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MBS: Hey, it's Michael here. So to help manage the flurry of madness that is a book launch, I'm releasing some of my favorite episodes from the Vault. Thanks for your support of how to begin buying it, reading it, gifting it, reviewing it. All of that means a great deal to me. And new interviews for 2 Pages with MBS will begin in February. Riaz Meghji is a fabulous teacher and communicator. And his book, *Every Conversation Counts*, is published by my publisher Page 2. And I think the book does a wonderful job at drawing on Riaz's experience as a broadcaster, and bringing those insights into everyday life. So please enjoy my conversation with Riaz Meghji.



MBS:

The pandemic has brought so many hardships and with them, an invisible complication, an epidemic of loneliness. How do we connect? I mean, deeply connect with others, when we aren't face-to-face? Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, where I invite brilliant people to read the first two pages of a favorite book of theirs, a book that has shaped them, a book that has moved them. One of my favorite things about podcasting is the opportunity to talk to great people and I've done it a bunch. And I reckon over time, I've become a decent interviewer. And yet I heard a podcast interview the other day between Brené Brown and Simon Sinek, and Simon was talking about his newish book called *The Infinite Game*. And one of the distinctions he makes in *The Infinite Game* is the difference between people playing a finite game, who have competition and people who are playing an infinite game, who have rivals and with the competition, you're looking to win, but with rivals, you're looking to hold yourself up against and be inspired and be provoked and be challenged.

Now I love podcasting because I get to talk to really great people. I've been doing it on and off for years, and over time. I kind of fancy myself as a decent interviewer. And then occasionally you run into people who are rivals. And my guest today is exactly that. Riaz Meghji is a human connection expert who spent 17 years behind and in front of the camera in broadcast television. From TEDx to MTV Canada. This man has interviewed thousands of experts about communication and connection. And in fact, if you listen to the end of this interview, you're going to hear him



school me on being an interviewer, which is kind of fun and certainly helpful for me. Now Riaz has moved on from being in front of the camera to being an author. So I asked Riaz what he missed most about being on broadcast television.

Riaz: The energy and camaraderie of being in a studio. You hear the director counting you down, coming up in 5, 4, 3... And then you know your live. And that is exhilarating, to know that when you're live, it could go sideways at any moment and you have an audience with you on the journey. And being around... Working in broadcasting, I've had the fortune of working with some terrific teams and leaders and laughing together and learning together, being physically in the space of just exploring ideas and then trying them on live television and then dissecting it all. It's such a fascinating experience. And I miss that camaraderie and energy of being physically together.

MBS: It's safe to say that most of us are missing the same things, the connection and the comradery, and Riaz has spent a great deal of time thinking about this for him and for us. During the pandemic he's been hard at work on his own book, *Every Conversation Counts* and the road has been a bit rocky. It's not just the difficulty of actually writing a book.

Riaz: I'm a stubborn guy. So somebody says, "Yeah, I don't know why people write books now, it's just going to get lost in the shuffle." To me, I'm like, well if you believe in your message and you believe and have seen it can help. I'm going to commit to the idea and I'm going to do everything I can to amplify this message and get it out there. And I knew for me,



human connection was such a passion. Studying the epidemic and I believe the social pandemic of loneliness and isolation were problems everybody was feeling.

MBS: And that Ritz told me, is why he chose the book. Everyone Communicates, Few Connect by the legendary John Maxwell. And that's what he's going to share with us today. I'll let Ritz tell you exactly what impact it had on him.

Riaz: I've always been fascinated by the art of how and why we connect. And I don't even know how old this book is, but I discovered this one year ago, and as an interviewer, I always thought, well, what is a great conversation? And it's that emotional piece, how to make an emotional connection, how to lead with a service mentality. So when I saw this title, it just spoke to me. And when I picked it up, reading a cover to cover, there are so many pages that are marked that I just... It was one of these books that I could totally relate to. It's much like yours, Michael. And I said this to you with the coaching habit. When I was reading these things, these are some of these tactics that I was unconsciously doing, but had yet to articulate. And it just spoke to me that way. And I thought, yes, that's why this works. And I love reading books that allow me to see these things. And then just up my game even more. And this book did that.

MBS: If you're hungry for deeper connection, I know I am. We could all stand to up our communication game. So here's Ritz Meghji reading two pages of Everyone Communicates, Few Connect by John Maxwell.



Riaz:

Deep down. Most of us want to feel important, but we need to fight against our naturally selfish attitude and believe me, that can be a lifelong battle, but it's an important one. Why? Because only mature people who are focused on others are capable of truly connecting with others. Ego. There is a very real danger for people with public professions to develop unhealthily, strong egos. Leaders, speakers, and teachers can develop a disproportionate sense of their own importance. My friend, Calvin Miller in his book, *The Empowered Communicator*, uses the form of a letter to describe this problem and the negative impacts it has on others.

The letter says, "Dear speaker, your ego has become a wall between yourself and me. You're not really concerned about me, are you? You're mostly concerned about whether or not this speech is really working, about whether or not you're doing a good job. You're really afraid that I will not applaud aren't you? You're afraid that I won't laugh at your jokes or cry over your emotional anecdotes. You were so caught up in the issue of how I am going to receive your speech. You haven't thought much about me at all. I might've loved you, but you are so caught up in self-love that mine is really unnecessary. If I don't give you my attention, it's because I feel so unnecessary here. When I see you at the microphone, I see narcissist at his mirror. Is your tie straight? Is your hair straight? Is your department impeccable? Is your phraseology perfect? You seem in control everything, but your audience. You see everything so well, but us, but this



blindness to us, I'm afraid has made us deaf to you. We must go now, sorry. Call us sometime later, we'll come back to you.

When you're real enough to see us after your dreams have been shattered, after your heart has been broken, after your arrogance has reckoned with despair, then there will be room for all of us in your world. Then you won't care. If we applaud your brilliance, you will be one of us. Then, you will tear down the ego wall and use those very stones to build a bridge of warm relationship. We'll meet you on that bridge. We'll hear you then. All speakers are joyously understood when they reach with understanding, signed your audience."

It's just so good. The first time I read Calvin Miller's letter, I was struck by how accurately it described me when I came out of college. I was so cocky. I thought I had everything figured out, but the truth is that I didn't have a clue. I had taken courses and speaking, but the university coursework I had completed for my degree had merely taught me how to construct a competent outline. My studies in no way, prepared me to connect with an audience. Our professors had encouraged us concentrate our attention on our subject. We were told to focus our eyes at a point on the back wall of the room. My delivery was awkward and mechanical. Worse yet, whenever I spoke, I wasn't very interested in the people to whom I was speaking. I was looking for the compliments I hope to receive after the message. Nobody can connect with that kind of attitude. John Maxwell is a legend for a reason.



MBS: Yeah. John Maxwell is a legend for a reason. That's beautifully read, thank you. What struck a chord for you there? What's the idea that resonated and went made you go, wow?

Riaz: When I read this book and read pages like this, it really made me reflect on myself of when I got into the business and television, and how concerned I would be with how I'm being perceived and losing that sense of authentic self. And the realization that true connection is, look at you, is greater than look at me. And John's articulating what the great speakers do, they give more than they take. And these words allowed me to just get more curious in a situation where I have the opportunity to present for a group. I'm having conversations with leaders, not just the event organizers, but leaders that'll be in the audience to understand. So what's your experience been like these past few years? And that allows such a deep understanding of where they're at and what they need. And then if there's the opportunity to speak, it's of pure service to what they need, as opposed to what I think you need. And what I think is a brilliant question or a brilliant idea. It's not about me. It's look at you is so much greater than looking at me.

MBS: Now one of the phrases used in the piece that you read out was, "Hey speaker, when you set aside your arrogance, when your arrogance is broken, then you'll have crossed a bridge and you'll become one of us." So here's my question for you, Ritz. Where were you arrogant? And what was it that helped you shift from arrogance to, I guess the way we strive to be as



is humility to a place of humbleness? I'm curious to know where the arrogant edge was you... When it was there.

Riaz:

Arrogance for me as an interviewer would show up with how I approached the conversations. For example, if there was a big name or a big conversation, I would think, how do I come across great in this? And I would come up with what I believe to be the best questions to ask this figure, to show off how much research I did or how emotionally intelligent I can be. And then the success marker. I would... I'm meticulous with watching playback and I would watch it, and I would say, "Yep, check, that was a success because I asked all of the questions I wanted to ask."

And then the emotional component, to me is some of the most interesting guests, the way they shifted from arrogance to humility, came in the green room. And one of the simple questions, and this is why I love your book, *The Coaching Habit*, because one of your seven questions talk about what's on your mind. And there have been some really powerful interviews with guests surrounding mental health, the ones that have dealt with adversity of life-threatening health risks, or before I even enter with my energy and my curiosity, is to just pause and feature that look at you as greater than looking at me.

And I would ask guests what's on your mind. And that question would allow me to prioritize their priorities. And if they gave me something that I hadn't researched, the interview shifted, and that's when these courageous reveals would start to be unlocked and I started to understand, it's



not about me. It's not about my questions. It's about this message they have to share. And the goal is to unlock it. In TV, you only have five to six minutes to unlock as much as possible, but give them that space in the green room so they trust you, and then reveal something powerful so the audience wins and their message connects on a deeper level.

MBS: That ability to create connection and trust, this is in part what your new book is about as well. How do you accelerate that? Because, sometimes you get lucky and there's a connection, and you're like, I know we're going to hit it off, but if you're a professional interviewer, you can't leave that to chance. You're like, my job is to accelerate trust and accelerate connection. And what I hear you already saying is meeting them in the green room, which can be a literal thing, but also a metaphorical thing. And being present to who they are. I'm wondering if there's other ways that you helped make that sense of connection deepen and ripen more quickly?

Riaz: It comes down to the recognition and patterns I'd watch after 17 years of interviewing people for a living, that there are three questions we ask ourselves the first time we meet someone. And those questions are, Do you care about me? Are you listening to me? And, can I trust you? And I believe the amount of research we could do to delve into somebody's work and research, maybe experiences that they've had, columns they've written to understand where they're at and get specific, shows that caring piece. The idea of simplicity with our curiosity of asking that initial question, and then getting out of the way, and then digging deep,



proactively with followup questions, conveys that powerful listening, where there'll be more engaged thinking, okay, they're picking up on what I'm giving them, as opposed to running down the list of questions that they have for me.

MBS: And it's so annoying when that happens, when they're like, I've just opened up a beautiful doorway for you, we could walk through this together. And the interviewer goes, "That's not my next question, sorry about that. I've got something else to ask you." You're like, a missed opportunity.

Riaz: It's so true. And the funny thing is Michael, being on the other side of the interview, I can spot it now. For me, I would always pride myself. If an author was coming in, I'm like, I have to read their book, because otherwise I'll just read the talking points that PR person gave. You've probably given out those talking points. What's the point? And you can tell when someone's done a deep dive into the work and when they haven't. I can spot it now. So that listening piece is really important. And the idea of can I trust you? I really credit Darren Hardy, former former publisher of SUCCESS magazine and author of The Compound Effect, which is another great book that I love. And I had the chance to sit with him a few years ago and he's interviewed some of the greats.

And I said to him, I'm like, "Darren, what's your secret? How do you get people to trust you?" And he said two words that stick with me and really helped me navigate my approach. He's just said, "Go first." And he said, "If you want people to



trust you, Ritz, go first and share something raw and candid and show you trust them, and create that safe space."

MBS: I love that,

Riaz: And I thought that was brilliant. And then he said, "If you want to motivate people, go first and understand what motivates them and help them achieve that." And then you'll have trust and connection because people will understand, yeah, this person cares about me. Yeah, they listen to me because they're helping me achieve my goals. That idea of accelerating connection Michael, comes down to those three questions. Do you care about me? Are you listening to me? And can I trust you? And recognizing, if you can answer those when you meet somebody, those all have a high emotional component leaning into those goes a long way.

MBS: That's wonderful. That's really helpful. That last point, particularly around that sense of, trust comes in part through a mutual exchange of value. And that's not money, it's let me show you some me so you feel safe enough to show me some of you. And I know, the language I use around it when I'm speaking is, as a speaker my job is to be the strongest signal in the room, which means that I've got to think about what I want my audience to experience in terms of energy, in terms of vulnerability, in terms of courage. And then I've got to be the signal for that because they respond to my presence more perhaps than they respond to my message, to my actual words. It comes back to our [inaudible] Canadian, Marshall McLuhan. The medium is the message.



You're creating that in the experience and in the questions that might follow it.

Riaz: I love that, strongest signal in the room. I'm writing that one down. That's such a relevant point too, especially when you're not physically present in the room of how you can be that strong signal virtually. I know a lot of people struggle with the virtual, but there is such an opportunity if we're still leading in by listening and engaging them and activating them right out of the gate, we can still be that signal just in a different medium.

MBS: Let me shift the question. Because I want to come back to one of the tensions about what you talk... What you shared in the two pages you read, the message that I took from that is, "Hey speaker" And by that, he's really meaning anybody who's in an attempt to communicate. "If all you're doing is thinking about yourself, how good your hair looks, how good your message is, whether your jokes land, your self-centered and you lose the bridge, the connection to the audience. You're not in a place of service."

At the same time, there's a tension to say, I want to create the best thing I can. What I'm trying to do as an artist, is build something that has the right beat. If you're a stand-up comedian, it's all about the beat after the punchline, the lead into the punchline, it is about perfecting that thing, it is about perfecting your presence. And when... One of the things that I noticed about you, is you're, if you don't mind me saying, a very beautiful man, I mean, you look great. You look great on the front cover of your book. You look great on this video at



the moment, you are well put together. I mean, I'm a little more shambolic, but you've actually got a presence and a polish and a thoughtfulness of somebody who has worked on the beat, the humor, the emotion, the language.

So how do you balance that tension between a commitment to your art and your craft? And for many of us, we're part of that. Our brand, our presence is at. And this idea of stepping aside from arrogance, being broken, connecting to the audience, which is part of what was mentioned in what you read.

Riaz: That's a beautiful question. For me, it starts with a commitment to listening and just listening in different ways. Step one, I'll listen to myself of, who am I? What is the message I have to share that can better somebody's life? And staying true to that because it's easy to get caught up in the people pleasing aspect, which I will throw credit to you of the, if it's not a hell yes, it's a no.

MBS: I wish I lived that more than I do, but I'm trying to embody that, and to give that credit that's from Derek Sivers and his work, which I love that adaption of that. It's like fully commit to a yes or just make it a no.

Riaz: Yeah. I mean, that is the gift that keeps on giving. And that requires truly listening to ourselves. I was talking to my wife this morning, who's a lawyer and she deals with a lot of egos and challenges and people that need things done quickly. And we were having this conversation of, okay, do I take on this new client? Do I take on this new contract? Is it for them?



Or is it for me? And I get in the beginning of our careers that having a collaborative spirit is vital if you want to succeed, we've got to pay our dues and show we have a strong work ethic.

Yet once the experience comes in, then it's important to start asking these questions, am I doing this for the right reasons? So how to answer your question, I start with the commitment to one listening to myself and having clarity in, here is what I have to offer and serve. Here is the deep dive of research I have done that I believe will better or elevate, I should say is a better word, maybe to elevate the culture, elevate your presence, elevate your connection with your people. And then it's a matter of trial and error and that commitment to listening of, I'm going to put this out here. And this is why I said, during this conversation, I still watch my playback on any presentation to this day. And one of the things I love about... I know a lot of people are tired of Zoom and have Zoom fatigue or whatever video medium you use. One of the things I love, will be the option to save the chat before the window is closed after a presentation is done.

And after that presentation, the first thing I'll do, is I'll watch my playback and take my own notes. And then I'll go back and watch what the audience reacted to, to understand what was of value and their ideas, were I think when I discovered it and I feel like at this point, I've been a curator of information through interviews and ideas and through writing, where I feel this is a valuable idea. The audience will always tell me if it's a valuable idea. So I try and match. I listened to myself, I



watch playback, take notes, critique myself, and then listen to, most importantly, the audience and see how they were served and then calibrate and recalibrate and continuously try new ideas. And every audience is different.

And understanding there will never be a hundred percent approval. That's something I struggled with in the beginning because of the ego in television. I want it to be liked by everybody. But after a while you realize it's not about me, it's about the moment you can create and the service you can provide. So that service of continuous playback critique, listening. Yeah. It all comes down to commitment to listening, that's it.

MBS:

It's such an interesting place you're pointing to Ritz, It's a unresolvable tension, which is staying an apprentice and owning mastery at the same time. And that's what I hear in the stories you tell, which is, by any measure, you're masterful at this work, whether that's presenting, teaching from your book, interviewing people, but the willingness, the humility to be an apprentice, to keep learning in some ways also allows you to best utilize that expertise because it's not a brittle thing. It's a expertise that's able to meet an audience where they are and go, look, I've got some stuff I know works, and I'm going to use all of those skills, whether that's obvious or whether that's a little more subtle and subliminal, but I can also use that to be present and to adapt and adjust to what the audience wants and what they need and where the energy moves in the room, so that you can be present to them as well.



Riaz: Yeah. And to build on that, one of the greatest things to take away from a broadcast career that has helped me stay focused in this space of writing and releasing a book, is to always maintain a beginner's mindset. Because in the beginner's mind, there are many options and in the experts, there are a few. And no matter what I'm doing, whether it's on camera work, whether it's writing, whether it's just blogging, it's just to maintain that beginner's appeal. Because that's exciting, that there's always something to learn and pick up on. Otherwise, if I close off, I'm going to miss that opportunity for connection.

MBS: That's wonderful. Hey, Ritz, we're coming to the end. I have a question that I learned from somebody which I love. And the question is this. What needs to be said that hasn't been said? I'm curious to know what comes to you when I ask you that

Riaz: I'm writing this question down because I love the gems you're throwing out here. Out of everything we've covered in this conversation. The idea that comes to me is how do we break out of autopilot mode, when we're not just communicating, but if we have an intention to connect with someone, if we're going to give them our time, if we're going to give them our attention, how do we break out of autopilot mode and get more intentional with navigating emotion? And all those years in television. And what I've learned from the interviews is that, in our conversations, how do we just bring... And this is an idea I'll throw to you.



You, who's listening to this and listening to us right here in this conversation, how can you create a dialogue with less information and more emotion? And a lot of people talk about their career. They'll talk about their health, but emotion lives in relationships. And that's our opportunity to have a commitment to listening and really delve into what matters most, what are people's emotional priorities and being with them. Not being afraid of emotion, especially if you know somebody's grieving or somebody highly frustrated, just allowing them to be witnessed and then leaning in with the curiosity, leaning in with listening and putting aside the distractions and just navigating emotion, less info, more emotion is what we need right now.

MBS: Well Ritz let me ask you this. So we've been talking for a while and as I am running through this experience in my mind, I'm like, how did I do in terms of connecting with emotion? Where did I miss opportunities in our conversation to allow emotion to come to the surface or be more present in the way we were talking?

Riaz: Okay. One of the ideas that come to mind is the artist's story. And that's also where emotion lives, emotion lives in when people speak about their relationships, but it also speaks about defining and milestone moments in their life. And if the objective of your question is, well, how do I draw out more emotion from Ritz? That's weird, I'm speaking in the third person... How do I draw more emotion from this guy? Is the stories of these moments of... We talk about the question, what's on your mind of... Take me to a moment



where that really unlocks something or take me to a moment where...

I credit the late psychiatrist, Gordon Livingston, who had the happiness equation of three real things that stand out if you're trying to connect with someone and you have no context of them and they're emotionally driven and he found that the happiest people have something to do, they have someone to love and they have something to look forward to. And those kinds of emotional touch points live in relationships. They live with stories and maybe that's the only thing that maybe I could have brought forward to this conversation is more stories with the emotion, because I appreciate the thoughtfulness and the questions of big ideas, humility versus ego. Feel there was great actionables in this.

MBS:

It's pretty ironic that last conversation Ritz and I had, when I asked him, what did I miss? Or what could I... How could I improve my game as an interviewer? And he's like, "Maybe stories, a few more stories." And I realize, ironically, that I've spent years trying to avoid stories, I'm best known for my work in the world of coaching and helping people be more coach-like. And one of the things I say in the coaching habit book is, "Stop them telling you the stories. It's just a distraction. It just suckers you in to wanting to solve it and fix it to give advice." And I still stand by that. I still think that's true, that if you're in a conversation that's coach-like where you're actually trying to open up new insights and provoke action, that often the story is a distraction because if you're the coach and you're pursuing the story, you're often trying to



pursue it so you can get more information so that you can then solve the problem.

But this is what I'm taking away from this conversation, and well many things, but I realized that the story might be a distraction in the world of coaching, but when I'm trying to connect with somebody, the story is so often the way in to that connection. And that's not to say you shouldn't stay curious. I think you should, but it might mean that you need different questions to help provoke the story, to kind of connect to the story, to uncover the story because not all of us are great storytellers. I don't think I'm a great storyteller. I... You just have to talk to [Marcelle] and my wife and she's like, "Tell me what's going on?" And I'm like, "Oh, I've forgotten." Most of what's already happened during the day. When I worked with Audra, who is the producer of the show and she's like... And I'm like, "Audra, how do I tell... How do I get people to tell better stories? I want that, but I've spent 20 years practicing, not getting people telling stories."

Well, what she did is she introduced me to, or reminded me of Alex Blumberg. Who's the founder of Gimlet, who has an online course around how to be a better interviewer. So I went there, I've started to pick up and use new questions, so that I can actually reach out and connect to people's deeper stories. And what I love about that is so much of it is, it has the same core principle as some of the coaching questions I love. The coaching questions are, Hey, what's the real challenge here for you that accelerates us into the real conversation, the real conversation fast? And I love that. And



I realized that the same method is what you're after when you're asking people to tell a story, I go, Hey, that moment, when you realize... That moment, when you were leaving broadcast television, take me there.

What was that like Ritz? I wish I'd asked that question because I feel that might have opened up a story of excitement and anxiety and adventure. And we didn't get to hear that because I didn't yet have that story telling question asking muscle developed. I'm curious to know, of course, what struck a chord for you, as Ritz said right at the end, is there were a ton of actionables, a ton of takeaways. I'd love to know what struck a chord for you. Now, of course, if you want to learn more about Ritz and Riaz's work, you want to go to his website, I'm going to spell it out for you, because he's got a name that is less familiar to certainly my eyes. So Ritz, R-I-A-Z or Z, depending on where you are in the world. And then Meghji, M-E-G-H-J-I .com.

And that gives you access to all the work that he's doing, plus ways of buying his book. And of course his book is available everywhere that you want to buy a book. Meantime, word of mouth is how this podcast grows. And as the podcast grows, that allows me to continually reach out to great guests and have them come on this show. So it helps you and it helps me both by passing the word along. So if there's someone you can think of who would love to hear Riaz's insights, who's looking for connection and communication and the ability to understand that every conversation counts. Well, please mention the episode to them. I'm sure they'd benefit from it.



And I'd certainly be appreciative of it. And of course, if you're moved to give the podcast a review or a rating, I am certainly grateful for that. I'm MBS, and thanks for listening to Two Pages with MBS.