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

Many years ago, I interviewed a woman called Barbara Coloroso. She is the author of a book that was originally called *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*. And then, I think they renamed it to be *The Bully, the Bullied and the Not So Innocent Bystander*. So, the title becomes a lot less subtle, but it really gives you a big clue to the key inside. What embeds dysfunction is not so much the dynamic of the bully and the bullied, but it requires the bystander, standing by, watching on, not intervening, not making a move, giving tacit approval. This feels like a real dynamic to me right now, as so much of the world is struggling. I mean, it's deeply tempting to throw up my hands and go, "It's too hard, too hard. Please, somebody, somebody out there, if you could just sort this out for me, that would be great." But, and I'll probably come back to this, I've heard on the radio just the other day, it is the deepest form of privilege, really, to say, "This is not my problem to sort out, It's somebody else's problem to sort out."



MBS ([01:07](#)):

Hey, welcome to Two Pages with MBS, 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. If you're a longtime listener and you know I've had various podcasts over the years, you'll know this name because Todd Kashdan has been on, I think, pretty much every podcast I've ever created.

MBS ([01:27](#)):

He's got a string of books that have intrigued me. And they always entwine an academic rigor with a human insight. You know the book that I first came to was called Curious? It's the definitive guide on curiosity. And you can guess why that mattered to me. But I also loved a book he co-wrote, The Upside of Your Dark Side. That's not a great book title. It's trying just a bit too hard. But the insight about the power of your shadow, I think, is profound. How do you tap into that dark side of who you are to be the best version of who you could be? And now, his latest, The Art of Insubordination. Now, that is a great title. I do think there's this connection between the bystander and insubordination. But what are we talking about here? Or a better question, when did this start for Todd?

Todd ([02:18](#)):

I think, for me, it stems from, and I think maybe a lot of listeners have this experience, I grew up without my mom, I grew up without my dad. And when you are independent before your developmental time period that you should be independent, you start to realize that most of the norms that adults give you and authority figures give you, at best, are empirical questions to test. So, when I was in Hebrew school, I always questioned authority about religiosity. When I was in school, I always questioned, why are we studying it this way? Why are we ignoring this country? Why are we only focusing on America? And it's carried me throughout my entire career in terms of questioning what other people assume is the default. I always ask, who says so, and why?



MBS ([03:05](#)):

Now insubordination is something of a loaded term. You might think of rule breakers and rebels, but Todd doesn't see it quite as simplistically as that. There's a proper, a principled way, to be insubordinate.

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

Well, so my focus is on, there's an important adjective in front of there, which is principled insubordination. And that's important. So, this is not about retaliation. This is not about being James Dean or young Bruce Lee and trying to upstart the system just to prove that you have power or dominance. This is about you see problems and dysfunctions and you realize, well, who's going to make the change, or start it, or initiate it? Rather than, if no one else is doing it, it might as well start with me.

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

One of the models I talk about in my own book, *How To Begin*, is that every choice you make has prizes and punishments. So, I was curious about the cost of being insubordinate. I mean, sure it's cool in movies, leather jackets, being a rebel, and whatever, but what about in real life? Is there a way, he asks hopefully, that you can be principally insubordinate without paying a price?

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

The costs are huge. You have to accept that your likability is going to be much lower than 100%. You're not going to be invited to every birthday party. You're not going to be beloved and the teacher's pet by all of your teachers. And your parents will often tell their friends that you are one of those extremely annoying kids that always ask why.



MBS ([04:32](#)):

Well, I was one of those kids. I think I still am actually. Or at least I feel like it. But what about the flip side? What are the rewards?

Todd ([04:40](#)):

The rewards are moderate term and long term, which is you've got this wide range of people that talking about be unassailably yourself, be authentic, and be true to your values and your core. And this is a relatively new phenomena in the scientific world, but it's been floating around since Esalen in the seventies. And I think when you really drill down to authenticity and you really drill down to what it means to make your moral compass, your cherished values and interests, you're really talking about is that, what are you going to do when it comes into conflict with systems, people, and situations where people don't espouse the same values and beliefs? And in that moment, that's when principled insubordination has the chance to flourish. Or you end up choosing the road of avoidance and compliance.

MBS ([05:40](#)):

It does feel that you have these crossroad moments, where you're like, "Okay, I can feel something's off. Do I stand up and speak about it or do something about it? Or do I keep my head down and stay undercover and hope that it gets sorted out or I can learn to live with it?" Somebody once, to me, early in my career, said, "Michael, you've got a real habit of throwing yourself on landmines." I was like, "Yeah, you're right, I do." And it was perhaps a misdirected, or unsuccessful, or I don't know, some version of insubordination that felt principled, but also didn't feel very successful at times. How, in that moment, in that crossroads, have you, in writing this new book, have you found any way of understanding how you decide which path to walk?



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

Yeah. It's a great question. You use the word crossroads, I use the term choice points. And there is really dozens every single day. It comes down to the simplest moment of, do you talk to the stranger that's grabs your affinity, your curiosity, who's standing right near you? Or do you keep yourself and say to yourself, "Well, I don't really know if they're interested in talking, and I don't want to intervene with their lives, and I don't want to impose my views."? This great body of work that shows that this wonderful asymmetry between strangers really love when people approach them with interesting, useful, and genuine comments. And yet, we assume that we are such an obstruction in this perfectly curated life of like, "They didn't ask for me to come and intervene," and yet they really do want to have a good conversation, just like we all do.

Todd ([07:34](#)):

I think that's one of the big lessons is that we only have access to the outside view of other people. Whereas, we have access to the internal experiences, and memories, and physiological sensations, and ruminating thoughts in our head for ourselves. It's really hard to bridge that gap. And one of the ways of daily principled insubordination is to that when you feel anxious uncertainty and discomfort, well probably other people do as well. And so, as opposed to relying on a term, such as imposter syndrome, of taking that step forward and taking that little small courageous act, which starts to modify your personality as you make these choice points, little by little.

MBS ([08:19](#)):

Todd, what have you learned about building the moral compass? Because part of what you're speaking to is like when you notice something that's out of sync with what you think is appropriate in the world, you speak to it, or you stand up, or you act in some way. But that says you've got a sense of what your values are or your moral compass is, to use a broader sense. What does it take to build a



moral compass? How do you strengthen that and refine that, so you actually know what you think about something?

Todd ([08:50](#)):

It's a great question. And the answer I'm going to give by no means provides the laundry list of ways you can reach this final outcome. But it's one of the paths that's probably the most simple for people to start with is that I think we treat our fleeting emotions as something that is outside of ourselves, that's imposed by what we drank, what we ate, our amount of sleep, whatever tasks that we're worried about or excited about that are coming about. Whereas, this is a subconscious system that is activated by two million years of evolution. And we should pay very close attention to when we feel disgust, when we feel worry, when we feel pride, when we feel compassion, when we feel a sense of a desire to protect, to care for it, other people who maybe don't have the same temperament and personality to care for themselves. And also a sense of justice, when we feel that there's, not outrage, but the sense of justice that has not been served in this situation.

Todd ([09:58](#)):

These are the moments that we should really be reflecting on and saying to ourselves, "What is it about this that's activated?" And then, "Is this something that I want to invest in?", whether it's in this moment or the longer term in terms of choosing a career or conversations you're going to have in the future.

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

If I'm one of the people who decided to storm The Capitol in the States, back in whenever it was, January, they might say, "I noticed those feelings and I decided to act on it, because this is a choice point. So, I'm being insubordinate. I'm being insubordinate in a way that is absolutely in alignment to my moral compass." And certainly, from where I stand, that looked like a disaster on all sorts of



levels. How do you sit with that being these are people playing out the system in the way that you're pointing too.

Todd ([10:58](#)):

I'm so glad you brought this up. So, yeah. So, if we had the opportunity to have a one-on-one interview with these individuals separately, my suspicion is it's exactly what you're thinking. They're going to talk about really core values, their sense of patriotism, their care for nationalism, the kind of real deeply entrenched thoughts that they've been reading the articles, reading books, talking to people about this.

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

Here's where you move from principle to unprincipled insubordination in this exact situation and other ones like it, which is to really thinking about the message. Okay, here's what I care about. I care about justice. I care about fairness. I care about inequities. I care about the process of a political system that will care for me and those people that I care about. All those things are there and things that most of us share.

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

But think about the message. Any time you bring violence, or destruction, or you actually have individuals that you actually laugh, smile, and enjoy the fact that they feel a sense of threat to their physical wellbeing, their emotional wellbeing, and you are willingly doing that, once you go into there, you're moving into the place of, are my values so important, am I so confident in what I believe in, that it's at the point I've crossed all of these other opportunities that are nonviolent, and I'm at the point where I am willing to threaten, and interfere with, and impair another person's wellbeing? It's at that point, that's really, it's almost like that is the threshold, when you're talking about impairing another person's wellbeing, that you're really crossing a moral divide from a sense of



morality to a sense of destructive intent and destructive behavior. And so, I think that's really a last resort.

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

And there's a time for rebellions and there's a time for... There is a time for violence. But the threshold should be really, really high. And in that case, violence wasn't meeting violence. And so, you're really moving into the very simple mantra, which is, do I need to be interfering with another person's welfare, physical wellbeing, and mental wellbeing? And I think the easy answer for that one was, it didn't cross the threshold.

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

It's a thorny topic, because I can point to the things that I want to rebel against, where I feel like I've taken an ethical insubordinate stand. And I'm like, "You know what? I'm trying to disrupt a system. And that means that I'm trying to actually diminish the people's status in the broader sense or the people who are benefiting from this system, from this structure of power." So, I am wanting people to go, "Look, I want your life to be less good, because there's a cost that we're paying for your life being as privileged as it is." But I can justify that because all of the causes I believe in are moral, and righteous, and true, and shine a white light. Whereas, where I look on over the fence to people whose political views I don't share, I'm like, "Yeah, but your cause is wrong. This doesn't justify what you're doing."

Todd ([14:19](#)):

Yeah. This is where it becomes really valuable to think about, am I holding the same standards of evidence and the same standards of behavior across the spectrum of people that agree and disagree with my belief systems? I would move away from the insurrection, because I think there's a nice pivot point in history, around the sixties for civil rights, where you had the Martin Luther King approach versus the Malcolm X approach. So, you had one which was Martin



Luther King had the normative, acceptable, socially acceptable, rebellion approach. And Malcolm X had a non-normative approach, where we're not just going to boycott, we are going to physically stand in front of the building, so you will not get to work today. We are going to physically be at your house and let you know that, listen, when you walk out of here, you need to know that the decisions that you're making, the actions you take interfere with our wellbeing. And we are giving you a visceral reminder that your wellbeing is tethered to ours. There was a lot of more varied reactions to Malcolm X, even today, than there was to Martin Luther king.

Todd ([15:26](#)):

So, I would just add this one element to this conversation, which is one of the benefits of the Martin Luther King approach of normative, principled, rebellion against a dysfunctional system is it wins adherence. It wins allies. It wins people that weren't thinking about it before. Now, one of the benefits of the Malcolm X approach is, if Malcolm X didn't exist and have violence and threats of violence in the civil rights era, there's a question of, was that extreme required? So, as a contrast effect, you looked at Martin Luther King and said, "You know what? Something's here that's wrong. I don't really like this extremist approach, but I'm going to buy in because I'm listening to both them, and there's something wrong, but I like the..." So, Martin Luther King might have needed Malcolm X's tribe.

MBS ([16:19](#)):

The anchoring, the anchoring of Malcolm X's approach-

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

Yeah, you needed that contrast. And I think... Yeah.

MBS ([16:24](#)):

... to make you go, "Oh, actually this is the more reasonable approach."



Todd ([16:27](#)):

Right. I'm not against extremism when it's used as a contrast effect with a more potentially effective long term approach that can fix the system.

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

Tell us about the book you've chosen to read for us, Todd.

Todd ([16:46](#)):

Somewhat related with a very, very, long psychological tether. Irving Goffman wrote this book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. I happened to pick it up in a bookstore, a used bookstore in Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village before-

MBS ([17:04](#)):

That's great.

Todd ([17:05](#)):

... I went into psychology, when I was working on Wall Street, trying to become the next Gordon Gekko. And this was one of the books that made me realized that, you know what? Focusing on the ups and downs of particular bonds and stocks is a lot less interesting than studying the complexity of human behavior.

MBS ([17:26](#)):

This is great, because I haven't heard of this book. I'm interested to learn more about it. How did you choose what two pages to read from it? Because that's always part of the quest, which is not only what book do you choose, but then what two pages do you pick?



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

Yeah. So one is, I think this is going to resonate with your audience, because it hit me hard, which is, it is tough to be human, because there's a paradox. Goffman doesn't talk about this, but this is a big takeaway that I had. The paradox is this. And you see this all the time online and all the time in conversations when people regularly say, "I don't care what other people think about me." But they had to voice it publicly to you to let you know that, which is automatically dismisses the comment.

Todd ([18:10](#)):

There's a paradox is that we tend to believe that we care less about what other people think, and yet other people have this profound influence not just on our behavior, but our thoughts and our vision about who we are and what we're about to become. People underestimate the influence they have on affecting our sense of self. Goffman, in these two pages, really captures the challenge of we are often on a stage acting a certain way to attain a certain outcome from other people. We are often oblivious that this is happening. And so, we have this internal conflict of, who are we when the public version of ourselves is different than the private version of ourselves when we're no longer around other people?

MBS ([18:57](#)):

It's interesting. This sounds like it's going to be great. So Todd, over to you, let's hear these two pages.

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

Okay. Because Goffman is definitely a better writer than me, and I aspire to be remotely like him.



Todd ([19:09](#)):

"In saying that performers act in a relatively informal, familiar, relaxed way while backstage and are on their guard when giving a performance, it should not be assumed that the pleasant, interpersonal things of life, courtesy, warmth, generosity, and pleasure in the company of others are always reserved for those backstage, and that suspiciousness snobbishness and a show of authority, are reserve for front region activity. Often, it seems that whatever enthusiasm and lively interests we have at our disposal, we reserve for those before whom we are putting on a show, and that the surest sign of backstage solidarity is to feel that it's safe to lapse into a sociable mood of sullen, silent irritability. It's interesting to note that, while each team will be in a position to appreciate the unsavory unperformed aspects of its own backstage behavior, it's not likely to be in a position to come to a similar conclusion about the teams with which it interacts.

Todd ([20:19](#)):

When pupils leave the school room and go outside for a recess of familiarity and misconduct, they often fail to appreciate that their teachers have retired to a common room to swear, to smoke, in a similar recess of backstage behavior. We know, of course, that a team with only one member can take a very dark view of itself and that not a few psychotherapists find employment in alleviating the skill, making their living by telling individuals the facts of other people's lives. Behind these realizations about one's self and illusions about others is one of the important dynamics and disappointments of social mobility, be it mobility upward, downward, or sideways. In attempting to escape from a two-faced world of front region and back region behavior, individuals may feel, that in the new position they're attempting to acquire, they will be the character projected by individuals in that position and not at the same time a performer.



Todd ([21:21](#)):

When they arrive, of course they find their new situation has unanticipated similarities with their old one. Both involve a presentation, a front to an audience, and both involve the presenter in the grubby, gossipy, business of staging a show. It's sometimes thought that course familiarity is merely a cultural thing, a characteristic, say of the working classes. And those of highest state don't conduct themselves in this way.

Todd ([21:49](#)):

The point, of course, is that persons of high rank tend to operate in small teams and to spend much of their day engaged in spoken performances. Whereas, working class men tend to be members of large teams and tend to spend much of their day backstage or in unspoken performances. Thus, the higher one's place in the status pyramid, the smaller the number of persons with whom one can be familiar, the less time one spends backstage, and the more likely it is that one will be required to be polite as well as decorous.

Todd ([22:22](#)):

However, when the time and company are right, quite sacred performers will act and be required to act in a quite vulgar fashion. For numerical and strategic reasons, however, we're likely to learn that laborers use a backstage manner and unlikely to learn that lords use it too. An interesting limiting case of the situation is found in connection with heads of state, who have no teammates.

Sometimes, individuals may make use of cronies to whom they give a courtesy rank of teammate, when moments of relaxing recreation are called for. This constituting an instance of the sidekick function previously considered."

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

One of the things I wanted to just touch, Mike, before you even say anything, is you can hear is that Irving Goffman is really prescient in talking about the social



status, the economic inequities, and when we're talking about systemic inequality right here and there, and that the idea of that there are really large differences between the elite and those of us that are the regulars. But when it comes to the psychology of feeling as if you have to perform, and when you get to be yourself, and when you're trying to project a self that you don't even aspire to or want to be, this is what we have in common.

MBS ([23:44](#)):

Yeah. It's really interesting. I mean, the book's 60 years old, but you are right, it's talking to a very human dynamic, and I guess just eternal dynamic. Todd, what's the gap between front stage and backstage for you?

Todd ([24:05](#)):

It's a good one. I mean, I'm very well attuned to this, because I study social anxiety and I study self-presentation. I think, for me, is I try to be very discerning in terms of what presentation style I'm trying to construct and what's the motivation behind it. And so, in some ways, you can break this down. John Nezlek and Mark Leary broke this down to four types of self-presentation. It's worth mentioning. One of them is ingratiation. And this is the idea we're trying to be likable. We're trying to be desired. We're trying to be seductive. We're trying to be, as your last book that you wrote, trying to be intriguing, intriguing with curiosity in other people.

Todd ([24:52](#)):

Another one tends to be self-promotion. And we have a wide range of reactions to this from Instagram influencers to celebrities, to powerful, distinguished people, where we are trying to look competent. We're trying to look important. We're to look significant in this world of where we're really insignificant in the grand scheme of things.



Todd ([25:13](#)):

And then, another form of self-presentation is what we might call exemplification. And this is where we try to look virtuous. We try to look moral. And you're seeing a lot of this in what they call the culture wars right now of, who is the victim and who was the oppressed? And who's the person that's being attacked, and who's the person that's the attacker? Both sides are trying to show that I have the moral upstanding position, and that's a self-presentation style.

Todd ([25:42](#)):

And the fourth one is something that men and women in different ways are suffering greatly from is the Adonis complex, which is try to present yourself as a physically desirable character, both for the self and the standards that society imposes on us. Boys want to look physically muscular, whether it's a Bruce Lee or Arnold Schwarzenegger. I don't know if those are already antiquated terms. And then, for women, you have-

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

They totally are-

Todd ([26:12](#)):

You're Gwyneth,

MBS ([26:13](#)):

I'm old like you, so it's fine.

Todd ([26:14](#)):

Yeah. I mean, this is to be Michael Strahan and Bruce Willis. And then women have your heroine chic models and your Gwyneth Paltrows. Thankfully, now your Serena Williams of these athletic frames. But if you don't have those



bodies, you have a self-presentation gap that you have to deal with, to contest with.

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

Do we all have a mix of those four self-presentation drivers? Or do people find themselves ensnared in one in particular?

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

The reason that I wanted to offer the framework to your listeners is then for them to have a little bit of a diagnostic of, well, everyone's got a profile, and which ones are activated by which types of people. So in the workplace, with your friends, with your neighbors, with your family, they bring out different sides of our personality. But they're not even different sides of our personality. We have a different personality in stable situations that we enter in regularly. When I'm with my aunt and my cousins, there's just a different Todd that exists, when it's compared to my best friends that I hang out with over whiskey and a fire pit. And that's not two personalities. They are activating different versions of me. And that happens with all of us.

MBS ([27:35](#)):

If that's true, and it does feel like it's true, because I certainly can go, "Oh yeah, this is what I'm like with my mom and dad. And this is what I'm like with my wife. And then, this is what I'm like with even my brothers." And these are my closest inner circle, and I'm slightly different with all of those different groups. How do you have a stable, moral, compass? And if this sense of authenticity matters, and yet you show up and you perform differently every time you're in a different context, you alter yourself with one of these, perhaps, you're tweaking the slider board of these four different ways of self-presenting. Is it possible to be authentic or are you always playing a role depending on the context you're in?



Todd ([28:21](#)):

Yeah. Maybe there's another question is, is authenticity desirable and when is effectiveness more important than authenticity? And when is efficiency, in terms of you only have a limited supply of cognitive resources, and mental energy, and physical energy, when does that take primacy over authenticity? I think, too often we treat each one of these strengths or valuable commodities for our lives as independent. And we don't realize is that we're often making trade offs. Am I willing to trade off to have more psychic energy to be myself at the expense of being incredibly persuasive and effective in this situation?

Todd ([29:07](#)):

And I think that's the question we should be asking ourselves is, what is our motivation that we have not that other people are imposing on us? What do we desire from this encounter? And then, how can I let myself go so I can experience flow and be fully absorbed in a situation and not worrying about how I'm coming across, what's my likability quotient right now? And then, I'm constantly viewing the world as work and just really allowing ourselves to be fully engrossed in situation. And later, we can do a postmortem and evaluate, how did that go for me? What do I want to keep, and what do I want to change the next time I enter a social situation like that?

MBS ([29:47](#)):

Yeah. I remember talking to some of the guests we've had on the show. And there's one in particular who just talks about, as a black woman, how every single act is an act of performance, and how exhausting that is. Because, she is constantly going, "How do I need to be seen by this group? How do I need to be seen by that group?", in a way that feels different from the way I live my life, as a old, straight, white dude who just thinks less about it. Because I just go, "Look, this is how I am, take it or leave it." If you are in a place of needing to perform,



how do you regenerate? How do you not end up psychically split and exhausted?

Todd ([30:46](#)):

It's a good question. There's a lot there, so let me take just a few pieces. You mentioned your brother as this being part of your comfort group, what I would call my wise council. I have a set of around five people. And I encourage everyone to figure if it's one person or to around five or six people. Who are the people that allow you to be effortlessly yourself? That is going to be a fundamental regeneration tribe that you can create for yourself.

Todd ([31:20](#)):

I've spent a lifetime of formulating who they are. And sometimes people drop out of the wise council. Some new people enter into it. They're often old friends, like people that have known you before you became established in whatever career you have and you formed your adult version of yourself. They've seen the frailties. They've seen the mysteries. They've seen the picadillos. They've seen the quirks. They've your edges when they haven't been sanded down, and they're messy, and they're sloppy, and they're ugly, and they're disgusting. And you could joke about it because you've been around them for so many years. There's such value in these old friends that there is there's no pomp and circumstance, because they've seen you as the self-conscious, socially anxious, wary-

MBS ([32:05](#)):

Exactly.

Todd ([32:06](#)):

... wary character who doesn't even know how to walk comfortably through a hallway without trying to change their gate, because, well, this is what a cool person would walk like as opposed to my natural predilection that happens



there. So, having that group of people is going to be a really important way to recharge.

Todd ([32:22](#)):

And the other one is to realize is that, when can I abort or end a situation, get what I need or what's desired, and then walk out? If I'm around people that are really making me feel as if I have to present myself in a way that feels foreign, so not a presentation but a foreign... The more foreign that you have to present yourself, the more of a variable that's activated that has to make you ask two things. One is just, what do I have to work on internally, psychically, to make myself more comfortable in these situations or comfortable being uncomfortable? And then, two, how difficult, challenging, or toxic is this situation where I am being-

MBS ([33:09](#)):

In performance mode.

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

This imposition on me that you won't accept me as me, and I feel like I have to be this foreign self. If it's the latter, this really imposed set of rules that you feel that you can't work around, I would say, try to go for quick entry points and quick exit points.

MBS ([33:29](#)):

Todd, one of my favorite books of yours is The Upside of Your Dark Side, which is another great title. What's the role of understanding your dark side in this place of regeneration and, if you like, almost backstage gathering yourself to help you then be able to better go out and perform or be on stage?



Todd ([33:55](#)):

Yeah. Well, thank you for the kind words. I wish the title... People could retain it, so maybe they could actually remember what's the title is that they can buy it, instead of The Upside of You Dark Side Downsides. There's a lot there. And I think this racial reckoning over the past year, during COVID and during a racial awareness moment in history not since the sixties, has made us realize that there is great value in anger and righteous indignation that I don't think that we appreciate. I think we have a very allergic reaction. And especially, as you said, when a woman is angry, unfortunately they are given a less social bandwidth in the world, in the business world, in conversations, at parties, stereotypes get activated very quickly by people and they're not allowed the freedom to express rightful, rightful feelings that something is wrong, something's obstructing my goals. I am angry as hell and I'm expressing it. And men get more bandwidth. White men get the most bandwidth. White men who are physically attractive get even more bandwidth. And white men who are physically attractive-

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

Oh, I was doing so well up until then.

Todd ([35:13](#)):

Your hair, your shirt, you are becoming more and more attractive as you age. So, we have to understand-

MBS ([35:21](#)):

You're making me blush.

Todd ([35:21](#)):

We have to understand that these demographic influences, they're real because they activate stereotypes by people. And going back to what Irving Goffman's talking about, we have to recognize that, when we are near the stage, these



stereotypes get activated. We make immediate judgements in seconds about, is that person behaving in a socially acceptable manner? And you say to yourself, thumbs up, thumbs down. You make this mental judgment very quickly. And it is perfectly fine to experience anger and righteous indignation. It's perfectly fine to experience social anxiety when we are concerned that perceived flaws in our character are not only being attended to by other people, but they are the reason that we're being judged, they're the reason that we're being rejected. These are normal evolutionarily derived emotions to protect us from being rejected and banished from our social world.

Todd ([36:16](#)):

And I'm saying, we should tune into them. We don't want them to frequently and too intensely. But when they come, there are signals that we should be giving more credence to, what is the situation that it's doing this to me? And what is it internally that maybe I have to work with improve how I handle and cope with these situations and be more effective at executing social skills?

MBS ([36:46](#)):

Got it. I mean, Goffman is talking about the stage metaphor, what you're like backstage, what you're like on stage, and how every time you walk on stage, it's a different setting, a different scene, and you figure out how to perform appropriately. What's the role of the audience? How do you be a good audience member?

Todd ([37:08](#)):

Yeah, this is several chapters in The Art of Insubordination I focused on. Because I think we spend a lot of time about the principled rebels and not... This word ally has been thrown around quite a bit in the past year. But we really haven't deconstructed of, well, what are we supposed to do?



Todd ([37:25](#)):

I'll give you a concrete example of a situation that a girl friend told me yesterday. When she worked at one of these tech giant companies, a guy leaned over and whispered to her and said, "Hey, listen, this is probably a point where you should reveal and say something, or ask a question, so you can show how valuable you are to this team." Because the leader walked into the room and the meeting was just about to start. And she had this very aversive reaction, which was that, "Well, why would you assume that I have to showcase my value over anyone else in this room? Why would you have to assume that I would have to be the one that speaks versus the leader recognizing of the behaviors and the contributions I'm giving?"

Todd ([38:11](#)):

And then thirdly, if you had that thought, which is actually, it's a well intended thought. And I think we need to have more, grace and we have to have more space and charity in these kind of moments. It was meant well. But her most visceral response was, "If you had that thought that I should be promoted on a higher pedestal for my contributions, why aren't you giving voice and giving that voice that air time to me? I mean, it's the exact amount of time spent talking to me. You could have said, 'You know what? Julie over here, I just want to say this wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for her.'"

Todd ([38:53](#)):

And so when we're on the stage as the audience, I think we have to really think about what can we do to boost other people up? What can we do to not just provide a forum for other people to give a voice, but actually actively let people know, not in a way that makes them feel vulnerable, and fragile, and weak, but in a way of saying, "Listen, I want everyone to know if I have this moment of gratitude and appreciation about this person and I want you to share in this capitalizing on this positive team member that we have and put it out there."



And when you do it that way, you're approaching a person, the principled rebel with strength, as opposed to from a place of vulnerability and weakness.

MBS ([39:43](#)):

There's a reaction to some of this, which is, it's easier for me to do nothing and get nothing wrong than to do something and get it wrong, even with good intentions. Do you have any guidance on how to have the courage to do something even though you might get it wrong?

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

Well, let me take a different approach with such a great point, which is... So Danny Conoman, who's our only Nobel Prize winning, or one of two Nobel Prize winning psychologists. He did some work with some Cornell researchers about regret. Here's a mantra that everyone should hold, which is, "The regret about inaction, about the things that we didn't do and wanted to do, in the short term, it feels good." Like you said, we all make mistakes. The target's not on our back. We're not being rejected. We're still there. We could punch our card and join. We are part of that room. We are at the table. We're seated there.

Todd ([40:48](#)):

In the short term, the regret for things that we said that were embarrassing, stupid, and we get flack for, it's really painful in the moment. But when you expand the timeline, the regret for inaction, it is so painful. The suffering is so much greater than the moments of embarrassment, and the moments of rejection, and the moments of ostracism that I think we have to really retain this is that, in the moment's emotional vicissitudes should not be the primary guiding force about tough, difficult, decisions about protecting and about being courageous in moments. Because in the longer term, we are going to feel really good.



Todd ([41:28](#)):

You know what? I got a lot of painful things said to me on social media. I had a lot of people who didn't want to talk to me. I had a lot of people that were talking smack about me and gossiping behind my back. And yet, I feel as if I have a moral ethical backbone and I can walk away one year later, five years later, 10 years later, and say, "I lived in a way that was in alignment with the things that I care about. And I protected the people that I care about." And I think we should have this mantra about the regret of inaction is the longer lasting, more painful, system than all the embarrassments, failures, and mistakes.

MBS ([42:08](#)):

Right. That's really helpful. And there's a way that your actions are always about building and strengthening your moral compass. This is who I am. This is what I stand for in this world. And inaction, if it's a, "I could do this, but I'm choosing not to, I'm opting out, because it's easy to keep my head down," is a way that it undermines a moral compass that you might be trying to set and build. Todd, I love talking to you. I'm curious to know as a final question, what needs to be said in this conversation that hasn't yet been said?

Todd ([42:44](#)):

Well, we could go on for hours as we normally do when we're-

MBS ([42:49](#)):

We could, we could.

Todd ([42:49](#)):

... in conversation.



MBS ([42:49](#)):

Exactly. When we're at a fire pit with a whiskey, that's what we could talk about just for hours.

Todd ([42:54](#)):

I think it would be this, is that you are not born, nobody is born with the temperament where you recognize dysfunction, you recognize villainous behavior, and you recognize problematic behavior, and you're ready to stand up and put your hands to your sides, and be ready to stand in front of people who don't have, for whatever reason, the power, or the status, or the emotional fortitude in that moment to stand up for themselves. We have a sense of responsibility. We have a sense of responsibility for whatever it is that we care about is that small, tiny, behavioral changes are the instigation of habits that will allow people to make sure that those injustices are not repeated, and those injustices don't have a contagious effect, where they actually have a larger ripple in the pond.

Todd ([43:50](#)):

It's the singular acts of singular people are really the cornerstone of creating large bands of people that stand up against tyranny, and dysfunction, and oppression, and whatever type of orthodoxy that is really just stupid and retrograded. I think we cannot underestimate the influence that we have over other people, even if we feel as if we have not yet reached a point where we can stand up for ourselves.

MBS ([44:32](#)):

It's powerful to hear Todd talk about regret for inaction. He's right, at least for me. I can think of a number of times where I feel I've been, I mean, I've been courageous, I've actually intervened in something that was happening that wasn't right. I haven't been the bystander. I mean, it was scary. I mean, in all of



these cases that come to mind for me, there was a degree of physical danger. I was being threatened a bit, and no regrets. In fact, the opposite. I think there's pride there. But equally I can think of a number of times when I backed away. I hid. I was a bystander. I didn't do anything. YI stood still, rooted to the spot.

MBS ([45:12](#)):

And I wonder if some of those moments are happening in some way right now with me. I'm really holding the mirror up for me at the moment, thinking about how I'm showing up in the world. I'm really noticing my non-action on the stuff that I don't want to regret. And I don't want to regret not trying to make them better.

MBS ([45:32](#)):

How about you? Where are you in action and where might you feel a little bit stuck? And I'm wondering if there's something in this conversation about principled insubordination that struck a chord. If it has, perhaps you'd share the interview with somebody. I mean, this is a call to arms, I think, from Todd. And if you could pass this on to somebody who you think could hear that call to action and perhaps respond to that call of action, I think that serves all of us. It serves the world.

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

If you've enjoyed the conversation and your call to action is to listen to some more podcasts, that's okay as well, I guess. I've got two I can recommend. Peter Bregman, a good friend of mine. That conversation is about a new book from his and it's called A Guide To Empathy. He's done such a nice job at thinking about feelings, and how to connect to feelings, and how to make feelings a guide for your life. I'm not that great at connecting to my own feelings. But I feel that is part of insubordination is to feel things deeply that you're moved to act on them.



MBS ([46:39](#)):

And the other interview that comes to mind is DeNora Getachew. That conversation is called Rebooting Democracy. She is an activist. She's also the executive director of a youth-based movement, I guess, called dosomethingnow.org. And just hearing her call to action and how she's trying to enable youth to move to action is a powerful conversation.

MBS ([47:06](#)):

For more on Todd, toddkashdan.com. And actually, if you go to that website, you can download the first chapter of the book for free. And you'll be on his newsletter, Provoked, which I would encourage.

MBS ([47:17](#)):

I'd also encourage you to give this podcast a rating somewhere, because we love that. It makes me feel good. I have a fragile male ego. So, help me out with this. If you'd like a little more additional resource, there is a free membership group called the Duke Humfrey's Library named after our great library in Oxford, where all the cool stuff was kept. In here, you'll find some unreleased interviews, some downloads, some videos, other bits and pieces. Please do sign up there, if you're interested. That's all. Thank you for your support. Thank you for listening. Thank you for passing the word along. You're awesome. And you're doing great.