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

One of my favorite words is penumbra. It's etymology is the combination of the Latin words for almost and shadow, so paene and umbra. So the word means the edge of the shadow, not quite light, not quite dark. And another favorite word, both because of how it sounds, and how it rolls off the tongue, and because of its related meaning is liminal. On the threshold, not quite here, not quite there. Now, some of my favorite people in the world are those who seek out those aspects and those spaces of ambiguity, and uncertainty, and fluidity.

MBS ([00:42](#)):

People who keep willing to dissolve a sense of who they are right now, so they can see and notice what emerges next. Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages of a favorite book; a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. And welcome to all



of you who are coming back. This is kicking off a new season for us after a brief break, where we relied on episodes from the vaults, whilst I got my new book out into the world, *How to Begin*. Thanks to everybody who supported that book. I do appreciate that.

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

I met Steven D'Souza at the House of Beautiful Business Conference in Lisbon. And immediately, and I hope this doesn't sound too needy, I wanted to be his friend. Steven has trained as a priest, written a wonderful trilogy of books about not knowing, not doing, and not being. He's been the vice president for an investment bank, and also head of learning and development for a Fortune 500 company, and one that sells tobacco. That, all of which, when you add it up, seems to make him more of an enigma, rather than less.

Steven ([01:54](#)):

Every day, when I think I know who I am, I am just left with a question mark, and it's a genuine question mark, because the older I get, the less I know about who I am. And the more I'm left with actually, I don't have a clue and there's a genuine not knowing. And as you know, it's something I've written about this idea of not knowing.

MBS ([02:20](#)):

Steven's referring to the book he co-authored, *Not Knowing: The Art of Turning Uncertainty into Possibility*. Now, listen to his interesting take on his own uncertainty.

Steven ([02:32](#)):

I discover more and more that I'm more mystery to myself, and maybe I'm not so much a mystery to others. I think others see us more clearly than we do or perceive ourselves. I remember one of my teachers at The Kennedy School



says, "If you want to know why somebody does what they do, they're the last person to ask. Ask somebody else."

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

Now, Steven might not have asked me, but look, I'm going to tell you my best guess at how I see him, who I think he is. I think he is both teacher-student and those two meld together. I think he's also, I'm going to say, another merged world seeker philosopher. And I admit, these are both all fairly amorphous terms, but the truth is we tend to be a bit fluid in our identities. I wanted to ask Steven what he appreciates about his own fluidity in who he is right now in this moment.

Steven ([03:28](#)):

So I appreciate that I have developed the courage to let go. And I think part of, as you say, fluidity is endings and also risk. It can be easy to stay comfortable, to stay in the situation we're in. And particularly in pandemic times, I think, where insecurity is higher.

MBS ([03:55](#)):

Yeah.

Steven ([03:56](#)):

And then to be able to keep on asking ourselves, "Is this the right thing for me right now?" And the courage to let go of the old before the new can come in. So at different times in my career, I'm sure in yours, Michael, you have to say goodbye to the old in order for the new to be born.

MBS ([04:12](#)):

Right.

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



So I'm appreciating that ability to, even though something is comfortable, to recognize the discomfort in it enough that I can let go of the old and make space for the new, even when the new is not known yet, and yet it hasn't come. I think Otto Scharmer talks about, he says there's this question, "What is wanting to be born? What's dying now? What's wanting to be born?"

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

And often, I think I appreciate the fact, I can say, recognize something is dying or ending. And not yet knowing what wants to be born, but having let's say maybe it's a faith or a confidence that something will emerge. I think it's that at the moment.

MBS ([04:58](#)):

Will you tell me how you think about risk? It's one of the words you use and it's a big one. It's a powerful one.

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

Yeah, I tend not to be some people when they're at the edge. For example, in the book, Not Knowing, I used the metaphor, Finisterre, which was a coastal town in Spain and people used to do an ancient pilgrimage. They used to walk from France or from different routes to Santiago de Compostela. It was the burial place of Saint James or the resting place of Saint James. And then they used to walk 90 kilometers more to reach this coastal town of Finisterre. And in Latin it means the end of the earth. And they literally thought in the medieval times, that was the end of the earth. Sailors would go off and they wouldn't return.

Steven ([05:45](#)):

They used to draw dragons or lions on the maps and it's a terrifying place. And for me, that's a place of groundlessness. And when I'm making the decision, I can feel that sense of groundlessness. And so risk comes in, in terms of how do



we make our choices then? And often, I and others, we have default reactions when we're at that edge, or we feel this groundlessness. We can feel it in our bellies, it's quite visceral, or in our breathing, our chest becomes tight. And my reaction to risk is I'm not somebody who turns to analysis. I do a little bit, but I don't get stuck in paralysis by analysis. But what I tune into is more my feeling, more in my intuition or my heart, and more my senses. And maybe it's one source of data.

MBS ([06:38](#)):

Yeah.

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

So I go inward, and then I tend to want to go outward, so I have a lot of conversations with people and I see what's resonating here. And that's the way I approach risk in my particular life. I think there's a basic sense of there're different reactions. One of the reactions is catastrophic thinking. For example, "If I take this decision, then I'll never work again." Or, "If I leave this job or I take on that job, I won't be successful."

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

I'm dead in the gutter as an alcoholic within about the next three weeks. Yeah.

Steven ([07:11](#)):

And to be truly honest with you, I do go there so I might. And I think many of us, we're programmed to think the worst. There's a book called Only the Paranoid Survive and in a way, because they're prepared for the worst, they can meet it. It's often never as bad as we think, but the cost is that emotionally, we may be really suffering in our imagination or in our bodies for a future that will never happen. So I tend to do a little bit of that, but then have this basic trust as well underlying that will be okay.



Steven ([07:46](#)):

And it's always that tension between the two. My own balance is do my work and then trust, and having that combination of both. And I think as Kierkegaard talked about this leap of faith, having this recognizing that I'll never know, but do I have enough basic trust to take the next step? And not necessarily knowing all the steps in front, but just is this the right next step?

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

Next step.

Steven ([08:14](#)):

As I say this to you, I find this is a very neat narrative. The actual process is a lot more messy, Michael.

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

Right.

Steven ([08:22](#)):

And a lot less herded, so I'd say it's more like a spiral rather and more like a rollercoaster than a neat diagram that is progressive.

MBS ([08:38](#)):

It's interesting. As I've been reading your latest book, Not Being, I've been reading Oliver Burman's latest book, Four Thousand Weeks, which just says you got limited time on earth. How are you going to rise above hacking your life and productivity and make the most of the time that you have?

MBS ([08:58](#)):

And actually, I've just finished chapter where he talks a little bit about the over awareness, the over unguardness about the future that you can have. And



talking about one of the gurus who said, "Look, here's the secret to my life. I don't mind what happens."

Steven ([09:15](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([09:18](#)):

I was like I wrote it down this morning because I'm entangled in a bit of my book's coming out in six weeks or something.

Steven ([09:24](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([09:25](#)):

And I'm a little bit I do care what happens.

Steven ([09:31](#)):

Okay.

MBS ([09:31](#)):

I'm like, "You know what, Michael? Just don't care what happens." And everything gets a lot easier, a lot lighter around that.

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

I like that in a sense of equanimity, I guess there's a sense of care, but at the same time, carelessness without being careless.

MBS ([09:43](#)):

Right.



Steven ([09:43](#)):

So this it frees up something there. I think the best compliment I had, which at the time, I took as a criticism, was by a professor. He said, "Steven, you seem to squander time." I thought about that because I've never been somebody who'd be the productive, measuring my time in increments or try to have a time planner.

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

And there's something about time that, as you say, is some people can view it as a scarce resource. But my relationship to time has never been that. It's never been extract the most juice out of the finite time when there's some sense of being in time and not having to necessarily manage as a resource.

MBS ([10:25](#)):

Yeah.

Steven ([10:25](#)):

And the paradox of that is I forget just how do you accomplish so much when you're not ensuring time is a resource? And I don't have an answer for that. But part of it might be because I squander time, although I'm not trying to manage it as a resource, and I'm not trying to think of it as an act that I need to manage.

MBS ([10:48](#)):

You're making me remember that one of the crossroads I came to was in law school. And in the summer, I did a summer internship in a law firm. And literally, they asked you to mark down how you spent your time every six minutes. Take an hour and divide it into 10.

Steven ([11:05](#)):

Okay.



MBS ([11:05](#)):

I was like, "Wow, this is as dehumanizing an experience as I can imagine for myself. Not least because I'm not doing a whole lot, I'm like an intern." It's like you can't really write dicking around for three hours, but that would've been the most accurate description of what was going on.

Steven ([11:23](#)):

Yeah. And we know from our work, that's often the creative space that allows productivity to happen. So it's, as you say, those spaces where we might go dicking about, or we're not being "productive," that's actually the more fertile ground that things have just stated, things are being born. So it's often not valued and only we see one more, let's say, the positive action side, rather than the negative capability that allows that to happen.

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

I think generically that's true. I can in no way claim that my dicking around in my law firm was at all productive. It was purely wasting time, but that's okay. The law system and I are both better off with me not having become a lawyer. We all win. Hey, Steven, tell me about this book you've chosen for us.

Steven ([12:15](#)):

The book I've chosen, Michael, is a book called The Self-Delusion, for those who are watching. Maybe if it's [crosstalk 00:12:19]-

MBS ([12:19](#)):

Yeah. It's a beautiful color.

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

An author called Tom Oliver. He's an ecologist at the University of Redding, and prominent ecologist and a systems' thinker. And what I liked about him, he's



tried to make science accessible, and he writes in a more beautiful and poetic level. This book is really around the surprising science of how we are connected and why that matters. That's the title of the book and that's the one I've selected.

MBS ([12:52](#)):

Lovely. How did you come across that?

Steven ([12:56](#)):

I believe I just saw that online when I was researching for a book I called Not Being. I thought, "Oh my God, he's written a book that I wish I could have written. I wish I could have written from such a good, scientific grounding." And whereas, mine is more philosophical and storytelling, his is really like grounded in the data. And I thought, "Oh my, so I can't compare to him," but there's something I could appreciate about him. And so what I did is I wrote to him. He joyfully responded, and was there at the book launch for Not Being.

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

It's something I admire about how can you take what people consider transpersonal, from the imminent, from what we everyday life, and still convey those same without resorting to a soritical, without resorting to other language? And he does that skillfully and beautifully. And it fueled me with wonder, and I think that's one of his gifts.

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

Yeah. Isn't it beautiful when you come across a book like that? There are some books I read, I'm going, "I'm glad I didn't write that book." And there are some books I read where I go, "I probably could have written that book if I thought about it." And there're some books I read where I'm like, "I could never have written this book. And I'm so grateful that this person did because it is something."



Steven ([14:23](#)):

Yes, it's definitely the latter, and for when I came across this book.

MBS ([14:28](#)):

That's lovely. And how did you come to choose the two pages?

Steven ([14:32](#)):

So it was difficult. I don't know if they're the right two pages, but they are just pages that got me to think differently. But to be fair, I think, Michael, I've underlined nearly every page in this book.

MBS ([14:48](#)):

Wonderful.

Steven ([14:48](#)):

I'm hoping that the listeners and the viewers just choose to dip into it if it interests them. But there's far more than what I'll be conveying in these two pages that hopefully they can find some something to address them.

MBS ([15:04](#)):

Let me make a formal introduction. So Steven D'Souza, man of many talents, but also author of his most recent book, *Not Being*, reading *The Self-Delusion* by Tom Oliver. Steven, over to you.

Steven ([15:15](#)):

Findings across a wide range of scientific disciplines, increased support, the idea that the central discreet eye we obsessively nurture, protect and talk to throughout our lives is just an illusion. Our body is a key part of our identity, yet most of the estimated 37 trillion cells that make up these bodies have but a short lifespan of days to weeks. There is a near continual turnover of material.



New molecules continually flow through us derived from atoms, from the furthest reaches of the universe, and which of have also made up the bodies of countless other plants and animals before us. And since our bodies are essentially made anew every few weeks, the material in them alone is clearly insufficient to explain the persistent thread of an identity.

Steven ([16:21](#)):

Furthermore, most of the cells in our body are not even human. We contain more bacterial cells than human cells. Moreover, some of these have the ability to influence our moods and to manipulate our behaviors, further detracting from our supposed autonomy. If not the materials in our body, what about the DNA instructions that code for its design? Perhaps these comprise our unique identity. Just like the molecules that make up our bodies, our genetic code flows so fluently through and between the branches of the tree of life, that it's more like one great networked cloud computer program.

Steven ([17:00](#)):

Our bodies harbor a small subset of that code, cut and pasted into a transient entity. If our DNA code does not compromise our unique identity, what about our minds? Surely, these are our own. Advances in psychology and neuroscience suggest that we have no unchanging independent identity. Instead, we are a bundle of beliefs and self-reflections in constant flux. Our identity is contingent on the time of day, where we are, and who we are with. Our perceptions are filtered by our consciousness, which is itself a product of those perceptions. And so our self-identity is a continually evolving product of the environment we are immersed in. This environment is hugely determined by other humans.

Steven ([17:54](#)):

Indeed, as humans, we are ground architects of our environment. We have achieved this by being the most mutualistic species on earth. Try considering a



simple manmade object that's closed to you right now. It's creation was contingent on the cooperative actions of hundreds, if not thousands of humans across continents, and over hundreds of years. Beyond the creation of these objects, our combined human endeavor contains the spoken and written cultures that so fluently cross the blood-brain barrier into our minds, and unavoidably determine the way we think. To consider ourselves to be sovereign individuals is a deeply misplaced belief.

Steven ([18:37](#)):

Unfortunately, we often struggle to comprehend our interconnectedness to others and the world around us. We struggle to see the bigger picture of ourself, because we suffer from a former blindness that we might loosely call an individualist perspective, or more critically a self-delusion when we recognize its harmful aspects. We are like a thread in a tapestry that is unaware of the majesty of the whole interconnected piece.

MBS ([19:12](#)):

A wonderful metaphor to finish on. Steven, where's the freedom for you in this realization?

Steven ([19:22](#)):

Yeah. It's a good question, Michael. I think it's a freedom from this sense of that burden that comes if we think of ourselves as separate individuals, we always need to protect, we always need to defend, we always need to grow. I think that's almost the cost of this excessive individualism. The freedom of knowing about this deep connection is this almost release from this having to be almost special, having to defend myself, having to progress, and I can breathe. And it's like okay, there's this relationship. There's this interdependence. It's also freedom from this whole drive of autonomy.



Steven ([20:05](#)):

This whole thing about I'm driving, or I am the captain of my ship, the master of my destiny, to quote the poem Mandela recited. But it's almost like I'm not the captain of my ship. I am not the captain of my destiny, but it doesn't mean I'm just almost like weightless or rudderless. It means that there's a basic trust and a basic understanding that I'm intimately connected, not just with other human beings, but also with the natural world and it includes both. So it's a move away from this ego and separateness to more like this ecosense of identity, as well as their social, human connections as well.

Steven ([20:52](#)):

And to be honest, I don't really know that's something I fully am aiming to. I'm aiming to fully understand, to explore. I'm more the Explorer, Michael, rather than the sage. But it's more how do we live from that perspective? That is my question. How do we begin to develop lives that take into account our deep interdependence and our deep interrelationality? And that's the question to live with, and the question I'm trying to understand and live more.

MBS ([21:32](#)):

It reminds me of the paradox of realizing that in no way are we the heart of the universe. When you look at the universe, and you just look at the galaxies, and it's actually overwhelming in terms of how insignificant we are. We're this small planet on the outer arm of a minor galaxy and we don't even know.

Steven ([21:55](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([21:56](#)):

But it's also true that we are also the central of the galaxy because there is a central consciousness that allows us to see the galaxy around us. I feel the same



when I hear you read. And I'm like it's true that scientifically, it takes like less than two paragraphs to go you're delusional around the sense of self, not at a DNA level, not at a cellular level, not at an intellectual level. Can you claim to be independent, an individual, and yet and yet we get our annual performance review, which is how you're doing?

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

Yes, you're right. I think it's not this either/or, but this both/and. I think what we're moving from is yes, you're right in human resources or in performance management. The world of work, people used to be judged as individuals only, and then people moved towards, "Okay, you are also part of a team." How was the team, how did the team do beyond yourself? And then how did the organization do? What I think we're moving towards is much more less an individualistic approach, and more a systemic approach, including the individual but also thinking more broader.

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

So for example, in the world of resilience, and mental health and wellbeing, we've seen a particular emphasis on and it is been accentuated because of COVID and the pandemic. Before people only used to focus on how do we increase the individual's resilience or the individual's mental health? And now, we recognize it's insufficient. It's like trying to say why is the fish sick if the water's dirty? What is the team that individual's in, what is the leader's role in leading the organization? So looking at all three levels and having much more of a broader approach than the individual alone.

Steven ([23:55](#)):

So I think what time is arguing is that the sense of individual self and agency is important. We need to operate. I think there is an illness, a neurological illness where people don't have a discrete sense of self and it's impossible to operate. So I think we need that sense of ego and we need a healthy ego. And at the



same time, how do we recognize that we're interdependent and linked with each other? I think that's holding both, I think, is our challenge. I think we've overemphasized, which we can see with isolation, with our relationship to environment, and nature and others, how we've overemphasized one end of the spectrum really. I think it's core to rebalance it to hold both.

MBS ([24:45](#)):

One of the stories that I went, "Oh, me too," in Not Being, your latest book, was a recognition around an overcommitment to personal development. I have a story that maybe it's similar to you. I think one of your stories it was like. Look, I took my first personal development course in my first year at university, and it was about paint your picture of your life and stuff. I was like, "Oh, this is interesting."

MBS ([25:16](#)):

It was actually a course on how to be more spontaneous, which basically I had the mickey taken out of me for about the next two years when I mentioned to my friends that I'd done a course in how to be more spontaneous. They're like, "Okay, a course on how to be..." But I'm curious to know, as you move into a stage of your life where, and I'm projecting here, but I'm going to say where I think of you as potentially, in an elder role, rather than in a learner role. But I'm curious to know where you find growth now?

Steven ([25:56](#)):

Yeah. I really felt that, as you said, and we shared this passion for personal development and continually learning, growing, which I think is valuable. But if I reflect on what drove me to that, I can see it was my own insecurities. It was my own almost like a way to feel more confident, to feel more capable and to have more maybe autonomy and mastery where I might have felt I lacked it in my own life. I don't dismiss that. It was very valuable and it helped me grow. But



now, I think where I find more the growth is I say less in the prose and more in the poetry. Less in the classroom and more in the nature.

Steven ([26:48](#)):

This sense of growth and learning, coming not necessarily directly, but obliquely in through engagement with life, and rather than through personal development courses or ways to do this. And that's the challenge. How do you learn from a good Russian fiction book about those in life, rather than necessarily a course in how to understand complexity? And now of course, there's room for both. I think for me now, it's how do I give enough attention to the other side? I think my stretch point is probably working in a more embodied way, so there's a good chapter about working with the hands, for example.

Steven ([27:31](#)):

And it talks about Matthew Crawford who was a lawyer, I think, in Chicago and gave [crosstalk 00:27:37]-

MBS ([27:37](#)):

The Soulcraft book?

Steven ([27:38](#)):

Yeah. And became a motorcycle mechanic. It sounds like Zen and the Art of Motorcycle with the famous book of the '60s by Robert Pirsig. But I love that one of the lines says, "The opposite of the narcissist is the repairman, who can listen to the broken washing machine, pay attention and really be available and present." I love that and there's some sense of still personal development, still veering more to the narcissistic. Not necessarily consciously, but this idea that I can still make myself better. I can still develop my personal brand. I can still... But there's this almost like this humility that's required of us when we're embodied, and when we're working with our hands.



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

And when we're surrendering and in contact with something that we're not trying to master or control, but we're working with understanding. And almost it's a different quality in that relationship. I think we find that out more in the arts. You find that in those simple things like gardening, for example, tending the soil. I think these are really the areas of growth that I personally think where I'll develop in the future, or at least hope to develop in the future.

MBS ([29:04](#)):

I love that point to the gardener or the repair person with the dirt, and grease, and callouses on their actual hands, rather than slightly callous fingertips from the typing, which is as far as it goes for me at the moment. How do you think about and perhaps decide on who to serve, because the repairman is an act of service and a gardener is an act of service? And my sense is that you are at a crossroads right now, and I'm curious to know how you figure out or who do you choose to serve?

Steven ([29:45](#)):

Yeah. I've always struggled with this in the past. When I was young, I thought of a religious vocation and I joined an Irish province of a French order dedicated towards service of the poor. What that meant it essentially was a youth leader, and working in an Alzheimer's disease unit, and two years in a homeless shelter. And then after this, I ended up leaving because I felt that wasn't my vocation, but still I want to serve. And I didn't know what is it, how is it that I'm called to serve. And long story short, I ended up in the world of work so firstly, as a HR manager in a chain of hotels.

Steven ([30:26](#)):

And then working in an investment bank. And if you had asked me in this bank, is that where I'm called to serve? I'd have thought, "Steven, you're losing it. How



are you serving here?" So I think what I've come to realize, it's less about the context of where I am. It's less about who I'm with, but it's more about who am I being, and what am I in relationship to who I'm with? So to give you an example, I was in the bank and I'd organized. I had more conversations around meaning in the bank, than I did when I worked at an NGO.

Steven ([31:04](#)):

And people come and talk to me about even what's my purpose, asking really deep questions. In context, that I would definitely never thought that had anything to do with me. So for example, I organized one of my friends to come in and do a talk about meaning at work. And within a few minutes, 180 people signed up. It shows you that it's not necessarily where you think that you are being of service to actually where you are being of service. There's that question. I feel less certain now about who am I called to serve, but more around remaining open to following what is life?

Steven ([31:46](#)):

I think Parker Palmer says it well. He says, "Let your life speak," meaning what is life calling me to be? What's it calling to me to be next? And often, it's not what I would've predicted. If I look back on my career, maybe yours, Michael, it's not like a highway. It's more like a winding pathway and less predictable than either of us could have thought, if we were asked be it 19 or 20, what would we be doing at our age now? It's unpredictable.

MBS ([32:17](#)):

Mine's like a very poorly designed video game.

Steven ([32:20](#)):

Yeah. For this idea of designing your life, I'm not convinced. I think it's a beautiful concept. But actually, you can decide out all the complexity, or the mystery or the surprise that comes with life. So I'm less from the design thinking school,



and more from let's open to this serendipitous adventure. And obviously, but you're still being guided. You're being guided by asking the right questions from your life.

Steven ([32:49](#)):

Continually thinking, "How best can I be of service and listening?" So there's a continual process of discernment, but it doesn't mean that you necessarily know the way that you are going to end up. I think it's the questions other way. And if we're asking those questions continually of ourselves, we'll find the way forward.

MBS ([33:10](#)):

I agree. I think that being able to be present to the curiosity, and the questions, and the mystery, but you used the phrase, which is a lovely one, which is what's life calling me forward to do or to be? I'm wondering how you hear that? What does it mean to be listening in a way that you actually pick up those weak signals that hint, and that whisper, and that glance, as you talk about in the book, that might be flashed your way, which might offer an unexpected but extraordinary adventure?

Steven ([33:50](#)):

Yeah. I hear it from people like you, Michael. So people that are willing to reflect back, willing to listen deeply, willing to challenge. So often, I tend to a few people I know, like friends and I talk to them and I share. And they reflect back to me something about my own lack of confidence or my own where I'm not seeing an opportunity or where I am, and celebrating that or helping me to do that.

Steven ([34:22](#)):

I think it's very much in the relationships and then listening for the clues, as you say, or the glimpses, or the moments that feel right inside that send you are on



the right track. I think one of the things that struck me about you was when you sent me an email, I think, to the house. And I think on your signature, something along the lines of you're doing great. Can you voice that?

MBS ([34:49](#)):

You're awesome and you're doing great.

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

Yeah. And I thought [crosstalk 00:34:50]-

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

Just postcards made up.

Steven ([34:51](#)):

Yeah. I have to say, I thought you had written that for me. I didn't know it was your signature. I thought, "Oh my God, this is really affirming." And to me it was like, "Oh, I've been doing okay. I'm on the right path." I think it's almost like a message often we need to hear, we need to say to others more. And in fact, I was going to do a LinkedIn post, maybe I'll still do it just sharing about your signature, because often I think those are the words of encouragement.

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

Chip Conley, who wrote the forward for Not Being, he coined this thing about modern elder. You used the word earlier in our conversation. He said, "The modern elder, part of their role is being a permissionary." It's giving people permission almost or encouragement to spread their wings, or to take that leap, or to try that new thing. Yeah, so I see almost like the signature's being a giving permission. You're doing okay, you're doing great. How do we do that and for each other?



MBS ([36:06](#)):

I started using that phrase when I was facilitating and I was getting people to... I paired people up and they go through three or four rounds of practicing coaching with each other. And just spontaneously, at the end of a first round, I said, "Now look at your partner in the eye and say, 'You're awesome and you're doing great.'" And it's incredibly awkward the first time that happens, particularly if you're in England, where everyone's like, "What are you doing to me?"

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

Imagine Australia as well.

MBS ([36:33](#)):

Exactly. You can feel the resistance and the eye rolling that's in the room. But by the fourth time, people are saying it, it's heartfelt. It obviously is resonating with people. I added it onto email signature and probably twice a week, I get somebody writing back to me going, "Oh, thanks for that. You're awesome as well, Michael."

MBS ([36:53](#)):

I'm like, Thank you. I am. That's true. We are all awesome," except for my mom. My mom hate because she's like, "Michael, you're a road scholar, and this is ungrammatical. Don't you understand?" I'm like, "Okay, I'm playing for the bigger game here. Not the grammar police, but just trying to" [crosstalk 00:37:11]-

Steven ([37:11](#)):

I think, as you're saying, it gives permission and just I guess a sense of reassurance, as what people are looking for as they start to make these decisions about what's next, who do I serve, et cetera.



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

Yeah. Steven, it's been such a rich conversation. As a final question perhaps, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Steven ([37:36](#)):

We talked about this time and we talked about this idea of making the most of time. Maybe the greatest provocation really in *Not Being* is this idea that you are already, and it's linked to your signature in a way, is that you are already whole. You are already complete and there's nothing to do. So say that you were intimately connected and you did deeply belong with not only others around you, but with the whole everything around you, literally your part, there's nothing for you that you need to accomplish.

Steven ([38:14](#)):

You can just allow yourself to be loved. You can allow yourself to celebrate. You can allow yourself to enjoy. Then you can create and you can achieve, but not from the space of I need to create in order to do this, in order to do that, but for the joy of it and for the celebration of it. I think that's really what I hope to get across in *Not Being*. I just want to name my co-author, Khuyen Bui from Vietnam. That's what we aim to really convey, this whole, deep sense of you belong. And I think if listeners leave with that, I think that'll be great.

MBS ([39:03](#)):

I love so much of this conversation. You can probably tell why I fanboyed Steven when I met him in Lisbon. So much I want to pull from in this conversation, but I think what I'm sitting with at the moment is the tension between careless and care less. That's not the same word. Careless, I'm thinking thoughtless, I'm thinking reckless, heartless, trivializing way of dehumanizing almost. It's just about me. You don't care about those around you. But care less,



well, that to me is about holding things lightly, and with laughter. Recognizing the smallness of us in space and time.

MBS ([39:45](#)):

I cannot wait to see the images and the photos that the James Webb Telescope has to show us. In realizing, I think, that this smallness in space and time is freeing for us. It gives us freedom to enjoy this brief glorious moment. It really is about asking us to marvel about what's extraordinary about the world we live in right now. As I look out my window, even as we speak, I'm recording this in the middle of a huge snowstorm in Toronto. We've had more than 30 centimeters. I guess that's what 10 inches in about the last 12 hours. I have to keep reminding myself to, "Go look out the window, Michael, and go wow because it's amazing."

MBS ([40:28](#)):

I think care less means that it's asking us to fully commit to the work that we're doing in a wholehearted way, and to worry less about the outcome as best we can. As soon as I say that out loud, I'm like, "That sounds a bit sweeping and a bit generically self-helpy, a bit unrealistic, maybe a tad privileged as well." But still, there's something extraordinary and liberating in the power of care less. But if you care about Steven and his work, and I hope you do, the best place to go is to his website, Steven D'Souza. And I'll spell that for you. Steven is with a V, so S-T-E-V-E-N D-S-O-U-Z-A or Z-A, depending on where you are in this world.

MBS ([41:21](#)):

Stevensouza.com and he's got a trilogy of books. His most recent is Not Knowing: The Art of Turning Uncertainty Into Possibilities. We love supporting our local bookstores so if you're thinking of buying it, look there if you can. Thank you. You're awesome and you're doing great.