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

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. What I loved about my conversation with Sandra Sucher, who's an academic at Harvard is that the book she chose to read was in many ways, just really unexpected. It's the story of the atom bomb, but what she's reading from it is a story of leadership in a way that I've really never thought of before. So please enjoy my conversation with Sandra Sucher.

MBS ([00:47](#)):

So during the first phase of the pandemic, you know, about 4,000 years ago, I experimented with a type of online gathering, which I called Cocktails and Questions. So after getting myself a cocktail, five people in my circle would



gather and they typically wouldn't know each other. And we all had six minutes to reflect on a question that I sent them through the day before. Now, they would talk without interruption and the question that I sent was designed to provoke reflection and vulnerability and insight. Now, over the six months that I did this, I think I came up with some pretty great questions, but one of my favorites was this, "What are you hold onto and why?"

MBS ([01:31](#)):

Woven into that question is the insight that once we've taken hold of something, we become committed to it. Often to an extent that's irrational. Often to an extent that no longer serves us and this is absolutely backed up by the science. I mean, perhaps you're wondering right now, "Well what am I holding onto?" Welcome to Two Pages With MBS. This is 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. Sandra Sucher is the professor of management practice at Harvard Business School and author of a new book, *The Power of Trust: How Companies Build It, Lose It and Regain It*.

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

Now, one of the themes that you'll notice I come back to a lot with my guests, because I'm fascinated by it, I think it's such a core part of anybody's journey is unique perspectives they have when they are both insiders and outsiders of the worlds that they inhabit. Or you know, perhaps another way of saying the same thing is people who have traveled various and different worlds to get to where they are right now. Sandra's now at Harvard, but she grew up in Detroit, Michigan and that gave her a very particular view of America.

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

That sense of me coming up through pretty tough schools where they were always public schools, and they were at times, kind of scary places to be. Where I had to navigate what it was like to be me, to make friends and to be in an



environment where it wasn't the easiest to figure out how to make it work. So I tried to be a good dancer, that helped. And not to be a jerk and that helped too.

MBS ([03:25](#)):

Okay. So you can probably stop the podcast right here, because I think we found one of the deep secrets to a successful life. Be a good dancer, don't be a jerk. Now, Sandra's early life was a foundation upon which she began to build her understanding of the world.

Sandra ([03:42](#)):

My elementary school, my high school was half Black and half Jewish, and it wasn't until I went to University of Michigan as an undergrad that I actually was around lots of people with blonde hair and blue eyes and I felt I had dropped into another universe.

MBS ([03:58](#)):

It was a jarring experience for her, but one that also gave her a new perspective on the world. From there, Sandra began her MBA doctorate and realized that as an outsider, she couldn't really teach business without first being inside business. So in her 20s, she decided to spend a year or two, that's all, learning from the inside. And of course, because that's the way the world goes, that one or two years turned into 20. But finally, Sandra found herself back at Harvard, but now as a professor. She'd come a long way from Detroit's public education program, but one thing stayed true and real for her.

Sandra ([04:37](#)):

I've always cared so much about how people relate to each other. I care about fairness and so that's shaped a lot of how I approach anything that I do.

MBS ([04:50](#)):

I asked Sandra who planted that seed about connection and trust.



Sandra ([04:56](#)):

It was a woman named Vicky Jackson. She was my debate partner. So we were a part of the debate squad. We weren't particular great as debaters, but we enjoyed playing with our apparel. So she wore a black blazer, I'd wear a white blazer, or we'd... but she was the person who actually helped me bridge some of those gaps and later on, she became the person when I was at the University of Michigan who said, "You know what? We can't be as close friends as we were before right now. There's stuff going on in the Black Power movement that I've got to be part of, and that's just where my life is." So her ability to speak candidly with me about these very personal, political issues showed me that there is a way to do that. That that's possible and so I'm very optimistic in that regard, possibly stupidly so, in thinking that there's a path that we have to connect with each other. That we actually can build that path if we want to.

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

As well as that ability to speak candidly about the relationship, as well as dress snappily. What else did she do that helped role model or maybe mentor, or just build the bonds of that relationship? Because that's what you're talking about with trust is a sense of relationship.

Sandra ([06:27](#)):

Yeah. You know, I hadn't thought about that. That's a really good question. I think that what she did is she allowed us to build something together. So it was always "What can we do in this debate?" And "What are you going to do? What am I going to do?" And it was sort of an early collaboration, in the sense that you can share work. You can do work together and that better things come out of it if you do that. And that's why, for example, my book is co-authored.

MBS ([07:00](#)):



How did the trust stay central to the way you see the world, as you embarked on your corporate career? Because I can imagine that's one of the things that happened as a younger woman, but then you get into corporations and you're like, "Okay, I'm going to climb a ladder. I'm going to have some success. I'm going to try to make this organization better." Was trust always part of the conversation for you? Or did that take more of a back seat then?

Sandra ([07:26](#)):

So it took me a while to understand how it was playing out. So I joined a very famous institution. It was called Filene's Basement-

MBS ([07:36](#)):

Oh yeah, I've been to Filene's Basement. I bought suits from Filene's Basement. It's this [crosstalk 00:07:41]

Sandra ([07:40](#)):

There you go.

MBS ([07:41](#)):

Great place where you go in and after a certain amount of time, they cut even more money off the price. So if you're smart and you get the timing just right, you get a total bargain for not that much money.

Sandra ([07:52](#)):

Right. So I learned about trust two ways in Filene's Basement, many ways. So one is... so one of the things you have to do if you're an assistant buyer is that you sat on what's called the return line, and all the people that wanted to return merchandise to Filene's Basement would bring it back, and because we had this automatic markdown plan, as you just said, the tickets all were stamped with a date in which it was bought. And I still remember having to tell some woman that the date on her ticket hadn't happened yet.



MBS ([08:26](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([08:26](#)):

This year, which meant that the merchandise was like a year old.

MBS ([08:31](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([08:32](#)):

And so it was... and I hated being on the return line because it was... you were up against people, who for a whole variety of reasons had decided that they had to return something. It was very painful.

MBS ([08:45](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([08:46](#)):

So that was an early part of it and it also, the whole... this premise of Filene's Basement was based on trust.

MBS ([08:54](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([08:54](#)):

So when you go... this automatic markdown plan, it worked at... after 10 days, any price of something on the floor was reduced 25%. 10 days later, 25% more, 75% and then eventually at the end of the month, it's given away to charity. So the bet that you're making as a customer is that we're not fiddling with the prices and the price tags. We're not going through the floor every night and just bringing everything up back up to the original date.



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

Right, right.

Sandra ([09:23](#)):

So it was one of these early examples of a business model that was based on the premise of trust, because you literally would have the same suit that you bought on the floor for two different prices, at least.

MBS ([09:35](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([09:35](#)):

And you'd have to kind of trust that that's the way the system worked.

MBS ([09:38](#)):

Right. That's so interesting. How did that experience with Filene's, how did it shift or deepen your understanding of trust? Particularly as you're scaling now from a single relationship to what it means to build trust as an organization, or as a brand.

Sandra ([09:57](#)):

So the buyers, so much of the success of that system depended on buyers knowing how to do what they do, which was to get merchandise out on the floor. Not so much that it's all going to take a markdown, and not so little that you lose sales. So it was this system where everyone had to be extremely skilled at kind of tie trading merchandise coming out onto the floor. And you definitely had a sense in the stock people who worked on it, and making sure that your stock was up to shape. I mean, it was actually a big team effort to mount this thing. And because it was famous, because it was hugely successful,



\$650 a square foot like when I was there in the 1970s, that you just felt very proud to be part of this thing.

MBS ([10:47](#)):

Right. Is it that... [inaudible 00:10:50] there's a lot going on there. Is it a sense of enabling a wide range of people to be working at their best? Was that part of it? Or is it the success of the... do they both need to be there? I'm just curious to know how that all plays out.

Sandra ([11:06](#)):

So if you're in a business, any kind of business organization... your success depends on how happy you are in your relationships with the people you work with.

MBS ([11:18](#)):

Sure.

Sandra ([11:19](#)):

And we take that for granted, but if you've ever been someplace where that's not in place-

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

Right, it's terrible. I've had that.

Sandra ([11:25](#)):

It's very hard to do-

MBS ([11:26](#)):

It's misery.



Sandra ([11:27](#)):

Yeah, it's very hard to do good work. And so there was that. There was also a sense quite honestly that you were helping people, who for whatever reasons couldn't afford the full price of something to get a bargain.

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

Really?

Sandra ([11:42](#)):

So that was like, "Wow, this is pretty cool. I can buy these sweaters and I can put them out, fraction of the cost and I feel pretty good about that because I'm helping these other people."

MBS ([11:52](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([11:53](#)):

So that's in both ways.

MBS ([11:56](#)):

[crosstalk 00:11:56] a game. Yeah.

Sandra ([11:56](#)):

Right.

MBS ([11:57](#)):

There's so much to talk about here, but I'm curious to know about the book you've chosen to read for us. So what have you chosen Sandra?

Sandra ([12:05](#)):

So be prepared for something different.



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

Yeah.

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

So this book is... it's The Making of the Atomic Bomb.

MBS ([12:13](#)):

Wow.

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

It's by Richard Rhodes and it won the National Book Award, National Book Critic Circle Award and it won a Pulitzer's Prize. And this is... it's huge. It's like you could... I'm holding it-

MBS ([12:28](#)):

It weighs the same weight as an atomic bomb, yeah.

Sandra ([12:32](#)):

Yeah. So it's there, but it is... he's just a brilliant writer because usually I'm not a history reader. So I read history somewhat reluctantly and I was... I'll explain why I needed to read this book in a minute, but he writes like a journalist.

MBS ([12:51](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([12:51](#)):

So it's so interesting and you'll see when I read the excerpt that I do. So that's the book. And I chose it because of a story that's in the book about the role that Emperor Hirohito played in helping bring WWII to a close.



MBS ([13:10](#)):

Exciting. You know, I looked this book up. It's from the early 60s and I looked at the first page of blurbs and it like 17 Nobel Prize winners. I'm like, "Okay. This is a man who knows how to get a book blurb, if nothing else and then went on to win all these prizes." So that's fascinating. Why don't you read us the two pages?

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

Okay great. And for the Japanese speakers who may be listening, I will do my best. I've been to Japan twice in my life. So I will try to pronounce a few of these names properly, particularly the place names and so I'm asking for some forgiveness, which I should have done more homework, quite honestly to look up how to pronounce these names properly. So I confess to feeling that I'm being somewhat disrespectful in not knowing exactly how to pronounce the names.

Sandra ([14:10](#)):

Strategic Air Forces commander Carl Spaatz, cabled Lauris Norstad on August 10th proposing placing the third atomic bomb on Tokyo. Where he thought it would have a salutary psychological effect on government officials. On the other hand, continuing area incendiary bombing disturbed him. "I've never favored the destruction of cities as such, with all inhabitants being killed." He confided to his diary on August 11th. He had sent off 114 B29s on August 10th. Because of bad weather and misgivings, he canceled the mission scheduled for August 11 and restricted operations thereafter to attacks on military targets visually or under very favorable blind bombing conditions.

Sandra ([15:03](#)):

American weather planes over Tokyo were no longer drawing anti-aircraft fire. Spaatz thought that fact unusual. The vice chief of the Japanese Navy's general staff, the man who had conceived and promoted the kamikaze attacks of the



past year that had added to American bewilderment and embitterment to Japanese ways. Crashed a meeting of government leaders on the evening of August 13th with tears in his eyes to offer a plan for certain victory, sacrificed 20 million Japanese lives in a special kamikaze attack. Whether he meant the 20 million to attack the assembled might of the allies with rocks or bamboo spears, the record does not reveal.

Sandra ([15:51](#)):

A B29 leaflet barrage forced the issue the next morning. Leaflet bombs showered what remained of Tokyo streets with a translation of burns reply. The Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal knew such public revelations would harden the military against surrender. He carried the leaflet immediately to the emperor and just before 11 that morning, August 14, Hirohito assembled his ministers and counselors in the imperial air raid shelter. He told them he found the allied reply evidence of the peaceful and friendly intentions of the enemy, and considered it acceptable. He did not specifically mention the atomic bomb. Even that terrific leviathan submerged in the general misery quoting him, "I cannot endure the thought of letting my people suffer any longer. A continuation of the war would bring death to tens, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of persons. The whole nation would be reduced to ashes. How then could I carry on the wishes of my imperial ancestors?"

Sandra ([17:06](#)):

He asked his ministers to prepare an imperial rescript, a formal edict that he might broadcast personally to the nation. The officials were not legally bound to do so. The emperor's authority lay outside the legal structure of the government, but by older and deeper binds than law, they were bound and they set to work. In the meantime, Washington had grown impatient. Groves was asked on August 13 about the availability of your patience together with a time estimate that they could be moved in place. Stimson recommended



proceeding to ship the nuclear materials, the third bomb [inaudible 00:17:44] Marshall and Groves decided to wait another day or two.

Sandra ([17:49](#)):

Truman ordered Arnold to resume area incendiary attacks. Arnold still hoped to prove that the Air Force could win the war. He called for an all out attack with every available B29 and any other bombers in the Pacific Theater and mustered more than a thousand aircraft. 12 million pounds of high explosive and incendiary bombs destroyed half of Kumagaya and a sixth of Isesaki. Killing several thousand more Japanese, even as word of the Japanese surrender passed through Switzerland to Washington. The first hint of surrender reached American bases in the Pacific by radio in the form of a news bulletin from the Japanese news agency Domei on 2:49 PM on August 14th, 1:49 AM at Washington.

Sandra ([18:41](#)):

Flash, flash. Tokyo, August 14, it is learned an imperial message accepting the Potsdam Proclamation is forthcoming soon. The bombers drop droned on even after that. But eventually that day, the bombs stopped falling. Truman announced the Japanese acceptance in the afternoon. There were last minute acts of military rebellion in Tokyo. A high officer assassinated. An unsuccessful attempt to steal the phonograph recording of the imperial rescript. A brief takeover of a division of imperial guards wild plans for a coup. But loyalty prevailed. The emperor broadcast to a weeping nation on August 15th. His 100 million subjects had never heard the high antique voice of the crane before.

Sandra ([19:35](#)):

Despite the best that has been done by everyone, the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage. While the general trends have all turned against her interest, moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb. The power of which to do damage is indeed



incalculable. Taking the toll of many innocent lives. This is the reason why we have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the joint declaration of the powers. The hardships and sufferings to which our nation is to be subjected hereafter will certainly be great. We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of ye, our subjects. However, it is according to the dictate of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable. But the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation.

MBS ([20:48](#)):

Thank you Sandra. That's a beautiful piece and you read it beautifully as well. So I really appreciate that. What's at the heart of this for you Sandra? Why is this such a powerful piece?

Sandra ([20:59](#)):

It had never occurred to me that for war to end, someone has to accept surrender. I never thought about war from the standpoint of the losing party and I never thought about the courage it takes to actually help the... battles stop. And obviously we are all thinking about what had been going on in Afghanistan and the end of that terrible 20 year war. 20 year war.

MBS ([21:33](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([21:34](#)):

And so I have actually used this particular example in a course that I teach, but the point to me really has been the kind of moral courage that's required to stand for the interest of your group, regardless of the conditions that you're in.

MBS ([21:53](#)):



As you've worked with students and executives, what have you learned about what it takes to nurture that moral strength? Because this is something you think you might be able to do in theory, but come the moment, it feels like there's all sorts of things, not only your own biology working against that ability. How do you nurture moral courage?

Sandra ([22:25](#)):

So I'll start narrowly thinking about Emperor Hirohito because there is a certain school of thought that says that part of how you nurture moral courage is through a sense of role obligations. So he's in a very particular role. He's the emperor.

MBS ([22:47](#)):

Yes.

Sandra ([22:48](#)):

He's been schooled in what it means to be an emperor and he's had decades to think about what that means. So when the moment comes, as hard as it is, he has kind of a path between where are we now and what should the emperor of Japan do right now?

MBS ([23:05](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([23:06](#)):

Now as you can imagine, this was... he knew this was a fraught decision. I mean, his privy counselor scurried to get that leaflet into him so that they could intervene before the military tried to get the masses up in believing that this battle could be won. So part of how you do that is you say for the role I'm in-



MBS ([23:29](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([23:30](#)):

What is it that I'm expected to do? And that lends a kind of objectivity to what can feel quite overwhelmingly personal. When you can start to abstract yourself and say in this role, the leader should be doing that.

MBS ([23:46](#)):

Right. You know, I think about the generals of the Japanese Army and wondering whether they're thinking in terms of how they might react, what's my role as the general and how should I be doing that as well? So I can see there's a tension there depending on what role you're in, and I guess how well that role is connected to a bigger picture.

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

Correct. And even within your statement, different people will have different interpretations of what that bigger picture requires.

MBS ([24:22](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([24:23](#)):

So if I'm a general, I win wars. That is the nature of my obligation. Now, it's true that actual Dwight Eisenhower was not a fan at all of using the bomb.

MBS ([24:37](#)):

Right.



Sandra ([24:37](#)):

In one of the stories that's recounted in this book is he talks about the fact that he didn't believe it was necessary, because the Japanese were already losing the war. And to him, it really mattered who was first to use the bomb, and he didn't want the United States to be the first country to deploy it.

MBS ([24:59](#)):

There's a new book by Malcolm Gladwell, *The Bomber Mafia* is a very interesting conversation about the morality of bombing and which of those is... which different approaches and which is the lesser of two or three evils, I guess, in terms of how to bomb that.

Sandra ([25:17](#)):

Right. I think you asked before about how you could prepare yourself for these moments. I think that these are... so I teach a course at Harvard Business School. It's called the Moral Leader and it uses actually literature, novels and plays and historical accounts like this one, to help students come up with their own definition of what they think an act of moral leadership consists of.

MBS ([25:46](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([25:46](#)):

So I'm not asking them to think about you're a moral leader 724, you know? This is if called upon, you call upon yourself to exercise moral leadership, what does that require of you and what would that look like? And the reason I'm telling this is that for people who want to think about this, that's an exercise that people can do.



MBS ([26:10](#)):

Yes.

Sandra ([26:11](#)):

And the best leaders who I know are very, very reflective about what it is that they think about their obligations, how they think about their aspirations for the kind of leader they want to be. And they prepare themselves by rehearsing events and going through things, and saying, "What did I learn from this?" And trying to build this intuition about here's how I think an act of moral leadership looks like for me.

MBS ([26:38](#)):

I mean, there's a famous quote... I'm not sure who. Allegedly from a military source which is, "We don't rise to the occasion. We sink the level of our training." I think is speaking to some of that.

Sandra ([26:53](#)):

Right. I think that that's a really good quote though, because what I'm suggesting is that there's a level of work that you can do as an individual that helps you rise above your training.

MBS ([27:02](#)):

Right. How do you navigate different morality? Because I'm all very for... I'm very pro the moral leader, if they have my morals and my morality and they see the world like I do. I'm like, "Exactly. This is how you serve the bigger game. This is how you serve the community. This is how you get vaccinated." All that sort of stuff that I'm like, "This is my sense of morally right." There's a bunch of people across the chasm from me who I disagree with around a range of different things, who feel that they are morally right, morally correct.



Sandra ([27:43](#)):

Yeah and that description is a really important acknowledgement on your part. Because the most important thing to understand about morality is that this is intensely personal. And so what I regard as worth doing, worth defending, worth fighting for is very much built into how it is that I see the world and the kinds of assumptions I make about it. And so the first guideline for working across this chasm is to assume good intent.

MBS ([28:19](#)):

Love that. Yeah.

Sandra ([28:20](#)):

Yeah and to really say, "Even though I profoundly disagree with the premise of this individual, they too are trying to do what they regard as right."

MBS ([28:30](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([28:32](#)):

And to at least give the other party credit, moral credit for having as positive intentions in their own way, as you have.

MBS ([28:42](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Is there a practice or a way for me to continuing to expand and refine my understanding of moral leadership? Because the other thing I worry about is that my sense of what is right becomes ossified and like... I figured this out when I was 30, I'm now 53. It's the same. And I'm wondering how you stay present to... the ambiguity and the grayness of what life is really like, rather than the black and white certainty that a moral stance can somehow feel like you're



holding the sword of righteousness and truth. And life is always messier than that.

Sandra ([29:27](#)):

Oh, way messier than that. And I think that... I'm not sure about this. I would propose that one way to think about that is the kind of content of the moral decisions. Another thing that I work on really is the process of moral reasoning. That's... so let me elaborate for a minute.

MBS ([29:54](#)):

Great. Yeah.

Sandra ([29:55](#)):

So there are... I'll choose four different ways to think about whether something is the right thing to do. So one right thing to do is consequence base thinking. We do this all the time. That's the calculus that was going on in Japan, in the United States. If I do this, this will happen. And that's a moral reasoning because you're saying, "I can live with the consequences and I'm judging the consequences." So the people who had second thoughts about incendiary bombing, they were saying "That's not something I'm willing to do. Or will not want to do given a choice. So there's consequence based reasoning.

Sandra ([30:37](#)):

There's reasoning based just on your basic responsibilities as a human being, one person to another. And so I think that that's the reasoning that says people deserve to be treated with respect. That people have lives that actually you should be enriched and you have an obligation to them, just because they're another human. To treat them as a human.

Sandra ([31:01](#)):



There's the way of looking at what's the right thing to do through the lens of rights, you know? And do people have certain rights that you believe actually need to be respected, and under what conditions. I've taught before about role obligations. That's another way to think about it. And finally, there are... people do make their own communal sense about... from a community standpoint, what's the thing that helps our community thrive?

MBS ([31:29](#)):

Right.

Sandra ([31:30](#)):

So I've just described four, five actually, different ways... and what seems to help the students is to take the same decision and to examine it from the standpoint of each one of these moral reasoning processes. And what you find is that number one, you can argue almost any of them, should you want to, but they shed light on very different things.

MBS ([31:54](#)):

Right. Yeah.

Sandra ([31:56](#)):

And at the end of it, you at least have a much more robust way of thinking about this decision and how to make it. There's no algorithm at the end that says, "Put this together." But it is a process that if you have the patience for it, it actually can help you make better decisions. That at least you know you've been intentional about.

MBS ([32:15](#)):

I mean, I think that's a very powerful perspective, which is different perspectives increase the nuance of your understanding. And also your understanding of both for and against the position you might be taking.



Sandra ([32:31](#)):

Correct. Right.

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

Because there's a way. I think one of the other ways about doing this is to argue the case as strongly as possible against yourself, against your moral inclination and see what light that also sheds on the crux and the moment that you're facing.

Sandra ([32:51](#)):

Yeah. And I think that that's useful, very useful to do as a immediate check, but sometimes our ability to argue against ourselves is absolutely determined by how we think about things. So that's why I feel some notion of opening yourself up to other ways of reasoning.

MBS ([33:11](#)):

Yes.

Sandra ([33:12](#)):

Actually creates more nuance you would have, even if you just said, "I'm going to play devil's advocate and take the other side.

MBS ([33:18](#)):

I see that. So did you feel your own sense of moral leadership has changed at all since you started teaching this particular course and diving into this world?

Sandra ([33:30](#)):

I think what's changed... so I have... just because I spent 20 years in business and increasing levels of responsibility, thought quite carefully about who I was as a leader, pretty much all the time.



MBS ([33:47](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([33:48](#)):

And I believe in lateral leadership, meaning at any level in any meeting, you can help lead the entire. So I'm used to thinking of myself as a leader and have for a long time. I think what this has opened me up to is the idea that good frameworks, good ideas, that they actually make a difference. So there is such a sense of kind of have to figure this out myself. And because it's hard, I feel like no one can help me think about this differently. What I've learned is to, I think be not humble, but curious about well what ways help? So that's why I wrote the book with my colleague Shalene, because trust was one of those areas where we all loved the idea of it, but if you asked the next first question, which what do you mean by it? And let's even pretend you thought it was a good idea, what are you going to do about it?

MBS ([34:44](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([34:45](#)):

You wouldn't come up with much. And so to me, that's taking leadership of a different kind.

MBS ([34:52](#)):

Yes.

Sandra ([34:53](#)):

That's kind of an intellectual leadership where it's like I can, I want to and the advantage point of being an academic at HBS. So I have wonderful colleagues I



can work things out with, literatures I can dive into and I can have the money to go study companies.

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

Yes.

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

So all of that creates a kind of obligation on my part. Well what do I do with all that [inaudible 00:35:18] And my senses, again it's not giving back, it's just giving.

MBS ([35:23](#)):

Yes.

Sandra ([35:24](#)):

And really wanting to use those resources for good.

MBS ([35:30](#)):

I wonder Sandra, as you talk about this... the focus is on our individual ability to strengthen our sense of moral leadership. The metaphor I've used in a different context about training people in general, which is like you can take the goldfish out and clean the goldfish, but if you put him back in the dirty water, you have a dirty goldfish pretty quickly. To what extent is the ability to have moral leadership in an organization determined by the structure and the culture and the system itself. Is it possible to be a moral leader when a system is itself flooded?

Sandra ([36:17](#)):

I think it's... so I'll answer two ways. It's always possible... to be a moral leader. I wouldn't want to give myself a pass, but say that just because I'm in a lousy organization, I somehow no longer have the responsibility to try to lead well in



ways that make sense to me. So I think that that's true, but the reason our book is actually written for describing what companies can do to be trusted by their stakeholders. So we are by definition, at the level of systems and processes.

MBS ([36:52](#)):

That's right. From the company you studied... and I feel that your book about trust and this conversation about moral leadership entwined. What have you learned about what organizations can do to increase the likelihood of trust and then reach the likelihood or moral leadership? And I know that's a... you've written a large book about this sort of vast question, but is there [crosstalk 00:37:24] Yeah, exactly. Is there a... perhaps a better question says what was most surprising about what an organization can do to shift the balance a little?

Sandra ([37:35](#)):

So I'm going to answer a slightly different question.

MBS ([37:39](#)):

Please.

Sandra ([37:39](#)):

Because I'd like to be helpful and I think that question would lead to a certain path, which I think is helpful. I want to be quite a bit more explicit. So for all the people that are listening, if you're in an organization and if you have authority to help manage decisions, the first thing you can do to enhance trust is to stop laying people off. So it's very easy to have these discussions and it's important to have them in the high level of what are the systems and processes and I'm a process person, a quality person, you know? Study quality by trade, but of all the practices that erode trust from the inside of an organization, it's how casually we treat the lives of the people who work with us.



Sandra ([38:30](#)):

And one of the surprising findings that it wasn't intuition, but how strongly reinforced it was is that trust really is built from the inside out. That it's very difficult, not impossible, but really difficult to be trusted by people outside your organization if the people inside the organization themselves don't feel trusted, and don't trust you in particular and the decisions that you make. So fear will take you to a certain level, but we know that we get different results, depending on whether or not people inside the organization feel taken care of, understood and that their interest matter and COVID has made that so clear to us all.

MBS ([39:17](#)):

Right, right.

Sandra ([39:17](#)):

That now all of a sudden, everyone's health and welfare is this is now an organizational responsibility of all organizations. And it's a way of saying we care about... not just saying we care about people, acting in ways that show that we either do or don't really take seriously other people's health and safety.

MBS ([39:38](#)):

Sandra, it's been a wonderful conversation with you, thank you. We barely touched on the new book and I hope what that's done is make every who's listening go, "What else is in this book?" Because it is a great book. As a final question, is there anything that needs to be said in this conversation that hasn't yet been said?"

Sandra ([40:02](#)):

So I will just end with a story that someone told me about the book. So this is someone who needed to get 50 copies of the book to an organization. She was at the post office and so she was asking the person, and she turned her back



and was doing some work. She turned around and he was reading the book. And he said, "This is so interesting." So she gave him one of the copies of the book.

MBS ([40:32](#)):

Oh, that's great.

Sandra ([40:34](#)):

And so we tried to take this topic, which can either be very academic or kind of silly, in a way honestly. And to embed in it stories of people and organizations, because we know that the stories are actually the things that people remember.

MBS ([40:52](#)):

Yeah.

Sandra ([40:52](#)):

So hopefully if we can capture that person's attention, we might be able to capture the intention of people on the call as well.

MBS ([41:04](#)):

So I have to tell you, I had this moment of being swept back 20 or 25 years ago when Sandra mentioned Filene's Bargain Basement. Man, I bought this amazing pale double crested pearl suit made from this beautiful fine Italian wore. It was so gorgeous that I actually never found time to wear it, and eventually I just gave it away, but I digress. Before this interview, I'm not sure that I'd really ever considered the courage of the vanquished, because when you're in a fight, you're holding on, you're holding onto pride and to hope. I mean, your hope and the hope of others. But if you're lucky, you come back to remember well what the important thing is, what the big win is really. What victory really is.



MBS ([41:54](#)):

And so often that's to fight another day. And by fight, I don't really mean fight. I mean to live another day, you know? I think that's what the emperor of Japan realized, which is the true goal is for the Japanese people to live and to flourish. That's his sacred duty. What's the action that serves that sacred duty? You know, I got this new book coming out, *How to Begin*, coming out in January. And in that is the idea of setting a worthy goal and this insight about the journey and the destination and where am I really striving for? Continues to be essential. And failure is just part of what it means to take on a worthy goal. I mean in some ways, that's how you know that you're actually doing the work. That you've taken on something thrilling and important and daunting.

MBS ([42:48](#)):

I love how Samuel Beckett said it, "Ever tried, ever failed, try again, fail again, fail better." And on that slightly down note or maybe it's not for you, it's not for me, I just want to say thank you for listening to the podcast. I appreciate you being a loyal listener. I appreciate it if you manage to give me a review on your favorite app and appreciate it if this episode or another episode has caught your attention and you've shared it with somebody, because word of mouth is definitely one of the ways this podcast will grow. You can find Sandra's books wherever you would buy books. I'd encourage you to use an independent book seller, if you have that choice. And you can find out more about Sandra and her work at Sandrasucher.com. S-A-N-D-R-A-S-U-C-H-E-R.com.

MBS ([43:40](#)):

And many of you have joined me at the Duke Humfrey's, which is a free private membership site. You can access it at MBS.work/podcast. And there's where you'll find just extra resources, some downloads, some favorite books, some interviews that I haven't released. Just basically additional bonus stuff. So if



you'd like to sign up there, we'd love to see you there. I think that's all. So I just wanted to say thank you. You're awesome and you're doing great.