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

I'm Michael Bungay Stanier. This is 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them and a book that has shaped them. And of course this is a variation on the usual interviews I have, because I'm the brilliant person and I'm reading it from my own book. Because I want you to know about my new book, How To Begin. So the twist is this, I've been inviting four or five really important people in my life to come on and talk to me about the book. They've read the book, they've chosen a chapter for us to talk about. And I'm very excited to talk to Ainsley Britain.

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

So Ainsley is my co-conspirator at mbs.works. She is the other half of the company. And we've got other people who support us, but Ainsley and I are the



ones who work full-time in full hearted, and full souled, and full brained on this project mbs.work. So she has influenced the book. She runs parts of the business particularly the conspiracy, which is where people go to work on their worthy goals. And she's just a lovely person and a friend and a colleague. So Ainslee welcome.

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

Thanks, Michael. That was such a nice intro.

MBS ([01:16](#)):

Well how would you introduce yourself? What's your story? How the hell did you end up working here with me?

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

I love the term co-conspirator. I feel like your lab assistant or your lab partner, a lot of the time running our various experiments. Hoping to move from experiments into more practice with the company. I've been working with you for two years almost to the nose. And had a really different background before that working in the nonprofit world, the anti violence world. But this has been such a refreshing adventure working together. And we get to build a lot of things, I get to learn a lot. And in some ways this book feels like it really captures a lot of what we've been learning together. And you've been teaching me over the last couple years. Whenever I read it, it just kind of reinforces so much of what we've done, and what we've talked about, and what I've learned from you. I love this book.

MBS ([02:30](#)):

Thank you. This will be awkward for you, but I'm going to ask it anyway. What's your superpower do you think?

Ainsley ([02:45](#)):



I think commitment and care. I would say that I'm a highly sensitive person. I'm really attuned to other people and what's going on for them and what might be working or not working. And I care deeply about helping folks figure that out. And I'm really committed to seeing things through, from beginning to end, or ending things. Those are some of my many superpowers.

MBS ([03:12](#)):

Well said. So you've chosen a brilliant chapter, which is the first chapter of the third part. There are three parts in the book, nine chapters in all, each part is three chapters. So in this chapter, we talk about crossing the threshold and the three ways to making progress. And one of the things that I was aware of when I wrote this book, which is I can't tell you how to get to the end. I'm just trying to get you across the start. I want to get you moving, taking some initial step. Because after that the journey starts to unfold. And that's what I really wanted to share in this first chapter. So I'm excited that you picked it. So I'm going to launch right into this. I'm not going to start at the very top of the chapter, which is a little bit of a story about me working in the world of product development. And trying to invent an alternative to [inaudible 00:04:07] these double chocolate layer cake, which was the dessert of the moment in the nineties in England.

Ainsley ([04:13](#)):

An impossible task.

MBS ([04:15](#)):

Actually it was an impossible task. But we're going to jump into just a couple of pages in. At a section with a subheading that starts curiosity, fuels courage.

MBS ([04:30](#)):

With small steps. You're doing two things, first fueled by curiosity, you are collecting feedback. It's the only way you can make your way forward in a



complex situation. Keep checking where you are, try some things out, collect feedback, and decide what's next. Second, you're mitigating risk so you don't end up jumping off a cliff, or running into one or more of the three terrors of the fire swamp, thus prematurely ending your quest. And as an aside, I hope the astute listener is picking up the shout out to *The Princess Bride*, flame spurts, lightning, sand, and rodents of unusual size. If you haven't yet watched *The Princess Bride*, stop this podcast immediately and go and watch *The Princess Bride*. That's the key takeaway from this book for you. But I digress, here we go. Jim Collins of *Good to Great* [inaudible 00:05:22], explains the process of figuring out strategy. Thus fire bullets, then fire cannon balls.

MBS ([05:28](#)):

Even if you're not a fan of military metaphors, this is helpful. Collins explains that bullets are cheap and low risk. Firing them is a manageable commitment. One that helps you figure out the real target. Once you've identified the target, then you can fully commit and fire the cannon ball. Collin says that most people don't fire enough bullets and fire their cannon balls way too soon. Or they spend their life firing bullets without ever having the courage to load up the cannon ball. Three ways to fire bullets and take small steps are a history, and experiment, and a practice. I'm just going to read the first little bit of piece around small steps in *Thinking About History*. And the subtitle is a past future version of you, which is a mind twist. So if you didn't understand it, don't worry. You're not alone. A past future version of you.

MBS ([06:24](#)):

You've already visited the past once. And I'm referencing to an earlier chapter in the book. When you weighed up the status quo, you noted down false starts made by similar or related worthy goals. But your false starts aren't the whole story, not by any means. You've also got stories about successes, peak moments where our best version of you rose to the occasion in just the way you



are hoping it will again. William Gibson said, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed."

MBS ([06:55](#)):

That's true on an individual level as well. In other words, and this sounds like a trippy back to the future Michael J Fox you 2.0 has already shown up sometime in your past. Search your story bank, chronicle your history, and find those peak moments stories. Moments where you were at your best. They're there. You have a You 2.0 waiting to be rediscovered, recognized and reintegrated. That's not the only benefit. Excavating your history isn't only about catching that glimpse of You 2.0, as powerful as that is. It's also a way of better quantifying the risks you articulated in the punishments process in way up that you journey, which is the previous chapter. It tempers our very human tendency to over or underestimate risk by holding it up against our lived experience. You calibrate your understanding of the real risk at play. When you did that similar thing before, did the bad thing happen in whole or in part?

MBS ([07:58](#)):

And of course I go on here, but that is our two pages. So I hope if you're listening, you're like, "This sounds so good, I definitely need to buy this book for myself and about 35 of my friends". That's that's the subtle subtext in this whole conversation. But is get to the actually interesting part of the conversation, which is Ainsley. What strikes a chord for you when you hear these two pages?

Ainsley ([08:24](#)):

I love these two pages and I love this chapter. Because they're all about accessible ways to gather data that you already have a bunch of information that you need to start taking something on. And that there's lots of simple ways to gather more data, to get more feedback, to get that little bit more extra information that might help you kind of commit to something and take a first step. So when I'm kind of taking things on, and this is stuff that we've talked



about, the non-violent communication stuff around feelings and judgements. I can get really bogged down around my feelings or judgements about a project, positive or negative. Or just overwhelmed by all the steps.

MBS ([09:14](#)):

So many steps.

Ainsley ([09:15](#)):

So many steps, so many possible bullets, so many possible cannon balls.

MBS ([09:21](#)):

We have A lot going on here.

Ainsley ([09:22](#)):

And this is just data is so grounding. And the idea that with history, you already have some of the information you need to make a decision about what to do next. You can just by sitting, and writing, and thinking about your own past experiences. You don't have to Google anything, you don't have to run any experiments. Right here right now you already have a bunch of what you need from your own history to kind of get some information about how you've done on similar projects in the past. And how risk or fears of yours have or haven't played out. And then once you've done that once you've taken that history, what you talk about next in this chapter is the experiments that you can run to kind of gather bits more of information. And you have so many ways that you make it so accessible and that you kind of you're like, these are some of the ways that experiments can go wrong.

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

You can make it too complicated, you can make it too big, you can be too attached to the outcome. So there's all these ways that you set the reader up for access. By giving them really simple accessible tools, by anticipating some of



the ways they may misuse those tools, undermine their own kind of experiment from the get go. This chapter is so useful for overwhelm and for are getting across that starting line. And all the things that you offer, they're accessible in the sense that they're simple and doable. And they all mitigate risk, because I think that's one of the things that we get so nervous about. Is like, what am I going to lose? What's at stake here. And you're like, these are all these ways that we can make very little at stake. We can minimize what's at stake and increase the value of the information you're going to get.

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

Just even better see what's at stake, because so often we make stuff up it becomes this amorphous huge looming thing. You're like, it might not be all of the at. So that's just made up BS and it may be a way of shaping up. So there is stuff at risk, but it's containable, and understandable, and you understand the equation that you're entering into.

Ainsley ([11:51](#)):

Totally. I love the positive feedback loop theme in this chapter too. The curiosity or the experiments or the small steps give you information, which fuels the [inaudible 00:12:15].

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

Ainsley let me ask you this, because I think you're speaking to a very deep theme here. How have you better come to learn to trust yourself in the last little while?

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

I think grounding myself in the facts. And what do I know to be true? What do I not know to be true? Doing that reflection with another person with you is really helpful. Because I can easily forget the strengths in my history, or the wins that I've had, or the things that we figured out, or the things that went



unexpectedly well. I feel like are just the way we're wired. Our brains are looking for danger, they're looking for risks, they're trying to keep us alive. And so you have to be really intentional about turning your awareness and perception and focus to the things that have worked. Because you need both, you need both to minimize the risk and minimize the danger, but also help yourself see the wins, and see the possibilities and see the successes. It's not enough to just reduce all the risk and eliminate all the danger, you also need to see the paths to growth and to success.

MBS ([13:38](#)):

I love that. I think there's something wise about just going a part of what this is about, is increasing your capacity to understand how much you can risk and still be okay.

Ainsley ([13:49](#)):

Totally. It is for lots of folks, I think this book will be, and this practice of working in this way is rewiring. It is rewiring in terms of changing our relationship to risk and failure and trying. In letting go of the outcome, in some ways, it sets you up for the best possible outcome. I love that line of you, I'm quoting you.

MBS ([14:22](#)):

That is amazing.

Ainsley ([14:29](#)):

It really does. When you just keep committing to the process of experimenting, and reflecting, and being honest with yourself. And calling in help, to be honest with yourself about what's working and what you know, and what you don't know, and what you should try next. When you commit to that process and loosen your grip a little bit on the outcome you're hoping for, you're more likely to get to where you're supposed to be. Even if that's not where you imagined you were headed. It is what's going to get you where you're supposed to be.



MBS ([15:06](#)):

Ainsley you're the head of the conspiracy@mbs.works. Can you give us a minute on the conspiracy? And then if people want to check out the conspiracy, where would they go to put their name down?

Ainsley ([15:17](#)):

Yeah, the conspiracy is it's an online community where folks who have learned the How To Begin process, taken the How To Begin course can come together to work alongside each other on their own individual projects. But work in a community of practice of people who are trying to make real progress on their worthy goals. So you get put in a small group of people to travel alongside each other. We work a rhythm, as like a chapter rhythm where we have these focused periods of time where we're doing those experiments and those practices. And then we have a reflection period that breaks up the chapters. And it's a community of people who are taking risks. And so we try to create a level of safety and trust and accountability and commitment like a container in which we can take those risks and support other people in taking those risks. As we try to make progress on these ambitious worthy goals.

MBS ([16:20](#)):

If you're interested, this is the easiest way to find out about the conspiracy is you go to mbs.works, which is the main website. Scroll right down to the bottom, and there's actually a thing that says if you're interested in registering and wanting to be notified when we next open the doors and the conspiracy, is a place to click to. Because the actual URL is just a bit long and messy. So I'm not going to tell you that, but that's for those of you who want the conspiracy. I hope if you're listen to this, you are thinking about buying the new book, How To Begin, start doing something that matters. It's a practical, fast, funny tool to help you claim ambition for yourself and for the world to find your worthy goal.



To work on things that are thrilling important and daunting. If you want more information about the book, howtobegin.com. Ainsley Britain, thank you.

Ainsley ([17:08](#)):

Thank you, Michael.

MBS ([17:14](#)):

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 the How To Begin book. How To Begin, Start Doing Something That Matters. If it's before January 11th, if you are 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. I wrote the book because a line came to me, which is we unlock our greatness by working on the hard things.

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

And when I think of my own personal growth and the difference I've made in the world and 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, 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 a 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 will 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.