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MBS ([00:01](#)):

Hey, it's MBS here and welcome to all the new listeners who are checking out this podcast, because it's the case study in my new book, *How to Begin*. So what's your relationship with ambition? Who do you want to be? Actually, scrap that, that question really doesn't work for me. How about what parts of you now do you want to grow and amplify and burnish, and what does success look like for you? How has that changed and evolved over the years? And now this is the kicker, what's your relationship with perfectionism? It's such a tricky dance for someone who wants to go somewhere and do something that matters and holding a standard. It has to be perfect. That can in fact, reduce you and shrink you and keep you playing small.



MBS ([00:59](#)):

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. And my guest today is Kate Berardo. She is the vice president of leadership development at Meta. That's the company formerly known as Facebook, which you've undoubtedly heard of.

MBS ([01:20](#)):

Now, when we were talking off mic, I heard Kate referred to herself as a lifelong learner. And I'm always curious to know when and where that seed gets planted. Was there a role model?

Kate ([01:33](#)):

I've been so fortunate in my life to be surrounded by people who are curious. My grandmother comes to mind though. I actually think we're all born designed to continually learn and sometimes life just chips away at that and takes away our curiosity or our capacity to learn. But it doesn't have to, I think we're just wired that way. But when you asked me that question, I do think of my grandmother. I remember being at a Bernardo Cioppino Sunday. We used to get together with my family, on the Italian side. And I remember her saying to me one day, she just said, "Kate, to be interesting, be interested." And it felt very true. Both to be interesting as a person, but to be interesting in life, be interested in life. And that fosters this curiosity that just makes you want to learn about anything and everything. And I think I've carried that with me in my life.

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

Now, in addition to being the VP of leadership at Meta, Kate's a mother, and her husband's a firefighter who routinely saves California from the terrible wildfires.



In other words, it's a full life. So how do you stop all that just gesturing at life? How do you stop that from extinguishing the spark?

Kate ([02:53](#)):

I am almost, I would say spiritually an engineer in the way that I think about things. So I have a lot of practices at the end of every day. I literally write down, I've created a leadership planner that asks me, what am I grateful for? What do I want to celebrate? And what have I learned? And so I find small mechanisms can be just helpful in bringing learning, or continuing to bring learning front and center for us.

MBS ([03:18](#)):

I hear about people with practices like that. And honestly, I just noticed my very, very patchy attempts to do the same. And I always wonder, do they survive things like, say, a global pandemic?

Kate ([03:34](#)):

I would say there was a period during COVID where I was just in a survival mode and I wasn't learning as much, or I certainly wasn't being reflective about the learning that was in front of me. I was more like, "Let's try and get through the day." And so I think there's that need too, just to notice when the quality of your learning is starting to diminish and then pivoting. But I go back to my grandmother, learning's all around us. It's just a choice of whether you notice, the choice of whether you choose to mine what's in front of you. So with the mindset, and then with some of those practices, it becomes a very virtuous flywheel that I appreciate.

MBS ([04:18](#)):

I love that this start with noticing. It's the same way that meditation starts with stopping and taking a single conscious breath. Curiosity and learning starts by stopping and noticing. And speaking of which as an aside, there's a great



newsletter I subscribe to called The Art of Noticing by a guy called Rob Walker. So you might be interested in that. So I ask Kate what book do you chose to read for us today?

Kate ([04:46](#)):

I chose Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott. And it is not a book about leadership. It's actually technically a book about writing, but as Anne's a brilliantly put, it's also a book about life in general. And I like looking to sources that aren't your, maybe traditional ones for lessons on leadership and living.

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

It is one of the great homes on how to write a book along with like Stephen Kings novel book called, I think How to Write. If you're recommending three books, those two are going to be two of three almost every time. How did you come across it? When did it come into your life?

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

That is a really good question. I feel like Anne has been part of my life for at least a decade. I say it like, I know her and we're friends. We're not, I wish we were. But I remember seeing her at a conference where she spoke and she spoke with such grounded truth and liberation. She wasn't afraid to say anything, which is part of her delight.

Kate ([05:53](#)):

And then I noticed I kept always coming back, one of my favorite quotes by Anne. And I don't know if it's from a book, or from a speech or where this brilliant little nugget came from. But she said, "The mind is like a dangerous neighborhood, you should never go there alone." And so I feel like that's quintessential Anne Lamott. Like, she'll just drop these truth nuggets that stick with you. And so somewhere in that process, I was like, "I need to learn more about this woman. And if she's done writings, I'll take the nuggets, but I'm ready



for the full meal.” And so Bird by Bird was the first book I think, from her that I purchased.

MBS ([06:31](#)):

Yeah. It is the gateway drug to Anne Lamott, I think Bird by Bird and-

Kate ([06:39](#)):

I don't usually push drugs, but this is a good gateway drug people.

MBS ([06:40](#)):

And she's good this spiritual background, she's got a background of addiction and a hard life. And somehow she combines that in a way that feels generous and authentic rather than sometimes these things can feel a bit manipulated, “Look at my struggles and I overcame them. And I'm wonderful. And you can be wonderful too.” But you never get that with her. And I love that about her.

Kate ([07:07](#)):

Yeah, it's a really good point. She doesn't take us on a typical hero's journey where everything's clean and turned at the end necessarily. She's still in the struggle in many ways, in a beautiful way. And invites us to be in that same place too.

MBS ([07:23](#)):

She reminds me a little bit in that way of Pema Chodron, as well, who has this kind of spiritual grounding, but also has a kind of messy life around that and tells it straight, “How did you pick the two pages? Because there's so much in that book that is great.”

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

It's ironic as we're talking. So the two pages that I chose come from a chapter called Perfectionism. And so here is we talk about how brilliant she is about not



trying to smooth everything and say, “Give us the Hollywood ending, but take us through,” or you see her living this work. And this idea of perfectionism, I think is certainly my work on a lot of regards. So this chapter, like so many of Anne spoke to me, but this particular one, maybe also connected to what we were talking about in this particular time, where life is challenging us to figure out who we are, how we want to show up, how messy life can be and still be good. This chapter, I think really resonated with me.

MBS ([08:21](#)):

Oh, wonderful. Well, it's been a while since I've read it. So I'm excited to hear it. So Kate, over to you, reading from Ann Lamott's classic book Bird by Bird.

Kate ([08:33](#)):

“Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life. And it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft. I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping stone, just right, you won't have to die. The truth is you will die anyway. And that a lot of people who aren't even looking at their feet are going to do a lot better than you, and have a lot more fun while they're doing it.

Kate ([09:02](#)):

Besides, perfectionism will ruin your writing, blocking inventiveness and playfulness and life forces. These are words we are allowed to use in California.

Kate ([09:10](#)):

Perfectionism means that you tried desperately not to leave so much mess to clean up, but clutter and mess show us that life is being lived. Clutter is wonderfully fertile ground. You can still discover new treasures under all those piles, clean things up, edit things out, fix things, get a grip. Tidiness suggests that



something is as good as it's going to get. Tidiness makes me think of held breath of suspended animation or writing needs to breathe and move.

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

When I was 21, I had my tonsils removed. I was one of those people who got strep throat every few minutes. And my doctor finally decided that I need to have my tonsils taken out. For the entire week afterwards, swallowing hurt so much that I could barely open my mouth for a straw. I had a prescription for painkillers though, and when they ran out, but the pain hadn't, I called the nurse and said that she would really need to send another prescription over and maybe a little mixed grill of drugs, because I was feeling somewhat anxious. But she wouldn't. I asked to speak to her supervisor. She told me her supervisor was at lunch and that I needed to buy some gum of all things and chew it vigorously. The thought of which made me clutch at my throat.

Kate ([10:16](#)):

She explained that when we have a wound in our body, the nearby muscles cramped around it to protect it from any more violation and from infection, and that I would need to use these muscles if I wanted them to relax again. So finally, my best friend Pammy went out and bought me some gum, and I began to chew it with great hostility and skepticism. The first bites caused a ripping sensation in the back of my throat, but within minutes, all the pain was gone permanently. I think that something similar happens with our psychic muscles. They cramp around our wounds, the pain from our childhood, the losses and disappointments of adulthood. The humiliation suffered in both to keep us from getting hurt in the same place, again, to keep foreign substances out. So those wounds never have chance to heal.



Kate ([11:02](#)):

Perfectionism is one way our muscles cramp. In some cases, we don't even know that the wounds and the cramping are there, but both limit us. They keep us moving and riding in tight worried ways."

MBS ([11:14](#)):

Nice. So good. Isn't it? Wow. What is it that rings true in that passage for you Kate?

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

So much. So as I'm reading it, and I stumble on the words, I'm like, "Michael, can we rewind? Can we do it? Can I get it right? Can I get it perfect?"

MBS ([11:32](#)):

I feel we're going to keep the stumble in just so we can write a lack of perfectionism. So thank you for making messages here.

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

Well, but I say that in Jess, but I think what I resonate here with is, what she invites in that is that exploration of what am I protecting by trying to be perfect with everything? And I think for many of us too, there's chapters, there's bright sides and shadow sides to almost all elements. So I do have a strong perfectionism saying, "streak, I'm sure it's contributed very powerfully to where I am now because I've hustled, I'm a go-getter. I wanted to get it right." And that has fueled a lot of my life. But I also think-

MBS ([12:20](#)):

I acknowledge that. I hear obviously.



Kate ([12:21](#)):

Yes. But I don't know if you feel the same, but there also becomes a point where you realize the strength that has propelled you is now starting to hold you back. And so this is where, when I hit on that chapter, I was like, "Ooh, Ooh, Kate, you got to sit with this one." And then figure out the wound and say, "Is there a wound still there? And what's my chewing gum? That's going to just release that and allow me to be perfect and be messy and imperfect?" Did I say perfect?

MBS ([12:53](#)):

You did say perfect.

Kate ([12:54](#)):

I would love to allow myself to be perfect. Just not going to happen.

MBS ([12:59](#)):

Exactly. It's like, I'm trying to hack the system where I can be messy yet perfect at the same time.

Kate ([13:02](#)):

Yes. But there is, isn't there a song that talks about all your perfect imperfections, it's-

MBS ([13:08](#)):

There is.

Kate ([13:09](#)):

Yes.

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

I'm not sure who that is. It sounds like Leonard Cohen perhaps, but maybe not.



Kate ([13:14](#)):

Yeah. I was going to go John Legend, but I don't know. I'm very bad at remembering names of songs and musicians. I'm sure to their regret.

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

If I can ask, what is your chewing gum around perfectionism? How do you learn to be kinder to yourself around that?

Kate ([13:36](#)):

It's a great question. I think when you hit on some of these things that are your life work and you're chipping away at it. So, I haven't mastered it. I think it'll be something I always work at. I wish there was an equivalent of a stick of chewing gum that would miraculously take it all away. But I've done a lot of work. So, I am trying to figure out what's underneath that.

Kate ([14:02](#)):

So for me, it was, I grew up in a family where there wasn't a lot of space for me to get things wrong, there was just a lot happening in my family. And so I felt this pressure. So it's like, you figure out the origin of it. And it's like, "Ah, okay, well, does that still hold true? Is everything going to fall?" Because what it can result in, is this for me, like felt pressure of, I've got to get it all right because the world's going to collapse. And that's not realistic.

Kate ([14:30](#)):

So, sometimes it's doing the work to understand what the driver is and then it's figuring out the mechanisms that help release you from it. So I have a mantra that I've used. I have sometimes nerves if I'm getting on stage or things like that and because I want to get it right. And I won't use the full excluded if so you don't have to beat me out during this recording.



Kate ([14:53](#)):

But I say to myself, I say, “Effort,” I’m like, “What’s the worst thing that’s going to happen here if you mess up.” And ironically, what that does is it, it frees me up. Because there is, that’s what she’s describing is this tightness that you feel when you’re trying to get it right, that actually makes you not be as good because people experience your tightness. And in life everybody wants that fluidity. Everybody wants that realness. It’s inviting to actually have a little bit of messiness.

MBS ([15:23](#)):

Right, right.

Kate ([15:23](#)):

Yeah. So I do a lot of work on it. The mantras help tell yourself effort if it works for you.

MBS ([15:31](#)):

Yeah. The team I work with here@[mbs.works](#), one of the phrases we have comes from a couple of writers, Rosa and Ben Zander, who wrote the Other Possibility some years ago. And his thing is when it goes off the rails, this is kind of the post thing, it’s screwing up, not the pre thing, which is the mantra, but the posting, you go, “How fascinating?” You throw your hands up in the air, and you go, “How fascinating?” And I love that because it’s a physical shift. Like you literally throw your hands up and that changes your presence. And that changes the way that you think.

MBS ([16:07](#)):

But it also puts you into a state of curiosity rather than despair and anxiety and self-loathing where failures can take you, you just go, “That’s fascinating. It doesn’t matter that much. This too will pass.” I wonder what I can learn from



that. And, Ansley, and I particularly spend a lot of time going, “How fascinating?” To each other. “Oh, that happened. Oh, how fascinating?” And we know what we’re doing with each other. But it is a comfort to each other as we stumble our way forward and try and do it as well as we can. And never quite as well as we hope.

Kate ([16:42](#)):

I absolutely love that. And I do remember. So it's nice to be reacquainted with that concept. Because it is an incredibly powerful one. And I think if you stop to step back, it's, you're offering to each other familiarity, but you're also offering safety. You're giving signals to each other of like, “It's okay.” Because when you say how fascinating it says, “Let's learn.” If you go into the like, [inaudible 00:17:07] now you're really going to have to bleep me out of this.” But then that triggers in yourself, this like protective, defensive tightening again. So I think it's a beautiful example kind of pulling the threads through our conversation of how to keep curiosity alive when things aren't going, “as well as you want them to.”

MBS ([17:29](#)):

Right. Kate, how do you scale that in a large company, like Meta the company formerly known as Facebook? Because what we're talking about is psychological safety and a chance to move forward with some messiness. And it's hard enough to do that for yourself, and do the work. To do it in the context of a big organization, which has OKRs, and KPIs and goals, and targets, and hierarchies, and bosses, and subordinates. I'm wondering what you've learned around creating the ability to stay curious and to learn and to stumble at scale?

Kate ([18:14](#)):

Hmm. A couple things. You can start by finding people who have that pension for curiosity, it sounds like, you mean, is it Ainsley? Did I get that right?



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

Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Kate ([18:27](#)):

Yeah. Like the three of us would delight. And then you can start to see when you have a small group of people all coming with that same mindset of, "We are going to be," I think the other thing to understand is like, if you actually want to innovate, if you want to do things differently, it won't be clean. It won't be error free because we're trying to figure out and push the envelope. So if you've got that mindset, then if you've got people who want to learn, learning agility is such a gift.

Kate ([18:56](#)):

And then I do think it's about continually embedding and reinforcing. So you gave a beautiful example of that, where with Ainsley, each of you invites in those critical moments. The how fascinating response. And that sets the climate. That sets the norm that allows learning. And that doesn't mean ignoring. It doesn't mean not taking accountability, but it does mean committing to being open to the learning and growing from it and getting better and better. And so, yes, recognizing the importance of it, hiring people who have that desire, deep desire to learn, and then in critical moments, making sure you're reinforcing it, I think is a lot of the work.

MBS ([19:39](#)):

I'm remembering that, when I'm talking to Ainsley over Zoom, she's got a little board behind her with three statements on it. One is, "How fascinating?" One is, "We've already won." Which is a one of our ways of trying to manage risk, which is like recognizing what success actually is. And that things that feel like small failures are actually in the context of a bigger victory that we feel like we've



already won in. And the third is Bird by Bird. So is a perfect connection back to your book.

Kate ([20:07](#)):

I love that.

MBS ([20:08](#)):

Yeah. Knowing that you've got a poncho and a passion for learning, what's your learning edge at the moment? Where are you exploring and growing?

Kate ([20:23](#)):

Right now, I am doing the work to try and figure out my next evolution of myself, which to quote Anne Lamott reference about probably sounds very Californian.

MBS ([20:37](#)):

Yeah, it does.

Kate ([20:40](#)):

But what I mean by that? Yeah, it sure does. I mean, what I mean by that is I mentioned COVID. I wouldn't say COVID. I'm using that as shorthand to describe the intensity of what has been the last few years. It took me offline in many ways, like in terms of being conscious and touch with myself. It challenged me, it prompted a lot of existential, which I think are quite common. Is, "One am I doing this right? Then what am I doing? And why am I doing it?" And it may also be my age, I'm in my early 40s. And so I don't know if all of those factors coming together, but my work right now is to, I sort of identify, but also let evolve my next version of myself.



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

And so that's a little bit what I'm just focused on is paying attention, noticing, thinking, envisioning what my next chapter and this isn't what my next chapter of doing, it's my next chapter of being exactly. So like, what does it look like when I've chipped away 60% at that perfectionism, and am I allowing the messy to be good, predominant force?" And what will that yield? How do I invite myself into that? So that's one edge I'm working for sure.

MBS ([22:05](#)):

That's a pretty big edge. I mean, Bob can win.

Kate ([22:07](#)):

Yeah, that's true. It feels like a cliff from trying to throw myself off of, in the best of ways. Yeah.

MBS ([22:13](#)):

Well, Bob Kegan and others model of adult development is, you move through stages, and then you get to the top of a stage and you have to see if you can get to the next stage. And that, I've been talking about it as moving through the stages you plus as you refine and polish and add, and it's additive to who you already are, but at a certain point you got to ask, "Well, what's me 2.0?" And that's when you, it's the difference between downloading an app and getting a new operating system. And in certain point, you're like, "What's my new operating system now?" And it feels that that's the question you're asking yourself, which is wonderful.

Kate ([22:53](#)):

Yeah. And how do you make that, like those apps that you get the massive overhauls, but then you get the 2.1, the 2.23 that fixes this bug and that bug and



so on and so forth and just make it a perpetual evolution too. That's the fun of it, for sure.

MBS ([23:12](#)):

Kate, it's been a wonderful conversation, and we're almost at the top of the hour. I know we've got a shorter time than we might have chosen. Is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Kate ([23:27](#)):

There's just, it probably doesn't need to be said, but I'll say it anyway, but I find life to be serendipitous in many ways. So, for those who are listening, they may not know, but you will know this, that I was originally going to read something different, which is Mary Oliver's devotions, which is also a wonderful book of poems.

Kate ([23:51](#)):

But I just take this as this example. So I pivoted last minute, I see so much connection, although I imagine you can connect with probably almost anything your guest bring to the table, but I found a degree of connection around that. And I want to offer that, I suppose, just to say, because in an interesting way, I shifted, I chose something a little messier because I hadn't given it as much thought. And goodness came from it in this conversation. So I think it just reinforces why sometimes to be spontaneous to choose something different, to not go with where your original thinking was and then see what that offers.

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

Kate saying, "Well, my next chapter is One of Being Not Doing," is pretty great, isn't it? But it's interesting to me, this progression is always presented as linear doing then being. David Brooks has a book called The Second Mountain and the two mountains career is the first one which is doing and then legacy, which is



being. And I have to think that those two things are entwined. I mean, in how to begin the emotional heart of the book is the phrase, “We unlock our greatness by working on the hard things, doing creates being creates doing.” It’s all very Frank Sinatra dooby, dooby, dooby, dooby, bad joke. I know.

MBS ([25:21](#)):

Look, if you enjoyed this conversation with me and Kate, let me suggest a couple of other interviews centered around curiosity and learning. First, The Law of The Rubber Band with Naftali Bryant. He works as a L&D person at Netflix. And then another episode called How to Practice Understanding with my friend Pamay Bassey, she’s the Chief Learning Officer of Kraft Heinz.

MBS ([25:44](#)):

Thank you for listening. I really appreciate it. You know, we’ve had a bit of a break for the last month or so, whilst I’ve been flapping around with the book launch. I’m pretty excited to be back actually and releasing episodes. I’m very grateful if you suggest this episode to someone because word of mouth is the best way for this podcast to grow. And I’m also grateful if you’ve taken the time to give the podcast a rating somewhere that makes the podcast easier to find. It’s a small thing, but it actually makes quite a big difference for us. See you next week. You’re awesome. And you’re doing great.