagine, I mean, you said it yourself, I have breast cancer is one version of a story. I am a survivor of breast cancer is another version of a story. I'm a healthy person who's had breast cancer is a third version of the story. I'm an unhealthy person because I had breast cancer is another version of the story. And you're like, which one of those actually serves me the best?

Susan (10:57):

Yes. Yes. And even that my might change over time. Right?

MBS (10:59):

Indeed. Susan, the book that I know you for and probably your best known for is 100 Things Every Designer Needs to Know About People. What's the connection to design? Why do you seek to serve designers in particular?

Susan (11:14):

Yeah. I've had this lifelong obsession with people and human behavior. And then when I was in graduate school, I had an aha moment about technology and humans and that intersection. I love technology. It's just fun. To me, technology, not always using it, that isn't always fun. Right? Trying to get it to work right can be frustrating. But I love this intersection about, as humans, we create technology stuff and it's amazing that we can create so much of it that is so unusable for humans when it is the humans that are creating it. It's not like an AI machine is creating all this technology. So oh, well, of course, it doesn't work for humans. No, up to this point, and this may change, it's been mainly humans creating it.

MBS (12:21):

Right.

Susan (12:21):

And it's like, why can't we create it to fit humans? But anyway, so that's my kind of interest and career in it is how do we create technology so that it better fits us as humans because we're not machines?

MBS (12:43):

Right.

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

We're not. The emotional part, the unconscious part, the way we make decisions, it is not machinelike, at least not up to now in our history.

MBS ([12:55](#)):

That's right.

Susan ([12:56](#)):

It's fascinating to me then, how do you need to change the design of things in order to make sure that it works well for humans?

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

I love that. It feels like it might be an interesting segue actually to the book you've chosen to read for us in a peculiar way. What book have you chosen?

Susan ([13:15](#)):

I chose a book... I'm sure you've had many people say this to you. This was so hard-

MBS ([13:21](#)):

Yeah. I love that.

Susan ([13:21](#)):

... to chose one book. How could you do this to me?

MBS ([13:26](#)):

And then not just one book, but then two pages within the book.

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

Two pages from one book. Yeah.

MBS (13:32):

So it's like insult to injury. Yeah.

Susan (13:34):

Well, because, like many people probably that you talk to, I'm a really avid reader. I read a lot. So there are a lot of books that have been important to me. But I picked a book called Beyond Happiness and the author is Ezra Bayda, and that's B-A-Y-D-A, Ezra Bayda. And that was the book I picked. I picked it because you know how you read these books that just make you think about things in a totally different way–

MBS (14:03):

Right.

Susan (14:03):

... like they just shift you. And that's what this book was for me.

MBS (14:08):

When did it come into your life?

Susan (14:12):

I could probably figure out the exact year, but I'm going to say it was probably around 2011, 2012, somewhere around there.

MBS (14:24):

Yeah. I think it got published 2010. So, that feels like it's still kind of out in the market.

Susan (14:29):

Yeah.

MBS (14:31):

How did you choose those pages to read? I mean, it's funny. This is a design problem because design is all of about having the courage to make a choice on something and eliminate the other choices.

Susan (14:41):

Yes.

MBS (14:42):

Of the wisdom that's in this book, how did you choose two pages?

Susan (14:46):

I was looking for two pages that would really encapsulate two things. One that would encapsulate what I feel Ezra Bayda is trying to say in the book overall, so that if you heard these two pages, you'd kind of have this overview of what the book was about.

MBS (15:09):

Nice.

Susan (15:10):

But I also wanted to pick two pages that were... There's so much great stuff in this book, but these two pages that, for me, it was like, there. That's it. That's it for me.

MBS (15:25):

Nice.

Susan (15:27):

It's called Beyond Happiness. That's, what's causing my unhappiness right there.

MBS (15:33):

Well, it's an intriguing title, but let me introduce it to you. So Susan Weinschenk, author of 100 Things Every Designer Needs to Know About People, reading Ezra Bayda's book from 2010, Beyond Happiness. Susan, over to you.

Susan (15:48):

All right. And this is the beginning of a chapter that's called Entitlement.

Susan (16:00):

Learning to live from genuine happiness requires first seeing what blocks it. One of the major blocks is our deeply rooted sense of entitlement. In fact, this is a big part of the "problem" of happiness: we firmly believe that we should be happy. We think it's our right, and consequently, we feel entitled to it, even if we're not clear what happiness is, except to feel good. This expectation can have many faces. For example, we often feel entitled to good health, expecting that we can and should be able to stay youthful and physically fit. When life comes along to greet us with illness or injury we can easily sink into a stupor of frustration and even despair. Sometimes just getting a cold will trigger our anxieties over losing control and feeling powerless. This sense of entitlement, which basically says that life should go the way we want and expect it to go, even tells us we shouldn't have to experience discomfort. Then, when we do experience discomfort, we feel that something is wrong; we might get angry and feel it's unfair, or we may feel sorry for ourselves.

Susan (17:15):

Having a sense of entitlement also guarantees that we will eventually feel like a victim. When we don't get what we firmly believe is rightfully ours, namely happiness, we'll experience the emotional discord of discouragement. And in feeling the negative feelings of being slighted or wronged, we actually increase our unhappiness. Still, it isn't easy to give up the entitled belief that we should

be happy; the belief that we deserve all of the good stuff is deeply ingrained in our thinking. Unfortunately we can't be happy just because we want to be. Nor can we just act happy, say, by smiling, and expect to be happy, except in the most superficial way. If we want to be happy we have to acknowledge that, yes, we want to be happy but that, no, most of the time, we're not; and in fact, all of the things that are supposed to make us happy, such as accomplishments, respect, love, sex, money, and praise, only give us happiness in ephemeral doses, not in the deep or lasting way that we truly desire.

Susan ([18:25](#)):

Along with our sense of entitlement, we have many specific ideas and expectations about what will make us feel happy. "If I only I had the right partner I'd be happy." "If only I had a better job, or more money, I'd no longer be anxious." "If only I had a better body I'd be content." The one thing all of our "if onlies" have in common is an underlying unwillingness to actually be with the present-moment circumstances of our life. Instead, we choose to live in endorphin-producing fantasies about the future. From one point of view this is understandable, in that it's certainly more comfortable to hold onto our expectations of a different and better reality than it is to be with what is.

Susan ([19:13](#)):

Yet, where does this leave us? It leaves us living a life that is neither real nor satisfying. But remember, the path to genuine happiness entails first recognizing what blocks it. We have to clearly acknowledge our many "if onlies," our subtle demands that life be different from what it is. Recognizing our "if only" attitude towards life is the first step in diminishing our sense of entitlement. Then we can begin to face the reality that is right in front of us.

MBS (19:54):

Thank you. That's beautiful. We've had a few people read from Pema Chodron's work on the show and I know Pema Chodron endorsed this book as a tome of wisdom. How has your idea of happiness shifted?

Susan (20:12):

I think, for me, I really hadn't thought about the fact that I have all these expectations and feelings of entitlement. When I read the book and even... I actually remember reading those two pages. I remember exactly where I was. I was on vacation on Washington Island in Wisconsin, which is a beautiful place. I was sitting outside on a sunny day, looking at the water and then reading the book. And all of a sudden I was like, oh my gosh.

Susan (20:52):

I thought about being at an airport and the plane is late, and how upset I would get and how I would feel so not in control because somehow I believed I was entitled, that the whole world was supposed to make sure I was comfortable. Right? Why was the airline doing this to me? Why was the weather doing this to me, right? And that I was miserable. I was making the whole trip miserable because I didn't want to accept what was going on around me. I just thought of all the different parts of my life in which I continuously expect the world to give me comfort and control. And then I'm miserable and it doesn't. And so I was making myself miserable. That was the kind of aha moment from that passage for me.

MBS (22:00):

Yeah. It's a really powerful insight. And I'm curious to know how that might have connected or influenced at all the work you do in terms of helping people and designers in particular see and understand people.

Susan ([22:17](#)):

I think that it's part of this whole idea, it's all about accepting what's real and what's present. And that's something that I practice in my life. And I say practice because I don't know that I'll ever master that. Right? It takes a lot of practice. But I think when we're designing stuff, that's part of it too. The product or service we're designing, we want it to work. We want people to do this, rather than that. We want them to use it. We want them to use it in a certain way. And sometimes we're unwilling to accept what's the reality, hey, this is your real target audience, not your imagine target audience.

MBS ([23:13](#)):

Right.

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

This is the real context in which they are using this product, not what you imagine it to be. So I think that idea of doing the research to find out what's real and then accepting that, and then figuring out what you can do to design for it. And maybe the product or service you have in mind is just not feasible given the reality of the situation. So maybe it'd be better to own that and figure out what you could do that might have an impact rather than what you'd like to do, but isn't real.

MBS ([23:53](#)):

Just that comment, it reminds me of a story. I'm sure I'll get some of the details wrong, but as I remember it, it's the person who invented effectively local aesthetic and was super excited about it, but then discovered dentists were using it to removing teeth easier. And he spent his lifetime going around trying to stop dentists from using his local anesthetic, because he thought it should just be used in, I don't know, by doctors in surgery. And it was just this denial of

reality around where the opportunity really was and what a missed opportunity that was for that person.

Susan (24:32):
Right. Right.

MBS (24:33):
Susan, is there a way, I mean maybe for yourself, but maybe in terms of working with the people, with whom you work to help them better understand the reality, to stop arguing with reality?

Susan (24:49):
Well, that's a really tricky question, Michael. I think you have to be willing to be an observer. It's so interesting. There's this balance between being disinterested, but of course you want to be passionate about what you're doing and what you're learning, but you have to be able to step away and take on the role of scientist, experimenter. And I guess, for me, this is a disadvantage for me, but I do that easily. And I enjoy that. Like to me, there's nothing more fun than just stepping back and saying, let's see what happens. Oh, look at that. Look what the people are doing. And I just find it interesting and fascinating. And I'm curious because I'm not attached to whatever it is I'm testing or observing. I'm not attached to a particular design, a particular product. And that's what you have to do, to do this well. And sometimes that's really hard for people.

Susan (25:58):
But I find if they try out interacting with their particular product or service in that way, they seem to get it. It's like this big aha moment. I had recently a client, I was dealing with one of the kind of high-level executive stakeholders, the business owner of a particular product, tech product at this company. He didn't see the need to make any changes in the product. It's fine. It's great. Why do we need to change anything? Why do we need to worry about the user

experience? So what I did was I said, "Okay, here you go. Here's the app. And now you pretend you're the homeowner trying to use this app to do what you need to do."

MBS (<u>27:01</u>):

30 seconds later, he's like, come on! It's not working!

Susan (<u>27:05</u>):

I turned on the camera and the recorder. And I said, "Okay, so here's your scenario." And I gave him the scenario and I said, "Let's see what happens." And yeah, you're right. It's like first step, "Oh, wait a minute. I don't know how..." And it's like, right. And you know, this was his product, but he had never looked at it at that lens before. He had such an aha moment. It really did change him in a big way and changed his whole idea of what to do with the product and the role of research and everything. And all it took was really literally two minutes. I just had to ask him the right question.

MBS (<u>27:56</u>):

One of the things that's become increasingly clear over the last, I don't know, particularly last 10 years or so maybe since the book Thinking, Fast and Slow has come out is just how many unconscious tweets and biases and prejudices that we have that allow us to interpret reality in a way that makes us look and sound good to ourselves. I can imagine you absolutely sitting down with the people with whom you work going, just watch this with me. Let's just see what happens as this person engages with this thing of yours in a usual context. And we'll see what you think will happen. And we'll see what actually happens. Human beings are brilliant at just interpreting stuff to make it sound good. Is there a particular bias that you wish... It's like I'm asking you to make a hierarchy out of these biases, which is like, what's the thing that drives you nuts around this? And what's the thing you're like, if you could just stop doing this, like you wouldn't see reality, but you'd get a little bit closer to seeing reality?

Susan (29:00):

Yeah. Yeah. Because I always have this view of, well, we're humans. I expect those cognitive biases. I don't think cognitive biases are a bad thing. We have them because they serve us. They serve us in many, many ways. And another thing that's interesting about them is sometimes people say, oh, well, you've studied these, you know all about them. Therefore, you don't fall prey to them. And it's like, no, I'm human too. The only difference is after I've engaged with a cognitive bias, I might be more likely to recognize that I did, not even always then. I don't think negatively about it. To me, it's not, oh I wish people didn't do this. I know they're going to do it. A lot of the techniques we have in design, or just in life, a lot of the processes that, if we're smart, we put into place, the reason for the process is to protect us against the cognitive biases, is to give us moments along the way where we stop and get them reflected back to us. We're like, oh, oh, there I go again. I just fell into that one.

Susan (30:21):

And so, I think it's just more a matter of, can you get yourself or the team or the group or the organization to have the discipline to follow a process? I don't even care which one. Pick one. Lean, Design Thinking, UX, User-Centered Design. I don't care. Pick one, follow the process because it will alert you when you have fallen into one cognitive bias or another, and it'll help you be a better designer as a result.

MBS (31:00):

Are there any rules of thumb, Susan, that you use on your day-to-day life that help you make better decisions? Like just on a daily tactical reason, I'm asking for me, of course, how do I stop making bad decisions?

Susan (31:17):

Yeah. I'm sure I make my share of really bad decisions. I mean, I practice mindfulness meditation. I try to do it every day. And I think that that helps me with decision-making because it means I have some time every day where I just am present with what is. And it just slows you down. You stop your brain from spinning a lot. So, that's one thing I do. And then I think the other thing I would say is I've done some reading and research on creativity and problem solving. And from that I know some about the brain science of letting our unconscious do its thing. And I do firmly believe... Sometimes we say, oh, unconscious decision-making. Like you mentioned the book Thinking, Fast and Slow, which I love that book. And sometimes we have a tendency then to assume that unconscious processing, unconscious decision-making leads us astray, but as much or more, it leads us to truth.

MBS (32:40):

Yeah. Mostly it's amazing.

Susan (32:42):

So you set an intention of the decision you want to make, be very specific about the decision and then you let it go. And I won't get into it right now, all the brain science of what's going on when you do this, but you let it go. And then your unconscious works on it. And at some point minutes, days, hours, a week, you will start to get insights, intuition, ideas around that decision will come to you. That is your unconscious processing, helping you make good decisions. So when you get those ideas, this is really important, this is a step people leave out, you must record them or write them down. People say, oh, if it's a really good idea, it'll come back. No, it won't. I have lost some really great ideas because I didn't write it down.

Susan ([33:43](#)):

So I have with me all the time, a way to record. We obviously can record on our phone. I have a waterproof pencil and pad of paper in my shower–

MBS ([33:56](#)):

I love that. Showers are fantastic.

Susan ([33:57](#)):

... because I get a lot of ideas in the shower. I've written many of my books pretty much in the shower. So I always have it there. I've had some house guests sometimes come downstairs for breakfast and go, "Why do you have a pad of paper and a pencil in your shower?" Or I find they've written me little notes because they found it there. But always having a way to capture ideas, I think is critical.

MBS ([34:27](#)):

There's a writer and thinker called Josh Waitzkin and I've heard him talk about this as well. And he literally, at night, will set himself a problem, a thing to work on. And then when he wakes up, his very first act is to kind of free journal for a while.

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

Absolutely.

MBS ([34:48](#)):

Because you're just tapping into the power of that unconscious to take the rational thing, take it in, mix it into all the stuff that you don't even know is in your brain.

Susan ([34:59](#)):

Right.

MBS ([34:59](#)):

And pop up with something interesting at the other end of it. Susan, this has been such a great conversation. Thank you. As a final question, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between you and I?

Susan ([35:15](#)):

Probably, Michael. I guess I would say something I've been thinking about a lot lately has to do with self-judgment. I think it's one of the ways we go astray is we're just too darn hard on ourselves. I think to recognize we're human. We're not perfect. Life isn't always what we think it should be. And if we can just ease up on that a little bit, I think we'll make better decisions. I think it makes us happier. I think it makes us more fun to be around. So, that would be the only thing I'd throw in there.

MBS ([36:09](#)):

That conversation about Entitlement sparked by the Pema Chodron, two pages, that was really juicy. I mean, you've probably seen, I certainly have entitlement at the more superficial and nonetheless deeply annoying job. As one very current example, that's the reason why people in the service industry are not going back to their jobs. It's not just the low pay, it's dealing with people who feel they deserve anything they want because they're a customer and they'll behave badly to get it. But there's that deeper question that Susan brought to us, am I entitled to happiness? Am I entitled to avoid discomfort? How at this deeper level am I resisting reality, arguing with it because of the sense of entitlement? How am I missing the sharp edged beauty of reality, because I want it to be something else? And then, maybe this is at the deepest level, how am I missing myself for the very same reasons?

MBS ([37:14](#)):

If you've enjoyed this conversation with me and Susan, I got another interview I'd suggest you listen to, Christa Couture, Toronto activist. The interview is called I am disabled but not broken. Very powerful, really lovely conversation. I think it would pair up really nicely with this chat with Susan.If you want more about Susan and the work that she does, her company is called The Team W and the website is exactly that, theteamw.com. And you can also connect with Susan on LinkedIn. Her name's pronounced Weinschenk, but it's spelled W-E-I-N-S-C-H-E-N-K.

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

Thank you so much for listening. It's always a pleasure to have you on board as we dig into these conversations about brilliant people, reading the best two pages. There's a free membership site called Duke Humfrey. It's named after a favorite library of mine in Oxford. It's where you can find transcripts, you can find other interviews, some I haven't released. So if you'd like to sign up for that, you can just find it at mbs.works and click the podcast tab. If you're willing to pass the word on about the podcast, I love that. Maybe there's somebody in your mind who you go, they should listen to this conversation about entitlement and design that we've just had with Susan. And regardless, I think you're awesome. And you're doing great. So thank you.