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

I've resisted therapy for almost all of my 54 years. Now I'm not sure whether it was from watching Woody Allen movies and going, "Ah, therapy is just something for neurotic Jewish New Yorkers," or whether, and this is probably true, whether it's more deeply rooted in a, "I'm all right, get your teeth, just muscle through it," way of seeing the world. The person who changed all of this for me was Dan Siegel and reading a book of his called *Mindsight*. And that was the moment when I realized that therapy could not only be about fixing what's broken, but also, and this is the resonant thing for me around integration, integrating consciousness and consciousness, body and mind, different types of memory, past and present, who I am and who I want to be.



MBS ([00:54](#)):

Welcome to 2 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. Today I'm speaking with Naomi Shragai. She is a psychotherapist who's been practicing for over 30 years. She's a freelance journalist for the Financial Times and that's where I discovered her, I read an article she wrote there. And she's the author of a book, *The Man Who Mistook His Job for His Life*, which, this is embarrassing to admit, is a contender for the title of my autobiography or maybe my biography. And that's why I needed to have this conversation with Naomi. That book of hers, *The Man Who Mistook His Job for His Life*, has its Genesis in the work she does.

Naomi ([01:43](#)):

I guess, how about 15 years ago really? I noticed something changing in my practice, and this is where it all began. I noticed people were coming to therapy and bringing much more work related issues. And that made me very curious and that made me focus a bit more on work related issues and what's happening? Why are we people bringing to therapy more problems from work?

MBS ([02:08](#)):

According to Naomi, her book was an effort to explore people's unconscious motivations behind their behavior and their decisions in the workplace.

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

Many people were coming to me knowing that they were doing things badly in the workplace. Perhaps they couldn't delegate work, or they were consumed by perfectionism. They got caught up in these work habits and they were given all the best advice in the world, but they couldn't change, they couldn't stop. So my interest is, why do people find it so difficult to change even when they recognize that their behavior or approach is harming themselves or harming



their business and they still can't stop. So my approach of course, is to dig more deeply and try to untangle the unconscious motivations behind their behavior. And oftentimes that's where the solutions lie.

MBS ([03:02](#)):

So I am always curious to know, what is it that motivates a person to dedicate their life to understanding why humans do what we do? Sometimes it's curiosity, that might be me, I'm pretty nosy. But for Naomi, it was more than that. It's more than curiosity. It felt like it answered a deep need.

Naomi ([03:22](#)):

My parents were both survivors of concentration camps in Europe, and much of my upbringing was influenced by that, which I'll discuss a bit more. So I was always interested and curious about making sense of people's perhaps their odd behavior, irrational behavior, difficult behavior. Because I had to make sense of this in my own family. And I think that's where it began.

MBS ([03:48](#)):

We'll talk more about Naomi's experiences growing up in just a bit and her story's gripping, but first I wanted to know what, as a psychotherapist, constitute success. I mean, how do you measure? How does she know her clients are making progress when they're dealing with deep trauma or daily work life?

Naomi ([04:10](#)):

Well, what I'm always looking for with people, I always want them to understand something that hasn't been understood.

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

Oh, that's nice.



Naomi ([04:14](#)):

So people come with their confusion of course. And you know, that's the best thing to bring to therapy. Your confusion, your worries, things don't make sense. So when I see people gain some clarity, can see things more clearly, that shows me that they've succeeded.

MBS ([04:36](#)):

And you know, you talk about the evolution of your practice and starting to see more people from bringing work issues into conversation with you, is your hypothesis that something's changed about work or is it just easier to talk about the crap that goes on at work with a therapist or what's your hypothesis for why your practice started to evolve and change like that?

Naomi ([05:02](#)):

That's a great question. Yeah, my hypothesis is people are bringing more issues about work because they're identifying a lot more with work. People are spending more time at work. They're is this, their mental, emotional, physical energy really is focused on work. So what I find interesting, and this is my half hypothesis, is that, because I talk of course about how people's earlier experiences are acted out in the workplace. And I say that, that now I see people are acting out their early lives more in the workplace, even more so than they are in their personal relationships, more so than their own families. So people all come to see me and say, "Well, things at home are fine, but I've got this thing going on with my colleagues is driving me crazy."

MBS ([05:52](#)):

Drama everywhere.



Naomi ([05:52](#)):

Dramas everywhere. So the dramas that are getting acted out are happening more at work than at home and that's what interests me. Because people perhaps, they're pretty prepared to say, "I've married my mother. She's just like my mother, he's just like my father. This is all happening all over again." But they don't consider how they might be reenacting their dramas in the workplace. And that's what I'm seeing more of. That's what I find interesting.

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

That is interesting. I'm just, this is such an interesting conversation for me. For a number of years, I've tried to use the Karpman Drama Triangle as a way of explaining dynamics to people. This is the victim, persecutor, rescuer, which is based on, as I understand it, transactional analysis, which is the adult parent child explanation of relationships. And I know I've always gone, the drama triangle is better and easier because it doesn't bring any of the kind of actual language of family relationships into the work thing because it felt a bit odd, bit personal. When you frame that conversation with people going, "You know the stuff from your past, the confusion from your past? It may be presenting itself in a dynamic that's showing up at work." My reaction might be, "Duh, come on. It's just work. It's not family stuff." I'm curious to know whether you get resistance around that or where the people are like, "Oh, light bulb movement."

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

Well keep in mind, if people are coming to see me, they know I'm a psychotherapist as well. That specializes in work related issues.

MBS ([07:27](#)):

Oh, there we go. Yeah.



Naomi ([07:30](#)):

So I let people know from the beginning that I'm going to probe a lot and I'm going to dig as deeply as we need to dig to solve the problem that they bring into my consulting room. So that's kind of a given, I let people know from the get go that we'll dig as deeply as we need to go to understand this. And you know, when people come to see me, they've got a serious problem.

MBS ([07:50](#)):

Right?

Naomi ([07:51](#)):

They've got a serious problem and I find that people are willing to go anywhere as long as we can solve this problem. And once start to make these connections, "I can't face situations at work because it resonates with some conflict I had with, that I saw my parents having when I was quite young and I can't face it and it triggers these feelings and..." Once they can start to make these connections and once they can start to see how this work works, I think they're always willing to go a bit deeply. And then they become quite curious, what else can we discover? What else can we find out? And of course because the results are, they find that they're work habits start to change, that relationships at work start to feel quite not so tense, or there might be some tension but there is not those overwhelming feelings that can paralyze one in the workplace. So they're feeling things less intensely. They find that they're relating much easier. In other words, they're starting to feel the benefits in not much time. So yeah, they're pretty open, pretty open.

MBS ([09:05](#)):

I love that. Is there a way you've come to help people nurture that curiosity? Because you know, curiosity is this odd thing which is, if you're not curious, it's hard to be curious and curiosity tends to build on curiosity. The more curious



you are, the more curious you get. I'm guessing that people arrive a little tender in that first conversation with you, a little kind of interested but also anchor us about going too far. How do you bolster their courage and their curiosity to keep exploring this? I can imagine me showing up going, "I see where you're pointing and I'm backing away from that because I'm mucky and murky and sticky and I don't want to go there at all."

Naomi ([09:54](#)):

Yeah. Well there are some tricks perhaps, I might try. Look, it's not an easy process and I let everyone know from the get go that this isn't a feel good process. I'm not in the business of 12 steps to make you happy at work sort of thing, or succeed. I'm here to help you face parts of yourself that are really uncomfortable. And they're interfering with your capacity to work effectively and interfering with your capacity to relate and cooperate and collaborate as well as you could. So, from the get go, I let people know that this is an uncomfortable process but we'll do it together. You're not going to be alone in it. And you are pretty much in safe hands with me, I think.

Naomi ([10:37](#)):

So once we establish something of a relationship and then I begin to point out that whatever they're doing could be harming them anyway, in other words, it's not serving them basically and it could be harming the business. So somewhere the motivation has to come from somewhere. You talk about courage and perhaps I might reframe that and say, "How are they going to dig up the motivation in order to go there?" And the motivation oftentimes come from facing what is actually happening and recognizing that it's pretty problematic really. And there's some harm coming from this. So once people faces a situation as it is, sometimes I'll think, "Okay, let's see where it comes."



MBS ([11:22](#)):

Okay, that's really helpful. It's kind of understanding that the stage is quo is obviously bearable because you're bearing it, but it may not be as acceptable as you are convincing yourself. You're like, "This needs to change."

Naomi ([11:36](#)):

Yeah. Or for some people, it may not be bearable and that's why they come from health. There's some situation-

MBS ([11:40](#)):

Despite the situation.

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

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MBS ([11:43](#)):

Yeah. I hear you. I mean, what book have you chosen for us?

Naomi ([11:48](#)):

All right. Okay. Well I had that I've chosen... I'll show, put it up so you can see it at least.

MBS ([11:54](#)):

Oh, yeah. Thank you. Okay.

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

The book I've chosen is called See Under: LOVE by David Grossman. He's an Israeli writer and this is a book, not just about the Holocaust, but what happened to the survivors and their families following the war. Now I read this book in the '90s and I was completely blown away because David Grossman was able to put into words my inexplicable experience as a child. I was born into



the world that Grossman describes in this book. It's a place in the 1950s where survivors of Nazi concentration camps came by the thousands. Now these were people who were fleeing from the horror of the Holocaust, but they brought their nightmares with them.

MBS ([12:47](#)):

Right.

Naomi ([12:48](#)):

And included in that wave of immigration, were my parents and this is where I was born. So this story, David Grossman's story, begins with Momik, he's a nine year old boy who was haunted by his parents suffering. But like all survivors at the time, they said very little, because what happened to them was just too horrible to talk about. So it can only be referred to as over there. Over there implying, of course, that it's not over. So his aunt Bella leaves a clue. She says to Momik, "There's a Nazi beast that lives over there. But in fact can reside and erupt in any living being." So this frightened Momik imagined the Nazi beast as a monster that control the land called Over There, where it tortured the people he loves and did things to them that hurt them forever. So Momik makes a plan. He captures animals in the street. He captures a cat, a pigeon, random animals. He puts them in cages and he decides he needs to find and face the Nazi beast inside them. So this was my world.

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

Wow.

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

Okay. My parents, especially my mother, was terribly damaged from the camps. And somehow I could see in her mind, she never quite left there. She was always, always scared. So like Momik, I was desperate to understand what happened. And I had this idea as a child, that if people knew what was



happening, if they understood, it never would've happened. So I made myself the one to understand and to explain, I tried to face what my parents couldn't talk about, but you know, of course now we know that people did know, and that didn't stop the Holocaust from happening. But as a child, that's what I believed.

MBS ([14:57](#)):

Well, that's what you hope.

Naomi ([14:57](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([14:57](#)):

Like it's just, you just don't know better, but actually maybe not so much. Yeah.

Naomi ([15:00](#)):

That's right. So you know, interesting. Quite late in life, my mother admitted to me that the real reason we left Israel and came to America is because someone had told her that the best psychiatrists were in America and that's why. So, she could feel she was going mad, of course, because of everything that happened. And I think she was frightened she couldn't look after her two young children, but she couldn't get the help she needed in Israel. So that's why we came to America on looking for the best psychiatrist to help my parents. So I'd say this is where my training as a psychotherapist probably began.

MBS ([15:39](#)):

I see that. Yeah. I can see that. This book must have been extraordinary. I mean, was it handed to? Did you just come across it accidentally or was it being kind of passed around your circle? Somebody went, "Naomi, you need this."



Naomi ([15:53](#)):

No, I can't remember in fact how it came into my hands. I mean, he's quite a well known writer today David Grossman. He has a book of prize winning novel. So, but at the time he wasn't known, this could have been his first novel and I think his best novel, I think. But when I read it, I was completely blown away. For a writer to get inside to my complicated little mind and see the world through my eyes was just extraordinary. But I'll tell you something else I found very interesting is that when I read the book, I thought he must be a child of survivors because how could anybody else know this? But he's not and so that really blows me away because it just goes to show because these days, people talk about how you have to have an experience in order to write about it.

Naomi ([16:44](#)):

It's not that he has the experience, what he has is an incredibly deep empathy. And I think that's what we need. The fact that he could write about my experience. And I think this whole story is about trying to put into words what is so difficult to put into words. And of course, as a psychotherapist, words are our tools. All we have is words. And what I try to help people to do is to find words for their experience. And that's tremendously, tremendously healing. Words can do so much. So that's why this book.

MBS ([17:20](#)):

Naomi, what an extraordinary and wonderful introduction. I mean, you've set it up so beautifully for us. So thank you for that. I'd love to hear the two pages that you've chosen for us.

Naomi ([17:30](#)):

Okay. I'll be delighted to read them. Momik had the beast to fight in various ways. He thought it from day to day because it was clearer than ever now that he must not fail. This was really serious, too many people and things were



involved and everything depended on him. And if the beast wouldn't take off its disguise, it was just being trickier than him. That's all. It had more combat experience than he had. But if it ever did decide to show itself, it would show itself to Momik and no one else because who else but Momik would challenge it like this? With so much daring hotspur and the devotion of soldiers who charge ahead and fling themselves on the barbed wire fence so the others can climb over them.

Naomi ([18:25](#)):

And by the end of winter, when the wind was having one as fling at wreaking beck messale, Momik reverses tactics, figuring that what he needed in order to fight the beast was the very thing that most scared it. The thing he'd been avoiding all along, which was to get to know more about the beast and its crimes, because otherwise, he'd just be wasting an energy no matter what he did, because the fact of the matter is he didn't have a clue about how to fight it. And that's the truth, which is how he got involved with the Holocaust and all that.

Naomi ([19:03](#)):

In total secrecy, Momik joined the public library. His parents wouldn't allow him to be a member of two libraries and he would take the number 18 bus to town some afternoons and read everything the library had on it. The library had a big shelf with a sign saying, Library of the Holocaust and Valor. And Momik started going through it book by book. He read incredibly fast because he was afraid that time was running out. And though he didn't understand most of it, he knew that someday he would. He read *Mysteries of Fate* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Let Me Stay The Night*, *Fife*, *The Dollhouse*, *The cigarette sellers of Three Crosses Square* and many other books. The children he met in the library were kind of like him.



Naomi ([19:53](#)):

Like he'd always felt deep inside all these years. They spoke Yiddish at home with their parents and didn't have to hide it. And they were also fighting the beast, which is the main thing. On the days, Momik didn't go to the library, he would spend hours in the gloomy cellar from a quarter to two in the afternoon till it got dark and even a few minutes after sometimes. He would sit on the cold floor in front of the animals with their shiny eyes and nasty noises and the way they tried to act as if they didn't care when he was around. But he knew it could happen any minute because obviously even the beast would crack up if you made it nervous enough by studying its crimes in a scientific way. And by sitting and staring at it so mardingly day after day, and it took all moments, efforts to sit there one minute more, two minutes more with his feet firmly planted to keep him from beating it out of there.

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

And he started making weird noises like wheezing or like a kitten squealing. He was beginning to remind himself of grandfather with all these noises, but he stayed put even after the light coming through the tiny slit in the window faded and it was pitch dark. And he was doing this because of what seemed to be a very important clue which he found tucked slightly away in *Mysteries of Fate*, where it said distinctly from other darkness sprung the Nazi beast. Day after day in the adult reading room at the public library, Momik sat on a high back chair with his feet dangling down. He told Harel the librarian. He was working on a special report for school about the Holocaust. And no one asked any question. He read history books with tiny print about what the Nazis did and stumbled over a lot of words and expressions that weren't used anymore.

Naomi ([21:58](#)):

He puzzled over some peculiar photographs. He couldn't figure out what was going on and what went where, but deep down inside, he began to sense that



these photographs might reveal the first part of the secret everyone had tried to keep from him. There were pictures of a mother and father forced to choose between two children, to choose which one would stay with them and which one would go away forever. And he tried to figure out how they would choose, according to what. And he saw a picture of a soldier forcing an old man to ride another old man like a horse. And he saw pictures of executions in ways he never knew existed. And he saw pictures of graves where a lot of dead people lay in the strangest positions on top of each other with somebody's foot stuck in somebody else's face and somebody's head on so crooked, Momik couldn't twist his head around like that.

Naomi ([22:57](#)):

And so little by little, Momik started to understand new things like how weak the human body is for instance, and how it can break in so many shapes and directions if you want to break it and how weak a thing, a family is, if you want to break it just like that, it happens and it's over. At 6:00 in the evening, Momik would leave the library, tired and quiet. On the bus home, he didn't see or hear anything. Almost every day at recess, as he would sneak out of school and detour around the street where the lottery booth is to Bella's Grocery Store. He would get there all out of breath, pull her by the hand to the corner and start firing questions at her in a whisper that was more like a roar. "What was the death train Bella? Why did they kill little children? What do people feel when they have to dig their own graves? Did Hitler have a mother? Did they really use the soap they made out of human beings? Where did they kill people nowadays?"

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

Wow, well that is a wonderful, extraordinary passage, really. I mean, just that presence of the darkness and the anxiety around that darkness. What's at the heart of it for you, Naomi.



Naomi ([24:28](#)):

Well, the heart of the story of course, is a child desperate to help his parents, desperate to stop the suffering. You know, a child... I think I felt like myself, wanted parents who were intact and didn't know how to help them. And I think it tells a story because you know, children are really very useful. And if their parents or traumatizes, say mine were, I don't know if traumatize is a word but children want to help them. And oftentimes when they help them, what they do is they try to take on their traumas. And as I try to do, try to face what my parents had face, but of course that never works for children, they only end up traumatizing themselves. And of course they can't take away their parents' pain, but they try to, as I tried to do, as this child tried to do. And that was it. That's at the heart of the story for me.

MBS ([25:24](#)):

Naomi, how do you navigate a relationship when the other person is traumatized and in pain and is struggling? That hunger that we feel, I feel, to jump in and fix it and solve it and help and be the rescuer and how futile that so often appears, it's kind of their journey, their life. How do you find the balance between supporting them without taking on the burden that this is your problem to fix?

Naomi ([26:02](#)):

Well, of course, we can't do that of course. But what we can do for people, is to be present for them and with them and know that they... so they know they don't need to face this alone. I think it's a tremendous thing to be able to do, to say to somebody is, "I'm here, I'm present and I can bury your story. I can bury your pain."



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

You know one of the lines that struck me from the reading wise, our hero Momik, he didn't have a clue how to fight it. In the work you do Naomi, I'm just wondering about that line. And as you think about people who arrive and feel helpless and hopeless, like they don't have a clue, where do you start? Where do you start to move from not having a clue to finding a clue to solve the thing that you're trying to solve?

Naomi ([27:00](#)):

Well, maybe if we can bring it back to what I'm doing now and what this book is about, which is what I'm really trying to do now is help people to solve their work related problems and what's happening to them in their present, of course. But of course, some of those solutions, some of those answers really lie in our unconscious. So of course, in our conversations, I'm attempting to help them dig in, into bring their, I feel like, unconscious experiences to conscious awareness where they can have some control over them. So, that happens in the course of our relationship and conversations by my connections between the past and the present, and perhaps offering some suggestions as to what might lie in the back of their mind or deeper in their unconscious, to try to bring these unconscious experiences to their awareness.

MBS ([28:00](#)):

You know, if we move that conversation to thinking about problems at work.

Naomi ([28:06](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([28:07](#)):

You know, and I was thinking about this before our conversation, which is, you've got these two forces. One is a person showing up in all their messy glory



with their bits that work and their bits that are a bit broken and dented. And then you've got the dynamic of work itself, which is its own context and its own way of working. Can you ever be fully human at work or is work itself a structure and a system that kind of, I'm not sure what the right word is, maybe amplifies what's broken or amplifies dysfunctional relationships. I'm struggling a bit to know what and to ask Naomi.

Naomi ([28:49](#)):

You might think you're struggling to know what to ask, but in fact, you've asked absolutely the right question, which is, can work bear for us to be human, because of course we all are. When we come to work, of course, we come with our ambitions, we come with our desires. We want to achieve, we want to be successful. We want to promote ourselves. We want all of these things, but we're also human and what we bring to work also is our sensitivities, sometimes our confusion, our strong feelings, our misperceptions, all of that comes to work with us. So I think that's the difficulty what I try to write about, of course. There's not much... Work doesn't have much tolerance for some of these internal conflicts that we struggle with. We might feel things very strongly, but work isn't necessarily the place to express strong feelings.

Naomi ([29:42](#)):

So what do we do with all those strong feelings? Where do they go in the workplace? Where do they land? What happens? Of course, we have them. Of course, they're there. Of course, they affect the working culture and working environment, but it's not spoken about. And there really isn't the space at work to understand. Our families are quite willing to put up with quite a lot of our moods and different sides of ourselves. I mean, they might not have the patience for it, but they're not going to reject us. They're just going to say, we're just a bit crazy, whatever it is that families say to us when they get fed up with us.



Naomi ([30:20](#)):

But work is lot less tolerant. So work doesn't really allow... Not only does work not allow for much expression of feelings, but there really isn't the space at work. You know, people at work want quick solutions. They're always asking me, "Okay, what can we do? How can we fix this? We need to know this now." And of course at the long side, this is a whole sort of internal lives that people are bringing to work, which is a bit more complex than that, where things don't shift so quickly. I was speaking to somebody yesterday, he absolutely cannot let go of work. Has to get his hands, he's a CEO, but he's got to get his into everything. So even though he knows that it's not his role really and he knows he's irritating his team and he knows he's feeling overwhelmed, he can't quite stop himself.

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

Now we need to take the time to understand what's going on inside him. And why does he feels he can't let go of control? So there's not an easy solution here, but I do think that work needs to acknowledge that everyone's coming in and they're bringing their messy lives in the workplace. People aren't leaving them at home or the work might wish it. And the other thing, by the way, about work, I say work doesn't like one or strong feelings. It doesn't want us to express that really. But it wants our good ones. It wants us to feel passionate where it wants us to be collaborative, to be empathetic, innovative-

MBS ([31:57](#)):

Enthusiastic.

Naomi ([31:58](#)):

... enthusiastic-

MBS ([31:58](#)):

All of that.



Naomi ([31:58](#)):

It's like work wants all of our good feelings, but doesn't want our bad ones. Well, that's not possible. That's not humanly possible. If we have feelings, they come with the good and the bad and work has to acknowledge that bad feelings exist. And the other thing is there's a whole culture where people shouldn't be upset or they should be made not to feel bad but bad things happen. We can't deny them, I think,

MBS ([32:19](#)):

Well, Naomi, if I'm trying to make my small part of work, a little more human, if I'm a manager or a leader or just a contributor, but that has a sphere of influence of some sort, are there specific things that you think I could do that could contribute to people feeling more human at work?

Naomi ([32:42](#)):

Well, I think there are a few things that leaders can do to help people feel more human. One of course, a leader themselves can be more human.

MBS ([32:52](#)):

Right. Physician heal thyself. Yeah.

Naomi ([32:54](#)):

Exactly. Exactly. So they can show a little vulnerability. They don't have show a lot, but they can show a little vulnerability. They can show that they can make mistakes and it's not the end of the world. So these are things of course, that leaders can do. And leaders can also show that they have the courage to face situations at work. And I think this is one of the most important things. There's so many leaders, not just leaders, so many people who are so fearful of conflict, that there's so many situations in the workplace that aren't dealt with because people don't want to deal with things that are uncomfortable or terrifying. So if



you're the sort of leader that avoids uncomfortable situation because they're difficult to deal with, first of all, you're going to lose respect very quickly. People are going to see that you're somebody who doesn't have the courage to deal with stuff. But you're also creating a culture where people think, "God, the things aren't really safe because if things go wrong, there's nobody in charge to deal with them."

MBS ([33:51](#)):

Right, It's ironic that enabling conflict creates safety often rather than thinking, trying to avoid it because this is the safer thing to do often has a counterintuitive impact, which has becomes less safe for people. So Naomi, I'm going to call myself an overachiever, quite driven, quite ambitious, quite kind of wrapped up in work. And the sense of meaning I get from my work. In some ways, we've been talking a little bit about people who are struggling, this is where I'm confused is what's hard, but I'm sure you've talked to people who are, maybe like your CEO, achievers driven, focused, identifying quite a lot with who they are through their work. Where do you start to have that conversation?

Naomi ([34:50](#)):

Well, with the overachiever themselves?

MBS ([34:54](#)):

Yeah.

Naomi ([34:55](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([34:56](#)):

Like if I'm in a conversation with you, where do you start?



Naomi ([35:00](#)):

Okay, well, keep in mind that if I'm having a conversation with than overachiever, they're coming to me because things have gone badly wrong. So I think for overachiever, one of the things to say is, you know these are people that found I think usually early on in their lives, by the way that achieving or winning, solve some psychological problem for them. Okay? It either of got them the parents' attention maybe, protected them from bullying perhaps. Whatever it might have been, winning solved some psychological problem. So something got fixed in their mind. I mean, I'm talking about really quite extreme overachievers. Usually the roots come early in life. So from an early age, I think, they've concluded that the only solution to everything is winning.

MBS ([35:52](#)):

Yeah.

Naomi ([35:53](#)):

So you know they put that above everything else, but then there are parts of themselves, of course, that become neglected in order to achieve, in order to win. You know, we've seen these overachievers. How do they work 18 hour days, 15, 16, 17, some of them 18 hour days. Why they're quite detached from their bodies. They've gotten... they're so obsessed about achieving that they've touch with their normal body cues for sleep, for food, for rest. You know, they don't know something's got wrong until they crash. They either burn out or they get ill or something quite serious happens.

Naomi ([36:30](#)):

I find that these people are... they find it really difficult to change because winning means everything. And if that's your only solution... and the other thing about achieving is like overachiever, the sad thing is that they seem to not be able to hold onto their wins. So even though they achieve something, as soon



as they've achieved, it's gone. And so they have to achieve the next thing and it has to be higher. So they're always raising the bar and whatever they have achieved. It's not as if they've accumulated all these successes in order to feel better about themselves. They still don't feel good about themselves. So it's quite a difficult psychological-

MBS ([37:17](#)):

Conundrum to entangle.

Naomi ([37:17](#)):

... thing to... yeah, very, very, very complicated. Very complicated.

MBS ([37:22](#)):

Naomi, it feels like I could talk to you for a long time about work, about what we bring to work about the role of work in shaping us as humans and the role of us in shaping work to be more human centered. But maybe as a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Naomi ([37:44](#)):

Well, I think even though what we've talked about today and what I talk about in my work, are encouraging people to examine themselves more deeply. They're unconscious, their inner lives, their inner worlds. And all of it, as you mentioned earlier, might sound a bit scary for some people. What I'd like to say is the intention of all of this is to bring a bit more humanity to work to help people. I hope people will feel more compassionate, let's say, with their colleagues and even their bosses to recognize, even though your boss may seem like a monster or your colleagues might seem completely irrational, they're also human beings. They also bring all this sort of internal trouble to work with them as well. So I hope people be more compassionate at work and more compassionate with themselves. Let yourself off the hook as well. And recognize that you are trying



to... if you like juggle the demands of the workplace with the tensions of your inner workings, and that's not easy for anyone.

MBS ([38:56](#)):

So the latest version of COVID seems to be dying down or passing or maybe we're just getting more used to it. So I'm experimenting at the moment. And most Wednesdays, I have dinner with two other people, they're different every time. And these are people I know a little bit, they're part of my circle, but they're not kind of the inner a circle, not part of my kind of core group of friends. And it's a chance to sit down, kind of reconnect with these people, introduce one brilliant person to another brilliant person. And of course, to have a good cocktail as well. Now I kind of lightly facilitate these gatherings. I ask people to introduce themselves by share two essential things with us, which is also juicy because when you say two essential things, people have to think hard about what that actually means to them.

MBS ([39:47](#)):

But after they've introduced ourselves or we've all introduced ourselves, I'm ask them to pick from a selection of questions that I've written out. There are five questions. So each per and picked one of the questions there. The questions change each week depending on what I'm in the mood for. And it's really interesting to understand what questions people pick. And then it's really interesting to try and answer them. We all answer every question. So last night, which is one of my gatherings, the question was, what are you pretending you don't know? What are you pretending you don't know? I mean, isn't that great? It's so slippery. It's like, what are you in denial about? But it's somehow less easy to resist? Well Naomi In our conversation, you remember this, said to me, people come to her when have started to go badly wrong and things aren't there with me yet, I wouldn't say things are going badly wrong. But here's a connection, I am definitely pretending that I am not as dependent on work for meaning in my life than I really am.



MBS ([40:57](#)):

And this conversation with Naomi has really got me thinking about, where does that drive come from? What keeps pushing me to work hard, create more, reach out, have more impact? Really to connect back to the start of this is, making me think of Dan Siegel and his work and how I might integrate working and living in a new and different way. If you've enjoyed the conversation with Naomi and me, I've got a couple of other interviews from the 2 Pages Series to suggest. Tope Folarin, a poet, writer and also an executive director. So doing good in the world, both in terms of his writing and his activism. His conversation is called Living in Two Worlds. He reads from a Icelandic poet, which is kind of marvelous. And then Jessica Abel is a second one I'd like to suggest. My interview with her is called How To Survive Being Creative. She is a creative and she teaches people what it takes to do work and stay creative and feel like you are nourished by your work, not kind of ground down by it. So I think she'll enjoy that conversation as well.

MBS ([42:07](#)):

For more on Naomi, you want to go to her website, which is just her name, so Naomishragai. I'll spell it for because both of those words are slightly tricky. Naomi, N-A-O-M-I and Shragai, S-H-R-A-G-A-I.com. Naomishragai.com. Thank you for listening. Thank you for a review on whatever your podcast platform is. That means a lot. It's how people figure out what podcast cast to listen to and gives us a little bit of credibility, stars, written words, all good. If you want a little bit more, we do have the Duke Humfrey's Membership. It's totally free, that's where you can access transcripts of all the conversations. What are some additional interviews that we won't be releasing through the mainstream podcast? I believe that's all I need to tell you other than you're awesome. You're doing great.