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

Hello, welcome. This is Michael MBS and welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, that's me, where brilliant people talk about the best two pages from a favorite book. They read it and then we have a great conversation about it. And as you've cottoned on the last little while, we've been twisting it up a little bit, because my favorite book is my book, *How to Begin*, and I'm the person who's reading it. I've been kind of living with this book. Love hate, hate love, mostly love, for a year, a year and a half now. So, it's pretty exciting to finally stumble into the sunlight blinking and going it's here, it's arrived. And that's why today's guest is so perfect. Jesse Finkelstein is the co-founder of Page Two who is the company who publishes and partners with me for this book and *The Coaching Habit* and *The Advice Trap* as well. So, yay. And Jesse, welcome.





Jesse ([01:04](#)):

Thank you so much. Yay is right. I'm absolutely thrilled to be here and on this special day, especially.

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

Yeah. I mean, you are a perfect person to have this conversation with, not at least because of how the brilliant job you do with Page Two, the numerous brilliant books you put out into the world and the style and the class and the wholehearted approach you have to publishing books. It's not just a numbers game and pumping stuff out, it's finding great authors, bringing out their very best and putting out books that they and you can be proud of. So, I really appreciate being a partner with you.

Jesse ([01:39](#)):

Thank you. We love it.

MBS ([01:41](#)):

Who are you Jesse? I mean, I know a little bit about who you are, but for people going, I've never heard of Jesse Finkelstein or Page Two before, how do you want to present yourself to folks listening in?

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

I'm an absolute lover of books who has the most straight line career one could ever imagine, straight line/boring, thrilling to me. But I've only ever wanted to make books my whole life and everything I've done from the point of view of my career, but really my life has been in service of that. So, I have worked in virtually every aspect of publishing, I think. I really have a bird's eye view of the industry through a multifaceted career and have worked with so many different kinds of authors. So, when I met my unicorn business partner and co-founder Trina White, we realized together that we had not only a shared passion, but





also a shared vision for not only the kinds of books we wanted to work on, but even more crucially, the kind of author we wanted to work with. And like any good entrepreneur, we looked very closely at who was that person?

Jesse ([02:57](#)):

Who are you? And we built a vision for a company around that. And this is what brings me to you, Michael, and brings us to you, thank goodness, is the fact that we built a publishing company that is in service to authors of your mindset, people who are publishing game changing books to change the world and people who want to do it in a way that really puts their own needs and goals at the forefront and in a way that is incredibly beautifully integrated with their own ecosystem that they're building. So, that's really my straight line path to you.

MBS ([03:43](#)):

Hey, tell me why Trina is a unicorn co-founder? Why do you use that noun to describe her?

Jesse ([03:51](#)):

I think that partnership is if you can find a wonderful partner and you talk about this, you write about this in your book in beautiful ways, it's sort of everything, right? And yet it can also be the hardest thing, whether it's a spouse, whether it's any kind of a twin. I was at a book launch yesterday with a twin sister and they were talking about how important that partnership is, that relationship. And so, a business partner, I find if you can achieve a really beautiful, productive, and effective form of partnership, it's brilliant and to us, it's everything, but it's very hard to achieve. And I'd love to credit us with having cracked that code for business partnership, but the reason I call her a unicorn is that I also think there's an element of absolute good fortune that we met because I think she's just the best possible publishing person for me and I think she feels the same way.





MBS ([05:04](#)):

How old is Page Two now, 10 years?

Jesse ([05:06](#)):

Eight.

MBS ([05:08](#)):

Eight years.

Jesse ([05:08](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([05:10](#)):

I mean, starting a publishing company is a worthy goal, thrilling and important and daunting. What was it that tipped the two of you away from being part of the publishing world and working for other people to actually starting your own company because it's a pretty bold thing to be doing.

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

I think it was actually a failure that pointed us in this direction. Again, something that comes up in your book, it was the fact that we met at a really wonderful publishing house, a venerable 40 year old well established house that for many different reasons, went through a very difficult bankruptcy process. So, it wasn't any one person's failure. It wasn't ours, but collectively as a company, it was a tremendously challenging thing to have to go through. And another reason I think that Trina is a unicorn business partner, is that it was in really in the ashes of that process. When you're going through something really challenging, that's when you learn what you're really made of and you learn what other people are made of.





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

So, I think the two of us looking at the experience we had been through felt, okay, we are either going to stay in book publishing, which is our shared love and go really deep and do it in a different way or we were ready to abandon it all together. It had to be one or the other because of that transformative experience. I'd love to say it emboldened me. I think it did over time. In that moment, all I can say is I felt a tremendous amount of fear. And I think Trina was the bold one. I relied her for that purpose and together, we kind of found a way to do it.

MBS ([07:03](#)):

It's a perfect segue to the chapter I want to read, which is the final chapter of the book. The purpose of this chapter is who should and shouldn't travel with you and the headline is don't travel alone. And I think one of the reasons that I wanted to write about this is a worthy goal is hard enough at the best of times to do it by yourself, where you will inevitably have moments of doubt and fear and trepidation and kind of it's too much, I'm throwing in the towel. Having people around you who can support you and encourage you and guide you in that at moment is so helpful and actually essential. So, the conversation and the relationship you've had with Trina to build Page Two is a beautiful context for reading this chapter.

MBS ([07:53](#)):

So, why don't I plunge in, and I'll read two pages from this chapter and we'll get going on it. All right, here we go. Chapter nine, don't travel alone. And the headline is build the band, which is a kind of hat tip to The Blues Brothers. I love that movie and Jake and Aykroyd Blues have to build a band to save the day and they do and I just thought perfect way to start. All right, here we go. It's been said we're the sum of the five people we're closest to, our weight, our wealth, our ambition, it's the average of their weight, wealth and ambition and so on. As





with anything apocryphal, it's not really true or rather the kernel of truth that's here has been distorted by repetition and memes, social media, the various forces that want everything to be reductionist. Turns out you can't blame that friend of yours for you not being as rich or as skinny as you'd like tempting as that might be.

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

So, just talking to my friend Phil here, you're off the hook. But here's what is true. It's good to have good people around you, particularly when you're journeying into the future. I love that L. Frank Baum came up with the name of the land of Oz by glancing over to his filing cabinets. You remember filing cabinets, right? And seeing the second draw labeled O to Z or O to Z. We've all seen Dorothy strolling down the yellow brick road with her companions on the way to the Emerald City just as we've seen Luke fight the dark side with the rebellion and Harry Potter, spoiler alert, taking down Voldemort backed by the order of the Phoenix. No one travels alone. Now's the time for you to choose your travel companions. But first, who do we leave behind? There isn't room for everyone. That's okay because quite frankly, you'd be better off without some of your current companions. It's not only who travels with you on the journey, it's also about who you choose to leave behind. Let me give you a list of people who you might consider.

MBS ([10:12](#)):

Who in your life wants you to stay unchanging? Who takes more than they give? Who in your life sows seeds of doubt? Who has betrayed you and may betray you again? Whose idea of you is historical rather than future facing? Who stains you with the worst thing you've done rather than reminds you of the best you can be? Who triggers the worst thing you, or at least the less than great? Who contributes to you being numb? Who contributes to you being afraid? Who colludes with you not stepping towards the thrilling important and daunting?





MBS ([10:51](#)):

These aren't small questions and they aren't trivial decisions. There's probably an entire book. Make that an Amazon subcategory about doing this work. All right. Those are the opening pages of chapter nine, don't travel alone. It got a little dark there.

Jesse ([11:10](#)):

It sure did.

MBS ([11:12](#)):

Who we're thinking about leaving behind. So, we don't have to talk about that exactly unless it's something comes up for you, but what did strike a chord for you in this Jesse?

Jesse ([11:21](#)):

Actually, I'm ready to go to the darkness to stare at it, bravely stare at that and really to speak, to come back to the question that you asked in the time when we launched Page Two, because really it is from a career perspective, the most thrilling and daunting thing that I've ever done. And at the time, in addition to the professional challenge, there was also on a personal level, I had small children, all kinds of additional baggage and constraints that brought with them so much fear and anxiety. And that's true probably for anyone starting a business ever, or taking on any thrilling and daunting endeavor.

MBS ([12:08](#)):

Right. There's always entanglements,

Jesse ([12:09](#)):

That's it. And part of what your process help to clarify for me, even in retrospect, looking back at the arc. I mean, sadly, I didn't have your book when we launched





Page Two, but I wish I did, but I was able to look back at that arc and think about how those principles applied or didn't. And there was an elegance in making those radical choices about who's with me on the journey and who isn't. And I found it very freeing once I gave myself permission to not only hold on to and hold very tightly to the people who were going to really support me on the journey and to abandon the people and the structures that would weigh me down. So, there was a radical simplicity.

Jesse ([13:01](#)):

And I think partly because I felt at the time, I actually didn't even have a choice, right? There was so much to be done and there were so many people depending on me. It made it a little bit easier than usual to figure out what to say yes to and what to say no to and who to abandon if we want to put it in that dark way.

MBS ([13:24](#)):

Yeah. Part of the call in this chapter is to have the courage to say no to that and to sit with anxiety and guilt and uncertainty and sadness about leaving people behind. What have you learned about managing those feelings in the service of your worthy goal?

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

What I've learned is that it's often to everyone's benefit if you're able to look honestly at a relationship or a structure of some kind and to let it go. But in fact, in some cases, some people or things that I might have been holding onto, they weren't benefiting for me in any way if I was only halfway in and or if I was out of capacity and couldn't really give them what they needed, which is probably the bigger problem in many cases from their perspective. So, if you're able to just be radically clear about those things, it's in service to everybody ultimately in the, I think the most optimistic view.





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

Yeah. But I agree with it, which is so often when we're facing this, we only think about, we only project the pain that this is causing onto the other person and onto the circumstances. And so, often it is as liberating for them as it is liberating for you to decide to part ways in some ways. Even if there is often some sort of short term friction, it can be a bigger win for both sides if that can happen with some grace as well.

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

I can give an example if it's helpful, Michael of-

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

Yeah, that would be.

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

Yeah. One of the things that I love about how to begin as you walk us through in the most intimate way, two goals that you have set for yourself, and we're all on the journey with you. And if I, again, track back to this time I'm describing, I was having to figure out how to streamline my life for the sake of my work, but also for the sake of my friends and family. And I think about what I let go of. One thing I immediately let go of was spending too much time with people, even colleagues that I loved and admired who were very entrenched in the traditional mindset of how publishing should be. Many of them while they might have been supportive of me personally, they couldn't understand why we wanted to do what we did and choose a very different publishing model.

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

And so, I spent a lot of time originally sort of explaining it over and over. And then I realized actually the people who really understood it were the people such as yourself who really needed it, the people we needed to be in service to.





So, the more I could tune into that, and the more time I could spend with people like you, and it's not about just finding people who are not going to challenge you, not at all. But it's about knowing how to pick up the right kind of challenging conversation and relationship and not the kind that is only going to add friction. And in my life simultaneously, I had to let go of things like volunteering at my daughter's school, for instance, that I held dear but I thought there is no time for this.

Jesse ([17:02](#)):

And I think I was being a really terrible half-ass volunteer showing up randomly or not. And now my daughter, I'm happy to say while she didn't have a mom did all the big sales, she has a mom who she follows on or whose company she follows on Instagram and is really proud of. She likes everything we post.

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

There we go. That's a well behaved daughter. When you're explaining the people in the publishing industry, you're like we need to stop talking. I'm like what you want is the metaphor because I love a good metaphor. You want people who are looking to help you trim the sail, not to throw out an anchor.

Jesse ([17:41](#)):

That's right.

MBS ([17:42](#)):

And trimming the sail is a decision and a debate, but throwing out an anchor is just stopping the momentum and that serves nobody.

Jesse ([17:50](#)):

Well said.





MBS ([17:50](#)):

And Jesse, for people who thank you for this quick conversation and for all you've done with your team to make how to begin such a excellent book, if I say so myself.

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

It is.

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

Before we hit recording, you were showing me the advanced reader copy. So, the all physical object, and it's the first time I've seen the physical object live. So, it's pretty exciting. For people who also want to follow Page Two on Instagram and want to just learn about you and the organization, where can they find more about you guys in the web?

Jesse ([18:24](#)):

pagetwo.com

MBS ([18:26](#)):

pagetwo.com. Perfect. Jesse, thank you.

Jesse ([18:30](#)):

Thank you, Michael. I loved being here.

MBS ([18:36](#)):

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 kind of get some notice of the book, to kind of 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 ([19:23](#)):

And 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 an 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 kind of 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 your self and do work that makes a difference whether that's work at work or work just in life outside your kind of a career, then I think this book might be for you. You can find out more about the book at [howtobegin.com](http://howtobegin.com). That will give you bonuses, that'll give you pre-launch extras if you're listening before January the 11th, and it will just give you additional resources if you're coming to it after January 11th. Thanks for your support. You're awesome, you're doing great.